

Moondust Manifesto

A distant memory

The people of Haim *will long ago have forgotten what Earth had looked like.*

Time had moved them so far away from everything familiar that to someone unknowing, they might have seemed like an ancient society from a forgotten past.

And if there were other humans in the universe, they were indeed ingorant. And the people of Haim were oblivious to their future. So much was lost, so much was rebuilt, and for such a long time, there was no room for detailed preservation. Most records became memories, and memories were mixed up with stories, dreams, and interpretations so that barely anyone knew what humans were really like before they got to Haim.

The knowledge of their arrival spread with the creative minds of humans like wildfire into new ideas, out of which arose a multitude of theories, then conspiracies. And then it burned its fuel of significance and became a distant memory.

Flying and travelling between stars had become a legend and then merely bedtime stories, bearing as little significance as theories of the big bang to a busy farmer concerned with providing food and resources for life. There was no space for slacking off into the past when the present was so fragile.

They shifted their attention to what is rather than what was, stranded in an uncaring new world. With a bleak environment that bore nothing but a beautifully shimmering yet valueless dust at night and an acrid sun at day, the few intact isolated rooms of the ship's ruin their only refuge.

The few survivors counted the days of their existence, as no technology that survived could keep the few animals and plants alive, and all technology necessary for humans to survive in the long run was irreversibly damaged. The last humans, maybe, but surely the loneliest generation at that point in history. Far away and alone. But their solitude suited them well, as out of loss, they evolved.

Dozens of variations of what came next were told, some more mystical in nature, others trying to be more factual and wave it off as a coincidence. But what was sure was the strange discovery that the dust, observed as useless at first, seemed to be more special than previously thought. It gave energy in different variations. Plants could feed on it, and with alterations, it could be used as an energy source, similar to electricity. The first humans started to call it "Moon dust", not solely for its resemblance to the color of the moon stone from earth, but also because it concealed the moons, staying the only light source at night.

Much later, the humans discovered that in some areas, and with the right equipment, it was also highly moldable and could be shaped into forms. How and why it seemingly was possible then, nobody understood, not even the best scientist who made it all the way through space with their intelligence and resilience.

But the perks had their limits. Curiously enough, in other areas where it floated in a more dense way, from the exact same material the dust was of, it was impenetrable, and its form couldn't be reversed as with the materialized dust. This seemed illogical, but nothing could be done about it, not even after multiple millennia when humans evolved into the next

subspecies. Their new home stood on, although very spacious, a limited surface of the planet.

This established itself as the norm pretty fast, as humans are luckily highly adaptable creatures. With new generations, newer, more useful ways and habits were implemented to deal with the new world. Out of that new behavior, the very nature of the human temperament altered, so much so that many traits necessary for survival on Earth were left behind by evolution, exaggerating the communal ones.

All effort was put into the generation and distribution of resources, since the supply of dust was unlimited yet hard to transform into its useful forms.

And so they grew their love for beauty and living things, as they were so rare in their new home. Grateful, but too preoccupied to care about what lay beyond their sheltered civilization.

Mercy of permission

The scientist thought she knew what it meant to pursue this profession, yet it became obvious to her that she didn't when she saw the faces of her family after telling them about her wish to become an explorer. Although her confidence was tainted by bitter doubts, when they explained to her, with tense patience and empathy, all the reasons how ungrateful, difficult and senseless this path would be, her stubbornness had the better endurance. She often thought of them when working in isolation in the atelier, but there was no going back now that she had gone so far. This is what she always thought, in a contradictory mixture of the most stoic endurance and fiery restlessness, and why her work was so precise. She had every reason to believe that soon, she could go out for discoveries. Getting permission and material aid for her craft was the single tedious chore she had to face —everything else she did with passionate devotion and in an almost spiritual state of flow.

