

Mars, Lost & Found

By

Katie Noon 7 T

The sound of children crying drifted through the thin, cold, dusty atmosphere. The people were being taken away from their planet. They were divided into groups and, suddenly, everyone had gone into The Survivor. All that was left was a planet—bare, rocky, and empty like most of the other planets closest to the Sun.

A few days later, as their gods had predicted, there was a gigantic collision. A huge meteorite crashed heavily into the surface of the dusty planet, and everything slowly started to change. The water slowly disappeared, and the land slowly froze. Water no longer coursed through the riverbeds; but from the hills above, their former passage could still be clearly seen. All that was now left was a dry, desert surface and the remains of a village that would still be left standing, eons later. There was to be an eternal silence across the decimated wasteland of the planet's surface.

Katherine, a NASA astronaut, was working out the final details of the landing on the red and orange surface of Mars. She knew how cold and rocky the surface would be. She was on a mission to find out about the possibility of life on Mars. Missions had been tried so many times before by robots, and now, after nine months of journeying through starry space, by humans! At last, the landing spot! "Now we can get started," she thought. In spite of her many years of training, she was still very excited about being one of the first to reach the Red Planet.



Katherine had always wanted to go to Mars. It interested her how our own planet, in some places, is so much like Mars, with river valleys and volcanoes, and how Mars has water-ice trapped beneath its surface. Also,

it is one of the few places that could possibly support living creatures, even though the only remaining life might be in the form of bacteria. Now, after years of anticipation, Katherine had gotten the chance to go!

There are many problems with staying on Mars, she had learned: how to breathe for a start, and it is hard to go around with a space suit on, even if you are much lighter. On the plus side, on Mars she could eat as much food as she wanted and still be lighter than on Earth! But arriving back home might be another story!

The astronauts on the Beagle 2 landed not too far away from Olympus Mons, the largest volcano in the solar system, to find information about the volcano. The flows of dark lava, the tell-tale signs of a volcano, were clearly visible, even at a distance.

The villages were around Riana, a sacred, dormant volcano. This was



where they worshipped their god Ala Sasa. To the lost civilisation, the warm lava flows had once emitted the wonderful, fresh, clear aroma of sulphur, and provided heat above them from the caldera filled with the molten lava.

The feeling of success ran through Katherine's body, a feeling of fulfilment, and of happiness, as she went to sleep. Outside, there was a fast-moving sandstorm that howled around the spacecraft. Suddenly, the sound of a piece of metal hitting the booster woke up Katherine, and she put on her spacesuit to explore outside. She was very surprised by this, as the wind, though very fast, is much gentler in effect than on Earth.

The rusty coloured dust around her was flying about, and she could barely see anything. Then she saw it. Something, which looked like cloth attached to a metal stick, had hit the spacecraft and dented the left booster. That wasn't what was puzzling her, though. Where had the cloth

come from? It had some strange markings on it. It looked like the image of a mountain exploding, a volcano! But to whom could it belong?

We are the leaders. We will love and pray for you. Tell us what is to become of us. Solea Alo Sasa. Solea Alo Sasa.

Swish, swish went the flags, as the ceremony began. It was a ceremony to christen The Survivor, a huge round spacecraft, which would fit 10,000 people. They would leave their home world before The Great Change happened. The Survivor was built to carry them to the new planet on which they would live.

Katherine took the flag inside and showed it to the rest of the crew who were amazed. The detail on the flag was wonderful. Now the search for life had really begun!

It was minus fifty (- 50) degrees outside, though no snow was falling, as it would on Earth. Katherine was shivering inside the shelter, even though she was wrapped up. For some time now, the crew had been studying the flag to find out what it all meant, but they had thought of nothing. Perhaps Earth could help. Katherine knew that, because of the huge distance, this communication would be a long process!

"Calling, calling; Houston, please respond."

10 minutes later

"Ah, Commander, tell us all your news."

20 minutes later

"We have found a sort of flag that hit the left booster."

30 minutes later

"What! It hit the booster! Is it all right? We will monitor this for you."

40 minutes later

" Yes, we have repaired the damage, but it isn't that I wanted you to know about. It is the flag. It has a pattern that looks like a volcano! We will show you on the video link."

1 hour later

"Did you ever think of Olympus Mons? I hope to hear from you soon."

This news had Katherine thinking. What if the flag showed a picture of Olympus Mons! Did this mean there were creatures on Mars before us?

The next day the crew set out on a journey to the massive Olympus Mons. The red surface burned their eyes if they looked at it for too long. As they climbed further up, they found strange markings on the rocks. The markings looked man-made and very, very old. The crew moved up further until they came to a ledge. They got the greatest shock ever! There, right in front of them stood a village (once called Tatu) that had been covered in rock and dust for millions of years.

"Wait a minute," thought Katherine. "That means people used to live here. But where did they go?"

The Festival Lacarona was held once every year near Mariner's Valley. The people celebrated The Coming Together, in the dusty sky, of the two moons, Phobos and Deimos.

A shape had formed in the sky, the sign of The Two Becoming One, a mark and a phrase always used by the people. It was this sign, in fact, that had brought them together in peace.



There was a noise in the sky, well, if you could call it a sky. It was covered with a blanket of thick, pink-coloured dust. With the coming of the fast winter winds, the dust devils whipped the coarse dust into spiralling columns. Through the dust, a new rich colour appeared, and the stars came out, like a procession.

Katherine and the rest of the astronauts prepared to make their way down in the

rover to the bottom of the valley, bigger than the Grand Canyon, Mariner's Valley. They looked down and saw its huge presence, twenty thousand feet deep and so wide that one edge could barely be seen from the other. It slashed its way across nearly a fifth of the Martian equator.

They carried out many experiments on the dust and the atmosphere, to find out about the chemistry of Mars and the possible source of the cloth flag. Then, unexpectedly, after months of steady work, they saw an amazing sight. As the afternoon sun was setting, the floor of the 5-mile deep Valley was pink with symbols projected all over it. These symbols looked like a country, bright and sunny. In one picture, the people looked happy, and, in another, they looked sad. There was an area in the middle of the floor where it looked as if some kind of gigantic spacecraft had stood on a launch site.

The Survivor reached the new world, a tiny planet, and its final destination. This planet was what the lost people wanted—a new home. Little did they know that one day, in the far distant future, humans would follow them in their ancient footsteps.

"What a way to spend the last days of the mission," thought Katherine. "But there is no way to extend our time here."

After so many months of searching for evidence of living creatures, their time had run out. A mission that had started with nothing had ended with so much. Evidence of an advanced civilisation had been found.

"We will come again, that's a promise," Katherine called, as a shout from the shuttle beckoned her to leave, "and next time we will find out the truth about this deserted wasteland and its history."

As the Beagle 2 set off for home, all of the crew thought that they heard a cry drifting towards them from far, far away, as though it was from the past.

Was it the sound of the lost children crying?