

Grailem

by

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Smashwords Edition

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To those I have known whose time was short.

All characters in this novel are fictitious,
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Chapter One

The magnetic field of the passing asteroid is generating enough energy to pull Grailem towards it. Waking from an aimless sleep he tries to use his precious energy to move closer. It had been aeons since he had stood on, or even felt a solid surface beneath his feet.

Grailem had been drifting aimlessly through space since his spacecraft had exploded, maybe a million years ago now. The exploding fuel tanks had thrown him out into the cold of space with such a force that he had almost achieved the speed of

light. The clouds of dust and gases of forming nebula he passed through slowed him down as he flew uncontrolled through the cosmos. With no propulsion system to aid him, the friction of forming nebulae of dust and gas eventually brought his speed down to a few kilometres per second.

The years passed slowly for him as he had little to distract his thoughts and he had long wished for the release of death. The only part of him that is human is his brain; and this has been incorporated completely into an artificial body. The body had been especially designed to cope with all environments; including the vacuum of space, but with the vital flaw of no propulsion system.

The long held dream that Man could eventually conquer death had become a reality. Grailem and many others like him, are the prototypes for a new generation of Man. The body skeleton, made of modern metal clusters, that would never decay, was almost indestructible. His inner machine workings were covered in a flexible carbon hybrid. The carbon, formed with the mineral pansaleite under extreme pressure gave the appearance and feel of human skin. The new kind of Man had to be in Man's own image and Grailem looked a prime example of his species; a little over two metres tall with a muscular looking body and handsome round face he could pass at a distance as human on any planet. Closer examination of his eyes would reveal their mechanical nature betraying his true identity. This was not a problem on his home planet as many people possessed artificial eyes – but to an outworlder he was one not to be trusted.

Mankind had been incorporating humans with artificial limbs and internal organs for generations. The more that Man depended on technology, the physically weaker the human race had become. Many humans were regularly being born with disabilities like missing limbs, blindness and also the inability to speak.

Substituting the missing limbs with man-made ones and combining computer technology, the blind could see better than with normal healthy eyes (though mechanical and lacking any sign of emotion), and the disabled could walk and run. To have a disability proved to be an advantage in this new world; as the replacement limbs and internal organs were far superior to that created by nature. All those who could afford it had mechanical hearts and kidneys. Some had arms and legs deliberately amputated so that they could be fitted with far superior man-made ones.

Life expectancy became measured in centuries rather than years. After three thousand years the human part of the body mysteriously changed, making the body susceptible to disease and death. Not many people lived beyond three thousand years; it was as if the body had an internal clock that stopped when it reached a certain age. The only organ that had to remain human was the brain, but this and whatever part of the original body remained always fell susceptible to disease, killing the host.

Grailem, and several like him, had been Mankind's hope to finally achieve immortality; created in a test tube they had been genetically modified to have no arms and legs in the hope of creating a superior brain. The brain, genetically cross-mutated with an alien species of wasp brought an immunity to the diseases that had affected Man. Kept as laboratory experiments initially and suspended in biotic fluid for the first three years, the brains did expand to twice their normal size and intelligence. Hard wired into a computer terminal the brains had access to all of Mankind's knowledge.

Grailem had become fully self aware after only a few months and had been content in his tank of biotic fluid. Though he was connected to the computer system he was unable to communicate. Regarded as nothing more than a young infant of a few years he was generally left alone - until the military intervened.

More advanced weapons could be constructed; with a human brain making the decisions rather than a computer.

The military under the command of General Naitirho, moved many of the functioning brains to the military's research centre in the desert. Grailem's brain, being the more advanced in intelligence and size, was moved to a 'more secure' location near the North Pole. The scientist's moving him were not aware of his dependency on the computer that was hard wired into his system. Carelessly unplugging him he becomes blind and senseless and retreats into the depths of his memories.

Aware of what was happening to him Grailem decided that the best option was not to co-operate. Trying to re-activate him at the remote military outpost they could not bring his consciousness to the surface. The military, in desperation used a very powerful mind control drug mixed with his biotic fluid to try to bring him to awareness. The drug, when mixed with the fluid transformed itself as it absorbed the oxygen and carbon from the life-giving bioplasm creating a new substance.

The transformed chemical spread into his brain forming a protective casing around the cells. Absorbing a high amount of oxygen from the bioplasm this protective casing became negatively charged, further encapsulating the newly formed chemical.

With no response from his brain to any form of external stimulation; including more powerful drugs, General Naitirho, who had high hopes for using Grailem's advanced brain, ordered the use of electric shock treatment. Inserting electrodes into the bioplasm surrounding his brain they turned the power on at a minimum power of one milliamp.

Having no observable effect they increased the power, not realising that the increased power was raising the temperature of the bioplasm and the power was increased. Bubbles started to form around Grailem's brain as the fluid started to boil and the scientists quickly shut down the power.

Aware that the boiling bioplasm would have damaged Grailem's brain, turning him into nothing more than a vegetable, the military, saying nothing of their experiments, returned Grailem's brain to the laboratory.

The harsh treatment he had received from the military, especially the hallucinogenic drugs and the dangerous increase in temperature, had caused many of his brain cells to mutate, retaining the harmful chemicals and forming new ones. The hallucinations created by the chemicals in his mind, as he had no eyes, became overpowering and, at times, dominated his way of thinking.

The desire to see and escape the nightmare hallucinations caused a response within his brain and the newly formed chemicals. Polypeptide chains formed together and produced fibres of collagen. The fibres cross link and combined into a helical arrangement and grouped together forming two roughly shaped spheres at the front of his brain.

Grailem suddenly found, after three years of darkness, apart from the computer input, that he could see as if he had a pair of primitive eyes. The bioplasm in the tank that surrounded his brain was opaque, limiting his vision as most objects beyond his container appeared blurred. A scientist in a white coat moves towards him alerted by the increased electrical activity recorded on the monitor.

Grailem feels his 'eyes' alter shape as they focus on the approaching scientist. As he gets closer and peers into the fluid Grailem can see him perfectly; unshaven and dirty with bloodshot eyes trying to focus on Grailem's brain he is not the most attractive first sight for Grailem.

The increased high electrical activity detected and recorded by the computer is misinterpreted by the scientist. Thinking that Grailem is suffering from shock and the increased activity is a sign of distress, the scientist initiates the cooling mechanism. This will reduce the temperature of the bioplasm to five degrees below zero; the fluid will not freeze but will induce a form of sleep, reducing his brain activity to nearly zero.

Slowly Grailem feels the temperature of the bioplasm increasing; how long he had been unconscious he had no way of knowing. As the temperature increases his 'eyes' come into focus and he sees that his container is surrounded by a large group of scientists all wearing white coats and hair nets. Several are clustered around the viewing screen pointing at a graph that is displayed. Pointing at several of the high peaks one scientist looks agitated. Turning towards the group he points an accusing finger at an elderly scientist and operates a communication device on the wall. Almost immediately two very large uniformed security officers enter.

The scientist says something to them and turning towards the elderly scientist they approach him, one of the guards takes a pair of handcuffs from his pocket. The old scientist looks on in shock as he is handcuffed and escorted out of the laboratory.

Establishing his authority, the scientist issues instructions to the remaining white coated group and they all approach Grailem in his tank of bioplasm. Watching their mouths move as they talk and not being connected to the communications terminal Grailem cannot hear what they are saying. The scientist is handed a bottle of a gold coloured liquid and Grailem's stress levels rise.

The scientist carefully opens the jar and pours the golden fluid into Grailem's tank of bioplasm. The effect of the liquid upon Grailem's brain is instantaneous; the fluid contains no electrical charge, not even a residual charge, but somehow attracts the negatively charged electrons from Grailem's newly formed defensive screen.

Now totally helpless and fully receptive to any electrical charge that may be inflicted upon him Grailem feels a wave of fear flow through his mind. The graph, still displayed on the viewing screen records his reactions as alarmingly high peaks. Darkness starts to cover him as he slips into unconsciousness bringing relief from the pain.

The increasing temperature of the bioplasm brings Grailem back to consciousness once again. Darkness surrounds him and his newly formed 'eyes' show him only blackness. Aware that he is now attached to the computer terminal he activates the viewing screen and the surrounding cameras.

At first Grailem is unsure what he is looking at until he realises it is himself. He now possesses a humanoid shaped head that is made of high pressure metal clusters similar to those of the skeleton. The metal shines, reflecting the overhead lights making the human looking eyes, of a deep brown, appear out of place. The eyes, though they look real are not functioning as Grailem is receiving the images via the communications terminal.

Below his head of bright shiny metal, the trunk of a human body has been expertly grafted onto it. Connected directly below the skull the body has a short neck and along with the lack of arms, legs and sexual organs looks grotesque. Shocked by what he has become Grailem moves the new body in agitation as the head scientist enters the room.

Looking down at Grailem and seeing Grailem's eyes staring at him he forms his mouth into an attempt at a smile; "Good to see that you are awake, I am Doctor Levashe and along with my team we will help your conversion."

Using the communications terminal Grailem initiates a new program that will speak his thoughts; "What have you done to me?" he asks.

"We have installed your brain into the metallic head that you can see before you on the viewing screen. It has been necessary to connect you to an organic body to enable your brain to function correctly. This is not the body that will be your final body but some of the neural connections need to be fitted."

As Grailem grew and matured mankind's dream appeared to be becoming a reality. Grailem's brain was developing as originally designed by the scientists and so far fitted the computer prediction. The cross-mutation with the alien wasp proved to be a complete success as Grailem was immune to all disease. Deliberately exposed to deadly viruses like smallpox, rabies and even the common cold his living brain rejected them all.

The newly designed skull enclosing the brain had also proved a success as the nutrient levels remained steady during the years of study. An improved bioplasm had been created that reproduced the life giving nutrients required. His brain had now become self sufficient and by all appearances would remain alive; forever.

The mechanical eyes were connected and proved vastly superior to the blurry image he generally saw, though they did appear cold and lifeless. Capable of high magnification and unusual wavelengths from infra-red to X-ray Grailem could now see everything around him.

The telepathic part of his brain did double in its capacity in his first ten years and he soon learnt to be able to read people's thoughts. Grailem also learnt that those people who had been designated to care for him; cared less and less for him as the years passed.

Unable to move other than wriggling along the floor like a deformed maggot he spent most of his time lying on a hard bed. Though Grailem was so badly physically impaired his 'carers' with the aid of the computers, taught him of the sciences, history and religion.

By the age of twelve he had degrees in physics, chemistry, biology and via the communications terminal, able to speak five different languages. The intelligence came at a price as at an early age Grailem learnt that he was different from other people; and that difference had been created deliberately.

Keeping the ability to read the minds of those around him a secret and aware of the control the laboratory carers had over him he always tried to do as they asked. Even though he was severely disabled Grailem felt he was superior and the promise of immortality strengthened this belief.

Being so helpless he had to depend on the laboratory carers and technicians for his every needs. Every carer who had looked after him had at more than one time, abused him in some way. Being so disabled brought a dislike towards Grailem that was instinctive to the humans around him. He was regarded as a liability and even a nuisance at times; especially when it came time for him to excrete waste matter.

Many times Grailem was left to lay in his own excreta and would remain thirsty and hungry for hours. If he complained he was usually abused by being pinched or slapped and kept to wait even longer until he could lay on clean sheets.

Grailem soon learnt to keep his mouth shut.

Over the years he nursed a deep anger against those who had created him; and all the carers around him. He never saw what happened to the other active brains that had been moved to the desert. Integrated into missiles their life expectancy would be short, but he felt there were similar brains in the same position as his own.

Some of the experiments they carried out on him were a second stage development of organics. The building blocks of brain cells and tissue had already been formed by something, or someone else and inserted into him for his brain and system to complete.

At the age of twenty, and four days after his birthday Grailem's skull was injected with a large amount of the gold coloured fluid. Immediately unconscious his living brain in its metallic skull was removed from the imperfect body. His brain was accessed by a small opening that led from his right ear into the bioplasm that surrounded his brain. By the use of micro surgery, computer chips and behavioural microchips were hard wired to his brain. Unsure on how he would react and being of

superior strength to the scientists, the behavioural microchips should be able to control any adverse reactions.

Satisfied that the microchips could totally disable him if need be the skull with Grailem's brain inside, was fitted to the new human looking body.

Grailem adapted quickly to his new body and soon realised that his creators had made him too well; He was indestructible and with a superior intelligence to all those around him; and also impervious to disease due to the alien wasp genes. Also carried in the wasp genes that was incorporated in his brain was its advanced intelligence. The wasp was an aggressive predator with strong reasoning powers, now combined with Grailem's own angry mind it made him into a dangerous killer.

Once he had fully mastered control of the new body and learnt that the behavioural microchips had no effect upon him, he planned his revenge on all those who had abused him over the years. Reading their minds as they abused him he soon learnt who took the most pleasure from the abuse they inflicted.

The telepathic part of his brain had expanded further once the brain had been inserted into the new body; and he soon learnt how to influence the thoughts of those around him.

After being monitored for only two weeks Grailem convinced the scientists around him, using the power of his mind, that he was safe to mix with the population. Most of the scientists were easy to persuade as their minds had little interest in real life beyond their laboratory. More interested in their experiments and computer calculations they agreed to every reassurance from him of his safety.

One scientist, a Professor Marian Florentia, an ancient shrivelled being who was nearly two thousand years old was more difficult to persuade. She seemed immune to Grailem's telepathic influence and seemed unaware of any suggestion he put in her mind.

Not having learnt the full power of his own telepathic mind he made his suggestions into a demand. The result brought the appropriate response from the Professor as she brought him a glass of water as he had 'commanded'.

The problem was that unlike the other scientists she was aware of his actions; "You cannot control me like you do the others." she tells Grailem in a harsh voice as she throws the glass of water over him!

Grailem is shocked by the impact of the water as it hits him directly in the face; but he is more shocked at the Professor's words.

"I have watched you and the way you order my colleagues around and have been wondering when you were going to get around to me." she almost shouts in the same harsh voice.

"I have been trying to influence your thoughts for weeks." Grailem admits with a shrug of his shoulders and a wry smile; "You are the only one who is aware of my capability; and we do have an old score to settle." he finishes in a threatening voice.

"What do you mean?" asks the Professor, the fear in her voice raising it a pitch.

"When I was ten years old you came to my bed and told me you were my friend. Then you attached electrodes to my brain and connected me to your computer system. I remember the pain and me screaming for you to stop; until you stopped my screams by disconnecting the audible connections."

"It was necessary to map your cerebrum and cerebellum so that the inorganic parts that we fitted to your brain would be of the right dimensions." answers the Professor defensively.

"I was only ten years old then; why was it another ten years before I was fitted into this body?" he screams at her in anger; "Why did you torture me for ten years?"

"It was necessary for the research, your brain may have rejected the implants and it was necessary to observe the absorption - you are after all amongst the first."

"You did not care that you were hurting me; I read it in your mind." Grailem replies,

the hatred he feels for this woman rising to the surface. His anger reaches into a part of his brain that he had been unaware of; as he feels his mind drifting forward towards the Professor.

Entering her mind is as easy as walking and he senses a damaged area in her brain; it is a tumour that is slowly strangling her blood supply. Finding he has the ability, he helps the tumour do its work by enlarging it and backs out hurriedly from her mind.

Professor Marian Florentia looks at Grailem angrily as she dies silently and slumps to the floor.

Grailem calls the medics on the internal phone who arrive within a few minutes. As they try to resuscitate her one of the medics questions him intently. Grailem looks suitably solemn as he explains that she just passed out in front of him. He explains that she had been telling him of her latest findings and assumed, with a shrug of his shoulders, that the excitement was probably too much for her.

The medic who had been trying to resuscitate her gave up and passes a body scanner over her. The scanner detects the abnormality of the tumour in the brain and Grailem is questioned no more as they carry her away.

Killing the Professor brought a feeling of justice to Grailem, he did not interpret the feeling as pleasure but revenge on someone who had tortured him for so long; did bring a certain amount of satisfaction.

The power of being in control of the life of anyone who crossed him went to Grailem's head. Drunk with power he decides to kill all those who had done him wrong; and any who got in his way.

Needing no weapons and it being nearly midnight, he visited the private quarters of his carers and scientists. Entering each room silently he killed the sleeping forms using fingers that are harder than high pressure cobalt; and arms that had a crushing force of thousands of kilogram's. Killing everyone in the huge laboratory complex Grailem found the biggest obstacles to him were the people with prosthetic limbs and organs; as they could almost match him for strength and agility.

Many of the modified humans were awake when he entered their rooms. The prosthetic limbs that were incorporated into their bodies were powered by their own atomic power supplies. With only the power of thought to operate them, physical demands on the body were slight.

Grailem's first encounter was with a young female, aged about thirty five years. When he opened the door to her room and stepped inside she looked up at him from her work desk in shock and fear. Seeming to know his intention she leapt towards him, fingers shaped into crooked talons. Swiping at Grailem's face with her sharpened nails they embed themselves into his cheek as she tries to pull downwards.

The tough carbon hybrid skin covering his body hold them fast and Grailem grabs hold of her wrist. Twisting it almost casually he snaps the wrist with a sharp cracking sound and the carer screams in pain. Grailem stiffens his fingers and pushes them into her chest, penetrating the heart and silencing her instantly.

Footsteps sound in the corridor outside as scientists and carers, alerted by the screams run towards her room. Stepping behind the doorway Grailem is not seen as four stockily built carers rush in. Seeing the dead woman laying on the floor makes them stand still in horror.

Recognising the four carers as ones who had abused him the worst Grailem shuts the door with a slam. Turning swiftly they face him white with fear.

Jobe, the biggest and cruellest is the first to recover and he rushes at Grailem with clenched fists swinging at Grailem with all his might. Grailem effortlessly catches the oncoming fist in his right hand. Squeezing Jobe's hand he increases the pressure

until the bones shatter and break. Jobe lets out a terrifying scream as the other three carers rush at Grailem.

Surrounding him they start to punch and kick Grailem as hard as they can – intending to kill him.

Grailem feels no pain under the hail of kicks and punches, reaching out he grabs the neck of two of the carers in each hand. With an effortless twist of the wrist he snaps their necks and drops them to the floor.

The remaining carer, now white with fear tries to get out of the door, turning the handle he feels himself pulled backwards as Grailem grabs hold and throws him against the far wall. The carer hits the wall with a mighty thud and slides down onto the floor.

Grailem wants to hurt this man and make him suffer like he had suffered over the years. Leaning forward he rips the carers trousers off and getting hold of the man's small penis he uses his sharpened nails to slice right through it. Throwing the penis down onto the floor Grailem straighten his fingers, positioning them above the area of the bladder with the intention of removing this also and he forms a cold smile at the terrified carer.

Heavy booted footsteps sound in the hall coming in his direction and Grailem assumes it is the security force on the way – who are probably armed. Taking a final look at his terrified victim Grailem turns away and runs at the nearest window. Leaping up he crashes through the window and lands on the ground four stories below.

Scientists and carers run as soon as they see him and soon Grailem finds himself all alone. Turning back towards the laboratory he enters by a side door and searches for the scientists and carers who have hidden from him. Two hours later and after setting fire to the huge laboratory complex as he leaves, he manages to escape in the confusion. Heading for the nearby city he rents a room in a poor section using the money he had taken from his victims.

Chapter Three

His body was a perfect copy of a human's; apart from hair growth, and he found that he could move amongst the population anonymously. The eyes were the only thing that could tell him apart, unless a scanner was used on him. The eyes remained cold and staring, irrespective of whatever emotional state he was in. Grailem purchased a light shaded pair of sunglasses, enough to distort the image of his eyes but not dark enough to make him appear out of place.

Impressed with his strength and ability to easily kill those around him Grailem felt that his rightful position on this planet was to be President. Though he felt immortal and impervious to any form of attack he planned his future moves carefully. The main problem he had come across was those people that were fitted with artificial limbs and body parts. Using the vast computer network that covered the planet he found it easy to locate those who had fully replaced limbs and organs. Medical records on this planet were public knowledge, by accessing the hospital computer banks Grailem was supplied with the information on all operations over the past twenty years – complete with names, addresses, marital status and employment records.

Civilisation had evolved and matured with a heavy reliance on computer technology. Only military information was restricted; including the laboratory and location in the desert where the other human brain experiments were carried out.

Systematically Grailem started to kill those who had the technological and

prosthetic advancements that were most likely to oppose him in the future. Most that he murdered, he created the situation where the death looked accidental or like suicide. Many fought to save their lives and caused extreme damage to their homes – dispelling the theory that it was a suicide.

Grailem knew that his time was running out, in his five day killing spree he had killed nearly ten thousand people making it obvious to the authorities there was a mass killer on the loose. Knowing it was Grailem with his superior abilities and who was able to hide and merge with the population, made catching him almost impossible.

For another three weeks Grailem continued his reign of terror, his confidence in himself and his powers made him feel indestructible. Killing became easy and he admitted, enjoyable. His twisted mind, coupled with the deep hatred he felt for his own species strengthened the genetic alteration with the alien species of wasp.

The mistake the geneticists had made when combining the wasp genes into Grailem's system was that they used the genes of the queen of the species. The queen's objective, being the dominant species on the alien planet, was not only to reproduce, but also to totally dominate the thousands of wasps that also lived in her colony and on the planet. The wasp colony, guided by the dominant queen, invaded nearby wasp and bee colonies. They attacked mercilessly, killing the queen of that colony and as many of the adult wasps and bees that opposed them.

Enslaving the survivors and the important eggs the dominant wasps created a slave culture. Showing almost human intelligence huge cities had built up which the inferior wasps maintained. Waiting on the dominant species life for the lower form of wasps was grim and allowed no freedom.

The genetic make-up of the queen wasp was very similar to humans; only a two percent difference, making it ideal for scientific research. The aggressive dominant nature of the wasp was ignored and considered of no importance.

With the genetics of the alien wasp dominating his thoughts Grailem continued his intended domination of the planet. Being on his own made him stronger, more independent and narrow minded. His one thought was domination of the planet – no other thought entered his head – other than how he was going to kill his next victim.

Killing became easier each time he murdered, this being a peaceful, placid world violence was rare and unexpected. Most of his victims froze with fear when he attacked and accepted his death blows as if they wanted to die. Grailem became complacent and approached the apartment of his final victim with a certain amount of sadness. He had enjoyed killing and hoped that in the future his slaves and servants would rebel against him; so that he could kill again.

Ringing the doorbell to his final victim Grailem waits patiently for the door to open. The door opens showing a small balding man, possibly eighty years of age. Being small, Grailem badly underestimated the man before him called Stoney Brooks. Clasp the man's neck he twists his hand sharply, expecting to break it in one easy snap. Medical records had shown that Stoney had prosthetic arms, legs and heart; but had not shown that his spine was made of a tough titanium alloy.

Stoney Brooks reacts instantly and throws Grailem over his shoulder onto the floor. Running over to the main door he triggers the intrusion alarm which is connected to the main security that covers the building. Stoney fights like a madman using his prosthetic arms and legs; such is the power in his arms he grasped Grailem in a bear hug so tight that it traps Grailem's arms to his side.

The elbows of Stoney Brooks are reinforced with a bulbous formation of titanium and these force themselves into Grailem's elbow joints. The elbow is one of Grailem's weak points and the bulbous titanium locks in causing serious damage to the two main servo-motors that power his arms. Grailem still manages to force his hardened fingers into Stoney's chest, stopping his heart as his servo-motors and safety system shuts down.

All of Grailem's parts are self-renewing but this takes time, the damage to his servo-motors in effect disabled him and his arms become immobile. He hears a hammering on Stoney Brooks' apartment door before it is kicked down a few seconds later. Armed security forces rush in and brutally force him onto the floor. Hand and ankle cuffing him they leave him lying on the floor as they call for back-up.

Aware of Grailem's capabilities and the thousands of people he had killed they tried many ways to kill him. His body, so well built, could withstand gunfire and even missiles. Connecting his body to the main electrical system and pumping five hundred thousand volts through him had no effect. Unable to destroy him, and aware that his self-repairing systems are working they encase him in hexi-plas, a combination of silica and carbon. Flying him to the spaceport the government and security officials remove the expensive satellite system payload that was due to take off and weld him inside the cargo hold. The government quickly blast him into outer space before his system manages to complete his repairs.

The repairs take twenty-four hours as Stoney had fractured both of the energy coils when he held Grailem's arms in his mechanical grip. Though not equalling Grailem's strength, the ball structure of his elbow joints had still managed to fracture the casing of the motors in both arms in his mighty crushing grip.

Regaining the use of his arms Grailem shatters the hexi-plas that surrounds him and tries to gain access to the control room of the rocket. As he had occupied the cargo hold at the front it was necessary for him to remove the reinforced wall that protected the sensitive navigation equipment. Gaining access to the controls proved to be no advantage; as the rocket had been pre-programmed.

Grailem's attempt at overriding the system results in a short circuit that ignites the remaining fuel. The rocket explodes in a ball of flame; the force of the explosion hurtling him into outer space. Due to the increased force provided by the explosion and propelled forward, Grailem was thrown into space at an incredible speed that almost matched the speed of light.

Needing no air or food his immortal body became a prison, a specially designed atomic powered heating system kept his brain at an ambient temperature – keeping him alive and conscious. The need for sleep also diminished, as he used little energy other than sight and thoughts and existence became a boredom of repetitive thoughts. His body, though designed to protect the brain from the rigours of the cold of space, could not propel or slow itself down. For thousands upon thousands, if not millions of years he drifted with only magnetic forces and dust clouds to slow or alter his course.

Keeping sane proved to be the biggest problem; for years he would drift along on a dream world of his own creation. Imagining the friends he never had and a desire to keep them changed his attitude towards the people who inhabited this universe.

The hatred he had felt had diminished and he realised it had been his undoing. The effect of the queen wasp gene had diminished once he found himself in space. With no other creatures to dominate, it had no purpose other than one of waiting for the next opportunity.

If he had not gone on an insane killing spree he would now be happy living with people of his own kind. His superior body and mind would have made him a natural leader and he no longer felt the desire for violence to achieve his aims.

Vowing to his god that he would lead a good life if he met other forms of life he prayed for release.

The release did not come, Grailem prayed for thousands of years in the belief that Good would triumph. Instead, confusion and misunderstanding filled his mind, and belief in a god diminished.

Surely with his improved body and mind and only doing Good a god would have a use for him?

The aimless drifting he had endured and the aimless drifting Grailem was to suffer in the future made him renounce a god; any god. There was no god, if there were, he or she would not have allowed him to suffer like this. The question of why he had been created nearly drives him to insanity.

Anger fills his mind and Grailem escapes his reality and creates a new dream world; one that is built around himself and his power, and where he becomes god and the master of the universe.

The magnetic field of the asteroid pulls Grailem into a tight orbit around it. This proves no great advantage as he cannot escape the magnetic field as the asteroid continues its own slow orbit around a distant sun.

Frustrated to be so close to a solid object yet unable to reach it and already close to madness Grailem utters his first sound in a thousand centuries as he screams. The sound, created by a mechanical device in his throat, expels no air and makes no noise in the vacuum of space; but the sound waves flying into space provide an energy that slightly alters his orbit around the asteroid. The movement is slight, only moving the orbit a quarter of a degree, but it is enough to show Grailem that he can at last move.

Positioning his body he screams like a child until he can feel the magnetic field strengthen as the asteroid sucks him towards it. Grailem's orbit is elliptical around the asteroid and if it wasn't for the atomic clock built into his system he would not have noticed its faint decay. Unable to move himself closer, no matter how much more he screams, Grailem has no choice but to wait for the orbit to decay enough for the gravitational field to finally pull him to the surface.

Chapter Four

Seventy five years later and the asteroid having orbited halfway around the sun, Grailem finally puts his feet onto a solid surface.

After a millennium in space the sensation is intense; even painful to the carefully manufactured sensors built below the prosthetic skin. The sensation brings hope, hope that he has a future other than one of aimless drifting in space.

All he has to do now is think of a way to get off this rock.

The asteroid is an oval shape and has a spin of its own. Spinning slowly it passes through space as it has done since the universe began. Grailem's weight increases the spin as he settles his feet onto the cold rock. Moving forward with the spin he balances on the end of the strange shaped asteroid.

Grailem's weight not only makes the asteroid spin faster it also increases its orbital speed. Moving around the piece of rock he learns that he can exert a certain amount of control over it. Altering its ancient orbit Grailem changes it so that it is aimed directly at the distant sun.

Calculating that he can increase the speed no more, Grailem settles down and waits. The millennia drifting in space had taught him patience and patiently he watches; and waits.

Time passes, even at the speed the asteroid is travelling, the vastness of space envelopes him and it is another fifteen years before he sees any of the planets. The outer planets look cold and inhospitable to him as he drifts past. The long coldness of space had made him wish for warmth; and the heat would also make his systems operate more efficiently.

As the asteroid continues its journey towards the sun Grailem sees his first spacecraft (apart from the one he was put inside). The craft is huge, at least three kilometres long and a kilometre in diameter made of a light absorbing material.

Giving no reflection it appears as a solid black cloud, shutting out the light from the distant stars as it passes him by.

The spacecraft is going too fast for Grailem to be able to intercept it so he calculates its trajectory, back to its source. The spacecraft had come from a large planet that was heading towards him in its orbit around the sun.

Grailem cannot believe his luck; he only needs to make the slightest of orbital changes for the asteroid to intercept the approaching planet. The journey still takes a month of patient waiting before he sees a small spacecraft approaching.

On a collision course with the civilised planet the large asteroid would not completely burn up in the atmosphere. Enough would remain to cause massive damage and the ensuing dust cloud; if it struck dry land, could change the climate for years to come.

The small spacecraft, sent to alter the course of the asteroid was Grailem's way off this rock. Hiding himself in a small meteor crater he considers his best options; if the occupants of the spacecraft see him on the surface of the asteroid they could regard him as a threat. The possibility that at the least they would report their sightings of him to the planet below, make him consider a more devious approach.

Watching the spacecraft land on the centre of the asteroid from his hiding place, Grailem sees large cargo doors being opened. A crane arm appears carrying a three metre tube at the end of its shiny cable. Lowering the cylinder gently onto the asteroid the crane remains stationary as a tall suited humanoid appears at the edge of the craft.