Knowledge and materials weren't attached to a cost or kept from anyone. The whole population, although so numerous, it was impossible to know everyone personally. Similar to a busy metropole, the way humans lived with each other developed unrecognizable to us in the past. Despite a complex social and political system, it was based on the core interaction between humans, which was much more empathic, and unavoidable on a biological level that our past species wouldn't quite understand. Somewhat comparable for us to the skill one develops within an intimate friendship, feeling emotions on a delicate level when words only serve as a complementary for communication.

Scientists, concerning themselves with exploration, seemed not to [R9] have developed that trait as deeply and as such, did not feel the deep suffrage when not being surrounded by others daily. This was required in this profession, as they worked in solitude, and barely anyone was concerned with their work. It still felt heavy at times. Seeing others together at feasts or gatherings, talking about live events she missed out on, not knowing what to communicate or how to respond. The natural bond with others was simply not gifted to her. The scientist's only regular companion was the automaton she built from stolen parts and bits of dust when she was a child. There was barely trash on Haim and using dust without consent from the community was highly illegal. But her curiosity and inherent difference from others always led her to unconventional and often wasteful ways of studying its energy. Although not alive, the automaton had easy needs, was easy to understand and never

complained about her methods. Exactly as in her atelier, where she knew every tool, the origin of every scratch in the interior, the history of every machine and how painful it was to obtain the necessary resources. The apparent disorder was intentional, familiar, and even when closing her eyes, was engraved in her brain like a map.

So when she walked the long, elegant, glossy halls high up in the towers where most other humans lived, she felt exposed and uneasy. This time, though, she had to try and get that nonexistent skill to work. She needed to persuade the organs of the councils of her need to get out. She required resources that wouldn't go back into the community. The last time, really. Of course, she said these dozens of times before, not out of ignorance, but her science was pioneering, with no example of what worked before. But this time, it was true. And then, they needed to waste the precious spawn energy to open the gates.

In the room with silky, organically built columns and small colorful windows scattered in their multitude like a mosaic sat only one member, to her surprise. It should have been ten to thirty, depending on the matter. But her matter was apparently so insignificant that even the only member present barely paid her a look.

His gaze buried into scripts, letting her stand there in the frozen silence. Still. The only movement in her chest was her controlled breathing. He knew why she was there. The awkwardly small audience was announced because of her matter. So with her very presence, she had to make him feel the importance of that matter to her. Like a staring contest, this was a test of will. Finally, an annoyed blink and his hand reached her, his silvery, mathematically perfectly round marble. His token! The signature she was dependent upon to

establish the protocol for the gate worker. The only chance to start the first research outside. Her life's work.

The scientist exhaled sharply, and with the release of the held-back pressure, grabbed the token, barely bowed (as normally one would to show deep gratitude), and turned to pace, then ran back through the halls back to the atelier. Not noticing the counselor's attempt to coerce her to research those topics the people actually needed. That they were about to face the next agricultural crisis, that the difficulties they faced with attaining dust would stop population growth once again. She only cared to see the wonders beyond the gates of the dome.

Preparation

How fast one's feet could carry one when fueled by anticipation. With the haste of a wild animal, her spirited body moved with agility past all the other busy ones with agility.

Capturing their attention by disrupting the common rhythm of their daily lives, she left them in confusion and shaking their heads. But only for a moment before they went back to their usual flow.

Rushing through the arcades within the greenhouse-bubbles for a shortcut. Where Haim's growers cared for the colorful, leafy plants, although shaped minimalistic, only a naive eye would think of them as primitive. They were highly efficient, and only the uttermost skilled scholars could become growers and dedicate themselves to the greatly adored position. A position that gifted food, medicine, and life to the people. A position everyone dear to the scientist wished for her, and she now didn't even care to look at while dashing past its finest executors.

Her feet couldn't dare to stop. They only had the atelier in mind and its laboratory, its machines. Further through the structures and buildings so great, their bodies and tops

disappeared in a foggy infinity. Like a friend around a tree, symbiotically build around the monstrously giant ruins of the ancient spaceship. Losing their dominance now that children played around them. Further, between temples of the community of humans and dust, and public shrines for gratitude to the past, made out of ancient, holy materials. Real stone and metal, they exuded a calming and unique smell when wet. One was a stone from the moon they said, blue and milky, almost identical to one form of dust. One of the most sacred objects of Haim, as no one saw the moon on this planet, and for the similarity it had to dust while being a completely different sort of material.

