# ROBOT WARS

SIGMUND BROUWER

BOOK ONE

# DEATH TRAP

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*Death Trap*



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THIS SERIES IS DEDICATED
IN MEMORY OF MARTYN GODFREY.

*Martyn, you wrote books that reached all of us kids at heart. You wrote them because you really cared. We all miss you.*

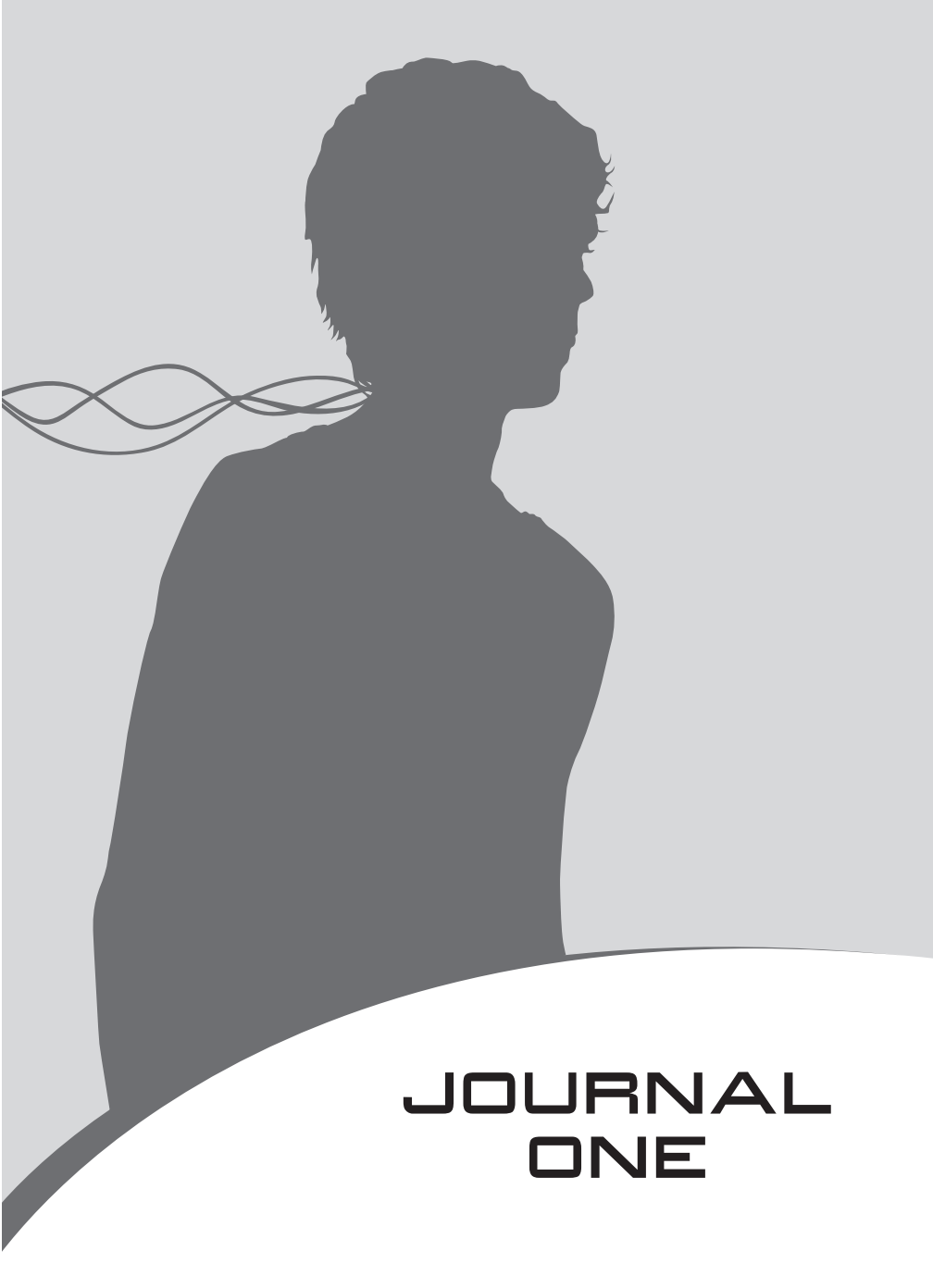
## FROM THE AUTHOR

We live in amazing times! When I first began writing these Mars journals, not even 40 years after our technology allowed us to put men on the moon, the concept of robot control was strictly something I daydreamed about when readers first met Tyce. Since then, science fiction has been science fact. Successful experiments have now been performed on monkeys who are able to use their brains to control robots halfway around the world!

