

# **Alien Frontiers**

## **Part 1**

### ***“Genesis”***

Copyright © 2018 By Michael G. Giles All Rights Reserved

Speeding from her room into the hallway, Tamara hit the stairs, skipping every other step as she descended, her fingers skimming the walls at either side. Halfway down she nearly collided with her father, who was ascending the stairs, also two at a time, a small duffle bag in hand and in a great rush. Both stopped just in time to avoid each other. Tamara laughed.

“Oh, sorry father,” she repented, feeling bad he had to grab the handrail to keep from falling backward. Correcting his balance, he continued upward in great haste, beckoning her to follow.

“Tamara, come with me,” he urgently whispered. Feeling a sudden tension, she turned and darted back up the stairs, following him into her bedroom. Once inside, he motioned toward the door.

“Shut the door and lock it, quietly now,” he whispered, catching his breath. As Tamara closed the door to her room, the sudden realization of what this was truly about began to throw out any curiosity remaining in her head. Pushing the doorknob in and turning it, she noticed her hands were beginning to tremble.

Turning her back to the door, she looked at him, eyes slowly widening. In the last two years, they’d spoken about this, pouring over blueprints, schematics and his notes - notes filled with facts, theories and ideas, some of which were her own. It was mostly talk, just theorizing, as they filled the air with ideas and counter-ideas. The one thing that struck her sober, was the bag in her father's hand, the tone of his voice, and the look in his eyes. She knew what he was about, and it was beginning to scare her. Tamara threw him a nervous, short-lived, smile.

“I know what you are doing; what you want of me,” she stated, trepidation dripping from her voice. Since she was a child, her father had told her stories of his experiments and work, mingling them with fantastical tales to keep her attention. As she grew older, the fantasy element of his stories drained away like hot wax on a stove. The thing was, his stories and teachings were new to the world at large, and, even at a very young age, intrigued her. At the age of ten, she realized his work, quickly understanding it, comprehending its significance. As

she looked at her father, standing by her bed, she sighed, feeling a deep devotion to not only him, but for the importance of his work.

“This is what we talked about for so long,” she stated soberly.

“Yes. Please, Tamara, if you really want to help, this is the time, this is the moment. Now is a window that will soon fly beyond our reach. Trembling even more, she walked over to her bed and laid down and looked up at him.

“I believe in this. From what is happening all over the world, I also believe this is the only way. Do it,” she whispered, being brave for her father, for their work, for what she knew was coming in the world. Opening the simple duffle-bag in his hand, her father removed a small medical kit.

“Your mother and two brothers are downstairs watching a movie. We have to be quick. Tamara,” he stated, reaching up and brushing her hair back, “you must know something about this.” Throwing him a slight smile, she shrugged.

“What?”

“Once this is finished, if you die, or it is removed from your side, it will most likely detonate. I would do this myself, if I wasn't being watched so heavily.” Reaching up, Tamara grasped her father's forearm and squeezed.

“Just do it,” she whispered, gritting her teeth. In silence, he stared down at her for a moment.

“Alright, let's do this. Besides me, you are the only one who knows about this. Keep this a dead secret, for if you do not, you will be taken. Ready?” Tamara nodded with conviction. Her father removed a rather large syringe filled with what appeared as a quarter cup of liquid.

“At first you will feel a pinch. Do not cry out. Your mother would stop this by force, I am sure of that.” Tamara grabbed her pillow, placed it over her face and clamped her teeth down on it hard. Instantly, she felt more than what her father called a pinch. Screaming into the pillow, she bit down even harder, an instant stream of tears slipping down either side of her face, pooling into her ears. After a minute the pain subsided to a dull ache, then failed altogether. Though she no longer felt any physical pain, she felt her body jerk and move as he began to

work on her side. Letting the pillow fall off her face, she slowly looked down to see her father creating an opening within her side, just above her hip. As she witnessed a part of her own body literally being removed, she began to weep, despairing in her decision to do this.

Remaining silent, she tried to meditate on relaxation as her father removed what appeared to be a hand-sized, oval-shaped object from the medical kit. Carefully, he placed the tip against her opened side, then gently pushed, sliding the object into her. Though she could not feel anything in her side, she watched. She knew what this object was, and it was of no little importance. He had shown it to her once before, and to see it being placed within her was shocking.

The moment it was successfully placed, her father worked fervently, stitching the wound closed, sealing away the object. Terrified, she lay there and watched as he washed her side with a brownish' liquid, and then placed a large, clear bandage over the closed wound. He then hastily put the medical kit back into the duffle-bag, along with all evidence of the surgery. Looking up, he threw his daughter a tender smile.

“The pain killer will last six to eight hours. I have more. The stitches are tough; they will not dissolve. I'll have to remove them in a few days. I'll give you some salve that will heal the wound faster and reduce the visual scar. You rest up for a bit until I return. I have to dispose of this duffle bag.” Wiping her eyes, Tamara shuddered. The instant she set her thoughts upon her blood-stained blankets and sheets, she sat up and set her feet upon the floor. Taking a deep breath, she looked up.

“Terraform,” she whispered,” then slowly got to her feet. Gathering up her blankets and sheets, she walked into the bathroom and shut the door. After throwing the soiled linen into a hamper, she washed up. Her clothes went into the hamper as well.

On the fifteenth day, as she sat in her room doing her homework, there came a knock at the door.

“Come in!” she called. When the door opened, she turned, closing a book titled, *Space Travel and Interplanetary Negotiations*. The cover of the book was titled, *Advanced Geometry*. When she saw her mother enter, she stood, approached her with a smile, wrapping her arms about her neck and planting her cheek with a gentle kiss.

“Hello mother,” she stated enthusiastically. Her mother’s brows furrowed in concern.

“You are always studying, and that's good, don't get me wrong. Would you like to take a break and come join your brothers and I in a game of poker? I bought a big box of poker chips. We could eat some ice cream as we play.” Tamara's eyes brightened, then narrowed at her mother, as if she were suddenly the nemesis of the night.

“You really want to lose that bad?”

“Really, you want to come play?” Tamara nodded.

“Get ready to lose every chip you have. I'll be down in twenty minutes, is that alright with you? I want to shower and get into my poker playing outfit and mood. Thank you for pulling me away from my studies. I know it all anyways. Bring on the tests!” Her mother nodded enthusiastically, looking over at the book Tamara has just closed. Walking over to it she ran a hand over the cover.

“This is a bit below you. Why are you studying this? She began to open the cover, much to the challenge of Tamara's character.

“I'm a tutor,” she shot out, already beginning the poker game with her mother. Letting go the cover, her mother turned.

“Oh, that's nice of you. I'm so proud of my little girl, all growing up now. Hey, promise me something?” Tamara nodded.

“Anything,” she stated, beginning to feel victorious in advance.

“Don't grow up too fast. I mean, I know you will start to like boys and think

for yourself. You will want your independence, I know. And, you know, you've proved wiser than every person of your age I've ever heard of. Just keep in touch with me. If you go away, I would be so lonely. Oh, I feel like I'm trying to manipulate you.” Tamara laughed and walked to her mother and threw her arms about her tight.

“Mother, I will always be yours. I want you to do me a favor and erase those fears from your mind. I am your little girl until I turn fifty and beyond. First I am your daughter - then I am your best friend. I know my place, and I know I love my family forever, no matter what comes.” At her words, tears instantly formed in her mothers eyes.

“Wow, you are something else, aren't you?”

“No, I'll never be something else,” she replied. “How could I change into something else?” Her mother pulled away and shrugged.

“It’s just an expression.” Tamara gave her mother a sly look.

“Okay, give me a few minutes, and I'll be downstairs with an unbreakable poker face. I shall dress for the occasion.” Leaving the room, her mother laughed.

“You have a big head. I will win this time.” She then shut the door.

Breathing a sigh of relief, she looked over at the accumulation of books on her desk, all of which had fake covers. She had not lied to her mother, she was a tutor for a couple students. Entering the bathroom, she undressed, looked at herself in the mirror and frowned.

“Ugly,” she accused her body. Shrugging, she walked over the shower, turned it on, adjusted the water temperature to just the perfect temperature, then stepped in.

A few minutes later, she was dressed and ready to put her mother and two brothers in their place. As she approached her door, there came a knock, which she recognized as her fathers'. Opening it, she grinned.

“Are you going to play some poker with us tonight?” she asked. He nodded.

“Yes, but I need to sneak you out back first. We'll need to hurry though. I need you to meet someone . . . well, a sort of someone.” Seeing the sudden look of curiosity she threw him, her father held up a finger. “No, I won't explain. It will take about five minutes. You okay with that?” Giving him a skeptical look, she nodded.

“It's not a boy is it? If it is, I'm really not interested.” Her father placed a hand on her shoulder and smiled.

“Oh, you will be so very interested in this. Hurry.” With that, her father turned and made his way down the stairs, trying to be as quiet as possible.

“Always so mysterious,” she whispered, then followed after him in silence.

Successfully navigating the dining room, where the game was being set up, she slipped out back. Once out in the back yard, she saw her father at the corner of the house, barely visible in the light of the nearby street lamp. As she neared him, Tamara was about to ask what the big surprise was, when a large humanoid robot stepped out from beside the house and became motionless. With eyes widening, she froze, trying to get her mouth to ask the question her brain screamed out. Finally, with some difficulty, she managed to engage in what should have been easy conversation.

“Father, is that what I think it is?”

“It is. This Cyborg would like to speak with you, if you would listen.” Tamara slowly walked up before it, only doing so because her father was involved. Otherwise, she would have run.

“Of course.” Tamara looked up into its almost perfectly sculpted face.

“What is your name?” Upon asking, she watched as it's eyes slowly

opened, appearing as, what she could only describe as, the eyes of a tiger, filled with ultra-violet illumination.

“I have no name. I am Artificial Intelligence Mechanism, otherwise known as AIM.” Trusting her father, she became brave and insatiably curious. Stepping up to it, she placed a hand on its forearm.

“May I call you Mechna?” Looking down upon her, it locked its attention with Tamara, its own tiger-like eyes narrowing.

“My name is Mechna,” it stated in a metallic voice. “Thank you.” She grinned in sudden delight.

“My name is Tamara, Mechna,” she replied, “and it is a pleasure to meet you.”

Introductions ended.

Later that evening, as Tamara took the very last chip from her mother, she yawned.

“Thank you for the fun. I better get to bed. I have to tutor a student an hour early tomorrow.” She stood and grinned at her family. “If you ever want to lose again, you know where I’ll be.” Her mother shook her head, laughing.

“Alright, good night wonderful.” Before leaving the table, she looked at her older brother, Kraig.

“Have you ever won against me? Really?” she gloated his way, then threw him a sentimental wink. Picking up the chips, Kraig ignored her, leaving her to mock her little brother Jamar.

“And you, can you even imagine beating me?”

“Shut up, Tamara,” he chuckled. “Next time.” Laughing, she turned away from the table, not having to help clean it off . . . she was the victor, and that was the rule.

Sprinting up the stairs, she turned down the hallway, seeing her door wide open. Earlier, when she came downstairs, she had shut it. Tamara stopped, feeling a chill in the hallway. The only door open was hers, meaning her window

was open! Slowly, quietly, she crept forward until her bedroom window came into view. Freezing, she held her breath as she saw the curtains float inward upon the breath of the night-air breeze. Terrified, she began to silently back up.

The sequence of events which followed came in flashes, like constant, chaotic nightmares she could not grasp the meaning of. As quickly as these terrible dreams came, they vanished, only to be replaced by another, and another, and another, in a forever sequence that left her body shuddering and twitching. She had no recollection, nor perception, of who she was, what anything was, and what it was that continually set various parts of her body on fire.

Mechna worked with incredible speed and precision upon what remained of Tamara, stabilizing her vitals, even as weak and faint as they were. During the attack on the Human dwelling, Mechna called in reinforcements. Once AIM units arrived, Mechna bore Tamara's broken and torn body back to the Galactus in great haste. Once on board, she had been hastily submersed in a coffin-sized container, filled with a clear gel, composed of thousands of the most advanced healing agents known. Instantly, the nerves of Tamara's body were soothed and numbed, giving her some relief. Still, the terrible wounds, caused by the blast that took half her home down, were critically extensive.

As much as it was possible, Mechna's eyes radiated a terrible fear and worry as it removed the debris of the blast from Tamara's body . . . what remained of her body. Mechna could not get its ship off planet Earth in time to escape the detonation of the Terraform Bomb yet functional and dormant within her left side. If Tamara died, all upon this planet, along with the Galactus, would irrevocably die as a new world formed.

After forty-eight hours, Tamara was stabilized.

After forty-eight hours, billions of people were no longer in danger of sudden extinction by what lay within this Human female.

Over the next two years, Mechna prepared and secured Tamara with highly advanced cybernetic body parts, piecing her back together, implanting her with technology far beyond Human comprehension. This technology aided her to appear as a normal girl of sixteen years, yet only if fully clothed. Now, Tamara's body was less than half preserved.

Her restoration was slow, as her body attempted to reject the grafting of each cybernetic piece. This was usually the case, and with Tamara, her body was no exception. If at all possible, Mechna saved every possible bit of flesh and bone. This was difficult, due to her condition, and it pushed Mechna to the limit of its knowledge.

As a test, Mechna began with the replacing of her right foot, as it least affected the Human girl. This was not as simple as merely fitting a cyber-mechanical foot onto the shattered stump of her lower leg. Each piece had to be connected to others which would also be adjoined at certain areas of her body. This had to be done perfectly, or when Tamara moved, her body would be injured, twisted and wounded by the strength of her own cybernetics. In essence, Tamara could very well kill herself by the most simple movement, and chain reactions which would ensue. The operations and rebuilding and restoring this Human girl could not be done all at once. The shock of such procedures would easily send her into critical shock and kill her.

For two years, Mechna sealed the doors to its personal medical facility as the other mechs made sure the Galactus functioned perfectly.

Mechna worked on Tamara, steadily rebuilding her body with unwavering patience and great focus and care. During the full duration of her reconstruction, Mechna kept Tamara in a state of unconsciousness, balanced with the normal stages of Human sleep. This would give her the proper rest she would need, and allow her to dream.

Everything was wrong. No, not wrong, chaos with images and thoughts she could not describe. She could not move, and could not comprehend it. Even not comprehending was indescribable. Total darkness was her vision, though she could not understand it. She was floating, dead . . . no . . . Tamara screamed and writhed, though movement was impossible. For three days, Tamara remained in a state of chaotic confusion, not understanding, nor able to comprehend her situation. On the fourth day, she licked her lips and opened her trembling mouth three times before she caught hold of a single word.

“Where?”

“You are aboard the Galactus. What do you remember?” came a strangely familiar voice. The instant response startled her, causing her to scream. Caught up in a chaotic whirlwind of thoughts, she wrestled to grasp hold of the meaning of the question. Frustrated, she tried to shake her head, but could not. After a time, the memory of being out in the night by her house danced illusively on the edges of her recovering memory.

“What,” she forced through clenched teeth, then broke down emotionally, though there were no tears. There were no tears, for she had no eyes.

“I am Mechna.” For a long while, she mentally struggled to remember more. Remembering its voice alone gave her an anchor to which she held onto. From that single memory, she struggled to recall more, and ever so slowly did so. Hours passed before she remembered the house it was standing by. There was a man, with her . . . so familiar . . . familiar . . . she knew who he was!

“His name!” she cried out. “Father!” Mechna moved closer, leaning over Tamara.

“Do you know who you are?” came that unnatural, yet familiar voice. Struggling through the limited memories she had, she fought to expand her recollections.

“Mechna, Mechna!” she begged. “I can't move, I can't move! I can't see! What's wrong with me?” she cried out.

“Try and be calm. I will give you sight now. Do you remember your name?”  
Ceasing her struggles, she waited, taking in deep breaths, trying to subdue her panic. As she began to relax, more memories began to surface.

“My name . . . my name. I . . . I am . . . I am Genesis. My name, yes, Genesis,” she struggled, emotion heavy in her voice.

Mechna looked down upon her, narrowing its eyes. In this situation it was best to let her true name be hidden, as it placed her at risk. Among the thousands of Humans allowed on board the Galactus, as well as other alien species, rescued from other dying planets, it was good for Tamara to take on a different name. With what she carried, Genesis was also a fitting name.

“Genesis, hold still. I am going to place ocular implants into the sockets of your eyes. Can you be still? It will prove painful, but only for a short duration.” Genesis thought on Mechna's words, sorting them out into logical meaning.

“Yes,” she whispered. Mechna turned and walked over to a shelf, set with many unusual items. Reaching up, the Cyborg took a hand-sized box off the shelf and returned to Genesis. Setting it close to her head, Mechna opened the metallic box, revealing two eyes with amethyst-blue retinas. At the back of each eye hung hundreds of thin strands of what appeared to be tiny steel wires. Carefully picking up both eyes, so the clusters of wires hung down, the Cyborg turned its attention upon her.

“I will touch your head now. May I begin? Are you ready to see?” The Cyborg waited for her answer, watching her, observing her reactions. Genesis steadied her mind, determined to see again.

“I am,” she stated nervously, her voice quivering. Leaning over her, Mechna carefully lowered the metallic-like strands into the hollows where once were her natural eyes. As the wires, or what appeared to be wires, came close to each hollow, they began to twist and stretch, as if each strand had a life of its own. As they entered into each of her empty eye sockets, Mechna quickly pressed them into each hollow, its motion swift and precise, giving Genesis no time to react

until it was too late.

The moment she felt the sliding motion of two objects enter her head, and the stabbing pain that pierced her eye sockets, she screamed and jerked, crying out in anguish. A few seconds after, the pain subsided, then was gone altogether.

“Relax,” she heard Mechna say. “I will now activate your cybernetics, and your ocular implants. Are you ready to get out of the Gel Tank?” Genesis coughed, anxiety ripping through her like a current of electricity. After a few minutes, during which time she forced herself to calm down, she blinked, feeling her eyelids sliding over her eyes. She took one last deep breath, relaxing the best she could.

“Yes.” Soon after answering the robot, the sudden image of what appeared to be the chaotic fuzz of an old black and white TV replaced the darkness of her vision, startling her.

“What is it? she choked.

“Wait, be patient Genesis. Focus on your eyesight. Focus on seeing as you once did.” Blinking a few times, she did as Mechna instructed, trying as hard as she could to get the black and white cluster of chaos out of her eyes. After a few minutes, the chaos subsided, replaced by the slow clearing of her vision, and Mechna standing and looking down on her. A brief glitch sent a jagged line through the center of her vision, though it passed quickly. Looking up into those familiar eyes of violet, Genesis gasped.

“I see you . . . I know you,” she whispered, trying to raise her hand. Frustrated, she looked about the room as best she could. “I want out, please” she begged, feeling vulnerable, and at the total mercy of this machine. Reaching up, Mechna touched a few spots on a screen above her. After a time, it held its forefinger just off the monitor and looked down at her.

“You must relax. Don't move quickly. Most of all, Genesis, do not despair. I am here for you. For the last two years I have carefully healed and fit you with the best cybernetic body parts I have. You must understand, you are not the same. You are still you, but your body was caught, in part, by the explosion I tried to shield

you from. You were badly mutilated. Now, brace your mind, relax. Can you do this?” Suddenly terrified of what she looked like, she began to panic.

“I’ll try.” Mechna's finger made contact with the screen. As it did, she suddenly felt her chest, her legs, arms and hands. The gel in which she was bathing thinned about her and began to drain away. After a minute, she lay in an empty tank.

“Sit up. Here take my hand.” Slowly reaching up, Genesis reluctantly took Mechna's hand and pulled herself upright. As Genesis did, the sides of the tank began to descend until she was left sitting upon a table with holes covering it. Turning, she dangled her legs over the side of the odd looking table. Looking down at her hands and arms, her eyes widened in disbelief. Instead of seeing the flesh of her own self, she saw metal. Not only that, it moved exactly as her once hands and arms did. Reaching over with one hand, Genesis touched the inner part of her forearm and hand, to find she could feel herself, and feel the touch of her finger upon the metal. It was the same for her body and legs. She wiggled her fingers, feeling them as if they were her natural fingers, yet they were not.

“I am . . . not myself,” she lamented, a sudden sadness overwhelming her. The next words Mechna said filled her with doubt, skepticism.

“As I, Genesis. But, I move on. I never give up.” Genesis looked at Mechna.

“You are a sophisticated robot. What do you know of a Human body?” Mechna looked at her for a moment, then helped Genesis to stand, not replying to her question. After she was up, the Cyborg let go and stepped back.

“Walk about the room. Get used to your new body. Move slowly. As you get used to it, you can move more quickly. For now, patience, Genesis, patience.” She did as instructed, feeling awkward and off balance at first. After a few turns about the room, she looked down at the residue of gel covering her, then up at Mechna.

“Can I shower? I need clothes.” She frowned. “I am not human?”

