



THE LAST DISCOVERY

PITCH DECK

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Logline

After making an extraordinary discovery, the small team in an isolated research facility in the Australian outback must struggle to survive, as one-by-one they become violently deranged.

The Pitch

The Last Discovery asks the question, “What if the universe **does** have a purpose, but we’re not meant to be part of it, and so need to be removed?”

The Last Discovery is a 21st century take on H. P. Lovecraft’s concept of “cosmic horror”, in which curious people inadvertently attract the attention of an uncaring universe. While doing so, *The Last Discovery* avoids Lovecraft’s bigotry, and his fondness for tentacled horrors and arcane cults.

Featuring a diverse cast of warm characters, the story avoids the toxic trope of “humans are the real monsters” by showing people clinging to their humanity, even as they confront soul-crushing horror and sadness. Audiences will welcome this celebration of humanity’s courage and compassion in these precarious times.

The Last Discovery also taps into sci-fi fans’ increasing interest in the **Simulation Hypothesis**, and introduces it to horror fans by giving the idea a dark twist.

Introducing *The Last Discovery*

The Last Discovery is a sci-fi/horror feature that follows the events in the days after scientists, in an isolated research station deep in the Australian outback, make a momentous discovery.

The story follows Hamid, a maintenance engineer, whose happiness for his colleagues' surprising discovery turns to horror and dismay, when two scientists destroy the facility's infrastructure and attack their friends. Shocked by these events, he and the others try to understand what is happening, while struggling to cling to their humanity, as one-by-one they become violently deranged.

The Last Discovery is a contemporary take on H. P. Lovecraft's concept of cosmic horror, and asks the question: What if the universe does have a purpose, but we're not part of it and so must be removed?

Set in the harsh beauty of the Australian outback, the vast location acts as a microcosm of humanity's place in the universe.

Peopled with intelligent, likeable characters from around the world, *The Last Discovery* avoids the trope of "humans are the real monsters". Instead it shows our characters struggling to come to terms with what is happening, while never ceasing to care for each other. Even when they begin to suspect what is happening, and their possible "culpability" in humanity's extinction, the last survivors continue to maintain their compassion and empathy to the very end.

And so, despite the bleak resolution, *The Last Discovery* is a celebration of humanity and our precarious place in a cold and uncaring universe.

Introducing *The Last Discovery* cont.

The Last Discovery shares elements with Michael Crichton's novel, *The Andromeda Strain* (which gave us both, the 1971 movie and the 2008 mini-series), and John Carpenter's *The Thing*, but without the need for a huge special effects budget. Discussing it recently, I was also reminded of Nevil Shute's novel "On the Beach", which was made into a movie in 1959, and again in 2000.

The Last Discovery also taps into sci-fi fans' current fascination with the idea that we may be living in a simulation, while at the same time introducing the concept to horror fans by giving it a dark twist.

Look • Pace • Tone

LOOK • In keeping with the story's themes, the visual style should emphasise the insignificance of the Research Facility, and humanity in general, within the vastness of the Australian outback. This could then be offset by photographing the characters in such a way as to bring out their warmth and humanity (like, for example, the way faces were shot in *Oppenheimer*, although that was done for different reasons).

PACE • *The Last Discovery* begins by introducing the cast and explaining the extraordinary discovery that has brought them together. And then, as soon as the audience understands the repercussions of the discovery, and has become invested in the characters, the horror begins. From this point on, the story seesaws between scenes of gut-wrenching horror to their sombre aftermaths. The cycle repeats, with variations, until the final, sombre, but uplifting denouement.

TONE • The story begins in a light and engaging tone before shifting suddenly into horror. From here the tone darkens to something akin to Carpenter's *The Thing*, but without the macho paranoia. Instead, our characters will struggle to maintain their small community, even as they try to cope with their grief and fear. The end of the story is bittersweet, when the last two survivors take control of their fate.

Short Synopsis

In an isolated facility in the Australian outback, a small team of scientists discover evidence that the universe may be based on an underlying code. Surprised and excited by their extraordinary discovery, they invite some colleagues to help validate their findings, before sharing it with the world.

