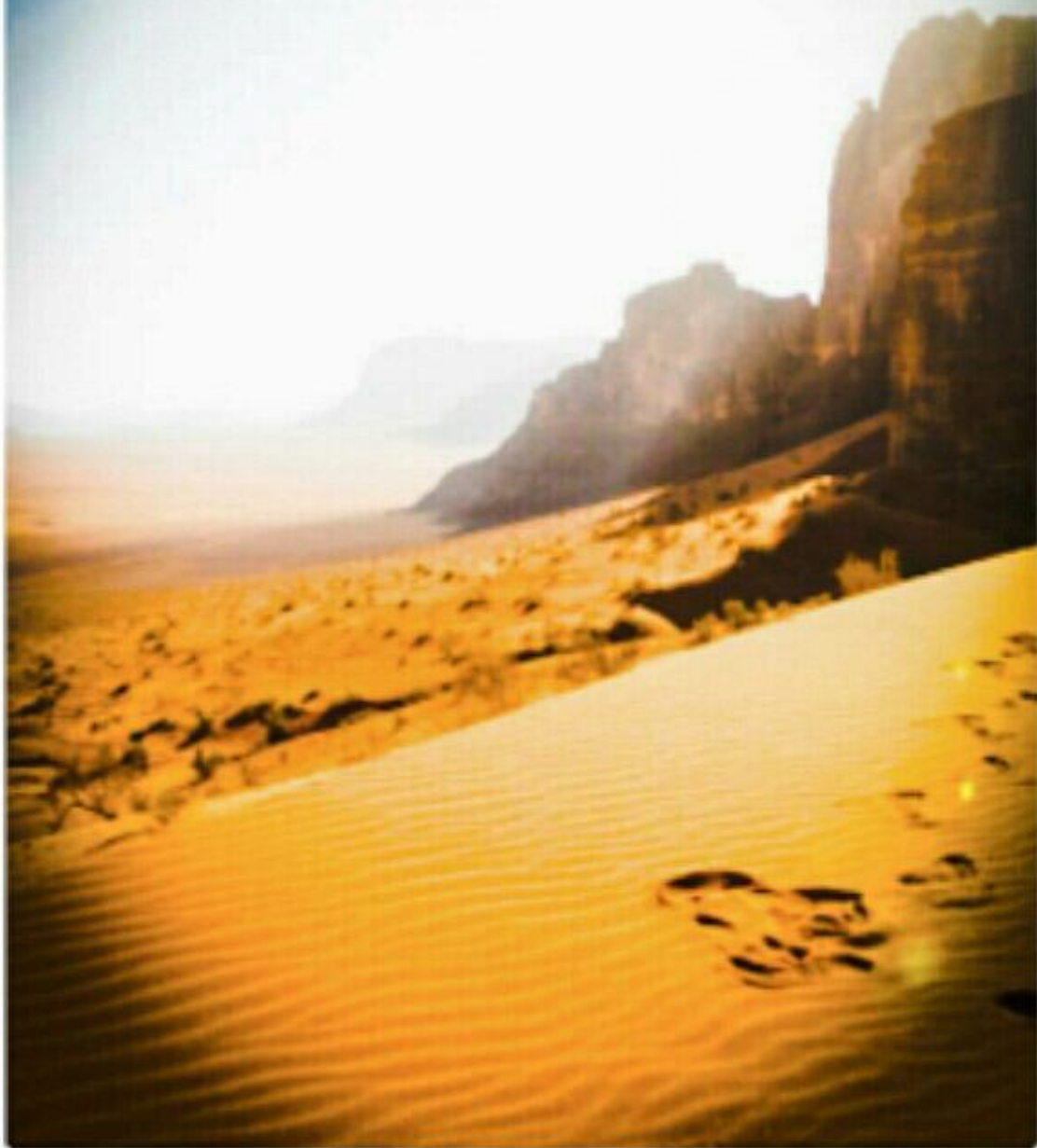


THE LIGHT OF THE BEAST

A NOVELLA BY ANDREAS INGO



“The Light of the Beast”

A novella by Andreas Ingo

“THE REFINERY”

The alarm went off in the remote refinery, the room was glowing, a golden light, created when beams of the sun deviated from the enclosure outside. Samson Reynolds awoke and sat up on the border of the bed. He pushed away dirt in his eyes, looked tiresome and watched the interiors of the golden room: Pipes of metal were seen on the roof, glistening, a rotating fan was seen nearby. Along the front wall a steaming aquarium was seen, filled with green fish, fed from a unit.

