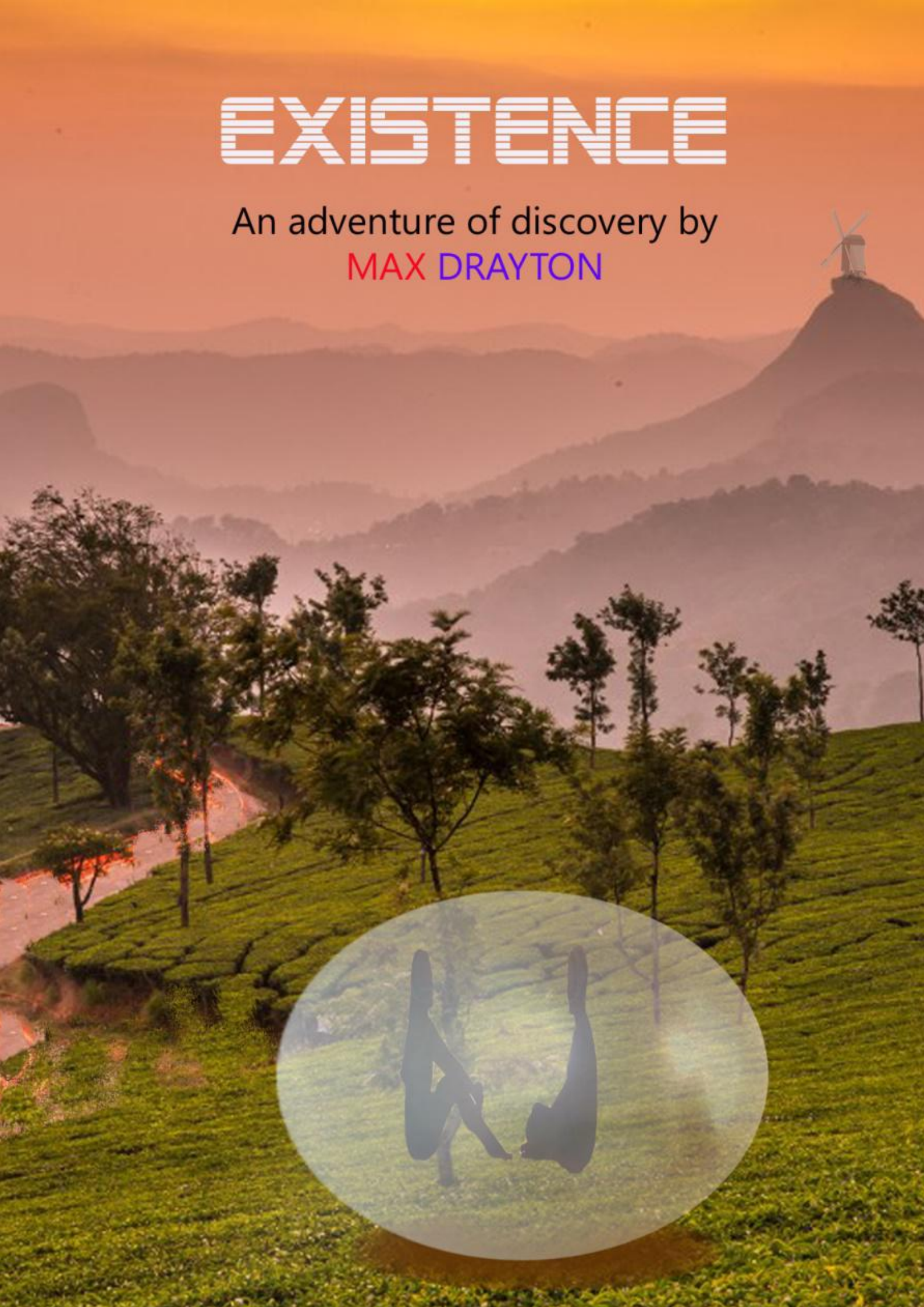


# EXISTENCE

An adventure of discovery by  
**MAX** **DRAYTON**



## **EXISTENCE**

**A Science Fiction novel by**

**Max Drayton**

### **3 Samples from the novel**

There are scenes of an adult nature.

