

OUT OF TIME

Taking another look around her town to survey what was going on all around her—or rather what was *not* going on—she looked at the locals' faces and the buildings of her hometown.

Desperately and at the top of her voice, Amber bellowed a “HELLOooo!” that echoed into silence. Whatever was happening here went on for as far as her eyes could see. Cars had stopped in the middle of the street, people stood frozen in mid-stride on the sidewalks or crossing the road, there were people halfway into doorways or about to open a car door—everything was motionless and deathly silent. And nobody had looked around at her shouting at the top of her lungs like a madwoman.

She decided that she would sprint home to check on her mom, but as she decided on doing so, something in town held her back. A voice in her head. It was her own voice, telling her to have another look at the crater at the side of the diner. Heeding the voice, she walked away from the diner door and around to her left.

The round shiny ball, around seven or eight inches in diameter, gleamed at the head of the crater. The grass around it that had been burning had gone out now, leaving only charred black and dark-brown scars around its edges. She could still detect that strong burning smell.

Amber had made sure her mom was okay before she left.

She will be okay, that voice that sounded like her own said in her head.

On a normal day, Amber would go to work, and Al would insist that she take her mom back some leftover pastries or muffins that were left on the counter plate at the end of her shift. *Mom would always look forward to that.*

Yes, Amber would straighten all of this out, feeling inside that if she investigated the sphere, she just might solve all of this. Then she could still go to work for Al and even have time to take her mom some cakes. *See you soon, Mom.*

She took another closer look at the ball, walking up to the

THE MARS MIGRATION

head and then crouching down next to the crater, staring at it as she inched closer. It seemed to somehow call to her silently.

She desperately wanted to run home, but something . . . something needed her.

She was tempted to pick up the ball, to see what it was, how heavy it was. She could not take her gaze from it now; she was trapped.

I can step away if I want to.

(Yes, but you don't want to. You want to be here.)

She reached out her hand, finger pointing toward the top of the mysterious ball, when she paused. There were still some small columns of steam rising from the ball now and then as well as the crater around it.

So, is it hot?

But it was too late—her finger had already reached its destination, seemingly moving forward of its own accord. A vibration rumbled up into her arm as light enveloped her.

Amber was no longer in her hometown of Selkirk, the town that she had never left in her whole life, while the ball stayed there, collecting the last of the setting Sun's red rays.

The top of the sphere was peeking out, barely visible from over the edge of its small crater, into what would normally be a busy little town.

The sphere had a view reaching up Manitoba Avenue, the direction Amber had come from, with the bank and the hotel on either side of the road, and behind its crater was the river. It was a pretty place.