The morning was sudden, Samson remembered no dreams, no thoughts or feelings, only the night before and the awakening later.

Samson went up to a mirror and brushed his teeth. He saw the shape of a man who had lived on the edge for three years: A man whose face had grown old features and had melted together with the place: Masculine features, a dominating forehead, hard cheekbones, lips barely seen, eyebrows pushed together by the intellectual burden.

He went over to the window and watched the sandy enclosure: Shadows rested on the walls of the refinery. A transport vehicle stood in the border between the shadows and the light. Reflections were cast on Samson Reynolds, reflections from the transport vehicle but also from silvery stones, who shared space with the sand on the ground. It was something dead and desolate in the air, an alien atmosphere, a feeling that shadowy areas melted together with the bright ones, and created variations of light.

Samson saw rectangular windows, with a hint of the rooms on the other side, where workers were seen without noticing.

Samson coughed, turned around, put on a fitting boiler-suit and walked out into the corridor.

* * *

The corridor was wider than the corridor on the home planet. Space was given to passing workers, clothed in uniforms, puffy around the chest and thinner around the waist. There were brighter and darker spots on the uniforms, a military look, but intended for workers. A cooling system made the corridors hum; blue lights were seen on the roof, now turned off.

Samson went up to a line of cabins that were mounted on the wall. Other workers made him company. Nothing was spoken, but a strained atmosphere revealed that demands had been raised: It was sky high demands from prospective customers, whose wishes decided the work flow.

“Stamp in before the beginning of the shift.” one of men said, “And the chance to finish becomes greater than zero.”

Samson opened one of the lockers and took out a headset which he mounted on the head. A lamp flashed. Something unpleasant was hinted in the periphery: Bosses and owners to the complex, passing in lines. Samson said hello, put on black boots, shelled his hands and put on a creased vest, which would protect him against the heat in the working areas.

* * *

The control room was a larger area, a larger hollowness. Soda machines were seated against the walls. Bunks of steel gave the workers some temporal rest before work. Queues had formed around the control unit, that rested on a spherical platform with glass, behind which surveillance personnel inspected the workers.

Samson went up to the control unit, greeted the inspectors, entered his code and continued to the working area.

* * *

Samson Reynolds was head of the working unit: He monitored and directed the work in the heart of the refinery.

Richard Edwards was seen in the distance, a thin and thoughtful guy, that followed orders but executed them in his own way. Another one was Morpheus, whose face revealed a man that had seen a lot. The workers used futuristic trolleys and managed the control units of the melting furnaces, where the valuable ore was separated from the rest.

Samson Reynolds gave orders to the workers: New furnaces would be used, more ore would be delivered and the heat would be increased to accelerate the process.

“It’s not possible!” Morpheus said.

“According to the management it is!” Samson Reynolds said.

The workers could do no less but to submit to Samson’s orders.

* * *

At lunchtime Samson Reynolds had lunch with the others: Not much were said, beads of sweat had formed in the foreheads of the workers. Their hands were filled with scratches and wounds, residuals of many years in the working areas. The sweat, the anguish, and the demands from Samson Reynolds made them as silent as the plates before them.

He had made the workers obedient, but the orders hit back upon himself: He didn’t want to get caught between the management and the workers.

* * *

When Samson Reynolds returned to the working area an accident had occurred: The trolley of Richard Edwards had collided with another one, which had overturned the ore and made the floor melt.

“How could this happen?” Samson Reynolds asked.

“You know it yourself!” Morpheus said without accusation.

“I will talk with the management!” Samson shouted.

* * *

In the evening all employees gathered in a tower in the upper parts of the refinery, where the sunset could be seen over the yellow mountains, with rough surfaces. It was scarred lines and tormented edges, the roar of a giant. A suffocating calmness penetrated the alien atmosphere, devoid of oxygen, but nobody was out: Fans rotated inside and thoughts arose on the forbidden.

Talks were made on the position of the company, that the competition was deadly and that accidents couldn't be avoided.

“I like it!” Richard Edwards suddenly said and made the others keep quiet.

“You like it?” Morpheus said.

“Yes, I hated it before but the demands have made me reconcile with my destiny.”

“What destiny?”

“That we'll never get away.” Richard Edwards said.

Samson Reynolds got it all, every syllable. A murmur broke out among the workers: Some wondered if the boy had gone mad. Others said it was about the demands of the time.

“Don't think like this.” Samson Reynolds said, “Focus on the task, think constructive, take time for rest.”

“I can't.” Richard Edwards said.

“You can, if you make time for other things.”