Grailem had been so intent on watching the unloading that he had not noticed the small doorway in the side of the spacecraft. His lips form into an attempt at a smile as he sees the perfect situation for gaining access to the craft. The telepathic part of his brain played an important role in the dream world he had created in his mind and he had worked on improving this ability. His telepathy had matured and grown whilst he floated and dreamed in space and here was the first instance where he could try it out.

The tall humanoid walks to the cylinder and unattaches it from the cable as a companion joins him. Picking up the cylinder between them they walk away from the spacecraft and are soon lost to sight beyond the asteroids small horizon.

Grailem assumes they are going to place the explosive charge in the right position so that it will blast the asteroid into a safer orbit. Realising he may only have a small amount of time he stands and makes his way to the spacecraft. As he approaches it he detects the thought patterns of another humanoid who has remained inside the craft.

Influencing the humanoid's thoughts Grailem persuades him, without the humanoid realising, to think of happy days from his childhood. Lost in happy thoughts the humanoid does not see Grailem approach the craft and climb into the cargo bay. Hiding in a corner and in a safe place for when the crane is returned he patiently waits for the return of the two spacemen who positioned the explosives.

The crane is retracted into the cargo hold and the doors shut before the two humanoids return. Just a few minutes pass after Grailem has settled himself in the corner when the crane starts to move; bringing it in slowly the skilled operator lowers it onto large metal clamps. The clamps grasp the head and body of the crane, locking it into position as the cargo doors close behind it. Now locked in total darkness Grailem feels trapped and claustrophobic. After the aeons floating in space this confined dark area with no stars to see makes him panic.

Regaining control of his emotions he calms himself; simulating deep breathing, the natural reactions of the artificial body help to reduce the stress. An hour passes before the sound of the two spacers entering the craft arouses Grailem from a distant

daydream.

It is another hour before the craft finally takes off and Grailem looks forward to being able to mix with other living creatures again. Learning that direct violence was not the way to gain control, he had re-evaluated his emotions during the drifting in space. Feeling that he had now achieved complete control of his emotions, especially his anger, he still dreams of taking control of the planet he is being taken to.

Hearing the spacecraft engines start up and feeling the faint vibration as the engines course through the hull makes Grailem relax; soon he will be amongst an advanced civilisation. Getting out of the spacecraft unseen will be a challenge; but once past that obstacle he can merge in with the population.

Feeling the craft slowing down relaxes him even more and he focuses on the telepathic part of his brain. Grailem may have to create illusions and control a great many alien humanoids when they open the cargo hold; and he wants to be ready.

The spacecraft lands as slowly as it had taken off from the asteroid showing a high mastery of rocket science. Grailem closes his eyes in the darkness of the hold and listens to the sounds as the engine is shut down. The exiting of the crew appears as noisy as the engine, and soon he is left on his own.

Waiting for over an hour without hearing a sound he slowly forces the cargo doors open. Raising his head above the craft Grailem looks around and seeing that the hangar is empty of people; climbs out of the cargo hold quickly. Jumping down onto the hangar floor he walks towards some offices on the far side of the building.

Searching the offices he finds a pair of red overalls and a pair of hard red plastic type material shoes. Taking off the alien clothes which had survived the journey through space Grailem stands naked. The artificial humanoid body should fit the clothes well and he puts on the pair of bright red overalls.

The overalls do not fit; designed for someone who is over three and a half metres tall the overalls hang over him like an old sack. Using his fingernails, which are razor sharp, Grailem shortens the arms and legs and ties the pieces together, making a belt, which he ties around his waist.

Picking up the shoes he notices that they are many sizes too large, cutting and shortening the front of the shoe and welding the material together by using the compression force of his fingers Grailem feels he is ready. He has made the shoes slightly smaller than he intended and he has to carefully insert his feet so as not to split the material. Walking is not difficult as his legs, controlled by separate power systems would still function even if he had no feet.

Security around the small spaceport Grailem had landed on proved to be non-existent; most of the work of unloading and looking after passengers was taken care of by robots. The people all seemed to average a height of three and a half metres, with a well built muscular body that was mainly a greyish-white. The head was small, more suited to someone who was two metres or less. The large hands were in proportion to the large body which to Grailem's eyes looked artificial.

The robots were all similar in appearance; 'male' and 'female' robots appeared to have come out of the same mould. Made to look like the tall humanoids and appearing to have lived for twenty years by a clever crafting of the skin made them look almost real. The only difference in the robots was hair colour which came in either brunette or blonde. The 'females' are cast the same; appearing in their early twenties and either blonde or brunette. Their clothing is also similar as they wear a uniform of dark blue and purple.

Grailem notices that no security checks are made of the passengers from a flight that has just landed. With the help of robots carrying their luggage they leave the building. Feeling confident in the bright red overalls, though conscious of his short height he by-passes the checking in desks by simply walking past them. Making his way to the main doors he soon find himself outside in the sunshine of this new planet.

Boarding a bus that will take him to the city, the blonde 'male' robotic driver does not even look at him as he takes a seat halfway along the bus. Sitting down he appears a similar height to the other passenger's and finally relaxes and looks out of the bus window. The journey to the city along well designed highways only takes twenty minutes. The vehicles are all driven by the young looking robots and Grailem is impressed by the orderly way the traffic is controlled.

Arriving at the bus depot he gets off the bus with the other passengers as the robotic driver stares straight ahead. The journey from the airport was obviously free and Grailem wonders if this society uses money.

The other passenger's stare at him as he stands on the pavement wondering where to go next. His obvious lack of height is not his only difference from those around him. The tall muscular bodies around him also contains a large stomach which makes the females appear pregnant. If it wasn't for the males to have similar, if not larger stomachs, Grailem would have been convinced he was in the middle of a population explosion.

Eager to get away from the staring people Grailem enters a cafe and sits down as a brunette robot waitress, wearing dark blue and purple approaches; "What will be your pleasure sir?" she asks in a human sounding voice.

Hoping that coffee exists on this planet Grailem asks; "Coffee?"

A mechanical smile forms on the face of the waitress; "Will that be deep grown or solarised?" she asks in an infectious attractive voice.

Grailem does not know what the robot means so replies curtly; "Solarised."

The waitress, unaffected by his abruptness, turns away and walks to the back of the cafe.

Returning about a minute later she puts a large mug of black liquid in front of him. Placing a small bowl of sweetener she portrays her mechanical smile and returns to the back of the cafe. Pouring the coffee into his mouth in one go, that leads to an empty receptacle container, Grailem puts the mug back onto the table and stands to leave.

The robot waitress pays him no mind until Grailem reaches the door where a camera drops from the ceiling and takes his picture; "Thank you for calling, please call again." says the waitress adding her mechanical smile.

Grailem turns his head and looks in her direction trying to cover the irritation of being photographed so soon. Nodding his head in acknowledgement he returns the same cold smile and steps out onto the street.

If this society functioned on personal identification, possibly retina recognition to spend their wealth and money; how was he going to make a living here?

Being mistaken for a humanoid, even though a short one, the robot shop assistants give him everything that he asks for; being photographed at every purchase. Within an hour Grailem, after several adjustments due to his height, had dressed himself in appropriate clothing and felt that he could now pass as a citizen of this planet. Feeling confident he buys three communications platforms and other electronic equipment which attracts no attention.

The only problem he encountered was trying to buy a weapon. No guns or knives, other than kitchenware, was available and after searching for many hours he had been unable to obtain any kind of weapon.

Aware of the surveillance systems in the shops and cafes he had visited he exits a large store to be confronted by twenty armed robots wearing light coloured uniforms and slim safety helmets.

This was not going to plan; he had shopped deliberately as a means of announcing his presence but had not expected such a forceful reaction. He had expected to be approached discreetly by a government official as his videoed picture had obviously not been recognised. With his profile not fitting, Grailem was obviously an alien; and

by all appearances of the armed guards in front of him, not a welcome alien!

Holding his hands above his head, clutching the bag of electronic equipment, he puts the robot police at ease for a split second - which is all the time he needs.

Backing hurriedly into the store before the robots realise his retreat, Grailem turns and runs through the crowd of shoppers and assistant robots to the back of the store.

The robotic police are soon on his tail and follow him into the store. Seeing his retreating back as he steps through a doorway a police robot fires a stun pistol at him. The aim is perfect as the stunning force hits Grailem squarely in the back. If he had been human the blast would have knocked him unconscious, but having no effect upon him he steps hurriedly through the doorway which leads him into a large warehouse.

Running as fast as he can Grailem becomes a blur as he races along the aisles of goods until he reaches the large open warehouse door. Stopping in the huge doorway he looks out at the yard spread before him. Robot handlers load the waiting trucks. A robot is shutting the back door of one of the trucks and Grailem hurries towards it.

The robot workers totally ignore him as they continue their work and he reaches the cab of the loaded truck. Inside a male looking robotic driver with dark hair sits behind the wheel awaiting instructions. Grailem opens the passengers door and climbs in making himself as inconspicuous as possible on the floor.

The robot suddenly springs into life and starts the engine of the truck and drives forward out of the yard. Reaching the main highway the robot continues its fast speed as it fits neatly between two similar robot driven trucks and continues north-west.

Grailem cannot believe his luck; as the escape seemed too easy.

After several hours of driving the robot pulls the truck off the main highway and heads towards a large city in the distance. As the truck reaches the edge of the city Grailem waits his opportunity and jumps out as it is turning a corner. Reaching the pavement in three steps, which is empty of tall humanoids, he walks along in the bright sunshine.

Badly needing somewhere to hole up and prepare for his next moves Grailem looks at the buildings and alleyways. Several streets later he finds what he is looking for; a disused building that stands back from the road. By all appearances the building was a shop many years ago and Grailem walks to the front door. Peering inside through the grubby windows he can see it is empty. Picking the lock is as easy as opening the door and he steps inside and shuts the door behind him without breaking step.

Empty dusty shelves surrounding the interior of the building confirm that this was once a store. Walking to the back of the building Grailem enters the storeroom; which also contains empty dust covered shelves. Peering out of the dirty windows he can see a large empty yard spread out before him.

Forming his lips into a facsimile of a smile, expressing his relief at finding the empty store as this will be the ideal location for him to work. His first urgent priority is to fit some kind of propulsion system to his mechanical body; Grailem has no desire to spend his life drifting helplessly in space ever again.

Chapter Five

A busy month follows as he improves the flaws in his 'perfect' mechanical body and re-designs his defensive mechanisms. Several kilometres from the empty shop an industrial estate containing engineering companies which supplies the materials, lathes and technology he requires. Night time proves to be the best as the

humanoids work a strict day shift and robots are the only occupants.

Meeting humanoids on his way to and fro from the engineering workshops gives Grailem no problems. His telepathic ability has improved a thousand fold and he can easily convince those around him that he is not there. The humanoid minds are easy to control as Grailem has begun to realise – and that they have been under control all of their lives and not been aware of it.

Also built into his artificial body are electrical sensors and Grailem can detect any electronic source from more than fifty metres away. If the sensors had not been fitted, his freedom would have been very brief. Detecting the first two robot guards on the street corner by his sensors gives him sufficient warning; and the opportunity to use a side alley before being seen.

The robot security guards, made from the same mould as the civilian robots, wore a pale white slim fitting safety helmet. A thin shirt and trousers of the same coloured material covers their hard bodies and shiny alloy boots fitted with a soft sole, cover their lower legs and feet.

Being this pale colour tended to make them blend with the surrounding light coloured metal of the buildings, and standing immobile would make them more difficult to see. The security cameras that were placed at strategic points about the city were easy to avoid as the security forces had made no attempt to hide them.

The security on this planet appears excessive as on most street corners robots stand on guard or cameras are fitted. Whoever is in charge here wants to remain that way; and Grailem sees that he will have his work cut out for him for his own plans, for when he is to be in charge.

The control exerted over this planet was not quite complete and by all appearances badly planned; using back alleys and suburban roads he could easily avoid the security robots and electronic surveillance.

Learning from the vast computer communication system that covers this planet Grailem found out that a little over three billion humanoids existed here. This number had been calculated many thousands of years ago as the maximum amount the planet could support.

The planet was divided up into sectors which were all designed to be self-sufficient. In all of these sectors humanoid birth numbers were strictly controlled as food supplies were restricted and too many humans would upset the balance. Anyone producing more than they were allowed in a sector where the restrictions were enforced, had the extra child or children taken away to be terminated. Some sectors where population was high were limited to one child per couple. Other sectors however allowed two or even three children to be born per couple. Fulfilment of the breeding instinct and happiness it seemed depended not only where you lived, but when. It was a harsh rule but Grailem could see the logic in it as it prevented famines and ensured a good healthy population.

Installing a communications platform he had taken from a warehouse to the communications system fitted into the empty shop Grailem connects to the network that covers this world. Who controlled the communications network took many hours of searching due to many false leads. Grailem only comes up with one positive company name; Sirap Communications.

The Managing Director of the company, a large individual called Rames Sirap appeared to rule the company with a rod of iron. A lot of the information Grailem accessed were legal documents dealing with land and property cases relating to the company.

The list of Directors and Managers showed that they all had the name of Sirap and many lawyers who had been involved in these legal cases also have the same surname.

In this perfect world corruption does exist; with control of the planet by one family spells Dictatorship. Amazingly advanced with robots doing the manual labour Grailem wonders why the humanoid population have not rebelled against the family of rulers. Some unfair dismissal cases he came across seemed unusual and appeared to be the only kind of rebellion. These numbers were small only numbering a few dozen in the past one hundred years. With advancement of intelligence comes the natural desire for equality, which appeared lacking in this society; or maybe was severely repressed.

Searching the memory banks on the history of the Sirap company Grailem finds that much of it is either 'unavailable at the present time' or worse; 'The file you have requested is corrupt'.

The only really useful information he can collect on the Sirap Communications Company is that the Managing Director for the last three thousand years has been called Rames Sirap.

Did this mean that the name Rames was passed from generation to generation or was Grailem not the only robot with a human brain? Or was he dealing with a totally different alien being altogether?

As far as he was aware there were only a handful of his kind in existence; and manufacture of more was probably restricted by his killing spree on his home planet. Mankind was shocked by the amount of deaths he had caused and may have modified construction since then; or ceased production altogether.

If mankind had continued with their dream of immortality the future human brain could have been programmed more correctly. Implants of human thought patterns into microchip's had been in an early stage when Grailem had them fitted to his brain. This research would surely have continued, even in secret, and may have even been successful.

During his aimless voyage in space Grailem had lost track of time; he could have been drifting for a hundred thousand or even millions of years. During that time slowly drifting through the cold vacuum, mankind itself may have changed and evolved.

Aware that he may be up against a formidable enemy Grailem incorporates more weapons into his artificial body. He had already put the thrusters into the prosthetic calf muscles to enable him to move about in space. Powered by small atomic motors the thrusters used a source of protons as the propellant; as long as he was in range of a light source, however faint, the motors would continue operating.

Converting the mechanical hands and fingers into energy weapons takes a little longer. His hands and fingers still have to look normal so Grailem makes a life-like looking cap that will fit neatly over the finger tips. The barrels of the new phasers and projectile guns in the fingers are completely covered by the caps and he moves on quickly to the next task.

Fitting a mini grenade launcher into each cheek makes his face look fatter. Aware that he needed to change his appearance he had stolen some black dye and silicone several days ago from an engineering works.

Using the thick black dye to cover his brown hair Grailem does not forget the artificial eyebrows. Packing the cheeks out further with the clear silicone he inserts a large amount under the chin. Giving the appearance of a well-fed humanoid Grailem tries to form a smile; the smile looks false and mechanical and the eyes remain cold. More work would be needed before he can explore this new world.

Several weeks later in his new disguise Grailem approaches the new shiny building of Sirap Communications. Carrying a small black attaché case that holds his burglary kit and enough explosives to reduce the huge building to rubble, he steps through the main doorway.

A smiling female looking robot receptionist wearing the uniform of dark blue and

purple greets him as he enters and asks him to step forward to the identifying scanner.

Grailem is prepared for this and knows scanners are used in all official buildings. Wearing prosthetic fingerprints and retina copies of a communications expert who lay dead at his workshop, he approaches the identifying scanner with confidence. It had been easy to re-shape the face and body to resemble the appearance of the expert, Alexander Finda and Grailem remains calm.

The scanner has a vital flaw in its programming in that it only scans retinas and fingerprints; if it had scanned the entire body or attaché case he would have no hope in carrying out the deception.

Easily passing the scanner test Grailem is shown towards a large elevator, as he steps inside, the receptionist pushes the button for the one hundred and forty fifth floor.

Determined to find out who ruled this planet Grailem had suspicions that it was the main company in charge of communications across the planet. Deciding to test his theory he had offered Sirap Communications a revolutionary device; when incorporated with any communication device it would also transmit all of the transmitted information to Sirap; without the user being aware.

He had forwarded initial plans and was convinced that Sirap Communications would eagerly accept this invention. The invention was not new as it had been created thousands of years ago by mankind. But on this planet Grailem had found no trace of such a device, though he knew that there had to be monitoring in some way. 'His' device had yet to be invented; and would enable complete knowledge and ultimate control of the population.

Stepping out of the elevator he is ushered into an office by a robotic receptionist in the mould of a blonde female wearing the familiar uniform of dark blue and purple. As he steps inside he sees a large table surrounded by smartly dressed executives. Sitting in leather bound chairs they all stare at Grailem expectantly.

The receptionist directs him to the far end of the room where a three dimensional projector stands beside a large white screen. The vague plans he had sent previously to Sirap had been in the three dimensional form. Expecting that such a projector would be available to him he had already prepared the sales pitch and technical details.

"Good morning Mister Finda." greets the grey haired man sitting at the head of the table; "Our company is very interested in your device; if it works as well as you claim."

"Yes it works, but it will involve an upgrade of all of your systems. Along with the device I have also designed a programme which will improve your current systems by at least thirty percent."

Grailem had done his research well on the communications system that controlled the planet. Choosing Alexander Finda was not a haphazard killing as he had learnt the mans' history before adopting his life and personality.

At one time he had been top of his field in binary communications; but getting married to the wrong woman proved to be his downfall. Her promiscuous behaviour broke his heart and he would attend work (which had been Sirap Communications) bad tempered and irritable.

His work colleagues could not work alongside him and one day he lost his temper and struck his senior manager. Violence was rare amongst his species and he lost his job and ended up on the streets.

This civilisation turned its back on those who were socially unacceptable and who did not work. Taking to sleeping in an empty warehouse he was an easy target; and he would not be missed.

Re-building Alexander Finda's profile and assumed companies was far easier than

Grailem thought it would be. Crime being non-existent here on this planet as no one had the reason to behave in a criminal manner with everything being supplied – providing that you worked. Safeguards on the computer networks that covered the planet were easily avoided and Alexander Finda was easily re-established as a prosperous business man.

Grailem was aware that the executives in front of him would be aware of his 'violent' past; but aware that he is an expert in his field. This meeting would not have been arranged if they thought the invention was unfeasible.

Smartly dressed and all politeness, Grailem's appearance and manner seemed to disagree with the computer files. Before presenting the video he swore everyone in the room to secrecy, adding to the intrigue. The installed device no larger than a pin head could easily be fitted to any communications equipment and was undetectable. Incorporated into the device was a device of his own that he hoped would help him understand this planet; and who really did control it.

As Grailem presents his ideas with the help of the three dimensional projector he notices that all those in front of him are 'different'. At first he cannot understand, but the suspicion grows in his mind. As he looks around the room at the executives he notices that due to the glare of the projector many have covered their eyes with a second eyelid.

The bright light of the projector reflecting brightly off the white screen had created an instinctive reaction. Realising that all those before him, though looking humanoid, were in fact aliens is a total surprise.

Some of the aliens breathe at a different rate to humanoids, the breathing being a lot slower. To Grailem it now appeared obvious, and he wonders why he had not noticed it when he first walked into the room. Grailem also wonders what their purpose is for being on this planet; were these the controllers he was looking for?

Finishing the presentation he packs the equipment into a case and prepares to leave; "I will await your decision as you can see the device is unique; and the payment I require is a three-quarter ownership including the appropriate royalties that go with it."

The aliens look shocked at the outrageous demand and not giving them the opportunity to reply he hurriedly leaves the room.

The next day Grailem receives a communication at the false workshop address from Sirap requesting a meeting in two days time. Accompanying the short message is an attachment of a large legal document referring to his demands.

Suspiciously Grailem scans the document and can find no hidden clauses and wonders why they have agreed so easily. Maybe it is their intent to acquire full knowledge of the device (as some information he had kept to himself) and then dispose of him.

Not wasting the two days available to him Grailem visits the spaceport; the large spaceship he had seen from the asteroid had aroused his curiosity. Reported in a news column on the communications network as a colonising vessel voyaging to a distant planet two hundred and ten light years away, did not ring true.

This planet Grailem is on appears to be the perfect Eden as no humanoid (apart from the non-workers) has need of anything. The population of humanoids is spread thinly across the planet and he had witnessed no overcrowding or poverty. The society is also based on the high use of robots to do all the manual work and labour. Able to repair and improve themselves they exist only to serve the humanoids.

Why would anyone want to leave? Though admittedly, most of the people he had seen looked unhappy.

The only reason he could think of was the breeding instinct of the humans. The desire to propagate the species, especially in the females, can be an overwhelming emotion. The harsh population control across the planet would make many want to

leave.

The spaceport built of a bright shiny alloy that appeared superior to the other buildings on the planet is surprisingly small. With no shortage of raw materials the outer planets and asteroids had yet to be fully exploited of their minerals and local space travel was kept to a minimum.

Grailem joins a tourist party and is shown around the entire complex. A large colonising spacecraft is being constructed at the far end of the spaceport. The huge craft has only had the skeleton framework built; but an army of robots was quickly covering it with an outer skin of the light absorbent material.

The robotic guide dressed in a smart dark blue and purple uniform informs the tourist party that the colonising spacecraft would be ready in two months time. The destination would be a newly discovered star system four hundred light years away.

The guide then recited the benefits and advantages of joining the voyage; free land and free robots who would make it habitable and comfortable. The complete freedom the colonisers would acquire would put no restriction on birth control. The destination planet was unoccupied and would be able to allow no birth restrictions for thousands of years. This appeared as the main selling point confirming Grailem's earlier thoughts.

This society had at first appeared perfect; but Grailem was realising that underneath the casual way of life there is a deep unhappiness. The new life offered is a way of fulfilling the breeding instinct and one which can be passed down the generations and is portrayed as the easy path to this happiness.

Chapter Six

Returning back to the workshop Grailem uses the computer network, connecting via an office complex close by, for information on the colonising Starship's. The information is poor as the news media only reported on the actual take-off and destination. Accessing the government computer system he learnt that five colonising Starship's have been leaving the planet every year for the last six hundred and fifty years!

Each colonising craft had carried twenty thousand passengers and fifty crew. Every colonising expedition sent out to inhabit new worlds rarely communicated back its success or failure. The general population had never been informed of this, as each voyage would take many hundreds of years to reach its destination. The passengers and crew put into deep hibernation, would have no family or descendants to remember them and became forgotten.

There were references made of colonising ships reaching their destinations in the news media. These references appeared false as no evidence was ever presented in the reports. Sirap Communications were the main source of these reports, each time saying they had received a transmission from the colonising Starship.

The supposed transmission was never broadcast.

Curious as to who had gone on these colonising expeditions Grailem tries to locate the names of the passengers.

All passenger lists prior to the Starship he had witnessed passing him on the asteroid were 'unavailable at the present time' or 'The file you have requested is corrupt'.

Realising that he may soon get the same answer on the recent Starship he had seen in space Grailem saves the list from that Starship directly into the memory circuitry of the computer platform.

A red message is suddenly displayed across the screen;

'Your activity is considered illegal, security personnel will arrive shortly to remove your equipment.'

Prepared for this possible problem, which was why he had connected his platform to the network via one of the office complexes that housed over five hundred communications platforms. Hoping that security will take time to find the exact communications platform he hastily transfers the information onto a portable binary coded memory board and disconnects the platform before they can get a more solid fix on him.

Grailem connects the platform to two copper wires which have a plug fitted at one end. Inserting the plug into the wall socket he turns on the power. As the power surges into the platform at a thousand times more powerful than the platform is designed for, it blows every circuit and detecting device that is fitted.

Connecting another computer platform (with his own modifications) to the system Grailem is soon back on line pretending to be Finda Communications. Aware that his suspicions of the government monitoring the computer system downloads had been realised he connects this time directly to the communications satellites.

Able now, with his modified platform, to search the system anonymously he tries to trace the history of each person on board the recently departed Starship. Inserting the coded memory board containing the downloaded information on the Starship into this platform he studies the list of names of the passengers.

Several hours later and only a quarter of the way through the list Grailem feels he has found what he needs to know. Of the two hundred and fifty passengers he picked at random whose history he had searched for; only twenty six appeared to have any kind of history!

These twenty six passengers he is able to find their place and date of birth, their school and college reports and their current employment right up until the time of their departure.

The other two hundred and twenty four passengers first appearance on the system is when they register for the spaceflight.

Needing no sleep proved a real advantage as Grailem works through the night. His meeting with Sirap Communications was scheduled for midday and he needed to know much more about this planet than he knew now.

Starting with the mysterious passengers he had a good guess as to their origin. The rule of 'one family, one child' had been law for thousands of years to all of the sectors covering the planet. This being ingrained in society for so long it had become an accepted way of life. The law being that all extra children born are taken from their parents.

Even Grailem's upbringing and subsequent state of mind to this fact still shocks him. Birth control drugs at the present time were in limited use but the price was prohibitive to all but the very rich.

There had been strong objection to this form of birth control when first instigated thousands of years ago. According to the records the planet at the time was heavily overcrowded, food shortages were a real problem and famines were common. Birth control drugs had yet to be discovered and the population had continued to grow.

The solution, though drastic, proved over the centuries to be the right one as the population decreased to a level the planet could sustain. The result was sufficient food and comfortable living for everyone.

The centuries passed peacefully until the population was recorded at a little over three billion; and had been ever since. A new radical government had come into power when the population reached this figure and now dictated the old Draconian laws. Quoting the famines and food shortages of the past they reinforced these laws by using security and military robots to enforce them. The result was more severe restrictions and a continuous flow of young babies being born and taken away by the un-emotional robots for 'disposal'.

Finding where the babies were taken proved another dead end on the system with the messages; 'Information unavailable' or 'File corrupt' whenever Grailem tries to follow them from their assumed place of birth.

The governments 'Population Control Department' appeared to be the only source of information, and they were not saying anything. Their address is only a few kilometres away from Sirap Communications and looking at the time he sees that he only has two hours until the meeting. The government department would need a night time visit, which Grailem hoped for later.

Quickly changing the casual clothes for a tight fitting black suit he packs his briefcase and calls for an auto cab. The cab arrives in a few minutes and Grailem instructs the robot driver to take him to a large shopping plaza that is close to Sirap.

The drive takes about forty minutes amongst a mass of orderly vehicles all driven by robots. The auto cab passes modern metal buildings as it enters the city that look newly made, many have tall shiny spires that reach up to the sky, each one competing to be higher than its neighbour.

After a slow drive through the maze of streets once in the city, the cab pulls to a stop directly outside a crowded shopping plaza. Opening the door Grailem gives no acknowledgement to the robot driver as he gets out of the vehicle. The door shuts automatically behind him as he walks casually across the sidewalk and enters the huge collection of buildings.

Walking past the brightly lit shops he immediately makes his way to a side exit that will take him back onto the street; and in the direction of the Population Control Department. Aware of the shortage of time he hurries along the street until he approaches the Department building.

Slowing down as he gets nearer, Grailem casually walks slowly past the futuristic looking building. Security is lax, which is expected and there are only a few robot guards standing inside the foyer. Making his way along the side of the building he looks for a side entrance. The huge wall of the building stretches before him; with no sign of a doorway and the windows are two metres above his head.

Walking to the back of the building Grailem sees that it is busy with robots as they unload supplies from several huge trucks. Curious as to what the supplies are he walks directly to the nearest truck and looks at the boxes; some are labelled as 'Stationary' whilst others are labelled; 'Medical Supplies', 'Medicine' and 'Baby Food'.

The robots totally ignore him as he is by all appearances humanoid, and they continue with their unloading. Following the consignment marked 'Baby Food' Grailem keeps close to the motorised craft. The robot driver drives slowly along a long corridor until he turns right through some double doors.

Holding back Grailem peers into the room the robot has entered; it is a children's ward holding about fifty babies and young children; from the age of three months to possibly one year of age.

Having no need to enter the ward as he had learnt some of what he came for, he casually walks out of the rear exit.

Walking back around the side of the building Grailem joins the throng of humanoids (one couple, one child in this sector) and robots as they walk along the path.

Looking at the time he sees that he still has a good thirty minutes before his appointment giving him time to look around the area. Approaching the Sirap Communications building he looks up at its enormous height. Reaching higher into the sky by at least twice as much as its neighbours the building dominates this part of the city.

Tall shiny metallic towers crowd around a large central tower that appears to touch the sky itself. The enormous structure is impressive and Grailem wonders if robots had been the main construction workers, as the workmanship is of the highest

quality.

Grailem walks along the side and to the rear of the building staring upwards as he walks. As he turns the corner an armoured guard, carrying a phaser rifle steps out before him.

"Can I help you sir?" he asks in a polite voice.

Grailem looks at him and sees that he is wearing body armour and he also has a phaser pistol in a worn holster on his right side; and strangely he is humanoid.

"Hi" Grailem smiles; "I have an appointment with the Director's in a few minutes. I could see no security outside and wondered where you were. Are there more of you stationed around the building?" Grailem continues in as pleasant voice as he can muster. The sudden appearance of the armed guard had caught him unawares; and this is the first humanoid guard he had seen who was armed. Looking around he could see no other guards; "Looks like you are alone, why are you armed?"

"Orders sir, from the Director of the company."

"Are you Rames Sirap's personal bodyguard?" Grailem asks curiously, using his empathetic ability to calm the guard as he reaches into his mind.

