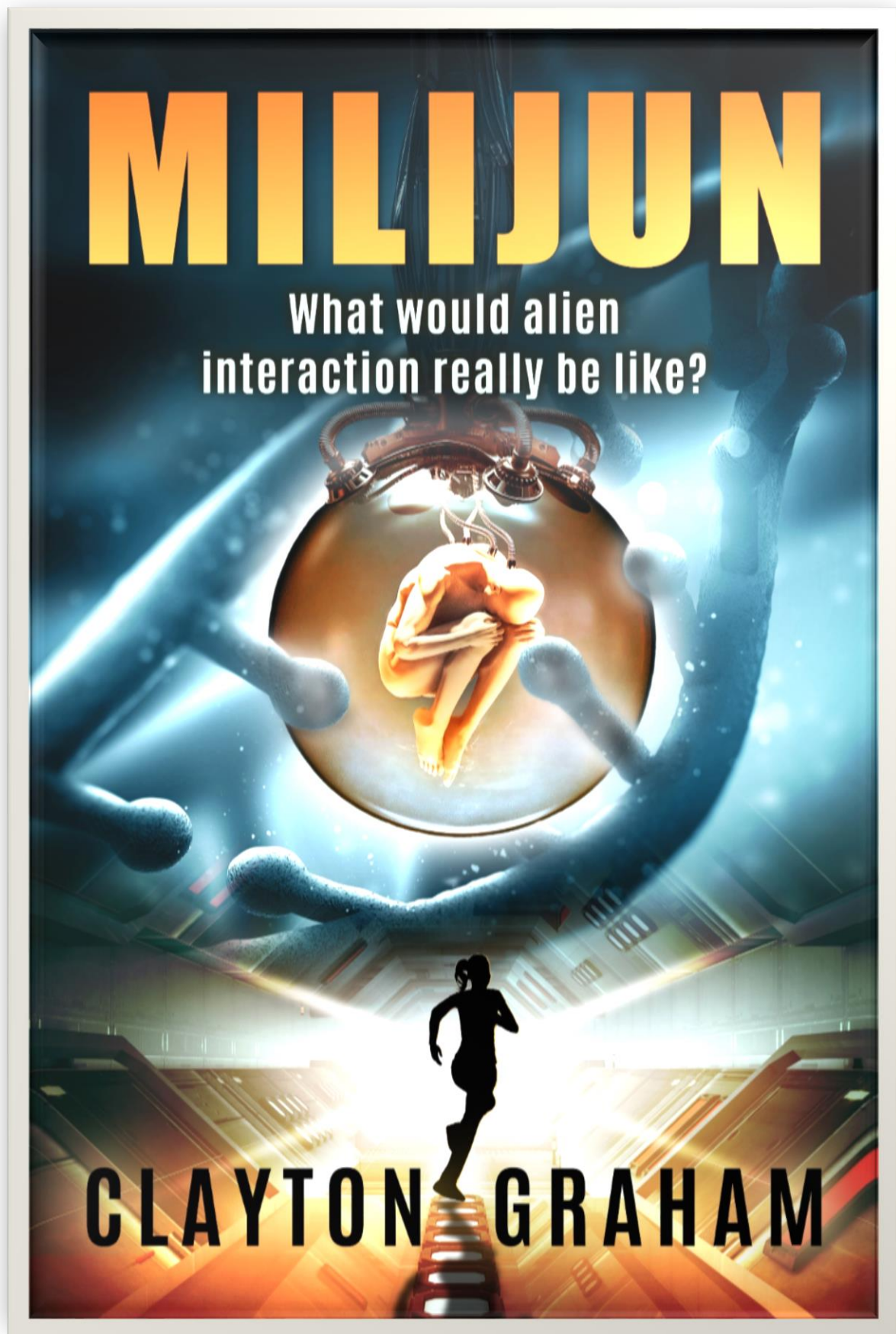


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Chapter 8: Excerpt from Milijun

Laura lay back on the bed, hands clasped behind her head and knees drawn up as tightly as comfort would allow. Jason, emotionally exhausted, was asleep in the other bed and for the first time in many hours she had the luxury of undisturbed time to think the day's events through. They had called a taxi from Robert's house and directed it back to camp. Having found Jason, she had no wish to chase into Caiguna and risk further confrontation with the police, Janice Mepunga in particular. There was just no forgiving the policewoman for leaving her stranded at Robert's house with a laser-seared dead body on her hands.