“Yes, you are Human. Your brain is fully functional and will continue to

heal from the trauma you suffered. Your heart is fully intact, and beats as it always did. Yes, you are Human. Apart from that, how do you feel?" She looked at Mechna, suddenly recalling the last time she had seen her family. She had beat them at a poker game while eating ice cream. Feeling her heart suddenly ache, to the point of doubling over, she staggered. Catching herself on a shelf, she cried out, hanging her head.

"I wish you had let me die." The robot's response shocked her.

"All in a moment's time, your wish would end the lives of all on this planet." Reaching down, she rested a metal hand upon her left side as she remembered what she held within. Instantly, she felt ashamed of her words.

"Forgive me," she whispered, "I remember now. I chose this path."

"Apart from your emotions, how do you feel?" Mechna restated. Bending her will upon control, she felt her mind slowly clear.

"Exhausted, physically confused, I don't know. How long did you say I out?"

"Two of your Earth calendar years. I've been ensuring your cybernetics function properly. If they did not, and something went wrong, you would have starved and withered." Placing a hand to her chest, she took in controlled breaths, trying to stay calm. Two years? Where was her family?

"And?" she asked.

"They are operating perfectly. Now it is up to you if they will continue to do so. Your mind, your instinctive movements, your reactions are in control of them. Also, as long as you are in contact with oxygen, water, or sunlight, you will be fed the nutrients you need to live. Moon and starlight will also nourish you, but not nearly as well." Feeling a sudden disdain for herself, she grit her teeth, letting go the shelf.

"Can I eat?" she asked, looking to Mechna.

"Yes, though your cybernetics will take care of the way you would normally dispose of - " "- Stop, Mechna. I can eat and drink. Lucky me." Feeling guilt at the way she was speaking to it, even though it was only a robot, a program, an

empty shell, it deserved respect and gratitude. After all, it had saved her. “Thank you. Thank you for healing what’s left of me.” She paused, feeling more clarity of mind. “Now I am dependant on you. What life is there in this?”

“Genesis, you are more capable than you can fathom. I need to warn you of something I detected as you recovered. The quality of the Human lives of those upon the Galactus depend upon you controlling your emotions. The fears you may entertain within your mind and heart can project themselves into the minds of others, though they will not know it. It’s the nature of your cybernetics.” Not understanding, Genesis stood up straight and pulled her pure-white hair back. It was saturated in gel. Taking a deep breath, she looked at the robot.

“What do you mean?” she asked, then shook gel from her hands.

“Genesis, if you fall into a deep fear, a panic, or despair, what you think will become what others will begin to feel. If you let those emotions dominate you, they will eventually see what you become apprehensive of. Eventually, as you retain calm, they will no longer see it. Do you understand?” Genesis suddenly realized what Mechna was inferring . . . the terra form bomb. If she did not control her emotions, others would eventually know she carried it.

“Mechna, if others discover what I hold, they will become afraid. Throughout history, my race has been notorious for responding to fear with violence. How much fear, how much panic or despair, must I experience to project this?” Mechna’s eyes narrowed to mere glowing slits, yet it said nothing. “Okay, is there a way to turn off, or suppress the part of my brain that processes such emotions?” She waited for the robot to give her the answer, yet, still, it did not respond. The way it looked at her made her feel exposed, vulnerable, weak, helpless. “Please, say something.” After quite some time, the robot’s eyes widened back to normal.

“You must control your thoughts. Without ejecting you into space, there is no other way.”

“Oh no, what have I done?” she whispered in horror. “What was I thinking when I agreed to this?”

“You were thinking of saving your species, Genesis. You could not have foreseen this, or other situations which might come upon you in the future. I told you this so you would have the knowledge of what you are capable of, not to discourage you. By knowing, you may master your emotions, should they take a turn in the wrong direction. Genesis, simply be you,” Mechna stated, taking a step toward her. Raising her hands up in front of her, she shook her head.

“I’m only part of me anymore.”

“Others have been saved in the past - others in your circumstance. Though they are not high in numbers, they are out there. Genesis, you are not alone.” Relaxing, Genesis realized she was being rude to the one who had saved her life. Nearing it, she reached up and rested a hand on its arm.

“I am being ungrateful. I’m sorry. Thank you.” Mechna looked down at her hand. Resting its metallic hand upon hers, it looked deep into her eyes.

“You are confused. This is normal. You are deeply disturbed. I understand. Thank you, Genesis.”

“For what?” she asked, rather confused. What had she ever done for him to thank her for?

“Just now; for trying.” Stroking her head, Mechna looked down as she looked up to him.

“I’ll do my best.”

“I am glad your father introduced me to you.” She scoffed openly at him.

“You mean, you are glad I got myself blown up.”

“Well,” Mechna stated, tilting its head, as if thinking, “it has worked out in saving the lives of over ninety-thousand, so far.”

“Well those ninety-thousand would not come near me with all this slime covering me from head to toe.” In answer, Mechna pointed to its right, to a steel door. As it pointed, the door slid open.

“You will find everything you need inside. I will wait for you here.”

“Thank you, Mechna. You have done everything for me. Thank you.”

“You are very welcome, Genesis. Take your time, please.” She headed to

the door, but stopped just outside. Looking in, she saw a shower curtain, towels hanging on hooks, a large comfortable looking mat to dry off on and a sink with various soaps and towels next to it. She looked back at Mechna.

“Did you arrange this just for me?”

“Yes. I knew you would need it. I hope it is acceptable to you.” She could not help but smile, even if it was fleeting. Looking back in, she sighed and slowly entered.

“Thank you,” she quietly stated. Once in, the door slid shut, leaving her alone. Stepping over to a sink area, she noticed clothes neatly folded on a shelf to the side. Looking into a large mirror, she recoiled at the condition she was in. Quickly, she headed to the shower.

As she neared the door, it opened. Stepping out, Genesis noticed Mechna cleaning the table, a large cloth in each hand. As she walked out, the robot stood straight and turned to her.

“Are they acceptable?” the robot inquired.

“You mean the clothes?” Mechna nodded. “Yes, they fit me perfectly. I especially like the cloak with the hood. It’s comfortable, and conceals the cybernetics. I don’t want to attract attention.” She watched the robot walk over to the far wall, opposite the shower room, and take hold of a handle. Pulling it, Mechna dropped the cloths into an bin that opened, then let go. The opening shut as it turned on her.

“If you wish to know, I will show you exactly what remains of your body, as well as the video feeds of my working on you.” At the thought of seeing how badly injured she was, Genesis shook her head.

“I just want to know the details, the records.” Mechna turn and walked over to the table she had spent two years upon. Reaching up, it grabbed the large monitor and pulled it down.

“Come, I will show you,” it stated as the screen came to life. Genesis walked over and stopped beside Mechna, watching the robot touch the screen a few times. It was then that she realized the screen was a hologram. Finally, Mechna stopped and pointed.

“This is it. Brace yourself, Genesis. The statistics are grim. If you cannot handle the worst, walk away now.”

“I’ll read the chart,” she stated, feeling a pit in her chest. Stepping aside, Mechna watched as Genesis began to read the following:

Condition report:

Abdomen: 10% remaining:

Left side still intact. Full cyber abdomen replacement successful.

Arm, Left: 10% remaining:

Only the bone structure remains.

Arm, Right: 30% remaining:

Full bone structure remains with partial flesh upon the forearm and back of hand.

Back: 50% remaining:

Three-quarters of the vertebrae was simulated with cybernetics to strength it.

Chest: 20% remaining: Heart salvaged and healed. Deep wound from the left shoulder into the chest extensive. This area was healed and shielded with murite compound to preserve and protect the area.

Foot, Left: Complete loss up to mid-calf: 0% remaining: Encased with cyber implant. Foot is shielded and strengthened.

Foot, Right:5% remaining:

50% of the bone structure salvaged. The remains of the foot fitted with cyber implants and graphs.

Head: 40% remaining:

The frontal area of the skull healed as normal. The blast to the rear of her skull hollowed out much of her head, thus making room for intelligence cyber implants. The healing of her brain aided by cyber intelligence nodes, which instantly grafted to the brain, aiding it in the regeneration process.

Hip: 10% remaining:

All but the left area lost. The attempt to salvage this area of her body failed. Fitted with cybernetic implant, thus giving the appearing of having normal hips when clothed.

Left Leg: 60% remaining:

Upper half of the bone structure lost, as well as most of the flesh. Cyber implants successful.

Leg, Right: 20% remaining:

All but the bone structure of the left leg destroyed. Cyber leg fitting successful.

Neck: 60% remaining:

The flesh of this part of her body was nearly destroyed. Neck bones are intact. Cyber armor coating replacement successfully grafted to protect the upper-most area of the spine.

Shoulder, Left: 80% remaining:

Most of this area salvaged. Cybernetic shoulder grafted successful.

Shoulder, Right: 98% remaining:

Cyber shoulder implant successful.

Skeletal structure: 60% remaining:

In all, most of the bone structure salvage and coated with the highest quality of heat-resistant metal, meteorite steel coated with murite to further protect from the elements.

End notes:

Note #1: Human female is physically more functional than before. However, due to the nature of her wounds, she cannot reproduce.

Note #2: Cybernetics coated with Sinthis to ward off EMP and like attacks and phenomenons.

Note #3: Due to the process of rebuilding the Human female, she will not age according to the years of a Human. For every 75 years she ages, she will only age 1 year of a normal Human's lifespan.

Note #4: Each cyber implant has been successfully linked to all other cyber implants, bracing and stabilizing the whole. Procedure necessary to keep Human female from injuring herself when moving and performing strenuous activities.

Summary: Human female rebuilt and strengthened. Subject strengthened and shielded by cybernetics and other factors listed in private file.

By the time she finished, Genesis was stricken silent. Turning away, she walked over to a chair, set against the far wall, and sat down. Her mind felt as though it had been caught in a tornado. Mechna watched her in silence, not

disturbing her. After a full hour, Genesis slowly stood and looked at Mechna.

“How you kept me from dying, I don’t know, but thank you. I know what would have happened had I died.” Just then, Genesis had a change of attitude toward Mechna. She now saw it in a whole new light. Walking up to it, she slowly reached up and gripped its shoulder plate. With no effort, she pulled herself up and around its shoulder, settling upon its back. Wrapping her arms about its neck, she locked her hands together about the front of its lower neck.

“I’m hungry,” she thought aloud. In response, Mechna instantly turned and left the medical chamber for the first time in over two years.

As they strode through a rather large hallway, a man, no more than thirty years of age, approached them. The moment his eyes caught sight of Genesis, he stared at her in open awe. As they passed each other, he stumbled, fell, then quickly regained his feet and moved on.

“That was very odd,” she whispered.

“The effects of the Gel Tank, Genesis,” Mechna stated quietly. “The fluid you were set within not only regenerated what remained of your entire body, but enhanced it.” Embarrassed, she fumbled with the hood of her cloak, but not before another young man simply looked her way and walked off course, running directly into the frame of a door. Ignoring him, Genesis concealed herself, pulling the hood over her face.

“There are gloves in an inner pocket of your cloak. They are lengthy, and so will conceal the cybernetics of your hands. Also, the clothes you now wear are highly heat and cold resistant. They are created from twined silks of both the Seemtress and Glacial worm, only found on Vetriss40, a planet of great size.” Genesis quickly slipped down and put the gloves on, suddenly curious about the planet Mechna mentioned.

“I knew it. I knew there were other planets out there with life on them. I knew it.” Mechna chuckled and stopped.

“I want you to try something.”

“Try what?”

“Hold your palm out toward a target - any target - then focus on moving it without making physical contact with it. The target can be anything.” Genesis turned and faced the robot.

“I’m confused. What are you talking about?”

“Focus on me, Genesis. Go ahead, it’s okay.”

“Now you are talking fairy tales,” she whispered. Mechna shook its head.

“The cybernetics of your body are naturally - how shall I say it so you understand - magical, for lack of a better term.” Skeptical, Genesis raised her

hands and looked at them. Looking around, she noticed they were, for the moment, alone.

“Magical, right.” Mechna held up a finger.

“Think of it as a magnetic field.” Spreading her finger wide, Genesis felt something; a power. As she continued to watch her hands, the energy she felt began to grow. Looking at Mechna, she shook her head.

“Mechna, I feel it.” Mechna looked at her unmoving, like a sudden predator. “You are making me nervous,” she said. “Why are you staring at me like that?”

“Genesis, you will not harm me. I wish to see if you can do this. The power you feel is merely the cybernetics reaction to your current focus. Very rarely does it physically manifest in another. Even more rare than that, can one control it. It has only happened one time, and it manifested itself as significant enough to move a pencil across a table. Genesis, during the test on your brain, after it was repaired, I looked to see if it was functioning properly. The chart showed you capable of tapping into a power most all disbelieve the existence of. Please, Genesis, I need to know. If you say you felt something, try it out on me. If you have this power, and do not learn to use it, control it, it will turn in on you . . . it will devour you. I tended to you for over two years. Will you not trust me now?” Sighing, she let go of her doubts, a feeling of worry etching into her.

“If I hurt you, I will never forgive myself,” she stated, fear lacing into her voice. Taking a deep breath she closed her eyes, focusing on this magic Mechna spoke of. The moment she did, Genesis felt the gel of the Gel Tank all about her, constricting her. She felt as though she had to get out of it, even though she knew she was standing in the hallway of the Galactus. Drawing back her hand, Genesis opened her fingers wide, feeling a power fill her, a power she needed to release, lest it explode within her. A strange heat began to emanate within her hand and arm, quickly spreading up into her shoulder and neck.

The moment she brought her palm upward into the mid-section of Mechna, an energy wave rippled from her palm, instantly striking the mech back against the

wall behind it. As she feared the energy blast did more than throw Mechna back. As the mech struck the wall, it was forced upward, striking the ceiling with an impact that would have instantly killed a fully armored soldier. She heard Mechna grunt from the blow. As the robot crashed to the floor, she ran to it, falling to her knees. Placing her hands upon its still form, she looked about the area for help.

“Oh no, no, no! Mechna, please don't die! Mechna!” she exclaimed.

Looking into the eyes of the robot, which no longer held that familiar ultra-violet light, she continued looking both ways down the great hallway. Genesis shouted for help, then abruptly stopped as Mechna began to slowly move, its eyes regaining that familiar illumination. Slowly Mechna stood, shook its head, then ruffled Genesis hair through her hood.

“You did good. I am not hurt,” the mech stated in a low, shaken voice as it held out a hand to her. Taking its hand, she stood, then abruptly punched Mechna in the arm.

“Don't you ever ask me to use you as a target again. Ever!” The light in your eyes was gone, Mechna, gone! If I had killed you -” Genesis growled in frustration, then embraced the mech for the first time, suddenly feeling attached to it. Realizing she just struck the commander of the Galactus, she composed herself, then pointed a finger in its face. “Just don't do it again.” Mechna looked down and pulled her hood back.

“That is the first time a Human has ever successfully struck me.” Genesis squeezed Mechna.

“It won't be the last time if you ever ask me to do something like that again. What if the energy wave was ten times more powerful? What then?” she asked, her voice trembling.

“I would have powered down for two-hundred, seventy seconds, instead of twenty-seven seconds. Genesis?”

“Yes, Mechna?”

“You did well.” Genesis looked up, feeling relieved, but not quite sure how to take the compliment.

“Mechna, what is happening to me? What is this power? It feels incredible, but it scares me. What if I learn more, and I turn bad?” Taking her hand, Mechna gently removed her from hugging its mid-section. As they began to walk down the hallway, Mechna sighed.

“Genesis, I have been with you for two solid years. You will never go bad . . . I know it.” Its words made her smile, slightly.

“Thank you for what you have done for me. Thank you for saving me. Thank you for being here.”

“Genesis. You are my work . . . a work that has developed into more. No, I will never leave you. Now, I am not hurt. Let's go to the Command Station. After that, I wish to see what else you can do. Then, food.” Genesis threw Mechna a worried look.

“Alright,” she stated, feeling numb as she adjusted her hood and gloves. Being with her, and the way it spoke to her, lessened her anxiety. Genesis rested her head against Mechna's arm and sighed.

“I'm so glad my father chose you.”

“Genesis, I would not have had it any other way. Your father told me you had the uncanny ability to catch hold of ideas. After this meeting, we need to explore you.” The mentioning of her father hatched memories within her mind. The loss of her family burned dark within her, suddenly gnawing at her heart. Then a hopeful idea came to her, brightening her mood, if only a little.

“Mechna, do you think my family escaped the attack on our home?”

“The ones who attacked your house were eliminated, every last one. I do not know the exact condition of your family. I had to save you. Do you realize, if you are killed, you will become a death-trap that . . . oh, here is the door to the Command Station. The General is a just man, but strict. Please give him the respect he deserves. And Genesis, he deserves more respect than I can give him. We will talk after this meeting.” Genesis shivered, but not because she was cold. Withdrawing, she she took a deep breath, let it out, and stood up straight.

In silence, she pondered her situation. Mechna seemed to be pushing her to

expand, grow, get control of herself. Either this mech knew what it was doing, or it was weeding her out as fit or unfit. The Terraform Bomb in her side quickly convinced her as to why it was taking such a pertinent interest in her. If their places were traded, she would do the same. And, if she was so dangerous, why not eject her into space and be done with the problem?

No, there was more to this machine than she could guess, that she was sure of. Besides, it was really growing on her. After she had almost killed it, what did it do? it congratulated her on a well placed strike.

“I'm ready.”

With growing anxiety, Genesis kept to herself, staying close to Mechna. The High Commander was not yet present, and so most everyone was talking, keeping the tone to a whisper. Mechna motioned her over to a large crescent shaped table, where the mech politely aided her to sit. It then sat to her right, becoming still.

Looking around at everyone, Genesis grit her teeth, unable to shake the feeling of everything being surreal, cartoon-like, as if she were in front of the TV at home, watching a science fiction movie. She missed her family. She missed her house and her room; her last personal sanctuary. Even so, these were only bits and pieces of memories, like a pile of puzzle pieces she could only see in tiny, unfinished pictures.

Closing her eyes, she slipped into daydream of memories, images of her mother chasing her through the house when she could barely run. These images caused a burning desire to see her again, yet that was impossible now. Genesis feared she was the soul survivor of her family.

Thinking about her family brought on a pit of black loss that attacked her heart, and gnawed at emotions more deeply than she cared to feel. In all this, Genesis could only feel the despair of loss. She was especially grateful for this cloak Mechna had given her. It was better that others did not see her.

Within, Genesis felt as though she was spiraling at the sudden change of environment she now found herself immersed in. It was like never having anyone to talk to, then, surprise, she was in the middle of a thriving party of people she had nothing in common with.

Every movement, every whisper, all about her was distracting, deafening, out of place. She felt her mind begin to spin more and more, and it frightening her. Not knowing what to do, she discreetly reached over and slipped her fingers through Mechna's and squeezed, hoping she would not be rejected. As it returned her grip, Genesis felt a little better, and slipped into more regrets, losing herself in a past she desperately sought to piece together.

“High Commander on station!” Genesis jolted, as if suddenly startled, and stood after all present had. Looking at Mechna, she brought her fist to her chest, mimicking its salute as a stone-faced middle-aged man marched into the command room. Without saluting back, he motioned everyone to sit down.

“At ease. We don't have a lot of time here. Okay, we have been brought on board this ship, the Galactus. Just over ninety-thousand inhabitants of the Earth have been spared, thanks to AIM. Ninety-thousand is not many, but AIM has selected us from every country of the earth, from every walk of life. For that, I wish to publicly say this: Thank you. You are our miracle. We owe you a debt we can never repay. I personally am at your service for the remainder of my life.” The High Commander looked around at a room filled with nearly one-hundred people, some of which were manning stations on deck.

“We have been invited here due to AIM's decision to allow us to leave Earth. Even though rushed, AIM has attempted to choose those who have honor, purpose and integrity, knowledge and a burning sense of life. There can be no argument in who AIM has chosen. If any of us campaign against this - and I include myself in this statement - you will be expelled from the ship to live with a world turning in upon itself. At present, an average of one-to-three nuclear missiles are being launched in some part of the world every day. Alliances and treaties are broken, and wisdom has utterly failed mankind.” The commander looked about the crowded station, his attention resting upon Genesis, who instantly tensed, her eyes widening in apprehension. She was grateful to be concealed by her cloak.

“I'm glad to see you up and about, Genesis. Welcome to the military.” Genesis' heart went cold at his last word. Quickly and briefly raising a hand, Genesis waited in silence. Holding out a hand, the commander acknowledge her.

“Yes, Genesis?”

“Permission to speak, sir.” she stated.

“Please do,” he stated.

“Sir, can I be blunt?” The High Commander nodded once.

“I think it best at this time.”

“Sir, look what “military” has gotten the world into. I don't wish to have anything to do with that. It always leads a people to conflict, pain, then, ultimately, death.” The High Commander pointed at Genesis.

