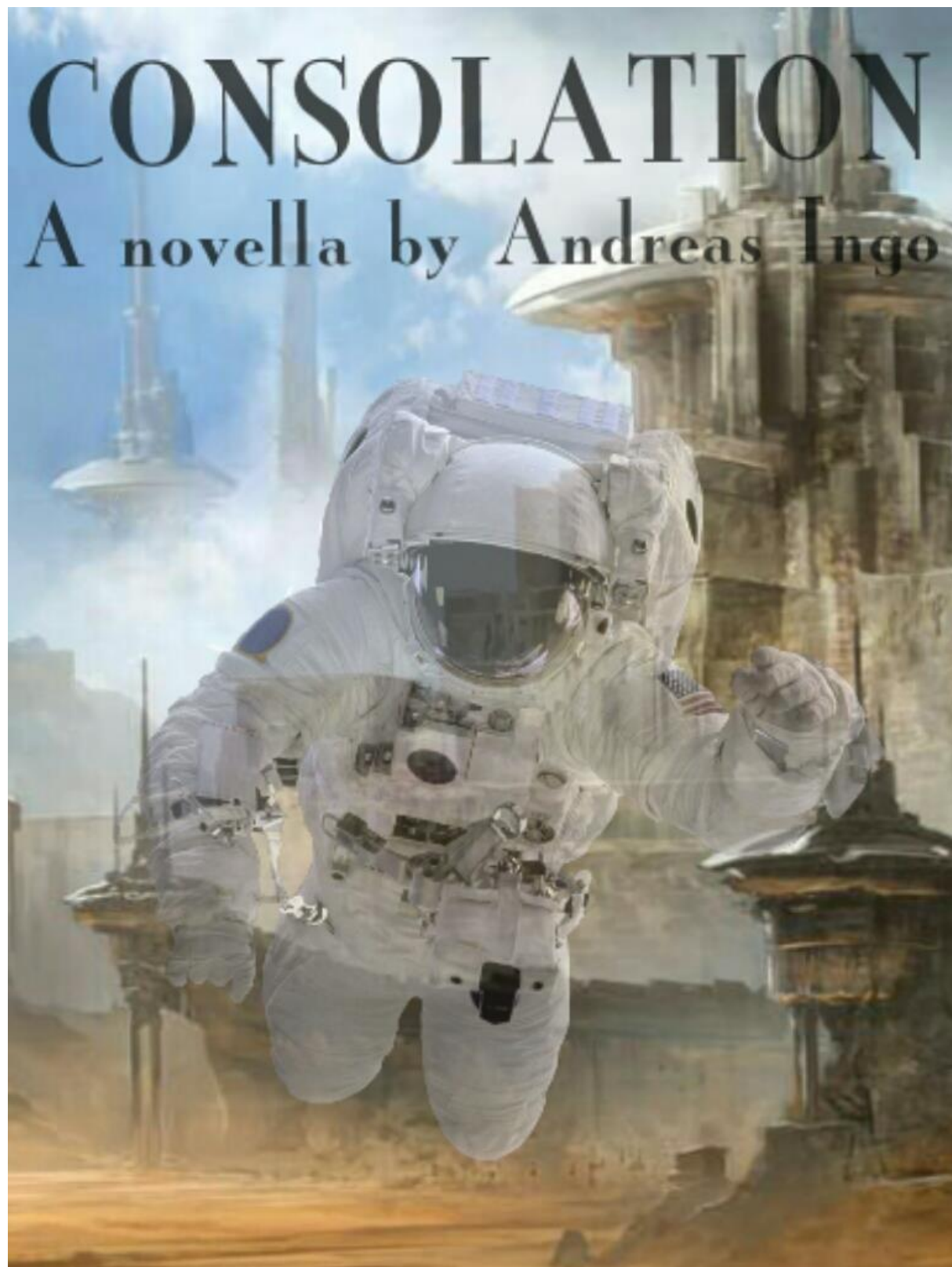


CONSOLATION

A novella by Andreas Ingo



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1

THE MINING OUTPOST

I can hardly remember it. My past life as a lone explorer. Travelling the universe as a reckless outsider. And now I'm sitting here in a compact bunker waiting for the work-shift to begin tomorrow. I'm just sitting here. It's like I have lost sense of time and space. Just staring at a blank communication device. Searching for messages to no avail. I wasn't always this lonely. This caught up in work and routine. But now, as the flashing armature irritates my senses and I'm isolated in a compact bunker by conscious choice, it seems like this emptiness is my destiny.

Working schedule.

