

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Place, Prose, Grades 10-12

### **Alien and Alone**

Space is as space does. Mind-bendingly vast and impossible to parse, though humanity has tried. Telescopes and mathematics and astrophysics and on and on, mapping out every inch of the universe with not a speck to spare. No space in space for any whimsical imagining.

Not without a bit of artistic flexing.

Perhaps our galaxy is nothing more than the left-behind scraps of some far greater civilization. They built their planets, reimagined our stars, and then flew off into the distance in search of something greater than a paltry nine planets. Humanity has been left behind to grow in the indentations of their footsteps, squinting at the marks they left behind and wondering at their implications.

The moon is our nearest neighbor, and a closer look reveals that it has not remained untouched. Papery skin has replaced its rocky surface; our lunar landmark now a fragile sculpture against the void of space. No longer a distant chunk of slag, but something far more *alive*, buzzing with the abandoned energy of a secret long forgotten. Every crater on its surface is a tunnel, leading down to a hidden network of underground hives. Celestial insects built their homes here; chewed and pasted and cut a world to their shape before jettisoning off to elsewhere, leaving nothing but a shell in their wake.

We see their stars and scattered scraps, and we ask if there's anyone out there, considering if we are perhaps the first to crawl from our primordial soup and stretch towards the skies. Skies that, much like the moon, are full of alien detritus. Spiderwebs, faintly glowing, still emitting the light necessary to preserve life in all its forms. Instead of constellations, thin fibers chart the spaces between the stars. Space wasps and now space spiders, crafting their homes around us but out of reach.

Even our planets are nothing more than the abandoned warehouses of civilizations from eons lost. Archaic alien nuts and bolts still scatter the empty floors, gathering stardust in an eternal pause. Buried beneath Mercury's baking soil sits an abandoned lattice of metal joists, supporting the crackling skin of the planet, repurposed into a thick shell for what was once a bustling hub of creation. Just past the factories beneath Mercury is Venus, with similar treasures hidden below the clouds on its surface. Clouds of pheromones and pollen, obscuring every camera sent down with a golden shimmer. The still trapped biological remnants of alien forebears, locked in eternal orbit around their emptied home.

It's difficult to imagine that there was someone before us. To come to terms with the fact that there could have been someone else out there, and our timelines just barely skipped past each other. No room for overlap, leaving the human race to float partnerless in the sea of the cosmos. Not alone, not the unfortunate first, but the tragically abandoned.

**Shira Hanovich is in 12th grade at St. Louis Park High School. She loves to dance (especially tap) and runs the lighting for her high school's theater productions. She loves sci fi and horror in almost any medium, though video games and books are her favorites. Shira likes to read, write, and collect long words.**

