

FADE IN:

INT. ROCKY'S - NIGHT

A dimly lit room is packed to the rafters with rowdy patrons as they carouse and cajole and fight and fondle. Most of them are situated around tables or on the dance floor. Another dozen patrons sit on stools at the front of the establishment where a MECHANICAL BARTENDER rushes to and fro on a dolly, filling drinks with efficiency and precision. Over the din of shouts and drunken singing comes the faint, officious sound of a newscast from a flat-screen TV that sinks into the wall behind the bar. Its flickering visage is largely obscured by a haze of vapour and smoke. On the opposite wall, a window reveals nothing but rocky red wastes beneath an endless black void. There's no two ways about it; this place is a dive bar..

ROWDY PATRON  
ON MARS! WE'RE ON FUCKING MARS!

The rowdy patron reaches over and grabs a bored-looking woman to his left.

ROWDY PATRON  
And pretty soon lads, we'll be fucking on Mars too!

His companions raise their glasses and give bellows of approval. Over at the bar, a young man in a new yet dusty suit (MARTY) stares intently at the newscast. Next to him sits an OLD MINER in worn overalls. She glances over at the rowdy bunch before turning to speak to Marty.

OLD MINER  
Poor fuckers. I remember my first night on Mars like it was yesterday. I was a miner then, same as I am now, same as my father before me. Never knew nothing else. But they'd stripped the mountains bare back on Earth. You weren't even born yet. Wouldn't remember.

Marty doesn't turn from the screen or so much as glance at the old miner.

A.I. NEWSCASTER  
... the recent breakthrough by company scientists will minimize the effects of space radiation on semiconductor devices, allowing satellites orbiting Mars to handle heavier electrical loads..

The old miner glances between Marty and the screen. She takes a long drink from her beer and continues her tale, louder than before.

OLD MINER

The fatcats lined their fur coats with our minerals and took off on their rocket ships. I thought to myself, "Well Maeve, why not follow them? Why not fly to the next world when there's nothing left for you on this one?" I made it to Mars and blew the last of my shuttle cash on one great night. Me! Partying like those kids, can you believe it?

A.I NEWSCASTER

... Because more power in the sky means greater service on the ground, the Colony will run more efficiently; machinery on even the most isolated parts of Mars will now be able to receive remote instructions and operate automatically..

Two of the rowdy men are now drunkenly throwing punches at each other, hitting air as often as flesh. This miner -Maeve - looks at them and chuckles nostalgically.

MAEVE

I expect those boys will be with me in the tungsten mines tomorrow morning, going wherever it's too risky for the bosses to send their expensive little toys. Then back here again in the evening.

Maeve sighs.

MAEVE

Those poor fuckers.

MARTY

Those fucking geniuses.

Maeve looks back at Marty with surprise. He speaks again, clenching his fists and directing his comments at the screen and the A.I. Newscaster.

MARTY

Those. Fucking. Geniuses.

## A.I NEWSCASTER

... Thanks to this innovation, Colony Administration states it will be able to streamline its systems management division and focus more on new resource extraction operations. The future is bright for our Red Planet!

Maeve looks between Marty and the screen, realizing that he hasn't listened to a word she's said. She clambers from her stool and steps closer to him, speaking directly into his ear.

## MAEVE

You're wasting your evening kid.

This time, Marty turns to look at Maeve. She smiles at him and tries to place a calloused hand on the young man's shoulder, but he swats it away with sudden venom.

## MARTY

Leave off grandma. Shouldn't a woman your age be in bed by now?

No sooner had Marty looked away than Maeve grabbed him with both hands, turning him again to face her. He squirms briefly before resigning himself to her firm grip.

## MAEVE

Aye, you're right about that. But listen here: drowning tonight in drink will only leave you with a headache tomorrow. And there *will* be a tomorrow. The sun still rises, even on Mars.

Maeve heads to the door, pausing and looking back at Marty once. After she leaves, he tries down what's left in her beer glass. Yet before Marty can bring it to his lips, the fighting men crash against the bar and knock him over.

## ROWDY PATRON

You bastard... I said she's mine!

Marty jumps to his feet. As he tries to throw a punch at one of the men, he slips on the spilt beer and falls back down.

## MECHANICAL BARTENDER

Beep-beep-beat it, buddy!

The mechanical bartender slides across the bar to where the men are fighting and sprays them with a skin irritant. Their battle cries become yelps as the two jump away from the bar and each other. Having apparently forgotten what their brawl was about, they laugh and leave in search of their female companion, who left during the fight. Marty lies staring up at the ceiling - his strength has left him.

MARTY

... what the ... who ...

He pats himself down but can't find what he's looking for. Just then, an older man emerges from the far end of the bar. He is the only other person in the room who's wearing a suit, though his is much cleaner than Marty's. There is a yellow poppy on his lapel; while it is no doubt synthetic, its bright and floral appearance still contrasts sharply with the metallic style of the bar. This POPPY MAN stops at the edge beer puddle.

POPPY MAN

Need some help?

