

Preface

Earth was dying. The energy Earth received from the sun was increasing and would eventually make the planet uninhabitable. If not for two brilliant engineers, the population on Earth would die as well.

Alex Rexton was only seventeen years old when he designed a new computer processor chip that increased computer processing speeds by several orders of magnitude. The new processor made it possible for Timothy McBain, the owner of Pinnacle Cybernetic Systems, to design and build androids capable of performing virtually any task a human could do, but they could do it faster, more accurately, and perform their assigned job tirelessly.

Alex Rexton's next invention was a wormhole generator that made the construction of interstellar spaceships a reality. Small ships were built and used to search for a new home for humanity. They found an ideal planet fifteen light years from Earth and named it New Terra.

However, before people could emigrate to New Terra, the infrastructure to support Earth's population had to be built, and it had to be done quickly. The job was impossible for humans to complete on time, but not for androids. Timothy McBain had to create an army of androids that would be tasked with building the required infrastructure.

Timothy was one of the first people to relocate to New Terra. He oversaw the initial construction project on the planet. The first project was the assembly of a prefabricated nuclear power station. That was followed immediately by a factory to build the androids needed for future construction projects. Once a sufficient number of androids were built, they began the construction of living quarters for the humans who would begin arriving soon as well as a medical facility.

An ultra-religious group felt the coming destruction was a punishment by God for the sins committed by Earth's population. The leader of the group purchased an atomic bomb that was going to be used to halt the migration to New Terra. Their plan was thwarted, but the U.S. government realized Alex Rexton's life was in danger so he and Aurora moved to New Terra.

On Earth, most of the countries formed a consortium to work on the task of relocating everyone. After the land areas on New Terra were mapped, each country that was a member of the consortium was assigned an area. Huge ships were designed that could carry fifty thousand people and thousands of tons of cargo. Those ships would initially be used to bring building materials to humanity's new home.

Now that there was a common goal for Earth's population, an era of peace and cooperation was created. As a result, Frank Carver and his special operations team were no longer needed on Earth. Frank was already planning on resigning his position at the CIA because his wife, Jill, was going to be part of the medical staff on New Terra. However, when he tried to submit his resignation, he was given a new assignment. He and his staff were assigned the task of creating a security force for the U.S. territory on New Terra. Additionally, Frank was also assigned the position of Territorial Governor.

Chapter 1

Frank, Jill, and their daughter waited at the bottom of the airstairs for Jill's mother, Cathy. Then they walked over to their new homes. Frank and his family were assigned to apartment 703 and Cathy was assigned to apartment 206. As they approached the building Frank saw two people he immediately recognized who were waiting for him.

Frank said, "Hi, are you guys the welcoming committee?"

Alex replied, "I suppose we are. It's nice to see you again Frank. Congratulations on your promotion to governor."

"Thanks, it's nice to see you too. Hi Tim. I hope neither of you have any problem with me being put in charge here."

Tim replied, "We don't. I've kind of assumed that responsibility because there were only a few people on the planet, but I'm more than happy to relinquish that responsibility to you."

"Good. I'd like you both to meet my wife, Jill, our daughter, Kaylee, and Jill's mother, Cathy."

Alex looked at Jill and said, "I didn't know you were pregnant. When is the baby due?"

"In about forty-five days. I guess he'll be the first natural born resident on New Terra."

Tim said, "I'm sure you're right. Have you picked out a name for the baby?"

"We're still discussing that."

They began walking to the apartment building. As Frank looked around he noticed there were now five completed buildings. Tim realized what Frank was looking at and commented, "The other four buildings are finished, but they're currently unoccupied. I'm sure that'll change fairly quickly. I'll be moving most of my R&D group here in two weeks, that's about two hundred people. The medical

staff will almost fill this building to capacity. By the way, your office building was completed a couple of days ago. It's across the street, next to the medical center. Please follow me and I'll show you your apartment."

"Okay."

Everyone went up to the seventh floor. Alex said, "Aurora and I are next door. We love the place and I'm sure you will too."

The door opened as they approached it. Frank was surprised to see an android standing in the living room. Tim said, "The android is a gift for you. Please feel free to name it. The name you give it will determine if it uses a male or female voice. It's designed as a household android and is programmed to cook, clean, do your laundry, and your shopping. I'm sure you'll find it very helpful."

