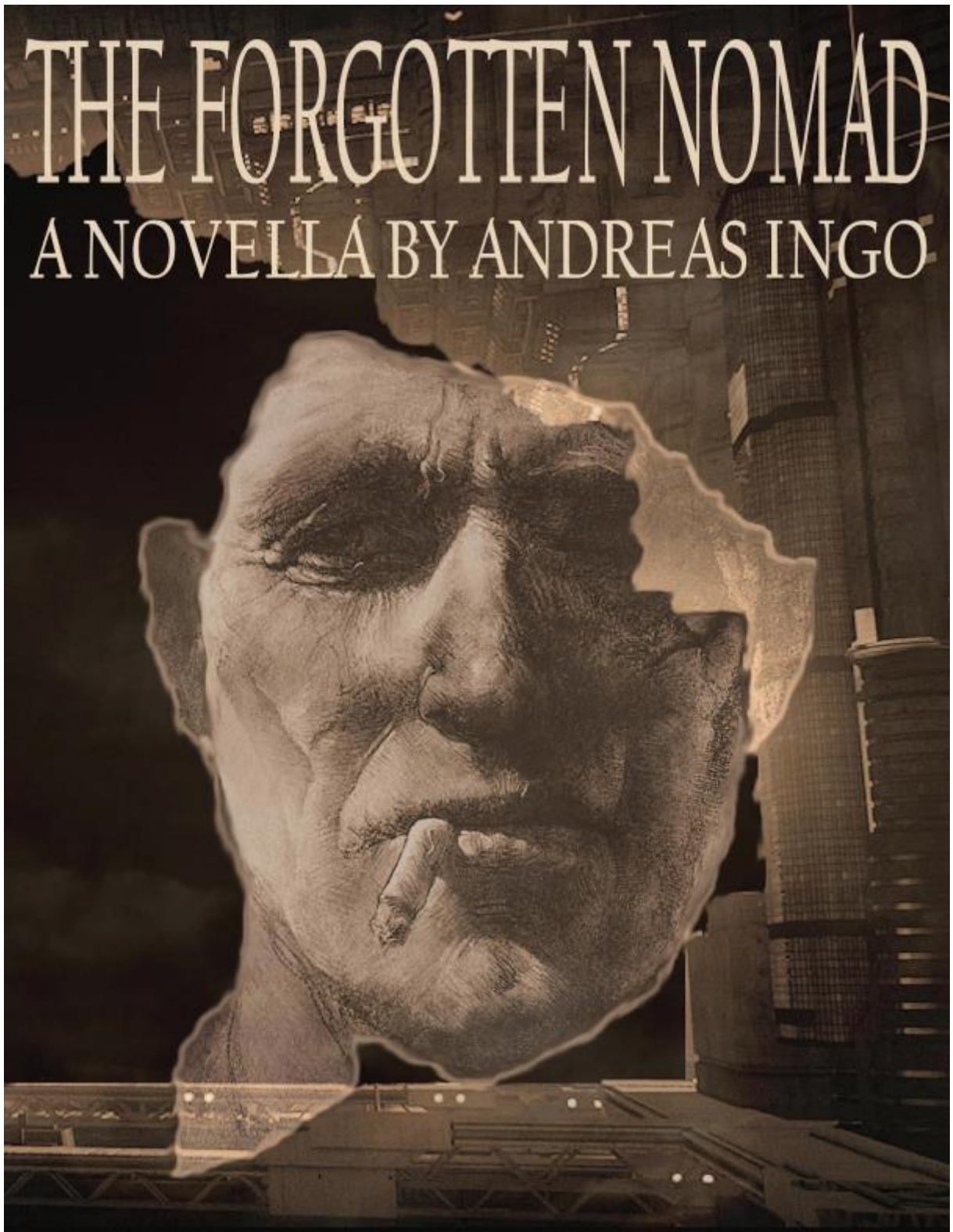


THE FORGOTTEN NOMAD

A NOVELLA BY ANDREAS INGO



The Forgotten Nomad

A novella by Andreas Ingo

1

AT THE BORDER OF THE SUNSET

Fabian undid the zipper, stuck the nervous fingers in his backpack and took up the explosive. This was a lump of explosive material, very sticky, that he broke gently. The plastic explosive was gray, a landscape of minimal ridges, shaded by the decline of the solar disk. Soon the sun would be hidden behind Jupiter, the mother planet, and was coming down. In about thirty-eight hours, the sun would be gone. People would lie down to sleep, only to go up again, though darkness still prevailed.

Fabian felt trembles in the knees; he loosened pieces of the plastic, careful not to make sudden movements. He mounted the viscous material on one of the rotating gears. These were three feet in diameter. He was on a large platform. This platform would transport people, animals and rare vehicles, to various units along the mountainside.

Fabian looked out over the glistening bay. He saw the terraced buildings, along a beach of domed rocks. A cape was looking out into the sea, and had a huge pillar. The pillar carried the terraces of the extraterrestrial colony, which stretched out over the sea.

Europa was Jupiter's fourth largest moon, white of ice but also colored by rust-red rocks. It wasn't a hot moon, but the colonists used heat energy from the moon's interior. Using gigantic pumps and whirring fans, ten meters in diameter, heat were spreading in the atmosphere.

Now dusk had arrived and it would soon be night. Fabian used the darkness to his advantage. He was part of a group of peculiar nomads: Individuals who fought for freedom in a colonized future beyond the bounds of reason. There were colonies on the Moon, Mars and Europa. There were rumors of people on Planet X, a newly discovered celestial body beyond Pluto. It was a future in which technology had progressed very far, but people had seen the backside of it: The dependence on computer technology, the escape from reality, which expanded the distance between the mind and the body. The technology had been abandoned to a large extent, the computers had been smashed, and the vehicles had been blown to pieces. The colonizers of Europe saw the return of the past: A future populated by weathered men, women and children, and even genetically engineered animals on the brink of starvation.

