

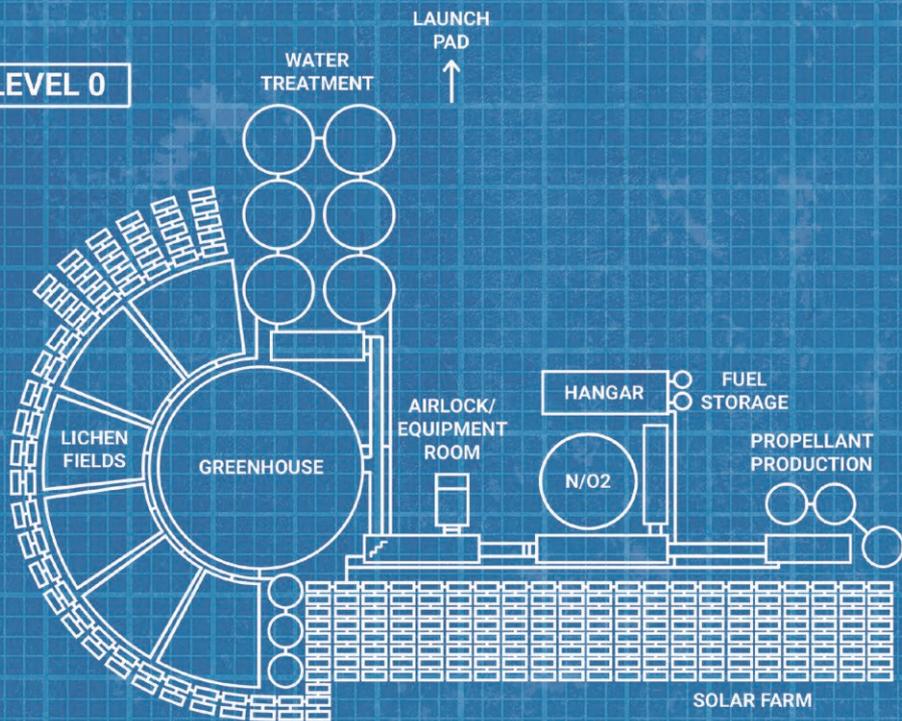


## CHAPTER 3:

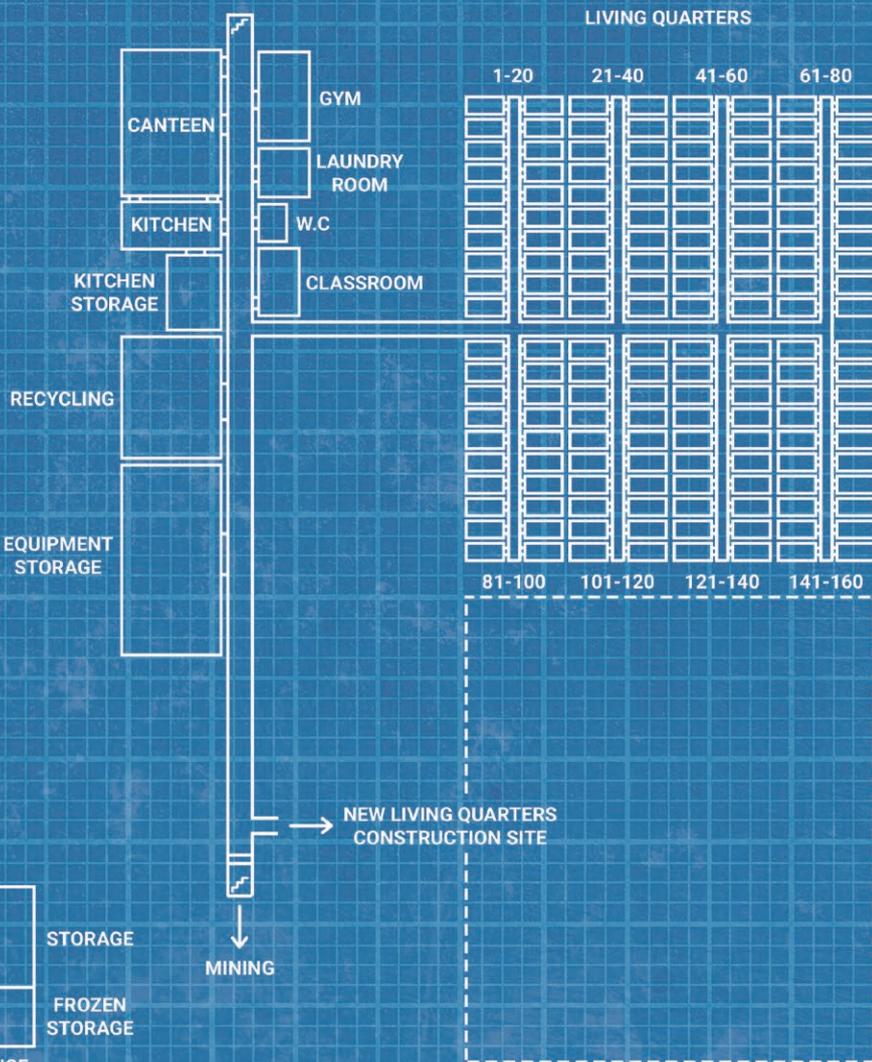
Welcome to the Marineris Colony

# MARINERIS COLONY, MARS 2060

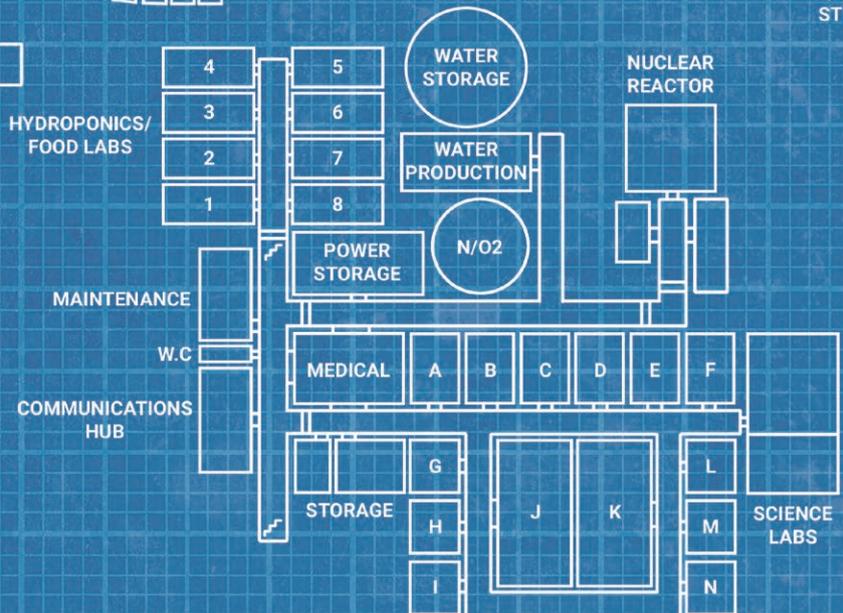
## LEVEL 0



## LEVEL -2



## LEVEL -1





MarsMail x



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ISCEA NEWS



https://www.mars.mail/inbox.html



INBOX (5)

SENT



SEARCH

Hello, ELLEN.SWEENEY19!

Tue 14 Sep, 11:44  
1 ATTACHMENT



From: JAZZ HARPER (jazz.harper@marsmail.com)  
Subject: HI GRAN!

Dear Gran,

HELLO FROM THE PLANET MARS!

The Argo landed on Mars yesterday but I've been very busy since then so I haven't had time to write (I've just woken up from a sixteen-hour snooze). I wanted to do a video call but Elijah said, "Don't you know that it can take several minutes for signals to travel from Mars to Earth?" Apparently, if we tried to have a video call, I'd have to wait ages for my message to reach you and then wait ages *again* for your message to come back! I decided just to email instead.