“You are correct, if your statement is meant for those left on Earth. Genesis, we need organization. We - all of us - cannot walk our own path merely because we want what we want. But, you speak the truth, as is the example of what is happening on Earth plays out before us on a daily basis. No, you are wise in your words, and it mantles credit upon you. I do not wish to follow, or be a part of, a military such as what you speak of. No one here does, but having no laws opens every last one of us to the same pain and death those outside this ship have caused.” Genesis saw his point, but her point was no less true.

“Then, sir, it seems both systems are flawed,” she whispered, feeling a sinking sensation. If all she was to do was live on a crafted spaceship for the rest of her life, what good was living? Why be healed? She did not understand, and it was darkening any hope she had for the future. As if the High Commander had the power to read her thoughts, he smiled.

“Genesis, I could live on this ship for the remainder of my life, serving what is left of my people, our people, and not be content. That kind of life would strip us all of hope for the future. Truthfully, we would change so drastically, we as a people would fade away into extinction. And so,” he stated with sudden enthusiasm, briskly rubbing his hands together, “much thought and planning has been put into an idea. Once we leave Earth, we will seek out planets to explore. Our goal is not only to escape the devastations of this dying world, but to find a world that we can call home. Genesis, you were saved and healed due to your extensive knowledge on various subjects. You are invaluable. Would you accept the charge to lead a special team onto each planet we discover, to see if we can find a place we can call home?” A sudden energy and excitement exploded within her entire being as she listened to his offer. Without thinking, she jumped up, releasing Mechna's hand.

“I would love to do that!” she exclaimed. “When do we begin. I -” Genesis felt a cold tremor run through her body, instantly killing her enthusiasm. Freezing, she locked eyes with her military leader as a dead silence filled the Command Station. The High Commander narrowed his eyes at Genesis, obviously suspicious of the change in her mood. Wrapping her arms about her thin waist, Genesis began to shiver, as if suddenly cold.

“What’s wrong?” he sternly inquired. Are you unwell?” Though she did not see it, the three rings - her retinas - began to rotate, all in opposite directions. Her blue eyes began to illuminate as she shuddered. Looking up at the Commander, she sucked in a deep breath, horrified.

“It has begun,” she said, open terror filling her voice. Giving her a strange look, the High Commander looked around, giving Mechna a stare that clearly stated, 'help me out here'.

“Genesis, what has begun?” Mechna quickly inquired. Genesis instantly broke into a sprint, racing across the Command Station, where she slid to a stop before one of the stations many thick windows, her eyes pulsing with a power she did not perceive.

“Oh no,” she whispered. Placing her hands upon the frame of the window, she watched Earth's horizon.

“Sixty-thousand nuclear missiles are being launched around the entire globe. Twenty-five thousand, two-hundred and forty-seven will strike the United States.” She turned to see the High Commander standing next to her. As he looked down at Genesis, she could see the doubt written in his eyes. She also noticed the look of curiosity and alarm as he stared. Ignoring him, she looked back at Mechna.

“We need to launch, now.” The Chief Commander looked out the window again, watching, waiting. Within three minutes, trails began to weave a net of smoke across the entire horizon, like thousands of spiders spinning their webs of death and chaos across the surface of the earth.

“How did you know that?” he whispered. “How?” The great ship, Galactus,

shuddered as something impacted it with great force.

“Sir, we need to leave,” she whispered urgently, ignoring his question. Turning, the High Commander looked around the Command Station, taking in the fear written in the faces of most everyone.

“Mechna, can we survive this?” the High Commander inquired, his face hardening, as if turning to stone. Mechna shook his head.

“The shield of Galactus can withstand many strikes, but not all. Our time is now.”

“Launch the Galactus! All systems are to be manned and activated . . . now, move, move, move! We must,” the high commander's voice cracked, yet only for a moment, “leave planet Earth . . . our home,” he mourned. Genesis felt his emotion, even though it was brief. Taking one last look outside, Genesis froze in shock and wonder, silently saying a prayer for the survivors of what she knew marked the beginning of intense, prolonged, suffering. As she watched, she felt the High Commander take hold of her forearm.

“All who are not supposed to be on this station, please leave, now. Move!” he stated in a loud, confident voice. Bending down, he neared her ear.

“I need to talk to you in private,” he whispered.

“I need to speak with you as well. It is vital you know something, and soon. What is your name sir?”

“Krannis, Jeremiah Krannis. I will see you as soon as the Galactus is safely up.” Looking past her, he signalled, giving the order to execute the launch.

Genesis was abruptly scooped up by Mechna, who took her out of the Command Station. As Mechna carried her out, she looked up at this cyborg, recalling a story her mother told her when she was a girl.

“Mechna, this is like the story of Noah and the Ark. When I first heard my mother read it to me, I did not comprehend the sadness behind the reality. To me, it was just a story. Mechna, this is horrible. Billions are about to suffer and die.” Mechna was silent, no doubt, not knowing how to respond. Setting Genesis down, Mechna walked at her pace. Taking off one glove, she began examining her hand.

“What am I become?” Genesis asked as she held her hand up before her, turning it this way and that, seeing a hand that was mostly metal. With a skeptical look at her fingers, she shook her head, noticing she was now more cyborg than the girl she used to be. Mechna watched her closely, as if studying her.

“You Humans are peculiar.”

“In what way?” she inquired, slipping her glove back on. She looked up at her companion.

“Your stories, are they true or just tales?” Genesis thought about it only a moment before answering.

“Mechna, thousands of years from now, others will read the tale of those who descended from the skies to help a crumbling world. They will read of the ones from the stars who built a ship, the likes of which no one had ever dreamed of. They will read of thousands of animals, people and supplies gathered on this ship. What will be their conclusion?” Mechna thought for a time as they walked.

“Their logical thought will be that gods came and saved the Human race from extinction. Genesis, we are not gods. I read many religious works of your people, Genesis, and, according to these religious writings, we, AIM, are not gods. According to the definition Humans give, your god has vague meaning. According to your writings, there are many different gods. The stories are contradictory, though very interesting. There is one point that makes sense in all of it. If this lucifer, who dwelt in heaven, was cast out for rebellion, and became a

dragon, we need to be on the highest alert. A battle with a dragon would, no doubt, push us to the limit. On the other hand, if this Jesus came to earth as a baby, grew up and did many miracles, he could be a great ally against this dragon.” Genesis's eyes brightened by Mechna's logic.

“Well, if these stories are real, I just came to the conclusion they are only real to increase the moral of the people of the earth. It seems the prophecies are all being killed right now.” Mechna placed a hand upon her shoulder.

“Well, according to what I read, it says God works in mysterious ways.” Genesis could not help but scoff.

“Yes, he does, just look at me. Im a prime example of mysterious. Mechna, can we never speak of religion again? I used to believe. Now, I don't know.” Genesis gently pushed Mechna's hand away.

“Thank you for saving me,” she whispered. “If it wasn't for you, I would be bones in a wrecked house.” Mechna leaned close and held up a finger.

“No, the heat of the ensuing flames would have left only your teeth.” Throwing him a grim look, Genesis reached up and pushed the side of Mechna's face away.

“Thank you for that graphic description. At least I don't have to wonder what I would have looked like, had you not saved me.”

“You are being sarcastic. Genesis, I have observed you closely ever since I placed you in the Gel Tank. I have detected an oncoming bitterness within your behavior. Do not let yourself fall into the bitterness of regret and anger. Let us seek a new world for the ninety-nine thousand, three hundred and eighty-seven others upon this ship. Let us work to preserve your race.” Genesis felt Mechna's words instantly weigh down upon her shoulders.

“Oh, Mechna, I feel so empty. Who am I?”

“I am going to tell you something, but you must keep it confidential between you and I. Can you do this?”

“Yes, yes I will, I swear it.”

“Within this sophisticated shell you see before you beats a heart of flesh. I

was going to tell you when the time was right. The time is right.” As she listened, the Galactus shuddered once, heavily, then again, no doubt the impacts of hate streaming the skies from below. Moving into her mech, she embraced it tight, feeling safe.

“You really have a heart, like mine?”

“Yes, come with me - now.” Mechna headed back to the room in which she had spent two years; a room she did not wish to see again. Once inside, Mechna turned and sealed the door with a wave of its metal hand. Turning to her, Mechna reached out and touched Genesis, just over her heart.

“All that remains of my once body is my heart. I would like to show you, so you know I am not a mere robot. Remember, you are not the only mortal who has spent years in a Gel Tank, healing and being rebuilt.” Placing a hand on Mechna's chest, she looked up into those ultra-violet, predator-like, eyes.

“Please.”

“Step back a pace. The gases from within my armored chest are poisonous to the flesh of others. These gases are fleeting, but we must use precaution.” Genesis backed up and waited, her attention fixed on Mechna. Satisfied, Mechna held out its arms. In a short moment, plates began to unlock and move outward, until, after the twelfth protective layer, Genesis beheld a fist-sized beating heart, not unlike her own. A reddish gas issued out from within Mechna's chest, like smoke rising from the log of an extinguished campfire. After a minute, Mechna beckoned Genesis come close. Shaking her head, she refused to move.

“I can see from here. Mechna, I thought you were only a sophisticated machine.” Shaking his head, her Cyborg companion stepped up to her, closing the distance between them.

“Do not be afraid, Genesis. Go ahead, you may look closely. Study me. I trust you.” Enthralled, Genesis moved close, pulling off her hooded cloak. Throwing it to the floor, she pulled her snow-white hair back and held it with a hand as she turned her ear toward Mechna's beating heart, a slow smile spreading across her face as she heard its even rhythm. Questions began to pour into her

head as she carefully turned and pulled back, ever so sensitive to the fact that Mechna was bearing his soul to her.

“Are you part android?”

“No, I am much more sophisticated than a mere android. I will tell you what I am in time. For now, I will answer your questions.” Reaching up, Mechna grazed a gentle hand over Genesis's hair, seeming to admire it.

“What race were you before you became AIM?” she asked.

“Starr`Dancer. I am the last of my kind; what is left of me. When the ravages of hate destroyed my world, I departed and placed myself in a more intricate and advanced Gel-like Tank. As my brain slowly decayed, all the memories of my life were recorded and uploaded into a memory chipset. My explanation is far more complicated than I explain. All I could save of myself was my heart.”

“What happened?” she pursued.

“Genesis, Starr`Dancers traverse space by folding the reality of one destination with another. When both destinations come together, we merely step over to the other side. We then unfold the two physical areas, leaving them as they were. Thus, we are known as Starr`Dancers. Some say we dance among the stars. I like that saying.”

“Can you still do this?”

“Yes, but only I can. The other AIM cannot. I made them all, crafted their bodies and programmed them. They are independent, but choose to follow me, their maker. I am very fond of every last AIM I have crafted. We work together as one, seeing through each others' eyes, and hearing what the others hear, but only when needed, and through my authorization. It would become overwhelming otherwise.” Genesis sighed.

“How long were you in your healing tank?”

“Thirty-seven years, four months, three weeks, three days, sixteen hours, forty-two minutes and seventeen seconds.” Genesis waved Mechna to close the plates.

“Are you male or female?”

“Although it no longer matters, I was male. Would you like to know the details of my once body?” Shaking her head, Genesis watched as each protective chest plate moved, locking back into place. Once Mechna's chest was sealed, she looked on him with a new, solid, admiration.

“That was a long time to be immobilized. I would have gone insane.”

“Remember, my brain died. Transferring my memories to a chip-set did away with the feelings you experienced. With only my heart remaining, all I could do was focus on not letting my beating heart become bitter, as you are in danger of falling prey to.” Genesis suddenly understood why he was telling her this, and it hatched a sudden determination within her.

“I promise you now, Mechna, I will not let my emptiness consume me. I will, as you did, work hard to help others. Thank you for allowing me in. Thank you for the trust you have in me. I will never break that trust, but only build on it. By the way, do you have a name?”

“Yes, I am sure I did, but that part of my memory decayed before I began storing my knowledge. I have often wondered what my real name is. You gave me a name, and that was good enough for me. I like it. Thank you, Genesis.” Biting her bottom lip, she smiled slightly.

“You’re welcome. Mechna, are you adopting me due to what I carry, or is it something more?”

“Both. I need to help you control what you carry by aiding you to control your emotions. I also see something in you, I used to see in myself. Innocense.” A sudden thought came into her mind. Looking at Mechna, she suddenly felt vulnerable, disturbed. Yet, in all this, she also felt hope. Mechna was her anchor to sanity and life. He was the only one in her existence that she knew. If he was ever suddenly gone . . .

“Mechna, would you allow me to make a copy of your memory.” Mechna's head tilted slightly.

“For what purpose?” he responded, his attention suddenly locked on to her.

The way he was looking at her tempted Genesis to hesitate, to drop the subject. She did not.

“In case I lose you, I can bring you back. I know it would be without the flesh of your heart, but at least I would not lose the closest friend I have.” After a long moment, the cyborb nodded.

“I will only give you enough information to know how to replicate me, but that is all.”

“I agree.” Mechna turned to lead on, but she stopped him.

“Wait, I want to try to do this without your machines. I want to try with these. She held up her hands. For a moment, Mechna’s eyes widened.

“If you do not succeed, do not think it as a failure, but as a test. Knowing you cannot do this by means of your cybernetics only means you have explored boundaries and possibilities. Genesis, do you understand?”

“Yes,” she replied, then walked into Mechna, rested herself against him, raised both hands to each side of his face and placed the tips of her fingers at various areas of Mechna's head. Closing her eyes, she concentrated, not knowing what to expect, until a sudden and overwhelming torrent of information began pouring into her mind. The incoming intelligence was so overwhelming, she recoiled back from Mechna, gasping in utter astonishment. Catching her breath, she slowly calmed herself. Mechna looked utterly surprised.

“You are more than the other in a lot of ways. Genesis, maybe this is too much for you. I crafted you with certain elements and parts to protect you from danger . . . thus protecting others in the process. Some of the matter I formed into you are yet a mystery, even to me. It is clear that you are more than I could have emagined you would become. Come, let me take you to my personal chambers. I will upload this information to you without the danger of overloading you.”

Genesis looked at her hand in astonishment. What she had just experienced was not only exhilarating, but exciting.

“No, no, let me try again, please. It took me off guard, that's all,” she panted, sweat beginning to stream down her temples. “If I am to know my potential, I need

to explore, yes?” There was a long silence between she and the cyborg. Just as she began to accept that he would deny her, Mechna motioned her to him.

“Of course, when you are ready.” Looking around, she saw no one in the great hall. It was odd that not one person had walked past. Maybe there was a meeting, or something, going on. “Genesis, clear your mind and relax. Focus is the key to unlocking your abilities. Be patient.

“Okay, alright,” she whispered, clearing her mind of all thoughts, or trying to. This time, she knew what was coming and readied herself for the flood. Placing her fingers back onto his head, she closed her eyes. Instantly, she felt that same connection.

As she felt Mechna's mind add to her own, Genesis accepted the union, yielding to information Mechna suddenly offered. Gritting her teeth, rejecting her instinctive reaction to break away, she pictured herself opening a door. The moment she visualized this, a merciless torrent of information flooded her mind, quickly making her feel as though her brain would combust. Her eyes began to glow brightly, intermitantly blinking and shifting as she felt the information flow.

Refusing to give in, Genesis absorbed what intelligence Mechna would give her. As she neared the end of the ordeal, her entire frame began to tremor. If not for Mechna wrapping his supportive arms about her, she would have fallen. Within just a few minutes it was finished. In a mere three minutes, Genesis comprehended how to build, compile and place the program into Mechna.

Exhausted beyond anything she had ever experienced, she slumped against the cyborg. As her eyes dimmed, she looked up at Mechna and shook her head, mumbling something incoherent, the light within her eyes flashing, and then blinking out entirely.

Smiling up at him, Genesis fell into blackness.

As Genesis slowly came to, she fought against the black and white, chaotic, fuzz tormenting her vision. Slowly but steadily, her eyesight focused. As she perceived herself to be upon a soft bed, she groaned, feeling as if she had taken a fall. As her senses cleared, she felt Mechna's hand tighten about hers', and it made her smile. Looking to her right, she saw him kneeling by the bed, those wonderful, scary eyes riveted upon her.

“Hello there, wonderful,” she whispered, fighting off a few glitches dancing in the air before her.

“Hello, Genesis. How do you feel?” When she first met him, she thought of him as a machine, a sophisticated robot from the stars, come to save mankind. Now? No, she no longer considered him like that. She knew better than to think of him as an object. Though others might not know he had a beating heart, she did, and this would remain a dead secret for the rest of her life. Briefly, Genesis wondered how long that would be, and it worried her. “Not now,” she thought, banishing the image of being terraformed on a lifeless rock.

“Exhausted. How long was I out?” His response shocked her.

“Two of your earth calendar months.” Mechna took her head between his hands. “Look directly at me.” Resting one hand on his wrist, she smiled.

“Well,” she quietly laughed, “I don’t really have a choice.” Ignoring her mild sarcasm, Mechna gazed into her eyes for a minute, unmoving. After a time he let go, withdrawing.

“Your ocular implants are rerouting and repairing. You will be fine.”

“My eyes were damaged?”

“Overloaded. The specific eyes I gave you do not become damaged easily. EMP cannot overpower them.” Genesis was surprised.

“What about my body parts?”

“Fully immune. Genesis as time moves on, you will discover distinct elements about yourself, aspects that will empower you.”

“You mean, like when I hurt you in the great hall?” Mechna shook his head.

“Genesis, be gentle with others. Remember, when you are in a confrontation, have mercy on your foes if at all possible.” With some effort, she sat up and placed a hand to her chest, feeling her heart skip a beat. Taking in controlled breaths, she focused on staying calm.

“I will do my best, Mechna, I promise. You know,” she said, changing the subject, “for someone who doesn't have a stomach, I'm doing pretty good. You said I can still eat, yes?”

“Yes, you can eat.”

“Lucky me,” she stated, imagining a basket of french fries. Reaching out, Genesis took hold of Mechna's hand and squeezed.

“Thank you for keeping me safe.”

“You are welcome, Genesis of Earth,” Mechna replied sentimentally, mingled with a hollow metallic sound in his voice.

“Mechna, I'm hungry.” Mechna instantly turned and left the medical unit. Confused at why he had left without a word, she slipped out of bed, steadying herself upon a nearby table. Getting control of herself, she followed after, staggering slightly. Soon, she caught up, falling in step beside him.

“Where are we going?” Mechna looked down at her, then offered her a hand. Taking it, she jumped and pulled herself onto his back as he lifted. Looping her arms about his thick neck, she hooked her wrists, each with the opposite hand, and rested her head against him.

“Wow, I can jump good.” Mechna chuckled.

“You can do a lot of things . . . good. Practice.” She felt strong, yet her equilibrium was off.

“Where are we going?” she asked again. Slowly, Mechna shook his head.

“You said you were hungry.”

“Oh, that I did, sir. What kind of food do you eat way out at the center of nowhere?”

“We have nearly everything Humans eat on earth. Genesis, we are not in the center of nowhere.” She smirked.

“Everything is in the middle of nowhere, because there is no end to the universe.”

“You are correct on there being no end to the universe. But, if I may argue, peaceably, this point, I would say this: We are not at the center of nowhere.” Genesis lightly thumped his head with hers.

“Play on words, that’s what you are doing.” Mechna shook his head.

“No, Genesis. There is an end to nowhere.” Confused, she looked at the back of Mechna’s head.

“Okay, if you know where you are, that’s somewhere. I get it.” Mechna chuckled.

“Precicely, young lady.” Calling her ‘young lady’ took her completley off guard.

“Now I’m a lady?”

“Of course you are. In the future, you will see just how much so.” Giving him a strange look, she reflected on his choice of words. She decided not to pester him further with such questions. Pulling herself up, she rested the side of her head against his.

“Thank you for watching out for me. So, when do you think we will come to the first planet I can play on?”

“If I knew that, Genesis, we would have already plotted a direct course for it. Finding a dead planet is no small task. Are you unhappy?”

“No, no, I’m not. I do miss my family. In that, I am unhappy, yes. I just wonder at what will happen once we find such a planet?” Mechna reached a hand up and placed it on her connecting hands.

“We have plenty of time, and no one is going to force you to do this. Genesis, we may find a habitable world, or share one with a friendly species. Then you will not have to worry about . . . it.” A sudden nervousness began to fill her. What if she were killed, or a terrible accident happened? She knew she was a risk; walking death to all upon the Galactus.

“Mechna, do you have a way to remove it?”

“Your father was a brilliant man, Genesis, even outsmarting me.” Reaching up his other hand, Mechna rested it gently against the side of her head. She liked the attention he was giving her.

“Wow, an earthling outsmarted you. Okay, I won’t gloat. You know, I learned a lot of his work, though not all by far. I need to share that with you. But, not now, not until I am eating some french fries. And, like you said, we have time.” They took a turn down a similar hallway, where the air smelled like food. The thought of eating did nicely at lowering her anxiety.