Fabian looked around, felt the pressure of the platform's slow acceleration, as it approached the center. The platform slowed down and stopped at a dusty unit, full of sparkling dust, where an opening led to a small hall. There were several guards in the hall. The young man was forced to abort the mission. He removed the plastic explosive and set out into the hall. He watched the light-beams that came from the windows. In various booths, shaded by steel gates, there were various forms of military equipment: It was ammunition, futuristic hand guns, and even spherical automatic weapons, which were unleashed during terrorist threats. Fabian tried to blend in among the visitors in the hall. He had taken a sweaty grip on the backpack. He saw enemies everywhere: Guards who saw his stiff walk, his brown and horrified eyes, who had no sympathy for flared clothing. Fabian was a skinny and sad individual: A man who always lived on the edge. When he stiffly walked along the dusty windows, multilayered, even decorated with cobwebs, he started to think about the reason for the fight. The reason he began, the meeting

with Eliah, the fight for an abstract goal. The locals didn't seem to be affected by the same thinking. They seemed happy and curious.

A couple of guards came up to Fabian. They greeted and asked what he thought about the weather. He said he waited for the night. That he'd spent hours in the wilderness but wanted a fitting conclusion. The guards looked at the backpack but didn't ask what Fabian had in it. Instead, they followed him to one of the windows and looked at the remains of the solar disk. It glowed red and ripe as an apple ready to be picked.

"I just wish it will be a quiet night." Fabian said. The guards looked at him with interest, and saw the sadness in his eyes. Then they went back to the gates.

Fabian went out a little later and moved upwards on the platform. The huge gears worked along jagged bars.

He took off his backpack, opened the zipper and took out the explosive. This would now be attached to the gear. The plan was to blow up the gear and stop the elevator. By this maneuver, the way to the weapon store would be locked and the revolution could begin. The rebels envisioned a world in flames: Of flames, smoke and suffocating gases.

The darkness was troublesome. Different people had joined with Fabian on the platform. He repeatedly had to interrupt the terrorist attack. And the closer the clock approached midnight, the more desperate Fabian became. Finally, he had to return home.

The rebels were on a higher place, above the elevator. They had made their way to the site through the interior of the building: By walking up a staircase, adorned with old bags, rotten banana peels and dead rats. Fires had been lit in the night. They were in a sparsely populated area. It was a strange place. A man was seen in an open window, dusting of a bed cover with trained arm muscles: This and a touch of good humor.

There were three young women, full of vitality, which found their way up the facades of the buildings: Those were named Belle, Ceres and Aimee.

Fabian stopped by Eliah, the old man, adorned by a rugged face, who'd seen all the times of the colonization. Eliah tried to console the young man, who failed his mission.

"There's nothing like a good effort." Eliah said, "I've seen many people in my life, and there's no one like you."

Fabian hesitated, he didn't think about the words, he just felt the stillness of the night, watched the fires that burned in the fireplaces and longed away.

"We have to try." Eliah continued, "We must do something."

"I don't doubt your sincerity." Fabian said, "I understand the purpose behind the mission. I know you have a good ideal and that there are sincere followers. But something has happened: I've seen too many people lately: People who aren't like us."

The smoke was looking up from the bonfires and the glowing remains of burnt paper joined with the darkness.

"I don't know what you're looking for." Eliah said. "What could be better than a future free from external structure? Freedom from government, the tightness of social structures and norms?"

He looked at the men who sat on the ground. They flocked around the couple but some glanced at the young women, who swung between the buildings on ropes of fiber.

"I don't know." Fabian said, "I don't know what I seek."

A moment later, the young women came down. The race had been to climb the dark buildings, reach the top of them, and then return. The first one was to be crowned as the queen of the night.

"It looks like we have a winner!" Caspian said, a man and a former criminal, who was fond of Belle.

"And this is me!" Belle said. She was a blonde woman of 23 years. She'd climbed with a beginner's zeal and hadn't bothered about the danger. Now she was ready for her coronation.

”The coronation is to be regarded as a hero tonight.” Eliah said. ”Come, sit down and drink some alcohol.”

Half an hour later, Fabian walked through the building, the roof of which was the platform at the fire. He came up to a balcony. Fabian went out on the balcony and watched the dark landscape below. Many lamps had been lit on the various terraces of the colony. These were fluorescent lights in various colors: Red, green and yellow. The terraces were different roofs, one above the other, in different sections.

Fabian wished he would disappear. Away from a world that demanded something of him. He’d joined with Eliah in the fight for freedom. But the fight for the ideal had led him away from the reality. He thought of the individuals he met along the way: On the children, the men and the women. No one seemed to suffer. Not as he. And he suffered in an incomprehensible suffering, existential suffering of a sublime nature.

Now he looked at the fans that squeaked into the night and gave warmth to a chilling atmosphere. They roared by a force whose power was the gravitational forces that existed between the heavenly bodies. The winds that occurred were just too strong to be met upright. But the kids liked the phenomenon and ran into the winds, repeatedly, only to be thrown back.

Fabian decided to go back to Eliah and tell him goodbye. He would leave the freedom fighters and face the world on his own terms: Perhaps he would travel to Planet X, the planet where other seekers resided.

But horrible noises were heard in the night: Sounds of screaming women and men.

When Fabian arrived at the camp, he saw the bodies of the dead: An acquaintance of Caspian: The body of Ceres. Eliah wasn’t there: Nor the others. Fabian knew that the government was responsible.

The remains of the bottles lay scattered on the ground. It glowed from ignited paper. A window was closed and gave room for Fabian’s isolation. Fabian wouldn’t fight for the freedom of others. He would leave to the lower terraces of the colony, to the dark bay, to meet the morning and his new life the next day.