Suddenly it's not so far-fetched to believe that these adventures could happen for Tyce. Or for you. Or for your children.

With that in mind, I hope you enjoy stepping into a future that could really happen. . . .

SIGMUND BROUWER



# JOURNAL ONE

# CHAPTER 1

Sandstorm!

Across the plains, the black shell of the gigantic dome gleamed in late-afternoon sunshine. It was beautiful against the red soil, laden with iron oxides, and the faded rose-colored Martian sky. From the bottom of the mountain where I stood, it took less than an hour's trek across the plains to reach it—in good weather.

But we would not get that hour. Sand rattled hard against my titanium casing, warning me of how little time remained. Much less than we needed.

I turned my head to the left, into the wind that raked the sand across me. A huge dark wall lifted from the north of the plains, a blanket of doom that covered more and more of the sky. Winds of near-hurricane force lifted tons of red sand

particles. Already the front edge of the storm reached out to us. In less than half an hour, those tons of sand would begin to cover me and the three scientists I had been sent out of the dome to find.

"Home base," I called into my radio. "This is Rescue Force One. Please make contact. Home base. This is Rescue Force One. Please make contact."

There was no answer. Just like there had been no answer the other hundred times I'd tried in the last half hour.

A solar flare must have knocked out the satellite beam. The sun was about 140 million miles away, so weak and so far from Mars that on winter nights, the temperature here dropped to minus 200 degrees Fahrenheit. Yet all it took was a storm on the surface of the sun to fire out electromagnetic streams nearing the speed of light, and communication systems through the entire solar system would pay the price.

"Home base," I said. "This is Rescue Force One. Please make contact."

One of the scientists walked in front of me, blocking my view of the base. He leaned down and pushed his helmet visor into my forward video lens. "What are we going to do?" he shouted.

He did not have to shout. I could hear him clearly. Nor did he have to walk around in front of me. I could have seen him just as easily with my rear video lens. Or one of my side lenses.

"Forward," I said. "We cannot stop."

"No! We must make shelter."

Did he think I had not thought of this already? Standard procedure in dealing with a sandstorm was to go to high ground, unfold an emergency pop-up blanket, and crawl beneath it. The pop-up blanket made a miniature dome that would easily provide shelter for as many days as it took the storm to pass. But fools who used the pop-up blanket on low ground would be buried by the sand, never to be found again.

"Forward," I said. "Follow me."

"That's easy for you!" he hollered. "You're just a stupid machine!"

He was correct both times. It would be easy for me to travel in a sandstorm, and I was just a machine. But he was also wrong. I was more than a machine. And I was not stupid. I knew plenty.

I knew that during each Martian fall and winter, the carbon dioxide gas in the atmosphere froze out of the air and onto the ground, making a giant hood of frost that covered from the pole to the equator. I knew that as spring arrived, the difference in temperatures between the sun-warmed soil and the retreating ice made for fierce winds. I knew these strong winds were so monstrous that sometimes sandstorms covered the entire planet. I knew if we took shelter, we might be trapped for days.

I also knew that the last scientist had only 10 hours of

oxygen left in his tank. If we took shelter, he would die long before the storm ended.

"One of you will die if we stop," I said. "If we continue, all of you will survive."

"We'll get lost in the storm! No one survives a sandstorm."

"No," I insisted. "My navigation system is intact. We will link ourselves by cable, and I will maintain direction. All you need to do is follow."

"No!" he yelled. "Not through a sandstorm!"

"Listen," I said, "if we stop, he has no chance."

"Should three of us die instead of one?" The scientist picked up a rock and tried to smash it against my head. But since he wore a big atmosphere suit and was very slow, I moved out of the way easily.

He picked up another rock and threw it at me. I put up my arms to protect my video lenses, and the rock clanged off my elbows.

The other two scientists watched, doing nothing. They were very tired. I had rescued them from the bottom of a giant sinkhole where they had been stranded for two days.

The first scientist picked up another rock to throw. It was a big rock. Even though his suit made him clumsy, he would be able to throw it hard. Mars has very little gravity compared to Earth. A person throwing a rock the size of a grapefruit on Earth could easily throw a rock the size of a basketball on Mars.

What was I going to do? If I let the scientist with the rocks force us to stop and put up a shelter, one of them would die. But if I grabbed the scientist with the rock in my sharp metal claws, I would most certainly poke a hole in his space suit. With an atmosphere of 95 percent carbon dioxide, he would die within minutes.

Either way, it didn't look like I could find a way to make sure all three scientists made it back to the dome alive. I would fail in my task. I could not allow that.