"Yes sir, I am." the guard answers automatically. Realising he is neglecting his duties, even with Grailem's telepathic influence he finally asks; "Who are you sir; and what are you doing here?"

Grailem smiles reassuringly at the guard; "My name is Alexander Finda, and as I said I have an appointment soon with your Director's. I came around here to admire this wonderful building, seen from the rear they can look so different. The front of the building is usually expensively made whereas the rear can be totally different."

Looking upwards as if to prove this explanation he continues; "But how wrong I am about this building; the rear of the building appears to have much more character. Look at that group of seven spires that sit on top of the rear extension." he enthuses as he points up at a two hundred and fifty story extension that had been added to the building at a later date. The spires gleam in the weak sunlight as if they are made of blue crystallised platinum.

Caught up in the enthusiasm the guard is also impressed with the huge building and is eager to co-operate; "Yes that extension was built about twelve years ago as that is the Director's private area. They use this rear entrance to come and go; which is why it looks better than the front." he finishes with a broad smile.

Susceptible to his telepathic suggestions Grailem suggests to the guard to lead him to the building. Feeling at ease and unaware of Grailem's influence upon him the guard leads him to the rear entrance; "I will leave you here sir." he says as the door opens automatically at their approach.

Grailem holds out his right hand out for the guard to shake.

Looking surprised the guard transfers his phaser rifle to his left hand and shakes it firmly; "Has been a pleasure sir, if you need me I will be here for you."

"Thank you." Grailem replies with a smile; his empathetic ability had gained a certain amount of control over the guard which the guard had been unaware of and he was not surprised at his offer of loyalty; "We must get together and swap life stories." Grailem laughs as he lets go of the guards hand and enters the building.

The telepathic and empathetic control he had accomplished over the guard had been his first real test of this ability. Pleased with his success he walks across the thickly carpeted foyer and approaches the shiny metal counter.

A robotic receptionist set in the mould of a brunette, dressed in the dark blue and purple uniform as the guide at the spaceport, welcomes Grailem with a 'Good Morning' and now familiar mechanical smile and waits for him to state his business with that infuriating patience that robots possess.

Aware that the negative thoughts about the robot in front of him is a sign of stress Grailem calms his nervous mind before speaking. Introducing himself as Alexander Finda the female robot directs him towards a security scanner. Passing the scanner

test easily Grailem is shown into a large plushly decorated elevator. This elevator is a lot different from the one he had used before when he entered the building from the front. This was obviously the Director's elevator as it has a wash basin with clean towels hanging by the side. A large viewing screen is fixed to one wall on top of soft velvet patterned wallpaper.

Pushing one of the three buttons on the panel the robot receptionist steps out of the elevator as the doors slide shut. The journey upwards, to the one hundred and forty fifth floor, Grailem assumes, only takes a few minutes.

As the elevator doors slide open Grailem can see that the corridor before him is lined with security and police robots. All armed with a phaser rifle and phaser pistol they make no acknowledgement of his presence as they stare directly in front of them.

Cautiously stepping out of the elevator Grailem has no choice other than to walk forward. The robots appear to ignore him until he has passed twenty robots, ten on each side; which places him directly in the middle of them. Realising he has been trapped, Grailem is not surprised when he feels his arms grabbed from behind by a robot on either side.

The grip on his arms is as tight as a mechanical vice and carrying on the pretence of being humanoid Grailem does not try to break free. The robots obviously think otherwise and several rush towards him to secure him further. Spitting a grenade from his right cheek at the robots advancing towards him he lifts his right arm and throws the robot holding it after the grenade. The one on the left quickly follows and he turns and runs back towards the elevator.

The remaining robots that lined the corridor now block the way and Grailem spits two grenades in their direction. The force of the exploding grenades, designed so that the blast would be directed forward, knocks them all to the floor. Five of them do not move but the remaining three try to stand upright. Not giving them the opportunity he swings his hardened hands in a karate style chop at their necks, snapping them instantly.

Reaching the elevator doors he pushes the 'Down' button and the doors obediently slide open. Stepping quickly inside Grailem pushes another button and manoeuvres more grenades from his throat into his cheeks. Removing the caps from his fingers he puts them in his pocket and opens his attaché case.

Taking out an electrical distortion energy pistol he shuts the case and turns and faces the doors of the elevator. Turning the pistol on, the familiar hum of the splitting atoms helps him relax, and he prepares for the welcoming committee that will be waiting for him when the doors open.

The elevator continues down quickly and smoothly comes to a stop. Grailem hopes that the passive humanoids that inhabit this planet have influenced the robotic security force into thinking that he will be the same. They will not be expecting violence immediately from him; giving Grailem that split second he will need.

As the elevator doors slide open he steps forward and pushes the barrel of the energy pistol between the doors as soon as the gap is large enough. The pistol is set on a wide spread of energy release and he presses the trigger before he sees his targets.

The foyer is packed with security robots that immediately fall to the floor as their circuits become disrupted by the energy blast. The pistol expels an energy force that short circuits every electrical circuit within fifty metres; except for his own shielded electrical system. Calmly he steps over the immobile robots and walks towards the exit.

The exit doors are operated by electricity and remain firmly shut, punching the large glass panel of the door hardly slows him down as he steps outside. More security has arrived and forty fully armed robots stand in an orderly line blocking his escape.

Casually Grailem points the pistol towards them and watches them fall to the ground like skittles as he pulls the trigger. Still set on a wide beam most of the energy

covers the security robots disabling them instantly. The energy also passes them heading for the busy street ahead. Affecting the vehicles and all other robots it touches the energy blast shuts down the passing vehicles and disables the robot driver. The noise of crashing vehicles fills the air as he runs towards one of the collisions.

The driver and vehicle have short circuited filling the vehicle with an acrid burning smell. To Grailem's nose detectors the escaping gas and smoke particles are poisonous and will reach a dangerous level within a few seconds.

Peering in at the frightened passengers he sees a well dressed middle aged woman clinging to her young daughter in absolute terror. Staring wide-eyed at Grailem, her face ashen she opens her mouth as if to speak. Breathing in the acrid smoke she starts to cough uncontrollably and Grailem rips the door of the vehicle off and throws it to the ground. Reaching in he gently grasps the woman's arm, and with her daughter still clinging onto her tightly Grailem pulls them from the vehicle.

Sitting them gently onto the roadway the woman clutches Grailem's arm; "What are you? I saw the way you ripped the door off its hinges, only a robot has that strength – yet you are not a robot." she asks, the fear in her voice raising it several octaves.

Grailem enters her mind soothing and calming with empathetic feelings and thoughts. Suggesting that what she saw was an illusion, an exaggeration of what she actually saw works well and the woman smiles up at him in embarrassment.

The traffic is at a standstill and the humanoids stare at him curiously. There are far too many people for him to influence using empathy or telepathy and he walks away quickly, trying to lose himself amongst the throng of humanoids and robots that crowd the pedestrian pavement.

After about a kilometre of fast walking he turns off the main street and follows a narrow path between two multi-spired skyscrapers. The narrow path between them restricts the horizon around him and he looks up at the clouds scurrying past. It is cooler in the shadow between the two buildings and the path stretching out before him appears deserted and unused.

Breaking into a run Grailem speeds along as if the devil himself is chasing him. Arriving at the rear of the buildings a few seconds later he turns left to take him further away from Sirap Communications. The rear of the building is a huge car park that is full of military type trucks and vehicles.

Getting out of several of the trucks a stream of pale suited security robots with shiny knee high boots advance quickly towards him. Surrounding him they form a circle five metres in diameter and point their phaser rifles at his head. Cursing his slowness Grailem drops the energy pistol onto the hard concrete surface of the car park and raises his hands above his head. During the few brief seconds it takes for the robots to surround him the trucks had continued their unloading of even more security robots.

Grailem estimates that he is now surrounded by several hundred security robots that are all heavily armed; and they all seem eager to use their weapons. This apparent eagerness to inflict pain upon him, or even kill him, shows they have a flaw in their programming, not that that is going to help him here.

Mankind had tried to integrate emotions with robots many times in the hope of achieving immortality, and met with failure at each attempt. For a robot to possess any emotion it had to have its independence and also a certain amount of freedom of thought. Having self awareness, logic and a superior body and mind, the desire that their human masters not harm themselves turned them into jailors.

Any food substance that could cause harm; like high sugar sweets and fatty foods were banned by the robots. Mankind's health did improve with no intake of harmful substances and the newly governed form of life was fully embraced. Within a few short decades Man, realising his freedom was becoming more and more restricted

started to rebel.

The cause of the rebellion had many reasons; boredom being the main factor. Much of the food that Man had consumed contained harmful substances, that when eaten in large quantities can cause problems – even death. Man had learnt to consume only small amounts to maintain variety and obtain vital minerals.

The logical mind of the robot, or more importantly the computer network that controlled them, failed to understand this. Nutmeg was the first to be banned and this was followed a few hours later by the banning of salt. The computer network refused to accept Man's need for salt and no amount of input would alter its decision.

Realising that the computer and its dominion of security and military robots ruled their world Mankind started to plan rebellion. The main computer, being self aware had created a force field around its main memory banks. No humanoid or robot could approach it beyond a five metre radius without being pulverised.

Mankind did not give up and started to group together, many of the ancient arts of metalworking and creating explosives had been forgotten centuries ago. The main computer restricted library access to all military information forcing Mankind to create new weapons.

Aware of the movements of the humanoid's under its control the main computer tightened its grip further by restricting all travel. Assuring the people by telecast that it was working to improve Man's safety in life travel would now become fully automated. Travel would be controlled by a new computer system and independent robots (Mans' high accident record while travelling, due to tiredness or lapse of concentration caused death many times) would now operate all vehicles and transport.

With travel now being restricted and Man's final grasp of freedom now lost made every living humanoid on the planet to finally rise up in rebellion against the robot enslavers. The robots were no match for the angry humanoid's as they had all been originally programmed not to cause any harm to Man. Easily destroyed all robots in the future were constructed with no ability to possess any emotion. Only able to serve, the idea that Man could be fully integrated with a robot body was born. The quest for immortality continued in laboratories across the planet and Grailem, and others like him, had become the new hope for Mankind.

Chapter Seven

The robots surrounding him easily outnumber him; there are far too many to take on. The energy pistol at his feet does not have enough charge to take care of this amount of hostile robots. The converted fingers containing phasers and projectile weapons would also be insufficient as would the remaining grenades in his cheeks.

Surrendering gracefully he allows the robots to escort him to a large armoured truck. Pushing him inside six armed robots follow Grailem in as the door is locked from the outside. Sitting either side and in front of him the robots stare and watch his every move. They do appear to possess independent thought as several adjust themselves to what can only be described as a more comfortable position, almost as if their rear ends hurt. The robots are still operating under orders as they record his every move with mounted shoulder cameras. Assuming his image is being transmitted Grailem keeps still, fully aware that the robots surrounding him are controlled by some one or some thing that he has yet to meet.

Gloomily Grailem stares down at the bright metal floor of the armoured truck; whoever was in charge of this planet seemed to know all about him. The army of security robots used to capture him showed they did not underestimate his

capabilities, and possible threat.

The truck drives through the city to a large industrial area and parks at the rear of a large steel clad building. The rear doors of the truck are opened and Grailem steps out amongst more than fifty security robots. All pointing their phaser rifles at him they escort him into the building and along a darkened corridor to waiting humanoid security guards.

The humanoid security guards do not search him as Grailem uses his telepathic powers on them; suggesting to them that they had already searched him and found he was unarmed, they allow him to pass with blank expressions on their faces.

Escorted along the corridor Grailem, confident in his growing telepathic ability tells the robots either side of him that they have no need to hold so tightly. Instantly he feels their grip loosen until they are only supporting the weight of his arms. Grailem tries a few robots ahead of him and gets them to bump into each other as they walk. Assuring them the floor is unstable they return to their orderly march, appearing not to notice his influence. Approaching the end of the long corridor a large riveted steel door, firmly shut bars their way. One of the lead robots activates a small hand held device and the door opens wide and Grailem is pushed inside and the door closed firmly behind him.

The room; obviously a prison cell, has one tiny window of reinforced glass, a single bed against one wall, and a latrine in the corner. The cell appears to be made of a reinforced alloy, Grailem assumes that the faint fibres interwoven into the metal are carbon nanotubes; increasing the alloys strength a thousand times.

Even with these extra security precautions he is unconcerned; he could break out of here in a few seconds if he wanted to.

Thinking about the behaviour of the robot guards Grailem wonders if he would be able to take full control. The independence 'flaw' in the programming of the robot security force did make them susceptible to any input around them as he had proved in the corridor. The ability to think for themselves and to come to a decision and act on it independently had made them easily susceptible to his suggestions and even his orders.

Aware that he is putting his life in danger by staying in this cell, Grailem is more curious as to how he was discovered - and caught so easily. If he were to escape it would probably be to no advantage; as they had appeared to know his every move.

Confident in the strength of his artificial body; which he had reinforced whilst here on this planet, Grailem felt more confident in winning his next battle with the security robots; providing there were not hundreds of them. The damage to his arms caused by Stoney Brooks had been remedied; along with the reinforcing shielding around the servo-motors that powered his arms Grailem had reinforced the casing around every servo-motor his body possessed.

The indestructible body was now even more indestructible and would be no match for the security robots; no matter how many there were; providing he had enough fire-power. Sitting down on the hard bed Grailem carries out a routine diagnostics test on his body. Ensuring that all systems are working perfectly and the power supplies are fully charged he sits and waits.

Several hours pass before the cell door is unlocked and a robot enters carrying a tray of food and water. Putting the tray onto the floor a metre inside the door the robot backs out and shuts the door behind it.

Grailem stares at the tray in total confusion; surely his captors know what he is? The amount of robot security that was sent to capture him and the way he was treated had proved that; or so he thought. The tray of food must indicate they consider him to be humanoid; yet why the amount of security? And this place is certainly not police headquarters.

Looking around the cell Grailem cannot see any security cameras; which does not mean there are not any. For appearance sake he walks over and picks up the tray. Returning to the bed he places the tray on his knees and starts to eat the strange looking food that is offered. A bowl of gruel, which his taste buds indicate is comprised mainly of vegetable matter, is full to the brim. The dry bread that accompanies the gruel is hard and tasteless, dipping the bread into the gruel Grailem pretends to chew it and swallow it down.

Consuming all the food and water he returns the tray to the exact position where the guard had placed it on the floor.

No more than two minutes pass before the cell door is opened and the robot guard retrieves the tray and walks out of the cell shutting the door behind it.

So; he is being watched after all!

Using the latrine when a suitable time had past Grailem hoped they did not examine his excreta; much of what he had consumed would be undigested, only broken down by the action of the rubberised stomach muscles. Pretending to sleep by lying on the bed and remaining motionless when night falls, he arises at dawn uses the latrine and waits for breakfast.

Breakfast is brought in by the same robot security guard and placed one metre inside the door before it retreats, shutting the door behind it. Grailem goes through the motion of eating the same gruel and bread and washes it down with the cup of water.

Replacing the tray back in the same position the robot security guard soon enters and retrieves the tray.

This routine continues for two weeks, trying his patience to the limit, and he is grateful for the 'space training' and can drift into a dream world to avoid the madness.

It was in the afternoon of the fourteenth day when the door is finally unlocked and a small humanoid dressed in a dark coloured suit enters the cell. Carrying a small attaché case he stands a metre inside the door as it is closed and locked behind him.

Grailem sits up from his position of lying on the bed and stares at the suited man curiously.

"Good afternoon Mister Finda, my employer apologises for the delay in keeping you here but searching your premises took time. My employer is curious about some of the equipment you have constructed; as much appears to have no purpose."

"A lot of what I am making is unfinished." replies Grailem in a calm helpful sounding voice.

The suit looks at him strangely, obviously expecting hostility or even aggression, Grailem's calm answer unnerves him; "My employer would like the purpose of these devices explained to him before completion. How you came to arrive on this planet is also a question my employer wishes to ask; and to how you obtained your identity." he asks, the fear he feels raising his voice several pitches and he closes his mouth hurriedly.

Keeping a calm expression on his face Grailem gives the suit opposite him a wry smile as he answers; "Your employer seems to want to know a lot; yet I know nothing about you - or your employer."

"I apologise for not introducing myself; I am called Raymond Sirap."

Memory returns to Grailem and the meeting with the Director's and Executives; he can remember the one standing before him now as being at the far end of the huge table from Rames Sirap. Obviously a low ranking family member he would have been presented with this opportunity as being an honour to interview the alien called Alexander Finda. The possibility that their captor could turn violent, showed to Grailem that the man before him was considered dispensable.

Grailem looks more closely at the being in front of him; by outward appearances he is all human but closer inspections reveals the second eyelid and artificial skin

covering his face and hands.

"I remember you, you attended my demonstration of the security device I had invented. I hope you liked the demonstration?" asks Grailem in the same friendly manner.

"Yes, we found it most informative; except for the parts you did not tell us."

"Parts - What parts?" Grailem asks innocently.

"Your premises have been thoroughly searched and several thousand of your devices were discovered. We have examined these devices in our laboratory; using X-rays, electronic microscopes and have even resorted to mass spectrometry; and your devices keep their secrets well."

Grailem shrugs his shoulders and continues to stare at Raymond Sirap's eyes.

Feeling uncomfortable under the cold unemotional steely gaze he hurries on with his questioning; "We need to know what these devices are for; and how you made them. Mass spectrometry results showed that the tiny spheres, which were encased in a titanium mixture, appear to contain a complicated binary circuit. Would you care to elaborate Mister Finda?" Raymond Sirap asks politely.

"Not all the time that you keep me locked in here as a prisoner." Grailem answers curtly.

Raymond Sirap is surprised by the strength and determination in his voice and upright posture; "You have committed a lot of crimes since you arrived on our world. Your arrival was undetected and is considered a serious threat to the security of our planet. Until you tell us how you arrived, your stay here will be a long one." replies Raymond Sirap as he turns and taps on the cell door.

The door is immediately opened and Raymond Sirap walks out of the cell without a farewell or backward glance.

Grailem feels frustrated by the brief interview as it did not tell him how they had located him and the workshops. The only solution he could think of is that all of the population is micro chipped; and the photograph taken at the cafe and shops takes more than his visible image. By telling the suit that the devices they found in his workshops would need months to complete, he hoped might deter them from looking further.

Their examinations of the devices would continue to prove useless as each one had a casing of titanium combined with a radiated form of a lead compound. His devices would appear mainly as solid objects and their circuitry remain a mystery. The components could only be determined by mass spectrometry which analysis's the chemical formula as it destroys the object. The result would be a collection of elements in varying degrees of quantity; how they fitted together would be hard to determine.

The mystery was why they had allowed him so much time before arresting him? If the surveillance was as good as it appeared they would surely know about his artificial body. The appearance of the regular meals showed their surveillance was not that good. Which means he could avoid it now more than he had done before.

The body of Alexander Finda was buried under the floor of one of the outbuildings and he would unlikely be found. If he had a microchip inserted into his body it appeared that it no longer functioned, maybe the electrical power of the living body kept it activated.

Or maybe there was no microchip at all.

Grailem wracks his brain for alternatives; Sirap Communications had over one hundred and fifty satellites in orbit around the planet. The planet's only moon also possessed communication equipment owned by Sirap. The power source that would be available on the moon would provide more than enough power for simple communications equipment.

It is certainly a possibility that surveillance of the planet is carried out from the moon; along with the help of a few satellites when it is out of 'line of sight'. The more

he thinks about it the more he becomes convinced that he is right; the power available would be more than enough to power a high resolution camera. With an eye in the sky that would have a focus that could count the blades of grass on a lawn is certainly a possibility.

Chapter Eight

He waits, patient as ever and waits for his jailors next move.

Twenty eight hours pass with no food or water and Grailem is left totally alone. The door to the cell is finally opened and two military type robots enter. These robots are built differently to the other security robots; they are both covered in thick armour plating. The armour looks to be twenty five millimetres thick and is composed of a strong black carbon.

Standing two metres tall and a metre wide their thick limbs make them look like they are designed for heavy construction, rather than security.

His captors consider him to be humanoid; and with having no food or water for twenty eight hours should have put him in a weakened state. The presence of the two huge robots seems totally unnecessary and Grailem wonders if there is a more sinister motive. Attempting to starve him showed that torture was not beyond their thinking.

Not giving them the opportunity to test out his theory Grailem attacks; standing quickly he extends both arms and grasps each robot around the thick neck. With an almost effortless ease he flexes his fingers and pulls each of the robots heads off. Stepping out of the cell as their bodies fall to the floor he shuts the door quietly behind him.

The corridor is empty and wasting no time he runs along it and turns the corner at the end. A security robot raises its phaser rifle at him but Grailem is on it before it has time to activate the weapon. Knocking it aside with a swing of his arm the robot hits the wall so hard it breaks into pieces. A security alarm screams filling the corridor with high pitched sound, not slowing down Grailem makes his way to the exit and reaches it in a few seconds.

Ten security robots stand in front of the exit all with phaser rifles raised; seeing Grailem they all open fire. His automatic defensive screen instantly surrounds his body in an electrical field protecting his body from the phaser blasts. Continuing to fire their phasers, the energy blasts dissipated by the electrical field surrounding him, shows the robots that their weapons are ineffective, but it makes no impression on their neural circuits; and the security robots continue firing. Grailem feels it is time to test out one of his new defence designs.

Activating his re-designed repelling shield, a field of activated neutrons replaces the electrical field that surrounds his body. The activated neutron field repels the power from the phasers – directing it back to its original source causing each phaser rifle to explode. The rifles explode violently blasting apart the security robots holding them and Grailem hurries out of the main exit.

The parking area in front of the building teems with security robots alerted by the alarm. Not as prepared as the security robots inside, most have their phaser rifles hanging over their shoulders in the correct military fashion. Standing in formation in lines of forty or more they block the way out of the parking area.

Grailem breaks into a run; running so fast he appears a blur as he runs through the guarding robots. His movements are so fast the robots have no time to un-shoulder their weapons before he is out onto the roadway. Overtaking the vehicles travelling along the road Grailem runs as fast as he can. This part of the city is unknown to him but he can see in the distance, maybe five kilometres away a spired building he

recognises.

Heading for the building is the only choice as it is close to the area of his workshops. He remembers that only a few kilometres from the workshops are the city's sewage treatment works, surrounded by a small woodland, it offers a good means of escape from the eyes in the sky. If Grailem is correct, satellites above him are following his every move and he needs to get underground. The treatment works have multiple pipes leading into it from the city and should provide the ideal hiding place.

Running at nearly two hundred kilometres an hour he soon reaches the sewage works and runs quickly over to the mass of shiny metal pipe work that is pouring out its unsavoury load. Hardly slowing down he runs over to the pipes and dives into one that is not disgorging so much waste material.

Finally having to slow down Grailem has to crouch on all fours as the pipe is only a metre in diameter. Running forward using his arms and legs until he estimates he is about eight kilometres from where he first entered and he finally stops.

Grailem had kept to one of the main metal discharge pipes as it was the easiest route. The pipe had no internal lighting and was in total darkness, though this made no difference to his night vision adapted eyes. Many side channels lead into the main pipe work and crawling slowly forward he looks for one that is rarely used. A half a kilometre further on Grailem finds what he is looking for and crawls inside a pipe made of stone and concrete.

The excreta that lines the bottom of the pipe has the consistency of soft clay with the top few millimetres dry and cracked. Still on all fours he makes his way slowly along the sewage pipe, his hands and lower legs sinking into the excreta. Crawling along for about another one and a half kilometres he finally arrives at the inlet. A cluster of twenty pipes, fifteen centimetres in diameter, stand ready to pour their contents into the chamber he is standing in.

Confident he has avoided any surveillance Grailem climbs a small ladder that leads up to an alloy metal cover. Reaching the cover he listens to the sounds outside; apart from a gentle breeze all appears quiet. Gently raising the cover enough to see the surroundings Grailem finds himself in a small courtyard that is surrounded by large derelict buildings. The buildings look old and are made of large concrete bricks that are slowly crumbling away.

Replacing the sewage cover he climbs down the steps and crouches inside the concrete pipe work. Feeling secure under the concrete shielding he runs a systems check on his temperature control system. All is working perfectly, if the observations of him were made by optics or heat sensors he would be able to adjust his temperature to the surroundings; and remain unseen in the darkness.

Needing to get to the workshops, or more importantly the body of Alexander Finda, Grailem patiently waits for night to encompass this side of the planet.

Waiting an hour after darkness falls he climbs the ladder and removes the sewage cover. Adjusting his body temperature to the outside air Grailem crawls slowly out of the sewer pipe. Seeing a crumbling exit at the rear of the courtyard he walks over to it slowly and peers into the darkness beyond. The moon is just rising, held in partial eclipse by the planet as it rises, and he looks around as the moon becomes obscured by low cloud.

Beyond the crumbling buildings a large industrial estate made of modern metal clad buildings greets his gaze. Recognising the estate as one that is near to the estate that houses his workshops a mechanical smile appears on his face. Pleased with his navigating skills and keeping close to the buildings Grailem slowly makes his way to the workshops.

Approaching from the rear he can see a line of security robots surrounding the main buildings. The outbuilding where he had buried Alexander Finda remains unguarded and he circles around and approaches the outbuilding without being seen.

The door is unlocked and Grailem steps inside quietly shutting the door behind him.

Lifting up several of the large slabs of stone that cover the floor he pulls Alexander Finda's body out of a deep hole. Using the electrical sensor that are fitted to the rear of his hands he scans the body for any electrical activity.

As expected, detection of any electrical charge is zero. Adjusting the sensors to detect any metal contained within the body Grailem carefully scans it again. Checking all the obvious places first; the back of the neck, the arms and legs and with no success he turns his attention to the main trunk of the body. This also proves negative and as a final check Grailem examines the skull with little hope. The skull is covered only by a thin covering of skin and nerves and head of hair and would prove uncomfortable to have some kind of device inserted.

Scanning the face, especially the cheeks he moves methodically over the skull, as he scans the top of the skull the sensors detect metal. The metal consists of a mixture of copper, platinum and traces of what would be considered on his home planet as rare earth metals.

Permitting himself another mechanical smile of satisfaction he can now see a way of travelling on this planet undetected. It would be a simple matter of once again adopting someone else's life; but now with a transceiver active and positioned on top of his head.

Needing no food or water and impervious to the germs and diseases that live in the sewage system Grailem explores his new 'home'. All of the newly formed alloy pipe work is exactly one metre in diameter. This forces him to explore the new surroundings crawling on all fours. He does not mind as any form of locomotion after the aeons drifting in space gives a certain amount of pleasure as he can now control his movements and go wherever he wants to.

For several months Grailem remains underground learning the maze of sewer pipe work. Locating nearly all of the security buildings that are situated around the city he had also located his next victim; a technician who worked in a computer assembly plant at an industrial estate on the other side of the city.

The technician, called Martin Maseeve, lived alone in an apartment block close to his place of work. Grailem had studied him carefully and felt confident he could be his replacement. Working in the computer assembly plant was vital to Grailem's needs; he had made many improvements to his systems at the industrial estates and needed the computer technology to improve them even more.

Using the sewer systems he was able to move freely around the industrial areas and using their equipment like before, he improved his armaments and protective shielding. Grailem had badly underestimated this planet's security and would need to employ more special equipment to avoid further detection; which is why he chose Martin Maseeve.

Lifting the sewage cover slowly Grailem peers around the darkened room; he had come up in the basement of the huge building Martin Maseeve lived in and all is quiet. Lifting himself out of the sewage pipe he replaces it quietly, reaching into a bag he is carrying he pulls out a pair of light blue overalls and puts them on over his naked smelly body.

Making his way up the service stairs he reaches the floor of his victim. Peering out of the emergency exit the hallway before him appears empty of people and robots. Stepping softly across the hall Grailem makes his way to Martin Maseeve's apartment. Hardly slowing down he turns the handle of the door and pushes it open; the door is unlocked - crime being non-existent here.

The apartment is empty, Martin is working at the factory and should arrive home in fifteen minutes time. Sitting down in a comfortable armchair Grailem patiently waits for him to return.

Fifteen minutes later the front door is noisily opened. Getting up out of the seat Grailem walks into the kitchen as the door is opened and Martin Maseeve walks in. Taking off his jacket he hangs it on a shiny metal hook. Looking tired Martin walks into the kitchen and hardly feels the blow to the back of his head Grailem gives him. The blow is hard but directed at the part of the head that will render him immediately unconscious.

Grabbing hold of his arms Grailem carries him out of the kitchen and places him in the armchair he was sitting in earlier. Tying his arms and legs and putting a gag in his mouth satisfies Grailem that his victim will not be able to struggle or cry out. Retrieving his bag which contained the overalls he reaches in and takes out a wallet containing a selection of small blades. Most of the blades are converted shaving razor blades fitted into metal handles and he lays them onto the table. Checking Martin's pulse Grailem estimates he will remain unconscious for a few more hours; giving him ample time to wash and shower.

A half hour later cleaned and disinfected he prepares to remove the microchip from Martin's head. His examination of the microchip in Alexander Finda's head had shown Grailem that the chip transmitted its location and life signs of the host. A small battery within the chip obtained its energy from the electrical impulses of the brain. Grailem estimates that the battery will continue transmitting for eleven minutes unattached from the skull before its power is exhausted.

The problem facing Grailem is that his skull consists of a different substance to normal bone and the one anxiety is that the electrical impulses of his brain will be shielded by the metal in the skull. This shielding may prevent the battery from obtaining its charge and transmission would end.

There was no way that he can test this prior to fitting; and one that he will have to carry out in reverse by use of a mirror when it came to fitting into his head. Setting this up first he takes the mirror from the bathroom and positions it above the table in the living room.

Shaving a small area of hair from above the microchip on Martin's head and wasting no time, he cuts into Martin's skull and skilfully removes the microchip. The pain has made Martin conscious and he struggles against his bonds as blood pours down his face.

Ignoring him Grailem sits himself at the table and separates the chip from its casing. Adding a modified section of the microchip taken from Alexander Finda's skull he puts the chip back into its casing and seals it. Positioning the blade in the same place as to where Martin had his chip fitted he cuts into the artificial skin. Using the mirror to enable him to see Grailem inserts the microchip deep below the skin until it is in contact with his metalloid head.