His fate was unknown and served right before him.

2

THE HUMAN COLONY

The night didn’t offer many surprises. The silence had settled over the colony. Fabian went down the stairs, in the interior stairwell. No door was opened or closed. An armature blinked at the ceiling.

If he listened carefully, he could hear the roaring sound of an old radio, set to the wrong frequency.

Soon he was down on the second terrace, from the beach. This terrace rose fifty feet above the ground. On top of this was the old neighborhood. Fabian went through alleys partially lit by colored lights. Doors were duplicated, outer and inner, and used as air-lock.

It was a quaint feeling to walk in the old town. Different ropes hung over the streets, complete with freshly laundered fabrics. Here and there genetically engineered cats were moving: Narrower than the cats on earth. They were higher, ribs thin and slightly sinister. They ran continuously around the colony in search for something to eat. Then the abandoned vehicles: Rovers from birth of the colonization, metal skeletons with smashed panes and fires that had long gone out.

When the morning sent its first rays of light against the bright buildings Fabian could see the floating island, which had been placed over the sea. It was a mile off the coast, measuring

one kilometer in diameter and was round as a dinner plate. But there were rectangular housing complexes that stood out and also towers placed on top of it. This was the ruler's department: A nesting place for officials who worked for the colony.

But Fabian had no time to dream. As soon as people found their way out of the buildings, they yawned and stretched, and Fabian found his way to the employment office. He talked with officials about job opportunities. He thought that if he worked hard for several years, he would eventually get to afford a smaller spacecraft, learn the route to Planet X and then go.

There was nothing holding him back.

The officials said that the work was for those willing. But he couldn't count on an easy task. Fabian said that the money was all that counted. He needed just so he survived, and an additional sum to put aside for future expenses.

They gave him a job far below the sea level, at a power plant in the sea, under the floating island.

Fabian said yes and was prepared for anything.

3

THE MEETING WITH VINCENT

Getting to the underwater complex was like entering another world. The peace that prevailed didn't significantly show up. Fabian walked along metallic corridors, lit by white fluorescent lights. It was stained blood on the walls. A hand had been drawn over the blood, and created a thin veil.

He was shown into a kitchen: A place where newcomers could prepare a meal. But from the reactions to be believed, this was something that rarely happened.

No one was there for fun.

He met a man called Vincent, head of Fabian's unit. Nothing was said directly, but the feeling of authority was palpable. His face was covered by a major injury. As if someone had poured boiling water over it while he stood and watched.

Fabian's room was exactly five and a half square feet. A small aperture sent a ray of blue light against Fabian's cheek. It was a rotating fan in the ceiling. Various tubes made up a ventilation system, practically designed. The walls were covered with various pictures representing relatives of the former guest.

But the guest had died and was sent home in a coffin.

Fabian lay down to feel the wings of destiny. He didn't know how long the work would continue. But if he worked a hundred percent, he thought the anxiety would disappear: He would unite with Vincent in the work for the colonists.

Thoughts gave way for thoughts. Fabian decided to stand up for himself. He wouldn't follow orders, but do something for himself: The only way to keep the fire alive, the suffering that separated him from the rest.

* * *

Fabian was awakened by an alarm the next day. It was a signal that was used to awaken sleeping workers, but it felt like a fire alarm. He put on the working clothes: A wetsuit and a purple helmet, which would be used for welding work.

At the way out a conflict arose between Fabian and Vincent: Fabian had been informed of the existence of dangerous creatures in the sea, near the workplace. He was traveling in a

private submarine, two and a half meters long, equipped with harpoons. He thought it was best to attack the invaders immediately, instead of waiting for the response.

So he veered off the planned route and met the invaders. Vincent was furious. When Fabian sent the first harpoons and met the aliens, he enraged the flock. The aliens were similar to octopuses, but they didn't have as many arms. Their heads were compact, made for confrontation.

The leader came to life. This was an imposing figure in black, two and a half meters long. The outer parts of the arms resembled suction feet, ready to take hold of an invading enemy. A green light was lit, a kind of orientation mechanism used in the deep sea. Yellow eyes moved insidiously in the protruding tubes that hung along the lower part of the head.

Fabian went into battle. Two warriors took hold of the submarine with their suction feet. They crushed the front window with their heads. Fabian had to escape through the air lock, and joined with the workers in the workplace. The black leader swam suspiciously beyond the periphery: Searching for a victim: Searching for Fabian.

Nothing happened.

An argument arose between Vincent and Fabian.

No one had made such a foolish decision. Admittedly there was a clear threat. But the workers had learned to respect the enemy. It was a cold and calculated war which was a kind of power struggle: Both sides knew that confrontation would lead to destruction and no one wanted death.

"I thought the war was already lost." Fabian said. He had seen the creatures the night before, when they slyly swam past his window and their green searchlight penetrated the blue bubble.

"The war is over when I say it's over!" Vincent shouted. He showed the injury on his cheek. "This damage doesn't come from the war against the aliens!" Vincent said. "It comes from the conflict between the workers and me. And I always win!"

Vincent was boiling with anger. But he couldn't believe it was true: That this young man, Fabian, showed such courage, and actually tried to rescue the workers.

"We'll let it be for now." Vincent said. "But the cost of the submarine will be deducted from your paycheck. That means you will work a whole year without payment. You will follow my orders! And listen to my instructions."

Fabian met Vincent's eyes.

"I felt that destiny was in my hands." Fabian said, "That the aliens would attack any minute."

Vincent went out.

The days that followed were strenuous days without a break. Fabian welded on a leaking pipe, stared at times into the compact darkness, where the aliens could be seen some moments. He wondered if there was any way out of this: If he ever would come to Planet X? If he would die on the spot, and never hear a kind word from his peers?