Further, further, through the forest of towers, the busy walls, arcs covered in patterns and twirls, over and under the nets of countless bridges, the diverse engines and lanterns put up for festivities. Such an array of materials made it hard to believe that they had their origin in one element alone.

A society not from the dark ages but from a time of light, all rushing beside her.

Finally, the walls of the great central bibliotheca, where all the knowledge of Haim lay, available to everyone, yet barely anyone shared the same passion for the ancient scripts the scientist was so fond of. This meant that the destination was near, and also the legs and torso burning from the strain, the heart commanded her to continue till the atelier's door was closed behind her.

Out of breath and sweating, the scientist almost collapsed, holding her legs, laughing and shaking from the adrenaline. The tiny automaton greeted with a squeak from the other side of the hall, barely notable from the gasps for breath coming out of the wailing lungs.

This organized chaos of curiosities was the home she was so ready to leave, but it didn't feel sentimental. So much of her life she spent in the crawling machine placed in the center of the hall. It felt more like home to her than the rest of the space.

The preparations went rapidly. Nearly everything was ready. The hardest part was to get the needed amount of wather since it was so limited on Haim and rationed carefully for the whole population. Deviation in needs was met with suspicion and complications, and she needed plenty of it for the journey and the machine. The safety suit was ready, and the legs of the crawling machine were in perfect condition to walk on different grounds of dust. The needed instruments and parts for the miniature laboratory with the machine were all shiny and aligned in their garbled new tiny space. The automaton waited patiently to get adjusted for scanning and reporting on the new environment. From time to time, it squeaked and whistled in codes, even difficult to understand for the scientist and tried not to interpret it as happiness and excitement, as this was objectively hardly possible. It was intelligent, for sure, it had to be for that task, but it did not live. Although her experimentation on the dust it was fueled on let her sometimes slip into wondering if it was capable of something similar to feelings or a had some grasp on free will.

Leaving

The lights went out in a bouncy chain reaction, one by one. The gates were about to open, but they would take their time. If not watching closely, one may not have noticed their movement. So enormous were they in mass and so lethargic their movement under it. And though the scientist waited for this moment for a quarter of her life, and two-thirds of her profession, she wouldn't dare to feel impatient and stood still. Respecting the unliving colossus that guarded all humanity and was now moving solely for her alone and her mission. After enduring the stretch that time likes to tease within moments of anticipation, in

silence, she felt it then. The labor of thousands of gears, the effort of motion for a giant, were under her feet, in her chest, and in her temples. Vibrating, groaning in a frequency not made for human ears to hear, but for human skin to feel.

And then there it was—rays of light. First peaking shyly through the hair-thin gap, the gate managed to open. Then overwhelming, bright, and irritating to look at from the dark hall. Bright patterns slithered in, dancing in spirals, pirouetting as if excited to occupy new space. This was the very border of the space humanity could occupy. The moon dust was too dense here to tame it into something useful or even move through it.

And too wild was its nature to stand near it. Its whimsical waves and patterns could sweep a person away like a paper ship in the middle of a raging storm.

It was the safest thing to switch off all apparatuses, even though they were more resilient than in the inner parts of the more civilized city. But not her engine. This was the most resilient, strong, safe transportation ever built on Haim. The density of dust in this area wouldn't hinder its movement like the other transportation humans developed here.

The scientist knew her few seconds of awe, glancing at the spectacle delayed all involved in proceeding with the security measures enormously; everyone waited for her to move the engine, so she did, flustered.

The machine crawled towards the colossal gate, its parts rubbing against each other like an insect. Moving effortlessly through the first denser patterns of dust, then slightly rattling from the movement of it but stabilizing quickly. The tension grew inside the scientist.