Another rock clanged off my leg.

"No!" I said. "No!" This was getting worse. If I ran off to protect myself, then all three of them might die. But if I stayed to try to protect them, one of those rocks might smash and disable me. Which would mean all of them might die. I couldn't decide what to do.

The scientist threw another rock. It hit my shoulder.

A huge blast of sand swept over us. For a moment, I could see nothing in any direction from my four video lenses.

In the instant the air cleared again, I saw the scientist with another rock in his fist. But it was too late. Out of the swirling sand he appeared, aiming the rock toward my video lenses.

The rock smashed down.

The rose-colored sky tilted. The red soil zoomed toward me. Then everything went black. . . .

# CHAPTER 2

"Ouch," I said.

I opened my eyes to the square, sterile room of the computer simulation lab. I was under the dome, not outside of it, stuck in a raging sandstorm. That was the good news.

The bad news was that although no rock had actually hit my body, my head hurt. That's the way it is with a virtual-reality program. It's like a computer game. Except you're actually in the game. Instead of watching your players get knocked out, it happens in a small way to you.

I pulled the surround-sight helmet off my head. My hair was slick with sweat. The concentration it took to move the virtual-reality robot controls by flexing my own muscles was hard work. It didn't help that I was also wearing a one-piece jacket and gloves, wired with thousands of tiny cables that

reacted to every movement I made. I'd been in the computer program for five hours, and that jacket held every scrap of my body heat.

"Ouch is right," Rawling said, looking up from his own screen where he sat at a desk across the cramped room from me. "My readout shows he cracked three video lenses and shocked your computer drive. Basically he killed you. A human defeating a robot."

Rawling McTigre, one of the two medical doctors under the dome, was stocky and in his mid 40s. He had been a quarterback at his university back on Earth when he was younger, and his wide shoulders showed it. His short, dark hair was streaked with gray. He said his hair had turned gray from trying to look after me. I spent so much time with him that there were days when I wished he were my father. I mean, because voice-to-voice calls were far too costly as my real father traveled between Earth and Mars, and because the round trip took so long, all I really had for a father was a photo of some guy in a pilot's space suit.

"What were you thinking out there?" Rawling asked.

"Thinking? I didn't have time to think," I responded. "I'd spent four hours tracking them down, and suddenly the one goofball decides he doesn't want to be rescued. Besides, who programmed the sandstorm into this rescue operation? Wasn't it bad enough one guy is running low on oxygen and the satellite communications are down? What was next—a

short circuit that left my robot unit with only one arm or one video lens in operation?"

"Tyce, Tyce, Tyce." Rawling shook a good-natured finger at me. "I don't remember anyone ever making it to stage five of that program. You have this gift, this talent, this—"

"You're about to lecture me, aren't you?" I said, sighing. "You always start your lectures by giving me a compliment. Then you let me have it."

He laughed. "You've got me figured out. But I have to discuss your mistakes and what you can learn from them. If I don't, how will you be able to control the perfect virtual-reality robot?"

"That's another thing," I said. I was hot and thirsty. I was mad at the scientist who'd knocked me out with a rock. I was grumpy. "Why do I need to control the perfect virtual-reality robot?"

Rawling gave me a strange look.

"I've been thinking about that a lot lately," I said, pressing forward. "I'm not the one who wants me to be perfect. You are."

He still said nothing. I wondered if he was mad at me.

"Don't get me wrong," I responded quickly. "It's fun to become part of the program and pretend I'm actually outside the dome. But I want the real thing. I want to get outside. I want to look up and actually see the sky and the sunset. Not just have it projected into my surround-sight helmet. I want—"

"Tyce," Rawling said quietly, "look down."

Even though I knew what was there, I looked down. At my wheelchair. At useless, crippled legs. At pants that never got ripped or dirty because I was always sitting, legs motionless, in my wheelchair.

"I know. I know," I said sadly. "Sinking into Martian sand would eat up these wheels in less than a minute. But I can't let that stop me."

He stared at me.

"You're the one," I murmured, "who always tells me this is only a handicap if I let it be a handicap."

Dome horns began to blare in short bursts. I counted four blares.

Four blares? That meant . . .

"A call for everyone to assemble," Rawling said, reading my mind.

The dome director was going to speak to all 200 of us under the dome at the same time. That hadn't happened since it looked like an asteroid might hit Mars, and that had been five years ago.

"I was afraid of this," Rawling muttered. He took my surround-sight helmet off my lap and set it beside the computer on the desk in front of me. "This may be your last computer run for a while."

"What?"

