

# Heavenly Angels

A short story by Andreas Ingo

My name is Barlow Henson. I'm a controller, a chief of department in the industrial complex on the planetoid Delta 6. The department has many facilities, including a refinery, a construction site and a foundry. I'm walking between these facilities to deliver new orders.

Orders to shut down the entire industrial complex. This is due to lack of demand for the company's products. The company is going down, "Trinity" (as I read on numerous signs along the way to the facilities) is losing against a fearsome competition. And the company is going bankrupt.

I enter the different areas of the industrial complex. Walking into steamy refinery chambers. Where huge ore trucks deliver their last load into enormous ore cylinders. I talk to sweaty workers. Using special heat protection suits to protect themselves from heat.

I'm awestruck by the strength of the workers. Enduring this hell contrary to their own interests.

The entire area of the industrial complex is resting upon alien ground on a planetoid several light-years from earth. The year is 2257, earth time, but the old earth is long dead and forgotten.

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I'm having a break from schedule. I enter the alien terrain beyond the industrial complex. Occasionally I see ore-trucks and miscellaneous planetary workers return from shift.

In these surroundings a shifting terrain display characteristics of something otherworldly. Mountains are displaying regular patterns not suspected on a planetoid. Protruding forms building long lines crossing the landscape like wall decorations.

I watch the alien landscape and see protruding lines blend into each other. I count them and lose count as I arrive at ten. Five lines changing to seven ones and then reverting to five again. The life beyond my company position seems uncertain, irregular, unwanted. I entered the company as a normal worker and advanced towards my current position by hard work and lucky circumstances.

I'm a blue-collar guy feeding upon the company founded by a man called Alastair Reynolds. A genius fighting for wealth in a world of many similar options.

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When I return to the industrial complex an atmosphere of uncertainty have made the remaining workers go silent. Alastair Reynolds has entered the industrial complex to talk with them about a desperate plan. A desperate plan to earn money still connected to the company.

The plan is to stage a huge theft of company products and properties. Filming it using regular surveillance cameras. To earn money from insurance companies. The only way to earn money for products impossible to sell. And keeping the products in a safe facility miles away from the actual industrial complex.

But the whole deal is problematic. Problematic as the insurance companies need good proof of an actual crime. Careful as they are concerning all insurance matters.

Some people have to die. Actually die as that is the only proof the insurance companies will take as sufficient. One man is going down and that man is Alastair Reynolds.

This man has ranked among the richest people in the interstellar colonial territories. But his investment in the future company led him to bankruptcy. And he want to establish a future for his children unaware of the present act.

Going down to save his children, his loved ones and the future of certain shareholders.

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I enter the alien terrain once more. Holding my breath as Alastair Reynolds explains the details of his own departure. I can't answer truthfully to his questions. He want a last excursion into the alien landscape as a conclusion to his own life.

"I did it like no one else." Alastair Reynolds says, "I did it contrary to luck. Making my way up by clear thinking and large amounts of effort."

"And you succeeded in a way." I say and swallow.

"At first." Alastair Reynolds says, "But the future world of interstellar economics didn't allow many with the same mind-set. The struggle for world domination was too hard."

I watch the man in silence. All words seem redundant. A deep turning of inner muscles make me twist in agony. I try not to show it. I try to maintain my calm, my initial position.

We go out. Out on the alien planes. Where an alien fog mix with the green liquid from a small river. Small plants grow on the alien ground. Green outgrowths looking like small bushes with long segments in the size of bananas.

"You served me to the bitter end." Alastair Reynolds says with a haunted voice, "You did it like several others. Are you pleased with the result?"

"I'm pleased." I say and lie, "The whole Trinity business has made me appreciate a lot of things."

"Good then." Alastair Reynolds says and walk back to the interplanetary rover vehicle (IRV).

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The actual staging of the film is made using local surveillance cameras. Alastair Reynolds has paid some outcasts on the opposite side of the planet. Going in patterns to load corporate products and properties on interplanetary rover vehicles.

Complete with a final shoot-out. Ending with the death of Alastair Reynolds. The staging is made in different segments. We need to make a convincing case of a theft. Display some resistance but lose the entire compound in the end.

It's becoming realistic with the reduction of Trinity personnel.

It all happens. We film the "theft": An extra-terrestrial heist film recorded in outer space with local surveillance cameras. Material we will use to cut the final film in order.

But somewhere around there. In the midst of firing weapons I sense something is wrong with the whole ordeal. That images blur together to build a vision of something otherworldly. "To never think about better solutions in these times!" I wonder, "To lose grasp of the entire concept 'restraint'!"

The heist film becomes like an alien intrusion. Almost as I see white ghostly shapes run in the periphery.

Contrary to logic.

It's a nightmare. A torment to my already weak condition. And I watch the film come to completion. A film ending with a huge space-craft crashing in the main area of the industrial complex. Setting on a huge fire.

Killing Alastair Reynolds in the process.

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Three weeks later.