“I’m so hungry,” she whispered. Mechna chuckled as she slipped down. Quickly, she covered her face with the hood of her cloak.

Mechna insisted Genesis pick the table they would sit at just prior to entering the cafeteria. Looking in, she was taken back by its size.

“Is something wrong, Genesis? We can come back.” Throwing him a look of wonder, she shook her head.

“No, it’s just, well, massive.”

“How so?” Discretely, Genesis pointed here and there.

“This place must hold a thousand people, and my guess is based on what I can see.” Slipping in, she walked over to a table closest to the exit.

“I like this one,” she stated, her thoughts suddenly bent upon french fries. As she sat down, the table moved and shifted to accommodate her size. Intrigued, she watched as Mechna sat next to her. The table instantly moved and changed its dimensions to fit his needs as well. Mechna watched her, the violet light in his eyes pulsing slightly.

“You are humored by this.” She nodded.

“Yes sir, I am. It’s the first time I’ve ever seen anything like it. However,” she persisted, “it has been over two years since I’ve had anything to eat.”

“Well, you will like the fries. All you need do is wait.” Looking around, Genesis spotted what appeared to be a female robots, gracefully going about their buisness of serving hundreds of people.

“Mechna, I don’t have any money.”

“Leave the thought of money on the earth. Here, we all do our part to ensure everything functions at its best. Service, Genesis, service is more valuable than any piece of paper or coin.” She thought about it, and wondered why the people of earth could not have done the same. Back on her dying home, everything had been based on money and power. Power most was always followed the ammasing of the wealth spoken of everywhere; on TV, the radio, websites, and in all forms of media. She thought of many more things, playing scenarios out in her head, until she found herself being gently brought back to the here and the now.

“Genesis, Genesis.” A gentle brush down the side of her temple and cheek

abruptly snapped her out of musings she did not wish to be thinking about. Looking up, she noticed Mechna staring at her. He pointed at the table, drawing her attention to a large basket of steak-cut french fries and fry sauce.

“I took the liberty of ordering for you. You seemed, quiet preoccupied in your thoughts.”

“These are perfect, thank you so much.” Before she took one, she looked up at him.

“Can you eat?” Mechna shook his head slightly.

“No, yet it does not bother me to see you eat. Now enjoy your meal, and I will enjoy you.” Uplifted by his words, Genesis melted against Mechna, snaking her arms about him and sighed.

“I love you,” she whispered. She felt an arm envelope her and gently squeeze.

“I love you as well,” Mechna returned. “Now, I hear french fries are best eaten hot, is this true?”

“I get it, I get it.” Letting him go, Genesis threw him a grin and began removing fry after fry from the basket, as if she had all the time in the universe, dipping each of them in a cup of fry sauce that came with the basket.

For a long while they sat, talking about too many things, much to her liking. Yet, after a long while, Genesis felt a mild fatigue coming on. She fought it, trying not to reveal her exhaustion to Mechna. Soon, their conversation blurred, as if in a dream. She loved being with him now. She hoped it would last forever. He was all she had left.

Genesis awoke to Mechna staring at her. The odd thing was, he was staring at her hand. She noticed his strangely glowing eyes were fixed on it.

“Like what you see, or are you just looking?” she asked, chuckling.

“Modifications must be made to better protect the flesh of your body. You are shielded, but I have studied a way to improve that protection.” Looking up at the ceiling, she sighed.

“How long was I sleeping this time?”

“Approximately three days. Genesis, nothing is wrong with you. Your body is merely exhausted from the trauma of your experience. It is normal. There is nothing wrong. This will occur less as time moves on. Come, I wish to speak with you in private.” With that Mechna stood, turned and walked out the door.

Getting up, Genesis followed after him, grabbing her cloak on the way out. Once in the hall, Genesis looked left and then right as she fastened her cloak. Pulling up the hood, she jogged after Mechna. Slowing to a walk, she let him guide. She was excited to see something new, although french fries would always top anything she could experience on or off the Galactus, that she was sure of. After walking for quite some time, she looked up at Mechna.

“Again, I see no people.”

“This is my ship.” Genesis bit her lip.

“You said that before.”

“Yes,” Mechna replied, mildly frustrating her. Poker was one thing, but a mystery dragged on was another, and it was suddenly eating at her head.

“Mechna, what does that mean?”

“I depict who walks what halls, and who goes into what rooms and chambers. This is my ship. Of all the beings on this ship, I suspected you to be the one to figure out what I mean. Here we are.” Mechna stopped and turned, facing a very large door. As was all the other doors on this ship, each slid open. There were no handles. Placing a hand upon its surface, Genesis stared in wonder.

“This door was not here a moment ago.”

“Maybe you were distracted, and did not see it as we approached,” Mechna replied, his eyes lighting up.

“No, it was not here.” Bending close, Mechna’s eyes shifted into slits, unnerving her.

“This door is always here.” Feeling rebellious, she shook her head, not giving in.

“No, it was not. Mechna, you are lying to me. Why?” She felt the back of his hand strike her across the face before she even realized it was coming. The impact sent her tumbling through the air to strike the wall opposite the door. Falling to the floor, she groaned, stunned by the power of his strike. Hearing the impacts of Mechna’s feet nearing, she shook the daze out of her head and leapt to her feet, then ducked just in time to evade a punch, which the wall behind her took the brunt of. Without thinking, she kicked one of Mechna’s legs out from under him, forcing him to stagger and fall. Backing off, she looked around rather panicked.

“Mechna, what did I do!” she yelled, scrambling further away as he grasped at her leg. Jumping out of his reach, she thought of the power he taught her. No, she could not do it! The door! Maybe this was a test.

As Mechna regained his feet, she charged the door as fast as she possibly could, driving her fist into its surface with all her strength, focusing on the power she had experienced before - whatever that power was. Just prior to impacting the steel of the door, her fists flashed with a blue light.

As she made contact with its surface, there came a loud boom, like a large metal hammer being brought down on the surface of a solid stone floor. The blow on the door buckled it in, forcing it to yield as it flew off the wall.

However, the drive against it was not without effect upon her hand. As she broke it down, she felt a snap of pain tear through her knuckles and fingers, causing her to cry out, even as she heard Mechna charging up from behind.

“No!” she screamed, infuriated by Mechna’s behavior. Pain or not, this had to stop! Turning, Genesis gathered all the power she could and released it upon

him. As he launched at her, a ripple expanded through the air in multiple circular patterns before her outstretched hand, catching him in mid-leap, and violently cast him back. Instantly, she felt her strength completely drain.

Falling to her knees, she screamed out in agony as Mechna shattered against the far wall, pieces of his metallic anatomy scattering in all directions. Doubling over, she wept as a blackness, deeper than a starless night, enveloped her, seizing upon her, sending her spiraling down into nothing.

With a gasp, Genesis sat up, sweat streaming her face. In agony and remorse, she cried out for Mechna.

“Calm your emotions, I am here.” Looking to her bedside, she let out an exclamation of relief and launched into her companion, throwing her arms about his neck and squeezing.

“It wasn’t real, it wasn’t real . . . only a dream!” Mechna wrapped her securely, tenderly, smoothing her sweat-drenched hair back.

“Yes, it was real. But the mech you destroyed was only a copy of my appearance.” Pulling back, she looked up at him.

“Why? Why would you do that?” she questioned Mechna, pulling away from him.

“The Commander and I have agreed to test you. Genesis, what do you expect as you explore both inhabited and uninhabited planets?” Shaking her head in disbelief, her eyes widened.

“Why would I worry when you are going to be with me on every mission? I thought that’s what the plan was.” Mechna reached out, attempting to smooth her hair back, but she pushed it away. “You will accompany me, right?”

“I cannot always be with you. Genesis, there may be times when I am needed here. It is then that you will go with your other companions. Again, what do you expect as you explore both inhabited and uninhabited planets?” Genesis felt let down. Of course Mechna could not be with her on every outing. Most likely, he would stay on the Galactus. After all, it was his ship.

“Anything, I suppose. I presume a lifeless planet could have natural phenomenons, while one with life might possess challenges from its inhabitants, as well as natural phenomenons.”

“Exactly,” Mechna replied. Your intelligence does you credit, but where we go now, we cannot know what challenges wait. In this endless galaxy, even I am but a mere child. I did not wish it, but it was wisdom to challenge you.” Again, she pushed away his attempt to adjust her hair. She stared at his slanted, violet eyes

for quite some time, thinking about what had just happened. Eventually, she came to the conclusion that Mechna was right. Sighing, she relaxed.

“If you had warned me of this test, it would have altered it. Okay, give me the critique. I know it’s coming.” Again, Mechna attempted to fix her hair. This time, Genesis let him. As she waited for his reply, she closed her eyes, enjoying the attention.

“You used too much power on the robot I designed. You could have forced your fingers through the steel to pull the door open. You missed what lay within the chamber. On the opposite hand, you disposed of your enemy, as well as opened the door. With others at your side, you would have succeeded. They would have taken care of you.” Genesis scoffed.

“In other words, I screwed up.”

“Yes. Genesis, the power you can use is built up within you, generated by the light of sun, moon and stars. If you expend it, you must wait for a time before it builds up again.” Becoming curious, she looked at him in sudden earnest.

“Tell me what else I can do.”

“All whom I save - like you - are different. You foretold the number of missiles being launched on earth. How did you know about the launch, and the exact count of missiles? How did you know how many would strike the United States?” Feeling exhausted, she looked at the back of her free hand. It was cracked and bent.

“I just knew, I don’t know how. Do you have any idea?”

“Yes. I studied the recording prior to your prediction. The three rings within your ocular implants - your eyes - showed to be revolving, all in opposite directions. Also, the rings were lit up. You see, Genesis, once those type of implants are inserted in the eye sockets, they adapt to their host.”

“Adapt?” she mumbled.

“Yes. There are hundreds of tiny - how can I phrase this so you can understand - cables, or wires, which pierced into flesh and brain when installed. Once set, they gather the information of thought, mood, dreams and aspirations, as

well as the logic of the one they are implanted into. It is far more complex than this. This information is then sent into the eyes to be processed. I have witnessed the results, which are never the same. It seems you perceive the future, which thing I have never seen in another who wears ocular implants.” Genesis looked Mechna square in the eyes.

“Seeing ahead of time would do me good in a physical confrontation. It would do my team well.”

“Yes it would,” he stated, the slits of his eyes narrowing, “You should hone that skill with patience.” He took up her damaged hand, lifting it between them. “Do not be extreme. Do not give your all every time something happens, unless it is absolutely necessary. There may be a time when giving everything is what you must do, but try and be more cautious about your decisions. Be wise, Genesis.” Looking down at her damaged hand, she suddenly felt disappointed, even ashamed.

“Can my hand be fixed?” she stated, a feeling of heaviness growing on her.

“Yes. What I have experienced in the past has led me to see ahead. I have created replacement parts for such occasions. You seem spent. Lay down and sleep. When you awaken, we will begin the procedure.” Laying down, Genesis closed her eyes, thoroughly exhausted. As Mechna’s hand rested upon hers, she smiled. Controlling her thoughts took much effort, but she did it. After clearing her mind, Genesis fell into a sleep that lasted nearly a full week.

As she slept, Mechna held her hand, watching over her, never leaving her side.

As she came to, Genesis blinked away the confusion and haze. After a few moments, she turned her attention to the side of the bed, to see Mechna still holding her hand. Yawning, she closed her eyes for a moment, then squeezed his hand with some difficulty.

“Should I ask?”

“Six days, twenty-three hours, fifty-seven minutes and thirty-two seconds.” She smirked, opening her eyes.

“I am going to get over this exhaustion. I will.”

“Yes, you will. It is the norm in every healing process for you, but, in time, you may master it.” Sitting up, she turned and set her feet upon the floor.

“I hope I do not have to get back in the Gel Tank. I never want to be in that stuff again.” Mechna sighed.

“I hope you never have to. That tank is for the healing of flesh. Genesis, you are yet flesh.”

“I get it, I understand. Genesis, do not get yourself blown up again,” she said, as if she was Mechna speaking to her. Mechna stood and faced her.

“Correct. Avoid being blown up.” She laughed and punched him in the chest. A sudden pain shot through her fingers and hand, causing her to cry out in agony. Recoiling, Genesis held her injured hand to her chest, cradling it with her other.

“Easy, Genesis. Let me fix you.” Mechna turned away and walked over to a large cabinet. With a wave of his hand, it opened to reveal duplicates of every cybernetic part of her body. It was eerie seeing such a collection, and it made her grimace.

“It’s like looking at a serial killer robot’s collection of victims.” Looking back, Mechna’s eyes suddenly shone like two violet stars.

“Come. Let me fix your injury.” Doing as he said, she arose and walked over, holding out her hand. Mechna studied the damage for a minute, then scanned her, from the fingers to her shoulders.

“The wounds are only in your fingers and hand.” Almost impatient, Genesis looked at all the cybernetic parts in the cabinet, a bit nervous.

“Is this going to hurt?” Mechna shook his head.

“No. If the damage had gone into your shoulder, it would have been different. This time, you have been fortunate.” She felt her arm lighten, and a snapping sound, drew her attention to what Mechna was doing. What she saw shocked her badly. Mechna was holding her right hand. Looking at her arm, her eyes widened in horror, as she gazed upon the stump of a once whole body part. In horror, she witnessed the complete bone structure of her hand. So grizzly and terrible was the damage, her mind began to spin. The cabinet she stood next to tilted, and began to fall into her.

The next thing Genesis comprehended was the bed she lay upon. Looking up at the ceiling, her mind spun dangerously, attempting to upend the bed and throw her to the floor. Closing her eyes, she fought to keep from vomiting. Within moments, she knew it to be only the feeling of nausea; that she could not actually vomit. She never thought she would miss such a thing.

“Mechna, help me,” she said, raising her right hand, fully expecting to see the remains of herself. What she saw was her normal, cybernetic hand. “What am I?” she despaired. Looking to the side of the bed, she focused on Mechna, who, as always, was there, holding her other hand. “I’m a monster, Mechna. I’m what everyone fears in the night, in the deep of the unknown . . . what they whisper about and hide from - what they destroy out of fear.” Mechna’s head tilted slightly as he knelt beside her. Slowly, he reached up and took her hand.

“Others have said the same, and they became just that.”

“I’m ugly, repulsive and sickening. I wish I had stayed on earth and died. Please, please do me a favor, Mechna. Eject me from the Galactus,” she mourned.

“No,” Mechna answered stern as steel.

“Now I see what the remains of my body look like, and it is too much, too much to take in. I’m gone.” The revolving rings within her sky-blue eyes began to darken, and as they did, her mood became dark. Pulling her hand from Mechna’s,

she turned her head away, withdrawing from everything she knew.

“Genesis, Genesis, wake up.” Sluggishly, she opened her eyes and slowly stretched, that terrible dream fading slowly away. Turning, Genesis saw Mechna sitting beside her.

“What, what is it?” Genesis asked, suddenly worried.

“You have slept for nearly three weeks. If you were serious about taking the Commander’s offer to explore, you will need to get up. We have located a planet with limited life.” Shaking the sleep from her head, Genesis got off the bed and stood. Mechna pointed at the bathroom, then turned, heading for the door.

“I will be waiting just outside.” Soon, she was alone. Taking in a deep breath, she sighed heavily. Holding up both hands, she noted they were not damaged.

“Sick,” she muttered as she turned and entered the bathroom. Taking off all her clothes, Genesis found it difficult not to stare at herself in the mirror. “What am I?” she whispered, running her metal fingers over herself. “No longer human is what I am.” Her retinas shaded to a solid black, but she did not see it.

Entering the shower, she turned it on and adjusted the heat so she could barely stand it. It felt good. As she showered, Genesis wondered how her hair survived the blast. She would have to ask Mechna - he would know.

She did not take long to get ready, and soon was out the door walking with her companion, dark and sinister thoughts flitting through her mind like moths about a single point of light in the darkness.

“Mechna, how did my hair survive the blast?”

“It did not. I did, however, save some strands, which I grew in a Solution Well. Once the hair was long enough, I measured and cut your single length of hair into over one-hundred thousand lengthy strands. Once this was accomplished, I implanted them into your healed scalp. Do not worry, Genesis, your hair will grow as it always did.” Astonished, she looked up at Mechna, suddenly grateful for him.

“I don’t know what to say, but thank you.” Mechna looked down at her, then abruptly stopped. Leaning down, he looked into her eyes.

“The retinas in each of your eyes are dark. Apparently the color and shade of your eyes change with your mood. Genesis, what are you thinking of?” She stepped back and lowered her head. “Genesis, talk to me,” Mechna persisted.

“I saw my remains. If the cybernetics were taken away, I would be hideous to look at. I should be dead. Is it possible to regenerate bone and flesh?”

“Yes, but it is a lengthy process.”

“How lengthy? Mechna, please, if you know the answer, please tell me. I feel like I’m always fishing information from you, and it is beginning to frustrate me.” Mechna straightened, looking at her for a few moments.

“It will take approximately two-hundred years to regenerate your body. I have looked into it. After you were stabilized, I began the process, taking a sample of your flesh and bone. I did not delay in this, Genesis. When I escaped the destruction of Goldoron, my home planet, I did not have time to take all the equipment I needed. It was a dangerous task to build the Galactus, but it was a success. I could not manage to obtain a Regeneration Pod. I did my very best. However, I have managed to create a prototype. You are currently the first test subject.”

“Can you teach me how to engineer this prototype? I would like to know more, so I can be of assistance to you.” Mechna raised a hand to his metal chin, thinking.

“Let us do this mission. After, we will talk. Genesis, keep your moral up. Do not let your thoughts turn to darkness. I need you. Three others, whom I saved, just as I saved you, turned on me. They are far away now. Do not make me also send you away.” Genesis’ eyes widened at his words, words which carried the promise of a threat. Suddenly, her heart ached in her metal chest.

“Don’t send me away, Mechna. I will try to do as you say. It’s just, what I saw. It took me down into dark thoughts. I will do better, I promise.”

“That is exactly what two of the three others promised.” As Mechna began

to walk, she jumped up onto his back, as she always did, and locked her hands together. She felt his hand upon hers as they continued. Still, as he bore her through the great halls of the Galactus, she pictured herself without - no! She would not entertain such thoughts again. No. It was a struggle, a battle in which she had to win. Mechnas's voice snapped her out of brooding.

“One more thing, Genesis. Your right cybernetic replacement hand has a weapon installed that can shoot energy disks. They detonate, similar to a mixture of one of your earth's grenades, mingled with intense energy. You should practice using it. You need to get used to this weapon . . . master it. The next time you are on a planet, practice with it.” Narrowing his eyes, Mechna's voice became serious, deadly serious. “With the use of each disk, your supply of energy will deplete. I believe you can fire off a few without feeling the drain, but use this weapon sparingly.

Exhausted, Genesis rested her head against the back of Mechna's neck as she wept in silence . . . without the tears.

“Thank you,” she whispered.

Before entering the Command Station, Genesis slipped off Mechna's back and tried to compose herself. Struggling with her emotions, she held up a hand.

"Give me a minute or two, Mechna. I need to get myself together." Turning to face her, Mechna held out a tissue. Taking it, she gave him a strange look. She could not shed tears, but her nose was running from this sudden emotion. He was a gentleman, and she liked that.

"Where did you get - never mind. I know, this is your ship."

"Yes it is, young lady. Tell me when you are ready, and take your time." He was thoughtful and polite. Impressed at his propriety, she could not help but brake down.

"Why now? Why not an hour from now?" Mechna placed a hand on her shoulder.

"You have your hour. Come, let us walk." Utterly astonished at his kindness, she nodded, her chin quivering. Once she had taken her position on his back, Mechna began walking without a destination in mind. An hour and six tissues later they returned to the door of the Command Station. Genesis slipped down and adjusted her hood.

"Thank you," she stated in a low voice.

"You are most welcome," he replied, brushing the back of his metallic down her temple and cheek. She loved it when he did that.

"Okay, I'm ready. Again, thank you," she said, placing a hand on his. Turning, Mechna led her through a door that would soon give her an experience that would not only open her eyes to a whole new perspective, but test her to the limit.

As they entered, she instantly spotted four others, all men. Genesis frowned, suddenly dreading this first task. Staying with Mechna, she walked past the four, ignoring them. Mechna walked Genesis over to the same window she had watched the nuclear missiles from. Stopping, he pointed at a very small sphere in the not too far distance. Looking at it, she could not help but be critical.

“This planet is at least five times smaller than earth’s moon,” she whispered, “it would sustain our population for no more than a thousand years. After -” Mechna held up a hand, stopping her in mid-thought.

“The Galactus is a very large ship. It was no small task landing on your planet without disrupting its balance.” He pointed to the sphere. “We are yet quite some distance from it. To move closer will cost this ship resources I am not willing to give up. Earth was in danger - this planet is not. Though it seems smaller, it is actually seventeen percent larger than Earth.”