"It means a techie has confirmed my oxygen readings. Director Steven is going to tell all of us to avoid using electric-

ity on anything except totally necessary activities. At least until we get our problem fixed."

"Oxygen readings? Problem fixed?" This sounded serious. Too serious. Just as serious as the look on Rawling's face.

"Over the last week," he explained, "and during routine checkups, scientists and techies complained to me about being too tired. And I've been tired myself."

Now that he mentioned it, my arms didn't feel that strong after pushing my wheelchair across the dome. Most of the time my arms were very strong, because I had to use them like my legs if I wanted my wheelchair to go anywhere.

"But I couldn't find anything wrong with them," Rawling continued. "So without telling anyone, I took some oxygen readings. The dome was down 10 percent in oxygen levels."

"Ten percent!"

"That was three days ago," he said. "I didn't want to spread panic, so I kept it to myself and asked the director to get a techie to confirm it. I hoped I was doing the readings wrong."

The dome horns began to blast again. Four blares.

Rawling waited until they finished. "I guess I wasn't wrong. Worse, today my own readings showed we are now down 12 percent. Somehow the oxygen generators are failing little by little, and it looks like the problem is getting worse."

# SCIENCE AND GOD

You've probably noticed that the question of God's existence comes up in Robot Wars.

It's no accident, of course. I think this is one of the most important questions that we need to decide for ourselves. If God created the universe and there is more to life than what we can see, hear, taste, smell, or touch, that means we have to think of our own lives as more than just the time we spend on Earth.

On the other hand, if this universe was not created and God does not exist, then that might really change how you view your existence and how you live.

Sometimes science is presented in such a way that it suggests there is no God. To make any decision, it helps to know as much about the situation as possible. As you decide for yourself, I'd like to show in the Robot Wars series that

many, many people—including famous scientists—don't see science this way.

As you might guess, I've spent a lot of time wondering about science and God, and I've spent a lot of time reading about what scientists have learned and concluded. Because of this, I wrote a nonfiction book called *Who Made The Moon?* and you can find information about it at www.whomade-themoon.com. If you ever read it, you'll see why science does not need to keep anyone away from God.

With that in mind, I've added a little bit more to this book—a couple of essays about the science in journals one and two of Robot Wars, based on what you can find in *Who Made The Moon?*

Sigmund Brouwer
whomadethemoon.com

JOURNAL ONE

# DOES GOD REALLY EXIST?

***Q: Why do science and faith seem so far apart?***

A: Much of this happened because of how the church in Rome treated a scientist named Galileo in the early 1700s. Galileo supported a new theory that the earth revolved around the sun. But the church insisted the Bible said otherwise. So the pope punished Galileo—he even threatened to have Galileo killed unless he began to teach again that the sun revolved around the earth. After that, many "religious" people thought scientists wanted to attack religion, and scientists became antireligion.

But Galileo, who deeply believed in God, became known as one of the greatest scientists of all time. He predicted that a new invention, the telescope, would prove the church

wrong—as it did. He wanted to save them from embarrassment, but they wouldn't listen.

***Q: Can you believe in God* and *trust in science?***

A: It seems that today we have two choices: accept God through faith, choosing to believe what the Bible says (that God exists and loves us individually) or believe what science claims to prove (that there is no God).

But over the last 50 years, science has admitted that every discovery leads to more questions than answers. A century ago, many scientists believed they were on the verge of knowing all the answers regarding how we arrived on Earth. Now scientists say that the more they discover, the more they discover they don't know.

For example, if the force of gravity were slightly more, the universe would collapse on itself, like a balloon with the air sucked out of it. If the force of gravity were slightly less, it would have drifted apart as gases instead of forming solids. If the force that held protons and electrons together were the slightest bit weaker, hydrogen would not exist, and therefore water would not exist, and therefore life would not exist. At all levels, it seems that coincidence after coincidence after coincidence has made human life possible in a lonely, cold universe.

Many scientists now believe that the 15-billion-year construction of the universe has had one goal: producing human

life. Science is proving that the odds of human life being produced by chance are like winning the same 10-million-dollar lottery every week for the next year. That's a big win!

It's true that belief in God truly takes a leap of faith, yet every year we see further proof that science—and reason—no longer stand in the way of a belief in God as the Creator of this universe.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sigmund Brouwer and his wife, recording artist Cindy Morgan, and their daughters split living between Red Deer, Alberta, Canada, and Nashville, Tennessee. He has written several series of juvenile fiction and eight novels. Sigmund loves sports and plays golf and hockey. He also enjoys visiting schools to talk about books. He welcomes visitors to his Web site at www.coolreading.com.