

Mars: A History

Flames licked around the capsule, enveloping it, growing larger and larger until the camera feed was awash with flames. Against the backdrop of the red landscape, it Aria felt like she was descending into Hell itself, and her already present anxiety was building inside of her. "I'm going to die, I'm going to die," she whispered to herself. At this speed the capsule would hit the hard, rocky ground and be obliterated, and her suit would help her none. The craft shuddered and shook as it rocketed towards the ground below it at breakneck speed, hardly slowing. Air resistance wasn't going to be enough.

She closed her eyes, waiting for the inevitable end to her suffering; her gut was twisted in knots, and Aria had so much adrenaline coursing through her veins that she couldn't feel her fingers or toes, or barely move them at all; her extremities just tingled in response to her movements. She couldn't have done anything if she had anything to control.

Someone in a soothing voice said something that Aria didn't hear. With a gut-wrenching tug that seemed to upend her world, the craft jolted several times in rapid succession. Her mind momentarily told her that she'd crashed, but the rushing sounds around her told her that she was still in motion, and further buffeting reinforced that fact. Had they hit something? No, Aria told herself, that was the drogue-parachute deploying; her scattered brain managed to cobble together that much along with some recognition of the sounds the voice had made earlier.

They were now in thick enough atmosphere and had slowed to the point where it was safe to do so. She opened her eyes and looked at another console near her, in front of another terrified individual. They were still moving several hundred meters per second. Another jolt struck, this one a bit lopsided, rocked the craft just as, if not more, violently than the first as the main parachutes deployed, and this time Aria gave out a short sound that was half-yelp, half-scream.

The terror felt as though it would never end – it would have been over much quicker had their trajectory been perpendicular to the surface still rising beneath them. Instead it had been a parabolic approach, starting nearly parallel to the planet, prolonging the torture as they hurtled ever closer, their arc curving now, directing them much more directly at the planet below.

Minutes more passed, and their doom seemed ever more impending; it was becoming readily apparent to Aria, who kept watching their velocity, and compared it to another display of their

trajectory. The parachutes weren't going to be enough either; it seemed as though the chute, massive though it was, did little. The atmosphere was too thin for it to be effective.

Then they were gone. The parachutes cut, rocking the craft a little, which corrected itself back to safety. At least the flames were gone from the camera feeds, but one of the feeds showed the parachutes fluttering far away and above them. Dread continued filling her up more than she ever thought possible.

One of the feeds cycled to show a side-view of the craft, looking down. The ground was still screaming up towards them, and Aria closed her eyes again, preparing for the worst.

All of a sudden, her fear was drowned out in a deafening roar for several long seconds. There was some jostling, and then... stillness and silence. Silence, except for the pilot's voice: "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Mars."