

Andropia

By

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Prologue

Thousands of glowing tubes stood erect upon the sterile floor. They rose just over three meters and contained a churning green liquid that shimmered. Except for the sound of incessant bubbling, silence reigned.

A door at the far end of the vast room opened, retracting into the wall. Sunlight poured through the doorway and it was accompanied by the whir of a small motor.

The sound grew more pronounced when a silver box mounted upon tiny, smooth wheels entered the room. Once it cleared the portal, the door snapped shut, ending the natural illumination and returning the room to its eerie greenness.

Graphs of every sort blinked across the metallic box's surface. Although its engine was barely audible, in a room so starkly soundless, it might as well have been rhythmic thunder.

It rolled across the expansive chamber past countless tubes until it finally stopped, for it had reached the last.

Or, perhaps this was not the last tube, but the first?

Each contained a floating human being who was apparently unconscious. The box remained unmoving as it regarded a particular human—a woman. Fully grown, she was the portrait of absolute health. Her perfect hair swayed as it bobbed in the chunky, green fluid; her skin had not one flaw; her musculature appeared lean and strong. She could only be described as physically impeccable.

The tubes throughout the room held a fully mature man or woman of every imaginable size, shape, and race. They were completely unaware of their surroundings, totally at peace.

But would they remain so tranquil if awakened?

Chapter One

Blackness.

He saw nothing, yet he was aware.

He knew his name, and it was Isaac.

Noise pervaded his ears. He sensed that he fell, though he had no prior context in which to determine what falling felt like. Isaac stretched out his hands and detected a smooth, metallic surface zipping along his fingertips.

The blackness continued as air ripped past him. He slid down the dark tube in a controlled drop, suffering complete visual depravation for what seemed an eternity. Finally, he noticed that his momentum slowed. Isaac hoped he would not have to endure his full one hundred and eleven years within the confines of such darkness.

At long last, he spewed out into the paradise known as Andropia.

He landed upon his feet. Isaac's knees bent ever so slightly and allowed the small impact with the steel platform to work its way throughout his body. Once confident that his landing had successfully concluded, he straightened himself, making sure to lift his chin and roll back his shoulders. Isaac took in the sight of the sprawling city with its infinite series of mammoth skyscrapers and lush parks. He saw buildings caressing the sky; he perceived wave after wave of vibrant trees dressed in emerald. Along the immaculate city streets, he noticed transport vehicles whispering along. They carried content Andropians holding casual conversation with one another.

He could not have imagined such splendor.

It was perfect.

Lost in the ecstasy of encountering his wondrous city for the first time, a subtle clearing of the throat finally captured Isaac's attention.

Following the sound, Isaac turned to discover a man standing at a podium upon the platform. Gesturing with his fingers, the station worker motioned for Isaac to leave the opening of the tube and approach.

Although they were his first steps in the thriving metropolis, Isaac felt no sentimentality. Instead, he glanced over his shoulder and studied the tube that had delivered him. He saw that it reached straight to the heavens and that it was not a singularity. In fact, he discerned hundreds of other tubes, each connecting to a platform much like the one he was on. As his eyes followed the tubes ever upward, he learned that they originated from a gigantic fortress hovering far above them. He knew that within the structure—the Citadel—the Maker created ... everything.

The man called out, "Let's move it along, please; we've got another due in three minutes."

Hard as it was to remove his eyes from the levitating behemoth, he felt compelled to do so, and thus, followed the worker's instructions.

"Hello," Isaac greeted after crossing the platform.

"Hello to you," the man replied without looking up from his control panel.

Isaac stood before the station, waiting for the worker's full regard. Curious, he leaned over the podium just enough to behold a screen comprised of innumerable data.

“Ah!” the worker exclaimed. After reaching into one of many containers atop a nearby conveyer belt, he retrieved a jumpsuit, saying “You must be Isaac. Put these on. You’ll get to pick out your own later.”