Nothing more was said but everybody knew that something was going on: Samson Reynolds, the head of the unit, had his directives and executed his orders, he wanted to say nothing but had to.

The workers ate dinner, watched the dying sunset with sadness. They returned to their rooms, fell to sleep instantly and hours went by.

The alarm went off and it was another day.

“THE DEATH”

Samson Reynolds had woken up, dressed and walked down lit corridors; he passed crowds of workers, inexorable victims of the sun. Some with heavy steps, some with light ones, knowing the importance of waking up.

Pulsating monitors were placed against the bright walls: The monitors shone artificially and updated information on a low frequency. Female officials took care of the information and the activity was high.

That something had gone wrong became evident when Samson entered the control unit: People spoke nervously, the controllers tried to calm the workers, that couldn't be put to rest.

“What is wrong?” Samson Reynolds wondered.

“You better find out for yourself.” one of the controllers said, “But don't let it put you down.”

* * *

In the working area, a couple of minutes later Samson found a dead body. A circle of workers surrounded it: It was a gathering of fearful workers, feeling helpless, seeing themselves in the corpse on the ground. Old workers confronting suppressed memories, the new ones experiencing death for the first time.

It was a young body, marked by a small waist, with knotted hands and a distinguished face.

“Richard Edwards.” Samson Reynolds said.

Nobody answered.

A light came in through windows on the roof: The rays of the sun bounced against the walls of the working area and created an orderly chaos, a hot flow of photons that joined in a higher unity: Like a vision of hell, a tragedy. The face was thin, bravely, outlived, but not filled with anguish but rather relief: A peace of mind, a pride, a kind of deadly romance.

“What to do with him?” one of the workers said.

“We collect a bag and put his body in it.” Samson Reynolds said, “We put him in the burning furnace. Then we take rest for the remainder of the day.”

The workers obeyed.

* * *

In the evening Samson Reynolds couldn't sleep: He lay on his bed and looked up on the rotating fan on the roof, he listened to the squeaking noises, looked at dim shapes that projected themselves in a horrible vibration. He was swept away by a sense of guilt, of getting between the workers and their own will.

What could have been done? What could have been said?

The boy was a victim on the altar of time, where effectivity was the only thing that counted.

Samson Reynolds felt that something more was about to happen: Another day, another worker: New orders, new deaths, a horrible experience of horror without sense or order.

But reality was even worse than expected.

“THE OUTPOST”

The rover moved over the yellowish ground: A road put between the raised transport belts, that moved fresh ore from the mines. The road led downwards, towards a naturally formed valley, a desert-like decrease between surrounding cliffs.

Silence had taken hold of the group: Samson Reynolds was one of the passengers, also Morpheus and other workers from the same unit. The emptiness that arose after Richard Edwards was filled with another worker, Thomas Edwards, who didn't say much.

They spoke of the implausibility of the mission: That these workers, educated to control trolleys and control panels, now would go to a distant outpost, to secure it from an alien threat.

Everyone depended on them: The outpost functioned as a station for the workers that worked in the mines.

The rover jumped and compensated for irregularities on the dirty road: The workers saw something tormented and desolated in the wind swept cliffs on the sides, cliffs that had formed into terrifying protuberances, protruding cliffs whose interiors were hollow and hosted tormented winds.

Someone thought he saw black shapes moving inside one of the cavities, but the distance was too long for right judgment.

“As soon as we close in on the outpost,” Samson Reynolds said, “unlock the weapons and make yourselves ready! You are not trained for the mission but it's about human lives.”

Nobody listened.

* * *

The outpost was halfway lowered into the planetary surface: It was a black base, complete with black towers, radars and rectangular windows. Guards had been positioned on the abandoned roof; these would protect the company against competitors and dangerous creatures from the desert.

The surroundings were barren, a yellow desert that was drenched in a yellow light. Larger rocks and gravel glittered and created mirages in the distance.

The doors of the rover opened and the men walked out, careful with the pressure from the oxygen tanks. They walked in procession towards the outpost, ready for survivors but nobody could be seen. Samson searched along the walls, moved along yellow dunes that buried the outpost in gravel, as if the base had been a victim of a sudden storm.

“We enter the base on the roof.” Samson Reynolds said, “The survivors have probably buried the base in an attempt to save their own lives.”

They went up on the roof and were met with several dead bodies: Guards in black, a bright worker and a sealed door.

* * *

Half an hour later the men found themselves inside: A building that was dim and completely drained of oxygen: Morpheus hit upon blank metal pipes used for cooling and oxygen flow. He was ordered to quit his games and to search for the switch to the oxygen supply. The desert had arrived at a temperature of fifty degrees Celsius.