The clock rang one hour ago. I'm on my way to the working ground. A mining outpost where we dig minerals in the ground. In a way all this nonsense is a spectacular thing. Watching the dunes of sand that blow over the alien surface on this particular moon. It's a landscape dug by howling winds under a blue sky with white clouds. In a sense it's a little bit like earth but also otherwise. Because this desert can accumulate huge mountains of sand and sometimes it's revealing alien structures. Black structures never explored in depth. No alien have been seen and it seems like these structures are thousands, if not ten thousands of years old.

We took hold of this moon to use it for financial gain. And to make better profit my employers hired people from the poorer areas of the universe. I was one of them. But as I said, I have no clear memories of the time before my working contract was written. It's a really stupid thing. I work as a dig controller, moving a huge tractor over the surface of the mining outpost. I look down upon a group of workers that is moving below the controller room. The people look like ants, like small points in space, moving and communicating over a communication device. Sometimes the digging mechanism gets stalled by hard obstacles. Or the management decides to try their luck in new places. The mining outpost was chosen for its great concentration of rare minerals. Minerals that can be used in quantum computers to advance information technology.

End of shift.

I sit with several workers in a dining room. A starkly lit dining space where some of the workers exchange comments but not many of them. It's a suffocating silence. An uncomfortable silence. And when we say something it's mostly insults and talk about working conditions. Some of us play cards. And when we play card we play with dull faces. Easily agitated. Easily irritated. Easily angered. And we're playing for money. Playing cards to waste time between working hours.

"So Eddie!" One of the men says to me, "You're cheating again!"

"I'm not!" I say, "But if I did you would surely deserve it!"

"So unfortunate!" The man says and spits on the floor.

The scene starts with aggression but escalates into a real fight. Me on the floor with this angered worker. We go down on the floor hitting each other, kicking and screaming. Using chairs, hitting each other and bleeding from open wounds.

I win.

Psychological evaluation.

I'm meeting a female psychologist in the safety of my own bunker. I have had my time of work and I'm meeting her in evening hours. The sun is coming down. A huge red-shift hue sends rays of consolation to the surface of my tired face. I look beyond my shoulders to watch other men entering their air-lock with a similar pace. I meet up with the psychologist and offer her a cup of coffee. She takes it with an edgy grin. She doesn't look much like the others. Coming from another sphere of human society: Educated, well rehearsed and projecting an image of well-being and security. Is it a learned manners or is she really feeling this good by herself?

"Hey." The psychologist says, "How are you Eddie?"

"I'm fine."

The psychologist, Mary, watches me with the most suspicious eyes. She can easily see beyond the rugged surface: The wrinkled features, the burning cigarette in my mouth. The stamp of an old adventurer lost to work.

"I can see that you're depressed." Mary says.

I explain the tension between myself and the other workers. I explain things in matter of fact from my own perspective. About the errors of the working unit. About the angered

worker that just couldn't take it. Mary listens with some attention. But as I try to avoid the hard subject, the *why* to this situation Mary interrupts.

"Please don't." I say.

"It would be easier to reach you if you just would listen." Mary says.

The psychologist has talked with me on several occasions. About my condition. About my trouble to handle the reality of this world. My way of handling the situation with escalating violence. She has talked about the need of attitude change. To change the way I think about my destiny and the things I take for granted.

"I think what you truly need is a break from your normal working conditions." Mary says, "A break with a new hobby, excursions into the alien landscape or something like it."

"You have already said it."

"But have you really listened?" Mary says, "I wanted to change your mind."

The two of us sit down in bed and suddenly I feel great sorrow. Like a turning in my stomach, a longing for something I can barely understand. But we don't get intimate. We just have a professional conversation. About the hardships of the working contract, about my negative condition. I tell her what I know. Mary makes me promise to change my attitude towards the other workers. As a chance for me to change my chosen destiny. To think more positive about change, about new possibilities.

"I'll try." I say. "But I already did it."

"Do it again." Mary says.

Two weeks later.

The workers and I gather at a high outcropping beyond the mining site. It's just the workers and me. A vista of reflective stones below. Of crevices and threatening cave openings. It's a bright and temperate day. But also something threatening in the air. Distant flashes from rainy clouds. Echoes of past civilizations seeking shelter in their forgotten kingdoms. Being dead?

The angered worker comes forward to start a new quarrel.

"Hey Eddie!" The worker says to me, "Have you ever thought about the strength of your muscles?" He says, "Driving the digging machine and what not? Doing nothing."

“Not your business!” I say.

“You’re still my enemy!” The angered worker says.

