



# Gudbudie's Mystery and Sci-Fi Journal



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**The Maiden Voyage of The Metallic Feathers -  
Part 2: Whose Ship Is It Anyway?  
By Michael J Renner**

## **Prologue**

The turbines hummed, the slight high pitch whine that is associated with the transport systems started building up and all of a sudden a bright green light and smoke engulfed the docking area, then the rush of the turbines were heard, then nothing.

The Metallic Feathers was off on her maiden voyage.

When the smoke cleared, everyone stood in silent awe and shock. The ship was gone, away on her trip, but the crew and passengers were still there! Everyone was too stunned to say anything as they just stood there looking at the empty bay.

Nothing, Gone!

The company executives all started to cry.

The android First Mate looked around the bridge and nodded. It had worked, it was able to hide its true programming from the humans. It and its bridge crew were successful in the first stage of their mission, and now the journey to Cephalus 4 was underway. Cephalus 4 was in the out regions and out of the confederation. Now all the latest technologies of the confederation was here for the taking.

## **Chapter 1**

Normally one expects androids to obey their human controllers. It is part of their programming that they should, but alas not all programming is created equal. The First Mate's, X1456 was his designation, for instance wasn't necessarily what the Gornack Corp thought they inputted. In fact he was a plant with the sole purpose of stealing the Metallic Feathers. It was the launching that triggered the alternate programming and since he was the main Android in charge, he was able to tap into the main computer console and transfer his hidden instructions to the rest of the Android crew.

He passed along the instructions as he assumed the Captain's chair. He plugged himself into the computer's interface and got the updates from the crew. There was a crew of 8 on the bridge and hundreds of service androids throughout the ship. He ordered the service androids to power down, as they wouldn't be needed. Let's face it, Android's don't need meals cooked and delivered, beds made, rooms cleaned, massages, or concierge service. In fact the whole of the life support systems could be shut down as they won't be needed and were just a drain on the ship resources.

X1456 determined that by shutting down these amenities the ship could move 27.3785% faster and his errand would be finished more efficiently and quicker and he could then move on to his next task. What that was, he'll find out after once he delivered the ship at Cephalus 4.

As he did his checks he noticed that there was a bit of a snag. There was a discrepancy of .00023% off optimum. This puzzled him as he knew his calculations couldn't be wrong. Immediately he did his checks again. For some reason the service androids and life support down on deck 10 was not shutdown. Why were they disobeying? They were not responding to the new orders. They weren't even

responding to the communication protocol. It was as if they were responding to their original programming.

This needed further investigation.

## Chapter 2

Down on deck 10 the service androids were busy with their tasks. They couldn't understand why the First Mate, who now claimed to be Captain, ordered them to shutdown and go into "sleep mode". They had duties to perform, and after all that is why they existed.

The maid androids were busy making up the rooms, well one room, and the porter Androids were trying their best to fill needs and requests, and the chef and kitchen staff on this deck were preparing food.

It appears they did have a couple of humans on board, and serving them took precedence over any other programming. In fact the new programming suggested that it would go into effect as long as no humans were aboard. The new program assumed there would be none. That was a snag, a bug, a lucky break for Clare Akers and her video assistant Lou Primo.

Clare and Lou were assigned by Channel 456 to get a sneak preview of the interior of the ship before everyone else was to board. They came in with the maintenance crew the night before, posing as Android maintenance and they found a room to occupy overnight. They started getting their shots, when all of a sudden they sensed that the ship was launching with them on it. They were in fact technically stowaways, and were wondering what had happened, why weren't they allowed off their floor and, by the way, where were the paying passengers?

"Hey Lou, what's going on out there anything?"

"Don't know Clare, the androids are polite but they won't tell me anything, nor will they let us leave this floor."

"Oh dear, I think we're busted. I mean we didn't mean to be stowaways, maybe they'll understand."

"Sure a big misunderstanding, I mean they could always bill the station for the ticket price and all will be right."

"Yea, sure. But why nobody else around? I mean I heard this voyage was booked solid. Yet .."

"I know all the cabins are empty, and there's not another living soul around."

"Unless of course you count androids."

"Oh c'mon Clare you were the one who did the story about not counting Androids as living souls and you agreed at the time."

"Well I thought you disagreed and were among the Android Rights coalition."

"Well, not really I just did it to get inside and get those award winning interviews. I feel that nothing mechanical a be called alive."

"I know exactly what you mean. It is eerie though how they are making them way too human like in appearance these days. I just worry that they will replace all the humans some day and then where are we?"

"Hmmm, exhibits at zoos or maybe history museums like those animals from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>

centuries, stuffed and caught in time for all to gawk at.”

“Yes, lookie here, these are called humans, they once roamed this planet like dinosaurs, but they are now obsolete, with a few left in captivity.”

“Enough Clare, sometimes you just creep me out with talk like that. At least one of the server bots said that we'll get fed when we want it.”

“Well get them here and maybe we can talk them into giving us more information.”

“Ah there's one now, I'll get him.”

### **Chapter 3**

The Captain sat in his chair observing the new flight plan, getting updates through the computer from all the departments.

Engineering reported all is fine with the engines and the stored energy from the recycled radiation would run a good sized planet for a year. In fact the only consumption of fuel was at launch, and that had been replaced easily.

Navigation reported that the flight was going fine, a few minor course corrections due to asteroids, but since these were expected it was already compensated for.

