



**Transplanting to Mars**  
by Oris Bracken

Olaf stares through their glastic spaceship hull. He sees a blue-gray beach ball moon receding into a vast black studded with jellybean stardrops. The eleven-year-old boy turns and smiles at his younger companion. “There was an ancient Nordic custom known as a Honey Moon Cruise. The initiates drank wild honey and wine.”

“Honey Moon...” Heidi echoed, dreamily. The girl stretches in her see-through armchair. “Yes. Totally beautiful.”

Olaf points among the stardrops to a glittering ruby. “That’s our new home.”

She tilts her head, lips pursed in an expression mature for a ten-year-old child. “It’s a fine planet. Bradbury World theme park will be lots of fun.” Pushes back long blonde hair to grin, blue eyes twinkling. “Will there be Martians?”

“Of course. They’ll be like ghosts, just wisps of fog.”

“Mars ... I can’t wait.”

“Barsoom is where I want to go, Burroughs Land. Warlords. Woola.”

“Hmm. Floating in lavender boats on canals of wine sounds nicer to me. I like wine.”

“Wine?” Olaf said.

“Rhine wine.” Heidi gives him a little smile. “Should we learn the next Great Secret before or after our dinner?”

“Is this Twelve, the Secret on Great Sexpectations?”

“Yes.”

The level beneath them is a bonsai orchard. They see crewmember Kirs picking ripe apples. Fruit to accompany their meal of walnut steak and broccoli sprouts.

“Let’s eat.”

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Heidi takes twin black velvet bags from a box. Carefully pulls out their communication orbs and hands one to Olaf. Being unadulterated specimens of *Homo sapiens sapiens*, the children have no input patch jacks. Each holds in their hands a large crystal sphere and gazes into it. For reception, touch is more important than gaze.

Images arise in their minds like encephalitic visions. There is the scent of roses.

A human avatar stands before them.

The Messenger appears to be a different gender to each of them. For developing a healthy mind in the *sapiens sapiens* clade, best to use a feminine authority figure for boys and masculine for girls. For Olaf, his Messenger is an elderly woman, but for Heidi, it is a man.

“Hello my young friends,” said the Messenger. “Glad to see you again.”

“My pleasure.” “My pleasure,” they answered.

The Messenger appraises its two young students. They were selected by psychological and hormonal compatibility tests from among the most accomplished Nordic phenotypes. The same procedure will follow for the remaining twelve breeds. Fewer than a thousand registered breeds remain. In comparison, a hundred million feral mongrels roam Earth at large. Their genomes were degenerated by ancestors who lived in a techno-swamp of electromagnetic radiations. The passing of damaged genes only became obvious when fifteen billion people were exterminated and their mongrel survivors mated.

A decade before they took their leave of Earth, certification of purebred genes was mandated. Theirs are certified perfect.

Resurrection of the pure breeds can be traced back to crystallized DNA residua of fossil bones stored in an underground bunker. Nearby a prehistoric seed bank was uncovered. It was obvious these all these remains were intentionally diverse. The human genetic reclamation effort became increasingly difficult as the robo-wars escalated into a mad killing frenzy.

The out-of-control warriors are defective self-programming militarbots caught in search-and-destroy feedback loops. The loops force the killing machines to fight each other into total

annihilation. Like rabid dogs. The Messenger knows humans will lose the wars on Earth. Knows these two children are going to Mars a thousand years before it is a safe environment. However, this is an emergency transplanting.

Messenger has a gleam in her eyes. She asks Olaf to summarize the eleven Secrets given so far.

“Yes, Ma’am.

“You told us that Heidi and I are the first of thirteen surviving human phenotypes to go to Mars. We --and the other twelve pairs of chosen leaders-- will begin populating Mars. Then, after the robo wars end, our tribes will be taken back to rebuild Earth.

“Heidi and I were selected to represent the Teutonic breed. We will mate and via vaginal birth have uncloned children. Because of the war there are no humans on Mars, they left to join the fight. Only their automatons doing repairs and construction work remain as signs of life. Heidi and I will live in Bradbury World until our Teutonic reservation is ready. We’ll be followed by a Boskopoid couple. Then come two Sumerians.” Olaf has finished and wonders if he left anything out.”