Cover by Phil Lewis

If you enjoyed this novel, please let me know.

If you didn't ... I have other novels.

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**SAMPLE OF: EXISTENCE**

*The human race is as advanced as it can become. A war with the Creech has brought mankind to the brink of extinction. One act of sacrifice has saved them. The survivors of the battle return home.*

Her heart was pounding - it had NEVER pounded before in her lifetime.

Gone, the complacent and easy going female. Now the heart racing, perspiring entity - a petrified woman. In the darkness, her hands fiercely gripped the tactile handholds.

Breathe, she told herself, large lungful of air exploded out into the compact enclosure. Silent machines sucked and expelled.

No sense of movement after that sudden acceleration. She still felt gravity, so her craft still had propulsion.

Her breathing eased as her blood composition changed and oxygen saturation adjusted. Heart-rate slowed, under direction from the electrical impulses reassigned to the relevant muscles. Vision cleared and so did her stimulated mind. Think! What to do?

Nothing. Everything is automatic. Stay tight. Wait and hope.

Wait and hope.

What had happened? No clues yet, no images in her mind, no incoming data.

Everything happened so rapidly. Alarms and warning messages, portals opening and closing. A door opening in her small space, motion, being herded towards a precipice, a silent closure behind her.

'Remain still'. A passive, neutral, mechanical, audible voice.

She was aware of the more familiar grip of the body restraints as they folded over her body. Holding their valuable cargo against any sudden change of direction that could arise from such an emergency.

Motion. Acceleration. Then spare time for fear.

The darkness lightened. Time to see where she was.

The blank wall close in front of her faded and she could see slowly moving stars. Sudden bursts of light all around, larger, faster-moving objects. Some bright with reflective light, some alight from flames, burning in an oxygen deficient environment, burning from their internal oxygen supply.

Battleships on fire.

Slowly the terrifying display fell behind, and the blackness of space enveloped her craft. Now all she could see was the pinpoint lights from the stars. These blurred, and she experienced the familiar brief disorientation of blip travel. She was free from the battle zone.

Breathing returned to normal. Heart-rate acceptable. Fear slowly reducing. Danger passed.

Thoughts reaching back, just moments ago, to her control room, reclined and secure. Watching the vista clearly spread before her. Ships whirling and twisting in the slow ballet of destruction. Her mind absorbed with the horror and wonder of sights never imagined. Her mind fully connected to the ship.

Sudden silence, emptiness, a rapid shutting out of the ship's mind from hers.

Her recliner had dropped through the floor, an escape route, and that descent had triggered her fear. She was in an escape capsule and heading for safety before she even knew she was in real danger.

'CaptainSerania, ThreeMinutes.' The voice was female and gentle. It came from nowhere and the silence that followed had been there all the time.

No reply was needed. The audible words a surprise to her, she'd felt no contact in her mind. A machine then, an automatic message. A planned response to a rare emergency. Formed as a condensed mind only communication, but without imagery.

'Where-I?' her thoughts broadcasted. No reply. She just had to wait, then.

Ahead a pulsing blue beacon of light, something large was approaching rapidly. Or was it stationary as her vessel hurtled towards it?

The glimmer ahead now forming into the recognisable shape of another ship, far from the destruction in the battlesphere. Large, stationery and sleek blue against the black of space. Gravity now reducing as her capsule slowed and passed through a small dark opening in the larger ship's side.



The pressure on her body eased, as the restraints allowed her more movement, as she entered the safe zone.

She struggled to get her mind into a sense of reality and prepare herself for what might happen next.

‘Back, Captain-Serania.’ The voice in her head was smooth, gentle and relaxed. ‘Defence-Committee. I-Vara. Thoughts-Through-Me.’

‘Where-I?’

‘Safe. Very-Safe.’

‘My-Crew?’

‘Returning. WHY-YOU-Here? Happened?’

‘Don’t-Know.’ Her mind sensed only silence, yet the tingle of a connection remained. ‘Forced Escape-Capsule. Now-Here.’ There was more silence.

