

## MAUDE MOLD

#1

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### SMART TARDS

tags: 1961, fng, jerrymander\_mold, mars2, tab1

9 August.

Gray over gray. No way to differentiate sky from skidmarks, save for the sporadic roar of transports kickflipping the gap. One had just landed.

Jerrymander Mold crouched in the dust.

TAB1 was standing. Squatting had never agreed with him, what with his factory second back. Here, the dry air had seemed to ease the regular pace of his chronic incapacitation, but still he was taking no chances.

TAB1 stood.

The transports were drunk, disgorging new users into the sand, careless with coarse dribbles of ornamental vomit. The new accounts stumbled around, likewise confused. It would take time for all present to customize their settings, some of them never quite satisfying themselves that the task had been accomplished. Tweaking even as they powered down.

Jerrymander drew a fresh white rectangle into the gray sand. He arrowed down and the text advanced at his pleasure. He looked up, then killed the window.

FNG was with TAB1, sampling statistical data from user exhaust. He was still getting his sea legs, here in the desert. He kept trying to access the admin panel, and TAB1 kept slapping his hand away. Use your local tools, he said.

The sun rose, and the gray desktop background slowly resolved into pink. An unauthorized modification.

"A demonstration of instrumentarian power," TAB1 began. he gestured with one glove, then the other. Made jazz hands. The puddle of users began to curdle, then writhe, then spontaneously it self-organized into a flash mob of fierce individualists, each partisan eager to impart a sudden, strongly held opinion about something neither TAB1 or FNG had ever heard of. TAB1 mimed washing his hands of the whole affair, and the body of smart tards resumed aimlessly milling around in the dust, frequently bumping into each other and verbalizing sub-lingual grunts and guffaws.

The sun was getting hot. TAB1 wiped his visor with his data gloves, and then took them off.

"Plinth says it's time to go."

Jerrymander had stood up, now, presently casting a series of oddly shaped shadows betwixt the precincts of TAB1 and FNG, disenfranchizing a fair amount of sand. He looked around.

"Where did all the school buses go?"