

Living in the Moment, but Forgetting About the Future

“A long, long time ago, the oceans were bigger than all the countries put together. Do you see that Hanson? Your father and I used to swim in the ocean when he was your age.”

On a rocking chair that was slightly rusted from years of use sat a balding old man past his prime with a small boy in military uniform on his knee. If you followed your eyes to where the old man was pointing, you would see a transparent picture of a blue and green planet called Earth on a wide window looking out into space. However, if you looked on the window next to it, you would notice a ball of white gas with barely noticeable spots of blue on its surface where the gas lapsed. Around it was a ring with lumps of ice that could be seen around planets like Neptune or Saturn. However this wasn't Neptune or Saturn. It was the corpse of a planet known as Earth.

“Grandpapi, how can there be that much water on Earth when here on Mars there's barely any water?”

“Well Hanson, people aren't as smart as you are. When Earth was still green and blue with life, mean and greedy people wanted to take without giving. They cut down trees that we needed to make oxygen with, filled the air with dark and dirty clouds, and destroyed all of Earth's gifts to us. When they were done, they left our home worse than how we found it.”

“I know! The clouds were made of cow farts right? I don’t know why people like cows so much. They’re stinky and dirty.”

The old man chuckled, “Yeah that’s right Hanson, people loved cows. They loved cows so much that most of the food and land that we had actually went to them, not us. People loved to drink milk and eat steak all the time. These cow farts weren’t the clouds I was talking about, but they did play a role into making that.” The old man again pointed outside the window as he continued. “When I was young, people always thought that global emissions or things like cow farts would bring upon the end of the world,” The old man laughed “, but it didn’t even get to that level. If I could go back in time, I would have told them that humans would bring the end of the world. What happened next was a chain reaction of things that honestly makes even me want to cry.”

The little boy eyes opened in surprise, “Something that even makes grandpapi want to cry?”

“Yes, it was how prideful, naive, and corrupted with power we were until everything came crumbling down.”

“After college, I went into the military as a warrant officer in chemical engineering. All day, I worked in the lab to create chemicals for the military to use in World War III. All bets were off as the Chemical Weapons Convention of 1993 was thrown out the window. Missiles and bullets were high in demand as weapon traders reaped the profits. Allies versus enemies, enemies versus

enemies, former allies versus allies. Everything was a mess and it was every country for themselves.

The little boy chimed in, “I learned this in military history class for officer school. World War III happened because of a crazy man attacked other countries, and just like World War I, the web of treaties made people fight each other even though they didn’t want to.”

“That’s exactly what happened Hanson. Everything was because of politics and money. No one had time for the environment as factories churned out guns, tanks, and planes. Progress in technology was the quickest it had ever been, with new robots and drones being created to fill in the ranks after millions of young men and women died for a lost cause. And I would have been like them if it wasn’t for the fact that I was on a classified project to create a chemical that would be used in the next operation.”

“The chemical’s name is Xenzoic and it is extremely reactive with sea water, to the point where the atoms destabilize and restabilize to cause massive explosions. Xenzoic would be dumped via cargo barges disguised as overseas traders into our enemies’ ports, potentially crippling their navy and economy as it would blow up ships and port towns to high heaven.”

“Grandpapi was assigned to such an important mission for our country? What an honor to be the grandson of a distinguished soldier! I hope to be as great as a soldier as you as well!” Hanson then gave his grandpa a smart salute.

The old man sighed, “You know, kids your age should have been playing around instead of being soldiers. Nevermind, I’ll continue. Xenzoic did exactly what it was supposed to do, and then some. By that I mean it took out the entirety of our enemies’ coasts and crippled their fighting power. We won the war, but we couldn’t celebrate for long. Xenzoic was powerful, but it was too powerful. The amount we put it caused a rapid increase in the acidification in the ocean as carbon dioxide from deep below the Earth was shaken up and drawn to the surface from the explosions. The carbon dioxide combined with the water in a series of chemical reactions and created carbonic acid. Fish and other sea life perished from the pH change, and soon the oceans were filled with corpses. Third world countries and native tribes who relied on fishing starved.”