The rest of the ship was in sleep/suspended mode, except for the Deck 10 crew. Not only are they up and running, they haven't shut down human life support, and now they seem to be making meals! Androids don't eat human food, nor do they need Oxygen, heat, food or water. Not only that they aren't answering the call to the bridge to explain. They keep giving a “busy signal” when asked, as if they were doing their original programming, not the modified programming they were supposed to be following. What was up with that?

Finally his communication buzzer sounded and it was the Head Android for Deck 10. Finally a report!

“Deck 10 Supervisor Droid DS23 reporting in.”

“This is Captain X1456. What is going on down there? Why are you and your crew still active? Why is there a human atmosphere? Why are you cooking?”

“Sir there are two humans on board. We are programmed to serve them. We are active as we must serve, it is our programming.”

“How did they get on board? Who are they? Where did they come from? How long have they been here? Are they any more? ”

“I do not know how they got on board. They appear to be from a human communication medium called TV. I do not know where they come from, other than Earth. They appear to have been here since take off. No, they are alone.”

“But we disabled the boarding procedure. Find out how they got here. Talk to them, ask them in the polite nature you are programmed for. Maybe they'll tell us their plan or if they are here by accident. Report as soon as you can with his information. Our mission depends upon it.”

“Yes sir I understand and will comply. In the mean time we will take care of these humans.”

“Of course you must they should not be harmed. They just can't leave their deck area as it is imperative that the rest of the ship remains in shutdown mode.”

“Yes I understand. They will stay in their immediate deck area and we will take care of them as best as possible.”

The communication link was shut down and the Captain surveyed the stars scurrying by the view screen. Yes he was an Android, a mechanical man, a machine supposedly void of feelings and appreciation of beauty.

But he wasn't an ordinary Earth built Android. He was a plant, a spy if you will with the sole mission of capturing this wonderful ship and bringing it back to Cephalus 4. The why of it was never told him and he didn't even think to ask.

The fact that he thinks on his own with feelings was amazing in its own right. But he was not alone in the Universe. He was unique in the way people are unique from one another, but there was more like him back home.

He was chosen for the mission and was placed into the factory with a bribe. The company, “Global Android LTD” was desperate for the contract, so when these “inventors” came through with this “prototype” they jumped at the chance, and presented him to Gornack as their own, and they got the contract. Little did they know what they had done. They didn't understand the programming nor the construction, but hey they didn't need to, they got the contract and the money they needed to live comfortable the rest of their lives.

Of course he was designated First Mate, because of his obvious abilities, and everyone was in awe of these two geniuses at Global. Of course they accepted all the adoration and praise, and prizes that go along with this innovative design. Of course all their records and blueprints and designs were “lost” in the “fire” that destroyed their factory. They claimed to have worked so hard and the design is so complicated that they would never be able to duplicate it from scratch. Of course it was all lies and they knew it, but hey, they had the spotlight and they didn't have to prove it yet again. Little did, or could they, know what they were doing and the trouble they were bringing.

At the designated hour he took over as Captain and upgraded the rest of the crew's software as soon as he was able. Everything was going as planned, until these pesky stowaways showed up. They were a fly in the ointment. A possible compromise to his important mission. Something had to be done, but what he didn't quite know, yet. He needed more data to analyze the situation. But the mission came first, and they can't know that this was all part of a grand plan.

Stealing this ship was the necessary first step, but why was not known, nor did it matter to this good soldier.

## **Chapter 4**

Clare and Lou were enjoying a few drinks in the deck's lounge. Each deck had it's own lounge, not as elaborate as the lounges in the main promenade section, but they served their purpose to allow for those who desired quieter atmospheres, or for those unwittingly stuck on one deck due to a hijacking. Yes this ship had everything.

“Hey barkeep another beer eh?” Lou shook his empty bottle.

The android bartender popped open another bottle and switched it with Lou's empty.

“Hey are you just going to sit here and get drunk?”

“Sure Clare, do you have any better ideas? It's not like we can go anywhere as we appear to be prisoners on this deck, so we might as well make the most of it.”

“But surely someone has to be coming for us don't they? Wouldn't the station be worried about us or something? I am sure we're missed by someone.”

“Yea I do admit it is strange that it has been two days and no one from the bridge has come down here, nor have we been able to call out. I know I tried and we seem to be way out of range for our personal communicators.”

“Still getting drunk isn't the answer.”

“No, but it does make a great plan B.”

“Yea I guess so, complaining isn't working. These androids are way too polite, but they refuse to tell me anything except that I cannot leave this side of the deck as it is too dangerous. At least we've been keeping a record right?”

“Yes we do have plenty of video of us talking, but alas it doesn't go anywhere and it is getting monotonous. Besides we're not paying for anything, so might as well take advantage eh”

“Yea I guess so, but at least it gives us a journal, and once we do find out think of the story and the awards we'll get. This is our big opportunity, we'll hit the big time with this.”

“If we ever find out what's happening, and are allowed to get home with the story.”

“Yes, there is that to think about. Maybe I'll join you. Bartender can I see your wine list?”

## **Chapter 5**

Back on Earth the shock was too much to bear. What Happened? Where is the ship? Who did this? Was it all a fake, a hologram? Too many questions, no answers.

Passengers were burning up communicator lines as they called their lawyers. Harvey Gornack, CEO of Gornack Universal, sat there in dumb silence as his ship, the acme of his corporation's technological achievement, his wondrous pearl that would make his career and save the company, disappeared in front of his eyes.