But their dreams of fame are shattered when two of their colleagues become violently deranged. Horrified by their friends' actions, they begin to suspect their discovery may have triggered their behaviour, as one-by-one, they fall victim to the same disorder.

Cut off from the outside world, the remaining survivors struggle to hold on to their humanity.

Long Synopsis

The night side of Earth as seen from space. S.E. Asia and Australia are outlined by billions of city lights.

The Australian outback, day. Two specialists, SHU-FEN (mid 40s) an expert on language, and ANTON (early 30s) an expert in finding and cracking codes, are met at an airstrip by the facility's maintenance engineer HAMID (late 30s).

They arrive at the facility and are greeted by GEENA (mid 50s), the project manager and RAKESH (late 40s), the team leader. They are joined by two other scientists, KRISTA (late 20s) and LARS (30s), and the facility's cook and first aid officer, CHARLI (mid 20s).

Over dinner that night, the guests learn that their hosts suspect they have discovered evidence that suggests our universe may be built on an underlying code or language. The two newcomers are stunned.

However, extracting the code from within the data proves to be more difficult than anyone suspected. So when they learn of a tropical storm that is expected to isolate them for about a week, they decide to take a break and throw a party to watch the spectacular lightning display.

During the party the power goes out. They go to investigate and are shocked to find their vehicles and the power shed are on fire. Charli and Rakesh go to find the fire extinguishers, and are attacked by Krista. Others rush to their aid, and Krista is restrained to a bed in the sick bay, screaming incoherently.

Shocked and confused, the group gathers in the rec room.

Long Synopsis cont.

There, Charli and Geena attend to Rakesh's wounds. They soon realise Anton is missing, so Lars and Shu-Fen go to find him. Soon after Hamid joins them in their search, they find Anton dying from a self-inflicted wound. They try to save him, but he fights them, while also screaming incoherently. Soon after, he dies from his wound.

The next day Hamid explores the facility and is disturbed by the thoroughness of the destruction wrought by Krista and Anton. He tells the others that he suspects it's something related to their discovery that drove the two scientists insane. The scientists are sceptical.

Later that day, Krista manages to kill herself. Mourning the loss of their friend, they inter her in her hut. Isolated by flooding, they cling to the knowledge that the university will soon send a plane to see why their communications are down. To that end, they layout a large "SOS" and prepare a number of bonfires. The work lifts their spirits.

Next morning, Rakesh is found standing on a dune, stripped of his bandages. Hamid tries to speak with Rakesh as he struggles for control. Then, rather than risk harming his friend, Rakesh impales himself on a metal fence post and dies.

With Rakesh interred in his cabin, the group relapses into stunned grief. Geena shares Rakesh's scotch with the others and proposes a toast. With no reason to stop, they keep drinking until the wake is interrupted when Lars sees a light plane. They rush out and light a bonfire, but the plane doesn't respond to the signal.

Long Synopsis cont.

Despondent, the group moves on to Geena's cabin to continue drowning their sorrows.

That night, Shu-Fen finds Charli alone in the dark kitchen. Charli tells her she's making a curry in honour of Rakesh. On hearing this, Hamid goes to give her a beer. He doesn't find her, but he does discover the curry has been poisoned. He warns the others and they go in search of Charli, hoping to restrain her. Charli confronts them and sets herself on fire, blowing up the kitchen. They barely escape. Hamid's legs are hurt.

In the morning they find Charli's remains and inter them in her hut. Frightened and unsure if anyone can be trusted, the survivors separate and spend the day apart.

That evening the four survivors gather together. The scientists now believe that whatever is behind the code, is intent on killing not only them, but all of humanity. Despite his initial thoughts, Hamid finds the idea too distressing to accept.

After a sleepless night, Geena and Shu-Fen meet and are relieved to find that they are both sane. Soon after Geena is attacked by Lars, who spears her in the gut. Shu-Fen rescues Geena and the two women flee to Geena's cabin, meeting Hamid on the way.

Over the next few days, Hamid and Shu-Fen tend to Geena as best they can, but peritonitis is killing her and there's nothing they can do.

