

1

October, 1944.

Simplified English. A nervous system for the Earth.

No advertising, no support, no bugfixes, payment in advance.

The way we go about our work.

As a report, this is fairly accurate.

The dead dog is still trying to move through the doorway. From the threshold, another dog attacks her, foam streaming from its lips. Body of the first dog crumbles as the newcomer bounds in and out of the room, snapping chunks of bone and flesh, crushing muscle and fat in its teeth. As dust. Undeterred, the dead dog continues barking.

I wake up, remembering these facts, uncertain as to how I arrived back in my bunk.

Terrible headache.

Clean up my room, gather my things. Some last minute paperwork.

Moving day.

2

South end of the runway is being cleared. Tearing down old hangars, moving debris. Piotr is nowhere to be found.

The humor here is that an earthmover is hard at work on Mars.

The test site is changing, as is customary, but I won't be around to report on the new developments, new products, new services. Any further records will be generated by my successors, factjuggling as a matter of policy. Truth is there's simply little left to cover, the

important work having been all sewn up. Word is the Chief will be leaving as well.

Our careful planning has evolved into a natural success.

Era Day.

3

There is trouble clearing the meridian between my quarters and the mess hall. Personnel routed carelessly, a group of propulsionists attempting to egress from the crowded movie theater simultaneous with the migration of some sort of celebration that is evidently still underway. My path is blocked.

Am I even cleared for this? Eventually, my patience wears thin. Barreling through the crowd, I elbow my way towards the waiting transport, looking away from the faces to avoid a breach of security.

Piotr nods as I board the vehicle.

4

He sets down across the north perimeter of the test site and nods again, this time directing me to exit the vehicle. I hand over my passes and he sweeps my bags before putting the transport back in gear, departing the perimeter. I stare into the sun and the dust clouds kicked up by his departure. Apparently, that was that.

Before long, Slake appears over the horizon, trundling towards my location in his old junker. I climb in and pull my hat down over my face. Time for a nap.

Hear the dead dog running along the perimeter fence. Still intact. Still barking.

Sit back up. Look out the window.

Glint of quartz on sand.

Over to you, Nana. I'm tired of making the effort.

NOTES