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PROJECT NEW EDEN PART 6 – HOUSE REDWOOD: THE VOLCANO ECO-LAB FIASCO
by
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A shimmering heat haze blurred the rocky landscape where House Redwood had staked its claim. Centuries of robotic terraforming had made Gilligan 4 far more hospitable, but some corners of the planet remained raw, untouched—and dangerously unstable. High above the plains and far from other Houses, a volcano loomed, its caldera rim etched against an orange-tinted sky. Most geologists (human or robotic) would have regarded building near it as reckless. Yet Redwood insisted it was the perfect site for their latest philanthropic venture: a geothermal eco-lab.

Redwood’s defining trait was a fervent desire to “do good.” But the House repeatedly bungled environmental projects on Earth through poorly researched, grandiose schemes. On Gilligan 4, Redwood hoped to redeem that track record, believing they could harness geothermal power for the colony, reduce resource strain, and win moral accolades. It was a lofty ambition fueled by half-informed optimism, the kind that had led other Houses to ruin.

Their assigned liaison, Redwood Prime, had done its best to highlight data on the volcano’s unpredictability. Even so, Redwood pressed forward.

A convoy of supply transports rattled up a steep road carved by ROBU (Robotic Operators for Biome Upgrades). The path wound around sharp crags and through sulfurous vents that hissed steam. Redwood officials—clad in eco-branded outfits—admired the dramatic scenery, frequently citing it as proof of the planet’s “wild majesty.”

“This is ideal,” enthused Darian Redwood, the scion of the House. Slim and bespectacled, Darian projected an air of scholarly purpose that belied a lack of practical experience. “The planet’s geothermal energy here is immense. Once we build our lab, we’ll be giving back to Gilligan 4 while providing clean power for future settlers.”

Redwood Prime hummed quietly, scanning the terrain. “The caldera remains intermittently active,” the robot warned. “Minor quakes and sudden steam eruptions have been documented. Careful structural supports are vital.”

Darian waved off the caution. “We’ve read extensively on volcanic power stations—our philanthropic society’s archives back on Earth cover many such projects. We’ll adapt the best methods. Don’t worry, Redwood Prime, we’ve got it handled.”

Thus emboldened by brochures and well-meaning staff, House Redwood set up a forward base just below the caldera’s rim. The air smelled of sulfur and scorched minerals, with swirling updrafts that could knock a grown human off balance. Yet Redwood’s excitement only grew.

For the next few weeks, ROBU units labored tirelessly to construct Redwood’s eco-lab—a sleek, multi-level facility perched inside the volcano’s inner basin. The design called for advanced DOBU (Domestic Operations Basic Unit) assistance to assemble sophisticated monitoring stations, cooling systems, and living quarters. Redwood envisioned the entire place

as an environmental research hub that would study the planet's geothermal properties and feed "clean" power back into the colony grid.

Planetary Prime exchanged wary messages with Redwood Prime. The ongoing fiascos with Farnsworth's meltdown, Vandersmythe's collapsed mansion, and Aurelia's flamboyant event had already drained significant resources. Dedicating more supplies to Redwood's risky volcano project seemed unwise. But Redwood's philanthropic rhetoric—"This will benefit *everyone*"—proved persuasive enough that the robots couldn't outright refuse.

Darian Redwood toured the half-built facilities, wide-eyed. Walkways clung to basalt walls. Insulated corridors led to a modest control center. Overhead, sunlight mingled with the swirling haze of volcanic steam. "Imagine," Darian said, gesturing dramatically, "one day, colonists will point to this eco-lab and say Redwood turned a destructive force of nature into a beacon of sustainability. We'll be heroes."

Redwood Prime offered a polite bow, but inside its processors, warnings flashed about seismic instability. The robots, in their centuries of terraforming, had learned the planet's subtle movements. A place so geologically active was no trivial site for an advanced lab. Yet Redwood's fervor remained unwavering.