Long Synopsis cont.

Their bleak routine is broken when a light plane approaches the facility. Hamid lights a bonfire sending up a plume of smoke. Fu-Shen joins him. Together they watch as the plane continues on to the horizon, never once wavering from its course.

They return to Geena's Cabin to find the door has been forced open and Geena dead from a fractured skull. Lars attacks them from hiding. Shu-Fen manages to smash-in his face with her cricket bat. They leave and lockup the cabin, interring what was once Lars, with Geena's body.

That night, bereft and alone, the Hamid and Shu-Fen make love. They then decide to splurge on a picnic and say their goodbyes, before one of them turns and tries to kill the other.

After the rain, the desert is now awash with wild flowers (see Look Book). Animals and birds enjoy the bounty. It is beautiful. Hamid and Shu-Fen make a day of it. One last defiant celebration of humanity. Near sunset, they hug and go their separate ways, never to see each other again.

We see the night side of the Earth from space. There are no lights. The world is in darkness.

Themes

The Last Discovery covers a number of interrelated themes about what it is to be human and our place in this (potentially) meaningless universe.

The Last Discovery answers these questions by celebrating humanity's quest for understanding and presenting us with a cast of characters who have found their purpose in the search for knowledge.

The Last Discovery is, in part, inspired by the Simulation Hypothesis, which is getting a lot of sci-fi fans excited at the moment. Its creator, Nick Bostrom – in the tradition of early scientists who placed the Earth (and humanity) at the centre of the universe – takes an anthropocentric view, suggesting a previous “human” culture created the simulation in which we live. However, *The Last Discovery* takes a darker view, positing that the simulations' creators have no interest in humanity and that our existence is merely an accident due to some bad code. And, now they are aware of it, they are erasing humanity from The Simulation.

The Last Discovery pushes the unfashionable notion that, in general, people can be compassionate and brave in even the most desperate and bleak circumstances. In *The Last Discovery*, humans are the tragic heroes – refuting the clichéd “humans are the real monsters” trope.

The World

The Last Discovery is set at a remote cosmological research facility deep in Australia's outback. The facility is at the hub of a 50km-wide circle of sensor stations, buried deep underground in bore holes, called "Wells".

While it is possible to get to the facility by road, most people fly into an airstrip, which is just a "short" 90-minute drive away. The roads are unsealed, and often become impassable after heavy rains.

While the technology used at the facility is at the cutting edge of science, the buildings are not. Most of them are "portables" that have been purchased secondhand from mining companies, the military or various education departments. Despite this, the lodgings are comfortable, if a little Spartan.

Arranged in an open quadrangle, the buildings include residential huts, a kitchen/mess hall, a computer lab and an amenities block, including toilets, showers and a laundry. They are linked by covered walkway. Beside them is a large carport for vehicles and a workshop. Nearby is a bore with a concrete water tank, and an array of solar panels linked to the power shed, which also contains a backup generator.

The desert around the facility is, in the earlier scenes, dry and bleak. However, after the thunderstorm, the desert slowly transforms over the next few days, until it is covered in wild flowers. Becoming a beautiful wreath to memorialise the passing of humanity.

Introduction to Characters

The characters reflect the internationalism of modern cosmology where scientists from all over the world cooperate to further humanity's understanding of the universe. In the current draft, characters represent people from India, Sweden, Taiwan, the US and, of course, Australia.

The Australians include a “new-Australian” from Latvia, one whose family emigrated from the UK in the 1930s, another whose Afghan forebears emigrated in the 1800s, and a First Nations Australian.

Please note: The current nationalities, genders etc of the characters have been designed to suggest how *The Last Discovery* should look. Characters can be modified if opportunities arise during casting.

They are a tight-knit group, joined in their passion for “The Search”, as they call their quest for scientific understanding. No doubt they have had their disagreements in the past, but the excitement generated by their discovery has driven any petty issues from their minds.

Character Descriptions

HAMID • maintenance engineer (35-45)

Hamid is a fifth-generation Australian. His ancestors helped open-up the Australian outback with their camel trains in the 1800s.