One night the rebels called. It was said that the group had reorganized. That some had disappeared but others had joined. Fabian wasn't talking to Eliah. It was Belle: A usually proud and exuberant fighter, who now mourned her sister.

"We demand nothing of you!" Belle said, "But new facts have come up! We've found a way to overtake the floating island! We will disable the floating mechanism and lower the island once and for all! Then the revolution can begin."

"I know what you're thinking." Fabian said, "I know what's at stake! But I've ended up on in a different place. I've seen how people think! I've seen that the destiny you seek is an illusion."

"How did you come to this?" Belle said, "There never was anyone as brave as you! There never was anyone who longed so much for freedom! And what now? You work! You work in a workplace where you will remain forever!"

"I know what you're looking for." Fabian said, "You seek to bring people into a living reality: A reality where the common initiative will spring, where equality is a measure of well-being. But people don't want to control themselves! They want to have a guardian that solves all their problems, while they lie in the cradle!"

Belle protested. She invested everything in Eliah's idea. She lived a bad life before: A life among slackers. She almost ended up in prostitution, but was rescued by Eliah.

Now everything was to be revealed: Friends would be turned against friends, and deviants would unite with their enemies.

"I just want away!" Fabian said, "I want to break away from all the demands put on my shoulders. Not to escape from you, but to win something of my own: Something I haven't found yet, something extremely vague, but at least own."

Belle interrupted the conversation, and joined with the freedom fighters.

* * *

The circumstances changed the next day. For some reason the aliens revealed their enemies. They did threatening sweeps in the periphery. No one could concentrate on the work. Finally, it was up to Fabian to do something: He tore off a harpoon and went up to confrontation.

The other workers followed him.

The creatures swam around the ring of light. Some made swift attacks on the workers. But the workers stood in a circle, with their backs to each other and responded. Someone picked up a gun.

Shots were fired but no aliens took damage.

Finally, Vincent discovered what was going on and approached the others. He put in everything he had in the attack: The submarine was loaded with harpoons, even explosive shots that he found in an old cupboard.

It became a war between Vincent and the leader of the alien flock. The smaller aliens circled around Fabian's gang, while the main battle was fought a short distance away. The leader used its compact head like the others: A bursting projectile to smash the windows of the submarine. This was successful.

But Vincent wasn't fooled. He saw the submarine fill with water, and used the wetsuit to maneuver in flooded condition. He saw the panels brake. He fired volleys of explosive shots and injured the leader. The other workers moved away and came to the rescue, but were attacked by the warriors. A bloodbath ensued: Red blood from the workers and blue blood from the aliens. Their brilliant membranes oscillated: Green light pulses that distracted the workers. But with the help of Vincent's intelligence and the workers courage, Vincent could make use of the explosive shots and kill the leader.

The humans had won.

There was a celebration in the kitchen the evening that followed: Drunken workers bandaged their wounds and talked about the battle: The longer the night the more forceful the expressions. And it was like a legend was born: A story that just got better as time went by. Vincent and Fabian became friends. Vincent thought that Fabian's first initiative hadn't been that bad. These creatures weren't sympathetic. They weren't looking for symbiosis, rather death and destruction. And in some ways he understood Fabian's reaction.

They were drinking and had a party. Someone threw up and was lying on the floor until morning.

When Fabian returned to his room he found two men standing at the door. They were wearing black jackets. They had black pants and light gray shirts: Even spotted ties. The men explained to Fabian that he'd been revealed, and had no other choice but to follow them home. This was Mars, the ruler's home planet and the place where Fabian would meet his enemy.

PRISONER ON MARS

He ended up in a room different from any room he'd ever been to. This was the opposite of the room on Europa, under the ocean's surface. Here, it was bright and futuristic. Instead of horrible blood trails, there were tropical plants, red orchids from the jungles of Africa. There were also smaller petals, in blue. A shelf had a glassed-in booth, where miniature figures made a striking image: A group of colonists, living in spiritual, social and material prosperity.

He thought he was locked in the room. He saw himself as a political prisoner. But he went to the door and pushed, and the door opened. He came into a larger space, not just open, but made up of different sections. It was light and airy. There were exercise machines lined up in different places. Was he meant to stay in this place for a long time? Where were the guards?

He stood by the window and looked out. In a meadow, which stretched hundreds of yards away, he could see genetically engineered cattle. It was like a forgotten valley from a time before the machines. But the high technology was real. It seemed that the colonists had been longer on Mars than on Europa.

A man came into the room. Fabian turned around. It was a long and lanky figure, something noble and yet familiar in a strange way.

"You!" Fabian said.

He stared at the man who stopped a short distance away. The man was escorted by two beautiful women, slightly shorter than himself.

"A happy reunion." The man said, "It was only a few years since before. Previously, we were fighting for freedom and justice: You and me. Now it's not the opposite. Just that one of us has changed sides."

"Bastian?" Fabian said.

"That was my name." Bastian said. "And I still hold on to it."

"I thought..."

"Yes, it seemed that I was killed. It was three years ago. But I didn't get shot; I was taken to Mars to inform the others of Elish's plans."

Fabian couldn't make a sound. Not much had changed over the years. He still felt drawn to his childhood friend: The furrowed face, extended: The cheekbones that were clearly marked: The lips that barely were seen. Bastian had always been hungry, even with a full stomach.

"It's a miracle you're still alive." Bastian said. "The rebels have always been a step ahead, but we've put up more resources recently, as you may know."

"How could you?"

"It's not for selfish reasons as you might think! No, I've learned that the fight is destructive, and that the people are looking for stability."

"You do it because you never searched for freedom!"

"You're right! But I'm one of the people now! I want to feel good and give from my abundance! And because of this I'm of benefit both to myself and others."

Fabian looked more carefully at Bastian's clothes. He had a white coat, a garland of flowers around his neck. The pants were pleated, and shaded by the afternoon light.