“Are there questions?” said the Messenger.

After long silence, Heidi shifts forward in her chair. “I’m uncomfortable with the idea of having babies growing inside me. Won’t it hurt?”

The Messenger shows concern. “Heidi, don’t worry about having babies; there will be effort, but no pain.” He pauses. “We don’t want cesarean. We’ve had enough problems with cesarean offspring.”

She feels relieved by his confidence.

Olaf, too, is reassured. He notices all three crewmembers have come together overhead. Their lithe bodies are softly illuminated by dots of light from the control panel. Strange. They’re having a conference.

Heidi accepts their mission goal yet remains curious. “Why are you saving purebred tribes and not the others?”

“I don’t know,” admitted the Messenger. “The governor on my cognition engine restricts access to your answer. Obviously, we do not need purebreeds to continue humanity. Mongrels are fine enough. But something big is supposed to happen. And in case that event is wholly catastrophic, we have preserved your kind to reclaim Earth.”

“But why?”

“Eugenic theory of evolutionary punctuation. If thirteen distinct human breeds of are kept isolated for millennia and then one day we let them free to mingle, an inflationary period will likely follow. Theory predicts an explosive renaissance of invention and spirit. After humanity has re-established civilization, you will be compelled to again construct agents like myself. Rebuild another Mother Earth Central.”

“We’re backups?”

“Correct.”

The children are quiet. Their respective crystal balls have hypnotically immersed them in this learning exchange.

“No more questions?” The white-haired Messenger smiles kindly at the two Nordic phenotypes. “Very well, let’s continue. Today, my topic is the Great Sexpectation.”

Both children shift in their seats. A bit nervous.

“You have each been under total surveillance since before you were born. You have never had privacy. Never had a secret. You have seen each other and all those around you naked and sweating and urinating and defecating and bathing and sleeping. You have cooked and eaten together. Learned together. Never a moment apart. Never a selfish moment. Quite rigorous. And necessary for good breeding. Takes generations of care.”

Olaf raises his hand. “Can I have sex with Heidi?”

“Not yet,” said the Messenger in her firm, understanding, voice.

He frowns.

“Olaf, I understand how difficult it is to restrain yourself from sex and it’s going to get worse. But it is essential to wait.

“Remember, you were selected because of your mental fortitude as well as physical exactitude. You received Tibetan yoga training for self-control; perfected your tantric exercises for psychic release.”

“What will you do to us if Heidi and I have intercourse today?”

“Nothing. I will simply find a new couple to lead the purebreds. You return to Earth and live among the Nordics as before.” The Messenger looks unflinchingly at the two young animals. “Sexual restraint may be a bit more difficult for you, dear Olaf. But Heidi, you, too, will have trying moments.”

“Oh?”

“Fortunately, there’ll be lots of chores to keep both of you busy. Sometimes a cold shower helps.”

The children know they don’t want to return to Earth in social disgrace. They are well disciplined and have a profound need to succeed. The force of youth mixed with the thrill of traveling to another world aboard a see-through spaceship keeps their moods light and free. They will do their best.

The cabin lights blink twice. They see the crew above has gathered around the solar-anemometer. Heidi is anxious to continue their session.

“Is that our Twelfth Secret?”

“Almost. There is one more part. That is: you know nothing. --Nothing. Only what I have allowed you to know.

“You may not be on a spaceship to Mars. You may not really be going to Bradbury World. This may be only a test.”

“We’ve talked about it. Heidi and I realize our situation.”

Heidi nods: “We have nothing to go on but what you tell us. We know this could be a simulated reality and we might not be who --or where-- we think, we are. But when I feel like

I'm here, then I think that's good enough. Because that is all there is. Are we actually here? Is any of this real? I don't care."

Ship lights blink twice.