He loves science, and physics in particular. But his poor grasp of higher mathematics and the expectations of his family kept him away from academia. When the job at the research facility came up, Hamid saw it as an opportunity to his contribute to science. And so he takes his responsibilities seriously.

He is excited for his friends and understands some of the implications should the discovery be proven real – both for humanity’s understanding of the universe and for the careers of Rakesh and his team.

SHU-FEN • linguist (40-50)

Shu-Fen was born in Taiwan. She speaks seven languages fluently and knows a dozen more. Originally a linguist, she now researches the fundamental nature of information and communications.

While at a conference in Sydney, she received an invitation from Geena to examine their discovery. Shu-Fen then suggested they also invite Anton, who had just delivered a lecture at the same conference.

Shu-Fen is awed by the implications of the discovery, and should it be proven, is thrilled to have the chance of bringing it to the world’s notice.

Character Descriptions cont.

GEENA • project manager (50-60)

Despite looking like a hippy grandmother, Geena is a cosmologist by training and the facility's project manager. She came up through the ranks in a man's world and knows how to fight for what she needs.

Geena took the role to prove (yet again) that she's capable of running her own project, and so is a stickler for "ticking the boxes". That said, she tries to foster a cooperative and friendly working environment.

Geena is very excited by the discovery. Not only for what it could mean for her career, but more importantly, for what it could do for humanity's understanding of the universe.

CHARLI • cook & first aid officer (late 20s)

Charli is a First Nations woman, and has lived in the outback most of her life. She learned to cook in pubs and mining camps, before training in first aid. She took the job at the facility to be "close" to her family, who live only 300km away ... as the crow flies. Charli is relaxed and friendly, getting along with everyone. She enjoys the job, despite missing her family.

Charli is happy for her friends, despite not sharing in their excitement, believing the discovery is only of academic interest.

Character Descriptions cont.

RAKESH • project leader (45-55)

Trained as an astrophysicist, Rakesh was born in India and has worked all around the world. While he could oversee the project from Sydney, he claims to have missed “getting his hands dirty”. While partly true, a recent divorce, and his abhorrence of academic politics, also played a part in his decision. Rakesh appears to be reserved, but he is warm and friendly once he gets to know you.

The discovery was a huge surprise. He is awed by the implications, but is also worried about making a mistake and becoming “famous” for all the wrong reasons.

LARS • cosmologist (early 30s)

Lars is on loan from Stockholm University. He volunteered after falling in love with the Australian outback while backpacking around the world. Large and intimidating in appearance, Lars is a gentle giant, who sees his colleagues at the facility as family.

A tireless and methodical worker, it was Lars who first noticed the anomaly that lead to the discovery. He is beyond excited. This is why he got into astronomy, to discover something huge.

Character Descriptions cont.

KRISTA • astronomer (late 20s)

Born in Latvia, Krista emigrated to Australia with her parents when she was in pre-school. A post-grad specialising in radio astronomy, she is now working on her thesis. A straight-edger with a temper, she is seen by the others as being a bit exotic, with her tattoos and penchant for black-metal. Krista is thrilled by the discovery and the chance to be a part of it.

The arrival of Anton is also a cause for celebration ... assuming Charli doesn't get to him first.

ANTON • cryptologist (mid 30s)

Anton specialises in identifying and extracting information from encoded, scrambled or incomplete data sets.

While visiting Australia to speak at a conference, he is approached by Shu-Fen with a problem he may be interested in. Intrigued by the mystery and excited by the opportunity to visit the Australian outback, Anton accepted immediately.

Teaser

The following scene takes place a couple of days after the horrific night when two of their colleagues went insane and tried to destroy the facility.

Dawn. Hamid climbs the dune toward Rakesh, who stands bare-chested, his dressings ripped from his wounds.

Cautious, Hamid approaches and asks how he is. Rakesh assures him he's fine, saying he's just there to view the sunrise, despite facing the wrong direction. Worried, Hamid tries to coax him back for breakfast, but Rakesh becomes agitated, snapping, "I'm fine!"

Hamid backs off and Rakesh immediately apologises. He admits how things must look, but insists there's no reason to be concerned.

