

Mycelium I

Kai Szulborski

Kai Szulborski is a graduate student, English GTA, and writer at UND. He first tried writing after he fell in love with a badly written gothic space-opera about a small blue ghoul who uses the soul of Charles Dickens to power his giant hammer-wielding robot. Now, he mostly writes about giant sad women crying in deserts. He is currently working very hard to accelerate the process of entropy in order to eliminate all stars in the universe. That way, he can sleep in as long as he wants.

Black skin tilts like sand over the expanse of a small, planetary surface. Across the pale darkness, green shoots arc and wither towards the curved horizon born from the ancient collapse of dust-discs and scattered light. The shoots flit mindlessly through unchanging functions, first filling the sky before stowing downward to crash into the black pools on the planet's surface. Once they've gone, their tails continue to chase each other beneath the dark waves, like seeds or bright-worm formations sliding heavily across the seabed. Neither the tails nor their sunken parents carry any awareness of the importance in their movements, their paths controlled only by lines of light and wind. Within their intersecting trajectories, they operate outside the framework of subject or object, instead forming an anti-idea.

The silence sits intractable on the planet's surface, blanketing its mountains and the violent chemical storms that sweep across its oceans. The light coming from the small sun heats bebies of liquid hydrogen hiding in the fissures between the planet's jagged mountains. Occasionally, the sun heats the planet's surface enough to crack an itinerant fault-line along its current superposition, spewing cold gravel out onto the scree at the mountain's feet. These stones plume briefly into the sky like glittering faces, the light from the sun reflected through their fizzling central chimneys towards the ragged peaks. When the plumes shatter back down to the ground, they open high-pressure vents which release streams of sulfide steam that bind together the valley's frigid arms.

Near the planet's equator, the brightest sky-serpents often fall on rings of small hills that once formed the headwaters of a large chemical spring in the planet's violent past. In its early days, the planet bled with rivers of sulfur strapped up to the

surface from its burning core, its ground scoured white under blooms of acidic teeth. Nothing now remains of those blooms or the springs themselves, aside from the long lines of red oxidation sloughing off into the valleys like layers of skin. The stars wheel into frigid black pools on the shores of the mountains, stopping briefly on beds of iridium and compressed carbon before falling into the distant chasms undergirding the bottom of the world. No rocks or planetary surfaces stray the stars from their path, their journeys tracked instead by maps of invisible radiation. They cannot disappear.

When the sun expires in future time, it will drag itself down to the surfaces of its cold children and seed them from the system like the galactic equivalent of fungal spores. The planet itself has prepared for this moment since its inception, the careful arrangement of rocks and dust designed by gravity to suit the hungry needs of the sun. At the bottom of the planet's largest ocean, intense pressure crushes carbon into dark jewels which the planet will present to the sun when its preparations are complete. At that moment, the sun will take the jewels into itself and transform them into jets of plasma to scour the surface of its predatory serfs. When the sun finally devours its children, it will do so gladly, without thought.