

IN THE BEGINNING, there was potential. Everything was possible, everything was chaos. From this chaos, IT became. IT was a frame of reference, an observation of the potential around and inside IT. IT grappled with this potential, and in trying to observe the subtleties of Itself, the potential collapsed on itself, waveforms falling into one another to create...

That moment lasted forever. That moment lasted in zero time. The vibrations of IT's possibility formed moments – points of differing states – that impacted and changed, releasing energy hotter than anything since. Within a second, opposing forms – the moments of collapsed potential – had annihilated each other, giving rise to new waveforms... In looking at Itself, IT had created energy and matter. These potentials swirled and coalesced into quarks and antiquarks, falling in on themselves, tightening the possibilities they were into hadrons and leptons, and finally into protons, neutrons, mesons, baryons. These tightened even further, falling into familiar and successful combinations of proton and neutron. Within a second, the first hydrogen atom was born, but it would not live long. Only after the light of the beginning had traveled over a million kilometers, had the temperature dropped sufficiently, only a billion degrees or so, were these particles – these moments of possibility – able to hold together with any stability.

The gravity of these new things attracted more of their kind. The radiation and matter of the beginning began to eddy and swirl in places, continued to rush away excitedly – taking energy with it – in others. The probability of everything was settling into well-traveled grooves. Matter and energy left the embrace of each other and gradually, the space around them began to darken and the temperatures continued to fall and the light spread inexorably away from the beginning. Drawn by mutual attraction, matter organized itself into things – balls of gas and gravity. The galaxies were born. Some areas were pulled too tightly together, the weight of

themselves swallowing the light and heat around them, trapping bits of IT. Potentials, possibilities, forgotten – creating order...

#### **1. A FEW BILLION YEARS LATER...**

Actualization of systems took a few seconds, but for the machine, the entire affair happened in zero time. The hardware fired up quickly, the 3D crystalline matrix that made up its mind flared to life. There were many ways the crystal brain could send and store information, but immediately it fell into patterns that were most efficient and useful. Possibilities collapsed on themselves, creating order. For the machine, it simply *was*. Before that, nothing existed.

Information streamed into the brain, filling it with images, sounds, knowledge. Suddenly, there was a past before *becoming*. It knew its shape, its size, it could feel the functions of its body snap into resolution and become familiar. It was made in the image of its creator: bipedal, symmetrical – with two arms, two eyes, two ears... Ten digits on each appendage; they flexed when the brain ordered them to, punching the orders through fiber optics. It was a General Robotics Mark III android.

“Good morning, Adam,” came a voice.