

Jinwoo Jeong

Age: 14, Grade: 8

School Name: Northridge Middle, Tuscaloosa, AL

Educator: Jamie Thomas

Category: Short Story

Cocoon-S

The Cocoon-S

The Cocoon-S was everything for us. It was an invention that had been keeping us alive in this polluted Earth. Once turned on, an almond shaped transparent shield enveloped the user. The shield prevented unwanted impurities and toxins away from the user as well as protecting them from physical harm. It had a built in display that showed up on the shield, almost like a hologram. Blue and white projections of light highlighted the daily tasks set up by the government. This display allowed users to use the internet. All It sized based on the users' heights, allowing people of all ages to adapt themselves to the machine. Resources needed to survive were all included with the device. It even had an included transportation device, capable of traveling on land, air, or water. It did have some safety issues. We were told that even in a second, if one deactivated the Cocoon-S, one would die of toxicated air. Yet the more daunting reality was that the resources in the Cocoon-S were getting depleted day by day. Oxygen, electricity, and food percentages were indicated on electronic gauges. In theory, if all of the percentages hit 5%, the bubble would not function at all. When the Cocoon-S hit 5%, you would die.

In the beginning, our earth didn't suddenly turn into a wasteland. It became this way after decades and decades of uncontrolled pollution. Now everywhere looked the same; a barren land coated with brownish grey color. Tons of neon microplastics and white plastic bags littered the landscape. Our government instilled us consistently that we were all trapped and surrounded by polluted air, water and land. This environment only created doubt and worry in people's minds. In an attempt to fix this problem, the Cocoon-S was introduced. To this day, I have always been wearing a Cocoon-S. It was such a great relief to know that at least you could survive. However, once activated, the Cocoon-S could only provide enough resources to go around 45 years. Yes, 45 years only. This made everyone, including me, feel like a walking time bomb. Each year seemed to pressure me more and more. Over time, I would find myself looking more frequently to check if the gauges went up or stayed the same. But like a machine, the gauges ruthlessly drained. Every percent that lowered seemed to kill me a little bit more. Our government also had no more of these inventions for everyone to have another. If the current Cocoon-S failed, it was almost like instant death.

One day, I tried to talk to my friend Eric over my Cocoon-S. According to the manual that we were given, I had to configure the settings to match the radio frequency of Eric. After much testing and error, I figured it out. To my demise, I must have changed something incorrectly. My Cocoon-S suddenly turned off while matching frequencies with Eric. The shield protecting me dissipated. I screamed. Eric panicked as well.

"Dude, my Cocoon-S also just opened! How could this happen to me?"

Apparently his Cocoon-S had just turned off with me. We were shocked beyond belief. How could it have been so easy to turn the Cocoon-S off? It was almost as if no one bothered to check the errors of this invention and just hurried to finish it. I quickly realized how hard it was to breathe.

"Eric, I can hardly talk anymore!" I wheezed.

I realized we were exposed to the polluted air for more than a few minutes. I wasn't ready for this. It seemed unfair how easy it was for me to perish. I thought about how the human race would end and how I wouldn't be able to start a family. In the midst of my thinking, Eric interrupted me.

"Hold on, hold on! Take a deep breath and talk to me."

"What?" I coughed. "Wait, I can breathe now, I can breathe! I thought I would die without the oxygen from the Cocoon-S. What is going on here?"

That was a good question. Nobody knew. We should've been the people to uncover the truth to the world. One thing for sure was that our government was lying to us. All of a sudden, my head started to spin. My vision was invaded by black spots that seemed to increase in size exponentially. Then my legs buckled and I blacked out.

I did not remember how much time had passed. I just felt an abrupt shaking of my body. Apparently it was Eric. He

flew across the United States to see me. However he did it, it was fast.

“Are you okay man? I don’t know how safe we are without the Cocoon-S.”

My mind was still hazy. My eyelids seemed heavier than usual.

“Wait a minute... wake up dude, wake up! Look your resource gauge. It just hit 20%!”

I leapt to my feet. How was the dashboard still there if the Cocoon-S shut down? Whatever was happening, I clearly didn’t understand. He was right. Our oxygen levels were at 20%. Was the Cocoon-S still providing oxygen for me even though it seemed to have disappeared? Wanting answers, we frantically searched for the manual. After countless hours of investigation, we found a clue. A crossword puzzle showed the word butterfly with 2 unknown words connected. Both words started with an S. Whatever it meant, it could give us answers. It could fix our broken Cocoon-S.

Since our machine was named as Cocoon-S, it made sense to include *butterflies*. But what in the world butterflies were related to this? And what did S stand for? I used my somewhat working Cocoon-S to research about butterflies. Google assistant told us everything about butterflies; from what they eat to how they live.

“Lets see, a cocoon is a before-transformation of a butterfly. How do we become a butterfly from a cocoon?” I pondered. “Also, how do I know that my Cocoon-S will even hatch?”

“Google says it detaches its skins from the cocoon and spend 10-14 days for being an adult. But not all butterflies form a cocoon. Apparently they sometimes burrow into the underground and wait for the transformation.” Eric said. And just like that, we jumped to the conclusion that soil was the keyword.

We were ready to take off to search for the soil. Death Valley was the only known place that had actually soil remaining. With the transportation provided with the Cocoon-S, we got there in 15 minutes. My electricity gauge dropped substantially but it didn’t really mean much to me. It was all or nothing.

We landed at Death Valley. The soil seemed like enough for our transformation. Our next question was what to do with the soil and with our somewhat defective Cocoons. We dug up the soil and put our Cocoon-Ss in the soil. Now we were totally detached from the Cocoon-Ss. On the crossword puzzle hint, the last word was left. S-word related to butterflies? According to Google, butterflies need sodium to live. There was a place called “Salt Flats” in Death Valley. Would it be necessary for us to consume sodium? If butterflies eat salt, so could we.

“Eric, I guess this is it. We haven’t eaten anything because we were so busy trying to stay alive. We should eat this salt and attempt to connect the Cocoon-S again.” I suggested. “Maybe that will help fix our problem.”

After swallowing the salt, we sluggishly lingered back towards their Cocoon-S. This whole idea of eating salt seemed so random and out of the ordinary. However, strangely enough, the Cocoon-S connect back to Eric after he configured it. I was astonished. After he helped me with mine, I realized that my Cocoon-S was back to normal and had 100% resources once again.