

# Outpost

## Characters:

ARIS	A third-generation Martian. (W/NB, early 20s)
LIAM	A third-generation Martian. (M/NB, early 20s)
JO	A third-generation Martian. (NB, early 20s)
TRISH	A first-generation Martian. (W, 60s-ish)

**Time:** Someday.

**Place:** Mars.

## Synopsis:

It's the day before the Test for young Martian colony residents Aris, Liam, and Jo. They decide to take their mind off the big day by hanging out in an old, abandoned part of the compound — a section that used to be inhabited but is now set for demolition. It's a space filled with history and ghost stories about a lost Martian resident named Trish. It also used to be used as the location for a presentation about Mars history. Jo and Aris love the creepy feeling of the place, whereas Liam would rather not talk about ghost stories.

When the compound's AI system, MARVIN, starts giving the presentation again, Aris, Liam, and Jo find they can't turn it off. So they decide to have some fun and play along with it, half making fun of the history, half reliving their childhoods seeing the presentation. But strange things start occurring — noises from other parts of the compound and strange malfunctioning from MARVIN. Liam wants to leave, but Aris and Jo convince him to stay.

The more they continue to play, the more tensions between the three start to rise. Aris is still dealing with the aftermath of her grandmother's death, Jo is jealous of Aris' special treatment as the descendant of one of the original Martian residents, and Liam feels unmoored from their friendship because he doesn't have the history together that Jo and Aris do.

Then, the entire night goes haywire when they come face to face with an actual ghost in the compound: Trish. Except she's not a ghost, she's been living in the abandoned compound for decades, hiding from Martian society. Staring down the actual face of history, rather than just a story about it, the three are forced to confront their own conceptions and emotions about the past. Can they deal with the history of their planet and move forward into a new future?

**The prompt image occurs on page 57.**

## Notes on the text:

- This play must be cast with diversity. The cast must include at least 50% actors of color.
- The FIGURE is TRISH. The OLDER VOICE is TRISH's voice, played through a recording.
- The YOUNGER VOICE is a woman, around the same age as ARIS, LIAM, and JO.

*Darkness. The interior of a Martian colony compound. It's the older part of the compound. Uninhabited. It hasn't seen care in some time. ARIS, LIAM, and JO enter. JO is carrying a backpack. They look around.*

ARIS

Anyone else just get the chills?

LIAM

I've never seen it this dark.

JO

Watch out, all the ghosts are going to get you.

LIAM

Don't say that.

JO

Boo!

LIAM

I'm going to kill you.

JO

Not if the ghosts do first.

ARIS

Do you think the MARVIN in here still works?

LIAM

I think he was only programmed to do the presentation. They might've shut him down already.

JO

You think we'll hear the scream?

ARIS

I hope so.

LIAM

What scream?

JO

Never mind.

ARIS

MARVIN? Can you give us some light?

*The lights come on and a computer's voice is heard: MARVIN.*

MARVIN

Welcome to Compound M-1, the first outpost of Martian colonization. This key piece in the history of Martian settlement —

ARIS

That's okay, MARVIN. We just wanted the lights. No presentation today.

MARVIN

When is the next presentation?

ARIS

— I don't know.

LIAM

You want to tell him?

ARIS

It'll figure it out.

JO *sarcastic*

Yeah, we don't want to hurt the robot's feelings.

ARIS

I'm being considerate. It turned on the lights for us.

LIAM

And look at that! No ghosts.

JO

I wouldn't be so sure about that, Liam.

LIAM

I'm not letting you scare me, Jo.

JO

No? You look pretty scared to me.

ARIS

Are we five?

We came here to see this one last time, let's not spend the whole time bickering about ghosts.

JO

We're just having some fun.

ARIS

It's always crazy to me, thinking that people actually lived in here. That my grandma lived here.

LIAM *looking around the space*

Yeah it is. It's so — simple. How did they keep themselves from getting bored?