Holding the cut artificial skin over the chip he sews it back together and then returns his attention back to Martin Maseeve. Martin looks terrified as he stares wide eyed at Grailem; the blood from the cut on his head is soaking into his shirt and starting to drip onto the carpet. Regretfully Grailem steps forward and reaches for Martin's neck; with a twist of his fingers he snaps it easily and Martin slumps back into the chair.

Returning to the bathroom Grailem washes again and dresses in Martin's clothes. He had not only chosen him because he worked in a computer factory and lived alone, he was also a very similar size and height to Grailem - and his clothes fit perfectly.

The months he had been studying Martin Maseeve he had learnt his habits and social life. His social life was non-existent as he appeared to have few friends. During the time Grailem observed him, he noticed he had no visitors and only went out to obtain food. His life was spent sitting in front of the large viewing screen that covered one wall.

Activating the screen in front of him an image shows of a golden sandy beach lined

with palm trees. The smell and sound of the sea permeates into the room and Grailem can see why Martin had no reason to go out; as the world was brought to him.

Feeling the microchip in his head raise its temperature by a quarter of a degree tells Grailem that it is transmitting. Anxiously he waits as the tiny microchip transmits his location and its hosts state of mind and physical health. He had been prepared for this and feeding false information easily into the chip from Alexander Finda's microchip circuitry Grailem portrays his new self as happy and in good health. The microchip cools when transmission is complete and Grailem relaxes a little.

Not sure that he has fooled the watchers of this planet he busies himself by cleaning the blood off Martin and dressing him in fresh clothes. Cutting off most of his hair he places it carefully onto the table and lays the scissors on top of it so that it will remain where he left it.

It was time to get Martin Maseeve out of the apartment, Grailem did not mind having him around, but he knew that in a few days the odour of death would permeate out of him, filling the apartment. The trip from Martin's apartment to the sewage cover in the basement could involve meeting other people or service robots. Straightening Martin's clothes and wiping the last of the blood from his face Grailem makes him presentable for the short journey.

Easily able to support Martin's weight Grailem holds him at his side as if Martin is standing next to him and exits the apartment. Using the service stairs he hurries down to the basement. Seeing no one he carries him to the room that contains the sewage cover and steps inside. Laying Martin down onto the hard floor Grailem lifts the cover and picks Martin up. Supporting him under the shoulders he lowers him into the sewage pipe and follows him down.

Tying Martin's arms and legs to the metal steps with a tough nylon type material rope Grailem stares at Martin's face. By reforming and adjusting the structure of the artificial muscles in his face he easily makes a complete replica of Martin's within a few minutes. Giving it a final look over in case of any identifying marks or scars he may have missed he steps back with a mechanical smile on his new face. Satisfied he has duplicated Martin's face exactly he climbs the steps and pull himself out. Replacing the cover he makes his way quickly back to Martin Maseeve's apartment.

On entering, Grailem looks up at the mirror which he had suspended above the chair so that he could insert the microchip. The stitching he had done looked neat and tidy and he glues some of Martin's hair on top of it to cover the scar. Pleased with the appearance he sits in front of Martin's communication platform and connects to the computer system.

Chapter Nine

Grailem has until the morning before he has to report for work at the computer factory. Confident he will pass any physical examination a thought keeps nagging at the back of his mind. He has to admit that his knowledge of this planet and the beings that run it, is sadly lacking.

The thought that had remained in the back of his mind he finally addresses; if every citizen was fitted with a microchip that regularly reported position and state of health; why all the security? Crime on this planet was non-existent as everyone's movements were watched and recorded. Grailem was beginning to realise that though the population appeared happy, they were under complete control.

Examining the chip taken from Alexander Finda he holds it closely to his right eye. Adjusting the eye to magnify the chip five hundred times he can clearly see the remaining circuitry. Grailem had removed the life reading circuit and adjusted it to

read Martin Maseeve's body chemistry. What remains is the transmitter, battery, location circuitry and what looks like a mind controlling device.

Grailem's face forms into a frown of annoyance; when removing the life reading circuitry he had only used a magnification of two hundred times. The controlling device appears part of the transmitting circuitry; which must mean it is a receiver as well.

Increasing the magnification to eight hundred times normal size he can see the intricate connections from the device to the transmitter/receiver. This would mean that the microchip fitted on top of his head also has some sort of controlling device. The device incorporated into Alexander Finda's chip appeared to be also a receiver and Grailem assumes that it is able to control the brain electronically, if needed.

This discovery deepens the mystery even further as to the security that covered the planet. If a citizen got out of control the device in their head could alter wave patterns and thoughts; and even cause unconsciousness, yet the planet was crawling with security.

The device from Martin Maseeve's head transmitted every fifteen minutes to a receiver that could be thirty metres away, or thirty thousand kilometres to a satellite orbiting above.

Now aware that the microchip is not only a harmless transmitter and receiver but is also an active device Grailem examines the one he had removed from Alexander Finda more closely. Next to the tiny receiver a collection of minute fibres extend from a central point out to every surface of the device. He curses his first hurried poor examination; he had not even noticed the intricate web of almost transparent fibres. Made of Graphine and being only one atom in diameter the fibres are super conductors of electricity. Able to transmit at various wavelengths these would be the main mind controlling substance; with so many all transmitting at the same time, thoughts would become disconnected and control of normal bodily functions, like breathing and blood circulation could easily be disrupted.

Grailem's first reaction is to rip the device out of his head but instead he sits down and waits for its next transmission. The last transmission on his condition was twelve minutes ago, calming the rush of thoughts through his head Grailem turns on the large viewing screen. Soft music drifts on a cool breeze towards him as the image of a tropical island set amongst a deep blue sea fills the screen.

The image helps to calm him as he watches the waves break gently on the shore. The cool breeze emitting from the sides of the screen have the scent of tropical fruit mixed in with the smell of the sea. The technology of the home viewing screen is impressive; the screen is two metres square and appears as thin as paper yet the image appears in three dimensions.

Feeling the device in his head warm by a fraction of a degree as it transmits, Grailem fills his head with happy thoughts. As the device cools, indicating transmission is complete he switches off the viewing screen. If, whoever controlled this planet could design such an influential device to control the population; it would not be at all difficult to make the viewing screen a dual device?

Annoyed with his continuous mistakes Grailem clears the apartment; putting the mirror back into the bathroom he moves his examination of the device from Alexander Finda into the kitchen area. As he places it onto the kitchen table he looks around the room. Mainly decorated with the same kind of metal as the building is made of, it looks cold and clinical.

The lights that are set deep into the ceiling shine softly and changing his right eye to detect only infra red Grailem looks more closely. The glow of the light source shows it as the main heat source, the coil inside glowing brighter to his eye. Bringing a darkened filter over the eye he is able to see deep inside. Beside the heated element another slightly smaller element lays dormant, as no electricity passes

through it.

Having a slightly different shape to the light element Grailem deduces that it can only be an inactive camera. If it had been the same shape he would have thought it as a back-up system. Increasing the magnification he can see that the element is comprised of a lense that entirely encases it.

Feeling happier that he is learning more about who is controlling this planet, Grailem stops his examination of the light and camera fitting and puts the microchip out of sight in a drawer. With the camera being inactive, showed him that Martin Maseeve's microchip device is sending the correct information.

To monitor over three billion people continuously would take over three billion watchers; which would be completely impractical. With the microchip device programmed correctly, performing any illegal activity or thinking incorrect thoughts would register differently to mechanical robot watchers. The humanoid's who carried out their lives honestly and obeyed the rules would not even be noticed amongst the population. Even though sophisticated surveillance equipment had been fitted everywhere, most would remain inactive until needed.

With the modified device from Martin Maseeve programmed to report normal bodily functions Grailem feels he can move about more freely. The location signature of the device he had left untouched and he curses himself again for overlooking it. Coming to grips with reality since arriving on this planet had been more difficult than he had thought.

In space, after his initial anger and as the years passed, he would only have need to think of one thing. Having movement that proved useless to manoeuvring in space made him forget at times that he had a body. The dream world he created had its problems, but these he could solve in his own time; with a new creation if needed.

Here on this planet he had a multitude of things to occupy his mind; the brain cells that had remained dormant during the aeons in space had begun to function properly again. It was difficult to slow the rush of thoughts at times as memories are re-awakened and connections to the prosthetic nervous system re-established. Memories of just what his artificial body is capable of; and the destruction it could cause reminds Grailem of his previous errors.

Getting the mirror from the bathroom he sets it up in the kitchen above his head; working his hands in reverse he pulls the newly attached hair from above the microchip device. Cutting the artificial skin open Grailem reaches in and pulls out the tiny device, snapping open the casing and using high magnification he locates the tracking beacon output and mind control circuitry. Fusing several of the connections together Grailem disables the mind controlling circuitry and adjusts the frequency so that it will respond to the electrical impulses of his thoughts.

Satisfied he can do no more he re-seals the device in its casing and inserts it back into his head. Using the pressure and heat from his fingertips, rather than sewing, Grailem relies on the compression and natural adhesion to stick the hair back over the scar to hold it together.

Eager to explore above ground he programmes the tracking device to report normally and leaves the apartment. Using the lift he is soon at the ground floor and stepping out onto the busy pavement.

Joining the people and robots that are walking along the pavement Grailem strides confidently. Glad to be in the open air rather than skulking around in the sewers he walks just for the enjoyment of walking. The shops in this sector are crowded with shoppers and feeling happy he enters a clothing store.

The variety is limited; most of the human population dress similarly to the service robots uniforms of dark blue and purple. The two choices are size and colour as all the garments have that same uniform style.

Leaving the store he carries on walking the way he was heading before he went

into the store. The maps of this area shown on the computer network were good but Grailem wanted a closer look around the neighbourhood. He walked every street within a kilometre of his new apartment; several alleyways he found that were not shown on the map, may prove useful - if he ever needed to run again.

The people he passed on the street did not look happy. They looked content and well fed and went about their business with a sense of purpose. None he saw hung around on street corners or stood around in idleness, even the refreshment areas the people stopped just long enough to eat or drink before they moved on.

Happy, smiling faces were non-existent - as was the excitement and joy of life. Serious faces usually surrounded him and Grailem, being empathetic, could feel their unhappiness influencing him and he craves escape to a happier world.

Returning to the apartment Grailem turns on the viewing screen and looks at the surveillance cameras in the infra red. All are inactive showing that the new disguise is working well and he eagerly awaits the shift at the computer factory. The viewing screen shows the same tropical island and he sits and rests; the computer and viewing network will be monitored; and Grailem wanted to show no unusual activity from this apartment.

Taking Martin Maseeve's shift at the factory proved easier than Grailem thought; his main job was monitoring the robot workforce. Grailem had watched Martin during his shift and safe and secure in his office he watches the viewing screens and the robots as they carry out their repetitive work. The main programming machine that fed the data into the microchips was only turned on when human staff were present.

Grailem's night time explorations and use of the factory's facilities and materials had given him the opportunity to carry out further improvements to his systems. His recent disastrous encounters with the security forces had shown that the lack of energy and insufficient weaponry had been his downfall. Fitting extra power supplies to feed the energy weapons and the repelling field Grailem felt he could fight for days; if needs be.

The computer chips he had designed and constructed to avoid the surveillance equipment are ingenious. When they are programmed he will be able to move about in complete anonymity. The ability to indicate that he is a metre or kilometres from his correct position will take little energy from his systems. The chances of confusing the enemy were going to be easy; and could even prove entertaining.

Programming the machine that would programme his design of computer chips is a simple matter of slotting in his memory card with his data into the machine. All Grailem has to do is walk down into the factory and place his chips on the conveyor belt, removing the blank ones. This only takes a few minutes as in the process he makes out he is cleaning a part of the machine.

With his chips replacing the company chips he hurries back to the control room. At the end of the day he hoped that by replacing the blank micro-chips rather than subtracting; the machine would record it had programmed the correct amount. Looking at the screen he sees he is just in time as the first of his modified microchips enters the machine. Activating his memory card he feeds its data and programming into his seven microchips. As the last one is completed Grailem takes out his memory card and transfers the programming back and hurries out of the office and down the stairs.

Reaching the conveyor belt in plenty of time he casually removes his now programmed microchips and replaces them with the blank ones he had removed. With a bit of luck this particular batch of microchips might not be needed for several months before the error is noticed. By then, he hopes to be long gone from this planet.

Returning to the apartment after his shift Grailem checks the surveillance devices and is pleased to see them inactive. Taking the modified microchips into the bedroom

(the room with the least surveillance cameras) he places them in a drawer and returns to the living room. Activating the viewing screen and locating the entertainment channel he sits and rests. Ten minutes pass before he feels the slight raise in temperature from the microchip in his head as it transmits its information.

Adding the newly designed microchips to his system; several contained within the prosthetic skull, would also enable him to detect other peoples microchip wavelengths. He could then adopt that persons identity and life functions into his own microchip detector and transfer his to theirs.

One of the microchips he had designed was especially for the robotic security force that helped rule this planet. The past attempts at controlling the robots had met with a certain amount of success. This new chip would enable Grailem to totally override their systems; and they would then only obey his instructions.

That is a long way away he hopes, as his main concern; even after his insane killing spree, is the concern for the people on this planet. They are obviously being bred as cattle; for food and slavery and periodically shipped off planet to who knows where.

This feeling surprises Grailem as all the time he had spent among these people on this planet, he had felt alone. He was different and had always been since his first awareness. That he cared for someone else other than himself was a new, almost alien thought.

The people here behaved differently to those who he grew up with and the freedom of mind he had experienced when he was growing up was not here. On his world the people did crazy things and had crazy parties just to celebrate the happiness of life. He had never been invited, but he remembered the carers around him talking about parties they had gone to.

When he escaped the laboratory and hid out in the nearby city he found that he merged with the population easily. Many around him did not seem to care what he was and where he came from. He went along to parties and tried to join in but never fully understood the purpose as he had 'never let go' and enjoyed himself. He did not know how to; and being friends with someone was a totally new experience. Grailem had only managed casual friendships as most considered he took life too seriously, which was true as he had experienced no real childhood and did not know how to 'play'. Some people he found did not take life seriously at all, and seemed to drift along not caring what was happening in the world around them.

Since Grailem had arrived on this planet no one had ever questioned where he was going or what he was doing. The family group of two parents and one child in this sector had been a familiar sight when he had gone to the shopping plaza. He had noticed the lack of noise as the family groups got their shopping. They did not appear to mix with the other families and the children appeared aloof to one another.

Grailem carries on his impersonation of Martin Maseeve for five weeks in which he constructs and programmes even more microchips. The chips have a multitude of uses; improving and expanding the repelling shield even further, and as extra memory and functional microchips which he inserts deeply into his skull. The memory chips expand his intelligence as he integrates them into his brain by a multitude of nerve connections.

When Grailem first installed the new microchip that he had programmed to receive all transmitted messages. Such was the quantity being transmitted the microchip instantly started to heat up, the temperature increasing rapidly as it started to overload and he quickly removed it and re-programmed it to only detect abnormal or unusual transmissions. The microchip cooled quickly in response to his thoughts as it then shut out ninety-nine percent of the transmissions.

Finally finished with the computer factory Grailem returns to the apartment and removes every trace of his presence. Going back to the sewage cover where he had

left Martin Maseeve's body Grailem lifts the cover. The smell from the rotting body would have made a normal human sick and very ill, Grailem has no such problems and climbs down the ladder.

Reaching the bottom of the sewer pipe Grailem unties Martin's body from the ladder and carries him out of the sewage system. Replacing the cover he picks up the dead body and hurries up the stairs to the apartment. Luckily all is quiet and opening the door Grailem carries Martin Maseeve into the apartment, shutting the door behind him.

Going into the bedroom Grailem lays him on the bed and covers him to the neck with a thick bed cover. Checking around the apartment Grailem can see no evidence of him ever being here. Waiting patiently for the microchip in his head to transmit its information he prepares the microchip he is to insert into Martin Maseeve's head.

During his time at the factory he had also made a duplicate copy of the microchip of Martin Maseeve. The only alterations he had made was to programme it to transmit healthy life signs for seven days by use of a dissolving battery. Once he fitted it into Martin's head the microchip would be able to receive and transmit, giving him a week before the chip detected he was dead and transmit the information and the battery dissolve.

The dissolving battery was not his invention as it had been used extensively on his home planet. When integrating some computer chips into human bodies an initial extended electrical force was needed. The dissolving battery supplied this energy and by dissolving as it gave up its energy, it created space for nerves and organic material to grow. This dissolving process also applied to his tampering - and would also ensure that no trace of his alterations would be detected.

Grailem feels the faint temperature increase from the microchip in his head as it receives and transmits. Before it cools he turns his attention to Martin Maseeve and wipes the wound with a soft piece of cloth. With his microchip now cool he turns on the new microchip for Martin Maseeve and seals it inside its casing. Pushing the microchip into his head he uses the pressure of his fingers to weld the skin together. Using a small amount of very strong glue he covers the scar and sticks Martin's hair carefully back on. If anyone were to remove the microchip by surgery his handiwork would remain undetected; he hoped.

Using the mirror from the bathroom to see he cuts out the microchip from his head and installs the modified one. The microchip is larger than the one he has removed as it consists of three microchip devices that incorporates his modified designs. Using the pressure of his fingers and the strong glue he seals the cut, adding hair to cover it. Looking directly into the mirror Grailem alters his facial structure to make a thinner face, like the one he was created with; and that in no way resembled his dead victim.

Leaving Martin Maseeve to his eternal sleep Grailem walks out of the apartment shutting the door firmly behind him. Using the lift he descends to the ground floor, walking across the foyer boldly and aware of the cameras, he keeps his eyes and face looking at the floor. Moving quickly as he approaches the main door he looks away from the camera so that it cannot see his face as he exits the building.

Walking casually through the district Grailem soon loses himself amongst the maze of streets. As he approaches the western end of the city he finds what he is looking for; an old fashioned library that contains ancient manuscripts and books made of paper. Books made of indestructible carbon also adorn the shelves and Grailem can see that further in are the computer and communication consoles.

Taking a handkerchief from his pocket he pretends to blow his nose as he enters the building. The handkerchief effectively covers his face from the camera and guarding robot and he walks in as if he owns the place. Making directly for the computer consoles he sees that it is three quarters full of people; mainly youngsters under the age of twenty.

Sitting himself at a console in a corner where he cannot be overlooked Grailem connects to the system. Taking a memory card from his pocket he inserts it into the machine; the memory card contains all the data of his new identity. Calling himself Grailem Almond he is employed at a large department store; and has been for the last forty years.

The memory card also contains the data needed to hack into the department store network and the computer network that covers the planet. It is easy installing himself onto the system and fabricating his employment history. Programming the department store to pay him credits into his account every month will enable him to buy his requirements; rather than steal them and attract attention. Using the camera integrated into the viewing screen he takes his photograph and sets up his new identity.

With crime being non-existent on this planet his new identity and addition to the population should go un-noticed. He had given his home address as a building that was crammed between two giant skyscrapers. He had come across the old building on one of his walks near Martin Maseeve's apartment. The building was not described and no ownership given and had only been marked with a number on any of the maps he had studied.

Satisfied he is now secure on the system and part of the population, Grailem removes the memory card and disconnects from the system. Standing proudly Grailem walks confidently through the library, no longer concerned with the cameras, he walks boldly out of the main door.

The street before him is fairly empty of people and robots and Grailem makes his way to the nearest train station. The spaceport is several hours away and the easiest route from this sector is by train. The trains are fast and comfortable as they run on a magnetic field and easily achieve speeds of five hundred kilometres an hour. Grailem was not worried about the comfort but the time it will take to get there; compared to the robot driven cars, he will be there in half the time.

The train station is composed of the same shiny material that all the buildings on this planet are made of. The apparently metalloid material may last for thousands of years but to Grailem's eyes it is becoming boring. Different coloured buildings do exist spread out in the city; but the same uniform surface remained.

Entering the huge building Grailem looks around at the multitude of people that fill the station. Robot servants carrying luggage mix in amongst them as they make their way to the trains. The trains, about fifty metres inside the building wait in an orderly line as people and robots board them.

The trains look sleek in dark blue, with a bullet nose shape to the front and back to cut down on the wind resistance. Grailem looks at the sign above each train and sees the train for the airport is ten platforms along. Below its destination a time is displayed for when the train is due to depart. Grailem sees that he has twenty minutes to wait, so casually makes his way towards it.

Security cameras are located above the entrance to each platform and with no way of avoiding them Grailem walks through the entrance for the airport train and along the platform. That he had been photographed was a certainty; as was the deduction of the fare from his account. The carriages are crowded with people and robots and Grailem walks past twenty five carriages before he finds one that is only partly occupied.

Sitting down Grailem adopts a frown of annoyance and stares blankly out of the window. Several passengers and robot servants enter the carriage; on seeing his annoyed face the people hurriedly sit down as far away as possible. Grailem needed to think and the disturbance of noisy people was what he could do without.

The train appears too crowded for a touring party of the spaceport and Grailem wonders what is going on. Not sociable enough to go and talk to the other passengers and ask, he continues staring out of the window. The city is vast and the

train passes through industrial and residential areas for a half hour before the scenery changes to fields and woodland. The fields are planted with crops of green and the woodland looks ordered and cultivated as the trees are all planted in straight lines.

Listening to the people talking softly in the carriage he learns that the Starship he saw being constructed only a few months ago is now complete. The destination is a star system four hundred light years away that is reputed to contain ten worlds suitable for human habitation. This coming voyage is the first to explore these planets and free land is offered; with a guaranteed no population control system in operation.

Grailem turns his head and looks at the other passengers; mainly consisting of young couples in their late teens and early twenties, they all look to be prime specimens of their race. There are several older passengers and these can be no more than thirty years of age and all have a superior look about them.

Their presence alters Grailem's plans drastically; if the Starship was going to leave soon, he was determined to be on it.

Chapter Ten

The silver spaceport appears in the distance and Grailem can make out the huge bulk of the Starship next to it. The ship looks ready as no robots crawl over its light absorbing surface. Grailem loses sight of it as the train enters the large building of the train station.

Getting off the train along with the other passengers he anxiously looks at the robot guards at the exit gate. If his disguise did not work, now would be the time when he would find out. Removing the caps from his fingertips he also manoeuvres a grenade into each cheek. Keeping in amongst the crowd he walks effortlessly through the gateway with the robots paying no attention to him.

Flushed with success that his new disguise and identity works well Grailem hurries towards the exit and steps out into the sunshine. Glad to be away from the noisy crowd he makes his way to the completed Starship. A kilometre walk later Grailem is standing in the shadow of the mighty craft. The main cargo hold at the rear is being filled with supplies by an active robot workforce.

Returning to the main building now that he has found his way off this planet Grailem looks for a suitable candidate to receive his microchip's information on his identity. Looking around the building he sees two groups of tourists similar to his first visit here, one group has just arrived and the second group has about a half hour before their tour is completed.

Studying the second group Grailem notices one individual, a young female who appears on her own. Casually following them on their tour he sees that she talks to no other tourists and looks ideal for his purpose.

As the group cluster around a model of an earlier Starship from centuries ago she stands separate and away from the group. Taking this opportunity Grailem takes the microchip out of his pocket that he has programmed to record his normal vital signs and holds it in his left hand. Approaching her quietly from behind he reaches out with his right hand and encircles the back of her throat. Applying enough pressure on her nerve endings Grailem renders her unconscious in under a second and holds her upright. Using his left hand he reaches to the top of her head and locates her microchip. Cutting the skin with a sharpened nail he pushes his microchip next to hers, activates it, and fuses the wound with a squeezing of his fingers.

The bleeding stops immediately and taking a small phial from his pocket he opens it and pours a pain killing substance onto the scar. The pain killer is powerful and providing she does not wash her hair it will be effective for twenty-four hours; by then the wound would have healed. Sitting her down on a metal bench that is next to the

display Grailem leans her against the back of the bench until she is stable. Moving to the end of the bench he watches her regain consciousness; at first she looks confused and with a little shrug of her shoulders she stands and joins the group.

De-activating the alien microchip in his head Grailem turns on the chip that has a similar code as emitted by the robots. Walking across the spaceport and secure in the knowledge that the girl is transmitting his health and coordinates of his assumed identity Grailem Almond, Grailem approaches the spaceship.

The rear cargo hold is quiet, as a line of robots stand ten metres from the cargo hold doors and await the next delivery. Slipping past them and entering the cargo hold Grailem is not noticed as he transmits the robot frequency. To other robots regard him as one of their own and he walks to the back of the cargo hold and loses himself amongst the crates and boxes. Making room against one wall he surrounds himself with packing crates and sits on the floor. Switching off all his systems except for the surveillance camera in his eye and his ears tuned to receive any noise he remains motionless and awaits take-off.

Fifteen hours later and with a crammed cargo hold, Grailem hears the engines of the Starship starting to operate. The Starship's engines slowly build up their power and are kept at the same level when the regular beat seems to operate on its own. The engines are kept at this regular beat for a half hour before the engine sound changes. The beating of the engines increases and Grailem can feel the enormous Starship lift off from the ground.

With the Starship having to travel such a long distance Grailem waits for twelve hours before attempting to leave the cargo hold. This should give ample time for the crew and passengers to have been placed in deep hibernation. Computer systems and robots will take care of the human cargo until it is time to wake them; which may be hundreds of years away.

Crawling out from amongst the packing cases Grailem locates the exit; the door has a simple opening mechanism; but one that is connected to an alarm system. No attempt has been made to hide this fact and must be a part of the safety system. Looking closer Grailem can see that the mechanism also incorporates a smoke and heat detector.

By-passing the mechanism is child's play and Grailem deactivates the system as he steps through the door. Closing the door behind him he activates the doors safety device and proceeds to explore the ship. As he reaches the end of the corridor two service robots are replacing a circuit board that operates the elevator. Paying him no attention they continue with their work as they remove the damaged board.

Some of the removed board is black and burnt where it has short circuited and the robots slot a new board in. Sealing the panel and carrying the old circuit board the robots walk past Grailem as if he is not there and continue down the corridor. Grailem admires their confidence as they had not tested the new board, appearing to assume that fitting the new board will be sufficient.

Grailem decides to test it for them and presses the button that has an arrow shape pointing upwards. The elevator doors slide open and Grailem steps inside; a glass panel with a multitude of signs gives him the option to go anywhere in the ship that he wants to. Pushing the panel above the highest sign which appears to resemble the bridge Grailem watches the doors slide shut before him.

The elevator makes no sound and there is only the slightest feeling of acceleration as the elevator speeds towards the bridge. Coming smoothly to a stop the doors slide open and he sees his hunch is right; as before him is the bridge. Empty of people with only a navigating robot at its station. Grailem steps out of the elevator and the doors obediently shut behind him.

The large forward viewing screen shows a galaxy of stars before them; aware that the Starship is in hyperspace Grailem is surprised to see that most of the stars look like they normally do. He could just as easily have been standing on a planet looking

up at the clear night sky, the sight being so familiar. Though the Starship is travelling at many times the speed of light the stars, being so distant, appear stationary.

Walking over to the navigating console Grailem looks at the readout on the viewing screen in front of the robot navigator. Their route to a star system is displayed before him and Grailem is surprised to see that it is not in a straight line. A detour around a large gas giant and a dust formation are plotted on the screen.

Looking at their final destination Grailem enlarges the image at this point to show the star system they are heading for. The system only contains one planet in the habitable zone, six other planets millions of kilometres beyond the orbit of the habitable planet circle the distant sun in icy orbits.

What about the ten inhabitable planets that they were meant to be destined for? With the passengers and crew in hibernation there should be more than enough oxygen and life support to last for hundreds of years. Plotting the distance from the planet they took off from Grailem calculates that the planet they are heading for is only eighty light years away.

With his curiosity burning a hole in him Grailem leaves the bridge and heads back down to the cargo hold. Entering the hold Grailem examines the packing cases, boxes and sacks that fill it from floor to ceiling. Approaching the first stack of packing cases Grailem sees they are stamped with a number and the word 'canned'. Walking to the next stack they are also stamped with a number and the word 'canned'. Curious as to what is inside Grailem is forced to climb the tall stack of crates to the top.

The crates are stamped with the same word and number and Grailem grabbing hold of the lid with his iron hard fingers effortlessly pulls the lid off. Inside the contents are protected by a thin waterproof casing made of thin plastic which Grailem rips off. Inside are one hundred cans the colour of gold. Reaching in Grailem takes out one of the cans and reads the label which is impregnated into the surface of the can.

Prime Organic Liver is the main title on the can with the image of a deep red liver below it. Below the image more information is supplied; 100% pure succulent humanoid liver; grown as nature intended. On the side of the can is storage instructions; nothing about how to cook the contents, making Grailem wonder if it is eaten raw.

Replacing the can and refitting the lid to the case, Grailem climbs down and examines the stack next to it. The number is different but the word 'canned' remains the same. Climbing the stack Grailem opens one of the top cases to find it contains Prime Organic Hearts; which are also humanoid.

Examining the cargo Grailem is shocked to find that it mostly contains humanoid body parts. No part of the body is wasted as he finds pet food of canned toes to canned brains; all guaranteed succulent humanoid to make your pet fit and healthy.

One section of the cargo hold held their latest technology; microchips. The type that are fitted into the security robots and there are thousands of them. Grailem recognises some of them as the ones that were produced in the factory where he had worked as Martin Maseeve. The machine that completes the programming is stored in the same section and looks operational. As Grailem has nothing else to do until the Starship reaches its destination he decides to modify the microchips.

According to the navigation chart the Starship would still take nearly a year to reach its destination; giving him more than enough time to carry out the improvements. Unpacking the programming machine Grailem connects it to an unused solar array. Even at hyper speed the array would still gather enough light and power to operate the machine; and he hoped, remain undetected.

Once Grailem had programmed the machine to alter the microchips with his design his only job was to unpack them, feed them into the machine and repack them. The work soon became repetitive and boring and Grailem is tempted to hijack a couple of robots to do the work for him. This would have been easy to achieve as he could

insert a modified microchip into the robot. The thought that the robots themselves could be monitored decided him to play it safe.