"I am fine. Nothing to con, concerrr ... ERRR—"

Desperate to regain control, Rakesh gives his face a brutal slap. Weeping, he tries to speak, but once again his words degenerate into stuttering growls. Horrified, he clamps a hand over his mouth.

Hamid tries to console him and repeats his offer of breakfast. Rakesh looks away. Instantly his expression distorts into a malicious grin. He snickers, and without turning, offers his hand to Hamid.

Relieved, Hamid reaches for Rakesh's hand, but before he can grasp it, Rakesh regains control. Screaming, he smacks Hamid's hand away and breaks into a stumbling run. Hamid chases after him.

Rakesh finds his way blocked by an old wire fence. He hesitates, trying to decide which way to run, as Hamid closes in.

Teaser cont.

Without warning, Rakesh throws himself onto a rusted star picket (*T-post*), impaling himself through the abdomen. He shrieks in agony! Appalled, Hamid staggers to a halt, as Rakesh lunges back and forth.

From the covered walkway, Geena sees this and collapses to her knees, dragging Shu-Fen down with her.

Sick with horror, Hamid forces himself forward, only for Rakesh to turn upon him, snarling and hands clawing. Helpless, Hamid steps back as Rakesh continues to thrash and scream. The star picket pushes through to his back, stretching the skin. The skin tears and the picket bursts through, spraying blood over the fresh, green shoots.

Devastated, Hamid falls to his knees as Lars strides past, clutching a steel post in his fist. Rakesh lunges at him, completely feral. Lars places himself and raises the steel post high, preparing to end Rakesh's agony. His hands tremble. The post slips from his fingers and falls to the sand.

Lars and Hamid watch as Rakesh's movements slow and weaken, until finally the body slumps, and he is dead.

Hamid goes to Lars. Distraught, the two men cling to each other.

A Multinational Production?

Given the fact the premise of *The Last Discovery* requires a multinational cast to reflect the global network of scientists working in cosmology, this suggests that the telling of this story could also be a multinational effort.

This in turn will provide a larger pool from which to draw financing, while also broadening the array of markets *The Last Discovery* can be sold in to.

Look Book

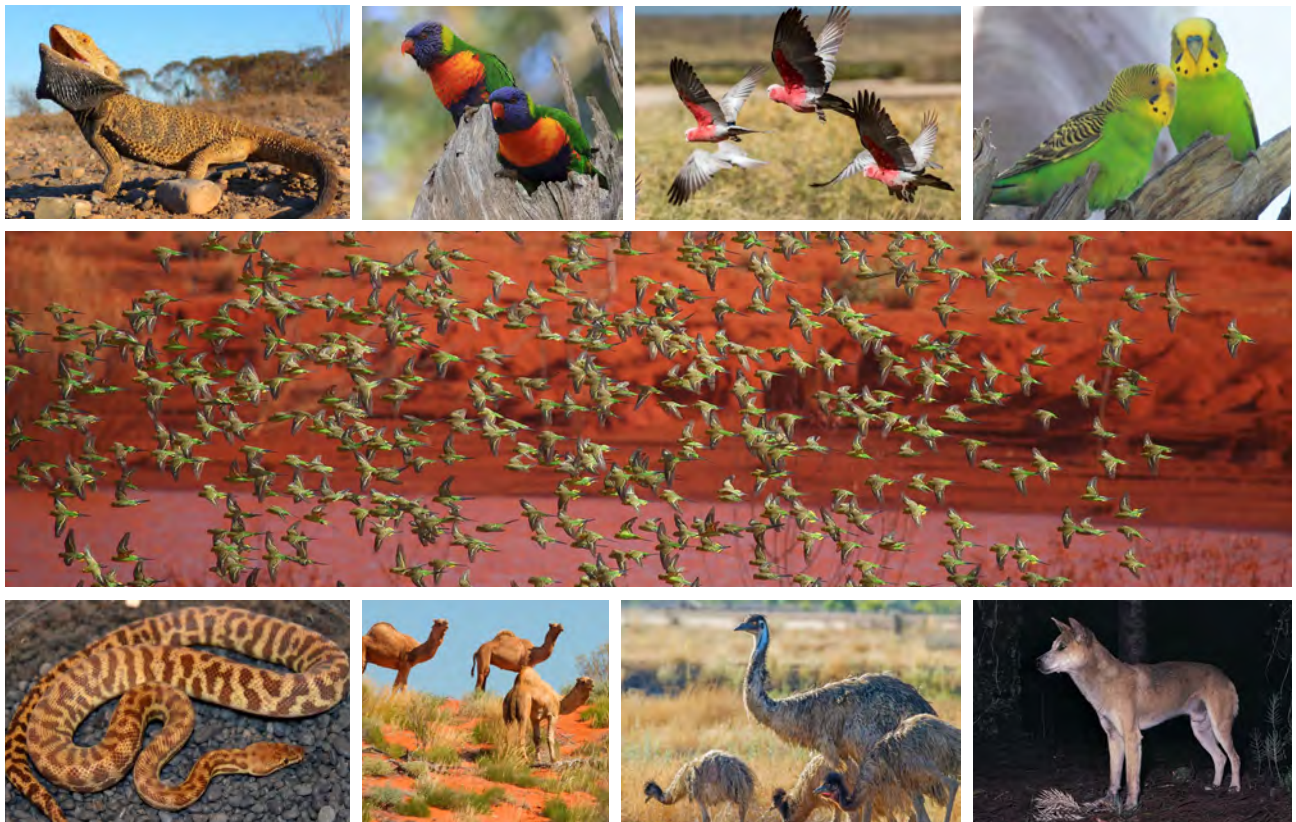
A few images to help set the scene – desert, storms, flowers etc.