JO

Don't you remember?

*Imitating a part of MARVIN's presentation that they all know.*

"For fun, they played a game, imagining —"

ALL

"What life might have been like on Earth."

JO

Classic.

LIAM *looking around the space*

You think we'll find anything worth keeping?

JO

I hope we find those swords.

LIAM

Oh, yes, definitely.

JO

Can you imagine what holding one of those things is like?

LIAM

I'd feel like such a badass.

JO

I think you have to know how to use it before you can be a badass.

LIAM

I'd figure it out.

ARIS

I want to find one of those old-school, original helmets. My grandma had one of those.

LIAM

What happened to it?

ARIS

She was buried with it.

LIAM

Right, right.

JO

There has to be one here. It doesn't look like anyone's cleaned this place out yet.

LIAM

You think they would've by now.

ARIS

Who knows what they're planning to do.

JO

Who, leadership? Probably planning to screw us with a really hard Test tomorrow, for one.

ARIS

Yeah, how are we feeling about that?

JO

I thought we were coming here to not think about it.

LIAM

Kind of hard not to. It's a big deal. It's our whole future.

JO

I bet it's going to be the hardest Test they've ever given.

ARIS

My grandma said her Test was pretty hard.

JO

Yeah, but she was, like, the first person who ever took it, right? I'm sure it was bad back then, but they've definitely gotten worse.

ARIS

What do you want to be assigned?

JO

I thought we weren't thinking about it?

LIAM

I'd want to work on projects to explore other planets. For sure.

ARIS

That would be cool.

*JO joking*

You think you can handle another planet? You're scared of this one!

LIAM

I'm not scared!

JO

Uh huh.

LIAM

It would be so great. I'd get to find new places, name them, be one of the first people to see them. Find out if they can support human life or not —

JO

You know there hasn't been a project like that since Mission Return, right?

ARIS

And we know how that went.

JO

Right. Making it back to Earth is pretty much impossible. Good luck making it to new planets.

LIAM

I know, I know, I just think it would be interesting.

JO

Okay, just checking.

LIAM

What about you, Aris?

ARIS

My number one is to be an engineer, of some sort. Build what the compound needs, you know? Make it better. Make sure nothing goes wrong.

JO

Uh huh, sounds *really* fun.

LIAM

Why are you being such a killjoy, Jo?

ARIS

Yeah, what's up with you?

JO

Because I thought we weren't talking about the Test! That was the whole point of tonight!

ARIS

Okay, okay, we'll stop talking about it.

JO

Thank you.

ARIS

*After* you tell us what you want to be assigned.

JO

What does it matter, anyway? It's all basically the same.

ARIS

Seriously, though? You haven't thought of *anything*? Everyone thinks about their Test results.

JO

I mean, I don't even know why we still have to take a Test. At this point, shouldn't Leadership already know who we are and what we're good at?

ARIS

All I'm asking is what interests you most. You could be anything you want.

LIAM

Right, because "The frontier is a place —"

ALL

"Of endless possibilities."

JO

Ugh. Don't remind me. I hate when they say that.

*JO opens the backpack and takes out three beers.*

Shall we?

*ARIS and LIAM each take one.*

ARIS

Here's to becoming Real Martians tomorrow. May we all get the assignments we want.

LIAM

Hear hear.

*They drink.*

ARIS to JO

So, you never told us what assignment you want.

JO

I don't really care. I'm just ready to finally get out of the compound and onto the surface.

LIAM

I think you're just scared you'll get a bad assignment.

JO

Oh, very funny. You called me scared.

*Calling out.*

Hey, ghosts, Liam here really wants to meet you!

LIAM

We've already established there aren't any —

*A loud sound from another part of the compound. They all freeze. The lights flicker out.*

*The chorus of "Don't You (Forget About Me)" by Simple Minds plays, through MARVIN.*

Oh my god. Oh my god, Jo. What did you do?

JO

That was — perfect timing.