Her capsule opened as a petal and she stepped forward into the reception bay. A dimly lit small bay, large enough to hold several of the escape capsules. She was the only occupant, more of her crew to arrive soon, she hoped.

Crews from battleships were used to this low operational lighting. Ahead, a featureless wall, part of which showed a portal. She walked through it.

Vara: ‘Lost-Contact Your-Ship, Captain.’

‘ANY-Contact-Crew?’

‘Something ... Unusual.’

‘What?’ She paused as she entered the next bay, waiting for a reply. There was none.

Ahead of her, a small blister bulged inwards, part of another craft. Its elliptical hatch parted like lips for her to enter. She stepped into it and the door silently sealed behind her. Her mind wished to seat herself and a recliner formed to support her, as she thought the command, ‘Home.’

She felt no movement, but Vara’s voice was in her head again. ‘Abandoned-Ship. Acting-Alone.’

The battle communication did not give her the detailed answers she needed. How could she tell Vara what had happened to her and her ship,

when she didn't know? 'No-Commun-Silent. Was heading-Arragon. What-you-know?'

'Nothing.'

Her transport moved. Acceleration, the dizziness of the blip and then gravity again. Her mind still calling out to her crew.

'What-That!' The unusual exclamation from the earlier passive com of Vara made Serania's long thin head snap upwards.

'What-What?' Her mind tuned for the slightest inflection of thought now.

'Arragon-Destroyed!' She struggled to understand the implication of Vara's breathless voice in her head. Arragon, the enemy's home planet, destroyed?

Her craft slowing. 'Front-View.' The wall cleared, and she could see the vista below as the craft dropped through the clouds of Earth. The sweeping green fields and the small settlement ahead.

'Arragon-Gone? How-Where?' were her silent questions.

'Disappeared. Exploded. Whole-Planet. All-Enemy-Ceased-Exist.'

Her craft dropped rapidly, the soft invisible restrains easing from the recliner. She glimpsed her approaching landing pad. The touchdown was so soft as to be unnoticeable. The craft's visible form dissolved around her, as she stepped effortlessly onto solid ground.

'My-Ship? Where-Now?'

'Destroyed. With-Arragon.'

She felt a moment of acute sadness, which was quickly replaced with concern. 'My-Crew?'

"No-Sign."

Her mind was clear, allowing thoughts to flow rapidly at the second level. She partially slipped into the first level. Clarity and imagery more descriptive at this level of communication. 'Did my ship destroy the planet, or the planet destroy my ship?'

'No-Information.' The voice in her mind now had an edge of uncertainty, confidence was slipping. This was a new experience for all of them.

If the planet had destroyed the ship, she had to answer as its Captain. Naval traditions demanded the Captain either go down with the ship or be Court Martialled over its loss.

The violent emotions had distracted her for the few seconds it took before she realised she was now home. The craft had touched down with no sign of a change of motion, the whole flight had no apparent movement at all. At first, when much younger, this had been a disconcerting means of transport. But like all things in modern life, everyone got used to it.

More alert now, she stepped onto her white flagged roof and strolled towards the pale circular housing that was the gravity elevator entrance. The breeze eased past her face and she smelt the scents it carried. Her olfactory sense had been automatically heightened by her bios and she could smell trees, flowers and even some of the larger animals that roamed the valley before her. She loved the open countryside.

Clouds hung calmly in the blue sky and she searched for recognisable shapes that clouds sometimes made, but she was not really concentrating too closely. She looked down the sweeping multi green land before her. Home. It looked like home, smells of home and for the first time she realised how precious home was to her. The near-death experience had shaken her, the sight and smells of home were helping calm her.

As she stepped towards the elevator her mind commanded, 'Where's my battleship?' an edge to her thought's imagery now. 'And my crew?'

Once on a planet, the Core could offer a more complete syncing of the population's thoughts. In battle conditions, it allowed the briefest interpretation, as it also confused the enemy. Once back home, her thoughts were now accurately absorbed by the Core and redirected to the correct recipients. It took less than a second, perfectly substituting any form of speech and providing automatic translation of the many dialects in the known Universe.