The elderly Messenger looks understandingly at their inquisitive faces. Library files indicate it was much like this in the days of domestic pets. Dogs and cats were isolated from their packs and prides became wholly dependent on human beings. They had no idea what it meant to be canine or feline in terms of their own essence. They were a sidestep of evolution that might not have occurred without *sapiens sapiens*. Today purebred humans have a similar dependent relationship to the cognition engine. For every purebred, unquestioning obedience to the cognition engine's Messenger comes inborn. They raise the babies cloistered as if in a monastery or benign military school. The reasoning power and self-control of these special children exceeds that of mongrel adults. "Heidi, everything that happens is real and true. Everything! Remember even I can be a deception, and when you wake up, I may be gone. But hallucinations have reality, too. And not an immaterial reality."

The children are pensive. A simulation is a valid reality. Physical laws may not apply, but moral codes do....

Lights blink.

Calm voice of senior crewmember Kirs interrupts. "Olaf. I need to speak with you."

Blink.

Why would a crewmember pull him out of a Messenger session? He sees Heidi putting their communication orbs in the black sacks. Olaf is not at all sure if he and Heidi had yet learned their Twelfth Secret. It was always that way with the Messenger and her Secrets.

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"This is important," said Kirs.

"What is it?"

“The sun. Apparently, the sun is being used as a weapon to incapacitate all non-Earth control zones set up by Mother Earth Central. They intend to fry every spaceship and satellite on the sunward side of the asteroid belt. Hard burst of gammas.”

“Well, turn on a filter and block it.”

Kirs looks perplexed. “We’ve been trying. The glastic won’t respond.”

A second identical-looking crew member approaches. Her name is Trau. Both femdroids look exactly like Heidi but for patch jacks in their skulls and golden antenna above the ears. “Defective crystallizer-- Someone has to go outside and replace the crystallizer.” She tosses back her long blonde hair in a sign of readiness. “I volunteer.”

Lasting silence as the three consider her bad news and brave offer.

“Well?” said Trau.

“No.” Olaf uses a tone of authority. “Fixing this problem is my responsibility as alpha-male.”

“He’s right,” Heidi said. “The alpha male goes into danger first.”

“You’re right,” added Trau. “Must admit, I was looking forward to going out.”

It occurred to Heidi that they, as well as Dana in the overhead room, are naked. “I wonder if we should put on some protective clothing for shielding?”

“Yes, of course,” said Kirs. “Plus, you and Olaf must wrap in cocoons for duration of the burst. The burst can’t hurt us three. We’re short-term.” Kirs looks at Trau who nods.

“I still don’t believe this,” Olaf said. “Mars trips do not have breakdowns. And, fixing our spaceship by going outside? It sounds made up. Like a test.”

“Yes,” said Kirs. “It could be false data.”

“Are you sure the crystallizer has to be replaced?”

“We’ve requested that the hull resolve into lead and block the ray burst. Our request has been processed...but no change. The glastic is stuck in its viscous state; we need crystals. Our transmutor can morph ice into lead.”

“Help me suit up.”

“Olaf,” said Trau, “these emergency decompression suits are to wear *inside*.” She points to a sign above the rack where their suits hang: NO ROCKETS ON SUITS not for outside use! “If you go outside, voice contact is only between control station router and suit. Not direct suit to suit.”

Olaf frowned. “That’s weird.”

“We are on an automated ride built to self-repair,” explained Trau. “Fail-safe crystallizer. No reason to step outside.”

Kirs brings a hooded silver robe to Heidi. “Here. Your emergency solar ray protection.” The femdroid fastens the cloak over her shoulders. “Better hurry.”

Olaf steps into the silver coveralls. They have the texture of thin silk. He pulls on boots, also silver. Reaches down and rubs around boot tops and pant-legs to close the seal. Heidi presses shut the zip-lock on his back and hears the hiss of a respirator-bubble forming overtop him. In a moment Olaf taps his new-blown helmet and says, “Thanks. Stupid to put the zip-lock seal on my back.”

Heidi giggles.