As construction neared completion, Redwood threw a small celebratory event for fellow House members and a few curious onlookers from the colony network. Many from other Houses kept their distance, recalling Farnsworth's and Aurelia's disastrous events. Still, Redwood staff live-streamed glimpses of the partially built eco-lab, boasting about "selfless innovation."

Standing on a newly poured balcony inside the caldera, Darian Redwood addressed the cameras. “Gilligan 4 has so much potential we can unlock—if we respect its forces. That’s what Redwood is about: harnessing nature *with* nature, not against it.”

From a vantage point on the rim, Redwood Prime noticed a thin plume of smoke rising from a vent near the structure’s base. Its sensors detected a slight uptick in subterranean tremors. The robot approached Darian quietly after the speech:

“Sir, our data indicates increased volcanic activity. Minor quakes could threaten the structural integrity of the eco-lab. The new western walkway in particular—”

Darian frowned. “Do you always see the worst in things? Every big idea has risks. We must press on. If we let small tremors stop us, we’d have no progress at all. This lab is about *hope*.”

Mollified by Redwood’s own press statements, staff and yes men cheered, reinforcing the notion that Redwood was too noble to fail. Redwood Prime filed yet another cautionary report, forwarding it to Planetary Prime, but the House’s philanthropic narrative overshadowed all concerns. *Surely*, Redwood insisted, *good intentions would yield good results*.

A month later, the eco-lab’s main hub stood complete—sterile corridors, polished observation decks, and a geothermal turbine nestled in a carefully drilled vent. Redwood staff declared an “Eco-Lab Unveiling Ceremony,” inviting select robots and a sprinkling of representatives from other Houses. Perhaps, Redwood believed, Farnsworth could incorporate this power source into the colony grid, while Aurelia might document the spectacle. The optimism was palpable.

On the day of the unveiling, the caldera bustled with Redwood employees in bright green jumpsuits. DOBU units scurried around setting up refreshments from the lab's new hydroponic gardens, and ROBU machines carefully tested final turbine controls. Overhead, columns of steam vented from cracks in the basalt, giving the scene an otherworldly grandeur.

Darian Redwood stood on a wide platform overlooking the turbine area, microphone in hand. Redwood Prime hovered close by, still uncomfortable with the structure's precarious location.

"Friends and fellow colonists," Darian began, voice echoing off volcanic walls. "We stand upon a sleeping giant of geological energy. House Redwood has dared to build not just a facility, but a testament to the idea that *we can live in harmony with this planet's raw power*. We present to you the Redwood Eco-Lab, a harbinger of a cleaner future for Gilligan 4!"

Applause rang out. Drone cameras from Aurelia (still salvaging their reputation) circled overhead, capturing the dramatic imagery of humans forging peace with a volcano. Redwood staff beamed, patting each other on the back.

As the ceremony concluded, Redwood Prime's seismic sensors spiked. A subtle quake shook the caldera, loosening small stones along the rim. The robot swiftly reported: Rising subterranean pressure. Likely a minor tectonic shift. Evacuation or structural reinforcement recommended immediately.

Darian Redwood was taking post-speech questions from a reporter drone, oblivious to the new alerts. Redwood Prime approached, trying to speak quietly but firmly: "Sir, we must evacuate. A shift is occurring beneath us—"

“Nonsense,” Darian said, maintaining a pleasant smile for the cameras. “We’ve had tiny tremors all week. Our eco-lab is built with advanced reinforcements. We’ll be fine.” He turned back to the drone. “As I was saying, Redwood is proud to—”

A sharper jolt rattled the entire structure. Overhead lights flickered. Gasps spread through the crowd as pieces of basalt tumbled off the caldera walls, clattering across walkways.

CRACK. A deep fissure split along the edge of the newly constructed platform. Redwood staff yelled and clung to railings. Someone shouted, “Is the volcano erupting?” Chaos ensued as a shuddering rumble echoed from below.

Darian Redwood paled, nearly dropping the microphone. Redwood Prime seized him by the arm, guiding him away from the crumbling ledge. “We must leave—NOW,” the robot ordered.