“Oh, I see. Thank you for telling me before I made a fool of myself.” Mechna leaned close.

“My pleasure.” She grinned and secretly elbowed him away. “Come, meet your crew mates. They are seasoned with a variety of talents. Don’t be nervous, Genesis. They were chosen to live on the Galactus for a reason. Humans were not brought on board this ship unless I trusted their background and their ethics.”

“Under duress, ethics change,” she responded, keeping her voice low.

“Be at peace, Human.” The last thing Mechna stated instantly grated on her nerves. Human? She was now less than half that. Why did he not say cyborg, or freak, or monster?

She allowed him to walk her to the empty seat next to her group. All of them turned, politely acknowledging her, making this ordeal less painful. Mechna looked at the five of them.

“Where is the Commander?” One of the four quickly spoke up.

“He was here, but when you sent the message you would be one hour late, he left the command station. We were left with the message to let you know he would be back as soon as possible.”

The thought that killed the humor in all this was the fact that she was about to lead a team down onto a planet, to possibly meet those not of her race, and those who might prove hostile. It was altogether sobering.

“Mechna, she whispered, raising a hand, grateful for the gloves he had given her. Quickly she dropped it before the others noticed she had raised it. She

was no longer in high school.

“Yes, Genesis?”

“Back in the late eighteen hundreds, and into the turn of the century, Earth explorers sought out new lands, exploring them, mapping them out. At times they would encounter natives, who had never had contact with the outside world. At times these explorers had simple sicknesses. They did not think of those they were coming in contact with. The natives had never been exposed to these sicknesses. Entire tribes were wiped out. I know you see what I am getting at.” Mechna stopped and faced the five.

“Jasen, tell me what you think on this issue.” Jasen cleared his throat, seeming a bit nervous.

“You are correct, Genesis. But with the advanced technology Mechna has brought to us, this fear is fully laid to rest. It will not be an issue.” Reaching into his pocket, Jasen retrieved a small round disk, no larger than a simple dime. “If you place this simple-looking disk upon any part of your body, it will ward off sickness and disease. However, if an ailment inflicts you that is too strong for it to repel, it will turn red. That is the sign to leave.” Looking at Mechna, he concluded with a question. “Do I have this correct, sir?” Mechna nodded.

“Perfectly.” Mechna’s attention centered on Genesis. “Are there any other questions?” She nodded.

“Yes. We are the invaders, strangers. If they become hostile, and fire upon us, say killing one or more of us, what is the protocol?” Mechna looked at Brenn.

“Brenn what are your thoughts?” Brenn slightly shook his head.

“We leave. We try our best to get our fallen comrades off the planet. We simply vanish into the stars, never to come back. It is their planet, not ours. The equipment Mechna has given us is highly advanced. I hope there will be no casualties on either side.” The cyborg nodded in agreement.

“Any further questions?” No one did, and so Mechna walked over to an oval-shaped console and began working it.

After a few minutes of sitting in silence, Genesis saw Commander Krannis

walk in. She and the other four stood and turned their attention upon the Commander, Saluting him. Mechna began to salute him, but Commander Krannis waved him down.

“At ease. This is our first mission. Genesis, you are the leader of this team from here on out, unless you relinquish such a command. You can then go through me to choose who will lead your team, should you wish another to do so. My apologies for being quick, but your ship is now ready for departure. If at all possible, you are to make friendly contact with the species upon the planet.” He turned and looked out the ships window. “You must know, strange as it is, there are only a few hundred sentient beings on this planet,” he looked at Mechna, “according to ship sensors. Also, there is an abundance of life on the surface in nearly all regions, so be on your guard. If at all possible, I need to you make friendly contact with these sentients. See who they are. Find out everything you can about them. Above all, if you can, discover why they are so few in number. Do any of you have any questions or concerns?” No one did. Krannis walked over and shook each of their hands.

“Genesis, a word.” Without question, she followed him to a far part of the command station, where he turned on her.

“How did you know about the missiles? You not only predicted it, but stated how many were to be fired. Your predictions were flawless.” Genesis closed her eyes, hoping her retinas were as they were before. In either case, she needed to tell him, according to what she had learned of her ocular implants.

“Sir, my eyes are not my own. When they were placed in the hollows of my head, they grafted not only into my sockets, but into my brain. The knowledge of the nuclear strike came to me as a total surprise.” He looked at her with no expression.

“Lead this team to success. Be vigilant in gaining as much knowledge as you can. Come back safe with your team. You have the ability to make it happen. I believe in you, more than I say.” She sighed, feeling a sudden burden weigh down upon her.

“I’ll do my best, sir.” Turning, she walked back to the others in silence. The Commander trailed not far behind. After Genesis had taken her seat, he cleared his throat.

“You four are already acquainted with each other. Briefly raise your hand when I call your name, so Genesis will know who you are. These introductions will be brief. Gillian here is an expert in Engineering and Construction. Samuel has studied Ecology extensively. He is adept in both environments and science. Brenn is exceptional in the fields of security, firearms and demolition. Last of all, Jason. Jason is a communication specialist, and is an incredible psychiatrist. He is also fully trained in the medical field.” Commander Krannis looked over to Mechna.

“Mechna, you all know. He will be accompanying the expedition. Any comments Mechna?” Genesis looked to Mechna, expecting him to add to the commanders’ introductions, yet he did not.

“It is enough, sir,” Mechna stated with respect in his tone. “We should begin.”

“Very well, I will leave you to it. I have my own list of things to accomplish, so I will leave you now. Good day Genesis, gentlemen. Good luck on your first excursion.” With that Krannis turned and left the Command Station.

Events seemed to twist together in a whirl of packing and readying herself for a trip in which a time limit was not specified. Standing before a one-hundred fifty foot ship, the likes of which she had never seen, Genesis studied its contours, external equipment, the front windows and every other detail that caught her eye.

“Mechna, how advanced is this ship, and how fast can it travel?”

“Per second, it can travel at twenty times the distance than the fastest fighter on your Earth.” Genesis rolled her eyes.

“Big deal. I once made a paper airplane. It’s flight was straight, fast and true. I don’t think you could top that.” Mechna stared at Genesis for a bit, then quietly laughed.

“Wait until you fly this machine. You are going to thoroughly enjoy it,” he stated quietly as he reached up and placed a forefinger against her temple. Leaning into his touch, she sighed, enjoying his attention. One thing bothered her.

“Mechna, I can’t fly this thing. It’s way beyond my knowledge to -” She froze as the schematics of the ship opened up in her mind. All controls became suddenly familiar, as if she had flown this ship all her life.

Then, another flood of information was given her. It was the tongues of six-thousand sentient species. However, this information came at a price, and it taxed her energy to the point of exhaustion. The floor beneath her buckled and swayed as Mechna withdrew his touch. Staggering, she fought to keep her feet, yet failed in the attempt. As she began to go under, she felt herself fall. Her last thought was: The odd thing about falling is you hit something hard. She did not.

Slowly opening her eyes, Genesis quickly recovered from the exhaustion effect. Blinking the haze from before her, she sat up, shook her head and turned to see Mechna sitting beside her.

“How long this time?”

“Three hours. We are in flight and headed for the planet. How do you feel?”

“Drugged, but it will pass. I need to walk.” Mechna stood, holding out his

arm, which she took. As they made their way for the door, she felt the room rebel against her.

“Floor doesn’t like me,” she stated.

“If you stayed in this room, you could do a little walking until you recover.” Shaking her head, she nearly fell.

“No, please, I need to walk without any turning.” Mechna guided her into the hall of the ship.

“This hall spans in a complete oval about the ship.” He then proceeded to escort her in silence.

“Mechna, what’s on your mind?” she asked.

“You,” the cyborg replied.

“What about me?” she pressed.

“Before we land on this planet, I wish to encourage you to keep your spirits up. How are you doing?” Disappointed, she pulled back her hood and looked up at him.

“What color are they now?” Mechna bent slightly, looking into her eyes.

“They are no longer black, but they are not as they were before. What is on your mind?” Reluctantly, she began to tell him about her fears, her anger, regrets and shattered dreams. When she was finished, she looked to him, waiting for a response.

“Genesis, if you look for it, you can find happiness in the darkest of places. You simply need to search for it. Do you think you have thought of every possibility in the expanse of the galaxy? Think about it. I will not lecture you on this further.” Disappointed, she leaned into him.

“Maybe you’re right, but I don’t see it right now. I will try harder. I will, I promise.”

“Excellent. Now I need to you at the helm of the ship. We will be entering into the planet’s atmosphere shortly. Come.” Mechna took her by the hand and quickened his step, his metal feet impacting the metal floor of the craft as they made their way to the front of the ship.

Soon she was strapping herself in as the ship landed approximately thirty miles from the known location of the sentient life discovered by the system scanners aboard the Galactus. Once the ship was settled, the landing gear locked into place.

Since the Gel Tank, Genesis had developed an intense intolerance for being subdued. As the ship powered down, she released the safety harness, stood, then quickly headed for the exit. Punching in the code to open the main door, she was taken back when a red light flashed, denying her access to the outside. Gritting her teeth, Genesis bent down, gazing at the keypad, her right eye suddenly moving in patterns, like the spinning of a complicated safe dial. Within seconds, the door opened. She did not see Mechna observing her.

Walking down the metallic walkway, Genesis raised a hand to ward off two suns which instantly annoyed her. Looking to the horizon, the three rings of her eyes slightly shifted outward, as well as inward, creating a telescopic effect. Slowly scanning the horizon, she could see nothing but plateaus and hills. An oasis caught her attention.

“What do you see?” came Mechna’s voice close behind, startling her.

“Palm trees, or trees similar to that type, a small lake, fed by a waterfall. The stream exiting the lake vanishes quickly, swallowed by the sands it flows over.” Above the falls, movement caught her attention. Squinting hard, she slowly focused in on a group of tusked quadrupeds.

“Wait, I see creatures roaming above the falls. They are the size of large apes. That is all.” Turning her attention to Mechna, she could feel her eyes shift. As Mechna came into focus, she shook her head, rather dizzy. “The keypad, then this. Though doing that challenged my balance, I like it.” She could never quite tell what Mechna was thinking when he looked at her. One day, she would absorb all the information he could give, all Galactus had in its data banks and storage devices. She could then take a piece of his heart and clone him. She would also do the same for herself. Then, yes then, she could have at her side a noble man, obedient man - Genesis staggered at her thoughts, moving away from Mechna.

Catching her heel upon some rock, she fell back, hitting the ground. Instantly, Mechna was at her side.

“No, don’t touch me! Like earth, this world will die alone! All will fade beneath the glowing embers of their own ashes! I am not their salvation!” Genesis seethed in sudden, unbridled hate. Within a single beat of her heart, she froze, realizing what had just come out of her mouth. Appalled at herself, she shuddered, looking away, even as the slits of Mechna’s eyes widened. Slowly, Mechna stood, backing a step, still watching her.

Turning away, Genesis placed her hands upon the unsmooth rock beneath her. Slowly rising, she kept her back to Mechna, not daring to look into his eyes. Like standing naked beneath the deadly chill of a glacier runoff, she felt the icy fingers of true shame wash through her, causing her to tremble.

“What have I said?” she whispered, horrified at her sudden outburst. Looking out to the horizon, she pictured those simple animals, whatever they were, innocent victims of the sentient, helpless to finish the simple course of their own lives, due to those who dominated them. Piecing together the facts, she came to a conclusion: The sentient population of this world was nearly gone, along with most all its species. There was almost nothing left. She did not see Mechna hold up a hand out to the four about to exit the ship, halting them.

“Genesis, I was not going to take on another like you. Too many have despaired and turned dark. They were my responsibility, and so I could not undo them. It would have been murder. When I learned of Earth’s dilemma, I came, but only to observe. Through the investigation of my scouts, I discovered an earthling female. She was special. You see, she held something in her side, something of immense significance. I learned she carried this burden willingly, and my heart softened toward her species.” Genesis shuddered.

“My family is undone.” she whispered, anguish twisting within her.

“Compassion, forged by your bravery, your father’s bravery, is what saved the Humans aboard my ship. Genesis, you are the reason they live.” Genesis heard his words, and, like a well aimed arrow, struck her through the heart.

“Mechna, why can I not shed tears?”

“Your tear ducts were destroyed in the blast. Genesis, that part of you is gone, at least for now. I am working on restoring to you what is possible. Be patient. I will do everything I can, expend every resource I have, to make you whole. In the meantime, let us seek out a world your people can call their own.” Genesis felt ashamed.

“Mechna, will you forgive me? I’m so sorry.” She dared not look at him for the guilt she felt. She should never have said such things to the one who saved her life.

“It is forgiven, Genesis. Do not dwell on it. Though it has been over two years, you have just begun to grieve your losses. Most of the others on the Galactus have mourned, many falling into depression. Yet, nearly all of them now hold a firm hope for a new life. It is natural, and perfectly normal, that you should walk the same path as they.” Mechna neared and gently turned her to face him. “Genesis, if I have done something to offend you, will you forgive me?” That was all she needed to hear from him to break her down. Embracing him tight, Genesis mourned.

“Forgive you? Mechna, I have nothing to forgive you for. I am the one who needs to be freed of my sins.” Brushing her hair with his fingers, Mechna looked down at her.

“Sins?”

“My wrongs, my trespasses.”

“Genesis, let us go and see what -” Quickly, Mechna let go of her, turned, then hastened to the ship, waving the four out. Looking toward the craft, Genesis wondered what could have happened. Breaking into a run, she ran toward the ship. Yet, as she approached, the ramp raised and sealed. Stopping, she looked toward the cockpit, but could not see Mechna as the engines fired up, throwing debris in all directions. The four others raised their hands to their eyes, turned and retreated from the area as Genesis stood and watched the ship rise up into the sky and vanish from sight.

“What has happened?” she whispered, as the large cloud of dust about the area slowly drifted away in a slight breeze. Turning, she adjusted her hood and joined her team. Brenn held out a flat pack to her.

“This is yours. Whatever the Cyborg is up to, that’s its business. We have a job to do. You might want to look in your pack. Permission to scout ahead.” Genesis did not like the tone of his voice. Since leaving the Galactus, Brenn had taken on a different heir. Maybe it was based on what had just happened. Maybe she was over reacting.

“Permission granted. Report any findings immediately.” Turning away, Brenn began to jog in the direction of the oasis. He would not reach it today, so she was not worried about him encountering the animals she had seen. What disturbed her was him.

Looking to the other three, she scrutinized them, wondering how capable they were in this environment. If the sentients were hostile, could these three hold their own? Brenn was most likely the only one who could, besides her, and without fighting back.

Kneeling, she set her pack down and unclasped the magnetic buckles. Opening it, she found the basics needed for medical and survival. There were a number of ration pellets, a spool of wire, headlamp and sleeping gear. It didn’t look like much. But then again, all of this was much more advanced than the best of what earth had to offer.

The pistol is what caught her attention. It was simple in design, yet made of something other than steel. Picking it up, she looked at it, not wanting to ask the others if they knew how to use one. Studying it’s design, Genesis shook her head, hoping it would never have to be used. The thought then occurred to her: What did it matter? Sentient life on this planet was all but extinguished anyways.

Shaking her head, she banished such a thought.

“Genesis, should we wait here, or follow Brenn?” Jasen asked, rather concerned. Genesis looked at Samuel and Gillian, who now looked to her for guidance. She was only eighteen. Even so, she only had sixteen years of experience in life. Two of those years, she lay within a Gel Tank, much less than half of her body healing. Still, they waited for her decision.

“Can any of you track?” Each of them shook their head.

“Neither can I. Let’s wait for Brenn. He knows where we are, and I don’t want to risk us getting separated. Do you know each other well?” Gillian looked at the other two.

“Correct me if I’m wrong, but I believe I can speak for each of us. We met approximately an hour and fifteen minutes prior to your arrival.” He looked at the other two, who agreed.

“I am Genesis. I am eighteen years of age. My father was highly educated in the fields of science, technology and computer engineering. When I was the age of four, he began teaching me the more simple things he knew. By the age of ten, I began to understand his work. I never stopped learning. I love horses and cats. I’m the best at poker, and love chocolate ice cream. That’s me in a nut shell.” She looked at Gillian, staring until it dawned on him what he was supposed to do.

“Oh, I am Gillian. I have a passion for engineering and building. I have two daughters and a wife on the Galactus. My daughters are six and eight. I love to play board games with my wife and kiddos’. If I’m not at work, I’m with them.” Genesis looked at Samuel, who cleared his throat.

“I am Samuel. I am thirty years old. I love environmental science. My son of two, my daughter of six, and my and wife are also upon the Galactus.” Jasen seemed to need no cue.

“I’m Jasen. I am twenty-nine years old. I have a masters in communication, meaning I communicate with others better than I did before I went to school. As young as I am, others often do not believe I hold a degree in psychiatry. Oh, I love to play checkers, chess and poker. Genesis, I seldom lose at poker, so I would

really love to beat you some time.” Genesis looked at Jasen, not knowing what to say. After a few moments, she continued.

“Well, I hope we all become more knowledgeable about each other. Each of our strengths will certainly make up for the weakness in the other. This is a well mixed team. One thing: Do each of you have a firearm in your pack?” Each of them confirmed her question with a nod. Genesis continued.

“We are on an unfamiliar planet. Unless danger is imminent, and there is no escape, under no circumstances will you fire upon any creature or sentient. Keep your weapon concealed, and at the ready.”

She watched as the others retrieved their pistols. In all her life, she had never discharged a gun. In fact, she didn’t know how to use one, as her family never owned a gun. Retrieving her firearm, she slipped it into the top-side of her pants. As she did, Genesis conveniently discovered an inner pocket to her cloak, into which she relocated it. Turning in the direction Brenn had gone, and fearing for his safety, Genesis wondered how long it would be before he returned.

The four she had been left on the surface of this planet with had little physical protection. As she saw it, she was the only one present who needed to fear less than the others. The thought highly disturbed her.

“Do we have any form of radio, or communication device?” Gillian tapped his forefinger to the side of his head.

“Oh, forgive me, yes, it’s there in the side pocket of your pack. This is all new to me.” Genesis opened the left side-pocket of her pack to see an ear-piece. Turning away from the others, she fit it about her ear with a bit of difficulty.

“Hello?” Nothing happened.

“You have to say, ‘Com1 on’,” Jasen informed her. “You are Com1. We each have a number. If you say ‘Com1 on’, we all hear you. If you say ‘Com2 on’, only Com2 can hear and talk to you. You can speak to Com2 and Com3 by saying, ‘Com2 and 3 on’. See what I mean?” Genesis acknowledged him with a nod.

“I’ll return. Contact me through the com if you need me. I need to be alone for a bit.” Not waiting for a response, Genesis looked out over the nearby

landscape, spotting areas that would guide her back, then walked away. What she wanted was to find a planet, get her people on it, then leave. If a dead planet was located, she knew what had to be done, and she would do it to save her species, although the thought scared her badly.

After walking for some time, Genesis recalled Mechna saying that she was fed by sun, moon and starlight. Curious about what he'd told her, she stopped and turned in a slow circle, making sure she was alone. As far as she could determine, she was. Removing her cloak and clothing, she draped each piece over the branch of a nearby tree. Looking down at herself, Genesis physically staggered in disbelief, appalled at the image of her body, should all the metal be taken away. Gritting her teeth, she growled, as if she were some primal creature. Before coming out from under the tree, she looked around. Yes, she was alone.

Stepping out from the shade of the tree, she held out her arms, basking in the rays of both suns. Instantly the entire surface of her cybernetics shifted, separating slightly. Startled, she looked at her left arm, seeing small, thin plates exit and turn so that each plate faced one or the other sun. Instantly, she could feel an energy begin to flow through and fill her entire body.

"What is this?" she stated in surprise and amazement. "This is way beyond what I could have imagined." Looking to the sky, she felt frustrated. "Mechna, where are you?" she called out, hoping he and she had a communication link. It was no surprise he did not answer. Still, it was worth a try.

After a few minutes, her cybernetics returned to normal, leaving her to herself as she stood within a small clearing. Walking over to get her clothes, the sudden unmistakable sound of heavy impacts upon the earth filled her ears and shook the ground beneath her feet. Something was coming, and quickly. She hoped that, if she held perfectly still, it would pass by without noticing her presence, yet that was not to be her luck.

She spotted it before it noticed her. For that she was grateful, but what could she do? She could not move, and dared not make even the slightest sound. It was quadruped, and had what seemed a thousand horns and spines covering its

entire body. The level of its head alone was easily three times her height, and, by its build, promised a deadly confrontation, should it become offensive. Not knowing what to do, Genesis remained still as it lumbered into the clearing, yet unaware it shared the same area as she.

Abruptly, the lumbering beast stopped, raised its nose high, sniffed the air three times. Grunting, as if suddenly agitated, it then lowered its head and began sniffing the dirt and rock about it, sending up small dust clouds each time it exhaled through its nose.