Six months of boredom follow while Grailem converts hundreds of thousands of microchip's. While the machine is converting the microchip's, Grailem has time to search the rest of the rear cargo hold; and in no time finds the security robots the microchips he is converting fit into. Neatly stacked in large metal containers Grailem counts the robots. He is shocked at the final figure as there are two hundred thousand; and they are all fully armed.

With all these thousands of security robots they can only mean one thing; that wherever these are destined for; the aliens in charge of them are planning some kind of invasion.

Chapter Eleven

The shock of the amount of the invasion force and the canned humanoid parts made him convert every microchip he could find. Looking at the final figure on the machine Grailem sees that he has converted two hundred and fifty thousand microchips.

Fifty thousand more than is needed; are these to be considered as 'spares' or are there more robots somewhere else in the ship? Now the work was completed and everything back in its original place he decides to explore the ship further to see what more secrets it holds.

Grailem had known where the passengers and crew were kept and had not given them a lot of thought. Now curious as to how they were being stored he makes his way to the hibernation section. As he turns the corner into the corridor that leads to the passengers and crew he cannot fail to notice the security robots that line each wall.

All of them appear inactive; as if they are here for storage, the same as the passengers' and crew though it appears an odd way to store them.

They must be here for another reason.

Convinced they are inactive Grailem walks between them until he reaches the hibernation section door. Grailem reaches out for the handle and turns it to open the door.

The door is locked!

This is the first locked door he has come across since his home planet and for a few seconds he stands still in shock.

The locked door and lines of security robots can only mean that the hibernation process can fail at times. If everyone was to return to consciousness halfway through the voyage their would be insufficient food and water for them; unless they were cannibals and could eat the canned 'foods'. During his search of the cargo hold he had found no food, water or supplies for the human inhabitants.

Before he busts the door down Grailem checks around the frame and lock to see if it is connected to an alarm system. Three alarm systems are in operation around the door; one at the lock and one at the top and bottom of the door. The alarm systems are active as he can feel the electric field that is generated by the electricity passing through them.

Turning around Grailem approaches one of the inactive robots; removing the tight fitting helmet he inserts his finger into the base of the skull and withdraws a long piece of alloyed copper wire. The wire, inserted into all of the security robots, works as an extra antenna when needed. The fitted microchip with its own receiver, usually picks up the transmitted signal. In the crowded cities the receiver sometimes failed to

connect to the system. The antenna would be automatically deployed and could pick up the faintest of signals – even those that are usually blocked by the tall buildings. Removing it may not show up for months and under normal examination and conditions the robot would appear undamaged. Grailem hopes.

Returning to the door he uses the copper wire to change the circuitry to indicate the door is locked and closed. Unlocking the door takes no effort and he opens the door and steps inside closing the door behind him.

The enormous room, lit by a soft red glow, contains all of the passengers and crew. From where Grailem is standing the room looks full of coffins that are stacked on shelving, one on top of the other until they reach the ceiling ten metres above. There looks more than the twenty thousand that should be on board; counting the people in the racks and multiplying it by the number of racks Grailem estimates that there are over thirty-five thousand in deep sleep.

This was certainly no colonising expedition and he wonders what will greet them when they wake up; and him when they get where they are going.

Leaving the hibernating passengers and crew to their sleep Grailem steps outside the door. All the robots are exactly where he had seen them last, leaving the wiring on the door he walks between them as they stare impassively at the wall or robot in front of them.

Turning the corner he follows an empty corridor that leads to the forward hold. The door leading into the hold is unguarded and contains no lock or alarm system. Opening the door Grailem is surprised to see that the hold is brightly lit, noises from the far end of the hold attract his attention and cautiously he walks towards it.

Reaching the end of the passageway that is between stacks of crates Grailem looks around the corner. Set out before him is a large production area; a long conveyor belt with robots operating each side appear to be assembling more security robots. Edging closer he can see arms and legs being fitted as the trunk of the robot is moved forward slowly along the conveyor belt. The head of the robot is then fitted and welded to the body; the robot is then put in a large metal container that appears designed to hold several hundred robots.

The metal containers are the same as those in the rear cargo hold and Grailem can see that the 'spare' fifty thousand microchips are not going to be wasted.

The robots working at the conveyor belt pay him no mind as he steps closer for a better look. The skeletal frame of the robot appears to be made of a titanium and cobalt mix, making it almost indestructible. This is a new design of robot compared with the ones he had to deal with on the planet. Their skeletal frames were made of a tough alloy covered with a plastic/carbon mix; and burned well as he remembers.

These new robot frames are being covered in glass fibre mesh that is interwoven with a high grade steel, making them fireproof. At the slow rate they were working showed Grailem that this was a new process as the robots being made were different from those stored in the rear cargo hold.

Was he looking at the consequences of his visit and battles with the security robots on the planet? Their surveillance systems may be of the most modern but their robot security force had many flaws and weaknesses. What had defeated him was the sheer amount of robots; there were millions on the planet, which vastly outnumbered him.

If what he was seeing was an upgrade of the aliens security force then the galaxy would be in a lot of trouble as they would be undefeatable. His presence on their planet and his apparent indestructibility had got them scared.

They had obviously thought he was a precursor for an invasion by beings like himself.

Very curious as to their destination and glad he had worked hard for all those months converting the microchip's, Grailem makes his way to the main computer.

Surveillance aboard the Starship seems non-existent but Grailem is aware that any computer activity will be recorded. Arriving at the main computer room Grailem looks at the large computer that operates the ship; standing three metres high and eight metres long it appears far too large for the task it has.

Looking at the back of the machine Grailem can see service ports amongst the connecting wiring and circuitry. Stepping away from the back of the computer Grailem looks around the huge room. Across at the far end several doors draw his attention. Walking quickly across the room Grailem approaches the first room; as he had hoped it is empty with several computer and communication platforms sitting on the desks.

Opening the door Grailem walks inside and disconnects the first computer platform from the system. Picking the platform and its viewing screen up Grailem heads out the door and returns to the main computer. Putting his newly acquired platform next to the service port, positioning the viewing screen so that he can see it clearly he plugs the platform into the nearest service port.

The viewing screen immediately shows an image of the forward scanner of the Starship; stars fill the sky though none seem exceptionally brighter than their neighbours. Checking that his platform will not automatically save or transmit any of the information of his activities, Grailem starts to explore.

Finding the original display he had seen on the bridge all those months ago he updates it to the present time. The new time tells him they will reach their destination, a planet called Octonal Neves, in two weeks time.

Seventy six hours later Grailem disconnects the platform from the main machine, in that seventy six hours he had learnt all of its secrets.

The reason that it is so large is because it is in itself cargo; designed and built on the planet he had recently left, it was designed as a control computer. It could do more than pilot and maintain the Starship as it is also capable of controlling an entire planet. Every electronic device from a light fitting to a multi-brained computer could be connected in some way to this vast machine. The processing speed and memory are beyond anything that Grailem has encountered before and he marvels at the technology. His home planet had been dependant on computers for thousands of years; but this one, with the use of highly advanced organics, is a new dimension all together.

Only five percent of the memory banks had been filled and that was with all the programming needed to pilot and operate the Starship – and the history of the Arct. The Arct are the race of beings who had controlled the planet he had left behind, and whose home world he was now heading for. Amongst the warfare history was a section on security, starting from the very beginning almost at the start of writing, examples of defensive measures are explained. From ring ditches, wooden and brick walls to automatic defensive robots, the entire history and their strengths and weaknesses is portrayed.

Invasion of other worlds came as a result of overcrowding; and the discovery of the humanoid species. The Arct are traditionally a carnivorous species who had fed on animals similar to their genetic makeup like monkeys and apes. As the Arct population increased and with no controls in place, the apes and monkeys became extinct. The Arct turned to cows and sheep and any wild animal that inhabited their planet as the next available food source. Able to breed the cows and sheep they bred enough to sustain the large population - but the docile animals were considered a dull and boring food.

Discovering a world populated by an aggressive humanoid species gave the Arct a new purpose in life. The humanoids fought gallantly against the invading aliens but tasted divine re-igniting primitive emotions and an Arct warrior species was born.

To the Arct, to die in battle became the ultimate accolade. From birth they were taught to fight, males as well as females and the whole race became a military force.

The main driving force had been the conquest of the enemy and the excitement of life it instilled within them; and the reward was to eat them. No other creature in the universe tasted as divine and enjoyable than the human species. For thousands of years the Arct explored the cosmos and waged war on anything remotely human until all those within their reach once again, became extinct.

Returning to surviving on wild and domesticated animals caused discontent amongst the Arct. Now spread across the galaxy they searched for a planet inhabited by humanoids. The eating of domesticated animals reduced their warrior emotions and a domesticated, boring way of life replaced their earlier glories. Tales of great battles and mighty warriors slipped into myth and legend and almost became forgotten.

Many centuries later, while testing out an improved hyperdrive, the Arct discovered a planet teeming with humanoid life.

The discoverer's, descendants of their race who had tasted human flesh did not become engulfed in bloodlust and the killing sprees of the past. Instead they reported their find to the home planet. The orders, when received a few hours later were plain; no humanoid was to be killed. Instead the crew were ordered to abduct as many humans as they could, without drawing attention to themselves.

Once they had abducted ten thousand they were to transport them to the nearest Arct controlled planet; where a breeding programme would begin.

That event had occurred many thousands of years ago and Grailem follows the successful breeding programme as recorded on the computer system. The spread of humanity throughout the galaxy in this sector is due to the Arct's desire for human flesh. Human breeding programmes were carried out successfully on every Arct inhabited world - until there was a combined rebellion on several of the planets.

The Arct, in their eagerness to breed this desirable food source had underestimated human intelligence. For decades the humanoid's on three of the Arct's planets conspired against their rulers. Stockpiling weapons and training people into warriors continued in secret until they rose up against their oppressors.

The humanoids on all three planets rebelled on the same day. Such was their store of weapons every humanoid became armed and they slaughtered every living Arct in a frenzy of killing.

The Arct tried to regain control with constant invasions and war continued on these three planets for generations until the Arct invented the military robot. Many of these robots were nothing more than walking guns and would fire at anything living that moved – human or animal.

On the three rebellious planets the humanoid's were all killed; mainly by the military robots, and within a year the Arct returned to reclaim their worlds.

The death of the millions of Arct that were killed in the uprising brought a big change to Arct society. All of the humanoid's were removed from the planets inhabited by the Arct and re-settled on habitable worlds light years away.

On each habitable world two hundred thousand humanoids were deposited, and were strictly controlled by the military robots. Allowed to breed they were kept as prisoners and harvested regularly; being outnumbered and outgunned by the robots did not stop them from planning a revolution.

A pattern developed over the centuries, as every twenty to thirty years the humanoid population would rise up against their oppressors. Many would be killed by the almost indestructible military robots before order was restored - and the harvesting of the humans could continue.

Controlling the humanoid's was becoming a regular and expensive time consuming process, and one which was slowly draining the wealth of the Arct civilisation.

The invention of the mind controlling microchip by a robotics engineer enabled the

Arct to finally control the humanoid's behaviour. At first they were too repressive, putting the humanoid's on a similar level as cattle and sheep. The unhappiness felt by the humanoid's made them taste bad and the solution was to make them think they governed themselves.

Exchanging the military robots for human looking security robots and servants (that could be controlled by the military) brought happiness and a false sense of security to the brainwashed, controlled humanoids. These 'happy' worlds produced the finest tasting humanoid flesh and the exquisite taste demanded high prices on the Arct worlds. The exporters grew rich and powerful; Rames Sirap and his family were a good example. The meat they produced was considered as average quality and not the finest, which the price reflected – due to the unhappiness they created on the planet. This still did not stop them being rich and powerful and Grailem wished he had killed them all when he had the chance.

After his exploration of the main computer Grailem thinks of a way how he can defeat these eaters of his own people. Put in the right perspective from the Arct point of view is that they consider they are doing no wrong. Humans do not consider the eating of animals or fish as evil as the body has evolved to absorb the flesh of other species. The eating of your own species was the only thing that was considered as evil, even though the body could absorb it. The Arct, being alien and of high intelligence could only see humans as a food source. The thought of them being equal to humans in intelligence had never entered their heads during their entire civilisation. They believed they were the supreme beings and it was going to take a lot of convincing that they were not.

Studying images of the Arct he had taken from the main computer Grailem sees them as ugly creatures with a rugged facial structure, small flat nose and deep sunken eyes. Sharp canine teeth protrude from their large mouths showing their carnivorous behaviour and Grailem starts to construct a life-like mask of an ancient resident.

Re-moulding the rubber type material that sealed an escape hatch for the mask proved the most difficult. The huge engine that powered the ship had the only sufficient heat source that would melt the hard rubber like material. The heat the engine generated was expelled into space by a complicated pattern of pipe work. Placing the rubber type seal on the hottest part of the pipe near the engine melted the material perfectly. Obtaining the shape by stretching and compressing with his vice like fingers; the face of an Arct soon began to show.

The hair that grew naturally on their faces over the dark purple and deep brown skin made it easier to make the mask as it could cover the minor imperfections. Forced to use the black insulation that enclosed some of the ships wiring for the hair took the longest time.

The problem also was the colour; the door seal rubber is a dull grey whereas the Arct have that dark purple and brown face. Grailem remembers that the robots that were being constructed on the assembly line onboard were dressed in a ready made security uniform of dark blue and purple when completed. Making his way quickly to the assembly line he sees the robots at their work. Walking to the end of the line it is easy to pick up a uniform as the robots seem unaware of his presence. Returning to the engine room he heats the uniform and using his hands like a mechanical vice he squeezes out the purple dye. Heating the mask Grailem rubs the dye into the rubber like material, at first the mask appears pink but constant addition of the dye, along with warming the mask, forces the dye in deep. Using a thick heavy grease from the engine room he works it in deeply to stain the purple colouring and covers it tightly with the black insulation 'hair'. The end result looks passable; Grailem does not want to reshape his own face yet to fit the mask as he gets the feeling that to stay with the microchips when they are unloaded, he may have to take on the personality of a

robot worker again.

Removing any evidence of him ever being on the Starship and remembering to shut doors he had left open, Grailem then retreats to the rear cargo hold. Finding his original position amongst the packing crates when he first boarded, he turns off a lot of his systems and waits for landfall.

Ten days pass before he feels the Starship slowing down and reluctantly he leaves his dream world. Re-activating all of his systems he makes his way out of the cargo hold to the nearest window. Looking out all he can see is stars and he makes his way to the forward observation deck. The planet they are heading for already fills half the sky and Grailem realises the starship is going into a high orbit. Presumably to slow the ship down as only moments ago it had dropped out of hyperspace. The navigation is impressive as the starship is still travelling at light speed as it circles the planet several times as it eventually slows down.

The planet below has two large continents; one that is close to the equator is a sea of green tropical forest. The other continent, a quarter of the way around the planet and slightly north of the forest is mainly a uniform grey colour that is entirely composed of buildings and roads. Specks of green exists between the mighty buildings and Grailem recalls from the history records he had read on the starship computer that it was not always like this.

As industry overtook nature the atmosphere changed its composition to mainly poisonous gases. Most of the vegetation on the planet died which proved disastrous to the Arct. Oxygen levels plummeted to a few percent and due to the lack of oxygen many of the Arct population died.

The southerly continent was cleared of all Arct habitation and the forest planted to provide the vital oxygen. Small parks were the only remains of any vegetation left on the other continent which had now become their home. That had been many thousands of years ago when industry was also moved off planet. Since that time the forest had continued to provide a healthy atmosphere for the millions of Arct that now lived here.

Several Starship's like the one he was travelling on come into view at a lower orbit. As his starship orbits the planet Grailem counts forty nine other Starship's circling below. The starship slows even further lowering its orbit until it joins the other Starship's. The engines power down to their minimum to attain orbit and for the next seventeen days Grailem joins the 'queue' to await unloading.

His view from the forward observation deck shows a stream of space vehicles travelling to and fro from the first starship in line down to the planet below. The unloading is continuous and they move on to the next starship with hardly a break in the routine as the now empty starship breaks orbit and heads back out into space.

Chapter Twelve

Finally the time arrives when the armada of space craft come to unload the starship Grailem is on. The cargo doors open out into empty space showing more Starship's behind waiting in the queue as one of the unloading craft lands on the deck. Robots pour out of its own cargo hold and start to stack the crates inside. As Grailem suspected the unloading is carried out entirely by robots and he bides his time. He needs to stay with the consignment of microchips that he has altered as he may need a few robots on his side to stay alive.

As the robots pick up the cases containing the microchip's Grailem finds it is easy slipping on board the craft. Keeping close to the cases carried by the service robots he simply walks alongside them and casually enters the craft. The service robots

totally ignore him and he hides himself amongst the packing cases and waits for loading to be completed. The spacecraft is quickly loaded and the cargo doors shut as the engines start. Grailem keeps perfectly still amongst the cargo as the craft lifts off and heads down to the planet.

Grailem feels the spacecraft come to a soft landing and taxi along the runway, as it slows down the engine noise echoes off surrounding walls and Grailem knows they have entered a large building. The opening of the cargo doors shows a transparent domed roof at least thirty metres above his head. Robots board the craft and quickly start unloading, Grailem waits until they are about half way through before he steps out of the craft and hides behind the high stack of packing cases that have been unloaded. Keeping close to the microchip's cases he watches the efficient unloading of the craft by the robots. Each robot appears to know what it is doing, showing Grailem that they are also capable of independent reasoning and thought. Even the simple robots in this society appeared to possess a high intelligence.

With unloading complete the cargo doors close and the craft taxis out of the huge building and out onto the runway. Gaining speed the shuttlecraft roars down the runway and takes off putting itself at a steep angle as it heads back to the starship.

Large trucks enter the building and pull up beside the unloaded cargo; immediately they are loaded by a large group of robots and driven through the large hangar type building to the far exit.

Soon the robots are picking up the cases of microchip's and Grailem follows them to a waiting truck. Loading the cases onboard Grailem sees that the truck is almost full and he can see nowhere inside to hide. Crawling under the truck he grasps hold of the back axle and wedges himself underneath and holds on tightly.

The truck leaves within a few minutes and Grailem is carried through the hangar to join a convoy of trucks that are heading for a large industrial area at the edge of the spaceport. The modern factories look out of place as the view from orbit just showed large residential buildings. With all their requirements coming from off planet they had no need to work; and if they did, the robot force would do it.

The truck heads ever deeper amongst the industrial buildings which all appear newly constructed. Driving into a large warehouse the truck pulls to a stop in front of a long line of service robots. As the robots unload the cargo Grailem drops to the ground and slowly edges his way out from under the truck.

Legs that are not robotic appear at the other side of the truck and Grailem rolls swiftly out. The warehouse is lined with machinery set out in a production line system. Not stopping to look if he has been seen Grailem runs across the warehouse and hides behind one of the larger machines. Keeping still he listens to the sounds of the robots unloading the cargo while two Arct talk expectantly about the new design of robot.

Grailem's hunch is right as he watches the modified robots made on the starship being unloaded. The robots are part of the two hundred and fifty thousand that will follow and the two Arct are eager to see the microchip installed. Instructing the robots to open the container that holds the new robots and taking two of them out they walk across the warehouse and lay them on two bright steel benches.

The Arct approach them with a robot behind them carrying a case of tools and the all important microchip's. The robot places the case on the end of one of the benches and walks back to help continue unloading.

Opening the case of tools the oldest looking Arct takes out an electronic tool that looks like a screwdriver. Taking hold of the tool in his hand he approaches the head of the robot. Unscrewing a plate on the top of the robots head with the electronic screwdriver the Arct removes it and lays it down onto the bench. Telling his companion, who he calls Thyne to pass him a microchip, he looks inside the robots head.

Thyne opens the casing holding the microchip and hands him one of Grailem's modified microchip's. Taking the microchip from his hand the older Arct pushes it into the receiver port inside the robot's head and appearing confident he screws the plate back on. Pulling two electrodes out from the end of the bench he connects them to the head. Turning a switch on the bench the robot jolts as the shock of electricity hits it and it sits upright.

Turning off the switch and disconnecting the electrodes the Arct orders the robot to stand two metres from the bench. The robot immediately swings its legs off of the bench and stands upright; walking the three short steps the robot appears to have difficulty with its balance.

"What is wrong with it Kifele?" asks Thyne looking worried.

"They are always like that at the beginning, let it stand there for a few minutes to charge itself up and carry out a diagnostics check on itself. We will fit the other one as we need to test two before we report."

"How long have we got before the military arrive?"

"About three hours, they are travelling in one convoy with all the equipment; more than enough time to give these two a thorough test." replies Kifele with what Grailem assumes is a smile as he bares his mouth of sharp teeth.

Grailem gets behind the ever growing stack of goods as the truck is emptied and driven away. Looking round for a better hiding place Grailem can see none; the warehouse, newly constructed only contains the production line and two benches - and the goods that have been unloaded. The safest place will be outside, and would be a good test of one of the improvements he had made to his system.

Invisibility he knew as an impossibility but he had incorporated the next best thing. Designed by the military on his home planet, the front of his body could be converted into a large viewing screen. The back of his body was covered with a multitude of tiny camera's that transmitted the image to the front of his body. To look at him directly you would only see what is behind him, as long as Grailem stayed still he would not be seen.

Switching on the device he steps from behind the cargo and looks at the two Arct; so intent on their work fitting the microchip to the robot they do not see him. Grailem, keeps his face and front towards the two Arct as he walks sideways across the warehouse to the exit. Reaching the exit he has to turn his face to look outside; all is clear but the sudden appearance of the side of his head catches Kifele's eye.

Looking up sharply with alarm on his face he looks directly at Grailem, who, by then has turned and faced Kifele and remains motionless, using telepathy he tries to calm the agitated alien.

Staring at Grailem the alarm on the Arct's face turns to confusion as all he can now see is the warehouse wall and the open doorway.

"Are you all right?" asks Thyne appearing annoyed at Kifele having stopped working.

"I must be going mad, for a split second I was sure I could see the back of a humanoid head." replies Kifele looking worried.

"I told you there was something unnatural about those crispy fingers we had on the way here. They were twice the size of the normal fingers we have in cans; I bet they were grown on that moon in the Riptor sector." says Thyne with deep conviction.

"I fail to see how them being larger would make me see things, their size is due to the low gravity, how can that effect my eyesight?"

"It is what they feed them on, their size has nothing to do with low gravity; it is the chemicals they feed them on."

"But they taste so good, that does indicate they led happy lives." replies Kifele defensively.

"The taste is artificial, I think you will find that the flavour is supplied by the root of a vegetable that they grow on the same moon. With a little help from the genetics laboratory they then feed it to the humanoids so they taste natural."

"How do you know all this?" asks an annoyed Kifele. They had stopped at one of the most expensive restaurants on the way here at Kifele's expense. Earning a good salary he thought he would treat Thyne to a restaurant meal. He had been working with Thyne for several months now and had only ever seen him eat out of a can.

"Seen it on the Natural Channel, they talk a lot of sense about the artificial ingredients that we use."

Stepping out of the doorway the two Arct do not see Grailem as he walks alongside the new building. Reaching the end of the building he looks for somewhere to keep out of the way. Before him is obviously the target range; a wall five metres high and a metre thick stands at the end of the courtyard. Painted on it are circular targets mixed in with painted humanoid targets. The humanoids appear to be carrying large rifles and the artists have hidden them amongst the brown and green of the painted undergrowth.

Everything is newly built and it looks like the robot workforce has just left; as everywhere is so clean. At the end of the building two metres above the courtyard an observation platform has been built. Reached by a metal ladder the platform is enclosed in thick glass that is protected from the elements by a light absorbent roof.

Climbing the ladder Grailem keeps on climbing when he reaches the doorway and climbs up onto the roof. The roof is made of a tough material that does not bend or flex under his weight and he walks over to where the roof joins the side of the building. Lying down sideways, Grailem keeps his invisibility imaging turned on and faces forward. Remaining motionless and with a good view of the target range he waits for the Arct to show a demonstration of their power.

Twenty minutes later the two new robots come into view followed by the two Arct; Kifele and Thyne. The robots are carrying phaser weapons; a large barrelled rifle is clasped firmly in their hands and a small hand phaser is in a holster at their hips.

Kifele and Thyne walk quickly to the observation platform and climb the metal ladder. Once inside Grailem hears them shut and lock the door as a machine starts up and continues with a steady rhythm. Grailem feels an electrical charge envelop the observation platform as a defensive screen is activated.

Hearing the two Arct chatting excitedly amongst themselves Grailem watches the two robots which have remained motionless in front of the target range.

Suddenly they come to life and start firing the phaser rifles at the circular targets. The targets absorb the energy leaving only a small black burnt mark at the centre of each blast. The shots are accurate to within a millimetre of the centre and the robots continue firing until the energy is exhausted. Dropping the rifles down almost carelessly they draw their pistols and fire at the humanoid targets. Every shot is a killing shot; the head being the main target. Once again they continue firing until the energy of their pistols is exhausted.

Grailem feels the electrical charge of the defensive screen dissipate as it is switched off. The door of the observation platform is opened and the two Arct hurry down the metal steps and almost run to the target wall. Pointing out the accuracy of the shooting and talking excitedly they walk back towards the entrance to the unit.

The two robots stand perfectly still while they wait and within a few minutes the two Arct reappear. Thyne is carrying a small cylinder that is connected to a harness and tubing, Grailem guesses that this is a flame thrower of some kind. Watching Thyne approach the robots he straps the cylinder to the nearest one and instructs it to hold the tubing at its end. Turning and walking quickly away he follows Kifele up the metal steps and into the observation platform.

Feeling the defensive screen surrounding him activated, Grailem watches the two robots with anticipation below. The unarmed robot walks towards the target wall and turns and faces the other robot. The robot armed with the flame thrower, walks

backwards until it is twenty metres from the wall. Raising the gun of the flame thrower the robot pulls the trigger igniting the inflammable liquid that pours out and covers the other robot in a ball of flame.

Burning fiercely the robot walks towards its opposite number appearing oblivious of its burning form. This is certainly an improved design compared to the other robots that Grailem had encountered before; and had burnt so well. Still appearing as a ball of flame the burning robot reaches the flame thrower and tries to take it out of the other robots hand.

With the gun still spewing out burning fluid it splashes back off the burning robot setting the other robot alight. The tubing erupts in a burst of flame as the container then explodes in a showering of burning fluid.

The robots still continue their struggling for possession of the gun until the inflammable liquid is consumed. Suddenly they stop and stand like statues appearing to stare at each other as the Arct override their programming.

Grailem feels the defensive screen power down as the door is opened and the two Arct hurry out of the door and down the steps. Approaching the robots they slow down as they draw near and Kifele holds his hand out in front of him protecting his face from the heat. The robots are blackened and burnt and continue staring at each other.

"We better let these two cool down before we run anymore tests, we can still test a few more before the Commander gets here." Kifele tells Thyne with a wide fanged smile as they walk back towards the building.

Staying on top of the observation platform Grailem watches as the two scientists test more of the robots with every weapon they can think of. Testing them to destruction they appear to enjoy themselves as they try to blow up the robots with phaser cannons and explosives. The robots are not totally indestructible but if there are to be two hundred and fifty thousand, losing a few thousand will have no real effect.

A little after noon the bright sun of the system takes on a brighter glow, appearing to shine twice as bright as it normally does and Grailem is forced to use filters to shade his eyes. The sudden brightening of the sun explains the extra eyelid the Arct had, without it the sun would burn their eyes and cause blindness. The extra brightness lasts for a little over an hour when it returns back to its normal brightness. That this process had been occurring for thousands, if not millions of years proved no handicap to the life forms on the planet as they mutated to survive.

That an invasion is being planned is painfully obvious as the Commander and the military arrive a few hours later. Hundreds of camouflaged trucks start to fill the huge yard as military personnel and service and military robots climb out. Even bigger trucks loaded with heavy machines are driven into the buildings and unloaded.

An empty building is soon filled with machines that are connected to the power supply and immediately start creating more of the new robots. As more machines and supplies arrive a continuous stream of newly created robots flow out of the building. Loaded onto the military trucks they are driven away. Grailem estimates, that at this fantastic rate of production, the remaining robots that need to be built to take all of the microchip's he had converted will take just seven days.

Several of the military robots are taken round to the firing range and made to face the new style of robot. Armed with phaser rifles and flame throwers six of them attack two of the new ones.

The battle is short, taking the phaser blasts and burning liquid in their stride the new robots calmly walk up to the military robots. Having no weapons Grailem watches with great interest as the robots disarm the military by simply taking their guns away. Using their superior strength they then proceed to disassemble them and carelessly throw the pieces down onto the ground.

Having lain on the observation platform roof for the day Grailem feels he can learn no more. If the robots are to be an invasion force he needs to know where they are being stored. During the day he had watched several hundred robots being made and shipped out. Climbing down from the roof he easily makes his way amongst the maze of military trucks. Hiding under an empty truck that stands in line waiting to be loaded Grailem wedges himself near the back axle and patiently waits.

Several hours pass before the truck is finally loaded and driven out of the gate. The grey surface of the road passes as a blur for a short while until the truck finally pulls to a stop. Nervous of security; which he had seen little of, Grailem waits as the truck is being unloaded. When about half of the robots have been unloaded Grailem drops down from his cramped place at the rear axle and makes his way to the edge of the truck.

Waiting the opportunity he slides out from under the truck as a loaded service vehicle passes. Keeping himself between the truck and service vehicle he looks under it for somewhere to hide. The gap looks small between the shiny metal and the concrete. Saying a silent prayer Grailem rolls underneath and grasps hold of the back axle and wedges his feet under the suspension.

The service vehicle continues its steady speed and drives into an already full warehouse. Taking a chance Grailem slides out from under the vehicle as it enters the warehouse and stands briefly in the doorway. The warehouse contains all the robots produced in the day and they stand shoulder to shoulder awaiting activation.

Using his invisibility imaging he walks calmly along the front of the building; and stops as he looks around. The spaceport is spread out before him; space shuttles, like the one he was transported in from the starship, stand in orderly lines. He can count fifty five as the noise of another approaches as it comes in to land.