"Our childhood wasn't easy." Fabian said, "But I can't understand why you changed sides."

"I remember our adventures..." Bastian said.

Their childhood was peculiar. They escaped as seven year olds from an orphanage, a little inland. They were in an underground tunnel, shining in gold, cut through the rock. This tunnel was a boundary mark between the hinterland and the terraced sections along the sea.

In this tunnel, the children would stay and carve designs on the walls. These were motives burning of childish desperation and longing: The children's silent protest against the colonization that caught them in poverty and slavery.

Their parents were dead, their relatives were poor, and no one would know of them, except Eliah who welcomed them into the inner circle.

Before they were freedom fighters, they made many treks into the cold landscape. They saw mountains formed as giant faces: Decorated by ice and oxidized iron. One of those faces was a glimpse of the forbidden, an old father they never had, that allowed them to live in freedom.

This was a cliff extending over adjacent rocks. A lake of ice lay in front of it; traces of the children's feet could be seen. The atmosphere was difficult to breathe. The boys climbed the cliff; they climbed relentlessly along the dangerous bulges. Wounds were torn up by grainy mineral fragments, which formed the cliff's surface. Finally they sat down in a cave, a cave that Fabian called "The Big Mouth". Ropes of fiber lay by their side, and they bandaged their wounds.

Their differences weren't greater than their similarities. But Bastian was always hungry and hoped for change. Fabian saw something spiritual in the quiet quest, in the suffering, where the illusory security of the orphanage led him away from The Dream.

They longed for the twilight...

* * *

Bastian abandoned Fabian in the airy space. The afternoon turned into evening and soon the night would come.

Fabian found himself standing at a shelf, which to his surprise, began to move. He came to a room, where a gigantic telescope stood on large plateau. He sat down on a stool and peered into the telescope's viewfinder. The telescope had been directed against Planet X. It was a gray shard in the sky, minimally lit. Not as round as The Moon, but oval.

A moment later, three women entered the room, through another passage. It was like the lookout was the center for the entire castle, and that all paths led there.

The women sat down on stools close to Fabian's body. They said that everything was done so that Fabian would understand what was in store for all of humanity: That the people were looking for nothing else than the good life, served right in front of them.

"I don't think you understand what I want." Fabian said, "I don't seek satisfaction, nor the lack of it. I want to be taken away to another world, where there is a will to be caught up in something else. Something I haven't found yet."

"That is what you don't understand!" One of the women said. She was quite smooth-skinned and full of zeal. She continued: "What you don't understand is that the mystery is solved! That the abstract is really tangible."

"What do you mean?"

"The search for satisfaction is the search for oneself. And the search for self is the search for the good life: For food, sex and other pleasures."

Fabian stood up and looked at the woman horrified. She was like a goddess of Babylon, probably in close collusion with Bastian.

Bastian came into the room and stopped near the women. His left hand fell on one of them.

"What we're talking about are not new ideas." Bastian said, "Even the ancient Romans knew this. But the difference is scientific evidence."

"What do you mean?"

"We have evaluated old and young, men and women. They come from Mars, Europe and The Moon. We have made a cross-section of all of mankind: All colonists. And the majority speaks."

"About what?" Fabian exclaimed, "How can you trust a science that doesn't rest in the hands of the people? That favors an elite with a lust to power!"

"The lust to power is the will to power." Bastian said calmly, "To transcend the small and will the large: To give of oneself for the sake of others."

Fabian watched his childhood friend with a sense of irony. He never imagined that Bastian would become an Emperor! He never imagined that anyone would utter such words! But with time the dialogue continued. He came into the rich people's clothing. He got to see Mars, he got to see The Moon, and he saw how it worked inside "The Castle".

It was nothing like he imagined! It was easy to talk to those in power, women were polite and sincere: No one suffered and made others suffer. He began to understand that Eliah's rebellion was a struggle against inner demons: There was no devil who tried to push humanity into her shoes.

Terror was terror, no matter how it was pronounced.

And finally he gave up. Fabian and Caspian would head to the floating island on Europa, to stop the rebels.

5

THE HOVERING ISLAND

They landed but they didn't know where the rebels were hiding. All they knew was the time of the attack and that the rebels would be hiding on the island.

The task force had split up, a bunch searched at the huge coils, which held the island floating above a magnetic field.

Fabian searched for himself. He walked through neighborhoods that didn't significantly differ from the environments on Mars. It was different to regard the island from the inside than from the terraces along the coastline. Admittedly it was similar to watching it far away, but it was hard to imagine how everything would look: It was a feeling of times gone by: As if Roman times had come back, but not literally. Aqueducts had been replaced by elongated tubes; the sculptures didn't represent emperors and empresses. Instead, there was a sense of futurism, a future that was built on the skills of the old masters.

Somewhere here, in an alley that was overshadowed by the bright facades, Fabian met Eliah.

Eliah was very surprised.

Fabian, for his part was troubled: He knew that he would meet the rebels, but he never imagined it would be this way! Not that he would face his Godfather, face to face, during a crucial conflict.

"Listen!" Fabian said loud, "I have gone over to the other side!"

"What do you mean?" Eliah said appalled.

"I've realized that the fight for freedom was a mistake! The force we've been fighting was the desire of the people! I've been reunited with Bastian in the fight for freedom."

"What freedom?"

"The freedom to live and enjoy! Not to throw away your life in a battle that ends in destruction!"

Eliah took hold of Fabian's clothing.

"I don't believe a word!" He shouted angrily. "They've done something to you! They've taken your strength and turned it into a weakness!"

"The only thing that happened was an awakening!" Fabian said, "I've seen how the system works on the inside! I understand the technological advances! And I understand that people are different."

"You are deceived!" Eliah said.

The two men stood motionless on the ground. Genetically engineered crows flew through the air and sat down on the ceilings. There were screams in the distance, but still not firing.