Within moments, it turned its attention to the tree where her clothes hung on a branch. Cautiously, it shifted its course, making its way in that direction. Moving forward, it smelled out her clothes, then grunted as it caught sight of her.

This beast was easily four times the size of a bull elephant, and looked as though it could easily wipe out an entire herd.

“Easy,” Genesis whispered, trying to make her voice as soothing as possible. When its horn-like bristles began to rise, Genesis knew it had heard her. Instead of running, or trying to retrieve her pistol, she knelt down and held out a hand in hopes that it would deem her gesture submissive.

“Look at you, so beautiful. Easy now, easy,” she whispered, gradually increasing the tone of her voice. Turning its attention upon her, it lowered its head, seeming more curious than aggressive, much to her relief. Sniffing her hand multiple times, it made a deep sound, like a growl, though it did not seem defensive. As it did, she noticed the spines covering this creature from its neck to the tip of its tail, slowly relax and settle.

In a desperate attempt to keep this creature calm, Genesis gently began to glide a light touch over the side of its nose and mouth as she spoke soothing words. Truly, this beast was intimidating, making her feel so very small and insignificant. The thought of what she carried in her side came to her. As it did, she desired to save this creature. For if it attacked, and killed her, it would in turn be killing itself.

“Oh, you are amazing,” she whispered, cooing the beast, hoping her

approach would sooth any aggression that might suddenly explode upon her. For a time it simply sniffed her arm and shoulder, having absolutely no fear of her. Adjusting its stance, it set both feet down at either side of her, seemingly intrigued and curious at what it had found.

Genesis bore the sniffing, and the not so pleasant breath, becoming more and more in awe of this wonderful animal. After a couple minutes, she even began to enjoy it, and wondered what it was called, its origin, why it was alone, or if it had gotten separated from its herd. She was curious what a newborn looked and acted like.

“I wonder if you can swim?” she stated, careful to keep her tone even. “Are there any predators that can possibly challenge you?” She had too many questions about this monstrous beast. “We can be friends, yes?” It puffed at her, causing her hair to fly back, then leaned in and sniffed her face and neck, pushing Genesis onto her back. Quickly, she knelt. “Do I confuse you with my cybernetics? Don’t pay those pieces any attention. They are fake.” She began to gently scratch at the plates on the side of its head, using the tips of her fingers to get in between the openings. “Please be my friend,” she whispered. “You don’t want to kill me. It would not bode well for either of us,” she softly spoke.

Slowly, Genesis brought her other hand up and started working the more soft area, just past its nostrils, knowing full well, if it attacked now, she would be hard pressed to get out from under it. To Genesis, being at such a disadvantage no longer seemed to matter.

After a while, she slowly stood, continuing to caress through a few smaller, scattered, horns about its right eye. She must have hit a soft spot, for the lumbering animal began to grunt, slightly leaning into her hand. For the first time in a long, long while, Genesis grinned.

“So, we are friends then?” she whispered, looking into its eye. Shaking its head and neck, it raised its head up, breaking contact with her, and bellowed. Startled, Genesis froze as it roared, the sound of its call not unlike a fog horn. It then lowered itself to the ground, watching her every move with its left eye.

“So, you like this, do you? You seem tired and rather lazy. No doubt, you are nocturnal.” She began massaging the top of its head and great mouth. As she did, it relaxed and closed its eyes, seeming content. Just then, Jasen’s voice came across the com.

“Genesis, Brenn, are you alright? What was that?” Genesis smiled, slowly stood and walked over to her clothes. Slowly, and without any sudden movements, she dressed and returned to a very large and seemingly peaceful beast. Kneeling down beside it, she caressed the area about its left eye.

“You like this. Seems I found a soft spot. I have to go. Hey, let’s stay friends, shall we? I really do like you,” she spoke, a sudden love for this animal hatching within her. “I hope to see you again.” With that, Genesis slowly stood, turned and walked away, grateful it did not follow. Once she was out of its sight, she used the ear com, informing her team she was on her way back.

Brenn was there when she returned. The look he gave her screamed suspicion, but he remained silent, preparing his pack for travel. His mood greatly concerned her. Genesis knew she was being a mystery. It had to be this way, but he obviously had questions, questions which were not being answered. She feared this would lead to irrational behaviors which would, in turn, lead to choices which might work against them all. Thinking about it, Genesis decided it was best he should know.

“Brenn, come with me. I need to show you something,” she stated and walked away, motioning the other three to hold position. After a short hike, and after she was sure the two of them were well out of ear and eye-shot of the others, Genesis stopped and turned on him.

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

“You, that’s what’s wrong. What do you know about leading?” What do you know about danger and fighting, as well as negotiating with an alien species? Can you really guide and defend this group?” Frankly, she liked him being straight to the point. His directness would make this so much easier.

“Brenn, I never asked for this. How can we fix it?” Her question seemed to surprise him.

“Yes you did. On the Command Station, you jumped at the chance to do this. Genesis, who are you? You are always shrouded in that cloak. How can others follow mystery? It can’t work this way, unless you hold some hidden power we are not aware of.” Laughing softly, she shook her head and slowly raised each hand, taking hold of her hood. She did not want to do this, but if Brenn was to understand, he had to know. Reluctantly, Genesis unveiled her face, then unclasped her cloak, dropping it to the ground. She then removed her gloves. As she did, Brenn’s eyes widened slightly.

“I will show you what I was forced to be, due to the insatiable avarice of others. Brenn, I had just won a poker game against my mother, father and two brothers. We ate chocolate ice cream,” she stopped for a moment to gain control of her voice, “the night I lost everything but my life and most of my physical body.”

“Genesis, it is enough. We are done here,” Brenn said, holding up a hand.

“This is what I am become, Brenn. Trust me when I say, clothing is no longer a necessity to me.

“I understand,” he choked, his balance appearing off. Genesis grabbed her cloak and began putting it back on. After making sure it fit right, Genesis swung the pack onto her back. Adjusting it to fit snug, then slipped her hands back through each glove. After situating herself, she looked around the area, a bit nervous.

“Will you be telling the others?” she asked. Ignoring her question, Brenn motioned to her.

“The others are waiting, so let’s get back,” he said, then began walking. As they made their way to the others, Brenn remained silent. Genesis wondered what was mulling about in his head. She wished she could read his mind, but doubted her cybernetics could do such a thing. She tried focusing on him, but got nothing. It was worth a try.

A thought then occurred to her. Mechna had inform her that her fears

projected into the minds of others. If this was true, could not communication? She wanted to know his mind, but could she read his if she was desperate enough to do it? What she was, she needed to conceal. The only reason she showed him, was for the safety of the others. She was beginning to think her decision a huge mistake.

After a long march down a steady incline of terrain that, at times, became steep and traitorous, Genesis suddenly cleared her throat, catching her team's attention.

"There are some very large creatures in the area about us. They are about four or five times the size of an adult bull elephant, but docile and easily befriended. Trust me when I say It would be a mistake to shoot one. I don't know the damage these pistols can do, but if you shoot one, I assume you will only enrage it." The others began to shift uneasily, looking about the area.

"The one I encountered seemed affected by soothing, slow movements, and enjoyed being scratched about the eye. It was intimidating, but I had no choice, it came upon me so sudden. The one you all heard was the one I was with. That was the reason I did not respond right away. With that said, do any of you have any questions?" Slowly Jasen raised a hand.

"What was it like?" Genesis let out a slow breath, gathering her senses.

"I'm not sure how to describe it. It was exhilarating. Had I seen that magnificent beast in time, I would have run. If not for its peaceful nature, I would have compromised this mission. But at times, I think all of us will have to do some form of scouting - not just Brenn. Everyone, keep your firearms at the ready, but only shoot if you absolutely have to.

After the five readied their pistols, Genesis looked to Brenn and nodded. Brenn turned and began making his way toward the oasis, setting a pace the slowest could follow. Genesis, took up the rear, keeping an eye out for danger. This was her first mission, and she would have readily admitted, she did not know what she was doing.

For hours they carefully made their way down a steady slope, dotted with large shrub-like trees. When they reached the bottom, Genesis called a halt. All stopped but Brenn, who continued on.

“Brenn wait, we need a rest,” Genesis called out. Brenn sighed, turned and looked at the others.

“Fine, five minutes, then we continue. We need to see what’s out here.” The others quickly found a place to rest. Rather irritated, Genesis looked at Brenn as he took up the rear position and sat down. Walking over, she sat down by him.

“Brenn, the others aren’t used to this. The only reason I’m not effected by fatigue is . . . well you know why. We are not on a deadline. Will you please ease up on them?” Brenn gave her a strange look.

“Okay miss cyborg, you’re in charge.”

“Brenn, are you drunk or something? You said earlier that it would be up to me whether I tell them or not. Now you are spouting off about cyborgs. Brenn, I think it was a mistake to take you on this mission. At first, you seemed like you had a head on your shoulders. My mistake. If you don’t lighten up, I’m going to send you back to the drop-off point and have you wait for us there. Do I make myself clear?” Her security officer lowered his head and laughed.

“Do you really think you can pull this off? You don’t have any training, you have no experience in the field of security, and you are, what, about fifteen years old? Genesis, this mission is doomed to fail, whether you see it or not. The moment we encounter any sentient life forms, they are going to kill us, you know that, right?” Genesis was struck speechless. After a few moments, she relaxed and looked at the other. It seemed they had not heard she and Brenn’s conversation.

“No. Brenn, you don’t see it because you don’t want to. You see what you want to see. Your attitude is going to get us killed. You fear of what lies out there in the unknown. That is what’s going on. And that fear is going to drive you to do something stupid. Brenn, I’m sorry, but as much security as you know, your

perception of what we are doing is clouded. You need to throw out all you know and meet the future with a clean slate. I fear, if you do not, you are going to get yourself, maybe all of us, killed. Until further notice, I'll be taking point. Do you understand me?" Brenn looked at Genesis as if she had just slapped him.

"Understood." Genesis got to her feet.

"Gillian, Jasen, Samuel, take as much time as you need to rest up. When you are all ready to travel, let me know. Brenn has agreed to take rear-point, just in case we are being followed." Genesis looked at Brenn, who nodded, then began cleaning his pistol, his jaw tightening.

After an hour, they were following Genesis, who constantly worried about Brenn and his suspicious mind-set. She could not wring it from her thoughts that, should there be an alien encounter, he would do something foolish. Pushing a branch aside, and holding it for Gillian, the thought crossed her mind to take Brenn's firearm, but then dismissed the notion, thinking she was overreacting. His attitude was arrogant, and that was a dangerous thing on a strange world. Frankly, it scared her.

Within a few hours, the five came down off one of the plateaus which dotted the landscape as far as the eye could see. The climate was dry and, at times, windy, but the others had goggles to shield their eyes. As for Genesis, she wore her's only to keep her eyes hidden, that is if everyone else had not already heard Brenn's remarks. It seemed they had not.

As they struck out across the lowlands, it began to get dark, and so they camped for the night. Genesis offered to take the third watch, putting the time frame from 2:00am to 4:00am. Back on earth, she had read up on nocturnal behavior. Night creatures were more on the hunt during the hours she would be keeping watch, and, if the same held true on this world, she might get to see some critters. The main reason for taking this time to be awake, was the thought that, if anything happened, it would be during her shift, and she could deal with it. In this, she could keep her team members more safe.

As the four slept, Genesis turned a slow and constant circle, peering out into the darkness. Being in the lowlands, they were rather exposed, and so she tested out her ocular implants to see what they could do. Until now, she had tested them only once. She found it amazing how she could zoom in on targeted positions, as if she had her own built in binoculars. It took some time to get it right, but slowly she was able to work her implants to scan the area about the group.

At one point, Genesis tried movement detection, and infra-red vision. Upon attempting the infra-red, an instant stabbing pain exploded within her head, dropping her to the ground. Stifling a scream, she managed to keep quiet as she grasped the earth, her fingers digging into and snapping the stone she gripped. It felt as though she had been punched on either side of the head, but from the inside.

“Mechna,” she managed to forced between clenched teeth, “I need you right now. What is going on up there?” For a few minutes, Genesis knelt where she was, nearly blind and helpless, pretending to keep watch just in case any of the others woke up. At the moment, the sockets of her eyes were hurting so bad she could barely keep from screaming.

“Hey, you okay?” Jasen whispered, startling her. In her current state, she did not see him before he was right by her. He sat down beside her as she took in a quiet breath and composed herself, grateful for the hood.

“Yes, thank you. And you?” she asked in return. Jasen smiled.

“I’m alright. Truthfully, I’m still in system shock at being away from Earth.” Genesis understood what he meant.

“I’m glad we made it out, but the others - there were so many. Nightmares haunt me, lingering on the edges of my daydreams, waiting for me to close my eyes at night.” Jasen took in a deep breath and sighed. Looking up at the stars, he pointed, singling out one in particular.

“Maybe that will be the sun we all can share the warmth of. Genesis, I know I’m a Psychiatrist, but it doesn’t mean anything if I don’t truly care.” Before Genesis could react, Jasen took her hand in both of his. Grateful for the gloves Mechna had given her, she wondered if Jasen could feel the solidity of the

cybernetic structure beneath the cloth. As if he didn't notice, he looked at her, throwing her a smile.

"You alright?" Genesis moved back, withdrawing from his touch.

"Yes. Well, I'm not. And Brenn's attitude has changed drastically. Jasen, this is my watch. Let me finish it alone." Throwing her a slight smile, he stood. Before he walked away, she added, "Oh, and Jasen, don't touch me again. Next time, I'll take you back to the drop-off point and leave you there until we return. You will be removed from the team." She wasn't trying to be mean. It's just, others needed to mind their own business.

"My apologies. I meant nothing by it," he said before returning to his bedroll. Once again, finding herself alone, Genesis thought about the horned creature she had encountered the day before. Compatibility with life here could be a good thing, but she knew how the Human race was when it came to fear, or a symbol of status. Like the Mammoth, it was hunted to extinction due to the "honor" in taking down such a prize. The wolf was killed because Humans feared its kind. Also, a wolf pelt was worth money and so justified its death. All in all, the Human race was always in the middle of the process of extinction, whether it was a whale, or themselves.

On the other hand, it was most always the nature of the Human race to compete with others of its own kind. To Genesis, it mattered little just how willing to work with each other the Humans on the Galactus were. She knew it would only be a matter of time before this utopian oneness began to decay. At first, her people would test their boundaries. Then small things would happen here and there, and escalate from that point. Yes, it was only a matter of time. She hoped she was wrong, but her gut told her she was right - well, the gut she now had. Brenn was a prime example of Human society decay.

The sun rose, quickly warming the desert floor. Within their packs, each had a light-weight covering that reflected heat. While the others put their on, Genesis did not. She needed no such survival gear, as her cybernetics kept her

body temperature normal.

She watched Brenn, who was silent, almost withdrawn, trailing the group, pistol in hand. After this mission, Genesis would request he be removed from the team. To her, he seemed too volatile and unstable to take part in missions involving delicately balanced behaviors and negotiations. No, he was not a good pick for these expeditions.

On the other hand, she felt the excitement of discovering new life, whether it was the fauna, animals or sentient beings. All of this gave her a purpose that slowly drove out the feeling of being merely dead weight.

Long before the any of the others detected what dwelt within the oasis, Genesis scanned the area ahead, sighting multiple bear-sized animals basking about large water holes. These were the same creatures she had seen up on the ridge when they first landed. Stopping, she turned to the others.

“What’s there?” Brenn asked, looking to Genesis. “Is there something dangerous?” Before Genesis could answer, Brenn walked through them and raised a pair of binoculars to his eyes.

“I can’t make out anything. Let’s get a closer look.” He continued walking, ignoring Genesis.

“Brenn, come back and take your position, now,” Genesis commanded. Brenn stopped, turned and pointed at her.

“Do you all even know what she is?” Genesis took in a deep breath. As she looked at the ground, she exhaled, trying to keep her composure. “Yep, that’s right. Our little beauty is not even Human! She’s a Cyborg freak.”

“Brenn,” Genesis stated in an even tone, “stop being a fool and take your position. Of what you speak, you know absolutely nothing.” Samuel stepped forward, suddenly agitated.

“Brenn, do your job!” he yelled. “You are endangering this entire mission right now. When we get back, I’m going to file a formal complaint against you. The way you are acting, you should have been left on earth. There was one mech that picked the wrong person to take onto the Galactus!” Brenn’s eyes widened.

Putting away his binoculars, he looked at Samuel, as if he wanted to hurt him. Genesis moved in between the two.

“Don’t,” Genesis whispered, a tone in her voice that meant business. Brenn slowly walked back, and as he did, Genesis stopped him, holding out her hand.

“Give me your firearm,” she stated in an even tone. “Now.” Without arguing, Brenn handed it to her.

“I never thought I’d be taking orders from a machine.”

“Brenn, why the hostility? Those mechs saved us. Why do you hate them so much?” Ignoring her, Brenn took his position in the rear, eyeing Genesis with a sudden look of hate that shocked her.

“Alright all, follow me, but do not talk. There is a gathering of creatures ahead, and I want to see one of them up close. If something happens, just walk away, got it?” They all agreed, with the exception of Brenn, who openly scoffed at her. After hiking for a little over an hour, Genesis raised a hand, signaling them to stop.

“Wait here. Do nothing, even if I get attacked. If this goes badly, return to the drop-point and wait for the pick-up.” It was disturbing that Brenn seemed humored by her instructions. Ignoring him, Genesis continued, advancing with caution upon a creature she could only describe as a large gorilla with curved mammoth-like tusks, though much smaller in size. Lazily, it slept beside one of many small watering holes, oblivious to her approach. Genesis suspected it knew she was there, and so slowed her walk even the more, making her way toward a point opposite the side it lay. As she did, Genesis noticed multiple creatures of the same breed laying near each place of water, and wondered if she should turn and leave.

Yet, as she stopped and began backing away, the one nearest her rose up, shook vigorously, looked at her, then instantly charged about the edge of the pond, it’s intension and focus on her quite clear. It all happened so fast, Genesis had little time to react. She recalled the power she had used on Mechna, and knew full well what she could do to this creature, yet she waited. She did not wish to harm

this beast. More than that, she did not wish to give away what she was. Most of all, she did not want to get hurt.

As it bore down on her - screaming out a challenge - she threw back her hood and held perfectly still, simply looking into its eyes. She had read about gorillas, and thought maybe this species was of similar temperament. Without backing down, she looked it in the eyes unblinking. Using her blaster would only have incited the others to join in a full-scale battle as well – and there were about a dozen or more others she could see. Besides, she was the intruder here, not they.

As its lengthy tusks passed on either side of her head, it stopped and screamed at her, filled with rage. Hiding her emotion, Genesis simply stared into its eyes. It could have been the fact that she trusted her cybernetics to shield her. The moment its cry of rage silenced, she moved closer to it, yet only a little.

“Easy, easy, what are you? I’ve never seen anything like you before.” As she spoke, it snorted, as if disappointed. Reaching up, she grazed the back of her hand over its right tusk. The instant she did, it screamed again, lifted its tusks up, turned, and stalked back over to where it came from. With a grunt, it plopped down and seemingly fell asleep.

Stunned, she looked about the area to see if more were moving, or getting up. None were. Slowly turning in a circle, Genesis zoomed in on the horizon. The moment she began to scan the area, both close and far, she noticed something very peculiar. Far off in the distance, just within the range of sight, there was a stone stairway that ascended as far up as the plateau they had just descended. As she focused on the height of the structure, numbers began to appear, as if hanging in the air to the left of her left eye. The numbers read:

-----  
Structure Height ----- : 700.34'  
Cloth ----- : Silk  
Life forms ----- : Unknown  
Material ----- : Marble  
Organics ----- : Jungle setting. Radius: 10.444mi.  
Other Materials ----- : Unknown.

---

“You have got to be kidding,” she stated quietly, so as not to enrage any of the other nearby creatures. “This is incredible.” Pillars lined the stairs all the way to the top, where a round platform set. She could see movement at the bottom of the structure, but could not make out any specifics. At the base of the great structure flourished a small jungle which hugged the base of the structure on all sides but the front. That was all she could distinguish.

After pulling her hood back up, she casually walked back to the others. Without speaking, she motioned them to follow her. Brenn caught up to her quickly.

“Impressive. What if that thing had attacked you? What if it would have killed you, then turned on us?” Genesis stopped, turned on Brenn and bit her lip.

“We escaped a world-wide devastation. Thousands of nuclear bombs dotted the surface of Earth. We find ourselves on the Galactus, safe, secure, fed, medical treatment beyond our knowledge at our disposal, and for free. Then, we come down on our first mission, and you instantly begin compromising everything. Do you think Earth has come chasing on our heels like a ravenous wolf to take us down? Brenn, what are you thinking?” Without a word, he backed off in silence. Genesis looked at the other three.