ARIS

Lights back on, MARVIN.

*The lights flicker back on, and the music stops.*

MARVIN

Welcome to Compound M-1, the first outpost of Martian —

ARIS

No, MARVIN, still no presentation today.

MARVIN

Standing by.

ARIS

— Okay. You do that.

LIAM

So. Do we leave now, or —?

JO to LIAM

Oh wow, you do *not* look well.

ARIS

It's an old part of the compound. It was probably pipes, or something.

LIAM

And the lights?

ARIS

I don't know.  
There aren't ghosts, Liam.

JO

Except there *is* a story about this part of the compound...

ARIS

Jo.

JO

What? You know this one, right?

ARIS

Of course I do. But let's not scare him anymore.

LIAM

It's fine. I'm fine. I'm just going to — sit and do some deep breathing for like, thirty minutes.

JO

Brave.  
So can I tell the story?

ARIS

Jo!

JO

What else are we going to do? Sit here and stare at each other? Listen to Liam's deep breathing?

LIAM

You can tell the story, Jo.

JO

Really?

ARIS

Really?

LIAM

Yes.

JO

I didn't think it would be that easy.

LIAM

Let's get it over with.



JO  
Okay. So. You know how there were the three people living in this compound when the Second Landing arrived? Like, fifty years ago?

LIAM  
Yeah, Aris's grandma and the other two Elders, what were their names —

ARIS  
Alan and Denver.

LIAM  
Yeah. They were the first three people born on Mars.

JO  
Well there was a fourth person too.

ARIS  
You've never heard this story?

LIAM  
I just knew the three of them were here for the Second Landing.

JO  
Right. But there were supposed to be four.  
The day they all passed their Test, they were given helmets and suits and allowed to go outside for the first time. They hadn't seen their parents in a few years; gone out on a mission and never came back. So the four of them decided to go out on the surface and find their folks.  
And they walk for a while before they see it on the horizon — the wreckage of a rover.

LIAM  
No.

JO  
Yes. And as they got closer, they found something truly horrible: the remains of their parents inside. No survivors.

ARIS  
Grandma said it was the worst day of her life.

JO  
One of them took it worse than the others. Her name was Trish. She ran off on her own.  
The others tried to get back to their rover to find her, but they were heading straight into a terrible dust storm. They had to turn back and get to the safety of the compound, leaving her on the surface with a dwindling oxygen supply, and hoping they could try again soon.

LIAM  
Oh my god. Did they?

JO  
No. The dust storm only got worse. They never found her.

LIAM  
That's — awful.

JO  
But there is a rumor that they found her body, and when their food supply started getting low —

LIAM  
They ate her??

ARIS  
That's not true.

JO  
It could be.

ARIS  
You're basically saying my grandma ate her friend.

JO  
Okay, maybe your *grandma* didn't, but the others could have!

ARIS  
They didn't eat her. My parents said that when they were young, the story used to be that Trish made it back to the compound with the others, but stopped talking to anyone. Stopped eating, stopped doing anything. Then one night she just walked out onto the surface without her suit or helmet. And disappeared.

JO  
Either way, now her ghost roams the old compound, the place where she was once happy.

LIAM  
Wow.

JO  
How do you feel?

LIAM  
— Scared.

JO  
Ha. I can tell by the look on your face.

LIAM  
Is it true? About Trish?

ARIS  
I don't know.

JO  
Your grandma never told you?

ARIS  
She didn't like to talk about her life before the Second Landing.

JO  
Well. It's a good story, though, yeah?

LIAM

I'm not going to be able to sleep for a few weeks, but — yeah. It was good.

JO

So, you want to hear another one?

LIAM

I didn't say that.

ARIS

Oh, is this the Faye Janssen story?

JO

Yes.

LIAM

I know this one. I think. She gets lost in this compound, and is never seen again?

JO

You're taking all the fun out of it.

ARIS

Yeah, come on, Liam, this one isn't that scary.