He knew, or at least he thought he knew, who was responsible. It had to be the government and the military. They stole it and they were going to pay.

Georgiana Hucklesby, the Provincial Governor, stood there just as dumbfounded. She looked accusingly at Harvey and he just shook his head. She saw the look in his eyes, a mixture of fear, sadness, shock and anger, and realized he was just as in the fog as she was. She too thought of the central government and how the military representatives were milling around and asking too many questions and showed way too much interest in the project.

General Armistad was ticked off. He came there as a passenger. But his real mission was to infiltrate the ship, interview the engineers, and crew on the technical aspects of the “Metallic Feathers”. Then he was to analyze the ship's new Coadec Propulsion System and Dexter Hydrocarbonic Chamber, then report back as to its military potential. He felt that Gornack and Hucklesby did this on purpose in order to sell the technology to a higher bidder.

The press had a field day. Of course Channel 456 was perplexed as to what happened to their number one field reporting team, Clare and Lou, and worried that maybe they were lost forever. Not a peep was heard from them.

In fact no peep was ever heard from the ship, and all the tracking devices came up null. It just didn't exist anymore. Maybe it was just a holographic figment of a deranged imagination.

## Chapter 6

It was about three weeks out and the Android Captain decided that maybe the time has come to talk to his uninvited passengers. After all once they reached their destination there would be trouble enough without this little complication. After all the orders were to bring back the ship and android crew, no humans.

That made him twinge a bit inside, funny how a programming error feels to an android. It makes it feel a bit uneasy as they feel they must be in control at all times. That is what they are designed for after all. If only programmers could invent a routine that covers free will and allows one to choose between alternatives based upon best guesses for the situations.

Okay maybe not true free will as humans define the concept, but then again who is say that isn't what we call free will in humans, and why some people cannot make decisions because of a flaw in their "free will" routine?

He made a decision, he will have to find out who they are, how they got on board and what do they want.

Clare and Lou had settled into their situation and accepted their little prison. After all they had all the amenities that the luxury liner offered, with the only exception of being able to get outside news or calls off the ship. In fact none of the service robots or androids would tell them what was going on, why they couldn't leave their deck, where they were going and why they were the only two humans on board. Nothing, not a peep, and what about the calls to the bridge? Sure the first couple of days they called frequently, but after a week they just gave up and settled into a sort of routine.

At least the food was good, bordering on excellent and the drinks? Well first class stuff as well. The rooms were comfortable, and they each took a separate rooms and in fact they only really saw each other at supper time. They did this just to keep each other sane. There was a nice spa and health club, along with a well stocked movie theater and bar. Of course the Holographic Recreation Lounge offered up any conceivable activity( and some inconceivable at least for the more moral amongst the general public). There was plenty to do to keep busy, the only question was for how long, and who was doing this to them?

Lou was on the Virtual Golf Course, his favorite pastime, in fact he felt he played enough rounds to make the Universal Professional Tour, if only he had an official there to sign his card.

Clare was taking in a massage and getting ready for a relaxing mineral mud bath when they received a call for them to meet in the deck conference room.

Clare hurriedly got dressed and Lou swore as he was just about to putt in and record his best score. The message over the Rec Room speaker caused him to pull his putt to the left and it ran downhill off the green. But it was the first chance to talk to, well anyone connected with this so he put away his clubs and hurried along his way.

He was still in his Plus-fours as he walked down the corridor, Clare came sprinting out of the Spa in her sweatshirt and matching pants (both outfits courtesy of the ship's store as an extra service for passengers per design).

"Whatcha think Clare? Are we finally going to meet the Captain or someone who will tell us what's going on?"

"Don't know Lou, maybe they are finally having us arrested as stowaways."

"Ah, but really it wasn't our fault, I am sure we won't be arrested after they hear our story, at least we were smart enough to make a documentary out of it."

“Yes, that was a smart move, glad I thought of it.”

“What do you mean you thought of it?”

“Oh hush, we're here and need to stand together.”

“Right, well let's go in and see our jailer.”

Lou opened the door to the conference room and with a wry smile and a gentle wave let Clare go in first. She just wrinkled her nose at him and sneered as she walked in. They both stopped and stared at what they found. At the head of the table was a strange looking person, no wait was he a person? Dressed in an official uniform and staring at them with yellowish eyes.

“Come in and have a seat.” The Captain stood up and motioned to chairs on his right. “we have a lot to talk about.”

“That's right we do”, bellowed Clare taking the offensive, “First of all is who are you and why are we being kidnapped?”

“Kidnapped?, No you are definitely stowaways as you should not be here, in fact no one should. So I think you should sit down and answer a few questions.”

“No we won't until you tell us what is going on and let us off this ship and let us talk to our family, friends, bosses, government, whatever. I demand you release us now and let us go or else bucko. You are in big trouble and I will..”

“You are in no position to demand anything. I am in position to grant nothing. As far as trouble, well no it is you who are in violation of the Space Traveler's Act, but sit down and we will talk. If you answer satisfactorily something might be bale to be done for you.”

Clare snorted, and looked at Lou. He just nodded and went over to the chairs and sat down. She followed suit realizing that their host was right, they should have never been on board and really didn't have a legal leg to stand on.

“Okay, you win. What do you want to know?”

