

Stardust

By Ben Puckett



The horizon seemed endless across the landscape of Mars with a dry ocean of dust. I had been walking for miles with only the movement of my steps to remind me of my progress. The sun was scorching the charcoal sky with its solar light as it began to vanish below the far sand. As I continued my journey, I wondered how anyone would work so hard to travel such a distance with the amount of time, skill, and determination that was required to travel to the very place on Mars that I was walking. I stopped to take a closer look at the dust in front of my feet remembering that great ideas start as small as a grain of sand. Looking back, I only saw an endless line of footprints; the only indication that I had come so far since the beginning. I glanced to the darkening sky towards the emptiness of space; the place where ideas hope to find. I stood up and surveyed my surroundings. I saw large dust clouds reaching across the horizon that separated the dust from the sky; an expression that the distance between ideas and their destination is great but always in view.

I looked in the distance to see what looked like a tall wave in the sea of the dust. A large storm was moving across the landscape. Flashes of lightning could be seen within the thick dust clouds. The storm was moving swiftly towards me slowly filling the sky in front of me. I have learned the skills to solve the challenges that would find me; I was prepared for what was coming. The storm came thundering like the engines of the spaceship that carried me through the sky on my journey to where I am now. I trudged through the chaos with the same determination as the storm. I thought back to those that had built the mission and what they experienced as the development of their ideas rose and fell like the clouds of the storm and how some ideas were struck down as if by the very lightning surrounding me only to be picked up and carried by the wind in a new direction. I continued to press on pushing through to the other side. When I made it, the rumbling slowly faded reminding me of the moment when the engines shut down as my spaceship escaped the gravitational pull of Earth. I looked back to see the storm move slowly away.

I continued my path while watching the sun fade taking the landscape with it; all that was left was the darkness of the night. I decided to rest and regain some strength after the encounter with the dust storm, so I looked toward the sky to see the stars stretch across my helmet visor. Focusing on the stars, I could see large interstellar dust weaving between them. Something that demonstrates how ideas are not always a straight line but must be joined together in an interweaving path. I followed the interstellar dust across the sky to the horizon where the storm disappeared almost as if the dust made it to the stars. This reminded me that the intergalactic dust would eventually merge together to form a new star. A process that requires time and energy but, in the end, can result in a beautiful piece of the universe.

I decided that it was time to continue towards my destination. I thought back to the question of why so many people would put so much time and effort to travel to such a quiet and desolate place far away from life. I realized that the answer lies not in the destination, but instead within how you got there. The ideas that form from dust and how they become stars is the motivation to travel to a place that we have never been before and discover new worlds. I realized that space exploration is more than just going farther than where our reach allows, it is about the challenges we solve that stretch the bounds of what we can do. I watched the light slowly bleed over the dark landscape as the sun slowly peaked above the horizon and thought to myself "This is why I am here..."

References

National Aeronautics and Space Administration. (n.d.). *Stars*. NASA

<https://science.nasa.gov/astrophysics/focus-areas/how-do-stars-form-and-evolve>