Isaac slid into the unremarkable garb after realizing that the sound of his own name pleased him.

“Yes,” Isaac confirmed while attiring. “I *am* Isaac.”

He paused for a moment, examining the worker standing across from him. Finally, he inquired, “May I ask your name?”

“O-Oh!” the technician stammered. He looked away, befuddled, and said, “I ... I am Orville.”

Though clearly taken aback, Orville soon found his resolve and faced Isaac anew, saying, “I am pleased to make your acquaintance; however, we will not fraternize. Future association will occur only through spontaneous encounters.”

Isaac placed his fingers upon the edge of the podium, pressing it tightly, and asked, “Why is that?”

Orville’s shoulders jerked as though he’d been electrocuted. He seemed once again mystified—even troubled. He mumbled, “Hmm. You are especially inquisitive. Interesting. But, to answer your question, you’re replacing Mohandas, and I do not know Mohandas; therefore, I likely won’t know you beyond this experience. Now kindly remove your hands from my equipment.”

Isaac dropped his hands to his sides and replied, “Certainly.”

He averted his eyes after deciding to forego yet another question. Orville obviously did not enjoy playing the role of reception host, nor, apparently, did he favor people touching his podium.

Relieved by Isaac’s trepidation, Orville said, “Good. You’ve already overcome your inquisitive nature. Frankly, I was concerned.”

Orville next plugged a small module—no larger than the palm of his hand—into his console and began downloading information. Once the transfer completed, he relinquished it to Isaac, saying, “Simply follow the directions on the screen and you’ll locate your residence. I believe it’s near the Riveters’ stadium.”

Isaac studied the weightless device while repeating, “The Riveters?”

Orville answered, “Yes, the Riveters. You know them—the baseball team.”

Isaac thought for a moment and, in an instant, he did indeed know all about the Riveters. In fact, he found that he was well-versed in all things baseball. Additionally, the entirety of Andropia’s amenities flooded his consciousness. Every piece of knowledge he required in order to function within his new city was but a thought away. Information made itself available at even his most modest of musings. However, when he tried to ascertain Mohandas’ identity and address, his power of recollection dwindled.

“Take this, too,” Orville said before handing him a small plastic card. “You’ll use it to acquire your own clothes. Everyone will know you’re fresh out of the tube if you walk around in that jumpsuit all day.”

Isaac took the card and nodded. The opportunity to explore the city while trekking to his living quarters made him happy, and so he wished Orville well and descended the platform’s mesh steps. As he did so, another new inhabitant burst out from the transport tube, the Citadel’s latest arrival.

Isaac checked his module for directions and noted that there were several clothing stores along the way.

He then began what he hoped would be an adventurous journey.

Chapter Two

She sat upon the dilapidated building's roof and stared through the trees to the skyline beyond. Her khaki-clad knees were pulled up to her chest with her arms wound tightly about them. She couldn't remove her eyes from the city, so many kilometers away, winking at her through the limbs.

Andropia.

It was her city, and she loved it. They did not understand her love, her devotion. They couldn't comprehend the sacrifices that she made on a daily basis in order to save them—her people. She would do what she must, no matter what they thought of her, no matter what the outcome.

Her eyes drifted from the skyline to the Citadel looming like a dark thundercloud ready to unleash its hellacious load. How much time did she have before *he* confronted her? What would happen to her when that day finally arrived?

It wasn't important.

She loved her city.

In a few moments, her love would express itself anew.

The personal consequences of her actions were irrelevant.

Chapter Three

Isaac obeyed the directions scrolling across his module. Everywhere he looked, his fellow Andropians bustled along. Some of them were in their work uniforms, and some were dressed casually for an enjoyable day off. Although they tried to avoid staring, Isaac noticed that they kept glancing at his jumpsuit. All new arrivals wore the standard apparel, but he nonetheless wanted out of it and to blend in as soon as possible. To do so, he needed to attain garments that better reflected his personality. This was his first priority.