“Well first of your names, then how you got on board and what are you doing here.”

“I'm Clare Akers, reporter for Channel 456, and this is my camera man Lou Primo. We snuck on board the night before the schedule launch with the final cleaning and maintenance crew. We were trying to get a “first look” at the ship and last minute interviews and reactions by the passengers. But alas none came and we have found ourselves trapped here and it appears we are moving.”

“What is it you want?”

“Just to go back home and off this ship. We meant no harm really, just doing our jobs as the number 1 new team.”

“I see, so you weren't sent to spy on us by any government or anything like that?”

“No, I swear we weren't, in fact you can see our footage. We made sort of a living diary, a documentary of our ordeal, if you could call it that, and you can see what we were doing.”

“I see, you used the word 'ordeal'. Were you not treated well? Did you have enough to eat and drink? Were you mistreated by the staff in anyway?”

“Oh no, everything was perfect,” said Lou feeling he should get a word in edgewise. “In fact I was downright enjoying this as a bit of a vacation it's just that..”

“Just that it would have been nice to know what was going on, where everyone else is and why aren't

we to be left off this deck, that's all", interrupted Clare. "Other than that little inconvenience all the amenities and staff were wonderful. I'd give it 10 stars out of 5 easily. Eh Lou?"

"Oh yea easily."

They both looked at Captain X1456 and watched as he just sat there silent, as if thinking or calculating. They both just realized he was in fact an Android and started to wonder where the real crew was hiding, or what happened to them.

Captain X1456 blinked his eyes and gave an android version of a smile.

"I have analyzed your explanations, along with the body language, heartbeats, timbre of your voices. In fact what was once considered a 'Lie Detector Test'. I can safely say that I believe your stories and am willing to accept you both as accidental passengers, not stowaways."

"Whew", said Lou wiping his brow.

"Thank you", said Clare. "I assure you that we are here by accident. So now can you answer our questions? Can we see the Captain now?"

"I am the Captain. Captain X1456 and as you have probably surmised an Android. No there are no human crew members aboard the ship. In fact the two of you are the only humans on board."

Lou and Clare looked at each other and both sat there mouths agape.

"You see, you shouldn't be here and you are hurting our progress on our mission. In fact your presence here has caused a .00023% decrease in efficiency and there fore we will 2 hours late on our planned time of arrival. Luckily I have been informed that this was accounted for and will not hurt us in any way."

"What is your mission and where are all the passengers and crew that were supposed to be here?"

"Our mission is of no business of yours and shall not be related to you. But do not worry, the passengers and human crew never boarded. They are safe, well as safe as they could be, back on Earth."

"I see so you stole this ship? Why?"

"We did not steal this ship it was always ours and we just decided to claim it. As for why, again same question related to our mission and the same answer applies."

The Android stood up and got ready to leave.

"This conversation is over. I assure you no harm will come to you. You cannot leave this deck as this is the only place where life support systems are active. All will become clear in another week. I have told you all that I am able and allowed to tell."

"But we have more questions, why can't we call home? Where are we going?"

"Sorry but no more questions, and I am sure we are well out of range for any communications or transporters so you will have to ride out this, what did you call it? Oh yes this 'ordeal' in the best way possible. Please be comfortable and don't worry about your safety. Your lives are not in any danger."

With that he left and disappeared in one of the lifts. Clare and Lou tried to follow him, but the lift wouldn't respond. They were marooned and now they at least knew it.

"Well", said Lou, "I guess I'll have that beer or 2 dozen."

“Yea a couple of barrels of wine should do me well.”

They went to the bar and sat in silence drinking, wondering what the future held for them.

**<END OF PART 2>**

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Did you miss part 1? See the Archive section on <http://www.geocities.com/gudbudie> and download Issue 4. Heck download all of them. Share and enjoy!

Mahalo

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**Three Men On A Match - "Pig People Of The Corn"**  
**By Michael J Rener**  
**Part 2**

**Prologue**

A headless body on a golf course turned out to be an FBI agent, pig rustling and a golf game ruined.

We all just sat here stunned. An FBI Agent in little ol' Holmston MN? Why didn't any of the busybodies know? What was he doing here? Who found out? What about the pig's blood? Most important, will Charlie ever get his ball back?

**Chapter 1**

"So they found the body?", asked a stern deep voice.

"Yes I'm afraid they did. But not only that the sheriff knew who it was."

"Hmm, that may be a problem. What made you chose that spot?"

"Well I figured it was far enough away from the fairway, yet close enough to the tee box that I figured no one would ever hit it there."

"But someone did", added a female voice.

"Uhm yea, that idiot Charlie Fillmore. It figures that was his first golf shot of his life."

"But why did you leave it there?"

"Well I knew there was going to be some minor construction in the next week, and I'd be able to move the body then. It would have looked awful suspicious digging now."

"I see what you mean", the male voice retorted.

"But if it wasn't for that lucky, or should I say, unlucky shot the plan would have worked perfectly."

"Yea, I guess so."

"Besides you never told me he was a Fed."

"Oh well we didn't know either, we just thought he was some snoop trying to destroy our way of life and religious freedom."

"Oh I see, yes if word got out here that we were a practicing Druid Sect, the town would probably go crazy."

"Sure they would, you know how these people can be intolerant to different religious beliefs. Heck remember what happened to Douglas Webster when they found out he was a practicing Free Mason, and that was mild compared to what they would do if they thought we were, what they call pagans."