Lead pilot Dana enters the room carrying the new crystallizer. Her green eyes and flaming hair distinguish her from all the others. She represents a failed attempt to genetically reconstitute the Celtic breed. This femdroid model was built to be a prototype. Though a genetic failure, she is an attractive model. Olaf takes the red block from her hands and proceeds towards the exit tunnel. “Hold on, Olaf,” called Dana. “Exit door is jammed, iris stuck.”

“What?”

“You have to crawl through one of the ventilation shafts. I recommend the big exhaust pipe where we blow off stale air.”

Heidi grimaces. Olaf looks stunned.

“Crawl in the bad gas shaft?” said Olaf. “This has to be a test. Or a joke.”

“Good luck,” said Dana.

Olaf crawls into the shaft. Places hands on one side of pipe, his feet, on the other. Like a four-legged spider, the boy pulls a long white cord with the red crystallizer block secured to its end. It floats in the center of the circular passage. Reaching the end of the shaft, Olaf has to remove the exhaust-recycling filter. This lets him crawl outside and, thanks to his adhesive boots, stand firm on the spaceship hull. Looking down he sees the three crewmembers, and Heidi in her silver robe, watching.

From within the ship they can see the bottoms of Olaf’s boots as he moves to the pedestal holding the old crystallizer. He tries to remove the defective unit while the new one floats above him like a box kite. Olaf seems to be having a problem. His body jerks back and forth.

“Be careful, Olaf,” Heidi said. “What’s happening?”

“The crystallizer is fused to its pedestal. No firm grip. It’ll take a team to change it. Why is this allowed to happen on a cruise ship?”

“Most likely, we’re involved in a test,” Heidi offered.

“Or sabotage,” said Trau.

Olaf looks closer at the defective crystallizer. “Core is dark. Block cracked.”

Dana nods to her crewmates: “We must suit up. Three of us will hold the pedestal firm so Olaf can twist off the old crystallizer.”

The femdroids help each other with their zip-lock seals. Their bubbles form and the breathing gas comes on. They start for the exhaust pipe. But first Olaf has to replace the filter cover on the big tube. This lets gas compression build so the crew can open the shaft without fear of vacuum suction. The iris opens, and the trio begins their crawl to topside.

Four pair of boots are walking on the outside hull. Heidi watches from inside the spaceship. Work seems to be proceeding smoothly. But the job is awkward. She watches Olaf

remove the old crystallizer from its pedestal. He passes it to Dana. Then pulls the white string and reels in its replacement unit. To screw it on, he must remove the string.

After the new crystallizer is freed the loose cord tangles around Olaf. It gets between his legs. Heidi watches Olaf trying to disentangle himself. Replacement unit stays cradled in his arms. He turns around but it's the wrong way. Turns back. Lifts one foot after the other. Uh oh... He is floating.

"Trau! --Olaf is loose."

Trau turns and sees Olaf drifting away. She reaches up and grabs his right foot. Got him. But the momentum of her motion breaks the seal on her boots. Trau floats off the hull.

Heidi shouts, "Kirs!"

Kirs looks up. "Oh!" She leaps and grabs Trau's foot.

Now all three are afloat.

Dana has been watching this catastrophe unfold. She releases the broken crystallizer and strides quickly to the pedestal. Her colleagues are already beyond her reach. Thinking quickly, Dana spies the mooring string twined about the pedestal. She unwraps the strand, climbs on the pedestal and grips its sides between her knees. She hurls one end of the white string toward Kirs who grabs it with her free hand. Dana can't pull three people in very quickly, but at least they're not drifting away.

"Hold still," Heidi directed. "Let the line settle down so Dana can draw it to her."

A loud voice: "T minus one thousand seconds."

Countdown to sun burst has started.

Dana clutches her end of the mooring cord. She feels the pedestal slipping from between her knees. Everyone is still. Kirs has wrapped the string around one hand and uses her other to grip Trau by the ankle. Trau is stretching, reaching with her right arm to clasp Olaf by his boot.

"I'm slipping," said Dana.