Seeing Mars from space was literally 'out of this world'! It's red-orange all over — except for the poles, which are swirls of white

ice like how Earth's poles used to be.

Our colony is in the Valles Marineris. The Valles Marineris is a huge valley that looks like a great big scar along Mars' equator. Mum's told me all about it. At one end, you can see the wriggles in the ground where there used to be running water. There are caves in the valley walls, too, so it's the perfect place to find alien life. I wonder if the aliens have their own colony. They must be very good at keeping it secret or Mum wouldn't have needed to come out here to find them. I hope that they don't think we're here to attack — we come in peace!

The spaceship landing was even scarier than the launch. We had to strap ourselves into our spacesuits again and get shaken about as the rocket descended onto the landing pad. In all the training we did before coming to space, nothing prepared me for how terrifying it is to be trapped in a big tube plunging towards the surface of an unfamiliar planet.

That wasn't even the worst bit. As soon as the Argo stopped





INBOX (5)

SENT



SEARCH

Hello, ELLEN.SWEENEY19!

Tue 14 Sep, 11:44  
1 ATTACHMENT



shaking, I felt heavy. My arms felt heavy and my legs felt heavy. My fingers and toes felt heavy. Even my tongue felt heavy. My fingers were like big blobs as I tried to unstrap myself. The moment I was free, I fell over. Everything spun and I felt sick. I thought that I was dying. Then, I remembered our training. After four months in space, our bodies weren't used to up and down anymore. I needed to get used to gravity again.

A team of medics in skin-tight, blue Mars suits boarded the rocket to help us to disembark and reach the colony. We had landed a few meters away from the colony itself so we would have to walk the final stretch. As we staggered outside, I felt so woozy that I forgot to look around at Mars. Mum had it worse, though — she threw up in her space helmet. It was gross! I just staggered over the stony terrain towards the colony's airlock.

Once we were inside, crowds of people gathered to greet us.

They waved and cheered but the way that they moved about made me want to close my eyes. Thankfully, it wasn't far to the medical wing. The medics stripped off our spacesuits, took some recordings, cleaned Mum up and put us all to bed.

