

Zombies to Mars

by Ed Higgins

Perseid meteors fly past their ship like cosmic fire-wasps. Smaller ones caroming off their inter-planetary craft's protective hull while fireballs the size of fists flash past portholes. Earth's apocalypse end has long since past. Slightly before back-then there was little time to sigh over regrets, less still to say goodbye, goodbye to Terran's once haven. Such was the thrum of Earth's historic zombie cataclysm. A small human remnant barely escaped, heading desperately toward Mars and salvic resettlement.

Advances in genomic remodeling at DNA levels ensured colonists were functionally now able to withstand anticipated, albeit still harsh, Martian ecosystems. Fortunately, Mars terraforming had been ongoing for decades. Several robotic missions of continuously occupying autonomous and semi-autonomous AI's were still safely doing the ongoing work largely untenable by humans. But when it became clearly and horrifyingly untenable for humans to survive Earth's zombies the gamble of a survival migration to Mars was a last-ditch effort. Thankfully, that last-ditch effort had ensured the continuance of the human race. The haven had turned Edenic in its success.

But now, in stealth pursuit, brain-hungry zombies travel through space toward Mars. Their galactic shuttle half-way there. Hurling at sub-light speed toward Earth's surviving remnant, and their at long last flourishing Earth-fled human settlement with its ever growing population. The colony fully unaware. The colonists having partially terraformed the red planet for decades now; third and fourth generations having all but forgotten the Earth-destroying zombies from whom a meager ark of their ancestors escaped. Zombies have become a receding myth on their new Mars world. Although there are recorded stories of terrified early arrivers watching the Martian night sky, telescopes and parabolic antenna fearfully directed toward the far away blue planet. For some time now forgetfulness

and skeptical dismissal have reigned. Yet there are still a few historical (some say hysterical) voices crying out in a faded multi-generational memory of those fearful wilderness settlements years.

Long since, school children now yearly celebrate a costume holiday dress-up on "Zombie-Eat-Brains-Night" going house to house to collect zombie decorated cookies and brain-shaped candies. All with feigned terror by neighborhood residents who answer the moaning knock on the door with the familiar entreaty by costumed youngsters of "Eat your brains or bring us treats!" Some adult residents even costume themselves as zombies to pretend-fright the fun-seeking children. Although, occasionally a younger child, even while costumed her or himself in mock-terror outfit, will recoil in tears. Much to the embarrassed adult's comforting efforts toward a faux-zombie scared child.

Erasing the distance through the silence of space, all five hundred of the torpor living-dead are brain-organ famished. Their numbers not many--given their once apocalyptic scale of destruction back on earth. They breathe stale recycled air to slow their speed of decay. No cryopreservation or artificially induced torpor is necessary on board. For zombies, torpor is their natural state, their anaerobic metabolism slowed to near zero for over a year's mealless days now. Less than a year left of across the remaining void until arrival.

Through the silent blackness of space this galaxy-faring horde creeps closer: dreaming, salivating. Anticipating being sated soon of their hunger.