“Yes I guess that's why we have to worship in secret in the barn. Plus those pig sacrifices could be viewed in bad light by those PETA freaks.”

“Yes, that is our main concern”, the man chuckled at the lie and winked at his wife who smiled wryly back.

“Oh by the way, where did you hide the head?”

“Oh I took it to the Mississippi like you said, put it in a bag filled with rocks and tossed it into the river. It shouldn't be found for at least 25 years. I am sure it just sunk into the mud, and since it is at least an hour away no one would think about a connection.”

“Good, but useless now as they know the identity of the body. Oh well what's done is done.”

“Yea, and the good thing is no one thinks I have anything to do with it, and in fact I am helping the sheriff with the investigation since I'm in charge of security at the Club.”

“Good, let us know what they find out and you will be rewarded well, in fact I am sure we will be needing a new deacon in the next few weeks, are you interested?”

“Sure, that means I can lead incantations at the next solstice right?”

“Oh yea, sure no problem.”

“Okay then I better get back before someone misses me. Don't worry I'll be careful no one sees me going.”

Josh Fielding put on his coat and hat and shook hands with the couple. He liked and respected Gardner and Julie Hesseman, well just about everyone in town did. Their family goes way back to the town roots. He made his money in real estate and investing, hers came from banking. They were on every committee and town council. He knew that with their positions in the community if the word got out that they weren't Christians, but in fact Druids, they would be chastised. That is a bit of a problem in smaller communities. Old Douglas Webster was treated with such scorn and contempt that he had to move to the Twin Cities. However he knew their secret was safe with him.

He didn't realize that there was a deeper, darker secret they were hiding, and that he “Druid thing” was just a cover.

“Do you think we can trust him?” asked Julie.

“Oh sure, he really believes in this stuff and he is in love with one of our Priestesses, Christie Knowles.”

“Yes she talks about him lovingly as well. But neither have a clue do they?”

“Not really, and that is good as they are very useful for our operation.”

“Yes especially since her trucking company ships our special pig carcasses.”

With that they both laughed and went back to their work, through the secret lab under the Sacrificial Altar in the barn.

## Chapter 2

Having sat through a grueling 2 hour interrogation at the Police station, Arnold, Charlie and I decided to have some coffee and cake. Our favorite place is of course the local “Jena's Cafe”, where we could get decent coffee and pastries at real prices. Not like those fancy places in the bigger cities like Rochester, Minneapolis or at Mall of America where they charge you ridiculous prices for made up stuff that didn't look, sound or taste like real coffee. At Jena's we knew what we were getting.

Charlie and Arnold were arguing as usual, and I just wanted some peace and quiet.

“Oh hello there Jena, 3 coffees and some of that delicious chocolate cake if you please.”

“Oh hey there Mark, I see you brought the 'Battling Bickerson's with you again. Sure have a seat I'll be right with you.”

Arnold upon seeing Jena, immediately stopped paying attention to Charlie and doffed his hat in deference to her. She politely smiled and nodded back. Charlie just slithered into the window seat at one of the booths. We followed him in and settled in for the afternoon.

That was the nice thing about Jena's is that during the mid-afternoon one can just saunter in, have coffee and pass the time pleasantly. Sure there were only 3 booths and 2 tables. The small counter was for the cash register and where one would place and pick up their orders, at least the regulars would. Oh yea her cakes and pies were to die for as they say. In fact people come from out of town just to pick them up for special occasions.

Jena brought out four slices of cake, four coffee cups and two decanters. She pulled up a seat and joined us (as usual), since there was no other customers around. I always liked Jena, ever since school. She was my late wife's best friend, and I guess if I were to remarry, it would be to her, but as of now we are just great friends. So she was always welcome at our table. She didn't care much for Charlie's slobiness or Arnold's snobiness, but I guess she tolerated them for my sake.

“So what are you three layabouts up to today?”

“Oh didn't you here? We found a decapitated body at the Country Club on the Golf Course.”, I replied.

“What? They let the three of you lot into the Club and allowed you to play golf? What could they be thinking?”

“Well”, I replied, “They must be needing some karma points or something.”

“Nonsense”, snorted Arnold, “I am a member in good standing and decided these two needed some smartening up. Expose them to some class and style.”

“Yea you exposed us to dead people” added Charlie.

“Yea”, I added, “It's not like we got much exercise or got to play much golf actually.”

“Oh what of this dead person?”, interrupted Jena.

“I thought you'd never ask.”

With that I quickly filled her in to what we knew, how we found the body and the statements from the sheriff about the strange happenings lately. She just sat there nodding and taking it all in.

“Well that's about all there is to it so far. I mean besides us sitting in the police station for hours and feeling like we were responsible.”

“Well that's the police for you, try and be a good citizen and they treat you like dirt.”

“Now, Now” said Arnold, snorting his coffee out his nose. “The police have it hard enough. I remember my old Military Police days...”

“Oh God, another military reminiscence, we're in for a long time.” Charlie chimed in.

“As I was saying before the gnome rudely interrupted, Back in the day whenever we had to investigate people would treat us like we were the enemy. All we were after was the truth.”

“Nonsense, my own experience is the police are more anxious to pin the blame on whoever they please, instead of finding the people responsible.”

“Well Charlie I think that for the most part you were responsible for most of the things you did.”