Alex said, "Tim gave us an android too. We named him Bob. He's really been helpful, and he's become part of our family. You may find this hard to believe, but about 15% of the androids made here appear to be sentient. Yours is one of them."

Jill said, "Thanks Tim. I'm sure the android will be a great help." Then looking at Kaylee she said, "Kaylee, why don't you pick a name for our android?"

Kaylee looked at the android and said, "Android, your name is Debbie."

Debbie said, "Hello Kaylee, it's nice to meet you." Then looking at Frank and Jill it asked, "May I call you Frank and Jill?"

"Of course," Jill replied.

They spent a few minutes looking around the apartment. Alex explained how the lighting worked. After the tour of the apartment was completed Debbie said, "I've taken the liberty of stocking the kitchen with foods and beverages. If you're hungry, I can prepare any meal you would like."

Kaylee asked, "Can you make me a cheeseburger?"

“Of course. It will take ten minutes. Does anyone else want anything?”

“Not right now,” Frank answered. “I really don’t know what’s happening on New Terra, so I’d like to schedule a meeting with you two tomorrow morning. Ross Dearborn was on the flight as well and I’m going to ask him to attend. Is there a meeting room we can use?”

“Yes, your office building has a conference room with seating for twenty people,” Tim replied.

“Perfect, let’s meet there at 10:00 tomorrow morning.”

“It’s open, so feel free to walk over there and look at it sometime today. If there’s anything you need, just let me know.”

“Thanks, Tim. I’ll do that. Is there any kind of communication system here?”

“Right now, you can send messages to any apartment. There’s a computer in the living room that has a list of all the residents on the planet. All you have to do is select a name, type your message, and send it. We’ll have a phone system shortly after the next Star Cruiser arrives. That will be in two days. By the way, for now you have to use the computer to check the time. The planet rotates slightly slower than Earth and a day lasts twenty-five hours, seven minutes, and twelve seconds in Earth time. My team on Earth built some digital watches to match the time here, and there were a hundred of them on the Star Ferry you arrived on. I’ll bring a bunch of them over to the meeting tomorrow morning.”

Frank said, “Thanks, I was about to ask about that.”

After Tim and Alex left Jill said, “I didn’t get much sleep on the trip here so I’m going to lay down for a while.”

“Okay, after Kaylee finishes her lunch, she and I will do a little exploring while you’re taking a nap.”

When Kaylee finished her lunch Frank asked, “How was it?”

“It was great. Debbie’s a good cook.”

Frank and Kaylee went down to the first floor and as they walked toward the door Ross walked in. Ross said, “Hi, did you enjoy the trip, Kaylee?”

“Yes, I thought it was great. But I like it here better. Our apartment is really nice, and now daddy doesn’t have to leave all the time.”

“That’s right, and I’m going to like it here too because I won’t have to travel all the time either. When I saw Jill on the flight, she looked a little uncomfortable. Is she okay?” Ross asked.

“She was more than a little uncomfortable. She’s taking a nap right now. I think it’s going to take a few days for the effects of the flight here to wear off. The building for me and my staff is right next to the medical center. I’d like you to be there at 10:00 tomorrow morning for a meeting.”

“Okay, I’ll be there. My team is going to be busy checking out all the equipment in the medical center for the next several days, so I have lots of free time right now. How long is a day here?”

“A little over twenty-five hours. Tim told me he had some watches made for us to use here. For now you’ll have to use your computer to get the time.”

“Well, that change in the length of the day won’t be a difficult adjustment. How about we get together for dinner later?”

“Sure, what would you like?”

“I really don’t care. Cathy’s a great cook, so whatever she makes will be fine.”

“Actually, Debbie, our android is doing the cooking.”

“You have an android?”

“Yeah, it was a gift from McBain. We’re in 702. Come by around 7:00.”

“Okay, what can Debbie do?”

“McBain said she can do any household chore. He also said some of the androids they make here are sentient.”

“That’s difficult to believe.”

“I agree. I’m going to discuss it with Alex. He’s my neighbor.”

“Let me know what you find out.”

“Of course.”