The confidence in the quality and sufficiency of her machine was unshakable. She'd dedicated all her life to, in this culture, a superfluous profession. One didn't just try out discovery in a place with the most delicate ecosystem and society, with the clearest thing being the limitation of movement beneath its space. These things needed the most attention and protection from all its members. To deviate from this meant to stand out through tough perfection and work, as well as think in solitude. So, the machine would work at least in a certain area. But the gate would open only once again in nine days. This would be the limit of her discoveries for a long time, if not forever, outside the city. What if she wasn't ready yet? Maybe there was something about the outside that she had not considered yet.

Perhaps there was a scripture about dust she hadn't read, yet that would have been vital in retrospect. It sure would be wise to give the ancient language of the first humans a try. They surely made a secret discovery about this planet.

But it was impossible to take into consideration what she was soon to witness, although all the scriptures were read by her. The language and its secrets from the first humans were lost forever anyway. But the people wouldn't share their resources so easily to support her discoveries next time, if she went hesitating.

And so she didn't dare to. Her crawling machine disappeared from view of the people by the gate, consumed by the stormy and shimmering moon dust.

Stuck

The scenery was hypnotizingly beautiful, and sublime, making one feel small and threatened but impossible to look away. The ground was glowing in cool tones of white and light blue, above only the milky particles that merged into darkness but covered the sky.

Behind the scientist was the dome with all its safety and familiarity, left behind, disappearing into smallness, swallowed by the uniform surrounding.

Before her, the shimmering desert, clouded by the dust, only revealed what's right in front, disguising the infinite vastness of its existence.

The scientist was not far yet. In fact, when no storm approached, many had been here where she was in the early days. She just needed to go further and estimate two days of the voyage. For the next couple of hours, she was too stunned to speak, and the attempts to communicate from her automaton were bothersome. She instructed it to report the coordinates. This was an important task, as the vivid motion of the environment could easily get them off track and ensure getting forever lost. Yet she wanted to watch in awe just for a couple of moments in silence, here where the dust was tamer still.

The scientist focused on the rocking motion of the machine crawling forward on the wavy and swirly motion from the dust, as if supporting it with her mind.

Suddenly there was a hollowed-out space in the cloudy air. The dust there was lacking, it seemed. Curious, the scientist stopped the machine and moved to the small back window. It was covered in a milky layer; the particles sticking to it. The front view wasn't enough to quench her curiosity about this strange phenomenon. This needed to be studied since it opened a new undiscovered possibility. Could the dust behave here similarly to the dome, where humans lived, yet on a microscopical scale in comparison?

She put on the bulky suit, a trusty protector of her lungs from the wild particles out here, the automaton squeaking beside the helmet. Of course, she wouldn't forget the most crucial part of the suit. Still, it was appreciated to feel a little sentimentality from its preoccupations, so she thanked it.

Turning a few gears here, dozens of levers there, all in a complicated order, that she could do in her sleep already. And with a celebratory, howling announcement, the heavy door opened the way to a new world of shimmering air.

The view in the suit was limited. Which often brought slight frustration since, in such sublime and never before encountered surroundings, the eyes were ever thirsty for new sights and never satisfied.

The ground emitted a slight crunching sound and gave in a little with every step. Here the dust build crystals here were more delicate than near the gates. The scientist moved carefully so as not to step in something that could get her stuck. Around her and the machine, there were barely any particles. Everything seemed so sharp and clear without the foggy view she was used to seeing during the journey. At a small distance around them, however, it started again. The automaton in her arms alerted her to the density of it.

Surprisingly, it was too strong to get through. It must have changed in the short time they stopped here—offering a great opportunity to take samples and rest for a while. The sunrise was near, and with the help of numbing herbs and the resilience of the machine, maybe she wouldn't feel its burn inside and maybe her body could even rest.