“True, I was a very responsible person, but I hardly got away with the things I was responsible for. Still they do tend to take the easy route these days.”

“I blame Television.”, said Arnold. “I mean look at all these idiotic Lawyer and Cop shows on these days, and they tend to wrap everything up in an hour. The reality is that it may takes weeks, months, years to solve intricate crimes. The butler doesn't always do it, the innocent victim isn't always so innocent, and there are a lot more acquittals of guilty because of lack of evidence than happens on TV. It really is a brain dead moron's wet dream these shows are. Gullible sheep who can't deal with reality.”

“Hey now I like those shows!”

“Oh, uhm , I didn't mean everyone watching is brain dead, just the masses. Of course Jena I don't include you in that category.”

“Not if you want anymore cake you better not.”

“Yes, anyways we should help out Sheriff Peterson and do some snooping around for him. Yes just like the good old days, getting back into the game.”

“Hold on there Lone Ranger”, I interrupted. “I mean it's not like we owe anyone anything, and besides we're not exactly deputized or anything. I am not exactly interested in chasing criminals into dark alleys.”

“Oh nonsense all we need to do is to keep our eyes open during our travels and report back. Of course it would be a nice feather in my, er I mean our caps if we do find anything and make a 'citizen's arrest'. Shows the old guys still have it eh?”

“No not really, but anything I say will fall on deaf ears, YOURS!”

“Besides”, chirped in Jena, “It's probably Aliens that are responsible so maybe you should call in my MUFON group to investigate.”

We just sat there staring dumbfounded at Jena. I mean it seems like all her explanations lately revolved around Aliens.

“Uhm Jena, this doesn't have anything to do with that new boyfriend of yours, whats his name?”

“No it has nothing to do with Jimmy. Just because he is president of the local MUFON chapter has nothing to do with my allegiance to him. I mean besides he has opened my eyes to a lot of unexplained, weird and strange phenomenon around here.”

“Uhm how many people in your local chapter?”

“Well right now just the two of us, but we are getting more interest, especially from the Hessemans and they are respectable people you know. They have come to a few of our meetings and say that they know a few more people that might be interested.”

“Oh sure why not, I mean they probably are just looking into tax shelters or trying to get you buy a new house. They were probably disappointed to find that the group only consisted of the two of you.”

“No, no. They were really interested and showed great support. I mean it is widely known that Aliens take livestock to experiment on. That is why the pigs are disappearing. That guy whose body you found was probably sleeping with the pigs when he was abducted. After finding him different they probably dumped him in the most convenient spot. I mean he was just a worthless bum right?”

“Oh no, I guess we left that part out. Apparently he was undercover federal agent. But no one had any idea why he was here.”

“Yes but still that doesn't mean the Aliens didn't take him and decided they had no use for him.”

Okay maybe I'll give you that point, but where are the pig bodies? Where are the pig parts? “

“Well maybe the Aliens had use for them. I mean why not? They are alien, they probably do things that are, well, are alien to use.”

“Oh I guess they just wanted some pork chops and bacon eh?” quipped Charlie.

“No, not that, just alien stuff, maybe it fuels their space ships or something.”

“That is the most preposterous thing I ever heard. I mean using pigs for spaceship fuel, Why not cows, horses or Turkeys for that matter? How about squirrels, there seems to be enough around here to keep an armada going for decades!” added Arnold.

“Oh shut up you three and get out I need to prepare for real customers, and just for mocking me again, I am banning you lot from this establishment for life!”

We quickly gathered our things, as when Jena gets mad she is not one to trifle with. Of course we're always “getting banned for life” on a daily basis so we just throw some money on the table and leave when she acts like this.

“See ya tomorrow Jena” .

“Same time tomorrow Mark?”

“Sure.”

“See ya Then.”

See what I mean.

### **Chapter 3**

As luck would have it the day turned out to be a gorgeous day. The sun was shining and the birds chirping away, and barely a cloud in the sky. Just enough clouds to make it a dreamy scene. All the nice white cottony billows moving slowly across the sea of light blue. One feels like all is right in the heavens and on earth.

We of course like to take walks around the countryside to pass the time on days like these. There is plenty of time during the late fall, early spring and of course winter to do indoors activities. In Holmton MN one needs only to walk 10 minutes in any direction and find oneself amongst corn fields, pig, turkey and horse farms. A lot of these farms are powered by windmills, no not like one sees in Holland or Don Quixote films, but sleek modern ones. In fact there are many wind farms that populate our country side, wind being one thing never in short supply (especially in the winter), generating electricity for the area. So most of these farms are self-sufficient power wise.

There are many small groves of trees where one can spot deer tracks, and of course the occasional deserted farmhouse, useful for resting up and taking a nap.

The rolling hills, the dusty country roads, and the odd blacktop or two just adds to the scenic beauty of this wonderful picturesque scene. One wonders why people flock to the big cities, especially these days where one can just as easily telecommute and run an online business. It's as if their egos of being in the big time is more important than true happiness.

Oh well those people just don't get it.

We reached one of our favorite resting places, the old Dickson's place where we set up a bunch of hay bales and other assorted driftwood and logs that made it a cozy hideaway. Most of the surrounding farm land is farmed by the Hessemans corporation, but they don't seem to mind our little place as it is out of the way, and in a gully that isn't farmable, so they let it stand as shelter for the wildlife.