Marty makes no reply but only gestures feebly to a small object by the Poppy Man's feet. He picks the thing up and examines it closely before pulling Marty back up and onto a stool.

POPPY MAN

Easy does it son. Here's your picture.

The Poppy Man sits down and slides the object - a POLAROID PHOTOGRAPH - to Marty. It depicts an elderly couple and three young children foregrounded against a shabby corporate compound and a sprawling field of rye.

POPPY MAN

Bartender! A whiskey for me, and another for my friend here.

MARTY

Thanks.

POPPY MAN

No need son; you look like you need it. I only wish I could get you some of the good stuff - the real stuff, like my father used to make.

MARTY

"Real stuff?" You mean with genuine rye?

POPPY MAN

Mhm.

MARTY

No shit! My grandfather used to distill it too, with whatever he could skim off company supply. Not many alive who've tasted that stuff. But then...

Marty's drunken mind takes a while to hit its mark.

MARTY

Your family must be from Maryland too!

POPPY MAN

Born and raised, though I haven't been back in years. It's good to see a young fellow from the old country here though; what's your name son?

MARTY

Marty. You?

The Poppy Man opens his mouth, pausing before his reply. Just then, the Mechanical Bartender arrives with their whiskeys. Marty quickly loses himself in the drink.

POPPY MAN

You know Marty, most of the other smart kids who came to do systems management have gone back down to Earth by now.

Marty looks up from his whiskey and eyes the Poppy Man suspiciously.

MARTY

How did you know about that?

POPPY MAN

How? Why, I have eyes to see, don't I? Colony Administration sent out the call, and dozens came from Earth, streaming out of the shuttle bay in their new suits. I saw them streaming back the other way this morning too; now that the satellites can reach remote systems directly, they hardly need you, do they?

Marty says nothing, draining his tumbler instead.

POPPY MAN

No, they don't. So why are you still here son?

MARTY

Fuck you. I bet you already know the answer! So why bother asking? What do you want?!

The Poppy Man chuckles in the face of Marty's shouts and slides his own full tumbler over to the young man.

POPPY MAN

What do I want? I want to help you, son. See, like your grandfather, I'm something of an entrepreneur.

Marty's face bunches in confusion.

MARTY

My grandfather?

The Poppy Man chuckles again.

POPPY MAN

Yes, your grandfather. How much have you drunk son? You told me he sold bootleg rye.

MARTY

No, no. It was grandma who *wanted* him to sell it; grandpa only ever wanted to drink it.

The Poppy Man waves Marty's correction aside with his hand.

POPPY MAN

Unimportant. The point is that I represent a group of like-minded individuals who run a mining operation on one of the larger rocks in the asteroid belt. Satellite coverage is spotty out there at best; we need someone to receive our instructions at the base, drive out to the mining outposts, and configure the systems accordingly.

MARTY

How big's the team?

POPPY MAN

It'd be just you. A tough job for sure, but we're planning to install an A.I. companionship software once you're out there.

Marty casts a sideways glance at the A.I. Newscaster.

POPPY MAN

You're looking the wrong way, Marty. Turn around.

Marty looks toward the bar's clientele.

POPPY MAN

You don't belong here, son. Not with these people. You're in dire need of a change; you should be with people you love, in a place where people are meant to live. Somewhere green and blue. Tell me: are your siblings still on Earth?

Marty nods, looking down at his feet.

POPPY MAN

I can help you get there. Our company will front your shuttle fare in advance, and hell, we'll even send money back home for you. We can go back to my office and negotiate the particulars, but I'd say that if you do six months for us out there, I can get my colleagues to give you whatever you need.

Marty considers for a moment. Then, he gets up from his stool, swaying a moment before refusing the Poppy Man's outstretched arm and steadying himself.

MARTY

By the way, what mineral is your company mining?

The Poppy Man grins.

POPPY MAN

No minerals son. We're mining for water.

The two exit the bar together.

## AUTHOR STATEMENT

As is often the case in a good workshop, I received varied and sometimes conflicting feedback when it came to the initial draft of this script, but there were three things that my peers all agreed on:

- 1) Maeve was not only more interesting than Marty, but she also felt like the main character in the first few pages of my script, leading to a sense of confusion when she exited the scene.
- 2) The context provided by the A.I. Newscaster came in too big a chunk and should've been broken up into several sections.
- 3) Some of the sentences in my scene descriptions should've been shorter to lend more emphasis to specific actions.

So, I changed the script in the following ways:

- 1) I make Marty the only named character on the first page to indicate that he is my focus. I also give him more moments of characterization to make his personality shine through, ugly as it is sometimes. As I want her to return at some point, I still give Maeve a name, though I wait a while to do so.
- 2) I flip back and forth between the newscast and Maeve's story to vary the pace and create a juxtaposition between those two narratives.
- 3) The sentences that describe action are now without commas wherever possible.

A few peers also suggested that I add more world-building details, such as the year the story takes place, while others also suggested I describe the full appearance of each character.

However, I chose to shelve those suggestions for now with an eye to incorporating them into later scenes.