And the worker pushes me to the edge of the high outcropping to test my strength, maybe even to push me over. And I turn on him: To smash the oxygen supply to his space-helmet. To crush his helmet protection and to make him breathe the poisonous air. The man watches, silently screaming. Looking like a wild animal before the kill. And I take the man upon my shoulders to throw him over the edge.

The worker falls to oblivion.

2

THE ALIEN PRISON

The alien structure loomed before me as an old and forgotten castle. The gothic discs upon the blackened towers to signal a coming apocalypse. It was my abyss, my dark descent into chosen slavery. Upon brownish ground.

I entered the huge gates and saw the merging of human and alien interiors. The alien structure had been rebuilt into a futuristic prison. To use the given structure for human purposes. I knew about my punishment but I couldn’t dare to blind myself to the mystery of this place. Of the arts and artefacts on the alien walls. Of the great obelisks on the central meeting points connecting the different parts of the structure.

I could see the great spires looming above me decorated by dotted lines.

I was taken into a cell with a simple bench and a translucent door where I could watch the other prisoners from the angle of my own. I heard noises, great screaming. A dark suspicion of torture devices unknown to most. I took to the silence of my own mind. To ease my pain and worry. But my state was unfathomable. I just sat on my bench and wept for my coming demise.

Two weeks later.

The personnel just couldn’t take it: My anguish, my pain, my sudden screams and shouts. I was put to a new psychological evaluation. With my former psychologist talking with me in rigid tone.

“We simply can do nothing for you except to keep you in isolation.” Mary said and she could barely take it.

“Isolation?”

“Yes.” Mary said, “You have to get separated from the rest. It’s about the peace and quiet of this place.” She said, “And also I think no positive thinking can change your attitude. You just have to suffer.”

“Why?”

“Because you might need your darkness to find your light.”

I was taken by two guards and was led to a dark cellar. A dark sphere of alien surroundings where occasional human technology lit the alien surroundings.

“Here!” One of the guards said, “You will work with temporary cloths to keep your mind away from the obvious.”

I watched them in horror as I saw the working benches with white cloths. Like ethereal ghosts they hang on hangers in the number of thousands. A surreal ghost house surrounded by alien walls. One of the guards had a sudden laugh. And one of the m was whispering to the other.

I begged for the possibility of something to disorient my senses: Some music, some kind of television. Anything. But I was totally denied.

One week later.

I thought about madness but I had already sunken to my deepest lows. I lost myself in work. To work with the white cloths. To wash them, to dry them, to fix holes with the help of a thread and a needle. And strangely enough I came to like it. I looked upon the white cloths as ghosts of my imagination. Something to fuel my desire after *them*. The alien creatures that had lived on the planetary surface before. Creating these structures for an unknown purpose. One can surely say I watched the walls in silence. Trying to decipher the meaning of the symbols and strange tokens. But it was a project that saw no clear progress or absolution. They just kept me wonder. The ones using a technology much more advanced than mankind’s.

The lights went out. I heard sounds of shots and great screaming. I stood in pure and compact darkness. Sensing my hands, hearing the sounds of my beating heart. I was horrified too. Horrified to be left to rot in this awful place completely by myself.

Suddenly a door was opened. Light was coming in. There, in front of me I saw the silhouette of a black man lit from his back with several flashlights.

“You are free to go.” The black man said as enveloped in shadow, “The rebels have taken control of the entire business.”

“The entire moon?”

“Yes.” The black man said, “The moon is our business and we want a decent pay.”

I was left to walk up a gothic ladder to the central vault of the surface floor. My eyes were enlarged by the darkness and adjusted to the light.

I was surprised to find that all criminals had been released. That several guards were left dead on the ground. That I saw multiple men and women celebrating their new born freedom. Freedom to roam the alien lands by modern rovers.

I was one of them.

So I left them. I left the prison ground to confront the sandy surroundings connecting to a mountain range. And there upon one of the mountains I saw the strangest shape. A giant cube in black, being five hundred cubic meters. Being held steady on the top of the mountain. A monument I didn't see before.

What about this monument?

It was just a cube, a dark feature extending from the top of the highest mountain. I was transfixed, deformed and haggard. I wanted to walk but I just couldn't stand it. I had chosen my slavery but I had forgotten the reasons. Freedom was just a word and freedom to me was just pure darkness. I couldn't stand that darkness.

Hours later, as I had walked upon the brown ground with a sense of hopelessness, I entered the huge cube for unknown reasons. Just walking up that hellish mountain. With brown crevices. With dangerous steps formed naturally by the evolving weather conditions. A kind of volcano before. A volcano which upon the top the cube had been mounted. But I just couldn't see the true purpose.