* * *

Samson Reynolds made his way to an abandoned kitchen later, where different kinds of food had been left alone to rotten in the heat.

“The best thing would be to do as Richard Edwards.” Thomas Edwards said to Samson Reynolds, “We won’t get away from here, so the best thing would be to accept it.”

“Don’t accept it!” Samson Reynolds said.

“Not only accept it!” Morpheus said, “Love it! This is our destiny.”

Samson Reynolds was at a loss for words.

* * *

The night arrived and the workers were put at strategic positions on the roof: The aliens were out there, in the desert, in the heat, and would make use of the coming night.

Howls were heard.

“THE ATTACK”

The solar disk was a red circle at the border of the horizon, still above the cliffs: Stripes of green and blue moved in the distance, formations of clouds colored by the alien atmosphere. Morpheus held his weapon steadily where he stood on the roof; he unlocked the fire mechanism, tried to shoot a couple of shots but was calmed down by Samson Reynolds.

The creatures waited out there, black ghosts.

* * *

The attack started before the beginning of the night: Devilish wolfs, full of wounds, chewing froth. They closed in from the hollows of the cliffs, in rows of hundreds and took turns to share the front line. They leapt against the walls, were met with shots from the workers, but didn't seem to be injured. Devilish forms that contrary to the mammals from earth were covered by a poisonous secrete.

Thomas Edwards was captured by one of the leaders, shot hysterically in all directions, but was dragged down to the ground where the alien wolfs leapt on him. The screams couldn't be heard. The enemy made the workers aware of the majority of the attack, but others closed in from the back.

Morpheus screamed to Samson Reynolds, other workers were killed; the rest retreated into the main building.

* * *

“What shall we do?” Samson Reynolds shouted inside.

“The same thing as the workers that shut down the cooling device!” Morpheus said.

“What?”

“To commit suicide! They workers died of heat, exactly like the guards that we found on the roof!”

“No!” Samson Reynolds said.

The men stared at each other. Samson Reynolds felt the hot breath from Morpheus, completely wild in his stare and soaking wet. Wails could be heard some distance away. Nobody said anything. Someone took up a cartridge and gave it to Samson Reynolds.

“To give up now!” Samson Reynolds said to Morpheus with sarcasm, “The war has just begun!”

“Yes, it has!” Morpheus said, “Hell is the only reality!”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about!” Samson Reynolds said.

“No?” Morpheus said, “Let me tell you a story.”

“THE SOLAR DISC”

It was four years ago: Morpheus, Cynead (Morpheus’ wife) and some other workers had been promised a new mission: To collect some dead satellites that had collided with a meteor belt close to the sun.

It seemed impossible. But they heard, from the management of the company, that it was better than it seemed: A breathtaking mission that also would give a significant salary, as large as to give the workers the opportunity to buy their own property.

The thoughts went back and forth: Morpheus and Cynead, that were over qualified, talked things through for weeks, even months. They were in a condition of slavery, without property, moving from place to place, to work.

* * *

At last they decided to go.

* * *

The solar disc was a burning sphere: So bright that the protective filter of the space helmets, with their dark shade, let too much light in. Morpheus was blinded by the light; he thought he saw green and blue angels dancing on the solar disc.

Cynead moved on, floated through space like an orange statue, completely still. Used her thrusters to move towards the satellites but Morpheus had to return back. He was blinded, exhausted, frightened, talked restlessly to Cynead but was put back. He sought shelter in the shadow of the asteroids. Waited for minutes, adjusted to the dark, watched the expensive space ship hang motionless in the vacuum of space: Hardened men spoke of silence and horror, over a distorted communication link.

Somewhere on the same spot, in the border between the shadow and the burning flames of hell, Morpheus lost contact with his wife. He broke the rules, went away on a desperate voyage, beyond the planned route and came to the sunlit side of the asteroid belt. It was unbearable! The heat found its way into the space suit and the rough surfaces clouded Morpheus’ consciousness, details melted together, others transformed.

It was devastating, unbearable, scratches of unknown features made bold imprints on the mind of the worker, details of the rough surfaces of the asteroids, not fitting in space.

A scream was heard over a static communication link.

* * *

When Morpheus came back to the space ship the crew listened to Morpheus' story and let the man rest: He turned in throes, in a rest room in the rear of the space ship where he imagined the suffering of his beautiful wife.

It was like an eternity.

The beautiful angels of the sun turned to demons and the crew collected the dead satellites on the other side. Cynead was never found.

Morpheus returned back.