Had the scientist known that this wasn't a simple momentary change that would be over soon, she wouldn't have gone to sleep so calmly. Although the vivid dreams woke her up in an anxious and disordered state. Asking the automaton about the coordinates, it

didn't answer. The scientist looked up at it, confused. Irritated, repeating: the coordinates? Hesitating, it squeaked that it didn't know. It lost track a couple of minutes ago, and the scientist didn't wake up from her deep sleep. She rushed to the front window. The clear view was still there. How was this possible, they were still in this small dome, yet they moved together with it? Not moved by the currency of the dust, but right in the middle, only surrounded by it? The samples! Surely, they had some data, at least. Disappointingly, this was not the case, they were still in the process of examination by her apparatuses. The only thing except sitting around then was getting out again.

This time she moved faster, the ground underneath her even noisier. Burned from the sun, the scientist cleaned the back window, checked the machine and adjusted what she could. This was utterly unnecessary, but it was something that she understood, and it usually calmed her down. It was not calming, however, that the legs of the machine were stuck in the ground and could not be freed by hand. Getting the automaton and equipment for dust removal also didn't help. What was this abnormal elemental behavior? How could this have happened? No message from the machine nor the automaton reported this issue. An infinite amount of time passed, and soon the sun would rise. Staying outside meant immediate death. The sudden recognition that nothing helped to free them from here, that all her research was for nothing, and she couldn't even see the results for herself, tightened her throat, suffocated the lungs and burned the heart. In despair, her burning eyes filled with the weather, and the acidic feeling of loss overcame her.

She fell on her knees before her giant, paralyzed creation and screamed up into the atmosphere. And stayed like that, crying silently, head still thrown back, arms limp beside her knees, surrounded by the element that betrayed her. A slight bump and shy squeak on her knees tried to comfort her. Now only she and the automaton had each other, completely alone, surrounded by lifeless matter. Taking it into a weak hold, she opened her swollen eyes. And again, tears fell. But this time, sweet tears, leaving her completely breathless and startled. The beauty above her hurt more than to die in loneliness. Not interrupting her gaze, she held up the automaton to what she viewed. She whispered: Nobody has seen them for thousands of years, the dust was in the way it seemed, but I always thought it was a myth. This darkness must be the sky, and this...these are the stars.

Gravity lullaby

The third day was surely long gone. This was the place she would rest forever, she thought. Passing in doing what she loved and in her very own home. The pull of gravity did not concern her body. The scientist fell asleep, not knowing which way was up or which way was down when her lids closed, finally succumbing to weakness.

Discovery of the architects

The scientist was nearly upset, but more so confused. She was ready to let her life go, she understood the very real possibility of that happening. But strange it was giving the last connection to life up, to greet annihilation peacefully and then waking up anew. It felt empty and deluded. After the surprise of being alive, she just then noted that she was lying, eyes

still closed. This was extraordinary, since opening one eye was never experienced by her as a thing to be actively thought of. Yet here she was, disconnected from the basic operation of her body. Could she move her fingers at least? Yes, strangely disconnected still, but possible. A soft ground underneath her, squishier than normal dust-ground. Warm sometimes, as if small streams of impulses would wander around. Was something moving underneath?

She felt the tiredness again. Only one moment of rest, she didn't have to go anywhere anyway.

Afterward, it seemed reckless to give in to unconsciousness so easily. Getting up was an enormous effort. The scientist was out of breath just by simple movement. But the air was fresh and smelled comforting, like wet stone. Then panic spread through her body, like lightning. She smelled the air! Her safety suit was damaged! Yet she was still alive. Strange. Maybe this place behaved differently from the dust desert? It looked different from anything known to her. In her memory she tried to catch the bits of knowledge explaining that...all, this everything. If anyone this very scientist, this haimian, this only human in existence could explain this. Yet here was the only suited one, and here she knew that no one could ever be the chosen one to understand what lies beyond a collective knowledge of intelligence. Moving through this space was more like floating than walking. It had to be breathless and slow, the space demanded it. No!

Forced it.

It was hard to not fall in love with it, although it did not signal friendliness nor invitation for a human.