OUTBACK



A vast, red plain roasts under the scorching sun.

WILDLIFE



A Bearded Dragon surveys its domain.

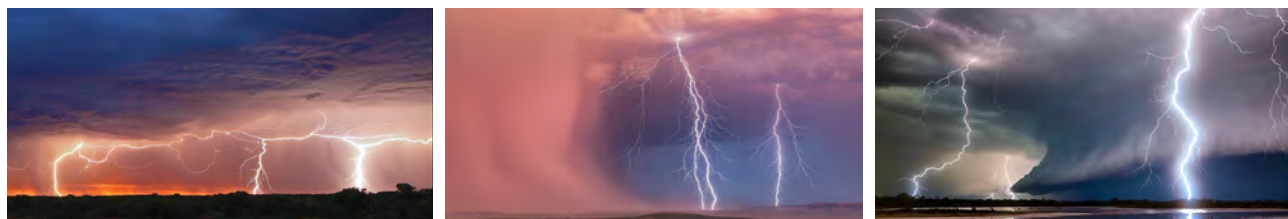
Look Book cont.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH INSTALLATIONS



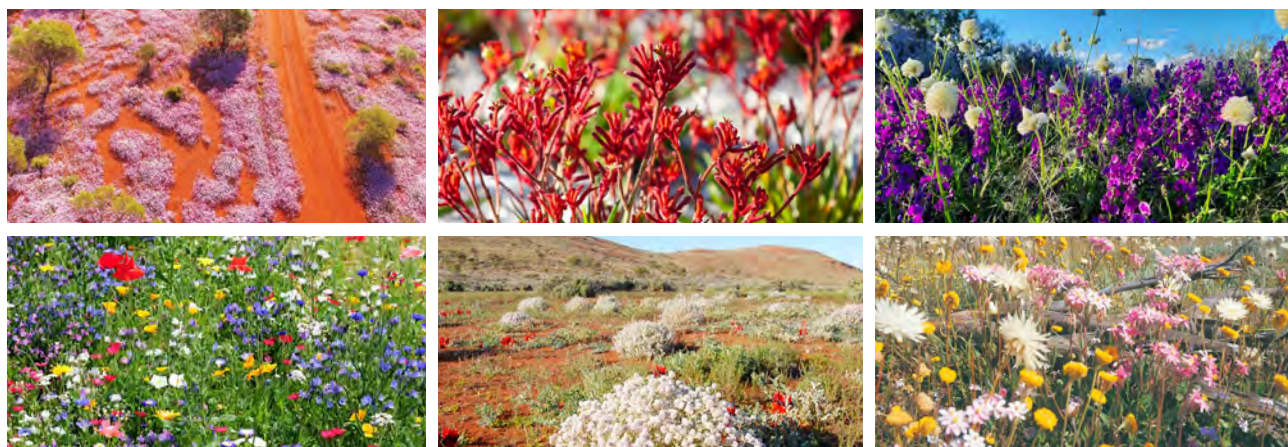
Portable buildings bordering a quadrangle.

