**The Coward’s Way Out**

By Aja Simpson

It’s time to be realistic about space colonization.

Yes, it is possible. And yes, Elon Musk from SpaceX and scientists from NASA are currently working strenuously to get us off of Earth and onto Mars, that fantastical red planet. But the reality is, like with that family trip to Disneyland in the middle of summer, our finances and stress are not worth it.

The amount of money and time it is taking to get us onto Mars is astronomical, and that cash would be better spent on fixing the problems we cause on Earth.

According to multiple science publications, like Mars One and Space News, the estimated cost of one *manned* mission to Mars will be around $230 billion. That estimate doesn’t even include the amount of money that needs to be invested in developing the right technology, testing it out and perfecting it for safety so that there are the least amount of casualties as possible. Prices for these major details top *at least* $500 billion (some estimate $1 trillion) spread over the course of the next 25 years. Currently, the yearly budget for NASA is roughly $18.4 billion, which the Trump administration has proposed cutting by 3%, and still there are plenty more projects that NASA works on year round that need to dip into that funding.

$500 billion could be spent on getting the U.S. out of debt, or fixing roads, or financing the public school systems, or investing in renewable energy to combat the climate change most of us would be running away from in the first place.

However, the big-monied visionaries and thought leaders working toward the Mars mission insist our eventual ascension out of this familiar atmosphere and into the strange atmosphere of our neighbor *is* in the near future. As long as we have the money, desperation, greed and curiosity, colonization *will* happen, promises NASA and SpaceX. Perhaps as soon as the 2030’s more than just a robot will be roaming around on the surface of Mars.

Oh, what an interesting visual that orbits around my mind. Large white domed hubs all connected by glass, above-ground tunnels that lead back to a large centralized hut where I presume community meetings would be held to discuss all things Martian (an image that can be seen, more or less, in a Google search of “mars space stations”). There’d be living quarters for each family, a hospital, farm, maybe a movie theatre; things to make us feel normal and safe.

But then one look outside would reveal the bleak reality of our new living arrangements. All at once surrounded by the dusty red hills of the empty and vast Mars landscape. And as it was eloquently explained by Astrophysicist Paul Sutter, we can’t even step outside to explore that landscape without needing a hulking space suit and oxygen tank. Because Mars’ atmosphere is 100 times less dense than Earth, the cosmic rays from space penetrate much easier and “cut through DNA like a hot knife through butter.” Damn.

However, on the upside, it would be possible to explore our new environment with the right equipment. NASA has designed a new, sleeker and more flexible spacesuit for Starliner astronauts, and Elon Musk’s SpaceX has revealed their version of a “chic and crisp” suit *(last image on las page)* that reduces the size of the bulky, detachable helmet of the iconic suits that Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin wore to man’s first promenade on the moon *(see on last page)*. The price of which would be a mere $4.4 million per person.

But let’s forget about the technological and economical aspects for a moment. Is Mars really much of a destination for vacation, colonization or otherwise? It is certainly not a planet meant to nourish human life. No trees to offer natural shade (though we wouldn’t exactly need any because the climate is miserably cold all year round), or grass for our children to play in, or salty seawater and fresh lake water to swim in, no lapping waves to listen to or even look at. Nor would we be able to bring our pets.

Only a few decades ago, the general public thought of inhabiting Mars as a fantasy from the distant future that novelists like H. G. Wells wrote about as a testament to how little faith he held in the human race and our ability to solve the problems we create. But here we are already at a point where we’re considering vacating Earth because we believe nothing can be done to reverse the disasters we’ve caused, and travel to Mars is becoming a tangible reality.

But I worry. Though we would abandon a myriad of problems back on the mother planet, what can our new lives on Mars have that make up for all the beautiful, small but monumental enjoyments that still exist on Earth? Is it more important to be living in a world with nothing but a fresh start than to simply figure out and attempt to fix the mistakes we made on a planet that allows us to really live? I get homesick already, just thinking about it.

