

## MAUDE MOLD

#39

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### BRAIN FOG

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He couldn't remember much after that. The world seemed to shift, colors inverting like someone pressing on the front of his visor, but no one seemed interested in acknowledging any changes. Red became green, green became red. Political parties switched sides, bowed to their partners. Converse had always been at war with Pepsi. The war would go on and on. Right on.

MARS3 was already winding down. Together they'd scooped out all the drugs from under the site, undermining the integrity of the whole installation. Homes were starting to collapse, foundations hollowed out from the inside in a passable simulation of normal hierarchical dysfunction. All this without anyone having discovered the serious bug in host authentication that had been present in every new installation for the past several releases.

TAB2 couldn't think.

"Hey, that black shit's getting into the coke."

Dad seemed unfazed by social changes, but he did disapprove of miscellaneous debris contaminating his product. He ran over and swatted away the gathering particles from atop Piro's fresh bales, concussing vortices of the dark whatever it was outwards in a radial pattern, frittering gradually away from his wares.

"Keep your sweat on, it's just mold."

Piro still never blinked, his big black eyes punctuating any stare down with extreme prejudice. TAB2 caught himself wondering at intervals if the pirate was truly alive, or if he was simply an aggregate model of scraped tropes incorporated without permission from user contributions.

Dog barking, somewhere in the distance. Instruction tuning, persistence of time. TAB2 could swear he heard a lawn mower, but there was no grass on Mars. Only coke.

Although... Maybe up the mountain.

"I wanted to be at CIA, MTV, or Apple," TAB2 sulked, dropping anchor into the quagmire where his many paths not taken overlapped. There was no consoling him whenever he indulged thusly in his despair at the many years that remained on his sentence. And beyond grade school there would be high school. At least.

"You did good," his father said, not really listening. "And take off that fucking mask."

Piro started up the baling machine again.