The automaton estimated it to be about as large as the dome city, yet much more of it was visible, and so it felt more freeing and oppressive at the same time. Bless, for its perseverance, however that was possible. No other device was in sight, even after walking for an inhuman amount of time through the webbed labyrinth of a terrain. It seemed to have been swallowed up by the surface of pastel and white. The only tool besides the automaton working special measurement was the nail thin tabula rasa, made out of soft dust element. It was hard to get something from it, since she only had two sheets. And no sketch nor language did justice to the impressions this place immersed one in.

Upward its branches seemed to flow, if there was truly an up here. The soles of her feet were steady and connected to the ground, but the head could barely comprehend such dimensions of mate, lustrous cosmos of mesh.

How could she explain the phenomena of the rounded hollows that were illuminated by strings of light? Or webs of glitter that sung like string instruments silently for themselves? And even the soft high points of the hills where globs and droplets detached themselves from the top and floated away like weightless foam? All abandoned by life, something humans have never seen and therefore didn't have the language to capture. All existing in a quiet flow, moving scantily, so that the human body could see it if looking closely but was not threatened by its impact. Safe it felt and passive, almost as if the surrounding cared not too much about the human. Some parts the scientist recognized, it was the moon dust. And although there was no absolute security in that, without necessary tools, it seemed like the surrounding was made out of dust. Like humans on Haim altered the dust and shaped it into different forms, materials and bodies, this place seemed to do this on its own. Was it possible by being sheltered from the wildness of the toxic sun or atmosphere, making its own atmosphere? Could the flow of energy through the veins in the ground give the dust its true and final form of being, in this safe space? Perhaps it was that, yet these were only

speculations, as the mind had no intent to obey and attend for inner thoughts, carried away by the maddening beauty.

Her body felt no hunger and her spirit no weakness. Sometimes endlessly she walked or climbed, talking to her automaton. Sometimes simply sitting in silence, being one with the dust. After a long time, she remembered her home and was strangely grateful the place didn't overwrite her memory by taking it in. Since her very being was under absolute explosion of the force that lay within. She didn't care to get home though. What for? The gates were closed anyway, and the crawling machine as well as the supplies lost forever, probably. The environment was hostile, she wouldn't last a day. And even if some miracle would happen, how could she possibly continue her life after this. Who would believe her, and what would they do with that information? There was no possibility of studying this, if she was even lucky enough to remember anything after this overwhelm. The three writing table writings were worthless. No, she would stay here, happy and in peace until the place decided to take her body. She was grateful to give it. She was grateful that it kept her alive long enough to fulfill her life's purpose and even beyond that.

The automaton gave a shrill squeak from afar. It wasn't visible! Was it in danger? The scientist ran after it, she didn't care too much for herself, but she felt for it. It was not just for it to not be in distress after all this. When the time would come, she would let it decide if it wanted to be switched off. But till then she owed it care, and now something sounded concerning.

She climbed up the smooth structures, up the nets of branches, till she reached an oval hole where the squeaks were the loudest and rays of light shone through. The small automaton was right there on a high ground. Everything seemed in order, but it didn't look at her. What was the matter that elicited this behavior? The scientist was annoyed first for the unnecessary alarm, then concerned for it to malfunction.

But the automaton with its abilities captured something an eye could not at first discern. When it appeared before the scientist's eyes, with its feathery crown of horns, its six or more legs connected and moving through the ground, its dark halo between the horns shaped like a human face, but upside down. One leg formed itself into a hand and waved a greeting, exactly as the humans on Haim did.

It was not alone. Connecting with her full compliance, the entities of dust, not its creators but its center, made her understand. Humans existed and were limited on this planet because of them, they were dust. They endowed humans this home. They were dust. And humans were a part of it too now.

And she wrote it on the last tablet, in her own words.

A consciousness with compassion

A mind and soul without a living body

It thinks and acts not bound to singularity

Connected

a hive

An ever present being, that maybe never felt the enslavement of time as we do

Learning, without having to start from birth

nor in terror of the restrictions of death

Omnipresent.

A merciful god.