Frank and Kaylee explored Frank’s office building, then they went for a walk by the shore of the lake. Both of them were fascinated by the fish that walked out of the lake and onto the beach. When they returned to their apartment Debbie said, “Jill’s still sleeping. Cathy went down to her apartment to unpack.”

“Okay, Ross Dearborn will be joining us for dinner. He’ll be here at 7:00.”

“What would you like me to make?”

“Surprise me.”

“Okay, I like cooking. I’ll go down to the commissary and find something to make.”

“Thank you, Debbie.”

“You’re welcome.”

Debbie’s comment about liking to cook surprised Frank. He said, “Kaylee, you look tired. Go take a nap. I’m going next door to speak with Alex. If you need anything, ask Debbie.”

Kaylee yawned and said, “Okay.”

Frank went to Alex’s apartment and rang the bell. A few seconds later Aurora opened it. She smiled, “Hi Frank. It’s nice to see you again. Please come in.”

“Thanks Aurora. You and Alex have been here for a while. Do you like it?”

“We’re between assignments so it’s a little boring. But that’s going to change soon. Our Star Hopper is scheduled to arrive in a few days and then we can continue to work on a new communication system to send and receive messages from Earth.”

“Once it’s done, how long will it take to send a message?”

“I think less than a day, we’re not sure yet.”

“That would be great. Is Alex here?”

“No, he’s working with McBain. They’re trying to figure out why some of the androids are sentient. They’ve been at it for several weeks and have made zero progress.”

“Alex said you have a sentient android named Bob. Does he appear that way to you?”

“Absolutely.” She paused for a moment and then said loudly, “Bob, please come here.”

Bob walked into the living room and asked, “Aurora, is there something I can do for you?”

“No, not right now. Bob, I’d like you to meet Frank Carver. He and his family live next door.”

Bob said, “Mr. Carver, it’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“It’s nice to meet you too. Please call me Frank.”

Aurora said, “Bob, please tell Frank what you do every morning.”

“Every morning I go out on the terrace and watch the sunrise. It’s beautiful and I really enjoy doing that.”

“Thank you for sharing that with me, Bob. Tomorrow morning I’ll try it.”

“You’re welcome.”

Bob walked back into the kitchen and Aurora said, “What do you think about what Bob said?”

“I assume he wasn’t programmed to say that.”

“Yes, that’s correct.”

“That’s truly amazing.”

“Is that what you wanted to speak with Alex about?”

“Yeah, it was.”

“Alex and I consider Bob to be part of our family. I’m sure Tim gave you an android too, right?”

“Yes, he did. Kaylee named it Debbie. Debbie is making dinner for us tonight.”

“Bob is a great cook. I’m sure Debbie is too.”

Frank and Aurora continued speaking for another fifteen minutes. Then Frank excused himself and went back to his apartment. Kaylee and Debbie were in the living room and Debbie was reading one of Kaylee's books to her. Frank said, "I thought you were going to take a nap?"

"I tried, but I couldn't fall asleep. Debbie suggested that reading to me might make me sleepy." Kaylee did finally fall asleep several minutes later on the sofa in the living room.

Ross arrived a few minutes early. Cathy opened the door for him. She said, "Hi Ross, how's your apartment?"

"It's perfect. Do you like yours?"

"Yes, I do. Come in. Debbie made chicken enchiladas. They smell wonderful."

Dinner was a big success, and everyone told Debbie how much they liked it. Debbie said she was glad everyone enjoyed it.

The next morning at 10:00 Frank, Rufus, Ross, Alex, Aurora, and Tim were seated in Frank's conference room. Frank said, "Before we get started, I'd like you all to meet Rufus Springer. We've been working together for a long time, and I trust his judgement. He's second in command here."

Rufus smiled, "Hi everyone. I didn't realize I'm second in command until a few seconds ago. Thanks for letting me know, Frank."

"You're welcome. Anyway, as you're all aware, I've been thrust into this position, and I know I'm going to need help. So, when an important decision has to be made, we'll discuss it as a group. I want your opinions, so please feel free to express them. First, I'd like to know what's happening on New Terra. I know Alex and Aurora are working on a new communication system, and Tim said we'll have telephone communication capability shortly. But what else is happening?"