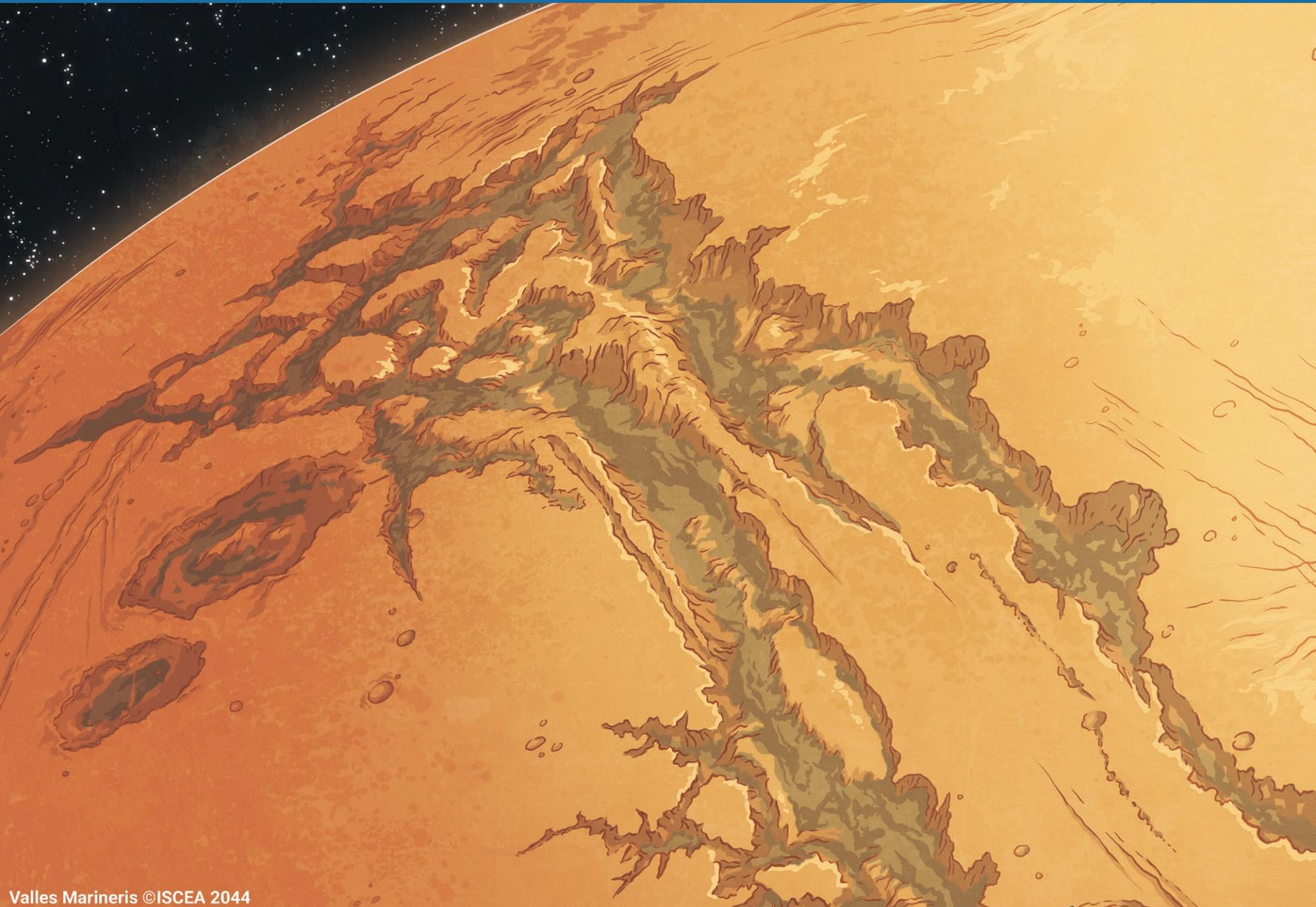
That's where I am now. It's so strange lying down on a real bed again after needing to be strapped to the walls to sleep! We have to stay here for a few days for observation. Apparently, the first few days are the most dangerous because our bodies aren't used to being on Mars yet.

Soon, we'll get to see our actual new home and my new school, and Mum can start looking for aliens — it's going to be so much fun!

Lots of love,  
Jazz xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

P.S. Guess what? I am a whole centimetre taller! The medics told me that when I was being examined. Just imagine — by the time we come home, I could be even taller than you!





Valles Marineris ©ISCEA 2044



INBOX (2)

SENT



SEARCH

Hello, JAZZ.HARPER!

Wed 15 Sep, 09:00  
1 ATTACHMENT



**From:** ELLEN SWEENEY (ellen.sweeney719@marsmail.com)  
**Subject:** RE: HI GRAN!

My dearest granddaughter,

I'm glad that you've landed safely and that you are acclimatising to the local environment. Arrival is one of the most exciting yet difficult times in an explorer's journey! Part of you wants to run around and see everything but you don't know what dangers lurk in your new home. Be wary, take things slowly and always listen to the advice of those who know the terrain well!

Understanding the dangers in your environment is possibly the most valuable lesson that I learnt when I was exploring. Did I ever tell you about my 2031 mission to the Arctic? There were seven of us off to investigate the impact of climate change on the local fauna. None of us were used to such cold climes — this

was before the melting of the ice caps, you understand — and though we were equipped with the best snow boots, sun goggles and thermal underwear, we simply didn't realise what a hostile environment we were in.