JO

It's probably not real anyway.

LIAM

But what if it is?

ARIS

What does it matter? It's in the past anyway. No changing it.

LIAM

How would you feel if you were the one who went missing? And a bunch of random kids kept talking about it forever?

JO

I'd be honored.

LIAM

Well, if we do see a ghost here, maybe tonight'll be your night.

ARIS

Oh shit, Liam, good one.

LIAM

Thanks, I try.

JO

Honestly, if my contribution to Mars was to be a legendary spooky story for generations, I wouldn't be mad.

ARIS

I wonder if that's an assignment you can get on the Test.

JO

Ooo, you think so?

ARIS

Maybe you just have to answer the questions a certain way.

JO

Maybe there will be a question about Trish. Or Faye Janssen.

LIAM

Those stories aren't real. They won't be on the Test.

ARIS

They say anything can be on the Test.

JO

We should go over the story, just to be safe.

ARIS

Good idea.

LIAM

You just want to freak me out.

JO

Maybe we do!  
Have some more beer, you need to chill out a bit.

LIAM

Fine, fine, fine. You're right.

*LIAM takes a drink.*

JO

Alright Aris, I told the last one, you do the honors.

ARIS

Thank you, thank you. Faye Janssen.

JO

Faraway Faye!

ARIS

Faraway Faye! Story goes, she was one of the kids on the Second Landing. And after she got to Mars, she was never quite the same. She would always get lost, looking up at the sky or wandering off across the compound.

LIAM

She missed Earth.

ARIS

She missed Earth. A lot.

LIAM

I'm sure a lot of people from the Second Landing did.

ARIS

She would sit in the biosphere, surrounded by plants, for hours. When the Earth was visible in the sky, she would walk toward it, as far as she could, until she would reach the outer edge of the colony. and stare through the glass at it. She couldn't be pulled away. Not even by her parents, her friends.

Anyway, they say that she was still in school when they started doing the Mars history presentations here. And she heard it keep talking about people leaving Earth, coming to Mars. And Faraway Faye got that familiar faraway look in her eyes. She left the room here, and wandered away. Nobody noticed.

At least, no one noticed — until they heard her scream.

LIAM

Is that why they always close the doors when the show starts?

JO

They won't say it, but it's got to be the reason.

ARIS

Will you let me finish?

JO

Sorry, geez.

ARIS

They heard her scream ring through this whole compound. But when they searched the place to find her, she was nowhere to be found. She had completely disappeared.

They swept the entire colony looking for her, but she was never found.

But —

JO

This is my favorite part.

ARIS

But sometimes, in the dead of night, the MARVIN can be heard imitating her scream.

LIAM

No.

ARIS

Spooky, right? I don't know anyone who's heard it, but —

JO

I bet that's part of the reason they're taking this down. It's too messed up.

LIAM

No, no, no.

ARIS

What?

LIAM

That's why you wanted to come here tonight, isn't it?

JO

He figured it out!

ARIS

We probably won't hear it.

JO

It's just for fun anyway. It'll only be MARVIN. It's not like we'll be in danger, or anything.

ARIS

Yeah, we're having fun!  
Last night before our Test, let's make it one to remember.

JO

How'd you ever have fun before you met us, Liam?

LIAM

Honestly, who knows.

JO

I wish the presentation had a ghost story in it. They're part of Mars history!

ARIS

They're probably not real.

JO

Still.

LIAM

Anyway, they probably just wanted to focus on the good stuff. "Endless possibilities" and all that.

JO

The boring stuff.

LIAM

I remember coming here with the class, to watch it. I always wished they talked more about the Founders' lives on Earth, before they came here.

JO

Even more boring.  
I always slept through it.

ARIS

I always had to shake you awake.

JO

I hated when you did that.

LIAM

I guess it's a little sad that they're shutting it down for good.

ARIS

I don't know, it's not like anyone was using it anymore. Nobody really cares.