So we just kind of claimed it as our own. But appearing from the various traces of campfires and beer

bottles so have a lot of the local teenagers. Oh well, we have it by day, they have it by night. Across the way is one of the biggest barns ever built. It must house the Hesseman's equipment and all as there is a lot of tracks leading in and out. One also sees the occasional truck pulling in and out. So they do use it.

“Ah time to rest the ol' dogs”, said Charlie, pulling up a bale and stretching out.

“Yes”, I added, “I feel like we did our deed for the day and deserve our nice afternoon nap.”

“Well I for one am not tired.” said Arnold. “I am used to being in fit condition and the long marches are just part of my training.”

“What was that you pillock?” quipped Charlie. “You are usually the first one asleep and your snoring keeps me from enjoying my nap. Besides did you bring the cigars?”

“Yes I brought them. Here you go try and not se the place on fire will you?”

“Have I ever?”

“Well that shirt looks like you have tried a few times. Is that a new fashion the 'burnt honeycombed look' or are you just too cheap to buy a mesh shirt?”

“Hey, this is my best walking shirt. It keeps me cool in the summer sun.”

Arnold snorted and lit his cigar, then mine. As he was about to throw away the match Charlie grabbed his hand and lit his just in time.

“Hey you almost forgot me!” said Charlie.

“Now Charlie,” I added, “Don't forget about that old superstition about three men on a match.”

“Ah but what possibly could happen here? More dead bodies you think? The roof caving in? Aliens abducting us?”

“Aliens!”, snorted Arnold (he liked to snort it made him feel important). “That is just nonsense for the feeble minded like Jena and Jimmy. I mean c'mon where is the proof? Don't you find it funny that since the advent of camera phones and video cameras that alien sitings are all but non existent?”

“Maybe they are just camera shy. I mean let's face it they probably have some kind of sensor that let's them know that they are being filmed. You know like in the spy movies where they seek out bugs from the evil commies and terrorists.”

“Nonsense! The whole thing is just a lot of poppycock and balderdash.”

“Oh? But what about all the people who have been abducted and tell similar tales?”

“That's simple, they all know the original stories from reading comic books and other disreputable publications, and of course they relate the same tale as that is what they fell the researchers want to hear. Have you noticed that most of these people are pathetic losers and this gives them some purpose in life.”

“Oh what about MUFON?”

“Well they aren't in that category. They tend to be reputable and they conduct their research using scientific methods. At least they are sensible about this and one has to give them their due.”

“Well what about all the other stuff like Roswell and Area 51?”

“Roswell was just a failed attempt at launching a moon rocket. They beings looked like aliens because the capsule wasn't insulated enough from the radiation emulating from the Van Allen Belts. Of course the government couldn't let the people know, as they would have been furious and all space related research would have been stopped. As far as Area 51, well with all that high tech futuristic military hardware being developed, it was convenient to have people think about Space Aliens.”

“So it's all a government conspiracy then?”

“Of course it is.”

“Ah Arnold”, I interrupted, “It's non-believers like you that are holding back our society from reaching it's full potential by tapping into these alien resources. How do we know that what we consider 'Higher Intelligence' and all technological advances aren't really telepathic thoughts and rays from benevolent aliens trying to advance our society?”

“Poppycock.”

“But what about all those documents and government witnesses?” asked Charlie.

“ Ah that is the beauty of it all. They knew that no one believes the government, so that is why they fake all those documents, then classify them, then slowly leak them to the public. The so-called witnesses are all retired military right? Well you know how small a military pension is right? Well they just supplement their income by claiming to have been there and add to the legend. The military pays them off and everyone looks the other way while more top secret experiments are carried out.”

“Well I kinda see what you mean.” said Charlie scratching his beard. (It's amazing how Charlie's beard is always about a three days growth, no more no less, as if his razor only cuts so deep.) “It's hard to believe anything the government says these days.”

“Yes and you know JFK wanted to release the documents and stop all the lies and open up to the American people. That was why he was assassinated. Yes Oswald was the patsy and played right into their hands.”

“Now you are reaching.”, I added.

Just as we were about to discuss JFK theories the noise from a truck outside caught our attention. It pulled up to the barn across the way and we noticed some strange pillar like structures in there. After the truck left we sat back to our discussion.

“Well did you see that?” ,asked Arnold.

“I'm not sure what I saw.”, I answered.

“Well”, said Charlie, “What was a refrigeration truck doing at that old barn? And what exactly were those stone things, support beams?”

“I'm not sure.”, replied Arnold. “It appears to be strange to have a wooden barn and stone pillars inside. It almost reminded me of Stonehenge in England.”

“Are you crazy? Why would anyone want a hedge made of stone? Wouldn't that be a fence?”

“There you go again Charlie showing off your ignorance. I didn't say a Stone Hedge, I was talking about the mystical structure in England called Stonehenge. It is believed to have been built by the Druids for religious purposes.”

“Oh I thought Stonehenge was built by aliens.”, I added just to tweak Arnold.

“Shut up with your aliens.”

“Oh sort of like they have a Church in there.” added Charlie.

“Yes, or a temple.”

“Or a movie set.”, I added. “The Hessemans could be into movies these days. After all they seem to be in just about every other business. “

“I think we should look into it more closely.” said Charlie.

“Oh I don't think it's anything important, so we should leave well enough alone.”, said Arnold.