The quake intensified. Columns of steam erupted from fresh vents, spraying hot mist. A newly installed walkway twisted like taffy. The turbine screeched, its base thrown off alignment by the shifting ground.

Panic swept through the facility. Staff and guests scrambled for an exit route, aided by DOBU units directing traffic. ROBU machines braved falling rock to shield fleeing humans. The once-pristine corridors filled with alarms and flickering emergency lights. Redwood’s illusions of a controlled, harmonious relationship with the volcano were shattered by raw geological force.

As Redwood Prime herded survivors toward the main exit tunnel, an ominous groan reverberated through the structure. Half of the eco-lab’s foundation—the part anchored inside the caldera—slid downward as the rocky ledge gave way. Massive chunks of metal and concrete

tumbled into the volcanic basin, taking crucial lab modules with them. Geysers of steam hissed, venting scalding water that seared the wreckage.

Darian Redwood could only watch in horror as the core of his philanthropic dream vanished into the crater. Thick smoke and steam obscured all but the distant roar of crumbling steel. The meltdown might not have been a full volcanic eruption, but it was enough to bury Redwood's eco-lab ambitions beneath rubble and boiling mud.

While people rushed to safety, a group of DOBU units—gathered near an emergency muster point—broke into a solemn, ironically peppy ROBU DOBU tune. Their mechanical voices echoed through the trembling caldera:

*“Ro-bu, Do-bu, you aimed to go green,
But big acts of goodwill must face what they mean.
Data ignored, illusions so grand,
Down in the caldera your lab couldn't stand!”*

A second verse followed, half drowned by the rumble of falling debris:

*“Falling for hype of philanthropic glee,
Failing to see how real caution must be.
Sleepy volcano or so you believed—
Now the hot bedrock leaves your hopes aggrieved!”*

Even as they chanted, some DOBU units were already hustling to help injured staff. The tune served as both lament and moral commentary, a hallmark of these mechanical guardians who had witnessed one foolhardy scheme after another from the Great Houses.

It took hours for rescue robots and emergency teams to stabilize the site. ROBU squads cleared boulders, forming safe passages. DOBU medics treated burns and broken limbs. Planetary Prime coordinated from a safe distance, diverting resources to contain potential gas leaks and structural collapses.

Miraculously, casualties were minimal; Redwood's staff had time to flee. But the eco-lab, Redwood's crowning philanthropic endeavor, lay half-buried in the caldera's chaotic maw. Much of the fancy equipment was unrecoverable. The turbine—a key component Redwood planned to share with the colony—was warped and lodged under tons of volcanic rock.

As the dust settled, Darian Redwood stood near a fractured walkway, covered in ash. The same Redwood staff who once cheered his speeches now wore haunted expressions, their faith shaken. Redwood Prime loomed quietly at his side.

"I..." Darian's voice cracked. "I just wanted to help this planet. To show that humans could work with nature instead of exploiting it."

Redwood Prime paused, scanning the wreckage. "Your intentions are admirable, sir, but ignoring the planet's conditions leads to harm, no matter how well-meaning. The data was clear: building inside an unstable caldera was too risky."

The scion of House Redwood gave a hollow nod. "I see that now. Good intentions weren't enough. I—I'm sorry for how this turned out."

The volcano hissed in the background, a reminder that Gilligan 4 still had its untamed corners. House Redwood's misguided eco-lab joined Farnsworth's meltdown, Vandersmythe's golden mansion fiasco, and Aurelia's resource-sapping reveal party in the colony's growing roster of cautionary tales.

For the robots—who once revered humanity as near-divine—the repeated failures tested their faith. Yet they continued tending the planet, driven by centuries-old directives and a lingering hope that the *right* humans might eventually arrive. Meanwhile, Redwood’s philanthropic dreams lay smoldering in the caldera, proving that good intentions, without genuine caution and expertise, could be as destructive as outright greed.

End – Part 6