Curious as to its cargo he makes his way to the main runway and arrives as the craft lands smoothly on the concrete surface. Standing still Grailem watches as it taxis along the two kilometre strip until it is slow enough to turn. Turning back towards him the shuttle taxis to the front of a shiny steel building five hundred metres away.

Walking smoothly so that the image portrayed of his background remains steady Grailem makes his way to the shuttlecraft. Arriving just a few minutes later Grailem can see that already the cargo doors are open and the cargo is being unloaded. The load looks familiar and being stacked one on top of the other Grailem cannot make out what it is.

Going closer he recognises the hibernation chambers that were used for the 'supposed' colonists and crew. The readout panels on the side still show the life signs of the inhabitant; showing that whoever is inside, is still alive. Though the craft is being quickly unloaded Grailem notices the care that the robots are taking with the chambers.

It looks like the Arct like to have their meat as fresh as possible!

Grailem feels a deep anger grow inside him and raise the temperature of his brain, recognising the feeling as to how he felt when he killed his 'carers' he tries to slow his racing thoughts.

Not having the desire to eat himself has robbed him of the pleasures of eating; and he views the Arct's actions as unnecessary - though he agrees the thought is illogical as they do have to eat to survive.

'You will have a legion of two hundred and fifty thousand at your command soon' says the voice in his head bringing control over his mounting rage. Walking backwards he puts some distance between himself and the live human cargo before turning around. Still angry he walks quickly back to the warehouse of robots. Blending with the back wall he waits for darkness as the sun starts to slip slowly below the horizon.

As darkness falls Grailem hears a small auto vehicle come to a stop in front of the

building. Curious he walks around to the front to arrive in time to see Kifele, Thyne and two uniformed Arct, wearing shiny military medals, enter the building.

Standing in the doorway Grailem watches as Kifele, apparently filled with excitement points a crude remote control device at the multitude of standing robots. Pushing the display screen he activates the waiting robots; the robots respond immediately as their eyes light up and many push themselves into a more upright position.

"As you can see, now they are activated we will not need to transport them to the shuttle; they can walk." explains Kifele excitedly.

"The sooner the better." replies one of the military commanders; "The spaceport has been cleared, you have three hours." he continues. Looking at his companion he orders; "You will accompany me to communications." and walks back to the auto vehicle with his companion close beside. Getting into the vehicle the doors shut quietly behind them as it drives away into the darkness.

"You take the first batch of five hundred to the shuttle and I will follow behind with the second load. Meet back here." orders Kifele.

Grailem backs out hurriedly from the doorway and watches as Thyne, leading four orderly lines of robots heads towards the parked shuttles. Grailem wonders at the secrecy, why wait until nightfall before loading? And why only three hours?

Grailem needs to find a communications terminal, a civilisation this advanced would have to rely on computer networks. Deciding to wait for the three hours before finding out how this planet ticked Grailem is curious as to what happens after the time is up.

Kifele and Thyne have all the robots loaded two hours and fifty minutes later. Totalling three thousand five hundred, they are loaded five hundred to a shuttle.

Exactly three hours after the military had left them, the auto vehicle returns and pulls up in the doorway of the warehouse. A rear door opens and walking over to the vehicle Kifele and Thyne step inside as the door closes behind them. Reversing out of the doorway the vehicle turns around and heads off into the darkness.

As the rear lights fade in the distance Grailem hears a shuttlecraft engines start with a roar. More shuttles also start their engines, loaded with, assumes Grailem, five hundred robots as passengers in each. In an orderly line they taxi to the main runway, Grailem watches as each one takes off and they are soon lost to sight in the darkness.

Walking quickly across the spaceport Grailem heads for the city, with the spaceport being on shutdown for the last three hours nothing is going his way. Service vehicles and small auto vehicles drive towards the spaceport, their headlights lighting the darkness. Making his way to the mono railway he arrives just as a train is pulling into the station. The passengers and robots quickly get off the train and Grailem hurries over to it, jumping down next to the track he looks for somewhere to hide.

The train floats above the single rail with electricity and magnetism as the propulsion force. With no wheels there were no axles to hide on and Grailem looks underneath; everywhere is covered and Grailem can see the long line of magnets stretching all the way under the train. Looking towards the pointed rear; which will soon become the front of the train Grailem can see that it is hollow. Forcing a panel open Grailem climbs inside and pulls the panel tight behind him.

Ten minutes later the train starts to move slowly as it leaves the station; as it clears the buildings it accelerates to its top speed. Grailem estimates the train is going at five hundred kilometres an hour, which it maintains for only five minutes before it starts to slow down as it approaches the city.

Pulling to a stop five minutes later at what appears a noisy railway station Grailem pushes the panel out to allow him to slide out of the train. With his invisibility imagery at full power he drops to the ground and looks around him. He is below the platform and can hear the multitude of people and service robots getting off the train above

him.

Raising his head above the platform he waits until it empties of people and jumps up onto the platform. Keeping his front side directed at the train, Grailem walks sideways until he reaches the wall of the station. Standing motionless facing the train he blends perfectly with the metal background of the building and waits for the train to leave.

The train moves forward gathering speed as it heads for the next station, looking around him Grailem can see the platform emptying of Arct and robots as they make their way to the exits. Soon he is left alone and walks to the end of the platform and well away from an exit. A small chain link fencing runs along the other side of the platform and Grailem walks over and jumps over it easily.

Bushes and small trees separate the railway station from the road and Grailem slips between them easily and steps out onto the road. Arct and robots file out of the station in orderly lines, some get into waiting taxis, whilst others walk along the road.

Relying on his invisibility imagery he walks across the road and along a narrow alleyway that is between two shiny metal buildings. Reaching the rear of the building he looks for somewhere to hide until the Arct and robot passengers have departed. Finding a void under a big metal staircase Grailem crawls in and watches the parking area in front of him.

The parking area has only a few auto vehicles parked at one side as it is still early in the day and is empty of people. Assuming the workforce will arrive at eight or nine a.m. will give him about three hours to find somewhere a bit more secure. Crawling out from under the stairs now all the passengers have gone, Grailem hurries across to the rear of the parking area. Beyond is a small area of waste ground that is covered in rubble and has become heavily overgrown. Walking through the undergrowth he sees in the distance a large factory complex that covers the land.

This is puzzling as by all appearances everything the Arct need is manufactured off planet. Checking the buildings for security cameras Grailem cannot see any; security on this planet does seem non-existent as the Arct appear confident in their mastery of their own home world.

Approaching the complex he reaches the nearest building; the building is made entirely of new shiny metal material that every building on this planet appears made of. There are no windows for him to look through and he cautiously makes his way towards the front of the building. The large entrance doors are wide open and Grailem takes a look inside.

Machinery and automated lines fill the interior and the noise and heat are intense. Large red hot furnaces pour metal into rifle shaped moulds. This is an arms factory making phaser rifles at a phenomenal rate. As they reach the end of the line they are boxed and stacked with others - that reach to the ceiling.

Looking around the rest of the factory complex he sees that every unit is devoted to making weapons. The robot labour force improves the efficiency and there seems no let up in the continuous outflow of rifles, pistols, hand phasers and bombs.

It makes sense to make all armaments on their home planet as to have them made elsewhere could turn against them. The urgency that the complex is working shows they have no time to waste and he wonders once again if he is the cause of all of this.

Needing a communications terminal Grailem makes his way to a small group of offices. Communication and computer platforms cover every desk and boldly Grailem steps inside, sitting near the doorway he switches the nearest platform on.

A complex work schedule fills the screen showing the calculated amount of weapons that were made the day before. The schedule starts at eight-thirty a.m. giving him a comfortable two hours before any Arct arrive. Grailem is impressed with the list of weapons as thousands have been made; war seems inevitable.

Connecting to the main communications network that covers the planet Grailem

tries to make sense of what is going on. The eating of human flesh appears the priority as there are pages and pages of restaurants; 'fresh' meat being the most expensive!

An hour and a half later Grailem disconnects from the network and returns the screen to its original work schedule.

Looking through the door of another factory unit Grailem can see the robots are already at work on a different kind of robot. Humanoid looking robots are the end result - and from his position in the doorway they look real; and alive.

These will be the first wave of the invasion, as the rubberised coating being applied would not endure any kind of battle. Already several hundred stood at the far end of the unit; completed and awaiting their assignments.

If the humanoid looking robots have been programmed correctly they will be able to merge in with the human population and create discontent. They could also have a more ominous purpose in being in a position to easily abduct any humans. Being so life-like they could seduce and entrap their victim and kill them with ease.

The manufacture of robots like he was seeing, had been tried on his home world generations before he was created. The robots were so well made that, unless you had special detection machinery, you could not tell the difference between robot or humanoid.

They failed because they so perfectly imitated the humanoid population, but were law abiding that was taken to an extreme and eventually no one knew who to trust.

The humanoid looking robots could cause an instability in the planetary government and would leave it ripe for an easy invasion. Merging with the wall of the unit Grailem decides to wait until the end of the working day before doing his own modifications.

The day proves interesting from his position against the wall as many military personnel arrive and inspect the work. The Generals and war heroes are easy to see as they wear their shiny medals proudly and stride around the place like they own it.

Night soon arrives and the Arct personnel leave the unit for their homes leaving only one machine working. This machine is the furnace that softens and melts the rubberised polyamide that is used for the skin of the robots and it is necessary to keep it on; and at a constant temperature. Pleased that the furnace is still operational Grailem sets to work; he had seen enough Arct today be able to improve his lifelike mask and he dismisses the idea of becoming a General.

Chapter Thirteen

As the grey of dawn starts to light the sky Grailem fits the improved mask over his head and puts on the gloves. The work had not gone well as finding the right shading proved the most difficult. Adding a few cubic centimetres of the dirty grease from one of the machines brought success. Confident in his new disguise and pleased that the mask is a big improvement he now alters the shape of his skull slightly to accommodate the mask. Wearing Arct clothing from the offices which he had altered to fit his small frame he strides boldly out of the unit.

At the rate of production of the legion of humanoid looking robots Grailem has only a few more days before the invasion fleet leaves. There is the option of accompanying the humanoid looking robots. Their flight is already scheduled to leave in six days time and Grailem decides to give it some more thought.

Now confident he looks like an old Arct and walking quickly to the main highway Grailem joins a group of Arct under a covered shelter as they wait for the public transport to arrive. With this civilisation being so advanced Grailem wonders why

there is a public transport system. With their obvious wealth it surprises him that they do not all own their own auto vehicles.

The transport arrives in a few minutes; a long coach like vehicle that can hold several hundred people and Grailem boards with the rest of the passengers. Two stops later most of the passengers get off and walk towards a large fifteen story office building. With the distance to travel so short from home to work it is obviously easier and more convenient to ride the free bus.

Grailem remains on board as the coach heads towards the city; travelling along the highway and busy roads Grailem becomes bored with the bright metal of the buildings, auto vehicles, coaches and even the small parks. As the coach enters the city the streets become more crowded with Arct and their service robots. No one appears to be in a hurry and the coach slows down to match their slow pace.

As the coach reaches the centre of the city Grailem gets off and joins the throng of people and servant robots as they go about their business. He can see no security cameras and no security anywhere, making him wonder if this is also a crimeless society.

Knowing the workings of the human mind as well as his own and his reading of other races, deceit and crime always composed of at least ten percent of any civilisation. The Arct all seem at ease and Grailem wonders if he has missed seeing a mind controlling device in them. The last planet that was under Arct control had control of all the humanoids, but it was due to necessity as written in their history records.

Why not on their own race and home planet?

Or had he finally found a race of beings that could co-exist happily with each other?

Walking the busy streets Grailem sees the same system in operation as on the previous planet he had been on when the citizens purchase any goods. Their photographs are taken as they leave the store and the electronic tag on the item they have purchased recorded - and assumingly their bank balance decreases at the same time. The Arct appear happy with this arrangement.

Entering a clothing store Grailem chooses a new pair of the military type uniforms. He chooses the purple type and tries them on for size; they are a perfect fit and leaving his old clothes in the booth, Grailem makes his way out of the exit, having his photograph taken and purchases recorded on the way out.

The city that he walks appears filled with happy Arct and he realises that once again he is on his own; apart from his legion of a quarter of a million military style robots.

The thought fills him with sadness, loneliness was beginning to have an affect upon him more than when he was in space. Though he is surrounded by many different Arct of all ages,

most smiling and happy, they had no effect upon him. Obviously lower in intelligence to himself Grailem had not considered bringing himself down to their level and made no attempt at socialising – mainly because he did not know how to.

These sad thoughts are interrupted by an 'attractive' looking female Arct who approaches him and looks him up and down,

"My, you are a big one." she exclaims and makes no pretence at looking at his trousers where his prosthetic penis puts a slight bulge in his trousers.

"What is it that you want?" asks Grailem in a gruff voice,

The Arct female ignores his tone of voice and forms a grimace, showing her canine-like teeth, which Grailem interprets as a smile; "Was wondering if you would like to come up to my place for a little while?" she asks as she steps forward and unashamedly reaches out and grabs hold of Grailem's prosthetic penis.

"I have to get back to the wife soon, she is cooking us humanoid child spare ribs with her special dressing."

The female Arct immediately loses interest and turns away and goes in search of

another victim.

This part of the city suddenly holds no appeal, he had learnt what he came for, and that was this area was not guarded. No security patrols wandered the streets or loitered on street corners like he had seen on the other planet.

Such was their confidence in their security, they felt they had no need for them - or military robots.

That, felt Grailem, will be their undoing as an idea was beginning to form in his head.

Deciding to head back to the spaceport Grailem retraces his steps to the railway station. Now disguised as an Arct he waits along with other travellers for the train to arrive.

The train empties in a hurried mass of Arct and robot servants and Grailem steps aboard and finds himself a discreet corner. He does not have long to wait as the train, half filled with passengers and robot servants, slowly departs the station.

Soon it is heading through the city with the speed increasing all the time. When the train reaches about five hundred kilometres an hour it immediately starts to slow down as it passes through residential neighbourhoods towards the spaceport.

Reaching the spaceport the train comes to a gentle stop and all the passengers disembark with Grailem trailing behind them. Exiting the huge building Grailem stands close to the wall and activates his invisibility imagery. No one notices his disappearance and he makes his way back to the robot factory.

The main doors are firmly closed but the noise of the machinery inside permeates the air. Walking around the side of the building Grailem reaches a small entrance door and turns the handle slowly. Gently he opens the door and peers inside.

Robots fill the production line turning out even more robots at an incredible rate. Several Arct wander amongst the robot workers checking the product at each stage.

For Arct to be supervising and quality checking at such close quarters shows Grailem the importance; and urgency. Settling himself into a darkened corner Grailem watches the robots being made and stored at the far end of the factory unit.

Grailem gives some serious thought as to what he is going to do next. His original plan had been to take control of the robots as they landed on the humanoid planet they were invading. Rendering them useless they could then be easily destroyed by the resident humans.

A new more daring plan had been beginning to take shape in his mind. Why not take control of the robots *before* they left orbit. If he could take control of the robotic operators and navigators aboard the Starship's he would have complete power over the whole planet.

Eager to see if this new theory could be put into practice Grailem makes his way cautiously out of the building. Once out in the fresh air he makes his way to the nearest shuttlecraft. The spaceport around the shuttlecraft is empty of people and Grailem can see, positioned between the shuttlecrafts and airport building, two guards wearing military uniforms.

As Grailem approaches the nearest shuttlecraft the guards keep their attention directed towards the main buildings and fail to see him as he climbs on board.

Making his way to the computer terminal in the main cabin Grailem turns it on and waits patiently for it to 'boot up'. Several minutes later when the machine has warmed sufficiently, Grailem works the keyboard at a furious rate. Feeding in complicated binary code, all from memory, he triumphantly hits the input key.

The screen before him changes immediately to a three dimensional image of the controls of the starship he had arrived on. Through the operating robot Grailem operates the mobile controller and alters the course of the starship by half a degree.

The operating robot appears oblivious to the change in course and remains motionless. Grailem returns the starship to its correct course, which is deep in space,

and watches the operating robot closely. Appearing not to notice the recent deviation in course the robot continues to monitor and pilot the starship, pressing no alarm buttons.

Flushed with confidence Grailem takes control of six other Starship's and their operators. Performing small orbital changes Grailem accesses their computer banks and studies the overall construction of each starship.

The Starship's had been built on a planet, rather than in space and he wonders if the Starship's would be able to take the forces of re-entry. Reading of their construction Grailem soon learnt that they are designed for re-entry and a safe landing.

Wondering why the Starship's did not land on the planet to unload, rather than sending a fleet of shuttlecraft, was not to be found in the engineering sections. Grailem found the answer in the historical section.

Starship's landing on the planet was normal centuries ago until several, from a newly discovered and quickly humanoid cultivated sector of the galaxy returned carrying an unknown plague. The plague was released into the Arct atmosphere when the cargo doors were opened; the cargo had been treated and sealed but the air trapped in the cargo hold carried the plague as it had not been sterilised.

Due to the alien nature of the attacking plague carrying a particularly nasty nematode, a cure was a long time coming. After three hard years of intensive laboratory experiments and field trials a cure was eventually found. But by then two-thirds of the Arct population had been decimated.

The cure, a harsh mixture of antibodies, was released into the atmosphere saving the remaining Arct. The antibodies were also released into the humanoid planets atmosphere and improvements in the meat production were hurried through. The next harvest proved plague free with a higher proportion of protein and energy per kilogramme due to the improved conditions.

The result was a population explosion in the humans and within a few short generations the Arct had to re-introduce birth control. Using similar antibody principles, humanoid species were tested in many areas that had been considered as unsuitable for food production in the past. With the use of domes and disease free air the humanoids flourished and produced good tasting meat; that was guaranteed chemical free.

The restriction of not landing would not apply to Grailem as the Starship's will contain his modified security and military force. Grailem's plan that had been forming in his mind was to use the robots here; on this planet, to exterminate all of the Arct race.

Every Arct would have to be killed; and that included the women and children.

Grailem had found a feeling of compassion in his endless wandering in space. He had learnt the feelings of hunters and carnivores and their insatiable desire for a continuous food source. The eating habits of the Arct and the domination of all humanoid life forms within a distance of over one thousand five hundred light years in every direction was disturbing. The subjugation inflicted on these billions upon billions of humanoids ignited a feeling of great defiance within Grailem.

To kill all the Arct would give him great satisfaction; and at the same time he would be ridding the galaxy of these evil eaters of human flesh. The feeling of kinship between himself and the humanoids he had met, brought a strong desire within him that to him had grown a thousand fold. Feeling that he is at last to be able to do good in the galaxy and dedicated to regaining humanoid control, makes him feel proud.

Satisfied that his improvements are functioning well he still has to wait until all the robots are constructed and programmed and loaded onto the shuttlecraft. Making his way to the parked shuttlecraft that are nearest to him, Grailem climbs on board and finds the best and most unusual place for hiding is the main cockpit.

The cockpit controls are different to what was designed on his home world, there the shuttlecraft were for more complicated and the Arct had solved many of the problems with simplicity. The control panel contained a joystick and ten glass covered dials that recorded fuel, battery supply and diagnostics on the state of the engines and systems.

In the forward section of the cockpit a large vacant area, between the control panel and the nose of the shuttlecraft, gave him more than enough room to crouch down. Testing his imagery equipment Grailem is pleased to see that he merges well with the background of the fuselage.

At two-thirty in the morning the shuttle cargo door is opened and modified robots start to fill the hold. From his position in the cockpit Grailem can only see the robots outside queuing patiently until they enter the shuttlecraft.

A half hour later the shuttlecraft is loaded and the doors secured. The pilots are robots and Grailem, from his position in front of them watches them prepare for take-off. Memorising their actions Grailem is confident that he could easily pilot the Arct shuttlecraft.

Grailem continues watching as the shuttlecraft taxi's out onto the runway and powers up for take off. A green light flashes on the instrument panel and the shuttlecraft moves slowly forward. Gathering speed when it reaches the main runway the robot pilot accelerates quickly, the G-force nearly pushing Grailem into the cockpit and he holds on firmly.

The shuttlecraft races down the runway until Grailem feels it is airborne, increasing the power the robot aims the shuttlecraft at the sky as the darkness of space rushes towards it.

Unable to see their destination through the metal of the fuselage, Grailem waits patiently until the shuttlecraft has docked. Looking through the top of the cockpit window Grailem can see the roof of a Starship cargo hold above him.

The robot pilots shut down the shuttlecraft and leave the cabin and Grailem steps out of his darkened corner and follows the pilots through the door. Walking along a small corridor he steps into the cargo hold and watches the modified robots disembark.

Turning on his invisibility imagery Grailem follows one wall to the exit. The robots are marching out of the shuttlecraft in military precision and following a long corridor that leads into the depths of the starship.

Getting out of the cargo hold is simplicity itself as all Grailem has to do is keep close to the wall. No guards are posted anywhere, robot or Arct, and Grailem simply walks out through the doorway and follows the flow of robots.

The walls of the corridor are made of flat panels of a metal/carbon composite; and have no doorways. Three hundred metres further along, doorways leading into storage areas offer a means of escape. Looking through the doorways Grailem can see they are packed tight with armaments; phaser rifles and pistols, flame throwers, disruptor rifles and more ominously disruptor cannons.

Remembering the history of the Arct, Grailem recalls an incident where a city was attacked with the use of disruptor cannons. Within an hour the city was reduced to rubble and no citizen survived. The disruptor cannon destroys everything that is influenced by its disruptor particles. Buildings fall to dust, along with all the humanoids, plant life and controlling Arct.

The disruptor cannons were outlawed centuries ago, but their inclusion amongst the armaments showed that the Arct were intent on wiping out whoever it was they were intending to attack.

Finding a partly empty storeroom Grailem steps into the room and makes his way to the rear. This room also contains armaments and by moving a few cases Grailem is able to hide himself until the sounds of unloading and loading cease. Absolute

silence descends on the starship when the faint engine roar of the shuttlecraft fades into the distance.

Stepping out from behind some packing cases Grailem leaves the room and goes in search of the Bridge. The ship is vast and it takes Grailem a quarter of an hour before he discovers an elevator. The elevator can take him anywhere into the starship but Grailem presses the button marked 'Bridge'.

A few minutes later Grailem is stepping onto the bridge; it is deserted, except for one navigator and the pilot; both are robots. Approaching the navigational console he watches the pilot as he continuously carries out systems checks. 'Suggesting' to the pilot that it needs to check the safety hatches, Grailem stands to one side as the robot stands up and makes its way to the elevator.

Sitting where the pilot was just sitting Grailem brings up the navigational charts. Their destination is a planetary system at the outer edge of the space they control. The planetary system has two inhabitable planets and reminds Grailem of home. Extrapolating the co-ordinates to view the galaxy from the point of view of their destination planet Grailem studies the star patterns.

Some of the constellations look familiar but appear further to the west than the view he was used to on his home world. Their destination is a system two hundred and eighty light years from his home world.

Examining the console closely Grailem removes a panel from the rear of the computer platform and studies the intricate electrical system. Finding the navigational controls and circuitry and by a clever re-routing Grailem easily gains control of the navigation and control board. Operated wirelessly from a transmitter installed in his chest cavity Grailem transmits a low pitched signal that alters the distant orbit of the starship around the planet. Returning the starship to its original course Grailem makes his way back to the cargo hold, as he has many more Starship's to visit.

Grailem manages to alter the controls of three other Starship's until the shuttlecraft stop their loading as daylight arrives at the spaceport. Remaining on board of a partly loaded starship when the shuttlecraft returns to the planet, Grailem decides to explore.

The Starship, built in exactly the same design as the one that brought him here has been altered drastically. Extra shielding now encircles the huge engine while robots work furiously converting the starship into a warship. Extra gun turrets are being added all around the vessel and Grailem wanders into a large factory unit that is making even more phaser rifles and pistols.

Shocked at the fortifications that are being added and the single mindedness of the robots as they produce the new weapons, almost by the second, makes Grailem vow to defeat this monster race.

The Starship had been stripped of all unessential fittings and equipment to make room for the robot force. Most of the corridor walls had been removed, along with doors and all the deep hibernation equipment. The improvements look like they will be finished before the next shuttlecraft, filled with military robots, will arrive. Grailem finds a secluded corner and sits and waits.

Returning to the planet on an empty shuttlecraft Grailem boards a much larger craft that is almost completely loaded. The larger size is apparent as Grailem enters. Singly controlled robot spacecraft, built in a torpedo shape with metal handles welded onto the casing for the robots to hold onto, fill the cargo hold.

These craft must be for the first wave of the invasion; their small size would make them almost undetectable to radar. Thousands could land and prepare the ground for the main invasion force; giving the inhabitants of the planet no chance of defence.

Looking at the torpedo shaped craft gives Grailem an idea; if he was to borrow one of these craft he would not have to rely on the shuttlecrafts to transport him from

starship to starship.

Grailem does not have long to wait until the roar of the shuttlecraft's engine fills the air. Taxiing slowly along the runway due to the extra weight the shuttlecraft gathers speed and barely reaches the right velocity before it takes off; only a few metres from the end of the concrete runway.

The robot pilot has difficulty controlling the shuttlecraft's flight as by all appearances the craft is overloaded. With computer's in control this error should not have occurred and Grailem wonders if the programming had been overridden. The invasion must be starting soon.

Chapter Fourteen

Stealing one of the torpedo shaped craft was simplicity itself; once unloaded into the cargo hold of the starship he had spent the night in, the shuttlecraft returns to the planet for more supplies. As there were no living creatures on the starship the robots had left the cargo doors open in readiness for their next load.

Sitting on one of the torpedo shaped craft Grailem operates the simple controls of joystick and accelerator and flies out of the cargo hold making his way to the next starship.

The next seventy two hours Grailem works feverishly 'modifying' the controls of all the Starship's that are in a distant orbit around the Arct's home planet. During that time an almost continuous flow of shuttlecraft fly between the Starship's and the planet. The daylight curfew appears to have been lifted as a new shuttlecraft leaves the atmosphere every fifteen minutes heading for a Starship.

By the end of the day all the Starship's have been loaded and a flotilla of shuttlecraft appear from the atmosphere of the planet and make their way separately to the Starship's that orbit the planet.

This must be the Arct arriving, the captains and officers who will direct and control the forthcoming battle.

Grailem had situated himself on the bridge of the flagship of the fleet; a starship twice the size of the other Starship's that orbited the planet and the most fortified. Large tactical computer's with equally large viewing screens surrounded the bridge, their standby lights glowing bright.

From his position behind one of the computer banks with his invisibility imagery making him appear part of the computer, he watches the Arct as they enter the bridge from the elevator.

Most look elderly, adorned with shiny medals and appear to have the superior attitude to match as they bark out orders. The most elderly, wrinkled face covered in pure white hair and slightly stooped, makes his way to the captain's chair. Sitting down he operates some controls set in the arm of the chair and the forward viewing screen turns on. The view is from a satellite high above the plane of Starship's showing every ship as it orbits the planet.

The Starship's closest to the flagship show a bright green light as a beacon, indicating their readiness. Grailem watches the screen for several hours as each starship indicates its readiness with the bright green beam of light. As the final Starship's light shows green the captain grunts in approval and instructs his navigator to set course for Dangilhooley, the planet they are to invade.

This is what Grailem has been waiting for; the Starship's to be fully loaded and ready for action. Using the transmitter fitted inside him he wirelessly transmits the right frequency that will release the poisonous gas he has also installed in every Starship.

Within thirty seconds all of the Arct on board the Starship's are dead. Activating all of the robots on board the Starship's he wirelessly instructs them to dispose of the bodies into outer space. Inserting his modified circuit boards into the main computer's Grailem takes control of all the Starship's in their distant orbit around the planet.

Assigning each Starship a sector of the Arct planet below, with each central point a city, he instructs the Starship's to land and the robots disembark and kill every living thing in their sector.

Remaining in orbit, in case the Arct possess a super weapon he is unaware of, Grailem watches the Starship's break orbit and head towards the planet.

The robots had been programmed well in preparation for their invasion of the humanoid planet. Their main directive was to kill; and kill they did. The Arct, with no weapons or robots to defend them and not experiencing any wars for generations were killed easily. Though the Arct were their creators it made no difference - as the robots slaughtered their one time master's - every single one of them.

Eighteen hours later every mammal on the planet was dead; women, children, the pet dogs and even the herds of buffalo and the birds flying in the sky were killed.

Breaking orbit Grailem instructs his robot navigator to land him in the capital of the planet. Called Severdia it was the height of Arct civilisation, before Grailem's interference twenty million Arct lived within the confines of the city. Grailem locates the science headquarters through the ship's computer network and instructs the navigator to land the Starship at a nearby park.

The main science building is an imposing structure; made of stone rather than the familiar bright metal of all the other buildings around it made it look old, and somehow evil.

The robots had done a good job in clearing all the dead Arct bodies away and many were mopping the floor, trying to clear the puddles of blood. Making his way to the main office Grailem pushes the door open and steps inside.

Here was one room the robots had not cleared, as the Director lay slumped across his desk, his head in a pool of blood. The ancient single shot revolver he held in his right hand implied he had taken his own life. With his death not being reported into the robot main frame, his body would remain here until the cleaning robots arrived.

Looking over his shoulder at the blood stained paperwork sprawled across the desk, Grailem can see that most of the information is obliterated by thick blackening blood.

Looking around the room Grailem sees a large star chart covering one wall. The chart is expertly done and shows the domain of the Arct. Every planet and moon they occupy is indicated on the chart. Population figures and estimates of humanoid food consumption are displayed in holographic three dimensional labels. Here before him, was all the information he needed to destroy the entire Arct race.

Searching the computer's memory banks Grailem tried to find the exact number of Arct who had lived on this planet. He knew the legion of robots had killed billions; but also billions of other mammals and all of the humanoids. Each Arct kill made by one of Grailem's improved robots was recorded onto the main computer in great detail. The problem was that all the other kills were also recorded, even though they were of other species the same amount of detail was recorded. The error in Grailem's computer programming was that the kills were added along with the Arct kills to give a total number of kills.