The interiors were a mysterious maze with strange cuts and corners. Weeks ago I wouldn't have dared to enter. But now, as I had seen with great clarity the reality of blackness I walked on with a sharpened temper.

And I found a central installation vault. With several graves reminding of the dead Egyptians. A central fire place. With a fire that long ago had lost its glory and power.

Now just a collection of black coals made from the trees in the past days. When the planet had a solid atmosphere and hosted alien life.

Three days later.

I joined with the future warriors in the gothic palace and I still couldn't sense the reality of myself. How I got to be in this blackened world. Of torture, of slavery, of brutal violence so contradictory towards the depths of myself.

"You are just a lost soul!" The black man said to me.

His face was torn by endless care and rapture. A face coloured by countless hours working for the preservation of humans like himself. But he hadn't gotten any weaker. The strain developed a hint of sadness in his eyes: Of the violence. Of the torture. Of the endless strain of the muscles of the heart. Fighting for victory.

"A lost soul?" I said.

"You are just a lost soul exactly like the others." The black man said, "Come join us in a party on the roof of the prison structure."

The evening had a sense of bleakness in its weather formations: Huge clouds, leaning to dark blue, to grey, to swirling forms taking shape upon the sky and along the mountains. It was a sight to behold for sure. And we drank liquor from unused bottles. Bottles preserved for those in charge of the whole operation. And some of the past criminals played cards and had occasional laughs. Thinking about their new opportunities but also thinking about their limitations.

"We have to talk about the past." The black man said, "The past as it was formed by your past decisions." He said, "No one should ever have ended up in this place. As it is contradictory to the nature of man, including your own."

Nobody would talk though. These men were hardened criminals. On the path of decay, towards death and violence. It was a dark spiral toward oblivion and nobody could take care of themselves.

"What about you?" The black man said.

"I can hardly remember." I said, "I was a lone escapist. A man thirsting for adventure and knowledge. But somewhere along the road I had a..."

I just fell silent. I couldn't remember. Or didn't I *want* to remember?

“Just keep it to yourself then.” The black man said.

The party went overdue with fireworks and strange occurrences. Criminals starting to talk much more as the alcohol made them happier. Men and women came together and even had romantic moments. Some of them revealed their past. Some of them gave up life for death as they simply couldn't take the hardships of true freedom. Some of them using violence to preserve the things left for them in the outer perimeter of the known universe. Others simply couldn't believe in their innate power. As that power was too alien to themselves. They used different methods to forget about their power: Drugs, sex and alcohol as the bottom of their souls were vibrating on a frequency of pure darkness.

They were afraid.

And I, the reckless adventurer taking to darkness went down upon the holy ground of the alien castle. Feeling the brown sand under my feet and sitting down in a corner of the installation. Completely dry from endless whispers, laughs and comments. I just sat there until the evening became completely dark. And I made images of past occurrences. Of the struggle for freedom so impossible to attain. I tried to but I just couldn't remember.

The black void of the night saw the emergence of white veils. Shapes I couldn't see but only sense as moistly winds pushed on the shape of my own body. I sank, I sank deeper onto the ground. Surrounded by these winds, digging me deeper into the sand until the birth of morning.

And a holy morning it was: Where the dim lit shapes that surrounded me gave birth to a sea of yellow tranquillity. Light beams shining through the fogs of the morning. Blending into my shape and casting silvery shadows. And there, upon the ground came the shape of Mary.

“What are you doing?” She asked and I just couldn't answer.

“Come with me.” She said and took hold of my hand to lead me into a rover.

And we drove all morning away from this paradise hell into the reality of a long road, leading to a space harbour. Along the way saw the emergence of the daily light. The fog to disappear into the normal haze and clouds of the day.

Cars were seen along the borders of the road. Cars that had crashed, some was burning. A burning inferno of a civil war where no one could take shelter.

When we arrived at the space harbour several revolutionary leaders had claimed the entire structure. Space-ships, landers, rovers, people walking around to find some gas and shelter.

“You are only allowed here if you pay some money.” One of the guards said at the space harbour entrance.

“I can pay you.” Mary said and looked at my dull shape as if reborn into compact darkness.

Later it was known that the space flights were few and very expensive. Mary only had money to pay for her seat and I just couldn't follow.

The night was spent in a close by hotel in the interiors of the space-harbour installation. We diverged into different rooms. To sleep for the night and think of new options.