Tim said, “Quite a lot. The roads between the four cities in the U.S. Territory have been completed. We have enough stored petroleum to last for six months. The plastics manufacturing plant is turning out all the building materials we need for construction so that it’s no longer necessary to import it from Earth. Construction of a semiconductor factory will begin in a few days. It will produce computer chips and LED lighting components. The factory will be two hundred thousand square feet. That’s a sixty day project. Then we’re going to build a factory to manufacture electrical components including motors, switches, light fixtures, outlets, fans, heating, and air conditioning equipment. It will be seven hundred fifty thousand square feet. Both facilities will be built in Petroplace.

“Construction has also started in the territories assigned to Germany, England, and France. Each country now has a fully operational nuclear power station. We’ve started building a second android factory in New Berlin that should begin producing androids in about fifty days. Those androids will be used for future construction projects in the European sector. Australia and India will be setting up their first cities within thirty days. In the English territory, the first factory to be built will be used for building cars and trucks. The vehicles will be using the motors and electrical components produced from Petroplace. A furniture factory will be built in the French territory, as will an additional oil refinery.

“Also, farms are being set up everywhere. They will grow the fruits and vegetables that we ate on Earth. There will also be dairy farms, and farms that raise cattle, pigs, and chickens near every city.

“There are a few other things I want to mention. We will have cellular communication shortly. The next Star Cruiser is scheduled to arrive in two days. It will be bringing two satellites that will be placed in a geosynchronous orbit. One will be centered above the four cities in the U.S.

territory and the other will be centered above the European sector. The Star Cruiser will also have five thousand cell phones designed to work with the satellites. The calls will all be routed through a recently completed addition to the android factory here. This will also provide us with internet access in the near future, although it will be significantly slower than what we were used to on Earth. The primary use will be for communication since there are no content providers on New Terra. As you all know, our Earth watches are useless on New Terra. Pinnacle designed some digital watches that match the length of a day here. A hundred arrived yesterday. Please take one or two. There will be more available when the next ship arrives.” Then Tim put a box of watches on the conference room table.”

Frank said, “Thanks for the information and the watches. I’m sure we all appreciate it. I’m curious, what is the current population on New Terra?”

“There are two thousand three hundred forty-seven people on the planet. There are also more than ninety thousand androids. That number is growing by six thousand per month. When the factory in New Berlin is in full operation, that number will more than double.”

“Do you believe the androids that are sentient will present a problem in the future?”

“No, Frank. I don’t. They are completely nonviolent. Alex and I have been working on that issue for several weeks, and so far, we haven’t been able to isolate the difference between a normal android and a sentient one. But I think having two types of androids is a plus. The ones that appear to be sentient are perfect for applications where androids and humans have to work together, but the androids that are doing construction or factory work don’t require a personality.”

“Alex, what’s your assessment of the situation on New Terra?” Frank asked.

“I agree with Tim’s assessment of the android situation. All Bob wants to do is please us. I’m sure you’ll experience the same thing with Debbie. Also, we can communicate with the androids, but the androids are unable to communicate with each other except verbally. So, any coordination between a group of androids is unlikely.

“As you know, Aurora and I are working on a communication system that will substantially speed up communications between Earth and New Terra. I need a Star Hopper to complete the testing. It will be here soon.

“One thing I believe you’re unaware of is the fact that, according to the pilots who make regular trips here, we’re being watched by aliens. I’m not sure if you’re all aware of the fact that the propulsion system used in the Moon Hopper was a design we reverse engineered from an alien spaceship that was found in a desert in New Mexico in 1996. The ship didn’t crash. It was a controlled landing. There were no aliens aboard. So, the ship was obviously landed remotely. The aliens wanted us to find it and use the technology in the ship so we could build our own spaceships. The ship that was found was not capable of interstellar travel, so it had to have been brought to Earth by a larger ship. In any case, it took us more than twenty years to figure out how the propulsion system in that ship worked, but it gave us the technology we needed to build the first Moon Hopper.

“I don’t believe the aliens intend to harm us. They are obviously far more advanced technically than we are. I’m sure they could wipe us out without a problem if that was their objective. I think they just want to observe us, and at some point in the future, I’m sure they’ll make contact.”