At sea, near the floating island, a Medusa was moving. This was a primordial creature, with silk-like sails, revived in laboratories.

"Let me tell you a story before the conflict breaks out!" Eliah shouted, "Let me tell you how it was when I grew up!"

* * *

This was thirty years ago. It was in the final stage of colonization where technology had fallen.

Eliah was not a particularly unusual man. He had a family with a popular wife and several children.

One day some criminals came into his home and robbed it. The wife resisted and was killed. The children threw themselves on the floor and cried. Before the criminals disappeared through the door, they threw a firebomb inside and burned the building.

The children burned inside.

Eliah had been out during the day. He knew nothing of what happened to his family. He was outside like many others out there: Experienced freedom without computers, without vehicles, without radio contact with his loved ones.

When he finally came home, he suffered a heart-attack. The neighbors came forward and explained what happened: It wasn't a case of usual criminals. They came from the outskirts of the colony, in the area where Fabian and Bastian had been before.

From that day Eliah decided to fight crime. He gave up all thoughts of the family and took a job at a prison, where he would meet other criminals.

At first, his only joy was the sadistic pleasure: Beating criminals behind the backs of the guards: Making it his business to behave like an executioner.

But something happened: He noticed that some criminals behaved unlike the others. That they came to the prison for political reasons, not private. These criminals weren't as tough as the others. They burned with a peculiar energy: They had a vitality, an inherent beauty.

When Eliah tried to make life difficult for them, they didn't respond in the same way. Instead, they understood: The rumor had gone.

It ended with the criminals becoming Eliah's best friends. He noticed that they were fighting for a greater ideal: An ideal of freedom and self-determination.

He left the prison and went into hiding. He understood that the only free men were the people who'd given up dependence on everything else: To live in the present, to follow the heart's impulse, to seize every moment.

The technology had fallen, and the old came back: The physical work, the pets, and "The Dronts", a sort of ostriches used as escorts.

Eliah became a legend, a freedom fighter, and a myth in the new time. But not many joined him in the fight for freedom.

* * *

"And how does this help?" Fabian said aloud.

"You don't understand people!" Eliah said. "People aren't as you think! You think they're looking for pleasure but it's quite the contrary!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that everyone says they're looking for pleasure! That they want to have everything prepared! But what they're really passionate about is the total freedom! To make their own rules and to follow them! Just as you have done."

Suddenly sounds of explosions were heard, screams, even gunfire! The floating island began to move: It began to lean, even slowly rotate around its own axis.

The old man was terrified, Fabian also.

The rotation became heavier. The couple was thrown to the ground. The crows flapped away and disappeared into the sky.

In the distance the total disaster was evident: The rebels had mounted explosives on the giant coils, which kept the floating island in place over the sea. The explosives had detonated. The rebels disappeared into the sky like majestic birds, with jets. Now the island spun several times, leaned more and then disappeared into the sea.

6

THE ESCAPE TO PLANET X

He desperately looked around the crowd, the chaos that ensued after the attack: Swum across a roaring sea, believed in death, but managed to get up on the rocky shore. He didn't realize how dire the consequences would be.

The rebels believed that the attack would redeem the people's will to fight, start a revolution that would lead to liberation. It was rather the opposite: Warlords arose and deceived many. A group of ex-offenders seized power and imposed martial law. Dissidents were exterminated; forces were directed to put an end to the extreme poverty, regardless of the consequences.

Somewhere in the midst of the chaos Fabian saw his chance to escape. He paid a bunch of criminals to help him gain access to the spaceport, steal a spaceship and leave. He learned to navigate but didn't have any friends.

He found himself flying away from Europa, passed the moons of Io and Ganymede, on his way out to Planet X. He thought about the rebels and Eliah, who was pulled down by the ocean currents and drowned.

The ship hummed with an orderly rhythm, Fabian was alone; bits of asteroids could be seen on the radar.

Fabian thought again.

He no longer thought about the past but the future that awaited him: It was a question of sheer survival. He started to play computer games. He lost himself in virtual worlds, connected to an electronic interface.

Other days he devoted himself to physical activities: He was like a criminal, stuck in a cell, but not for life.

He fantasized about Planet X: About people with a different search: With thoughts that didn't take root: With hearts that burned for eternity.

One day he discovered a flying object on the radar. On closer examination, this proved to be a spaceship.

Fabian compensated for speed and docked with the space ship, after agreement.

The visitors turned out to be a bunch of lawless nomads, free as Fabian. They drove around the solar system, looking for space debris. Fabian needed food, the nomads needed rocket fuel.

He would repent. The leader, a space pirate named Zack, climbed onboard, but said nothing. He walked around the futuristic ship, with a haggard look, looking for faults.

They were on "The Bridge", an area in the ship's central regions, where there was a connection interface to virtual reality.

"You are from Europa you say?" The pirate smirked, "Not much on it anymore?"

Fabian didn't know what to say.

"I know who you are!" Zack said, "Not that I know you literally! But I know who you are, because I can see what type you represent!"

Zack went back and observed the young man. The pirate's face was full of sweat beads. The teeth were yellow. The clothes were worn and loose.

"What do you say?" The pirate glanced at the men in the background. "Shall we skin him alive?"

"What do you want?" Fabian shouted.

"I just want to destroy something beautiful!" Zack said. "You see ... I know who you are! You're a seeker in search for dreams and illusions. And searchers constantly strive for the ultimate freedom."

The situation was unsustainable. Fabian tried to escape but ended up in the hands of the pirates. Zack laughed and brought him to the interface for virtual reality, where he was placed in the chair and tied up.

A sudden sound was heard and an asteroid collided with the spaceship! A large hole formed in the metal hull! Zack was killed and the air was sucked out.

It was like a cruel dream, as if the computer games had brought Fabian to a parallel reality where anything was possible.