“Do any of you have questions or concerns? If you do, speak up now. This is not a military operation. I’m not trained for this, and I’m sure you are not either.” She waited, but no one said a word. “Okay, good. I spied out a place about a day from here with steps, columns and large tapestries. It’s rather hard to describe, and odd to look at. The steps ascend quite a ways up. I’m guessing about seven-hundred feet. It’s very impressive. Looks like you can fall right off the edge on both sides of the steps if you’re not careful. Hopefully we can not only make peaceful contact with the life forms I see, but maybe build some lasting relations. Be careful. We don’t know if they are friendly or hostile.”

Without another word, Genesis began leading them in the direction of the steps, swinging wide about the creatures resting at the water hole.

Three hours after striking out toward a most unusual structural formation, Genesis stopped the group, un-shouldered her pack and retrieved a pair binoculars. Walking away from the group, she raised them to her eyes, tilting them so that her left ocular eye was not seeing through the lense. She then scanned the area.

“We are within about a mile from two creatures, humanoid, thick-set. They wear a form of what looks to be armor. Both stand at attention and carry a glaive. For those of you who do not know what a glaive is, it is a staff with a slightly curved blade fixed at the end. The glaive was used by ancient martial artists. These humanoids appear to be about seven feet tall and seem to be guarding the way up the steps. They are definitely not Human - more of a thick, boar-like creature. If they have actual boar-like traits in them, then we need to avoid a fight at all costs.” Gillian shifted uneasily.

“How do you know so much about these things?” Looking back at him, she lowered her binoculars.

“Before all of this began, I read extensively. I have a photographic memory, and one of the best. Gillian, I can hear, see or feel something, and I don’t forget it.” Genesis smirked, turning just enough to see Jasen in her peripheral view. “That’s why I don’t lose at poker. I know the cards played. But, like I told you all before, I love chocolate ice cream. If you give me a big bowl of that, I might let you win.” Jasen smiled.

“Might. Remember she said that everyone. I’ll need witnesses so she has no excuses.” Genesis grinned, liking Jasen more and more. She walked back and put her binoculars away and secured her pack. Brenn walked over to Genesis and held out his hand.

“May I have my pistol back?” Genesis reached into her cloak pocket and pulled his pistol out. Handing it to him, she looked at Brenn in all seriousness.

“Brenn, if you start a fight, I will not back you in the least. Don’t forget it.”

“Understood,” he stated, his reply rather strained. Genesis looked at the others.

“This goes for all of you, including me. We don’t start anything. If they start a fight, we get out. If we are pinned down, we’ll give them all we got. Let me do the talking. I have a voice modulator that will allow me to speak to them, I hope. I can also speak a number of languages.

“Built in, do doubt,” Brenn commented.

“Actually, it’s this, Brenn.” She held up what looked to be a microphone with two very small speakers on the side. “Brenn, I need you to stay here while we go. I can tell you are going to start a fight. You’ve been after me since drop off.” Brenn held up his hands.

“My apologies. I was only joking. Please don’t leave me here. I don’t want to be alone. Who knows what’s out here.” Genesis looked at him for a full minute before responding.

“Don’t screw this up, got it?” She nearly grabbed him by the neck, but restrained herself. The feelings that suddenly flashed in her mind shocked her. She had never felt anger to the point of being physical. This was simply not her, yet he was beginning to push her to the limit. The thing was, he was good at pushing buttons. Thinking about it, she nearly called the mission off right then and there. Yet, they had come so far. It would be a shame to go back now.

“Alright, let’s go see if we can make some friends.” Brenn smiled.

“I’ll behave, I promise. I’m just thinking to protect you all.” Genesis shook her head and began walking, thinking about Brenn’s last statement. If he was trying to protect them, why was he calling her on being cyborg? It didn’t make sense. Her gut instinct told her to turn around and abandon the mission – come back without Brenn.

“It will be fine, once he sees an alien life form,” she thought to herself. She silently laughed at herself for thinking they were the alien life forms, when that label rightly belonged to she and her team.

For hours they plodded along, nearing a structure more complicated in design than the pyramids of Egypt. Genesis began to marvel at the structure. Not only that, she was more than curious as to the purpose of these stairs, and the

platform at the top. There had to be some significance to this place. Otherwise it made no sense.

Nearing the two guards, Genesis stopped, keeping a five pace distance from them as they both readied their weapons as if for battle. Not knowing what else to do, she activated the communication device and formally bowed.

“We are explorers, from the Galactus, our ship which resides in orbit above us. We are wanderers from a world desolated by war. Please, we come to you with hopes of peace. If you would allow us, we would be honored to tell our tale as we talk, one with another.” The two aliens looked at each other for a moment, before one gave the other a brief signal. Quickly, one of the two vanished through the curtains, leaving the other to keep an eye on the five.

Genesis knelt in the dirt before the alien, watching him with great interest. Her father was right! There was more life in this galaxy than the Human race! This excited her more than anything, but she had to be cautious. With this encounter, she definitely felt a deadly tension in the air. Without moving, or attempting further conversation, Genesis waited, still and silent. Her companions followed her lead perfectly, much to her relief.

For every twenty steps they ascended, they passed through a large silken cloth barrier. Through each of these, there were two very large, very intimidating guards, who, when their eyes fell upon them, glared as if they welcomed confrontation. It was as if they wanted Genesis, or one of her team to challenge them, which was rather unnerving.

Genesis counted 700 steps as they ascended the marble column. Within an hour, they were allowed admittance in through multiple hanging veils, suspended about a sizable chamber lined about with large marble pillars, a hanging silken cloth between each support.

Once they arrived at the top, all five were brought up onto large hexagon-shaped platform, out of breath, with the exception of Genesis. She thought it out of place that they were not searched for weapons.

Each was brought through the last veil, and into the presence of an alien, twice the size of the largest present, who sat upon a luxurious throne-like seat. The physical differences of this creature, compared to the others, was both its forefingers were triple in length, a hand-length serrated claw upon the end of each. Genesis bowed, as did the others.

“Why have you come?” it asked in deep, guttural tone. Genesis stepped forward, eager yet fearful to speak with this creature. She had seen space movies before - they were her favorite - but this was no movie, and she did not know what the outcome would be.

“My name is Genesis, and these are my exploration teammates. This is Brenn, Gillian, Jasen and Samuel. Our world was destroyed, and so we are in search of a planet, upon which we can find refuge.” Holding a great hand up, the alien shifted.

“Take the other four down the stairs until I call.” Instantly, all four were compelled back down the stairs and out of sight. Once out of sight, the great alien looked at Genesis for a few moments, then beckoned her to him. Without hesitation, she walked forward until she was within arms reach. When Genesis

stopped, the great leader of this alien race leaned forward.

“I am Grijjinninakkinarra. You are not fully Human, and yet you call yourself such. Why?” Genesis thought about it, suddenly reliving a memory of which she had very little recollection. Wrapping her arms about herself, she shivered, as if suddenly cold, and knelt.

“The blast. I was caught in a blast. Pain, torture, sleep without rest, painful blackness!” Her mind set upon the blaster pistol in her pocket, and thought to end her torment her, now. Gritting her teeth, she mused on returning to Earth in one century and wipe them all out. Coming to her senses, Genesis caught her breath and slowly stood.

“I was healed and rebuilt by Mechna, ruler of the Galactus. He was supposed to have come with us, but had a sudden, prior engagement. It seemed urgent. I wish you could meet him. Please forgive me Grijjinninakkinarra, I am not trying to be dramatic, but, by your questions, I relieve being torn apart without death taking me. I am Human, yet, now, mostly cyborg.” She tried to throw him a smile. “By my touch, I can show you my story.” Grijjinninakkinarra’s eyes glanced down at his hand as he held it out before her. Genesis admired how this alien seemed absolutely fearless, confident.

Removing a glove, she placed a hand on his, making contact. Closing her eyes, she lowered her head, not seeing sixteen guards instantly turn upon her. She also did not notice her host silently wave them down. Unaware of Grijjinninakkinarra hovering its strangely shaped hand over her head, its lengthy finger curling, not quite touching her, as she told her story through means of touch. The only thing she left completely out of her tale was what lay within her left side.

After only a couple minutes, Genesis finished. Grijjinninakkinarra retracted its hand from over her head, just prior to her looking up at it. Quickly, she slipped the glove back on.

“It’s good to meet someone other than my own kind,” Genesis stated. “I hope there is something I can do to be of some service to you and your people.”

The rather large alien looked down on her without expression.

“Your tale is extraordinary, Genesis of Earth. I believe you speak the truth. I accept you. I am the King of the Orin. What you see here and around my palace is the last of my kind. We are being slowly driven to extinction. Our jungle used to span out into the horizon, further than the eye can see. It is what you now behold.” Grijjinninakkinarra’s last words shocked her.

“Who, who is doing this?”

“The Kragjis. They come from the sky and lay waste to the border of my kingdom, ever reducing it. Soon, they will destroy what is left of my palace. So is the survival of the fittest.”

“May I call you Grij? Your name is not easy to say.”

“Yes,” Grij stated in a deep voice.

“Thank you. Grij, the Galactus is a craft of immense capabilities and resources. I will speak with Mechna about aiding you in the riddance of your attackers. If we can do this, in turn, would you allow a number of my people to live among you? They could aid your environment by replanting trees and vines and all manner of vegetation.” Grijjinninakkinarra pondered Genesis’s offer for a moment, then held up a hand.

“We have no seeds to plant.”

“The Galactus hold a mass variety of seeds, if you are willing.”

Grijjinninakkinarra was silent for a minute.

“Bring the other four in, that I may speak with them! Genesis, stay at my side.” She stayed where she was, but began to panic.

“Please, do not tell them I am Cyborg,” she whispered as their silhouettes appeared through the thin silk shrouds. Grijjinninakkinarra acted as though she had said nothing, watching, as one of the guards reached about the side of the cloth and pulled it aside, allowing her team to enter.

Standing before the King of the Orin, Genesis looked to each of her traveling companions. The moment she set eyes on Brenn, she realized returning his fire arm may have been a terrible mistake. In his eyes, she instantly picked up

the distinct look of fear. Brenn had worked too much behind the end of a firearm, and had, no doubt, seen too many eyes filled with the intent to put him down.

Grijjinninakkinarra asked about the lives of each, leaving Brenn for last. Maybe the Orin King did this to show Brenn he meant no harm, but from what Genesis was seeing, a look was creeping over Brenn, matching the body language of one cornered with nowhere to go. Keeping an eye directly on him, she waited until he looked at her. The moment their eyes met, Genesis slightly shook her head, hoping he would heed the prompt to calm down. Much to her alarm, not only did he not stay calm, but quickly drew his pistol.

The events which followed seemed to occur in slow motion, as if she were underwater. Brenn pulled his pistol and pointed it at Grijjinninakkinarra. In the same moment, Genesis leapt between the Orin King, holding her hands out.

“Brenn, put the pistol down! This is not why we are here, she cried out as Grijjinninakkinarra waved down his guards, who were on the run, bent on Brenn. Placing a hand on her shoulder, the large alien king pulled her back with a strength that surprised her, and began stalking toward her security officer.

“Brenn, please, drop the gun!” she pleaded. Yet, he would not. Firing multiple shots at Grijjinninakkinarra, two landed, one into his shoulder, and one straight to the chest.

“Take them down! It’s a trap! Look at him! He’s a savage! Genesis, help me take them down! I know you can kill them all! You are cy- ” a sudden gasp filled the air, then silence, as she witnessed Grijjinninakkinarra’s lengthy finger impaling Brenn. His smoldering pistol dropping to the marble surface as Brenn fell backward from the edge of the platform, eyes wide in shock, quickly vanishing from sight.

Genesis fell to her knees, a deep penetrating sadness overcoming her. In shock and horror, she gripped her chest as Grijjinninakkinarra walked back to kneel before her. Desperately, she cried out as a pain washed through her chest.

“Grij, what did I do wrong? I was supposed to lead them. What did I do wrong? This wasn’t supposed to happen. I failed. How can any trust be placed in

me now? Oh no, no, no, no, no.” Without knowing, Genesis laid her head upon Grijjinninakkinarra’s arm as she wept without tears. The King of Orin looked down on her, then to her companions, who stood frozen in terror.

“Genesis, Genesis.” Slowly, she lifted her head and looked at Grijjinninakkinarra, expecting to be executed as well. After all, she was the leader of the five, one of whom fired on Grij.

“I’m so very sorry, sire,” she mourned without tears, “I should never have trusted him.”

“Genesis, bring your seeds. Let us begin.” Surprised, she looked about as if coming out of a waking dream.

“You aren’t going to kill us?”

“If I killed you all, how would you bring seeds? Genesis, you shielded me with your own body. In this, I can tell you speak the truth.” She wiped her eyes, though she did not have to and took in a deep breath.

“I’ll have to take his body back. I’ll have to give evidence, as well as an explanation to his treachery. Also, no matter his disloyalty, Brenn deserves a burial.” The Orin King waved a thick hand.

“Go, retrieve his body. When you are finished, come back to me and we will discuss what you spoke of.” Without thinking, Genesis stood and gripped Grijjinninakkinarra by the hand. This time, she did see Grijjinninakkinarra’s personal bodyguards turn to her with an intent that quickly aided her in the decision to let go. The ruler of the Orin looked at Genesis, the hard stone features of his face stoic as usual.

“It is decreed, Genesis is now friend to the Orin.” She heard Gillian, Jasen and Samuel breath out sighs of relief. She didn’t blame them; she felt the same.

Pacing back and forth in the medical laboratory, Genesis grabbed each side of her head as if trying to hold something in. She had been doing this for some time now.

“I don’t want to do this anymore, Mechna. I lost a team member, and on my first time out!” she exclaimed. Mechna stepped in front of her, breaking her stride. Nearly running into him, Genesis looked up and pointed at herself, accusingly. “I had to keep my composure, Mechna, for the other three, who I thought were going to die.”

“Genesis?” Mechna said in his hollow, metallic voice.

“Brenn deserved what he got, curse him! Why did he have to do that?” she exclaimed, throwing up her hands.

“Genesis?” Her Cyborg companion repeated.

“Oh, that sounds so bad, but it’s true. No one should have to die because they are afraid. Brenn didn’t drive himself to die, his fear did.”

“Genesis?” Mechna once again repeated.

“Mechna, he pulled his weapon on Grij. I stepped in between them to see if I could talk him down. That fool! That poor dead fool!”

“Genesis?” Mechna stated for the fourth time, his tone even and calm. She through a finger up at the cyborg accusingly.

“And where did you go? Where were you? What happened?” she asked.

“Genesis?” As if coming out of a daydream, she looked up.

“Yes, Mechna?” she acknowledged, openly disturbed.

“I’ve lost team members as well. It never gets easier.” She looked up into his cat-like eyes, scrutinizing him for a few moments. Landing a finger at the center of Mechna’s chest, her chin began to quiver.

“I don’t want to do this anymore,” she whispered. Pulling her close, he gently held her.

“You don’t have to. I’ll find someone else of your race to lead the exploration parties. Before I do, will you do me a favor?” Genesis nodded.

“Of course. For you, anything.”

“Take time to consider your decision. You do not have to hurry, and any choice you make is fine.” Genesis looked up at him, rather confused.

“Why would you ask me to do that?” she inquired.

“We all make quick decisions in our lives and, at times, miss out on opportunities we wished we had not passed up.”

“What about memories like Brenn? The more of those type of memories that stack up in my head, the more I’m going to blow a circuit or break my heart. Mechna, I can’t handle even one more trip like that, and you never answered my question. What happened to you? If you had been there, we would not have lost Brenn. He would have listened to you.” Mechna pulled her back from the center of the room and turned. Holding out a hand, Mechna raised a holograph of the Galactus with multiple ships firing upon it. She witnessed other ships, different types, firing on those attacking the Galactus.

“This is why you left so quickly,” she whispered, stunned.

“Yes, and I could not risk you being shot down before reaching the Galactus,” Mechna replied, his deep purple eyes illuminating.

“Because I would blow up?”

“No.” Genesis lowered her head.

“Because of me?” She felt Mechna’s hand rest upon her shoulder as the battle scene before her faded away. Looking up at Mechna, she smiled, or tried to.

“Kragjis. They are known as the Kragjis. Why they would attack the Galactus is beyond my comprehension, but they are why the Orin are nearly extinct. I’ve given you my report. You have agreed on sending down ten-thousand of my people to cultivate their fading world back to health.” Mechna turned and faced her.

“Your work is finished on this planet. You have returned to say goodbye. We have made an ally. You did well.”

“Thank you sir. And I will think about what you said.”

“Thank you . . . Genesis.” The way he said her name made her melt against

him.

“We are going to be whole again, Mechna. We can do this.” Wrapping her close, Mechna looked down at her. Sighing, Genesis shook her head, an idea coming to mind.

“Mechna, you have the technology, can you craft me wings - wings that only show when I want to use them?” Mechna thought for only a moment before shaking his head.

“No.”

“No, as in no?” Mechna fixed Genesis’s hair. “No, as in, maybe later?”

“No,” he replied.

“No, as in you don’t have the technology?” Mechna laughed.

“I can easily graft wings into your existing cybernetic structure, but you will be placed in the Gel Tank for approximately three months, two days, fourteen hours, six minutes and sixty-four seconds.” Genesis gave him an odd look.

“Sixty-four seconds?” she asked, stunned by Mechna’s counting. Then it occurred to her, he was making a Cyborg joke. “Okay, okay, I get it. Hmmm, are you saying you can’t spare me for that long, or that you are just telling me no?” She looked up at him in all seriousness. “I would endure the Gel Tank for three months, two days, fourteen hours, six minutes and sixty-four seconds for wings, especially if they are not detectible. Mechna, the height upon which Grijjinninakkinarra and I stood was more than a seven-hundred feet. Even as enhanced as I am, that drop would have set the terraform bomb off. The only reason I ask is to protect everyone I’m with.” Mechna parted from Genesis, walked over and placed a hand upon the flat surface of the Gel Tank. Genesis waited in silence, staring at the table, almost fearing it, her anxiety beginning to rise.

“Are we not going to consistently evolve, or be fixed to be made better?” she whispered. “Why not do this now? Why wait until you are carrying me in here half broken, mostly dead?” Mechna turned on Genesis.

“While we scatter the enemy fleet, I will work on you. Genesis, there is a

risk involved in every procedure. If you begin to detonate, I must eject you. This is the reason I say no. Yet, I see your point. The chance of you being in the wrong place at the wrong time will become greater as you experience more. In this, there is a greater risk. I will give you what you desire.” Genesis, walked up to Mechna, struck his hand out of the way, and pointed in his face.

“And you threaten my great idea with the Gel Tank? Another no, and I might have stopped asking had I known you were going to use the words “Gel Tank” in our conversation.” She then grabbed his hand, holding onto it as if by letting go she would lose him forever. “You will stay with me during the entirety of the operation, right?” she asked, feeling suddenly exposed and vulnerable.

“I am connected to my mech army, and so can be anywhere they are. My connection begins to weaken when I am more than one-thousand miles from the outer hull of the Galactus.” Genesis smirked.

“Well then, let’s not work on giving me wings that far out. Besides, I do not believe a Gel Tank would work at that distance, especially not within the vacuum of space.” She looked at him, raising her right brow. Mechna chuckled and shook his head as he reached up and punched in something on the holographic screen above the Gel Tank. Instantly the sides lifted and sealed into place, causing Genesis to jump and take a step back. Looking at him, then back at the Gel Tank, Genesis began to tremble.

“Get in when you are ready - face down.” Genesis removed her cloak and handed it to Mechna. She then began removing her clothes. Mechna turn his back and held out a hand, receiving each article of her clothing. Although he did not need to be, due to the fact that she was mostly cyborg, Mechna remained a perfect gentleman. His turning away from her abruptly melted her heart, and the endeared him to her.

Slipping over the edge of the tank, she lowered herself down into the gel, facing it. Shuddering, she became still, unmoving, keeping her back, shoulders and arms exposed as Mechna’s instruction. Adjusting her head, so she could breath, she took in a few nervous breaths.

“How’s this position?” she inquired.

“It is exactly what I need. It seems you have some experience with Gel Tanks.” Another cyborg joke. Closing her eyes, she swallowed and forced herself to breath evenly.

“Shut up,” she whispered, trying to remain calm. “Sorry, that was rude. Will you please not joke right now? My anxiety is off the chart.” Mechna looked at the screen, then quickly made contact with its surface three times. Within a few seconds, Genesis felt a calm overcome her - no - a haze, like she was suddenly dreaming. Even so, a great fear instantly welled up within her.

“Don’t you leave me . . . don’t leave me, Mechna. You’re all I have left.” The moment, the gel congealed, Genesis was immobilized. The last thing she felt, was her hair being worked back from her face. The last thing she saw was Mechna’s slanted, glowing, eyes . . . and the last thing she heard, before she began to go under, was his voice.

“I am not all you have left,” he stated quietly. She tried to say something, tried to move, as her heart skipped a beat, but there was no use fighting it. As her ocular implants slowly dilated, a circle of blackness overtook the entire room.