JO

It's for the better. This whole part of the colony can be scrapped and used to build new things that we actually need.

ARIS

Right. Old stuff like this doesn't matter anymore.

*MARVIN plays a portion of "Don't You (Forget About Me) by Simple Minds again. The lights flicker off.*

LIAM

Why does that keep happening?

JO

You don't think we upset it, do you?

ARIS

I don't know, maybe it wasn't too thrilled to find out it's being scrapped for parts —

LIAM

Oh, I know. You're messing with me, aren't you?

JO

Ha. Why didn't we think of that, Aris?

ARIS

That would've been a great idea.

*The song stutters and fades. The lights stay off.*

LIAM

So how do we get the lights back on?

JO

How are we supposed to know?

LIAM

I don't know, you're the one who set this up.

JO

I swear we didn't!

ARIS

I think something's going on with the MARVIN.

LIAM

MARVIN?

Can we get the lights back on, please? We didn't mean to upset you.

JO  
I can't believe we're apologizing to a robot.

LIAM  
It's MARVIN.

JO  
An old, out-of-date MARVIN. A presentation MARVIN. It just repeats the same things over and over again. It's not useful or anything.

*The lights flicker back on. More colorful now.*

LIAM  
There we go.

ARIS  
I think it's just malfunctioning, or something.

MARVIN  
Hello, fellow Martians, and welcome. Please take a seat. The final presentation begins now.

JO  
MARVIN, we said we don't want to see —

MARVIN  
Welcome to Compound M-1, the first outpost of Martian colonization. This key piece in the history of Martian settlement offers a glimpse into how the first humans on Mars lived. But first, how did we get here?

JO  
I can't believe this.

LIAM  
What are we supposed to do? Can we stop it?

JO  
MARVIN, stop!

LIAM  
There aren't even any actors. It won't be the same.

MARVIN  
This initial portion of the compound, as well as the biosphere, was constructed remotely from Earth, and took over thirty years to complete. The MARs Virtual Intelligence Network — you know me as MARVIN — was developed to facilitate communications, monitor food growth and water supply, and maintain atmospheric conditions safe for human survival, among a host of other capabilities.

JO *overlapping during MARVIN's speech*  
Do we just have to sit through this?

ARIS  
Why don't we play along? We could be the actors.



LIAM

Oh, yeah, we should!

MARVIN *continuing*

Once it was finished, a crew of eight Earthlings boarded the spacecraft Shepard, with the knowledge that they were opening a new chapter of human history. They would be the first permanent residents of Mars.

*ARIS, LIAM, and JO reflexively speak with MARVIN:*

Strap in, pioneers.

JO

Can't we just chill and have a drink?

MARVIN *continuing*

Blast off in ten — nine —

ARIS

We'll have drinks and play along with it.  
It'll get our minds off the Test for sure.

MARVIN *continuing*

Eight — seven —

LIAM

Plus, we can keep props from the show! You can get your helmet, Aris.

MARVIN *continuing*

Six — five —

ARIS

Yes! What do you say, Jo?

MARVIN *continuing*

Four —

ARIS

I bet you'll have more fun than you think.

MARVIN *continuing*

Three —

LIAM

You know you want to.

MARVIN *continuing*

Two —

JO

Fine! Fine. Let's do it.

ARIS

Yay!

MARVIN

One.

*ARIS, LIAM, and JO sit down and pretend to strap in. The lights grow even more bright and colorful. The room rumbles.*

And we have lift-off.

LIAM *half joking*

Ooo, lift off! Next stop, Mars!

JO

I already regret this.

LIAM

"Alright, crew, this is your captain speaking. We're on our way."

MARVIN

They climbed higher and higher into the Earth's atmosphere and toward the void of space.

ARIS

The actors usually talk here, don't they?

LIAM

You mean the crew.

JO

Oh my god.

LIAM

I'm just putting us in the moment!

ARIS

Right, right — they talk about the view!