Fabian gasped for breath, the air was absent. The pirates fled in the other spacecraft. Fabian pulled and managed to cut the tape that held him in the chair.

The bridge appeared in a different light: Warning lights rotated, alarms howled. The bloodied floor, where the majority of Zack's body lay without a head, was like sandpaper. Unpolished surfaces had peeled off. Fabian fought on all fours, through an indefinable chaos, but managed to get to the air lock.

Soon, Fabian sat down in the captain's seat. When he looked at the radar, he discovered that the spacecraft approached a rocky zone. There was a giant asteroid belt, which stretched in different directions for miles. Fabian steered the spaceship past the compact rocks. Some were small; others were as big as cliffs.

Soon, he caught sight of the pirates: They had collided with a smaller cliff. The anger welled up in Fabian's chest! He had never been restrained and almost tortured, for no other reason than the search for freedom!

Not even the guards on Europa had tied him! Not even Eliah when he told the secret!

He removed the locking for the ray gun. Took aim at the enemy ship and pulled the trigger. An explosion of green plasma made the pirates' ship explode. The pirates stared in horror into the light, beaten by the moment. A rain of sparks from an exploding space drive fell on the nearby cliff.

Fabian steered the spacecraft away from the asteroid belt.

The spaceship approached Planet X. The gray celestial body wasn't round like other planets. It was slightly oval, with a slightly uneven surface, bombarded by meteorites. At times it seemed that it had a "man in the moon" but this wasn't like the face on the moon, but rather like a tarsier.

Fabian made ready for contact. He sent radio messages to the celestial body: A carrier that aired on all frequencies. But no answer was heard. He tested new frequencies, analyzed the noise deeper. He thought he heard the tracks of a sound, a kind of signal that differed from chance. But this sound wasn't repeated.

So he changed direction and made more excursions across the planet's surface. No structures could be detected: No cities. No roads.

Fabian decided to land. Maybe "The Searchers" were hermits? Tired of humanity and its ways?

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The gravel raved when the spacecraft descended. This ship wasn't like the traditional spacecrafts in Fabian's world. Instead, it had two controllers: Chambers under glass, reinforced with metallic leads.

The walkway was hoisted down and the forgotten nomad stepped out onto the planet's surface. He had a space suit, oxygen tanks and a helmet, the atmosphere was absent.

It was a feeling of euphoria to walk on the porous rock: There were sand, gravel and pebbles. In some places there were large boulders. Fabian took up a small stone and surveyed the rough surface. There were streaks of unknown minerals in the stone. Not entirely uniform, but streaks of different minerals on top of each other.

He looked back at the starship, surveyed the tracks. It was quite dark but a light shone over the landing site, from lights mounted on the spacecraft. He thought about going outside the illuminated zone. But he had no searchlights and went back to the spaceship.

Again he tried to send signals: Perhaps there were colonizers further away? Outside the illuminated zone, behind the next hill?

No answer.

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The next day, Fabian decided to make a longer excursion. He would wander outside the illuminated zone and survey the area in the ship's vicinity. He took various plastic pipes that he found in the spaceship.

On this walk Fabian began to think. What if the rumors of "The Seekers" weren't true? What if no one ever landed on Planet X? In that case, he was a hero!

It was almost equal to land on the moon for the first time in human history!

He walked in euphoria and managed to stumble upon a crevice, which was hidden in the sand.

He looked around and began to claim the area. If no other people were at the scene, he was at least alone in the lighted area!

The day passed in a fairly predictable manner. Fabian was looking around the spaceship. He went through an area equal to one square kilometer. No people in sight. He realized that his earlier suspicions were correct: There were no adventurers like him!

In the evening, he was back in the spaceship. He drew a map of the terrain. It wasn't a completely flat landscape: There were ridges, ravines, and even parts that resembled river beds. He was looking for special features: Signs of nature he could use to locate himself, in case he would be lost.

He sat down in one of the driver's modules and peered with one eye toward the sun: It was like a bright star in the distance.

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Day three: Fabian began to feel lonely. He made more trips, longer and farther away from the spacecraft. But there was a limit to how far he would go. He came to a ravine, larger than the others, where he found a rock with something that looked like a face: It was just a human face, not a tarsier's, as before.

He leveled the ground and sat down. He listened to the static noise on the radio. He pulled off the volume and marveled at how far he'd gone.

It started to dawn on him that he'd come for the adventure. But the adventure was an adventure with others, not like this. He thought of Belle, Caspian and the others. What if he would return and unite with them? Not that he wanted the old colony, but what if he would convince them? Convince them to travel to Planet X and start anew?

It was big thoughts.

He stood up and returned to the ship.

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Day Seven: Fabian created a clear picture of the desolate landscape. The map was printed, erased and upgraded in several versions. In one place he found a big cliff. This was a cliff that got Fabian to remember.

It resembled the cliff that Fabian and Bastian found on Europa: It was possible to climb on it. Gravity was weak and he approached "The Big Mouth", if only he dared to risk his life.

He went into the mouth and down into "The Gorge", a cave that miraculously pierced the rock. In there, in the dense darkness, Fabian decided to light a fire with signal flares. It was a red fire that burned by unknown minerals.

Fabian looked at the walls, looking for patterns. But no carvings could be found, no traces of humans or other creatures.

He realized that he was alone and would remain alone.

He sat there for hours, very pleased with himself and what he accomplished.

Finally he extinguished the fire. The signal flares went out. He lit a spotlight and found his way out: Up to "The Tongue", down the cliff and then to the gravel.

He marked the coordinates on a paper. The rock would be the center for the new colony.

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The following days made Fabian stronger. He overcame his fears, his weaknesses, and his tendencies to resist.

He walked the landscape again. He nearly ran, jogged on paths that he created around the spaceship.