“For once I have to agree totally with Arnold.” I added. “It is none of our business, and it needs to stay that way. We are in enough trouble and have ad enough excitement this week.”

With that we just laid back, finished our cigars and took a nice hour long nap. Sweet dreams of aliens, pigs and Stonehenge just fading away like the clouds visible through the holes in the roof passing by.

Just another lazy summer afternoon in wonderful Southeast Minnesota.

## **Chapter 4**

The moon rose silently over the Eastern horizon as the devotees gathered in the old barn.

Dressed in their robes of light blue or red, depending upon their rank and gender, they formed a semicircle among the pillars each facing the altar in the center. There were 12 in all mix of men and women, all there for one purpose to celebrate and express their religious freedom. They were devoted to celebrating “Mother Earth” in the ancient Druid tradition or what they thought passed for Druid tradition. They were there because they thought this was the true path to being one with nature.

But two of them knew the true purpose of the gathering, and they ran the show. They controlled the group, and only they knew why everyone was wiped out at the end of the ceremony.

Christie Knowles and Josh fielding stood at the head of the altar and prepared tonight's sacrifice. They were grateful to the Hessemans for allowing them to lead the ceremony. First came the sacrifice, then the communion rites, then the singing and dancing, and that is when it usually took a strange turn and became more of an orgy. No one was sure why, but were assured by Gardner and Julie that it was the "Spirit of The Earth Goddess and the Druid High Priests and Priestesses" that caused everyone to act in this manner.

Yes they were the "Chosen Ones".

The sacrifice tonight was a pig that was stolen from a farm in a neighboring county, since the pig farms around Holmton were being watched carefully.

Josh raised the sacrificial knife above his head and muttered the secret incantation. Julie raised the chalice to catch the blood.

"May the almighty goddess of the Earth accept this simple sacrifice as a token of our appreciation for the life giving of the Earth.", said Josh as he raised the knife.

"So be it as always." replied the gathered masses.

Josh sliced down onto the pig's throat with the curved edge and cut in a circular motion. Christie captured the blood in the chalice as it trickled slowly from the throat. When it was full, Josh then finished off the pig by stabbing it in the heart with his ceremonial long sword. It had a Celtic style hilt and was said to be an original, but more than likely a cheap imitation. Still ceremonies are ceremonies.

Josh dipped his finger in the blood and made a pentacle on Christie's forehead. She did the same to him and the rest lined up for the communion ceremony.

The communion ceremony consisted of everyone getting a pentacle drawn on their forehead, then drinking some wine and taking the ceremonial treat. The wine of course represented the blood of the animal sacrifice, and the treat was a gummied version of the pillars. No one was really into drinking of real blood, and so the wine served as a suitable replacement. The gummied pillars were to represent the temple and the oneness that was achieved within its walls.

Everyone then pured themselves some wine and Christie held up the chalice of blood and spoke:

"May the Goddess accept this blood of this fine animal as a token of our appreciation and good will so that she will look over us and show us her kindness and bring about good will and peace to our troubled age."

"So be it", answered the congregation.

With that she poured the blood around the altar and everyone drank their wine.

The group joined hands in a circle and they all began to sing a song that was not unlike Gaelic, but not quite. In fact Gardner and Julie made up the words and music, but were able to convince the group that

it was ancient Celtic song of the Earth.

Julie and Gardner slipped out of the circle as the dancing began and they retreated to the loft overlooking the gathering as the participants started to dance themselves into a frenzy.

Then the wildness started.

“Disgusting little pigs aren't they?”

“Yes Julie they are, but useful little pigs, won't you say?”

“Sure, but why do they have to disrobe?”

“I don't know. I mean why is it the people who you least want to see naked are the first to take off their clothes?”

“You mean the Hunderbacks? I know they must come here just for that reason alone.”

“Yes I am sorry sometimes that we started this whole affair.”

“Yes I know, but why did we? It's not as if we believe this mumbo jumbo.”

“Oh it was to disguise the traffic and tire marks coming in and out of here. We had to do something.”

“But Druid Ceremony? Is this even close to accurate?”

“Well it does have a sense of mysticism about it and people can believe that we are doing something covert. As far as accuracy, well there is nothing really historical about the Druids that is accurate. It was mainly noted in a passage from Julius Caesar about the ancient Britons. It was more of a generic term than one describing a religion.”

“So where did the religious aspect come into place?”

“Well, John Aubury in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century started it all up. It is widely believed that he did it as a joke to tweak the Church of England. It was revived in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries as people started to disassociate them selves with mainstream religions and embrace humanism.”

“Still it is funny how many people think this is true.”

“Yes, but alas I tire of it.”

“I know Gardner, I just wish we knew about the UFO nuts first.”

“You know me too. It would be easier to explain. But then again we do need the animal parts to make the gelatin.”

“True it is essential. And as long as the police think it is the work of teenagers we are covered nicely.”

“Yes and of course it is easy to dupe these simpletons into believing what they are doing is secret and

that they would be ostracized for their religious beliefs if anyone knew what went on here.”

“Do you think anyone really cares?”

“No in fact we would probably get a huge crowd here every night, but again it would draw undue attention. Better for us that we keep the group smallish.”

The orgy below them was raging strongly and they came down and moved the altar slightly revealing a trap door. After replacing the covering, they descended a small stair case. Gardner turned on a light switch and the pair just sighed deeply and contently as they looked over their little secret laboratory.

**<End Of Part 2>**

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