'We're just checking now, *Captain*.' The thought touched her mind, non-aggressive and calm. A fully formed thought, so ... someone remote from the battlefield and battle coms. The "*Captain*" was a reminder of her place.

She'd located the com and recognised its sender. 'Please let me know the moment you know, *Councillor*.'

She felt the brief moment of weightlessness as she glided down onto her accommodation level. The elevator wall vanished, and she walked into her living area. The sight was familiar and suddenly ... reassuring. A place always open and relaxing, where she consciously spent most of her time.

A wide curved floor ended in a vista of the valley. The outer wall now non-existent, the scented breeze allowed to blow through the room. Long fine woven diaphanous curtains hugged the floor's edge and played with the stirring draughts, forming a ballet of shapes, changing colours as they wafted.

The nanowall stopped all insects, scheduled weather and any extremes of temperature affecting the living area. It also prevented unaware occupants falling out and down four storeys. The plain white floor was soft and devoid of any visible furniture. They needed none, comfort was provided when required. There was no storage, as no one needed possessions anymore, everything supplied on demand.

She bent her tall angular body as if to sit, and a recliner formed underneath to take her minimal weight. She stretched her delicate looking frame and eased into a reclining position. The pale couch, almost invisible to the eye, adjusted to her exact body profile.

For a moment, she closed her eyes and felt her bios calming her body and mind. She ran all the events of the last fifteen minutes through her mind memory, on the third level only. The private level where no one else could access, not even the Core.

### ***Another section of the novel ....***

***The human race is divided, a small planet totally forgotten while mankind develops further into the Universe. Here, life is a daily struggle.***

The cart had seen better days but was still serviceable. It was in need of a carpenter, and George Charles had booked one for a week's time. He hoped the rickety old waggon would hold out until then, and he had enough spare grain for barter.

Albert was waiting outside his tiny house, sitting on a short step jutting into the main road. As Sanctuary's oldest resident, no one told him it was a hazard to street traffic. No one said anything negative to the old man.

To get to the top of Dawson Cliff, they had to take a long and winding road. Overly worn with bumps and dips that could catch out the unwary, the beast of burden had one speed and it was not quick. The cart shook the two men, sometimes violently, and by the time they reached the summit they were sore and weary.



George Charles took out a flask from his cart's small box behind the seat and offered it to Albert. The old man's eyes lit up, and he took a long swig before handing it back. His eyes were already brighter, and he felt the harsh liquid burn through his internal tract and bring a fire to his spirit.

He looked up into the clear skies and squinted at the tall old wooden construction at the very top of the cliff. "This windmill is older than me. My father built it ....."

"And mine bought it from him ...." Finished George Charles, replacing the flask in the cool of the box. The story was old and often told. Mostly by Albert.

Albert turned his eyes on George Charles to see if he was mocking. He wasn't. "Have I told you that before? How the wind's best up there ...?" Albert said, still testing if there was any mockery in his friend's voice.

"Just a few times, Albert. Or ... if you like .... every day for the last ninety years."

"Old age, eh? Gets to us all. You'll find out, George. You'll find out. What's wrong with it this time?"

"Gears are stuck." He jumped from the waggon and hefted a large cloth bag full of tools and walked towards the small door set in the side of the huge windmill.

The wood had once been decorated with bright colours, and now all the paint had peeled away. The basic structure was still sound. "Still a few more years left in her yet," Albert said, rubbing his gnarled hands over the wooden door's surface.

The windmill was just a hollow box. Inside a central shaft descended from the gear system at the top to the grinding stones at the bottom. To one side stacks of dried grain ready to be ground, on the other the bench where the fine flour was packed into more closely woven bags for distribution to the village. A small rickety stairway ran around the inside of the wall to reach the mechanism high above them.

"Shall I shout down to you, Al? Or are you up for a climb?"

Albert was considering. "If we can take the flask up with us ....."

George Charles laughed and placed his toolkit on the dusty floor. "I'll get it."

“It will be easier if I can see the problem from up there,” Albert said, looking intently high above him.

It took a long time before Albert made it to the platform high above the ground. He looked down and felt dizzy. “Water first.” George Charles said and handed him a large flask.