I'm entering a huge space-station far away from Delta 6. It's a huge giant of rotating infrastructure. Built in segments containing sleeping areas, commercial districts, government headquarters, a justice department and much more.

I walk the corridors of the huge space-station. Coloured in grey segments with blue and yellow stripes.

Maps are placed strategically along the slick walls.

I watch these maps, trying to build a picture of where I am and where I am going. I'm using my last earned credits and hope for insurance money.

But I soon get lost within multiple path-ways. In sections lacking artificial gravity. In other sections having some. And other sections where I feel very heavy indeed.

This space-station is built pretty close to the remains of a dying star. A star expanding to a red giant in the past. Then exploding as a bright supernova. The remains of the super-nova have built a fragmentary nebula with countless stars.

Now I'm entering the justice department for a hearing in a huge chamber. Having artificial gravity and a spherical chamber design. A form with multiple segments built with relative height.

The hearing is of the formal kind: "The Heist Film" has been inspected by several surveillance film experts.

The representatives from the insurance companies are there. Along with the representatives from the other side. Mainly Trinity stock holders and relatives to Alastair Reynolds.

I'm witnessing the entire charade.

Questions arise from the insurance companies. Questions I have to answer with a clear mind. But my mind can hardly register the questions. Nagging questions lacking a clear escape.

"You see." One of the insurance company experts says, "We haven't found the origin of the criminals doing the heist." She says, "And some of the film segments display characteristics of fake evidence."

"What fake evidence?" I ask.

"Weapons lacking true assault capacity and other things."

I look down upon my bare hands. I find composure and look the accusers in their calculating eyes. Some of them are turning with imposing movements. And I watch the procedures continue according

to law and routine. Seeing the lowered middle-section below with the judge and several others.

Surrounded by blue furniture.

“I’m just truthful.” I say and lie, “The evidence is pretty clear from my own point of view.” I say, “Just as I observed the heist in front of my eyes.”

“It’s problematic.” One of the insurance company experts says, “As the evidence points into several directions. But some people ended up dead.”

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I’m moving to sleeping areas. I’m taking an elevator to the sleeping chambers. From my own point of view I’m moving in a horizontal direction. But all angles are relative in space and could also be seen as vertical movement.

The sleeping chambers are rotating along a central axis. They are arranged around a centre piece in the middle. The beds are blue with white sheets. Not looking too dissimilar from medical sleeping units.

I try to sleep, talk occasionally using body language with other guests. Guests with different spoken languages.

In time I see that sleep is impossible. So many are my physical impressions, so intense my psychological condition I start to visualize the time on the planetoid Delta 6.

Going through the faked heist filming process. Watching Alastair Reynolds with a haggard look.

I try to put all thoughts behind. I try to focus...

“I will never become like Alastair Reynolds.” I think to myself, “I will never become like him.”

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The later procedures pass by in a process of questions, answers, and leads. I never find the right things to say. I don't know if I say the worst things.

It's impossible to guess the purpose of the twisted questions.

And somewhere there I watch the middle-part of "The Heist Film" and watch white forms appear and disappear in segments. Alien intruders. A cloaked specimen from the haunted environment of Delta 6.

"Are you with us?" The judge ask me as I resume consciousness. "Are you with us today?"

I'm led outside with some guards to the area of my first contact.

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Now I'm in a gigantic space-harbour. On the huge space-station close to the nebula. Red, green and blue light from the overarching light configuration pulls me into a vibrant state of mind.

I'm walking along a queue leading to a space-ship. A crowning achievement of future design. Looking a bit like a traditional ocean-liner.

I watch the body language, the clothes, the different smells and sounds of the space-tourists.

"How was your trip?" I ask one of the tourists coming from the interstellar ocean-liner.

He smiles a wicked smile and says: "It was very well worth it! An experience for sure."

I stand there in silence and watch the lingering queue.

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Weeks later I'm boarding the interstellar ocean-liner! Contrary to initial impressions the trial has resulted in victory for Trinity's part. I'm sailing along the black void of space. The ocean-liner passes the nebula, away from the dying star to hidden areas.

Passing planets, shining stars and new-born dust-clouds. Collecting in hives due to gravity.

Somewhere there I meet a woman. Someone not much older than me. We dance in a hall of zero gravity. We fill our lungs with smelling air (Smelling like flowers from an extra-terrestrial morning).

And I lose myself in the moment.

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Two weeks later.

I'm lying in bed and I start to imagine things. Thinking of the procedure of the past trial. About the Trinity corporation. About Alastair Reynold's death.

All the different people, all the different environments.

I try to divert my attention. I try to see things clearly. As I have found a good woman and have the trip of my life. But the alien shapes from Delta 6 intrudes on my consciousness. I don't know "them". I don't know if I remember things correctly.

It's the sudden joy!

I visualize the woman I met on the ocean-liner: I see her as a sudden surprise. An oddity in the life of a lucky chief and controller. It's a strange occurrence, building momentum but it's all too different from my past.

I imagine her as a dark enemy, an evil companion.

Meeting her the next day.

And giving all my credits away.

# THE END