He did push-ups on the bridge. He washed away the bloodstains from the pirate who threatened his life.

He looked ahead and saw life as a colonist. He hated the idea of colonization from the beginning.

He hated the men who decided his life.

But now he found his own version of the story: He realized that the adventure wasn't proper without others. He realized that he didn't want to watch.

He made some rounds around the landing site. He gasped exhausted and lay down on the space gravel. He gazed up at the stars and couldn't help it: Didn't fail to dream! Didn't fail to be carried away by the thought of life!

8

BACK ON EUROPA

On Europa, the system had stabilized. It was no longer Bastian that ruled, but local crime syndicates.

Fabian found his way over a cast plateau, at the sea, and in addition to this, along the mountainside, where buildings were moistened by the sea.

It was tides that rose and fell, as Europa was affected by gravitational forces from Io and Ganymede.

Here, in a stairwell that led from the beach to the peak of a cliff, Fabian found the rebels.

They were very depressed.

"Where have you been?" Belle wondered. She sat in a rejected pose, on a step near the others.

"I'm sorry." Fabian said, "I spoke with Eliah before he died. Shall we go?"

Belle rose and the others followed her; it seemed that the old hierarchy had dissolved, and that the young woman was the leader.

The waves came and went. The beach, which was full of gravel, but also adorned by old newspapers, bottles and papers, was hidden by the flood, which slowly found its way up the beach.

In the distance the gigantic cliffs appeared and also the terraces from the colony.

"I understand how you feel." Fabian said, "I was in the same situation a few months ago. That night where I failed my mission."

"What happened?"

"It didn't happen instantly. It was experience after experience, over several months. I began to realize I was different: That Eliah was different. That we all were separate from the people and really fought for our own thing."

Belle looked at Fabian with a sad face. She never thought that the ruin would be so obvious, so real. But the beauty still shone in her eyes: The sense of life that was hidden behind the skin, soft as velvet.

Fabian continued: "It may seem as if everything we've done was wrong. But we're people, just like the other colonists are people. The only thing we need to realize is that the idea was good, we did what was required. In fact, we were never able to do otherwise. Freedom is an idea worth fighting for, but we won't do it for others, but for ourselves."

"What do you mean?"

"We will create a new colony, free from the constraints of Europa: A colony on Planet X, where the warlords are missing."

Belle wondered if Fabian had gone mad! Several other rebels had taken to the bottle: In the vacuum that arose after Eliah's death.

The water rose sharply, and the waves licked the rebels' feet. The party went into the stairwell, up a staircase and to a room with a view. There was a group of furniture there, a table, chairs, a sense of hope in a dismal context.

"I've thought about it very clearly." Fabian said, "I've been on the planet and laid claim to an area."

He took out pictures of Planet X, which he'd previously taken. Belle saw the landing site, the spaceship, and the tracks in the sand: Even the rock that looked like a face: She was very confused.

"I've been there and seen the light." Fabian continued, "It's like floating on clouds! As if destiny decided that we would become space-travelers! Imagine it: To create something new: To build a society on our own terms. Here and now!"

"I don't know..." Belle said.

The others went up to the table, gathered around the pictures, and it was like a collection of prehistoric humans, pure independents, deranged but very few.

"I've laid claim to an area." Fabian continued, "I've come across a spaceship. All we need is energy, courage and a good conscience."

A murmur of voices was heard.

9

THE NEW COLONY

They were at the cliff, where Fabian had climbed before: They had lived on the planet for a few weeks.

Below the cliff, it was like a small valley. The colonists had achieved the impossible: To make plants grow.

The plants were a species of genetically engineered algae, capable of growing under unreasonable conditions. The colonists stimulated the correct DNA chains and allowed deviations. Some of the plants could be used as food, others as timber for housing, yet others would trigger a chemical process that emitted light.

The colonists walked through the organic fields, wearing space suits, and waited for the day when they would take off their spacesuits and breathe.

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Fabian's imagination had no limits: He built houses of stone blocks, first to himself, then as an inspiration to others. There were houses with stones brought from the different places he visited: The areas around the spaceship, the slopes and the dry river beds.

They drilled at the river beds and found water at the depth of three meters. The water was used to irrigate the burgeoning algae, but also used as a liquid to "The Dronts": The different ostrich animals that were previously living on Europa. They wore a special protective shield and had oxygen for survival.

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Fabian's house was decorated with pots, where the algae would bloom. In the evenings, the colonists would gather and watch the play of light, the magical field of bright spots on the plants, which oscillated in the dark.

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A lake had formed in the lower regions of the valley. The plants spread out along the corners of the cliffs.

The planet began to flourish. The pressure in the atmosphere had increased. Finally, it was possible to take off the space helmets. The colonists went through jungles of bioluminescent algae.

Here Fabian and Belle came together. They weren't lovers or freedom fighters, rather siblings from a bygone time: They talked about the dangers in the new era: That the government troops would soon discover their paradise and threaten the colony.

But the years went by and nothing happened.

Fabian decorated "The Gorge" in his cave. He built a model of the ultimate future: A future without boundaries, where children would grow up, where colonists were united and yelled. But no one would be forced to remain on the planet. They would travel away into space or settle on Europa.

Fabian thought Eliah had succeeded. He fought for freedom but lost his life. The fight was futile but the ideas were large. Now, Fabian brought back the heritage and took the ideas a step further: It was about adventure: To think the forbidden thoughts, but to do it in style.

And while he did it, he thought about how it all would end: To not build a wall of resistance, where the life-force was denied and gave room for doubt.

He would listen to his inner voice, please the colonists, and in the process win something he could call life.

He sat down in the cave, this hollowness called "The Gorge". He watched the play of light that moved across the ribbed walls: Bright spots in a controlled movement that played a silent symphony, to the sounds of heavy metal.

THE END