They both sat and waited while Albert got his breath back. “Eighty years I kept this machine running. That’s a long time, Georgie.”

“A long time.” Agreed George Charles. “A lot’s happened in that time.”

Albert looked at him, water dribbling down his bearded chin. “Like what? Nothing changes here. Nothing.”

George Charles stopped to think. “You’re right. Nothing changes, just the people.”

“More of them now, the rest ... just older is all.”

“We split the colony, that was something new.”

“Yeah. But it had to come, didn’t it? Had to happen.”

“Had to happen.”

“How’re they doing at Harmony? Set up ok, are they?”

“It’s been fifty years, Al. I’d expect they’re as established as we are. I’ve never been, but Richard Ernest Roy went last year with his dad, they said they were doing great. Higher up in the valleys, there. Weather not so good, farming not so good, but livestock ..... We really should start to trade with them.”

“Meat for grain.” Al spat out into space and watched the time it took before landing on the dirt floor. “I thought that’s why they wanted to leave because they couldn’t agree on how to trade. Selfish bastards. All of them. I remember .....”

“Al. Is this the problem here?” Albert hauled his memory to the present day and looked at the simply made wooden cog system, which comprised the turning gear for the windmill. His years of experience and intimate knowledge of the machinery made him the only expert left.

Under Albert’s instruction and George Charles’s manual dexterity, they worked for two hours to free the stubborn piece of wooden equipment, corroded and suffocated by fine dust.

As George Charles laboured, and the air heated, he slipped off his woollen over-jacket and his shirt. His taut, lean frame moving and glistening in the light that shone through the top aperture of the windmill. Albert was working his way through both flasks. The liquor one winning.

“You know ... your father and I were great buddies. So were your father and mine. When we settled here, we had to all work together and help. Just like now, but those two were the real leaders. But it was more .... exciting in those days. We had proper equipment ... that worked. This stuff ...” he waved at the series of wooden cogs and laughed.

“They do their job. You built them well, Al.”

“When we first arrived, we had the proper metals and equipment. Can’t build that way anymore. Those days ... long gone. Metal...long gone. They were good times, Georgie. In their way...good times.”

“So I heard. I think I might have fixed this .....

“If it wasn’t for the prepping war .....” Albert coughed suddenly, George Charles glanced at him. Albert recovered and took a swig of water. “..... we’d all be better off.” He was silent in thought, before he said quietly, “I really liked our first settlement.”

“So you say.”

“You weren’t even born before we left it. I remember your mother, she wanted you more than anything. Several miscarriages she had before you popped out. It was the last thing she ever did .....” Albert realised what he’d said and looked quickly at George Charles, still grunting with the machinery. “And the best thing.”

George Charles paused and stared back at Albert. The old man had his eyes closed and he could just see a tear pushing its way under one wrinkled eyelid.

“Al? Are you all right?”

He put down his tool and shuffled over to his friend. Albert’s eyes opened, and he tried to smile. “So many memories, boy. So few worth remembering.”

The journey down the steps was easier than going up, but Albert needed assisting, as one flask was now empty. George Charles sat him in the cart and asked if he could wait while he ground out a few sacks. People were running short because of the delay caused by faulty machinery.

Albert waved him away. “I’ll have a little nap here. I’m fine. Do your work, Georgie. As your dad would’ve done. And his before him .....” He was asleep.

George Charles bent mindlessly to his task of grinding grain to make flour suitable for bread and other edible treats. This was the only mill in Sanctuary, the only source and it was his only income. He could exchange what he could and barter for the services he needed. Like a carpenter.

He estimated ten sacks should do for today, then tomorrow he’d get up here earlier on his own and put in a full day. If the cart would stand it.

As the huge wood and cloth vanes rotated above him, the spindle turned the creaking wooden gears. The power transferred at a ninety-degree angle down the long vertical wood shaft to the two heavy stone grinders, pulverising the harvested grain.

To separate the husks from the useable flour was the main effort, and he worked hard to get his task done. The lifting of the sacks onto the cart took the last of his energy, and he sat breathless on the side of the road and waited until he could gather the strength to make the journey home. He wished both flasks were not empty.