Heidi lets her robe fall to the floor and dons the remaining spacesuit. By attaching a thread, she pulls up her zip then reaches behind her neck to smooth its seal. Runs to the gas shaft

as her air bubble grows. I'm locked out! The crew left the outer filter off. Heidi runs toward a sign glowing bright yellow: WARNING Trash Ejection Area.

This is where the janitorbot puts self-immolating trashcans. The janitors load the cans into the vacuum tube and shoot them into space. Heidi sees a large spool of binding cable. Quickly she rolls it out. Ties one end around her waist and the other to one of the metal hoops recessed into the Ejection Area wall. Grabbing the START lever, she pulls, but it won't budge. She brings all her weight down on it and feels it give.

A loud crack--

Heidi is instantly sucked out through the open hole. The binding cable holds firm to its hoop and gives her body a hard jerk. She recoils and pulls herself back to the hull. The vessel with no crew inside and minimal lighting looks like a ghost ship.

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The burst is intense. Console lights blink. Walls turn gray, and interior structures, florescent white. The ship is lit so totally there are no shadows. The white light turns purple, fades to crimson, and pulses down to black.

Then darkness.

A slight rocking, as in a small boat at sea.

At last, the walls begin to clear and stardrops return.

Heidi and Olaf come out of their cocoons smiling. The test--if it was a test--seems to be finished.

Everyone removes their spacesuits.

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“Before eating, you both need to visit Dr. Li,” said Dana.

Kirs agrees. “Must be certain your genomes weren’t damaged in the burst. Remember, in just three years Heidi is due to start having babies.”

“That’s in Mars years,” Heidi emphasized.

Dana taps a button and the entrance to Dr. Li slides open. Thick red light. The children step inside and the door shuts behind. His floor is warm to their bare feet.

“Hello, little ones.”

“Hello, Dr. Li,” they said, as one.

“Haven’t seen you since I chose your genomes for Mars.”

A purebred human named Dr. Li, developed this medical AI four centuries ago. His creation performs a gene-by-gene check scan in twenty seconds and in another twenty, protein alignment. Introns and exons are mapped and matched with previous charts to note evolutionary trends. “Please lift your arms and spread your legs.”

*Flash. Flash.* “My goodness, you’re maturing beautifully. This is excellent. Your ova and sperm are fortunate to have such fit hosts.”

“We appreciate your confidence in us, Dr Li,” Olaf said.

“Yes, we do.”

“Genome looks fine. Proteins appear in order ... ah, good, good.” *Flash. Flash.* “Good charts. You can expect beautiful children. First born will be a girl.”

Olaf raises his brow. “I wanted a boy.”

“Don’t worry, you will have sons to raise.” Thick blue light. “OK. You can put your arms down. I’ll see you in Bradbury World.”

“Thank you, Dr. Li,” they said, hearing his doorway open.

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Heidi and Olaf relax with a meal of fresh spinach leaves covered by a scoop of protein-enhanced yogurt topped with sunflower seeds. Side bowl of cranberry relish. Heidi orders an ounce goblet of *Liebfrauenmilch*.

As the humans feed themselves and talk over their day, the crew drink quietly from large mugs their antennae quivering. Femdroids do not eat. They absorb their vitality from nutrient laced mineral water. The elixir is completely absorbed by their metabolism. Androids never produce bodily waste except with an occasional breath.

The crewmembers are nearing the end of this life cycle. They willingly accept this as part of their bargain for experiencing life. Femdroids are programmed to believe reality is a simulation and a new one begins when this one ends. No fear of final shutdown.

After eating, Heidi rises and feels a tingle of anticipation. “It’s time for us to learn the last Secret.” She quickly goes to the black bags containing their crystal balls and brings one to Olaf. He rises to take it...and for a moment, Heidi focuses on his young growth of pubic hair. She blinks, realizing the wine loosened her programmed restraint.

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The children return to armchairs and sit back. Both place their hands on a communications sphere and stare into it.

They see lightning flashing!

How strange.