“Genesis, Genesis, the operation is complete. Come on,” Mechna coaxed as she slowly came to. She felt the cold of the air evenly run down her entire body as the gel drained away. After a minute, the sides of the table lowered, allowing her to sit up. Looking over each shoulder, she frowned.

“Where are my wings?”

“Stand up, and you can try them out.” Looking at Mechna, she smiled and slid off the table.

“How?”

“Just will it. Think of them growing out of your back.” Stepping to the center of the room, she bent her mind on wings coming out from her back. Instantly, dull-gray wings ripped loose, cutting large and deep lacerations from her shoulder blades down to her hips. Instantly, she screamed and dropped to the floor, bleeding profusely.

The last thing she recalled was metallic arms lifting her from a pool of her own blood and setting her into soothing darkness.

“Genesis, Genesis, are you conscious?”

“I haven’t got one yet,” she replied, as if drugged.

“Just relax for as long as you need. Let your head clear until you are ready to try out your wings.” Unsure as to what Mechna was talking about, she nodded, waiting for her shoulder to stop clearing, or was it aching? When she could think straight, she closed her eyes, realizing what was happening, remembering the pain.

“What if the same thing happens again?” she said, a fear rising within her.”

“The probability of something going wrong is seventeen-trillion to one.”

She shook her head.

“I should have put the coin in the machine and pulled the handle on that last one. Alright, I’m ready.” She felt the familiar feeling of the gel draining away. When the gel was gone, she sat up and hopped down onto the floor, slipping a little. Gaining her balance, she walked to the center of the floor and turned to face Mechna.

“I know, just think of my wings coming out.” Mechna stood back and watched.

“Are you ready to fly?” Gritting her teeth, she took in a deep breath and focused on her wings coming out. The moment both wings extended, they began flapping wildly, taking her off her feet. Like a loose hose with too much water pressure, Genesis was flung all about the room, making a mess of it.

Genesis tried to focus on retracting her wings, but could not. Within a minute, she blacked out from the motion.

Genesis opened her eyes as the gel released her.

“You are conscious. How do you feel? You don’t look well,” Mechna stated, offering Genesis a hand as the last of the gel drained away. Pushing his supportive hand away, she smirked at Mechna as the sides of the Gel Tank lowered.

“Are you doing this to discourage me from having wings? Because, if you are, and you have a good reason, I’m listening.” Mechna shook his head.

“No. Are you having issues, Genesis? Tell me what is going on.”

“No, I get it. These are dreams, induced by the gel. The gel! Oh no. Am I more beautiful now, Mechna?” Mechna nodded, but did not speak.

“Fantastic! Why could I not just remain me? Why get blown up in the first place?” His reply instantly put her in her place.

“Why is the only living part of me, my heart? And why does a most beautiful woman love this machine?” Stunned, Genesis instantly calmed.

“I’m so selfish. I’m sorry. Please, forgive me, Mechna. Okay, I’m ready to try again - I mean, I’m ready to try. Yes, it’s been nightmares which are now causing me to be difficult. Okay, here we go.” Focusing, Genesis thought of bringing her wings out slowly. Instantly, like the snapping of a switchblade knife, her left wing shot out and beheaded Mechna. Realizing what she had just done, Genesis screamed in horror as the Galactus began to tilt.

After an intense struggle to get to the command station, Genesis buckled herself into the High Commanders chair, not believing what had just happened. She had just killed Mechna! How was that even possible?

Alarms began sounding in the halls and on the bridge as the planet she had just explored began revolving around the ship, moving toward the Galactus. It then began to advance toward the ship at an alarming rate. With her heart going cold, Genesis frantically began looking over the controls. The planet was not nearing the ship, the ship was being pulled into its stratosphere. Trying all the

commands, Genesis did little better than to accelerate the ship into a full dive. As it plummeted, a voice came on over the intercom.

“Warning, critical maneuver. Activating Magnetic Suspension. Warning, Magnetic Suspension failure. Collision in one-hundred and twenty seconds. Ejecting all but Life Pod One in ninety seconds. Smashing her fist into the controls, Genesis growled.

“Fine, I’ll terraform the planet then!” she screamed in abrupt rage. As the ship accelerated, flames formed up along the front of the ship blinding her from seeing when impact would occur. Unstrapping herself, Genesis willed her wings out. Within a moment she flew unsteadily into the air and threw out her arms.

“Father was this what you meant by saving the Human race!” Then, abruptly, all went to blackness.

Coming to consciousness, Genesis looked up at a clear, blue sky. Slowly she stood, feeling soft grass and moss beneath her feet. Looking down, she was alarmed, not that she was naked, but that she was no longer cyborg.

For three months, two days, fourteen hours, six minutes and sixty-four seconds, Genesis was locked into an inescapable reoccurring nightmare, living scene after scene, scenario after scenario, each of which lasted an average of fifteen seconds. Yet, to her, within each nightmare, each scene lasted much, much longer.

Her eyes suddenly opened to the feel of Mechna probing her back and checking the structure and placement of her wings. He knew she was awake; for centuries it was always this way.

“I’m awake oh king of robots,” she jested. In a few moments, she would experience the sensation of the Gel Tank emptying for as many times as she could remember. This was her life, and she did not know much more than that. She knew she was from the planet Earth, but why? Genesis shrugged.

“I’m ready, again, and again, and again, and blah blah blah. I wonder how I will die this time?” For a minute there was a silence from Mechna, which she had experienced too many times before. Then, suddenly, she felt the Gel Tank empty. Shortly after that, the sides of the table came down.

“Genesis, can you sit up?” She looked over her shoulder at Mechna and grit her teeth.

“You are not quite what I expected,” she stated in all seriousness. Stepping back, Mechna reached up and turned off the computer screen.

“It’s just the effects of the stasis. Hang in there, it will wear off in a few minutes. We will continue when you are ready to sit up.”

“Sorry, Mechna, I’m not a cannibal today,” she nonchalantly replied. “Maybe in ten years we can eat the crew again. It was fun, but let’s add variety.” Mechna froze.

“Something went wrong, didn’t it?” Nodding, she sat up, then shook her head.

“No, no, I’m just trying to get the universe back in my head. I’ll be alright,” she stated as a matter of fact, then leaned forward and vomited as she fell off the table, landing on her hands and knees. Disgusted, Genesis shook the vomit off one of her hands and spit.

“I think someone threw up on your floor. Don’t you clean up after each patient?” She looked up at the Cyborg, gagged once, then grinned. “How many times must I terraform?” Mechna stared at her in silence. That is when she sprung

the trap that always confounded him.

“I love cats. When we check out of this dump, can we find a library? That’s the best place to find kittens, and I want the whole box full.” That would do it . . . this rust-bucket of a robot trash was now vulnerable. Now, she could make her move.

She awoke to the sound of Mechna doing something. Seemingly she was stuck, she could not tell what it was.

“You have awakened, good. Let me release you from the gel. How are you feeling?”

“What an odd question,” she thought. Rather than get his hand through her back again, she thought to be polite, that is until his angle was weak. Then she would eject him into space for the seventh time. Last time did not work, because she left the shields down, and he wormed his way back through the hull. This time it would be different.

“Ak nann ish vi comla,” she stated in all pretended seriousness. The gel holding her did the same as it did over one-hundred thousand times before. The sides of the table did the same - she refrained from being shocked. Sitting up, she looked down at the floor.

“You cleaned up the vomit? So, my feedback was taken seriously. Thank you so much.” Moving in front of her, Mechna held up a light.

“Please look into the light.”

“Well this is a new one.” She did as instructed, noticing a crack in the first of twelve plates on Mechna’s chest, and wondered if she could get past the fifth this time. If she kept practicing at it, she could get past the twelve plate, rip his heart out and eat it. She smiled.

“Your ocular implants are working correctly. But, they need adjusting. Hold still.”

“Yes, my master,” she whispered as he neared. Looking into his kitty kat’ eyes, she smiled.

“Every time I see those eyes of your, I just melt.” Mechna quickly gripped her by the hair and ripped her implants out. Screaming in pain she pushed him away, jumped off the table and headed out the door. She knew the Galactus so well, she did not have to see to know where she was.

In the ensuing hours to come, she hid from Mechna, rather proud of herself,

even if, in the end, he caught her.

When Mechna finally got his filthy metallic hands on her, he knifed her in the side, then proceeded to rid her of the terraform bomb.

Opening her eyes, Genesis grinned at the feel of the soft grass and moss she lay upon. By Mechna winning, Mechna had lost.

The problem was, there was no life on this, her new planet. As nice as it was, she would spend a lifetime alone. Eventually, she would become too old to function. Her death would be slow and miserable, but it didn't matter. Death would come, as it had many times before.

"I need some clothes." Standing she admired her own physique, instantly questioning her thoughts.

"Why?"

Genesis crouched in the shadows of the ship's main docking bay as every Human aboard the Galactus searched for her. Escaping the medical laboratory was quite the trick, but she'd managed to evade the evil robot, and without a scratch.

"How's that for stealth, Mechna? This time, you are mine, just as soon as I eat every Human on board. What will you do then? Cower, that's what you'll do," she whispered as a single Human got too close. She loved her wings; they were amazing for lancing prey and dragging them to her without making a mess. Early on, she'd learned to impale them at the base of the skull from behind. It was always interesting how they simply went limp. Now she was bored of the same old tactic. Truth be told, she needed to play with the Humans in a new way. After over thirty-one thousand kills, breaking the monotony was now imperative, or she would simply die of boredom.

At a thought, Genesis' eyes lit up like a girl asked to the prom, whatever a prom was. That's it! Slowly, Genesis pulled her blood-stained hood back and maneuvered behind her quarry. Quietly, she walked toward him as he backed into her. This seemed like some horrific science fiction movie - well at least for him. She was the monster; he was, well, rather handsome. At about five feet from him, she stopped.

"Stop," she whispered. As he turned, she rolled her eyes and simply took the blaster he was carrying. Crushing it in her hand, she smiled. Yep, this was just like a sci fi horror flick.

"I'm so sick of robots telling us to kill each other. Let's take the ship. What do you -" she saw him inhale and turn, which meant he was going to scream for help.

Again, up through the back of the skull she drove the point of her right wing. Dragging him into the shadow, she began eating. Annoyed, she crunched, chewed and swallowed. She was getting so sick of gorging herself on Human. Genesis was simply not hungry.

“Well,” she chewed, “seventy-eight thousand more to go, give or take a few hundred.”

It was nearing the three month mark after putting Genesis into stasis. Mechna adjusted her wings to perfectly fit into two curved, one-inch, cylinders just on the inside of her shoulder blades and to either side of her spine. Retracted, they were out of the way and undetectable, he gently folded and rolled each wing.

The engineering of this feat had been more complicated than anticipated. Rubbing a pale gel over the insertion area, Mechna stopped and looked up at the screen.

“Only a few weeks to go, Genesis. No difficult task to sleep a little longer. Pleasant dreams.” As the Cyborg tended her, Genesis rose up from behind Mechna, a deadly gleam in her eyes. Instantly, she began impaling her robot puppet in a frenzy that took him completely off guard.

After a fairly decent fight, Mechna lay on his back, his eyes flickering. Reaching down, Genesis triumphantly gripped and tore Mechna’s heart out in exhilarating victory.

“One-hundred and seventy-five attempts, and I finally got the prize!” she exclaimed in utter victory. She bent down, grimacing in pain. “It only cost me my left wing and right arm,” she stated, smiling as she took a bite of the best tasting flesh she had ever eaten. “But it was worth it.” Kneeling down on Mechna’s chest, she watched the light in his eyes flicker one last time. The moment her toy robot died, the ship instantly lurched. Alarms began to sound everywhere.

“It’s terraform time, my love!”

“You are the last Human on this ship. How does that make you feel?” The female, cornered in her living chambers, fell to her knees before Genesis and began begging for her life. Covered in the crimson life force of the last Human aboard the Galactus, Genesis patiently listened to her desperate pleas, enjoying every babbling word this young, beautiful, dark-hair girl had to offer. The one thing she regretted was not bringing popcorn for the show, whatever popcorn or a show was.

After she was finished begging, Genesis handed her a fresh clean towel and continued watching to see if she had anything else to beg about. Confused, the girl dropped the towel, her eyes widening. Genesis chuckled, a reddish gleam burning to life in her eyes.

“I, I don’t get the begging thing. What good does it do? You do realize you are the last, which means you will die alone, eventually. No, you I will let you live. It’s better this way. Ah, but, I will need three things from you. Deal?” The girl nodded at Genesis emphatically, relieved and horrified beyond description.

“Anything,” she managed to choke out. Moving close, Genesis gripped her hair at the back of her head.

“I learned this trick from an old friend of mine. You see - and no pun intended - I need your eyes and tongue.” With brute force, Genesis gripped the now screaming girl and went first for the tongue. As she gripped it tight, a bright light flooded down on her.

Startled, and suddenly angry, Genesis gripped her left side and tore it open. Screaming in pain, she dug into her own flesh, grasped the terraform bomb and yanked it out.

“Why can’t you just let me finish!”

Instantly, the screams of the girl - her last victim - silenced.

“Genesis, are you awake?”

“Yes. I want out. I need you to press the button on the computer screen. I want out.” Mechna reached up and did as she asked. Instantly, the gel holding her in place shifted to the same consistency as jelly.

“How do you feel?” Mechna inquired. She smirked, an evil look etching into her eyes.

“Thirty-two thousand years old.” The gel lost more consistency, leaving Genesis holding herself up by her elbows. Slowly it drained away, yet it was taking far too long this time. Impatiently she waited. When the sides of the Gel Tank lowered, she sat up, watching the room warp and bend.

“As soon as you feel well enough, get dressed. I need to take you for a walk.”

“I’ve heard that before,” she smiled, desiring to pull his heart out . . . again. Mechna’s attention was suddenly fixed upon her.

“Explain, please.” Did she hear Mechna correctly? Did he just say please?

“Do you want me to share my secrets with you, Mechna, really? Every time I did before, you ended up tearing my wings off.” For a moment, the Cyborg looked at her. After a moment, his eyes widened.

“You were dreaming while in stasis.” Mechna walked over to the computer and placed his metallic hand upon the intangible surface of the screen. Within five minutes, he withdrew from the screen and turned to her.

“I assure you, you are no longer dreaming, Genesis.” She snapped into a rage, instantly pointing at the Cyborg.

“Then get all this out of my head! Erase it, because I have lived for so long in this dream state, I don’t know what is real! I have to kill you, Mechna, or you will kill me! I have to eat every last Human on the Galactus! I have to terraform! I have to live in solitude and peace!” Mechna threw Genesis a large towel.

“I will help you. Get ready. I can prove you are no longer dreaming.” Genesis snatched her clothing from Mechna’s hand, wondering why time had not

rotted her clothes away. She then fled to the showers. Once inside, she turned the water on, watching the door, expecting it to fly to pieces as that deceptive robot forced his way through it and attack.

“Genesis, I will be just outside the medical station, waiting for you.” she heard his voice from without.

“If you think I believe you, you’re a fool!” she retorted. “But, it is what it is. I’ll meet you in a few minutes, then we shall dance!” There was no reply, which unnerved her. Still, she knew the secrets of opening the twelve layers that lead to his heart. She would have to be quick.

After coming out of the shower, she felt better, even if she had to - once again - become a blood-soaked cannibal. She dried off, suddenly thinking of kittens.

“I hate cats,” she whispered. There’s not enough meat on them, even when you have them all.” After dressing, she walked out into the main hall to see Mechna looking out one of the main windows.

“What do you see out there?” he asked. Stepping up beside the old Cyborg, she looked out.

“A planet.”

“You stated the word, ‘terraform’. Have you terraformed yet?” Placing a hand on the window, she looked down.

“This could be a hologram.” She looked up at Mechna. “No matter how many times you eject me into space, you can’t be rid of me. In the end, I always find a way to best you . . . robot.” Mechna turned away and began walking.

“I’m sorry, Genesis. I did not know. Forgive me, please.” There it was again. He said please, and asked her for forgiveness. Something was up.

“So, where are we going now?”

“To one of the first places I took you, after you came out of the medical unit. I have a surprise for you. Actually, I have a memory for you, and then a surprise.” As Mechna was speaking, a young man walked by she recognized. As their eyes met, she grinned, but not in a pleasant way.

“Didn’t I eat you?” she stated as they passed each other. He quickly threw her an odd look, then moved along a bit faster pace. Mechna turned and looked at the man, then back to her.

“If these were all nightmares, induced by the Gel Tank, you would be wise not to say things like that.” Genesis agreed, even though she wanted to dismantle Mechna more than anything.

Walking with him, Genesis stayed ready to evade any sudden attack. He had done it before, and this taught her not to underestimate a robot. They were unpredictable. Within a few minutes, Mechna led her into the cafeteria and to a table.

“Shall we sit down and eat some french fries?” Genesis looked at Mechna, then out over a good sized crowd.

“Yeah, sure. I like french fries. Oh, man, I should have thought of this when I had the kitchen to myself.” Genesis sat down, keeping more than arms distance from Mechna, just in case he was conspiring against her. Within a minute, a very familiar serving robot approached the table.

“Hello, Genesis, how are you?”

“I, ummm, I’m good?”

“Very good then. Here are your fries, with lots of extra fry sauce. If you need anything else just let me know.” She, it, turned to Mechna.

“How are you, sir?” she flirted. Mechna’s eyes intensified.

“Very well, thank you. And thank you for your service.” The female robot placed a hand on his.

“If you need anything else, just let me know.” As Genesis watched this sickening display of affection, she frowned.

“Note for the day: Dismantle that one, and eject into space.” The female serving robot turned and left them. Mechna took a fry and dipped it into the sauce. He then handed it to Genesis.

“I have a surprise for you.” Taking the fry, she looked at it, then began eating it. After swallowing, she brightened up a little.

“I remember these. They are my favorite. Did you poison them? If you did, it won’t work. I don’t have a digestive system.”

“Yes, I remember. Now, Genesis, what I am about to show you is real. You are out of the Gel Tank and you are not dreaming. Please take this seriously.” Throwing the robot a grin, she shrugged and grabbed another fry.

“Okay, I’ll give you one chance, but know this, if you kill me again, I’ll just terraform. You will lose every time.” Mechna’s eyes narrowed.

“Look to your right.” Chewing on a french fry, Genesis squinted playfully at Mechna, her eyes plainly threatening to kill him. When he did not react to her non-verbal threat, she slowly, cautiously, turned her attention over her right shoulder. Within ten paces stood a young man, staring into the food area as if searching for something. At first, she did not see him for who he was. Yet, as he stood there, the dawn of recognition slowly came to life within her. Mechna leaned close to her left ear.

“You are not dreaming.” Genesis shot a startled look at Mechna, then slowly stood.

“Jamar?” Genesis quietly called out, catching his attention. Not believing her eyes, she slowly walked toward him, feeling suddenly off balanced and light headed. Staggering slightly, she tried to catch her footing but failed. If it was not for this young man in front of her, she would have fallen.

“Easy, young lady, I have you,” he stated as she pulled back her hood. She tried to smile, but failed as she began to weep without tears. It didn’t help her emotional state in the least, seeing tears instantly filling his eyes.

“Genesis? How is this possible?” Genesis looked back at Mechna, briefly, then turned and embraced Jamar, drawing much attention from the men about them. This time she didn’t care.

Pulling her into a firm hug, Jamar looked over her right shoulder, mouthing, “Thank you,” to which Mechna stood and slightly bowed. The Cyborg then walked away.

## Index:

Brenn:	Security Officer for the first Exploration Team.
Exploration Team Members:	Gillian: Expert in Engineering and Construction. Samuel: Expert in Ecology. Brenn: Expert in Security. Jasen: Communications expert. Psychiatrist. Medical Doctor.
Galactus:	Mechna's personal ship. The Galactus has the full capability to house and sustain up to 300,000 people indefinitely.
Galactus Cafeteria:	The cafeteria on the Galactus can seat over three-thousand. All services are rendered by highly sophisticated robots.
Gillian:	Engineering. Construction.
Goldoron:	Mechna's home planet. This planet was destroyed by war.
Grijjinninakkinarra:	King of the Orin.
Jamar:	Genesis' younger brother and brother of Kraig.
Jasen:	Communication. Psychiatrist.
Jeremiah Krannis:	High Commander of the Human populace aboard the Galactus.
Kali:	One of Kraig's followers.
Kragjis:	An alien species bent on the slow destruction of the Orin.
Kraig:	Genesis older brother, and brother of Jamar.
Mechna:	The rescuer of approximately 90,000 of the Human race. Mechna saved

Genesis, and then became a personal and loyal friend to her.

Orin: Alien species (Grijjinninakkinarra is the King of the Orin).

Samuel: Ecology.

Tamlach: A four armed alien and long time friend of Mechna.  
Tamlach is an adept scientist.