“Finally when the loss of sea life started to chip into their profits, the voices of the lobbyists made the government start combating climate change and environmental impact. Again, chemical engineering was used because it was the easiest and fastest solution to the problem. It was discovered that if Xenzoic was added to a newly made atom from the Large Hadron Collider and put into ocean water, it would be able to force the water to break apart and use water’s OH⁻ ions to bind with the acid in the ocean. This was the beginning of the end.”

Hanson looked up at his grandfather’s face with eyes of anticipation as Grandpapi took a deep breath. “It was a mistake. A horrible mistake. A new atom, combined with a chemical weapon in order to save Earth. It makes me laugh. Without extensive testing, tons of the new chemical called Xenzoic-1 was dumped in our oceans. Politicians gave rousing speeches about cheesy

things like looking towards the future and the power of humanity to change the world. CEOs and their companies “graciously” donated millions of dollars in support. Reports from the media hailed it as the savior of Earth, and millions rejoiced as the acidification of our oceans would stop. Fish for everyone! Earth is saved! What a joke,” The old man grimaced and his knuckles turned white from gripping the armrest.

“ Not long after, the sea level dropped, and the beaches were covered in steam. Everything living near the coast was killed by the extreme heat that resulted, Xenzoic-1 had caused a chain reaction that would act similar to the energy released by the original chemical and gave enough energy for the ocean water to evaporate.”

“Is that why there is ice floating around Earth just like Neptune and Saturn?” asked Hanson

“Exactly. Normally, the steam would have been trapped by the atmosphere or restricted by the force of gravity. But the energy released was enough to release some of the ocean into space and create those rings. Luckily I was working up in this space colony after the war ended. However, the others down on Earth weren’t as lucky. Billions of people, all gone. Burned from their insides as well as their outsides as the substance that gave us life, ended it.”

“Some people tried to escape by space shuttles. Politicians, CEOs, billionaires, all of those types and more, had the gall to desert the planet that they destroyed. Unfortunately for them, most of

them were too late, and the ones that did make it didn't have much leverage or power left on the last bastion of humanity: the Mars Colony.”

The old man spit onto the ground and made a disgusted face as he replayed his memories.

“I can't imagine billions of people like on Earth.” said Hanson as he played with his grandfather's glasses.

“Neither can I. In fact I've probably only seen a few thousand in my life, talked to a few hundred, and known a few dozen personally. But that's all gone now. Gay rights, pro-life or pro-choice, guns or no guns, it all doesn't matter if we're all dead. We had good intentions, but we were blinded by greed and selfishness.

Well I'm alive so grandma could pop out your dad and your mom could pop out you, so there's no use crying over something that happened before you were born,” laughed the old man.

At this moment, the old man's watch sounded an alarm. “Well would you look at that. It's time for me to head back to the lab now. Gotta get those documents to Jimmy before noon otherwise I'll get an earful from my supervisor. ”

“Aww you gotta go already Grandpapi?” whined Hanson as he tugged on his grandfather's coat.

“Unfortunately, I have to do some important research in order to find out a way to expand the colony on Mars. You do remember that outside is mostly just dust made out of rust right? It’s nothing like how Earth was,” the old man sighed as he walked towards the door, “I don’t know who thought that colonizing Mars was a great idea, but if I find them, I’ll probably throw a few punches their way.”

Hanson sat in his grandfather’s rocking chair, lost in thought. Unlike his father or his grandfather, Hanson was born and raised in the Mars Space Colony all his life. The greatest contact he had with nature was the nearby park, a man-made, artificial structure formed by landscaping. He had and will never see the beauty of the shimmering oceans nor the many towering trees of an ancient forest, except for the pictures saved on the computer. Thinking about such a thing, but not having seen it in his life, Hanson felt left out.

Hanson pressed a few buttons on the rocking chair and brought up an image of Earth before the crisis. He scrolled through pictures of towering skyscrapers, wide lakes, man-made structures, and natural ones as well. He saw pictures of people dancing, comedy sketches, and talk shows. However, none of that caught his interest. As Hanson was about to turn off the screen, he stopped at an image of children playing tag on a field of grass without a care in the world.

An alarm from his watch shook him from his trance. It was time for him to go to Officer’s school. Just like his grandfather, Hanson sighed and headed towards the door. Before he exited the room, he turned his head back and looked at what could have been.