LIAM

What a spectacular view!

ARIS

God, look at that moon!

JO

Wow, yeah, fantastic.

LIAM

Look back there behind us, sure looks like a gigantic crater; look at the mountains going around it. What do you think?

JO

My gosh, they're really mountains, huh.

ARIS

Play along, Jo.

JO

I am.

LIAM

Did you get some pictures of that?

JO

Yes, I just took one. I have the camera, I'm taking pictures.

ARIS

That's kind of a foggy window. You sure you got the picture?

JO

Yes, I'm sure, what are you even talking about?

ARIS

It's a horrible window. It's too bad we have to shoot through this one, but —

LIAM

You could spend a lifetime just studying that one crater alone, you know that?

ARIS

You could.

JO

That's not how I'd like to spend my lifetime, but — sure.

LIAM

Beautiful!

MARVIN

These brave explorers would spend the next seven months aboard the Shepard, traveling over ninety million miles to their new lives on the Red Planet. Can you imagine what they might have been feeling?

ARIS

— Oh. This is the discussion part.

JO

We don't actually have to discuss, do we?

ARIS

Yes! We have to "inhabit the past!"

LIAM

They must've been scared. And excited. They must have been thinking about all they'd leave behind: their loved ones, family and friends, their favorite restaurants and comfort foods, their movie theatres and their art galleries, the trees and the flowers and the grass beneath their feet. And how it would all be worth it for what lay ahead.

ARIS

I wonder if they thought about how they would never again be outside without a helmet on.

LIAM

I'm sure they did. And how they would be forever remembered as the first humans to settle another planet.

ARIS

They were probably thinking about the last hugs they gave their family.

LIAM

And if that would ever be enough.

JO

We'll never know what they were thinking. There's no point in speculating.

LIAM

The point is to empathize a bit.

JO

I thought the point was to make fun of it.

ARIS

Don't worry, we'll do that too.

JO

You want to know what they probably thought? I bet it was "Wow, I'm going to be on Mars in a few months and I feel totally unprepared. What was I thinking?"

MARVIN

Finally, after two hundred and eleven days of travel, they began making their final approach. The surface of Mars loomed closer and closer, bright and rocky and orange. Their entire lives were in front of them.

LIAM

It's the wrong size.

JO

What?

LIAM

That's what they usually say at this part.  
It's the wrong size.

ARIS

It's too big.

LIAM

Right, yes. I'm too used to it being a small bright pinpoint in the sky. I knew it was a whole planet, conceptually. I pictured this moment a million times. Landing.  
But — it's still bigger than I ever thought.

ARIS

Seeing it get bigger and bigger, right in front of you — that's when it feels real.

JO

I wonder what it looked like.

LIAM

There are the old pictures. The slight curvature of the surface, radiating against the void. The white blip of the compound in the distance.

JO

Yeah, but it's not the same. The picture doesn't give you the same feeling as being there.

MARVIN

They landed, and stepped out onto the surface of their new home.

*The lights go orange. The sound of wind on the surface.  
Three space helmets appear.*

ARIS

Ooo, it's actually happening!

LIAM

I knew it would! Let's see how it looks.

*ARIS takes a helmet and puts it on.*

ARIS

Does it suit me?

LIAM

It's perfect.

ARIS

Thank you.  
— This smells really bad, I have to take it off.

*ARIS takes her helmet off. LIAM and JO smell their helmets, wince.*

JO

Yikes. It's like fifty years of bad, hot breath.

ARIS

MARVIN, were these ever cleaned between presentations?

*Pause.*

JO

Yeah, we're not getting an answer to that.  
Are you going to keep yours?

ARIS

Why not? A helmet's a helmet. It'll be a good souvenir.

*LIAM has closed his eyes, listening to the sound of wind.*

LIAM

If you close your eyes, you can almost imagine you're there.

MARVIN

Looking out from the compound, they faced the untarnished frontier of a new planet, untouched by humans.