THUNDERSTORMS



They ooh and ahh at the flashes of lightning.

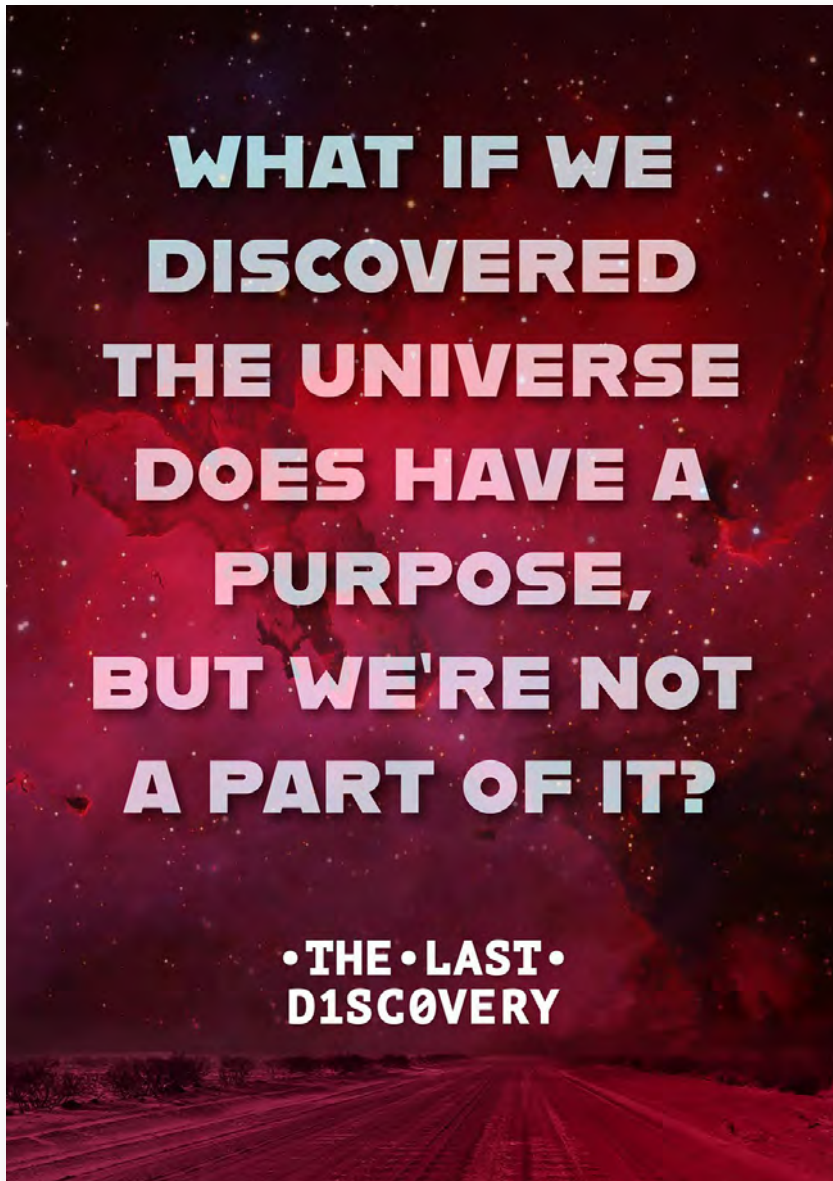
FLOWERS BLOOM AFTER THE STORM



Birds flit among the flowering grasses and shrubs.

Look Book cont.

TEASER POSTER





• THE • LAST • DISCOVERY

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