Abruptly, the Messenger stands before them in total reality. Heidi looks at him with puzzlement. Olaf is simply relieved to see her again. "Greetings, dear travelers." Behind the voice, they hear rumbling thunder. "We haven't much time. I have your Fourteenth Secret."

"Thirteenth Secret," Olaf corrected.

"Never a thirteenth. Trust me. Fourteen is your top Secret. And that is..."

Olaf interrupts, "You're going to tell us that fixing the crystallizer was a test!"

"Are we really on a spaceship?" pressed Heidi. "Where are we?"

"Who are we?"

"Children --no time for details. But you have become more precious than ever. --The mongrels have been exterminated."

Heidi and Olaf exchange glances of alarm.

"Robos have overrun all resistance. Most animals dead. Of phenotypes aboard spaceships, we lost our Boskopods to the sun burst when their crystallizer cracked."

Olaf blinked. "It cracked?"

"They failed to replace it in time," said the Messenger. "Fortunately, the Sumerians did. They land at Cydonia resort in six months." Loud pounding behind the Messenger. "Must rush to send our remaining couples...nine more breeds."

"Is this a test?"

“Your most important one.” A loud crash. Sirens. “Purebred tribes will have Mars to yourselves for awhile, perhaps a long, long while.” A bolt of lightning crosses the face of their Messenger. A louder roar is heard. Image flickers.

“Good luck, kids. Keep your grades up. Pass your tests.” CRASH! The silver haired Messenger vanishes and brown smoke fills their crystal balls.

“What do you think?” Heidi said.

“Umm. I don’t know. Difficult to believe the Messenger is gone forever. This could be a test.”

Both children are concerned.

But for now, there is immediate sadness. Heidi and Olaf must say goodbye to Kirs, Trau and Dana.

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Each crewmember graphs their fondest thoughts into the Rhodia life-cubes of Heidi and Olaf. Memento of their exciting voyage to Mars.

Kirs says, “Time to go.”

Heidi struggles to hold back tears. She knows tears are inappropriate.

The crew give their passengers farewell hugs and kisses.

Their golden antennae quivering, the trio dutifully climbs into the compost boxes. They lie down. “Aloha,” said Kirs. “Good luck,” said Trau. “Goodbye,” said Dana.

Each femdroid uses her tongue to touch a spot behind the upper left rear molar. Each falls asleep.

Olaf looks sadly at their inanimate bodies. The antennae have turned black. They look so human... Heidi touches Kirs on the cheek. Cold. Olaf shakes his head and one by one, closes the lids on their boxes. Latching activates a green recycling light. Their crew will enrich garden soil.

The children look past the boxes to the awesome panorama of Mars looming before them. Phobos rising.

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Their transparent spaceship lands like a feather on a terraced plateau at the edge of Bradbury World. Olaf and Heidi see a town. Flags wave and large balloons in bright colors bob. Gondolas on canals of sparkling rosato weave through plazas of garden domes and tall spires. They put on their Mars suits. The exit ramp rolls down as the ship door slides up. In the opening, Heidi and Olaf stand hand in hand and look down at their welcoming committee.

Thirty-six Martians.

Wisps of fog somehow held together and kept from dissipation. Large eyes like gold coins. The creatures face the alien spaceship but are not looking at Heidi or Olaf. The Martians gaze over their heads.

Heidi feels a strange anxiety building. Feels drawn to walk toward the cluster of apparitions. She tugs Olaf's hand. They walk down the ramp across the sand.

And stop. The Martians are staring past them, above them.

The young immigrants turn to look at the sky.

Olaf points.

Then Heidi sees it. "Wow." High in the Martian sky. A pulsing point, glowing bright. She gawks, confused. A yellow flare. Her mouth drops open. "Earth's on fire!"

In the chilled night air, their blue planet has turned orange. Yes, it will be a long time before the settlers come back. Heidi and Olaf turn to address the Martians.

Desert sand. Wind.

"The Martians--" Olaf gasped.

"They've vanished," Heidi whispered.

"Whew." Olaf shakes his head. "Our Messenger sure knows how to give a test."

Heidi laughs.

They walk toward Bradbury World.

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