On one occasion, we saw a polar bear with her cub not far from base camp. Of course, we were thrilled! This was exactly what we had come to see, but it was dusk; the light was failing and the temperature was dropping. Nevertheless, my colleague insisted on going to make some observations. She said that she wouldn't be long.

Well, after half an hour, we began to wonder...

After forty-five minutes, we began to worry...

After an hour, we decided that enough was enough. We tightened our boot buckles and stepped out into the cold night.

It felt like an age before we found her, though in reality, it was less than ten minutes. She sat in a snowdrift, still conscious but woozy, with one glove discarded on the ground nearby. Her bare





INBOX (2)

SENT



SEARCH



Hello, JAZZ.HARPER!

Wed 15 Sep, 09:00

1 ATTACHMENT



hand was like ice. When we arrived, she hardly recognised us — she simply asked us if we knew where her bunny had gone!

Despite the cold, she wasn't shivering. That's how we knew that she was succumbing to hypothermia. We rushed into action, carrying her back inside.

In the warm camp, the snow on her thermal layers began to melt so we replaced her damp clothes with dry ones. We wrapped her in blankets, particularly around her middle, head and neck. We knew that, though her hands and feet were the coldest, warming them too quickly could send her into shock. Instead, we gave her sips of heated water to gradually warm her from the middle out.

Thanks to our care, she recovered and didn't even lose any fingers to frostbite, though it was a near thing. That experience taught me something I'll never forget: one never knows what dangers lurk

nearby. That is why I urge you, Jazz, to take your time, go steady and learn about your environment before you go off exploring.

I miss you terribly and can't wait to hear all about your adventures when you come home.

Have fun on Mars, my duck, and watch out for aliens!

All my Love, Gran xxx

P.S. Give your mum a hug from me.

ATTACHMENT: EXPLORERS.JPG



Sol 41, Mars Year 57

Dear Diary,

Whoops! I've been so busy landing on Mars and being monitored by the medical team (in case I accidentally turn to jelly) that I forgot all about writing in my adventure diary. There is so much to describe that I don't know where to start!

I guess that I should really start with the most amazing thing: the colony toilets. They're real toilets, which you can really flush. They have proper seats — like the ones on Earth — rather than just a hole in a teeny plastic frame and you don't need to worry about floating away! I can't explain how much I've missed real toilets.

Then, there's the gravity. The gravity on Mars feels as if it's not really trying. Elijah says that it's because it's only around 40% as strong as Earth's gravity. If you throw something up, it always takes longer than you expect to fall back down. Thanks to the gravity, though, I can see that my hair has grown quite a lot since leaving Earth. When it just floats around your head in space, you hardly even notice

it, but now that gravity is pulling it back down, I have to keep on brushing it out of my eyes! I can't wait to get it all cut — perhaps they will have special Martian stylists who can give me a cool alien hairdo!

We've been here five sols now. A sol is like a Mars day, only Martian sols are thirty-seven minutes longer than Earth days because Mars takes twenty-four hours and thirty-seven minutes to spin on its axis.

"Did you know that Mars years are longer, too?" said Elijah as we were lying around in the medical bay feeling bored.

I told him that I did know, actually, because it was in the training but this didn't stop Elijah. As I said, he just likes telling people facts.

"But did you know that they are nearly TWICE as long as Earth years?"

"Yes."

"It's because Mars takes nearly twice as long to orbit the sun as the Earth does," he rambled on.

"Yes, I know."

"I bet you don't know why it's the year 2060 on Earth but on Mars it's the year 57."

He was right, there. I didn't even know that it WAS the year 57 on Mars. "How come?"

Elijah's face goes all happy and animated when you ask him to explain facts. "In 1956, before humans had ever been into space, scientists noticed a large dust storm on Mars. When they started sending spacecraft to explore Mars, they decided that Mars needed its own calendar. They picked the year of the dust storm to be year 1 and kept counting up from that."

