

## **Second Chance** by Kamran Weiss

Pluto had always been overlooked by scientists because of its small size, cold temperature, and harsh living conditions. Of course, those are the planets I look for. Every day, I put on my sweaty, disgusting, thick, heated coat and venture into Pluto's -375 degree freezing temperature, making life nearly impossible. I buckle my spiky crampons around my coated feet to help me navigate the slippery terrain.

I try to walk, but because of the coat, I awkwardly start waddling like a so-called "Earth-penguin." I've heard stories about Earth before. Some elderly people in our colony have said their ancestors lived to see it smoldering. Here, let me fill you in. For the past 500 years, we've been living on Pluto, and before that, we lived on the red deserts of Mars, polluting our living space and extracting everything we could. It all started when Earth's ecosystem couldn't be saved and its leaders made a risky decision to save our species by rocketing away.

Now, back to me. I'm Ty. I've studied for seven years to get a degree in Human Habitats. This intense education has helped me get one of the most respected jobs in the colony: an analyst at Planet Research. We assess prospective planets for future human colonies. I've been working non-stop because we are running out of time on Pluto.

As I enter Planet Research's headquarters, I get chills from the awe of working here. I find my cramped office stocked with devices from radars to sophisticated telescopes that can photograph planets billions of light years away. I am overwhelmed as I start looking at all of my trackers and datasets. Failure is common in my field, and so far, nobody has found a viable new home. My days are blurring together as I constantly compare images, sizes, and data points. Sometimes my co-workers tell me that I mumble coordinates while I methodically work.

I came home defeated for still not finding another planet. My roommate and best friend Rone tries to cheer me up. At seven feet tall and muscular, Rone towers over me. Even though he could throw me to the other side of the colony, he has a warm heart and many friends. I've known him since we were seven years old when we'd mischievously race around icy fields and topple over each other. As young explorers, we longed for adventure, but the immense wall that stood to protect our colony always stopped us; I still wonder what is on the other side.

"I've been hearing rumors about a secret group plotting to overthrow Planet Research," started Rone after we finished dinner, with a little bit of uncertainty. "They want to stay on Pluto and find a clean way of disposing of waste. You may want to look into it, Ty."

This was no small claim, and I decided to think about this for a moment.

"Have you realized how far I've come to get this job? And now you think I'm going quit?" I pounded my feet up the steps, tears flooding my eyes that my best friend would make me give up on my career pursuit for the last decade. Grueling hours were spent reading maps, analyzing planetary data, and building new models that gave me entry into this exclusive club of scientists to find humans a new home. He should know this.

The next few weeks, I worked late nights building a promising new approach. We were finally getting somewhere. We identified a planet two billion miles away that appeared to have lush jungles -- and lakes and rivers were abundant on the planet.

That night, I met up with Rone. Things had cooled down a little, and it had been OK for the last few nights.

"Ty, I need to talk to you. The revolution is getting bigger, and I want to join. They promise a better Pluto for us to live on. Just think about it. We don't want to hop to another planet when we can make ours better! C'mon, just think about it." Rone was pacing back and forth trying to persuade me as I looked at him in frustration.

"No." I coldly walked up to my room, my insides burning with fury.

After getting 5 hours and 37 minutes of sleep, I put on my blubber suit and waddled through the divided streets of the colony. Signs of protest against Planet Research hung across the wind tunnels, blowing in the frosty winds with a slightly putrid smell from littered garbage.

After shutting the airlock and entering my office, I immediately started reviewing data on the new Planet HK-2243\_&7 in Galaxy N-234. As I was about to import some of the research I had worked on earlier, a mysterious looking file caught my eye. It was named "Earth." I opened it. A blue and green sphere rotated with a smaller gray sphere circled around it. That mystical paradise, long gone from the galaxy.

I looked at the file curiously and decided to re-run the probability of planet failure. After several hours, I stopped the program in disbelief. 234 simulations of every possible calamity came to a similar conclusion: a 50% survival on Earth. Wait what? I thought Earth leaders *had* to leave!

Immediately I realized we could not do it again. My giant kind friend Rone was right that it was time to join the rebellion. How did I not realize this before? It's for the good of the next generations and the ones after that. Let's make Pluto better. Even though I was terrified to leave my career, I went to my overseer and told her "I quit."

Rone was animated when I shared my decision and we discussed new changes. If we stayed, we could transform Pluto into a graceful ice house, not a sad looking one. Sure, we would be waddling for the rest of our lives, but we didn't need to look for other worlds for our future.