Below him the valley stretched away into the distance, the homes spreading out like a spider’s web from the main street. All at random, no order. No straight roads, or streets. The earth covered roofs showing smoke columns as the women prepared the evening meals.

He shaded his eyes against the sun, judging the time to be mid-afternoon. All was peaceful, all serene. He resisted the urge to count the houses. It was a population that was growing slowly. Too slowly. They’d established the colony a hundred years ago, yet only a hundred and fifty families survived here. He’d heard the split village of Harmony was no larger.

This lack of technology was hampering them, without the proper ore, there was no metal. Without metal, there was no machinery. Without that, no steam. No steam .... no power. Without adequate power ... no development. No development ... no future. Then what was the point .....? “How we struggle .....” his father’s old phrase came back to haunt him.

A grunt behind him brought him back to reality. He struggled to his feet stiffly and helped Albert into a sitting position. The old man looked around the sky, at the set of the sun, and huffed. “Time to go home, Georgie.”

“If the cart’ll make it.”

“It’ll make it. I built it forty years ago. Like me .... still going strong.”

“Well .... still going, anyway.” George Charles said with a grin.

Albert smiled back. “Next time a bigger flask, Georgie. Some pregger’s drunk all that one.”

By the time they reached Albert’s home, they were both too weary to say goodbye to each other. Albert returned to his sticking out seat and fell instantly asleep.

George Charles encouraged the beast to pull for a little while longer. The proximity of its familiar stall and the knowledge of a good meal made it hurry slightly faster than before.

***Another section of the novel ....***

***The Creech are an insect nation with ambition to dominate in space - at any cost. Capturing Memnons is just one step.....***

In the darkness of the underground world, the Memnons waited in fear. They smelt the damp, foetid atmosphere and watched a swarm of phosphorescent creatures moving towards them. The smaller species of insects that gave off a pale green luminescence quickly surrounded them. The Memnons were being illuminated for closer inspection.

Without warning, a few of the creatures surged forward and grabbed an unsuspecting Memnon. The biped creature screamed as they hauled it away across the backs of the waiting army of insects. Dragged back into the darkness and huddled Memnons heard its cries for help for a long while, diminishing in the blackness of the cavern. They remained helpless and frightened.

They never saw their colleague again.

They had separated the Memnon from their spacecraft. They were without weapons or sustenance and totally at the mercy of these insects. The aggressors appeared to have limited intelligence. In the fluid language of their race, the Memnons discussed the situation and decided all they could do was wait.



The Memnons slept and tried to walk around as much as the small space allowed them. They grew weary, thirsty and tried the water and thought it drinkable. After a few hours there were no harmful efforts, they volunteered one, and he drank greedily from the lake. Hours passed, and he showed no signs of being poisoned. The rest drank their fill.

A flurry of movement started at the rear of the swarm in the far darkness and rustled closer. The Memnon heard something approaching, then saw the rippling of the mass of parting insects. They became alert and were ready for another attack. They grouped together for perceived safety.

Two insects gained the front and held forward raw meat. The Memnon suspiciously took it and the creatures retreated through the swarm, their delivery of sustenance accomplished.

The Memnon saw this as an offering, but was it a peaceful one? Were they being fattened up for a feast? To the Memnon, the meat smelt neutral. Raw, they didn't want to eat it, but they were hungry. How to create fire?

The beach-like strip of land they were on was littered with debris. Discarded by millennia's of marching insects. They assembled a small pile with dried sticks that were once vegetation. Carrying basic equipment in their clothing, the Memnons started a fire with a spark and used some larger sticks to skewer the flesh. As it cooked, the swarm became agitated. More .... interested.

The Memnons tentatively ate the food and agreed it was edible, but not too desirable either. But they had to survive. As long as the insects gave them food and allowed them to drink, they stayed alive. What happened next would be up to the species of insects, that didn't even know how to create fire.

The swarm never left, they remained massed patiently awaiting orders. The Memnon grew restless and knew their fate would not be a pleasant one. They had timepieces and calculated the time, they were there for three days.