Now that I know about Mars' calendar, I've decided to record the date in my diary in Mars years instead of Earth years. After all, I live on Mars now.

Yesterday, the medics told us that our bodies had FINALLY got used to the idea of gravity again so it was safe to go on a tour of the colony. It's HUGE. We saw the oxygen plant and the water treatment facility, which are outside

on the surface and connected to the rest of the colony by corridors. We also stopped for a moment at the greenhouse but I barely had time to take in the jungle of plants and trees before we were off again. We loped down these long, gloomy hallways until we were deep underground.

Most of the colony is underground to shield us from the sun's radiation, since Mars doesn't have a protective atmosphere like Earth does. We saw the bustling labs, heard the clang of dinner cooking in the canteen and stopped by the communications room to see where we could read and send mail.

By the end of the tour, I was getting used to the strange way in which you have to walk on Mars. Basically, you have to walk more slowly than on Earth and you bounce a bit — you move just like an excited puppy! Running is fun, too, because you bound up and down with each step. It's a bit like running on a trampoline.

At the end of the tour, we reached the living quarters. They're set right back in the rock of the Valles Marineris, furthest from the sun's glare. It's like living in a giant, underground hotel... without room service. There are lots

and lots of numbered doors and behind each door is a little flat where someone lives with their flatmates or family. Ours is number 140 and Elijah's is number 152, which is only round one corner.

The living quarters are very small, very plain and, of course, there are no windows, but we soon made it feel like home. Mum brought our favourite blankets from home and she had printed out some pictures of home to hang on the walls. There's a photo of my last birthday when Gran made the biggest chocolate fudge cake and Mum filled our house with star-shaped balloons. There's a photo of Gran on her scooter, riding through Sunset Heights. She's wearing her explorer gear and she looks like she's on a safari, but the only wildlife in sight is a puzzled squirrel. There's a photo of me and Mum on the beach. Instead of sunbathing, we went to explore the caves and rock pools. On that day, I found two sea anemones, six sea snails and a tiny, green crab.

Once we'd finished decorating, we went to the canteen for a meal of algae stew and fried cockroaches, which was surprisingly delicious. I had only just started to feel hungry again. Since arriving here, my stomach had felt really funny and the medic said that our digestive systems had to get

used to the weight of themselves again after floating around in space for so long. Then, Mum took me to the greenhouse. She said that there was something that she wanted to show me.

The greenhouse on Mars isn't like the greenhouse at the bottom of our garden on Earth. It's a big glass dome which stretches in every direction. There are rings of vegetable patches covering the ground, growing almost all the food that we eat on Mars. It's the closest thing the colony has to a park.

We went right to the edge of the greenhouse, where we could stare out of the glass onto the Marineris Valley, which stretched away to the horizon.

It was beautiful.

The land was all flat and dusty, and we could see for miles. The soil was a burnt orange sprinkled with pebbles, rocks and boulders. Here and there, dust was quickly whipped into the air then suddenly dropped back down to the floor. In the distance, I could make out the tips of the coppery mountain peaks. The sky was a deep red-orange and the

ridges of the valley walls cast dark shadows.

"Woah!" I gasped. "This is the most beautiful view I've ever seen!"

"Just wait," Mum smirked.

That's when I saw something unbelievable.

The sun sank in the sky. As it got lower, something wonderful started to happen. Everything changed colour...

The fiery sky was washed away and replaced by a deep blue. It reminded me of watching waves running up the beach back home on Earth. Within a few minutes, almost the whole sky was lit by a blue light.

Mum grinned at my shocked face and explained that Mars' sunsets are blue because of the thinner Mars atmosphere and the dust particles. It even made the sun look pink.

I snuggled up to Mum. It was all so incredible.

After the sun had completely disappeared, we went home.

Mum says that I need to get a good night's sleep but I don't know if I can – I'm much too excited. Tomorrow is my first day of Mars school!

