

## MAUDE MOLD

#15

by Stanley Lieber

### THE BOOK THAT READS YOU

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1 October.

"Dad said the whole place is shutting down. They're moving everyone out of 'Las Vegas' and sending them somewhere else."

TAB2 to his mother.

"Yeah, it makes no sense to me either, what with the war on and everything. Anyway, smell you later!"

He waved his hand in empty space, disconnecting the call. All right, he'd done what he'd been told to do. Now he was free to roam his new digs. Fresh from an extended stay down the silo back on Earth, he had issued himself a general warrant to stretch his legs anywhere they might carry him, back here on Mars, where the flowers didn't grow.

MARS3. DET-87. The new test site.

Staff from MARS2 had been informed during today's morning call. New playset, redesigned uniforms and insignia, updated weapons and support equipment. Even new filecards, although the mini-bios were still being written by the same guy. Some of the staff had balked, but old hands accepted the changes as just another part of the job. They'd still be wrapped in the same bubbles and hung on the same pegs. Those with actual contracts had been well provided for. As a matter of logistics, families were being migrated first. If all went well, the workers would follow suit, bringing up their projects one by one on the new hardware, and finally folding down the old test site to lay fallow until the next reboot. Any stragglers could always be retrieved from cultural memory. Recovered from the store room and placed on the shelf, ready for customers along with everyone else.

If TAB2 had been fine with all this, Spiro Mold was less sanguine. His father hadn't warned him of the impending upheaval, and of course he had just started a new school year. As birthday presents went, this sucked.

FNG for his part had been served his walking papers. Victor Charley money, was how he referred to his next gig, which he'd booked even before the end of the morning call. He said nothing to anyone before he departed.

For her part Maude Mold was ready to get out of that apartment.