* * *

“What happened then?” Samson Reynolds wondered.

“I returned to the home planet, got the money as promised and was about to settle down for good! But the scream from beyond tormented me, the loneliness killed me and I searched for new jobs.”

“But this is only a destiny of *many*.” Samson Reynolds replied, “There is also something *else*.”

“Like what?”

“Like the joys of finding another wife.” Samson Reynolds said.

The workers gathered around the couple and the discussion continued endlessly: It was as if the whole nature of the universe had to be explained and put to rest. Howls from the wolves were expected but started to dissipate: Calmness entered the outpost and a humming sound was heard from the cooling unit.

Soon one of the workers had enough! He went out and saw the features of a young man walking in the desert: This was Phoenix Donovan, an adventurer from the deep corners of space. He went inside and greeted Samson Reynolds with a secret smile.

“What do you want?” Samson Reynolds wondered.

“I have come to warn you of danger.” Phoenix Donovan said.

“What danger?”

“A huge beast, who have seen the defeat and who seeks revenge.”

“A beast?”

“Yes.”

Samson Reynolds was thinking. He had seen the signs. Alien wolfs from hell, nightmarish working conditions and the possibility of a lost battle. But he refused to confront the errors and decided to fight.

The universe couldn't be *that* terrible, *that* meaningless and someone had to do it.

Morning came.

“THE LIGHT OF THE BEAST”

It felt meaningless to place the workers on the roof. They had confronted an unrivaled enemy, shapes from the outskirts of the desert, from the hollows, from the windswept spaces hosting alien life.

Samson Reynolds thought about the *beast*, how to defeat it: There were individuals, like Morpheus, who willfully came forth, tired of life and ready to meet the danger. But Samson ordered him and others to *not* fight, because it was suicide.

Samson spoke with the young adventurer instead, if there were ways to kill the beast.

“It is impossible.” Phoenix Donovan said, “That’s why I came here.”

“To die?”

“To warn you, go away and move to another planet.”

Samson Reynolds didn’t listen.

* * *

This day was the most horrible day of Samson’s life: He had sealed the rectangular windows with protective panels of reflective metal, impossible to break for a manifold enemy. He went by himself into rooms that temporarily were kept cold, conscious of the terrible heat outside. The beast was something material, but the supernatural image of something else grew deeper inside the ruler’s mind.

* * *

The attack occurred at noon: Enormous shakes, strikes and vibrations. It was as if a giant had emerged from the landscape and started to hit upon the outpost with a giant hammer. The workers were hit with a fear of death; Samson lifted his weapon against the roof and stared: The men shuddered; someone pissed in his space suit and cried. The central hall was filled with the rampant fear of the workers and larger hits had the metallic walls to break. The roof collapsed in front of the workers. The light of the sun entered and revealed the features of the mighty beast: A monstrous creature in golden and brown, with glowing armor, a sunken head and eyes of green.

The length was twenty meters, the width was seven and the height was five.

Nobody could do anything: Samson stared at the beast that crushed the outpost and the workers ran for their lives.

“ON THE HOME PLANET”

Samson remembered: He remembered the hovercraft, that swept by the greenish skyscrapers on the home planet: Blue neon signs, yellow interiors, and a glittering inferno of hovercraft, electronic lights and ship computers.

Somewhere here he swept by his home, three years ago, to join with his wife in a night of love.

* * *

When Samson came home he met another man in the living room. The room was filled with smoke but looking as before: The shining table, a dark blend that shone in the light of the sunset. The smoke formed a statue of fog, as if the smoke of a smoke machine were lit on a distant stage.

Samson's wife was sitting with the man in a black sofa.

“What are you doing?” Samson exclaimed.

“We're smoking.” Samson's wife said.

Samson stared at the man, completely unknown to him and then on to his wife, as if to strangle her. And it was as if a feeling of suppressed memories came to the surface: Nightmares from distant walks in the city, on the pavement, on the paved walks in the filthy parks. Thoughts he never dared to nourish, but suspicions that came with dark feelings.

On the adulterers.

“You don't understand!” Samson's wife said, “You have agreed on it yourself! The new time! The new rules! The *unselfishness!*”

“I see.” Samson Reynolds said.

* * *

Samson Reynolds went out onto the city streets: Desperate, filled with inner conflict, a feeling of wanting to make love with his wife but at the same time wanting to kill her. He came to a block filled with the low life of the city: Poor people, elders, children.

A man stopped him and asked about his feelings: Samson Reynolds hadn't seen the darkness of his own eyes: The rigid walk, the tense shoulders and the lack of a smile.