As Isaac became lost in thought, he accidentally collided with another Andropian and knocked the startled man to the sidewalk.

"Excuse me!" Isaac cried while reaching out a helping hand.

"Think nothing of it," the other Andropian said, brushing the dust from his dapper jacket. "You are new to Andropia."

"Yes; I am Isaac."

"Lovely to meet you, Isaac. I am Gregory." Gregory patted himself down, making sure everything was perfectly in place, and, once satisfied, said, "Well, then, Isaac, I'm sure you will enjoy our fabulous city. Farewell."

But before Gregory had gone too far, Isaac called out, "I presume I will see you again, by coincidence, if nothing else." He liked this Gregory without having any notion as to why.

Gregory peeked over his shoulder as he marched away. He said, "I very much doubt that, Isaac."

And, as would so often be the case, Isaac couldn't stop himself. He asked, "Why is that?"

Gregory came to a halt. He turned and faced Isaac. While Gregory endeavored to remain polite, his body language gave every indication that he simply didn't have time for a chat. Isaac wondered if the gentleman had an important appointment to keep. It was obvious, though, that Gregory had difficulty turning away attention.

The fact that Isaac had asked a question appeared to have escaped the hurried man's notice.

Gregory took a fleeting look down the sidewalk, wrung his hands together, then began a cordial response to Isaac's question, saying, "Our consorting would be a distinct impossibility because I'm on my way to—wait!"

At that moment, Gregory's entire demeanor changed. Whatever engagement he sought to keep had been dismissed as an afterthought, for he had at last registered the unusual circumstance. Gregory approached Isaac, far more closely than what was considered appropriate, and stated, "You asked me a question."

Shifting from foot to foot, Isaac stammered, "Er, well, uh—"

"Spit it out, Isaac," Gregory demanded. "You asked a question."

Having little choice but to reply, Isaac said, "Yes, I did."

Gregory scrutinized the individual who had knocked him for a loop, both literally and figuratively. Finally, he leaned in even closer and advised, "I wouldn't make a habit of that ... if I were you."

Without pause, Isaac retorted, "Why n—?"

However, before he could finish the inquiry, Gregory shoved his hand over Isaac's mouth. He next wagged his finger back and forth, like a metronome, beneath Isaac's nose.

And with that, Gregory turned and walked away.

Stupefied by the ordeal, Isaac could do nothing more than merely watch while the man left his life forever.

At a loss for how to interpret Gregory's words, Isaac peeked at his module, and then followed its directions once more.

Soon, he saw a clothing store. He didn't yet have a firm grip on his exact tastes, but the mannequins' clothing looked like something he wouldn't mind sporting. It was time to say goodbye to his jumpsuit.

Ignoring the crosswalks, Isaac dashed across the street to the chagrin of the transport drivers who almost flattened him. He leapt to the sidewalk after his mad sprint and then waved at the vehicles sounding their horns. Andropians walking along the street looked at Isaac as though he could be a madman; they kept their distance. Isaac regretted making such a scene. For a man intent upon fitting in, he had failed to win anyone over thus far.

Looking down at the pavement and shaking his head in self-admonishment, Isaac quickly left such contemplations behind when the building across the street—where he had been only seconds before—exploded in a fury of fire and debris. An evacuation alarm erupted and sprinklers from bordering structures activated.

Andropians fled in every direction, but they did so calmly. Isaac found this general composure most impressive. They were orderly and fully in possession of their wits, even as chunks of concrete and steel crashed around them.

Within seconds, the fire crews arrived and discharged fire retardant into the blazing building.

Because no one else seemed particularly troubled by the inferno, Isaac shortly disregarded the spectacle and entered the clothing store. He was excited to purchase his new clothes. He wondered if his workplace—whatever it may be—would provide his uniforms, or if he would have to pick those up, too.

He also pondered, while giving the flaming building across the street one last thought, what might have been a hospital.

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