

Student ¹⁰ Student

Experiment 023681

"They're still regressing," said Martak, as he raised his head from the viewing screen. He wore a look of disappointment on his face. "I can't see much use in the continued funding of Experiment 023681. We have others which are working much better."

"Very well," rumbled the deep voice of Martak's supervisor. "It's too bad, though. They seemed so promising."

"I know, I know. Disappointing, isn't it?" commented Martak. "But living conditions are horrible, they insist on killing each other in these petty little things called 'wars,' and look at their life span: on the outside, ninety-five of their 'years!'"

"I agree. OK. You now officially have permission to terminate Experiment 023681."

Johnny gazed on his mostly finished sand castle and felt all the pride a four-year-old could have. He noticed it was getting dark, though, so he proceeded at top speed.

Martak looked at the small mass of swirling blues, greens, and whites for one last time. Then he slowly pushed the red button and entered his access code.

"Request?" questioned a tinny voice from a grill in the wall.

"Terminate Experiment 023681."

"Request confirmed . . ."

5—

Johnny looked up. Did he hear his mother calling him? He couldn't be sure, so he went back to playing in his sandbox.

"John!" screamed his mother from the house.

4—

Johnny sighed and dropped his shovel as he slowly trudged toward his house. He knew his mother meant it when she just said "John." He looked up at the darkening sky and saw the first stars.

3—

"Now, John!" yelled his mother.

"I'm coming!" he responded. He ambled to the porch, cleaned his shoes, and began to walk inside. On some unexplainable impulse, he turned and looked at the sky once more.

2—

Man, that's a bright star up there! Hmmm, it seems to be growing larger! I guess it's an airplane, he decided. He opened the door and went in.

He then moved to the window and looked out. Man, it's even bigger! It looked like a big flashlight had been shined on the house.

1—

He heard his mother yell at him to get away from the window, and his father yell something about invaders, but he was entranced.

0

Martak watched as the small, perfect sphere was engulfed in a yellow flame. The flame slowly turned orange, then red, then finally settled into a black cloud which died, leaving behind only dust. He sighed regretfully, as Johnny had done, and turned to the next experiment.

— Peter Leary
Athens Academy
Athens, Georgia