“Where can I find a prostitute?” Samson Reynolds asked desperately.

“Follow the street to the right, pass some buildings but look out for the drug addicts!”

Samson walked towards the prostitutes but stood still to watch the old women with anguish, the prostitutes were older than himself. Wounded, crippled, addicted to drugs and alcohol, ugly in a degenerative way. It was as if they knew nothing else than the harsh reality of the street, yellow lights flashing. High voices emerged from the fog: Voices of a lost generation, drug addicts running towards hover cars but having no credit.

Red lights blinked: Dark spells were cast upon depressed pimps in the background.

Samson went home and spent the night on the black sofa, while he heard noises from his wife and the man who were making love in the bedroom beside.

Samson Reynolds gave up and decided to become a *ruler*.

“BACK IN THE INFERNO”

He arose from his memories as a changed man: The action had come to a halt: Workers were running without running: Phoenix Donovan was standing with big eyes, observing the menace with awe: Wolves were howling in the distance, frightened of their own leader.

Then a man kept aside, Morpheus, throwing a nuclear bomb into the vicinity of the beast.

It exploded.

* * *

The beast was brought to the ground, roaring. It threatened with its claws but collapsed on the spot, dying. Leaking blue blood, mixed with orange liquid, igniting. Parts of the outpost caught fire and the beast was consumed in flames.

* * *

Morpheus, who had thrown the bomb against orders, went up to Samson Reynolds. He was not proud but delirious of excitement: A deadly killer. Samson Reynolds watched the old man with a sense of dizziness.

“What were you doing?” Morpheus asked Samson Reynolds who had disappeared in his own memories.

“I disappeared in the past.” Samson Reynolds said.

“Have you realized your mistake?” Morpheus said, “Have you realized that hell is our only reality?”

“Yes.” Samson Reynolds said.

Phoenix Donovan came up to the others: The sun shone in the sky. The hot temperature threatened to fry the workers. Phoenix hadn’t counted on Morpheus, the nuclear bomb, the craziness!

“Well done!” he said.

* * *

The day turned into night: The survivors spent time in the rover. The discussions went aside concerning the nature of reality: About destiny, about evil, about the requirements put on the shoulders of the living.

“We know all about our own *lives!*” Samson Reynolds said, “But what about *others?*?”

“We know that our own lives are *hell*!” Morpheus said angrily, “And the same goes for others! Just like we said!”

“It’s just that I have a suspicion.” Samson Reynolds said with hesitation.

“What suspicion?” Morpheus said with great irritation.

“That this hell is just about *perspective*!”

Phoenix Donovan listened to the others. He believed the men had gone crazy. He was an adventurer of a special kind, the one doing things others neglected. But he wasn’t content with the life he had. He told them of a paradise they all had missed: That there existed another life out there: Of contentment, of pleasure, of a path of light, giving new experience.

“So life is different for others but it makes no difference!” Phoenix Donovan said, “Let me tell you a story.”

“THE ADVENTURE”

Phoenix Donovan had recently arrived to the remote planet: He had come to a base, which marked the border between the inhabited part of the planet and the wilderness: A landscape, a delta bordering on the ocean, that was seen in the distance, through the rectangular windows of the base.

It was not a random landscape: It had forests of blood red trees, waters of turquoise and rough cliffs in gold, that curled along the landscape like snakes.

Phoenix Donovan found out he could move freely within limits, but not go further than the curling cliffs: Green algae was found beyond and could stop the engine of the boat.

* * *

The journey had begun and Phoenix enjoyed the view of the desolate landscape: The wind was still and the humans were far and few between. He passed the border of one of the curling cliffs, whose form deviated and forced the boat closer to the origin than expected.

He was met by a group of visitors, that in a thinner passage greeted the newcomer: They laughed and warned Phoenix of the sea monsters, the indefinable shapes, that in the color of opal, moved under the surface.

The reeds were high, beige straws and pink flowers decorated the edges of the delta.

Phoenix was caught by the maiden planet, of the landscape, of the weather, of the humans decreasing. He went by several smaller passages and the water reservoir opened: Phoenix tasted the forbidden, to enter forbidden territory to risk his life.

* * *

Somewhere out at sea Phoenix Donovan disappeared: He passed the border of the curling cliffs, discovered the sea monsters and also other species without name, dolphin like herbivores that also had wings.

A bay was seen, in the middle of an alien delta of algae that surrounded Phoenix and flowered: Strange stumps in brown could be seen, golden shapes, with straggly outgrowths and thorns.