I was depressed. I lied on my bed thinking about death and the holocaust. I was put in the land of Hades. In the land for the dead where some of them saw revival. I could only sense it: A loss of weight. Of crazy eyes looking like an animal with human features. It was surely hell. An ongoing apocalypse. But the *threads* were coming together.

I heard a knock on my door and Mary came in. She just walked up to my bed, sat down and started to talk slowly.

“Here it is:” She said, “We need a new psychoanalysis.” She said, “Now when we switch ways I need to find the truth of your destiny.”

“My destiny?”

“Yes.” She said, “You need sleep paralysis. To delve deeper down the hole of the subconscious. Revealing the truth of your previous life.”

“Let's go for it.” I said.

And she made a try at elevated hypnosis. Making me go deeper down the hole of death and revival. I saw several images. Of a space traveller beyond the border of the known universe. Travelling by himself to alien lands. Discovering the truth of the alien race as seen on the current moon. But being unable to guess the truth of their real identity.

Other images were flashing by. Or anguish, of silent torment. This was a street with hovering trains and strange traffic. Accidents, a shape looking like an elder woman. Pleading for mercy, trying to alter her son's will. And this man escaped from it. Escaped from it all to travel the outer planets surrounding the central system.

But these images came like guessing, hardly facts. It was about a man concealing his inner darkness. Trying different ways to overcome the depths of self.

As I woke up I still had Mary by my side. But she had been shocked to find that there were no connections between the particular images. The “answer” to my problems would never be able to be guessed by hypnotic suggestion. My inner life was something else. Something not clearly discovered by psychoanalytic models.

“We have to break up.” Mary said, “But if you find the money then meet me at this hotel later. I will leave with the space-ship lander in a week.”

“I’ll try.”

3

THE FINAL CONFRONTATION

I arrived at the place I once had feared absolutely most. It was a place of slavery. The mining outpost now arid and abandoned. The whole digging business had been abandoned. I walked the sandy dunes, watching the holes dug in the sand and I wept for the reality of my destiny. Mary and the black man had awakened old and faint memories. But these memories also came to the surface in the visiting of the black dungeon. In the hazy white veils of the alien planet. Of the cube, of the horrid adventure unknown to man.

“What was all this slavery about?” I thought to myself. And I continued to walk the walk. To watch all the monstrous machines previously digging. I saw working shelters, tools left to lie on the sandy ground. And minerals. Crystal patterns looking like gold in the stone minerals. Looking like gold but fading away.

“It was nothing!” I suddenly said. “All this slavery! All this work, torture and violence! I took it upon myself for unknown reasons.”

I left this place once again with a bag full of expensive minerals. To buy a late ticket home.

I travelled the deserted road once again. In the rover. Seeing that the smoke from the standing cars had ceased, now being white as in burning metal. But something was hanging in the air: A sense of hope, death and revival. I entered the futuristic space-harbour with a sense of happiness. And I saw the shape of Mary, now dressed in blue clothing. A princess perhaps, a royalty of past decent.

We sat in the space-ship lander to be taken back to the mother-ship and later towards earth where I possibly would meet my mother. As I had gone through circles of erroneous reasoning. Never finding the truth of myself and my destiny. We sat down upon the white seats. Almost sinking down along the shape of the plastic pillows.

And I remembered!

I remembered the notes I had taken on my journey toward the slave planet. I had clearly seen this myself. I dug with my hand under the space of the seat and found a beautiful notebook. And this notebook was full of notes I had made during my journey towards the prison planet.

And it said:

“I will never once again walk upon the land of the free and resting. As true freedom is slavery! Leading to true liberation.”

And the woman Mary looked me deeply in my eyes and focused on the text on the notebook:

“You did it to yourself!”

“I think I had to!”

“You had to do it to become a god onto yourself!”

I fell silent. I felt a silent torment. A sense of wicked truth and the emergence of an ironic laughter.

“I just had to!”

Now the space-ship lander was igniting and the world around us became a blur of sounds and visions. As the lander started its trajectory towards the mother-ship and later earth. And we flew. We flew upon the winds of the alien country. Clouds gave way for clouds and a certain consolation. The truth of my destiny was the truth of the alien destiny. As an alien space-ship, the size of a whole village emerged beyond the clouds to fly in the direction towards the alien planet.

Black, in the size of the entire mining complex. And it took turns, sending flyers of smaller proportions to greet the space-ship lander. Make movements and deviations. Circulating around the space-ship lander to watch the previous inhibitors of the alien land.

And the swirling masses of clouds gave way for the blackness of space and shining stars.

Moving the lander towards the mother-ship in front of us.

THE END