They were fed the same food three times. Each time the meat looked a little older. Each time they cooked it the swarm became interested, pressing closer to watch the flames. Several moved forward to touch the brightness and were burned. A high-pitched screech announced the pain the creature felt from the flame. The vast cave echoed sound quickly, that screech rippled back through the crowds. Interpreted by a million mandibles and other insect made noises.

There were moments of absolute silence, and moments where a chatter began somewhere in the swarm. It rippled throughout the millions of bodies stretching back into the darkness.

On the third day they listened to a different chittering in the distance. There was a movement, slow but steady. The noise built up and echoed around them. They braced themselves, something finally was happening.

There were insects in front, who parted to let an assembly of moving Arthropods take their place. The six remaining Memnons stood and watched as a group of insects approached them. These insects looked different; they were less scaly and had softer bodies. A phalanx of worker class carried them. In the light from the phosphorescent bodies of the small insect creatures, the new arrivals were light grey and grub like.

The Creetch had spent the three days breeding this new species, based on their examination of the captured alien. During dissection they established it had a larger brain than theirs and was more intelligent. Now the Creetch wanted to know how intelligent, and how might they use that intelligence to their advantage. The new species, a direct cross between a worker and the elite breed, had been created purely as a go-between for their captured aliens.

The lead Memnon walked forward and stood before the fat slug and waited. The creature pulsing before him was repulsive, it gibbered and writhed. He tried to speak, but got no reply, no response he understood. He wanted news of his colleague.

The Memnon realised that mathematics was a truly Universal language and used that route. One captive pointed to the whole six Memnon and held up one hand with six digits on it. He held up a further finger showing his absent colleague and pointed that finger in the direction they had taken him.

The slug convulsed and a small insect next to him scurried away. The Memnons saw the crowds parting into the distance, to make way for the courier. Had he gone to fetch his colleague?

The lead Memnon, Harr, tried another approach. He encircled his group with a gesture and held both hands palm open towards the insect nation. He hoped this would convey they intended their visit to be a peaceful one.

The slug's carriage made of live insect workers moved forwards to inspect the empty hands, then stepped back in disappointment. They wanted a tribute, a gift, thought Harr.

He waved one of his colleagues forward and asked for the fire making equipment. His friend handed him the small machine that created the flame. Harr stepped forward and ignited the held object. The slug reeled back and squealed, instantly several hard bodies workers were between the slug and Harr. Their clacking pincers sharp and close to his face. He extinguished the lighter and stood back. The workers slowly relaxed their aggressive stance.

Harr thought quickly, this might be his only shot at communication. He picked up a twig and stuck it in the sand. He waved the creatures away, and they shuffled a few metres back; the slug protected by the front ranks. Slowly and carefully Harr lit the twig and retreated.

A chittering started again, rippling through the cavern. The slug seemed to shrink inside itself, and then expand as curiosity got the better of instinct. The creatures holding the slug moved him cautiously forward.

Harr realised the slug was somehow communicating with its attendants, as one of them moved forward and put his mandible into the flame. It screeched and withdrew. Again a command from the slug and the creature move forward again. Another mandible burst into flame and a screech. The same sound repeated through the cavern into the dark distance and fading slowly.

Again a command and the insect put a leg into the flame. It held it there until the flame had heated the flesh beneath it and the creatinine case had burst; the creature remained silent. Another command and another leg. Within moments it left the creature balancing on two legs and waiting further instructions.

Harr grasped a bunch of twigs and threw them on the glowing twig, soon there was a fire burning. Harr stood back, guessing the next move. The wounded worker threw itself onto the fire and burnt to death in moments. Its hard shell bursting and cracking as the flesh expanded inside. The slug made no reaction.

The swarm chittered again. There was more activity from the dark recesses of the cave. Soon a messenger approached and held out more food to Harr. He took it and nodded his thanks. Was this a reward?

A worker moved forward and drew six lines in the sand. A seventh line was drawn separately. The creature tapped the raw meat with its leg.

It was then the Memnons realised the food they had given them was their fallen colleague's flesh.

If you enjoyed this sample please consider reading the whole novel.

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