He continued further, to violet sandbanks and inverted rainbows, that scintillated with life and renewal.

He arrived in paradise.

It was an emotion he never had captured: A green ocean bay that almost dissolved into blue: As if a gate had opened and brought another thought, another feeling: As if he was beyond time and space and tasted eternity. This was happiness.

* * *

But time passed and the adventurer realized he had achieved what he had sought after: He had gone to heaven and had nothing more to do.

No experience could surpass this one, nothing he had done, nothing he could do, would make the light shine brighter.

So he returned to the home planet, and even further back, to taste the life he had left: The hardships, the suffering, and the hells.

Phoenix Donovan returned back to time.

“THE BATTLE IN THE DARK”

The workers watched the sun that sank above the alien desert: Watched the fires in the demolished base that had flared up and remained after the ignition of the orange liquid.

“Why are you doing it?” Phoenix Donovan asked Samson Reynolds.

“To fight the last ones?” Samson Reynolds said rhetorically, “To end the alien threat and to return to the refinery as a human being!”

“This isn’t possible!” Phoenix Donovan said.

* * *

After Phoenix’s story the pair had started to haggle: Phoenix said that there existed nothing beyond his previous adventure. Samson Reynolds, that didn’t believe in the story, said that the “emptiness” was due to Phoenix loneliness and that he didn’t raise the bar for coming adventures. No end could be seen.

But this was just a fictional concept: Samson Reynolds only believed in hell.

The discussion threatened to escalate violently and the fires burned: The disc of the sun disappeared below the top of the cliffs, darkness descended and the lighting was lit in the rover.

“You can never survive the coming battle!” Phoenix Donovan shouted, “If there exists something beyond this hell we will surely not experience it! And when it comes down to you and me we are surely alike.”

“I will try to win.” Samson Reynolds said abruptly.

* * *

When the alien wolves arrived at the base the fires had gone out a long time ago. The lighting in the rover was out: The survivors had spread out among the remains of the demolished base. Howls could be heard, gasps and shrill cries, a flock of alien wolves looking for bad blood, a revenge against the humans.

The wolves attacked, the weapons were fired and the black shapes were lit by the fire of the weapons.

Samson Reynolds ran around, went down on his knees and fired a lot of shots. The beasts went upon him; he fired the weapon as much as he could and later made use of a knife that he carried in his belt. He saw nothing, it was completely dark. He heard whimpering, yells and high shrieks.

Something resembling humans. He stood up and ran around shooting: The fire made beacons of light that blinded the wolves but hardly killed them.

Something made him stumble and fall.

He took the chance. He lost himself in the battle. He forgot the struggle as an obstacle, but saw it rather as a goal, as a life. A new perspective. He felt the entrance into the dark, a shilling pathway into death, into the world of godless battle. A strange love, an infernal abyss of infinite darkness, a journey into the joys of suffering.

And he loved his enemy.

* * *

When the morning came he was the only one left alive: The bodies of the dead were spread out on the ground, in all directions. Phoenix Donovan and Morpheus could not be seen but traces of blood led out into the desert. Samson Reynolds sat down in the rover and started the engine: His hands were shaking.

And a cry on low frequency restored Samson's connection with the refinery.

“THE GHOST”

Time passed...

When Samson Reynolds returned, he was degraded to a common worker, due to the death of the others. But he soon adapted to the situation: Nothing was as usual and the head of the unit was surprised: Samson Reynolds, the ghost from the desert (The man that couldn't be alive.) was more effective than the others. He didn't speak much, made all the tasks with precision, did more than requested and ran the trolleys faster than before.

That was surprising, when the degradation should have made him sad.

* * *

It was a new night in the tower where the sun sank over alien cliffs: Golden shades in infinite variations: It was the same atmosphere as before; outside; and the same spirit inside as the night with the late Richard Edwards: A golden light of shades and reflections, a bright light of suffering and death.

“What else can we do than to see the obvious!” the owner of the refinery said to the workers, “The speed of the work can be increased!”

“With how much?” the head of the unit asked.

“With fifty percent!” the owner said.

A buzz could be heard among the workers of the refinery. Nobody had even heard of such a nightmare. The workers looked down upon the plates, saw the food, lifted it up but could hardly swallow. The new schedule was due to Samson Reynolds, that proved the errors of the past workers, who didn't work hard enough.

“My question is only how you made it?” the head of the unit asked Samson Reynolds.

Samson Reynolds just said: “I love it.”

