

Grains of Jupiter

Kemp wades out in elastic ribbed cloth, the marshmallow puff of suit swallowing him like a pillow. Shoes, thick soled and metal plated, weigh him down against the marbled sand surface of the planet. Red, purple, and orange sediments jump up, despite the heavy gravity, with each footstep and fall with the slight tinkle of rain. Through his globed helmet, hazy sunlight flares like a match strike against a canvas sky painted pale blue. Io eclipses the sky, a mottled sphere of rotting skin, with Europa peeking behind it, a hatch-marked marble. Halo, Main, and Gossamer rings band the curve of the planet like a second horizon line, strips of loose deposit, dust, kicked up from the fatal impact of asteroids.

Kemp nurses a Nikon in his right hand, the thick woven strap laced around his helmet mount. The zoom lens extends out like a bayonet, over a foot long – focusing, focal length, and aperture rings line the barrel with rows of italic numbers. Kemp holds a preservation capsule in the other hand, bottle shaped and sealed – a thick filter lines the bottom, pumps oxygen and carbon into the oblong space inhabited by the fly. The cylinder is lined with various buttons, glowing green dials, a number printed across the cap in bold white letters – C-series F32.1. A needle head valve punctures the thick plastic barrier – back on the ship, Kemp inserted a syringe through the hole, dribbled drops of condensed fruit secretion and human feces, a tincture handmade onboard. The fly hovered in the air, vinyl wings gently buzzing within the vacuum space.

Kemp turns the bottle, sees the fly now hooked to the cap with twitching stick legs, hiding in the dark vaulted shadow upside down and expectant. Its myriad glass eyes glisten, shifting in their sockets and lock onto Kemp's bright blue orbs. He twists the bottle, once, twice, thrice around, flips the lid right side up. He presses a fingertip to his wristband

and the image through his helmet is magnified, stabilized as it hones in on the fly. A timer begins to count down. The fly floats up, wings fluttering like camera shutters, fighting against the harsh gravity. *One, two, three.* It falls like a bullet shot downward to land amongst the grains of Jupiter, spiracles closing on its skin like stars snuffed out.

Kemp closes the bottle, places a finger against his wristband and records through the headset attached within his helmet. *3.45 seconds, best so far.* He takes a moment to place the bottle between his knees, raises the camera towards the pinprick of distant sun. Through the interface, he lines up Io, Europa, and sun – each more distant than the last – and hears the muffled click of the shutter. He turns towards the ship, labors up the extended docking platform, lolling like a tongue out of an open mouth. The supply compartment within is scarcely equipped, walls lined with simple metal shelves, glass shutters drawn down with the touch of a button. Kemp drops the empty container in a waste chute attached to the chamber wall. He walks to the third column, reaches up and twists a capsule from its place – C-series F32.2.

Word Count: 531