Grailem studied the figures which showed that the total number of kills was nearly three times the recorded population of Arct. Many Arct may have hidden themselves amongst the shattered buildings and may have even escaped to the forest. Instructing his robot legion to seek out any remaining Arct and with the figures confused by the addition of the other mammals they searched for a week and only found a few who were half-starved and near to death before Grailem was satisfied no

more remained.

The next Arct occupied populated planet was fifteen light years away and travelling through hyperspace the journey would take nine weeks. But it would not be nine weeks wasted, as after witnessing the death of every mammal on the planet; including the wildlife and humanoid's, Grailem knew he had to alter the robot's programming. More importantly to him was the wasted week searching for Arct survivors, which in the end had only numbered a few pathetic individuals.

His concern for the millions of humanoid's and other wildlife his legion had killed on the planet was non-existent. Death and suffering of the Arct became his one obsession and the death of the other creatures only slowed his legion down and caused confusion with the total of recorded kills.

Grailem decided he would have to make his robot legions more selective. Selecting the image and profile of an Arct he programmed all of the robots to destroy this one target. Due to the sheer number of robots he had to delegate much of the work to the repair robots or he would have run out of time.

Working as quickly as he can altering the programming, the repair robots put him to shame. Even with his mechanical arms and advanced technology he was no match for these nimble fingered bits of metal. Each repair robot could alter the programming of a military robot five times faster than Grailem could.

Their work was also superior, much to Grailem's disgust.

The computer provided the information by giving him the exact population of Arct on the next planet. Each kill carried out by a robot or disruptor cannon would now be recorded in the main memory banks of the flagship. When the record of kills showed that all the Arct had been destroyed they could then quickly move onto the next planet; and not waste a week searching for a few stragglers.

Sitting in the forward observation deck of the Flagship, Grailem looked out at the galaxy spread before him. Rather than seeing the wonders portrayed before him the view reminded him of his countless years of drifting in space. His dream world re-awakens inside his mind and he forms a mechanical smile at the memory it invokes.

The loneliness that he always felt but kept repressed surfaced with a vengeance and he felt a cold wind blow through his mind. The loneliness of space, without even the carers to torment him, nearly drove him mad with despair. He had always been alone, different from those around him which made true communication difficult.

The loneliness of space was different, for out there he was totally alone and the sadness and depression of it all had made him wish for death.

Grailem opens his eyes (he had not even realised they were closed) and comes back to the reality of the observation deck. There is still no sign of the sun and planetary system that is their destination and Grailem wonders at his thoughts.

Why was he thinking about his time drifting in space, and more especially the loneliness he felt?

Because that is what he feels now.

He had also felt lonely when he was on the Arct controlled planet even with happy smiling faces around him, but had refused to admit it. Here on this Starship he felt even more lonely and acknowledged that he would always be alone. He was different from anything else in the universe - and would probably always remain so.

Several hours later a distant sun shines brighter than the stars around it as they finally approach their destination. Of the two habitable planets in the system there were also several terraformed moons and large asteroids.

An all out attack on one planet would alert the other that his fleet had arrived; and these planets may also have sophisticated weapons. A different approach would be needed, of the forty-nine Starship's he could deploy twenty four to each planet and

the remaining Starship, loaded with extra shuttlecraft, used to kill all those on the moons and asteroids.

Slowing his fleet down to sub light speed Grailem transfers all of the spare shuttlecraft to the second largest Starship. Loading it also with extra robots and armaments Grailem programmes the main computer. Identifying the highest populated moons he instructs the computer to destroy the highest populated first. Working down to the lowest populated moon he then programmes it to destroy distant asteroids that contain only a handful of Arct.

Re-entering hyperspace the forty-nine Starship's head there separate ways and carry out the programming efficiently. Even though the Arct had been warned when their home world was being destroyed they had no real idea how to defend themselves. Having no weapons and with their civilisation being complacent and peaceful for so long they could not come to a decision as to what to do.

The dithering of the politicians provided no leadership and Grailem's legions attacked with no mercy. Twenty-one hours later the computer registers that all Arct within this sector have been destroyed; though not without casualties this time.

Damage was inflicted on one of the Starship's which had been hit with an old fashioned atomic device fired from one of the moons. Half the robotic force of the Starship was swept out into space into a cloud of meteors and destroyed before the hull was sealed. The moon the Starship was attacking had a militant hostile force of resident Arct; a feeling almost alien to their culture.

The moon had been dependant on supplies from the nearby planet and for several years food deliveries had been poor. The discovery of a rare mineral that could prolong life had been discovered on the moon and the big Arct corporations wanted it all. Their intention was to starve the local inhabitants off their moon and take over.

The occupying Arct, instead of giving in, made secret factories deep underground and armed themselves with phaser rifles and pistols. A lot of their weaponry was based on atomics as a nuclear power station provided the heat and power for them to be able to survive on this barren moon. The bi-product of the nuclear fusion was their main source of weaponry and they had been constructing them for years.

The Arct were preparing to invade their home planet when Grailem and his legions arrived. The battle for control took many hours and Grailem could see many shortfalls in his 'indestructible' army. This was the first time they had met properly armed resistance; and his robots were ill equipped for most of the projectile atomics that were fired on them. Being only machines, fear did not exist in their way of thinking and they forced their way deep into the moon by sheer force of numbers. Stepping over or on their fallen 'comrades' the robot legion single mindedly carried out its purpose and killed every Arct that lived on the moon.

Visiting the destroyed home world Grailem's concern was for the captured and imprisoned humanoid's. Many were kept on farms deep in the countryside; with their Arct rulers now dead they embraced their new freedom. Fear of Grailem and his legions of military robots was plain to see on their faces. Though he had freed them from a life of bondage the fear they felt of him made him feel uncomfortable as well as unclean.

Leaving them to sort out their new lives Grailem searches the nearest city. Humanoid's held in hibernation in factory complexes as a fresh food source were revived with the help of Grailem's legions. Most of the humanoids had been in deep sleep for two or three years as this softened their flesh giving a good texture when eaten raw.

Their weakened condition prevented them from being able to feed and look after themselves. The time taken in transporting them to the 'farms' in the country and convincing the healthy humanoid's to look after them took time and all of Grailem's diplomatic skills.

Convincing them that their new world would be governed by themselves made them adjust quickly to the new situation. Grailem explained the control the Arct had inflicted on them and the real reason for their existence. Deeply shocked as to their fate they reacted with the appropriate anger and started to take control of 'their' planet.

They were eternally grateful for Grailem's help but could not get over their fear of him. His legion terrified them and Grailem knew that he could not stay here.

Hoping the people on this planet did not all think the same Grailem moved from city to city. Finding and freeing the humanoid's at first brought a feeling of well-being and Grailem started to think and feel that he was doing the right thing. The novelty soon wore off as most of the humanoid's he set free appeared more scared of him than of the Arct. Happy to gain their freedom, but happier to see him leave made his loneliness feel more acute.

Chapter Fifteen

Grailem met a large group of humanoid's in one of the cities that had been sparsely populated with Arct. Much of the buildings and superstructure remained and the humanoid's looked forward to setting up their new home.

They appeared friendlier than the other people he had set free and Grailem felt like a conquering hero. A wrinkled old man asked him if the Arct were likely to return to reclaim their planet once he and his legions had gone. Grailem could only reply by outlaying his plan for destroying the entire Arct race. Continuing with the nearby planets and star systems he could see no reason why their planet would be singled out.

Leaving the humanoid's to defend for themselves Grailem regretfully leaves the planet. He had hoped that he would be accepted here and be able to lead a happy, peaceful life. The act of destroying all the Arct set him apart from everyone else and along with his mechanical body he knew he would never be accepted as an equal. Joining his fleet beyond the second moon he plots a course for the next Arct system.

Using Octanol Neves as the central planet, Grailem spiralled outwards destroying every Arct they came across. The Arct, even though they were warned of his coming were still unprepared for any invasion. Secure in their sector for so long, weapons had become obsolete; along with the knowledge and desire to make them. The only military Arct he ever saw in the entire campaign had been the ones in control of the new robots on their home world.

Attacking when in sight of their quarry his battle hardened robot legions killed without mercy. Most of the Arct they came across offered no resistance, even when their family were falling dead beside them killed by a phaser blast. The desire to fight and protect themselves, along with the ones they loved did not enter their heads. Passively accepting death Grailem's legions could eradicate a planet of every living Arct in a maximum of twenty-eight hours.

Freeing the humanoid's was what took up Grailem's precious time. Even with the help of all his legions it still took on average seven days to free enough humanoid's so that they could release and care for the other captives.

Grailem had learnt from his past mistakes on trying to be friendly with the freed inhabitants. All reacted to him in the same way as all were scared of his legions and of him. He appeared more of a threat to them than the Arct and no amount of persuading, even with the use of his empathy and telepathic abilities would convince them otherwise. Briefly advising the humanoid's the situation and leaving them to survive on their own, Grailem would waste no time in heading for the next Arct

controlled planet.

Grailem carried on his own private war (though history considered it as nothing more than slaughter) for the next three hundred and twenty two years, with his fleet of forty nine armed Starship's and over two hundred and thirty thousand military robots remaining, he was unbeatable.

At the end of his campaign not a single Arct lived within fifteen hundred light years of the central planet, Octonal Neves. Billions of humanoid's now lived free and able to govern their own lives thanks to Grailem. The fear and uncertainty they felt towards him was the same on every planet he set free. His hatred for the Arct blinded him of the deep hatred that some of the humanoid's also felt towards him.

Admittedly he and his legions had slaughtered billions, but in his eyes he did not see himself as a mass murderer. He was ridding the galaxy of a terrible plague and the expected thanks and gratitude never materialised. The humanoid's regarded him as a vicious killer, even though his hatred was directed only at one species - the humanoid's feared for their own lives in his presence.

Grailem was at the very outer edge of the Arct controlled sector of space when his war was finally over. The position in space he found himself in he felt was not accidental. Looking at the star charts Grailem is aware that he is now very close to the humanoid planet that was to be the original invasion by the Arct all those years ago. The original planned invasion to this far planet was considerably close to his own home world and Grailem's memories re-awaken.

Never having the opportunity to be a father to his own children, or even to feel love and compassion, his emotions were not human. Having different priorities and incapable of some feelings his hope of being able to live on a humanoid planet and be accepted appeared remote.

Grailem suddenly feels homesick, even after the abuse he had suffered the call to go home was strong within him. The flagship he had commandeered for nearly three hundred and twenty five years ago, he now considered as his own. The fleet of Starship's he also considered the same way; they and their cargo of military robots were his to command. With this amount of power he could control all of the known universe.

Setting course for his home world and accompanied by his fleet they enter hyperspace and are soon lost to normal space. The short journey to Grailem's home world gives him time to prepare himself. Emotionally he feels a mess; the fear that if the humans on his own home world reject him would prove too much plagued his mind. Not sure of his reception and with a feeling of defiance building within him he loads his armaments; extra grenades in his cheeks and phasers fully powered.

Dropping out of hyperspace Grailem is surrounded by a universe he knows so well, From an early age he had studied the moons and planets, fascinated by their sizes and colours, his mind smiles in happy memories of his stargazing youth.

His home world looks dirty and dusty, not the blue and white that he remembered. Ordering the fleet to dock near the planet's moon Grailem continues on towards the planet.

Orbiting the planet the science instruments test the atmosphere while the surface is scanned by the geology sensors. The planets surface is a thick covering of bare rock and sand. The atmosphere contains little oxygen being mainly composed of nitrogen and carbon dioxide with high concentrations of radioactive isotopes; especially uranium that were decaying at a steady rate, their poisonous fumes destroying the planet.

Grailem is shocked at the results as it means none of his race has survived. The only hope of finding any humans is the nearby planet that was the first target of the Arct. Maybe the disaster on his home world was predicted or due to a long war, survivors from the planet below may have taken the long voyage to the nearest inhabitable world.

Leaving orbit Grailem instructs all the navigators of the fleet to set a course for the Arct's destination; a planet they called Dangilhooley.

Eager to reach this new world, the desire to be with his own people burns like a fire within him. Memories of the abuse he suffered at the hands of his carers and the hatred of the billions of humanoid's he has freed is forgotten and he imagines a happy world filled with people like himself.

The engineering and repair workshop on the flagship is almost futuristic in its design. The latest most modern equipment including microchip manufacturing machines and microchip programmers shine under the bright overhead lights. Unsure what is to greet him at Dangilhooley, Grailem updates and improves his systems. Though he has been made in Man's image his appearance is one of a smart business man. Hair cut short on his head and having a hairless body made him the perfect image of an ambitious modern man,

Desperate to be accepted as humanoid Grailem alters his skin structure to resemble the skin of a fifty year old man. Adding hair to his face, follicle by follicle, hair by hair, he constructs a slightly unshaven appearance. Treating the backs of his hands in the same manner he contemplates the rest of his body.

Now with a tough weatherworn face Grailem felt confident that he would be accepted everywhere; except for the upper classes due to his unshaven appearance.

Slowly their destination system starts to fill the screen, the sun, a bright yellow in the darkness illuminates four planets. The two outer planets, giants of rock and ice appear to have no life upon them. The extreme gravitational force and cold, so far from the sun would make mammalian life impossible.

The two inner planets are both in the habitable zone where water is present and capable of forming naturally into a liquid form. The planet Dangilhooley, coming up fast on their viewing screens shows it to be a fertile planet. Bands of green vegetation, deserts, snow capped poles and a deep blue ocean make it look to be the perfect home.

Scanning the airways Grailem hears a confusion of broadcast messages flowing out towards him. Many are television and radio channels broadcasting entertainment channels and news.

Ordering his fleet to remain stationary two hundred million kilometres from the planet, Grailem approaches cautiously in his flagship. When he is in visual scanner range he observes the planet on the large viewing screen.

The civilisation occupying the planet Dangilhooley are well advanced technologically. Large cities and towns break up the green of the vegetation with perfectly straight grey coloured roads connecting them. Thousands of vehicles travel between the cities conveying goods from large metal clad factories to equally as large distribution centres.

As the planet slowly revolves below him Grailem sees a large military complex covering the land. Armoured vehicles and missile launchers fill one end of the complex whilst thousands of soldiers exercise around a cluster of buildings.

Large areas of virgin green jungle occupy most of the land which only occupies fifteen percent of the surface. The humanoid's, for that is what they are, must only number a few million and Grailem is pleased to see after one complete revolution of the planet, that there was only the one military complex. No opposing army or armaments were detected anywhere else and Grailem wonders at its purpose.

With this thought Grailem brings his flagship to a complete halt and using every available sensor he scans the planet below through the entire spectrum, from infra red to gamma rays and even X-ray.

The results, after the entire planet had been scanned, showed fifteen areas spread across the planet that contained nuclear and high plasma missiles. The missiles were aimed out towards space and confirmed Grailem's suspicion that they were a

defence against alien attack, assumingly the Arct.

Adjusting the transmitting relays Grailem alters their frequency to be the same as the television signals broadcast across the planet. Setting up a camera so that his audience may see his face, Grailem broadcasts to the planet below.

Broadcasting on all channels with such power that the signal overrides all those others broadcast, Grailem announces to the people below that the Arct are no more. Explaining briefly his three hundred and twenty two year campaign against their enemy Grailem assures them of future peace and freedom.

Turning off the transmission Grailem returns his attention to the sensor readings recorded earlier. Though he was confident in the findings he felt uncomfortable, there was something nagging at his brain that would not surface. Something was missing, the planet below appeared perfect, almost as if it had been designed, rather than evolved.

His suspicions aroused, Grailem instructs the navigator to plot a course for the other habitable planet called Kethcox by the Arct. Long distance scans and telescopic observations had shown the planet to be similar in size to Dangilhooley. Green vegetation and blue oceans could be seen using the optics of the flagship. Tests of the atmosphere showed it to be seventy percent nitrogen, sixteen percent oxygen, twelve percent carbon dioxide with rare gases making up the remainder.

Grailem approaches the planet Kethcox and scans it with every device available. The sensors show that this planet is more heavily fortified than Dangilhooley. Five large military centres occupy each of the five continents and one hundred and twenty five missile clusters, containing nuclear and high plasma warheads, point ominously at the sky.

Grailem listens to the broadcasts that are directed towards him from the planet Dangilhooley. Every television and radio channel is broadcasting the same message; and it is an invitation for Grailem to visit the planets capital.

Grailem replies his thanks and calculating the flight time Grailem advises the inhabitants that he will be landing in eight hours time. Explaining the size of his flagship he requests a large area for him to safely land.

The reply is almost instantaneous, as if they already know the size of his craft. An important politician by the name of Irin Gspa expresses his honour in Grailem's visit and gives him the coordinates of their spaceport.

Grailem brings up the scans he made earlier of the planet and focuses on the coordinates they have given. Expressing his concern that the area appears too small, Irin Gspa assures him that many of the buildings will be removed so that he may land safely.

Impressed at the amount of effort that is being put into his visit, Grailem acknowledges Irin Gspa with an almost human smile as he breaks the communication.

Filled with hope that at last here was a planet of humanoid's who would accept him for what he is, rather than what they think he is, the flagship follows the coordinates and Grailem heads for the spaceport at the edge of the city.

Watching the landing from the forward viewing platform Grailem can see the huge spaceport below him. By the looks of the different shades of concrete at least twenty large buildings had been removed to allow room for him to land. The flagship fits perfectly into the small area allowed and Grailem shuts the engines down.

As the engine noise falls silent Grailem makes his way to the main exit and opens the large door. The steps slide down automatically and Grailem steps outside.

Before him is a full compliment of military personnel, dressed in their finest uniforms and they all come to attention and salute Grailem as a brass band plays some awful tune. Everyone stands to attention and continues their salute while the music plays, until thankfully it comes to an end.

The soldiers return their arms to their sides and stare wooden faced in front of them. An orderly group of elderly Commanders and Generals covered in medals, march towards the bottom of the steps.

Raising his hand in a greeting Grailem descends the steps to meet the large group of Generals and Commanders.

One particularly elderly General steps forward holding a small red velvet cushion in his hands. On the cushion lays a star shaped medal in gold, silver and other precious metals all inlaid with precious gems.

"We honour your visit and your news brings great relief to our people. Please accept this token of our appreciation, it is the highest award that we can offer as a recognition of peace." says the old General in a firm voice.

Grailem takes the medal whilst bowing in respect, the medal is attached to a long silk ribbon and Grailem realises his error in picking it up. Replacing it gently back onto the cushion he kneels down and bends his head forwards.

A General who is closest to them steps forward and takes the red cushion as the old man clasps the brightly coloured ribbon. Leaning forward he puts the medal around Grailem's neck and takes a step backwards.

Grailem stands upright, his empathetic feelings telling him not is all as it appears and he stares the old General in the eyes.

"The council would like to talk to you of the conquest of the Arct, will you join us at the Government Assembly please? The whole world is awaiting your incredible news." says the old General with false enthusiasm. Though he smiles and bows slightly in honour, Grailem feels the hatred the man feels towards him.

"Of course, lead on." smiles Grailem as he extends his arm for the General to lead the way.

Chapter Sixteen

Grailem is led to a flotilla of large expensive auto vehicles, obviously all government owned, as those surrounding them are half the size. Invited to step into the first vehicle Grailem sits comfortably on the backseat as the two Generals get in with him. The door is firmly shut by someone outside and with no engine noise or vibration the vehicle moves slowly forward.

Gathering speed the auto vehicle is soon speeding through the empty streets of the city. Grailem assumes that the streets have been emptied so that he may be ferried to the government buildings as soon as possible. This worries him as the news he brings is one of freedom and everywhere there should be crowds of happy waving people – not empty streets.

Forcing his body to breathe naturally and slowly he calms his worried mind. Whatever these humanoid's have planned for him whether good or bad, Grailem reminds himself of his superior indestructible body; and of the phasers and grenades he is armed with. Fifteen minutes later, after travelling at incredibly fast speeds through the city the auto vehicle pulls to a stop outside a multi-story skyscraper. The building is the highest that Grailem has ever seen and he looks up at its five kilometre height.

Made of a hard grey iron that looks like it has been integrated with molecular chains of a cobalt hybrid making it shine like jewels in the weak sunlight; and make the building impervious to all weather and ageing.

Grailem is led inside and follows the old Generals to a lift door. The oldest looking General presses a button and waits patiently for the lift to arrive.

Hearing a noise behind him Grailem turns and looks at the multitude of people who have come in behind them and now fill the foyer. Estimating there are at least two

hundred crammed into the little space Grailem wonders how they are all going to fit into the elevator.

Turning around at the sound of the elevator door opening Grailem follows the old Generals through the door. Pushing a button the older General smiles reassuringly at Grailem as the doors slide shut. The downward movement of the elevator surprises Grailem as he had expected to head up into the dizzy heights of the huge skyscraper. The G-force tells Grailem the elevator is moving incredibly fast travelling several miles underground before it slowly comes to a stop.

The doors slide open into a large auditorium that is packed with people. Grailem gives a questioning look at the old General.

"Do not be alarmed, before you is all the heads of our governments, your arrival is welcome as is the news you bring. It is up to the government heads to decide if all your information can be made public." explains the old General in an apologetic voice.

"No need to apologise, I understand the politics of planets. Do you want me to go up onto the stage?" asks Grailem indicating towards the high curtained stage.

"Yes please, everyone is excited to hear your news."

Grailem walks to the front of the auditorium and climbs up onto the stage. Turning to face his audience he looks at them all carefully before speaking. All are humanoid in various shapes and sizes, and all are wearing a light coloured overall in the finest material. Grailem is glad he has no tribal difficulties to overcome and he stares at the government heads, the desire for knowledge making their eyes shine with anticipation.

Implying that he was born on the first planet he encountered the Arct, Grailem fabricates the story that he was involved in an accident where his mind controlling microchip in his head became damaged. Free of Arct control he escapes in the Starship where he discovers the microchip's and robots. Explaining in a technical jargon that no one understands he describes how he altered the microchip's and took control of the legion of robots.

Briefly recounting his exploits and total destruction of all Arct, Grailem makes every effort to appear humanoid.

Finishing his tale Grailem looks around at the stunned audience; "Now that the Arct are gone you have no need of missiles or military and can lead peaceful lives."

"Disarm, so that your legion of robots can come in and take control, is that what you really mean?" asks an angry voice at the back of the auditorium.

"How do we know what you have told us is true? You claim to be like us but you are more alien to us than the Arct." says another angry voice in the crowd.

"What do you mean I am alien? Yes, I am alien in that I do not come from this planet, but we are of the same race." replies Grailem defensively feeling out of his depth. Something has given him away as not being humanoid; he can see that plainly by the suspicious looks aimed at him.

"The defences that we have protecting our planet are not for the Arct. We have been aware of them for generations and they, in all that time, have never visited us. The defences are there for your kind." continues the same voice as armed soldiers step out from behind the curtained wall and aim their rifles directly at Grailem.

Confused, Grailem looks around at the several hundred soldiers who totally encircle the auditorium. Keeping still and making no hostile move Grailem shouts to the room in general; "What do you mean 'my kind'?"

"We have been aware of who you are since you first landed, our sensor and X-ray equipment is the most modern in the universe."

"Why is it that you fear me? I have done you no harm, in fact I have annihilated your enemies as the Arct, with the help of the robot legion, were planning on invading this sector and killing every humanoid that lives."

"We only have your word for that, we have had personal experience of your kind."

Two came from another planetary system and killed half our people before we fully developed the high plasma bomb and destroyed them. Since then we have been fully armed and have feared your coming for many generations."

"I am no threat to you, I came on my own with only a few service robots and left my legion in deep space to show you my true intentions."

Grailem is not given the opportunity to say anymore as all of the soldiers, acting as one fire their phaser rifles directly at him.

The repelling screen comes on automatically and returns each phaser power to its source. The phaser rifles explode dramatically in a burst of energy and flying metal. The bits of rifle fly around the auditorium like shrapnel and kill or wound most of the government personnel and soldiers holding the rifles.

Realising his defensive actions will be misinterpreted as aggression Grailem steps quickly off the stage area and runs to the nearest elevator and pushes the 'up' button. The elevator doors open immediately and Grailem steps inside pushing the button for the ground floor high above.

Preparing his armaments by filling his cheeks with grenades and removing the caps from his fingers exposing the phasers, Grailem waits patiently for the elevator to stop. An eternity passes as the elevator speeds towards the surface and when Grailem begins thinking that the elevator has been tampered with it starts to lose acceleration.

Coming smoothly to a stop the elevator doors slide open and Grailem is met by an empty foyer. Not caring where all the people have gone he runs across the foyer and out into the street. The pavement is crowded with people who scream and run at his appearance.

Stepping in front of an auto vehicle he holds his hand up for the driver to stop. Sheer terror covers the female drivers' face and she puts her foot on the accelerator in error and smashes into Grailem's legs. The repelling field automatically returns the force of the impact but not before knocking him over. Grailem picks himself up and walks over to the driver. Yanking the door off its hinges he leans in and grabs hold of her by the shoulder. Tightening his grip the female driver screams as Grailem pulls her out of the vehicle and throws her carelessly behind him.

Getting into the vehicle Grailem studies the simple controls, the engine is still running and he puts it in forward gear and drives towards the spaceport. The traffic is thick and congested in places but by using the wrong side of the road and at times, the pavement, Grailem makes good time and is soon in sight of the spaceport.

Wirelessly transmitting instructions to the robots on board the flagship, Grailem orders them to ready the ship for flight and to start warming the engines.

Grailem had lied to the humanoid government in saying he had only brought service robots with him. Two hundred fully armed military robots awaited his instructions in the cargo hold. Ordering them to secure the spaceport for his arrival Grailem breaks the transmission and tries to get more speed out of the tiny vehicle.

Arriving at the spaceport Grailem can see his military robots have formed a defensive circle around the flagship. Humanoid bodies litter the concrete and armoured trucks burn and smoulder. Grailem drives up to the door of the flagship and hurries inside. Ordering his robots into the cargo hold he waits the few minutes it takes them to enter the ship with impatience.

Finally the green indicator light shines showing the cargo doors are closed and the ship is secure. Operating the controls himself, Grailem powers up the engine and blasts off from the planet. Keeping the throttle wide open the ship reaches eighteen gravities as it enters space. Setting course for his legion of robots Grailem sits down in the captain's chair and thinks back over the past few hours.

The government meeting deep below ground especially holds his attention as several comments made remained unanswered.

The defences of the planet were a defence against beings like himself. Only two

had arrived on their planet and almost destroyed it. Were these creatures really creations like himself, or were they something totally different?

Only two of these creatures had visited their planet, why were these people so convinced that more would follow; and why hadn't they blown him up on sight?

His home world, the possible origin of such creatures, had long ago been destroyed in what must have been a planetary nuclear war. The readings he took of the radioactivity implied the source had originated sixty-three thousand years ago. How many like himself had been made before the destruction of the planet?

He had proved to be unstable as his killing spree showed, maybe those that followed had been more controlled; until something went wrong. He had been aware of other experiments similar to his own when he was growing up. Kept away, and all knowledge of them was denied to him, even though he knew several were years older than him.

The thought that after all this time he may not be alone in this universe, that there may be other beings like himself who he could feel at an equal with, gave him hope and brought him out of his deep depression.

His attempt at becoming humanoid had ended once again in disaster, making him feel more alone than ever. By ridding the universe of the Arct, Grailem thought he was doing mankind some good; instead they hated and feared him.

The knowledge that there may be others like himself had the reverse effect as loneliness suddenly covered him like a dark cloud; and more than ever he craved for death. Death would bring the peace he so badly craved; but his creators had built him too well. His living brain would still function even if he removed his head. Hardwired to his brain were inhibitors, powered by the very electricity generated by his brain that made it impossible to harm himself.

His early childhood (which was not a happy one) involved many suicide attempts as soon as he was aware of his deformed body. Assurances that he would have a perfect body did not alter the fact at the time that he was totally disabled. After numerous attempts in which he nearly succeeded, the suicidal cells in his brain were identified and destroyed by laser and an organic pre-programmed microchip put in their place.

Instead of wishing to commit suicide, the microchip altered his brain waves to have the reverse effect and make him want to live. Such was the power of the organic chip it was at one time impossible for him to even contemplate suicide or self harm. The long drifting in space did give him good reason to want to die – but even out there he was prevented from committing suicide by the inhibitors.

The question he asks himself as he is aware of the organic chip, and its purpose, is why is he now wishing for death?

The chip should control enough of his mind for him not to have such thoughts.

Was the organic chip failing or was his mind evolving and becoming stronger? He knew that bone grew into artificial joints, as he remembered some of the artificial body parts were specifically designed to combine with bone. If his brain was growing into the microchip, maybe it was being fully integrated and not working as a separate entity. The experiences and rejections he had received from his fellow humanoid's did have a strong effect upon him. Maybe the micro-chips power was being reduced as its actions were proving illogical to Grailem's hurt mind.

Why live when living was meant to be filled with happiness? Something he had never really experienced.

Whatever was happening to him would have to take its own time as the realisation keeps flooding back into his mind that it is possible he is not alone after all in this universe. The two that had visited Dangilhooley had obviously gone rogue, with probably the same reasons that had turned Grailem into a killer. The humanoid's who had encountered these beings would never trust and accept him or any of his kind ever again.

Chapter Seventeen

Meeting back with his fleet Grailem wonders what he is going to do with them. To search with a fully armed legion of military robots would hardly show peaceful intentions, but who knows what is out there? His legion might prove a necessity to his very survival sometime in the future.

Instructing the computer to give him a readout of all habitable planets within five parsecs of his position he stares impassively at the robot navigator. The navigator in the form of the young male sits inactive at its post awaiting instructions.

Grailem forms a thin mechanical smile with no humour in his eyes as a wave of loneliness sweeps through his mind like a cold wind. All the robots on board, and on board the other Starship's, are emotionless machines.

No wonder he felt lonely.

The computer continues its search and starts to display the habitable planets, moons and asteroids that are capable of supporting humanoid life. The display updates itself as more information is added as it displays, other than size and distance from its sun, the atmospheric readings of the planets and other celestial objects.

Grailem is amazed at the quantity as the readings show two hundred and eighty three planets and four thousand nine hundred and twenty other celestial objects capable of sustaining humanoid life.