* * *

The next morning the manager walked down the corridors as usual: He had slept bad and had been thinking about the day before. He was heavy in his head. His breathing was irregular. The walls of the corridor were humming, due to the cooling pipes. Fans rotated in irregular rhythms: A vision of hell, contrasted to the golden light. It was a sea of tranquility, signaling torture and unknown bliss. Or was it an illusion? The manager arrived at the control unit and said hello to the controllers: It was

saddened faces monitoring workers as well as himself: He entered his code and continued to the working area.

The manager was met by the usual heat, of the noises from the melting furnaces, the working area was empty and the man started his shift. But something was strange: The manager thought he saw something on the floor behind one of the melting furnaces: He went up to the place and saw an old working suit.

He remembered the death of Richard Edwards.

He went back to one of the trolleys when a wailing sound could be heard. He went up to the sound and right there, behind one of the trolleys, was the body of Samson Reynolds. Shake after shake hit the man, the eyes were white and foam had formed around the mouth.

“What have happened?” the head of the unit yelled.

“I - I have worked!” Samson Reynolds said.

Samson Reynolds gasped, the tongue came out and then the ghostly shape collapsed on the floor.

* * *

The following days were filled with anxiety: The workers wondered what had happened, *why* it happened and what could be done about it. The head of the unit said that Samson Reynolds had worked to death: He loved his work, had suffocated in the heat and had worked more than two hundred fifty percent.

“He went mad!” one of the workers said.

The management kept silent. Samson Reynolds couldn't be *mad*; if he was the others had to work *less*. They called for another worker, and told the other ones that the work schedule would be kept as usual, with the addition of another ten percent.

There was no easy way out in a competitive universe they said, where the weak succumbed and the strong multiplied.

“But then we have nothing to live for!” one of the workers said.

“You have!” the head of the unit said, “But not in the here and now! Only in a better future! And this is what we are fighting for!”

* * *

A couple of days later the new worker came to the refinery: He left the landing site, walked down a slope and saw the harsh features of the golden refinery: Saw the glistening walls, the futuristic design and the loaded trucks standing in front of the building.

The worker walked on the space gravel, using black boots, haunted by bad dreams. The crunches made lumps in his throat: He was fresh, unnecessarily naive, unfamiliar with the refinery.

The steps became heavy; time came to a halt, like a call from beyond. The worker joined with the others on the inside. He saw the dark looks of the workers and passed the point of no return: To join the dark lord beyond the gates of hell.

Feeling captured.

“LIFE AFTER DEATH”

Samson Reynolds had recently arrived to the remote planet: He had come to a base, which marked the border between the inhabited part of the planet and the wilderness: A landscape, a delta bordering on the ocean, that was seen in the distance, through the rectangular windows of the base.

It was not a random landscape: It had forests of blood red trees, waters of turquoise and rough cliffs in gold, that curled along the landscape like snakes.

Samson Reynolds found out he could move freely within limits, but not go further than the curling cliffs: Green algae was found beyond and could stop the engine of the boat.

* * *

The journey had begun and Samson enjoyed the view of the desolate landscape: The wind was still and the humans were far and few between. He passed the border of one of the curling cliffs, whose form deviated and forced the boat closer to the origin than expected.

He was met by a group of visitors, that in a thinner passage greeted the newcomer: They laughed and warned Samson of the sea monsters, the indefinable shapes, that in the color of opal, moved under the surface.

The reeds were high, beige straws and pink flowers decorated the edges of the delta.

Samson was caught by the maiden planet, of the landscape, of the weather, of the humans decreasing. He went by several smaller passages and the water reservoir opened: Samson tasted the forbidden, to enter forbidden territory to risk his life.

* * *

Somewhere out at sea Samson Reynolds disappeared: He passed the border of the curling cliffs, discovered the sea monsters and also other species without name, dolphin like herbivores that also had wings.

A bay was seen, in the middle of an alien delta of algae that surrounded Samson and flowered: Strange stumps in brown could be seen, golden shapes, with straggly outgrowths and thorns.

He continued further, to violet sandbanks and inverted rainbows, that scintillated with life and renewal.

He arrived in paradise.

It was an emotion he never had captured: A green ocean bay that almost dissolved into blue: As if a gate had opened and brought another thought, another feeling: As if he was beyond time and space and tasted eternity. This was happiness.

* * *

Samson stood before the gatekeeper, the angel: He had experienced the adventure of Phoenix Donovan. He had a choice: To go the easy route, as Phoenix had done, to be reborn in hell and to relive the same life again and again. Or he could do what no one ever did: To choose *heaven*, which meant a greater *hell*, where he would *induce* suffering instead of fighting dangerous beasts.

This was improbable.

He chose heaven.