As the readings start to cover the screen Grailem instructs the computer to show the nearest five objects that are capable of supporting humanoid life. The computer responds immediately by showing a planetary system one and a half parsecs away that contains one habitable planet that is orbited by three habitable moons.

Orbiting closer to the sun the display shows a planet with a large moon that has an atmosphere of nitrogen, oxygen and carbon dioxide. The moon does not look large enough to have enough gravitation to retain an atmosphere and Grailem wonders at the engineering and forces required to maintain it. The moon is obviously artificial and Grailem is intrigued by its construction.

Programming his fleet Grailem instructs them to keep a distance of a half a parsec from his flagship. Instructing the navigator to set course for the strange moon Grailem watches the robot as it programmes the computer and engages the engines.

The transition into hyperspace is hardly noticeable and Grailem studies the available information obtained of their destination. Sensor readings show the moon to be composed mainly of iron. The concentration of iron is ninety-nine percent of the mass helping explain the atmosphere retention due to the extra magnetism.

It was an intelligence created world, the regular ordered structure of the surface was definitely not natural and Grailem prays the creators are friendly.

Approaching the artificial moon Grailem puts his flagship in a high orbit. Scans of the moon show no weapons or defensive measures. The surface of the moon under the atmosphere of white clouds, sunshine and rain shows it to be an idyllic world.

Green forests encroach on cultivated land that is full of crops in all stages of maturity. Vast plains of grass feed a multitude of herbivores that cover a continent that is surrounded by a blue ocean. No sign of the creators can be seen. The strange moon appears dedicated to the cultivation of crops and growth of the herbivores, as no buildings are in evidence.

Scanning the area of space around the moon and the planet it is orbiting show no signs of any other spacecraft. The planet appears as a dead ball of rock and dust, with no atmosphere to protect it from the harmful solar rays that make any attempt at organic life impossible.

Returning his attention back to the moon Grailem sees that it is a perfect sphere. Using deep field equipment he surveys the composition of the artificial moon. Iron is the main component with traces of gold, silver and many other precious metals.

Taking a deep X-ray of the planet Grailem sees that the iron core is honeycombed with tunnels, passages and large open areas. The surface has been constructed of an interlocking thick iron web-like pattern that covers the entire moon. A fine mesh has been fitted to the web of iron and the top soil placed on this material up to a thickness of a quarter of a kilometre in places.

Orderly manicured fields of cereal crops and cultivated forests show it is all highly maintained.

As the flagship gets closer and with the optical detectors on maximum power Grailem can see thousands of tiny robots cultivating and weeding the fields. Setting the sensors to detect humanoid life Grailem starts a methodical search of the moon.

No humanoids appear on the surface and Grailem sets the sensors to look inside the honeycombed sphere. Below one hundred metres the sensors start to detect humanoid life. Sparse at first, as if they are guards protecting a perimeter, for beyond them the sensors detect thousands of humanoids.

Intrigued, Grailem brings the flagship into a tighter orbit and surveys the whole moon. Every part of the moon has been altered in some way so that it may support vegetation. The ice he expects to see at the poles is an 'ice' of green forest that spreads across both poles.

That the moon is artificial is obvious and Grailem wonders at the lack of defences. Having several platoons of fully armed military robots Grailem decides to land the flagship in a large pasture that has a high concentration of humanoids directly below the surface.

As the ship comes into land Grailem can see on the sensors that the humanoids below the surface directly under and around him are retreating deeper into the moon. No technical equipment was visible or detectable on the surface and Grailem wonders at their sensor systems.

Exiting the flagship Grailem walks alone to a metal doorway that is set deep into the ground. Detecting no lock he pulls the heavy metal handle down and opens the door. The odour of humanoid sweat floods past him in a wave of warm air as it escapes to the cooler air outside.

Stepping inside a large tunnel, brightly lit with overhead lamps, Grailem shuts the door behind him and follows the passage deep into the centre of the artificial moon. No trace of any humanoid occupation shows, apart from the overhead lighting until he estimates he has walked a kilometre.

Walking into a large chamber about ten metres in diameter with a roughly carved roof three metres above his head, Grailem sees recent signs of occupation. Clothes lay on iron benches whilst on a large table stands six iron bowls mostly filled with a green coloured liquid that is still warm; as if the humanoids had left in a hurry.

Following a brightly lit tunnel that leads deeper into the core of the moon, Grailem suddenly feels his repelling screen activate as a blast of energy hits him. The energy power is immediately reversed and Grailem hears an explosion and a male humanoid screaming for a few seconds until death overtakes him. Hurrying forward Grailem looks down at the smouldering remains of the humanoid. Dressed in a military style uniform of dark black he looks like any other human. Black close cropped hair, now visible as his helmet has been blown off in the blast, looks well trimmed though the face is unrecognisable as it has also been blown off in the blast.

Walking past him, with his repelling screen on full power Grailem continues along the tunnel until he is forced to stop. A force field, made of a single thickness of iron, contains enough electrical power to blow every circuit in Grailem's body.

Even though he can blast through it he steps back and sits down onto the floor of

the tunnel and awaits the secretive humanoid's next move.

Several hours pass before an ancient humanoid suddenly makes an appearance the other side of the force field. Such was his sudden appearance that Grailem realises they must have teleportation technology.

"What is it that you want?" asks the old man, dressed in a bright shiny metallic material and with perfectly smooth pale skin, makes it difficult for Grailem to determine how old he really is.

Feeling unsettled at the man's sudden appearance Grailem realises there must have been a lot of other things on this artificial moon that he has failed to notice. Due to the surface of the moon dedicated to agriculture he had underestimated the intelligence controlling such a system.

"I am a traveller in space and this artificial moon intrigued me as it implied there was intelligent life here."

"I do not believe you are a tourist, what is it you want?" rasps the old man.

"I come in peace and seek friendship and companionship."

"Is that why you have left your fleet of Starship's deep in our solar system, where you think we will not see it?"

"No that is not the reason, I come here in peace and to be accompanied by forty-eight Starship's would hardly imply a friendly meeting." Grailem replies with an attempt at a reassuring smile.

The force field between them shimmers as if more power has been fed into it. Grailem shows no reaction and reminds himself he is here to try and stop the awful loneliness he feels.

"Generations ago, beings like yourselves visited our world, they designed and constructed this moon to be able to create more food for our crowded planet. The beings like yourself, disagreed over who should be in control, forcing our population into large armies they waged war for nearly fifty years before some escaped whilst the others remained to die. The result of that war you can see by the barren planet below that we now orbit."

"You are not welcome here, take your Starship's and go find somewhere else to destroy." the old man says harshly as his body fades as he is teleported away.

Grailem is angry and upset, this race of humanoids have judged him without a fair trial. His evil time was over, all he wanted to do now was do good and feel wanted; something he had never experienced in his long life.

How much longer was he going to be made to suffer?

Angrily he spits a grenade from his cheek at the force field, blasting the thin structure apart easily. The burning smell of electricity fills the air as the force field short circuits and Grailem steps casually through and follows the tunnel deeper into the artificial moon.

The black of the iron reflected by the overhead lights shines and glistens as if it has been newly forged, it could have been made five years ago – or even five-hundred thousand years ago as it looks ageless. The surface is smooth as if a high power laser had been used to carve out the tunnel. Grailem estimates he has walked for nearly two kilometres before he meets the second defence.

It is another force field, this one reminding Grailem of a spiders web, every division and circular form seems precise to the exact millimetre. The structure pulsates with an irregular feed of electricity, ranging from low to high voltage as the force field searches for Grailem's circuits and own brain electrical activity; ready for him if he were to enter the field.

The pulsating electrical feed would interrupt his own brain patterns and would either turn him into a blubbering idiot or short circuit his brain and servo motors. Neither option holds any appeal so Grailem decides to sit and wait. The humanoid's may feel secure behind this force field and Grailem waits to see if they will make the next move.

Several minutes later humanoid's start to appear, dressed in a similar metallic material as the old man gives them the appearance of being new and fragile. The pale colour and obvious softness of their skin shows they have lived below ground all their lives. The skin looks smooth and artificial as it is blemish free reflecting their secure lives in this moon. It was obvious they have never experienced the feeling of the wind and weather in their faces. Teleported to the other side of the force field they stare at Grailem and disappear a second later. This behaviour continues for several hours until Grailem estimates that everyone on the moon has had a look at him.

Stillness follows for another half hour until the old man materialises on the other side of the force field. More old men, and some very elderly looking females start to crowd the tunnel as they are teleported in.

The old man steps forward and stares at Grailem's mechanical eyes; "Many of us do not believe your intentions, our history has taught us well of your kind. But there are also many who want to believe you, the younger generation admittedly, but they hold a strong voice. Before we proceed we would like you to tell us of your origin and your life."

Starting at his first awareness Grailem explains how he was created in a laboratory and integrated with the artificial body when he was an adult. Not telling them of his killing spree, he lies and says that due to his longevity he was to become a space explorer.

Grailem tells them that the spaceship he was assigned to accidentally blew up and hurled him into outer space. Convincing his listeners that he found god in the vastness of space his landing on an Arct controlled planet was an act of that same god.

To kill all of the Arct and free Mankind from slavery seemed ordained and as he hoped he would return to his home planet victorious. Destruction of the Arct was easy as due to their long domination of their part of the galaxy they had become complacent. No wars had been fought and the robot legions that Grailem now controlled, was the first army that had been formed for thousands of years.

The return to his home planet and the destruction he found he admitted was a great shock. The destruction had made him feel very alone and that is why he is here; searching for his own kind or somewhere he can live in happiness.

The tunnel the other side of the force field starts to clear as the elderly humanoids are teleported to who knows where. Eventually all that remains is the old man, he looks tired and frail and looks at Grailem's mechanical eyes with tears in his own.

"My heart goes out to you, but in many cases you have lied to us. Admittedly for your own preservation you have left out the many murders you have carried out. We cannot trust you, but the main reason you cannot stay here is the long life you have ahead of you. Our people live for only five hundred of your years; yet you will live for eternity. You will form bonds and friendships, even love, only to have those very people die before your eyes. How many could you endure to lose? Each death making you more lonely."

Grailem could see the wisdom in the old man's words, having never experienced friendship or love he could lose more than he could gain; and the unfamiliar emotions may effect his sanity.

Without a word, Grailem stands upright and turns and walks back the way he had come. Loneliness weighs heavy upon him, to have one friend, one person like himself who fully understood him and would live forever alongside him is all he craves.

Emerging onto the surface of the moon he barely acknowledges the green of the field as he walks quickly to the flagship. Calling in his security robots he secures the flagship and instructs the navigator to make for the next inhabitable planet.

The planet is in the same system and sensors show that the three moons in orbit

around it are also capable of sustaining humanoid life. Putting the flagship in a high orbit around the largest moon Grailem eagerly scans for humanoid life. After five orbits without finding any trace of humanoid life though the sensors do show evidence of mammalian life, Grailem moves on to the next moon.

This also shows a negative humanoid result, as does the other moon and the planet below. Deeply disappointed Grailem instructs the navigator to plot a course for the next habitable planet.

Grailem and his robot legions spend the next seven hundred and forty years searching the cosmos for a companion of his own intelligence. Exploring more than two thousand worlds and an untold number of moons and asteroids meets with little success.

Life is abundant on all the worlds he explored; some held extremely hostile humanoid's and others had strange highly intelligent aliens. The alien species he came across, some in the shape of giant insects, had a different outlook to life compared to Grailem's and all the other humanoid's he had met. Many of the aliens had the thought they were the superior being in the universe and all other life was there for them to do with as they wished.

Some of the alien cultures he visited were very highly advanced, with cities and civilisations more advanced than man yet they still refused to recognise the individuality and intelligence of other races. Grailem tried to communicate with these strange beings but such was their outlook on life he could not be understood. That he was not trusted was obvious as most tried to avoid him. The dismissive attitude to the life around them brought a dislike in Grailem as deeply felt as his hatred for the Arct.

His long life and destruction of the Arct had shown him the awful cruelty that existed in the cosmos. Though he started to hate the aliens with a passion he knew that he would change little by destroying them also.

The hostile humanoid's, did not trust him either; possibly the same beings who had destroyed his home world and many others he had found, had visited these planets previously. Much of what they told him (when they would talk to him) had occurred thousands of years ago and most of the stories, or myths, had been passed down the generations.

Whether they were the truth or not, Grailem found that he was not welcome on any of these world's. Superstition, even amongst highly intelligent beings, seems ingrained and Grailem, feeling more lonely each time his visit proved pointless, would continue his search and move on to the next habitable world.

After a survey of the two thousand, four hundred and thirty second planet Grailem was beginning to despair. Much of the intelligent humanoid life he had examined, though hostile towards him, he had no desire for anyway.

The humanoid's appeared to live a humdrum existence. Robot labour was not used as extensively as in the Arct culture, and most of the work had to be done by hand.

Life seemed to exist of going to work, coming home to eat and sleep, and going to work again. Their immediate hostility to him on some of the humanoid planets he visited implied they were more than unhappy in their lives.

The appearance of Grailem, an alien on his own, was an easy target to take out the frustrations of their world upon someone who was obviously better. Visiting a solar system with only one inhabitable planet he discovered the humanoid's lived a primitive stone age existence. Electricity and explosives had yet to be discovered and the people lived in poorly made wooden huts.

Their main occupation was waging war on their neighbours and by all appearances would continue to do so. Studying them in orbit Grailem found a single tribe living on one of the small continents. They appeared peaceful as they had no neighbours to fight and Grailem felt that at last he would be able to make friendly contact.

Dressing himself in animal skins like the humanoid's below, Grailem uses the

shuttlecraft to take him down to the planet. Landing twenty kilometres from the little village Grailem hides the shuttlecraft in a deep valley and walks across country so as not to alarm them.

Approaching the village causes a lot of commotion as the humanoid's arm themselves with primitive spears, flint knives and bows. Many of the women and children hide, leaving the big males to protect them.

Grailem approaches with a smile and greets them in their language. The response is one of hostility as they wave their weapons in his direction and shout at him to leave.

Standing fifty metres away from the village Grailem tries to reason with them, but the more he tries the more aggressive they become. Their desire to kill him becomes a strong force in his mind, the shock of such a rejection by peaceful humanoid's, who he considers beings like himself brings a deep anger.

Grailem's repelling field activates itself automatically when a large brute of a man runs forward and picks up a huge rock, weighing over a hundred kilogram's, and throws it at him.

The rock bounces off Grailem as if he was made of rubber and rebounds directly back to the huge brute. The force of the rock hitting him crushing his ribcage as it knocked him over and lands on his head.

The humanoid was obviously dead much to Grailem's dismay as he knew the humanoid's would now become more hostile – even though he as not the one to get violent first. Grailem made a hasty retreat back to his shuttlecraft and left the planet as fast as he could to the safety of his flagship and set course for the next habitable world; which he hoped for once, would be friendly.

Grailem kept searching in an ever increasing spiral out from his home world. Meeting with failure at every planet he visited he began to despair, the suicidal thoughts no longer occurred and the desire to live and find happiness began to become an overwhelming thought.

Chapter Eighteen

A star, many light years away at the very end of a long spiral of scattered stars and with no other stars near it seemed to draw Grailem's attention. The search he had made these past years had been in densely populated regions of space. Travelling from one world to another would only take a few months or years in hyperspace. The star that he was observing would take forty-seven years to reach. Deep field sensors showed that there were seven planets within the habitable zone and the whole system comprised of eighty four large planets.

Why this particular system should attract his attention Grailem could not understand. A sixth sense inside him convinced him that whatever, or whoever he was looking for, he would find it there. Instructing the navigator to plot a course for the distant sun Grailem feeds all the known information into the computer as the flagship enters hyperspace.

Reaching the solar system forty-seven years later the Starship's drop out of hyperspace and Grailem looks at his scanner outputs. The planets and moons are easy to plot but at least a million other bits of rock, comets and disused space vehicles litter the system.

Space travel looked prolific, maybe from several thousands of years ago. Some ancient vehicles orbit aimlessly at the very edge of the universe, their sub-light engines must have taken them centuries to get that far out and Grailem scans them in the hope of finding humanoid life.

Some of the space vehicles he examines are the size of colonising ships. One that

he examines, built in a torpedo shape, is ten kilometres long and three kilometres at its widest point. Appearing to drift aimlessly it spins end over end in an almost graceful movement.

Detecting no life or power output Grailem orders his navigator to another huge vessel of a similar size that orbits a large asteroid. Remembering his first feelings when he landed on that lonely asteroid years ago now, he feels optimistic that this craft will contain life.

The sensors detect a weak power source that would be sufficient to power the ship's internal systems - but the main engines read inoperable. Within the huge space vehicle his sensors tell him the atmosphere inside is high in nitrogen, oxygen, carbon dioxide and a multitude of other gases. Vegetation appears to fill the ship along with various mammals; and a humanoid species.

Fine tuning his sensors to look inside the spaceship in more detail at the humanoids bone structure they do not appear to fit the profile of a normal biped. Instead the head appears larger, by as much as double the normal size, along with a frail, almost skeletal body. Very little flesh or muscle surrounds the bone of the skeleton, which in most cases appear in the horizontal position.

Bringing his flagship close to the alien vessel, Grailem makes his way to the cargo hold and boards the small shuttlecraft. Putting on a spacesuit for appearances sake, as he does not want to alarm the humanoids on board, he opens the cargo doors and flies the small craft to an airlock that is on top of the vessel.

Landing the shuttlecraft as gently as possible next to the airlock, Grailem gets out and examines the door mechanism. A simple spoked wheel in the centre of the airlock looks to be the way in and Grailem spins it open. The door releases with a gentle hiss and Grailem opens it wide and steps inside.

Shutting the door behind him he turns the wheel until the door is firmly sealed. The airlock is a perfect three metre cube and Grailem walks over to the inner wall. Pressing a green coloured button he feels the air pressure start to slowly increase as an amber light flashes brightly on a rectangular panel. Several minutes later the flashing amber light is replaced by a continuous green light as the inner doors automatically slide open.

Atmospheric readings show that the air is breathable and Grailem removes his helmet. The smell of fresh vegetation washes over his nose receptors and he can feel the richness of the oxygen in the air. Stepping through the doorway he finds himself in a long corridor. In either direction he cannot see the end as it fades in a perfectly straight line into the distance. The airlock he had entered, almost in the centre of the spacecraft, had shown a large concentration of humanoids half a kilometre below.

Looking for an elevator or a way to descend, Grailem walks slowly along the corridor. Unbroken panels of a hard blue plastic type material line the walls and Grailem walks nearly half a kilometre before finding a break in the monotonous shiny surface.

A doorway, two metres high and a metre wide stands open before him. The door, made of the same blue plastic material of the walls is wide open and held back magnetically securing it to the wall.

Stepping through the doorway Grailem can see that the room he has stepped into is a very small one. Suddenly the part he is standing on falls away beneath him and he finds himself on a narrow platform, a metre square, that is taking him down into the depths of the huge spacecraft.

The view from his tiny platform is awe inspiring; the roof of the spacecraft is one giant light that stretches from one end to the other. The light, though not bright, is obviously of the right spectrum for plants to grow as below him it is a green jungle. Many areas that had been planted with cereal crops were being enveloped by fruiting bushes and bountiful trees.

The platform continues downwards until Grailem's view becomes obscured by the lush vegetation. Slowly the platform descends onto a metal walkway that is two metres wide and stretches away to become lost in the sea of green. Grailem steps off the platform and starts to walk in what he hopes is the right direction. As he steps away the platform starts to slowly ascend, gaining speed as it gathers height and is soon lost to Grailem's sight.

Following the metal walkway for several hundred metres he passes a large round chamber thirty metres in diameter. The chamber appears to have no ceiling as it stretches up towards the top of the craft disappearing from sight. Set into the walls and individually lit by a pale red light humanoid occupants lay.

Stepping closer Grailem looks inside the nearest one to see a male humanoid with an abnormally large head. The head is covered by incredibly long black hair that also covers his face and stretches down to his bony knees.

A long black tube reaches down from the roof of the transparent container and fits neatly into his mouth. The chest rises and falls at a count of two a minute indicating the occupant is still alive. The bed, or panel, that the humanoid lies on appears to feed electrical signals into him. The occupant responds by an almost unnoticeable tightening of the muscles on his face when the panel increases its light by a few lumens.

The chamber is full of humanoids in the same condition, stacked one on top of the other they number in there thousands. Looking into more of the chambers Grailem sees more hair covered males and also hair covered females. The heads on all are abnormally large, and Grailem wonders if this is an effect of being in space for so long.

In an environment that has little or no gravity the bones of a humanoid start to soften and dissolve. Being in the kind of suspended animation that the occupants were in, and being fed with nutrients and electrical stimulation feeding the mind, had possibly made their brains continue to grow.

The legs do not look able to support the weight of the body, which in itself has degenerated to mainly tissue that has replaced a lot of the dissolved bone. The change looks as more of an adaptation or evolution to their environment than anything harmful occurring to them. The life signs indicate that they are all in good health and Grailem cannot find any that are diseased or have died inside their chamber.

Curious as to how long this spaceship had been on its now pointless journey Grailem goes in search of the main bridge.

When he scanned the spacecraft from his own flagship, the bridge and main control area was indicated as taking up a large section of the front of the craft. Realising he has at least four and a half kilometres to travel Grailem leaves the chamber of humanoids and emerging onto the main passageway runs along the blue plastic lined corridor.

Every one hundred metres, doorways leading to more chambers of humanoids, stacked one on top of each other like so much cargo, fill this lower level. Grailem enters several to see that the occupants are in a similar sort of suspended animation as the first chamber he had visited. All register as fit and healthy with high brain activity and all appear the same; with a very large head and thin wasted body.

The blue plastic material of the corridor walls changes to a lighter shade of blue, and Grailem estimates he has run over four kilometres. The corridor appears cleaner; which may be due to the effect of the lighter colour, but Grailem is not convinced. He senses conscious moving beings close by, possibly on the level above him.

He had passed some closed doorways between the open ones of the chambers and assumed they led to the other levels. Testing his theory he walks back about twenty metres to one he has just passed. The handle is set into the door and Grailem grasps it firmly and slowly pulls it down. Pushing the door open he looks inside to see

a small chamber with a spiral staircase made of incredibly thin black metal and a door, which is possibly an elevator door. Beside it a transparent panel with strange markings seems to confirm it is an elevator.

Hoping that he has not already been observed and not wishing to alarm the beings above, Grailem starts to slowly climb the black spiral staircase. Keeping balanced in the middle of each step so as not to shake the staircase he climbs up to the next level.

Reaching the next level Grailem sees the same arrangement of elevator door and spiral staircase heading up; and a door leading into the main corridor. Walking over to the door he opens it a small amount and peers at the corridor beyond. The walls are covered in the same light blue material as the level below; except that he can hear movement and voices along the distance of the corridor.

Opening the door Grailem steps into the corridor and shuts the door behind him. The sound of voices drifting along the corridor appear monotonous and mechanical and the movements regular. Walking along the corridor in the direction of the voices he passes the familiar chambers of humanoid's stacked one on top of the other.

Several hundred metres and thousands of chambered humanoid's later Grailem reaches the main control room of the huge spacecraft. The mechanical voices continue as several robots read aloud the displays in front of them. The language is strange and Grailem scans his translator memories for a similar one. Being robots the language must be based on a binary code, feeding in the sounds of the nearest robot voice the translator starts to assemble a parallel.

The robots totally ignore him as he stands watching them from the doorway. The regular sounds that he heard are the movements of several of the robots arms as they operate the controls. The bridge appears a strange mix of modern computer controlled technology and older versions requiring a physical movement to maintain power.

The robots appear a similar mix with body and limbs appearing as a coarse metal framework that supports a super computer inside the smoother metal casing of the skull. Most appeared integrated with their particular instrument as most had only moving arms and rotating heads. The multi-faceted eyes appear unnecessary as the robots have little to look at and Grailem wonders if they have a multiple purpose.

Stepping onto the bridge he approaches a large opaque robot that is in the central position and seems to control those around it. The opaque covering, about twelve millimetres thick, encloses the robot completely and merges it with the metal framework that supports it. Like the other robots around it, the arms and head are the only part of it that are capable of movement.

As Grailem steps in front of it, the multi-faceted eyes change colour from a pale grey to a deep amber. Raising its right arm as if in acknowledgement of his presence it reports to him the condition of the ship. The translator chip inside him converts the strange language the robot is talking into one he understands. The language is similar to early computer communications that the Arct first employed when they started to spread across the cosmos.

The robot reports atmospheric concentrations inside the craft, the percentages of electrical power available in various sections and on the condition of the humanoid's held in stasis.

The good news is that all the humanoid's are in good health and none have died since its last report.

The bad news is that the robot seems unaware that the spacecraft is idly drifting in space and that the plant life is out of control. It also does not know when it made its last report and how long the craft had been in space.

The robot continues its report verbally, though no lips move, for nearly half an hour before it finally subsides into silence. A lighted panel set into the structure of the framework supporting the robot and directly in front of it attracts Grailem's attention.

Hoping it is a main access terminal to the computer banks he approaches slowly.

The robot makes no movement or further acknowledgement that he is there and Grailem looks down at the panel. It is a touch screen panel that is covered in the writing of the language the robot speaks. The translator chip inside of him is able to translate the spoken word but the written word would need a complicated display screen; which he does not have.

All previous alien languages he had come across in his long life had been based on simple phonetics and easy to understand. The translator chip easily converted any language which his mind understood also. Already thinking how he is going to make the connections between himself and the computer panel, an easier solution presents itself. The robot beside him must have been monitoring him in some way as suddenly it asks in an almost friendly voice what service he would like?

Twenty-eight hours later Grailem finally finishes his exploration of the ship's computer's; with the help of the master robot.

He had been right in his first assumption that the opaque robot controlled those around it. Capable of independent thought it was used mainly as a relay between the technology of the spacecraft and operating robots and the main computer. The main computer made the decisions but needed the master robot to implement those decisions.

Instructing the master robot to search the memory banks Grailem learnt of the history of the noble race called the Buidshee.

The Buidshee had evolved on the inner planet in this system; the planet that was orbited by the three moons and had been Grailem's main destination. Evolving in a similar fashion to other humanoid's spread across the galaxy, the evolution from ape to human had continued. Affected by the gravitational effects of the three moons their bodies elongated until maturity but the brain continued to grow in intelligence and the skull continue to expand around it.

The evolution from ape and stone age man to a civilisation capable of space exploration took less than three thousand years. Colonising the moons was their first objective and easily accomplished within a few years. The reduced gravity in space and on the moons also accelerated their brain growth. The cost was less reliance on the body as more intellectual pursuits reduced the bodies activity.

Creating robots to do the manual work they integrated their bodies into the computer systems. The Buidshee soon became totally dependant on the technology they had created. Unable to function in a natural environment the Buidshee created an electronic dream world of their own making.

Secure and more suited to their artificially created environments on the moons and in space the Buidshee left their home world to explore the cosmos. The craft Grailem was in was one of thousands that had been one of the last to leave, ninety-seven thousand years ago. The huge spacecraft had taken two hundred and thirty years to reach this far into space when the main engines failed. Since then the craft had drifted in this far orbit - and would continue to do so until the end of time.

For all their intelligence the Buidshee made a large error when programming the ships computer's. Making the dream world for the Buidshee for when the craft was in flight took up most of the computer's memory banks. Leaving the running of the ship to what room remained in the craft's computer's and robots all of the Buidshee went into a form of hyper-dream sleep. More interested in the mind stimulation generated to occupy them during flight the Buidshee slowly slipped from reality.

When the spacecraft's engines broke down the computer could not repair it; or instruct the mobile robots to fix it either. Such was the faith in their engine design as none had broken down before, the Buidshee did not build any fail-safes into the system. The robots main job was ensuring the good health of the Buidshee, though the hydroponics had got a little out of control no alarm registered within them. As far as they were concerned all was well and they would serve their Master's until told otherwise.

Grailem could not see the point in waking any of the sleeping occupants, as all he needed to learn he could get from the computer banks.

What Grailem learnt from the computer banks made him feel the loneliest being in the universe. He had nothing in common with any of the Buidshee apart from the aeons of time he had spent in his own dream world. He had no desire to repeat any of it so he let them sleep and dream on.

The Buidshee had thoroughly explored this quadrant of space thousands of years ago. Using robotic craft they had visited every planet light years away and made some of the fertile ones the final destination of the huge Starship's. The journey in many cases would take thousands of years as the distances were so vast, but that made the voyage even more appealing as more time could be spent in their dream world.

In all of their explorations from the beginning of their time to the present, they encountered no other life forms like Grailem. Humanoid's were spread across this sector of the universe; and they all appeared to originate from one source.

His own home world.

Grailem recognised many of the star formations and the universe his home had been. Even though he had been cruelly treated during his entire life there – it was still home. He wished again for the happy days that never happened, or maybe it was his own naivety that he wished for.

Feeling close to a mental breakdown and with a wave of loneliness washing through him, Grailem runs out of the control room and heads back to his shuttlecraft as fast as his legs will carry him.

Blasting off from the top of the huge Starship he heads back to his flagship and robot legions. They all wait patiently for him, loyal yes, but none of them would ever be a friend, or give birth to his children.

Cursing his creators he sets course for the next Galaxy; he had learnt well from the Buidshee computer banks about their technology and had many plans to improve his own. The computer's calculate Grailem will reach the next Galaxy in three hundred and fifty seven years.

Maybe there he would find a friend or at least someone who liked him.

The End

The Author

Gary L Beer born in Kent, England and of English and Welsh descent became a traveller at an early age. The travels to the mountains of Wales with his parents as a child instilled in him a wanderlust that has remained to this day.

After raising a family a new life was forced upon him and taking up the challenge Gary went to university and achieved a BSc in Pharmaceutical Chemistry following this with a Masters Degree in Chemistry, studying nano-particle science at the very cutting edge of technology. Able to turn his hand to most things in life he has worked as a Carpenter, Steeplejack, Car Mechanic, Panel beater, Chemist and Teacher.

Gary has written many popular novels;
Journey Thru America My Quest For Peace
Journey Thru America The Way Home.
A Good Find
SUZY
Starship Stinedern
Grailern