Some semblance of inner strength returned. They would have to see Mepunga tomorrow, of course, and learn what happened to Bradley Robert or, more accurately, how he had ended up with a hole drilled in his chest.

Careful not to wake Jason, she made her way outside, in search of fresh air. Looking up at the darkened sky she saw a pale moon rising and what could only be Venus shining brightly. The air held a slight chill, and she shivered involuntarily.

Laura scanned the sky, half expecting something to emerge from the star-pricked canopy and descend upon her with mischief in its heart. What was it Jason had said? *Sometimes when it touched me I didn't even feel it.* She didn't know what to believe but whatever it was, Janice Mepunga was the next step.

They had found the camera in a kitchen drawer, but it contained no record of Jason's pictures. Robert had obviously removed the stick. Or, of course, the alien had. Surprisingly enough, observing Jason's face at that moment of disappointment served to remove her doubts concerning his version of events. She had totally believed, if only for a few seconds, that an alien being had emerged from Bradley Robert and examined her son.

Tomorrow they would see Mepunga. And maybe get some answers.

At the Eucla defence base the only source of light in the room came from a large wall screen that portrayed the death throes of choppa flight 209 from Cape Pasley to Cocklebidy on the night of 17 January 2179. In the room were Assistant Commissioner Ray Parlane of the West Australian Police, Major General Sebastian Ord, Air Vice-Marshal Jean Pescos and Sergeant David Jameson Cooke of the Australian Defence Force. The whole flight cam episode had run for no more than three minutes, and now the group were digesting, and struggling to understand, what they had just seen.

"At least it ties in with the radar records," Jean Pescos stated, a frown ageing her otherwise smooth, olive complexion. "Definitely two ..." she struggled for the right word, "... attackers."

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Sebastian Ord raised his brow at the use of the word. “Could it have been an accident, a collision?”

Cooke snorted and said, “No sir. The radar shows two objects peeling away from the main group. Definitely intentional.”

“I agree,” Jean Pescos ventured. “Definitely intentional. Analysis of the short flight path they took indicates an optimum trajectory for intersection with the choppa.”

“You mean it shows intelligence.” Ray Parlane looked incredulous. Short, with luxurious eyebrows, he had obtained his rank by being down to earth and taking no nonsense. This whole episode did not sit well on his shoulders.

“Perhaps even more to the point, what the hell are the damn things?” Sebastian Ord asked. Tall and wiry with piercing blue eyes, he wore his neatly pressed uniform like a glove. He started the video again and they watched as bright moonlight exposed a flock of large creatures moving through the night sky. The choppa had hovered no more than two hundred metres away, and its lights had picked out two of the objects breaking away to veer towards the camera. They looked large, too large for any known species of bat. Strong white beams highlighted their outstretched wings as they homed in on their target, revealing thin reticulated arms as they grew closer. Large reflective eyes dominated the screen for a moment and then focus was lost as the creatures appeared to collide intentionally with the choppa’s canopy.

Ord ran the video back to show the best zoomed shot of the creatures as they approached Pilot James Vanelli’s machine. He shook his head slowly. “Hands up those who have seen animals like that before?” he said sardonically. “We need to let an expert look, but I wouldn’t be confident of an identification.”

“And don’t forget the radar showed them descending from at least ten thousand metres,” Cooke added. “Air is thin up there.”

The group grew silent as Parlane switched on the light and turned off the wall screen. “So, what happens now?” he asked nobody in particular.

“One. Expert opinion on identification,” Ord replied, counting off on his fingers. “Two. Find out if anyone else saw them that night.” He looked at everyone in turn before raising a third finger. “Three. Try to find them.”

“Then what, after we find them?” Jean Pescos asked.

Parlane was swift to answer. “We must eradicate. Can’t have them bringing down air traffic.”

Ord couldn’t help smiling. “Let’s give the scientists a say. If they’re a rare or unheard of species it could be a different anecdote.”

The room became quiet again and Cooke stretched uncomfortably in his chair. He wasn’t convinced. Other than Vanelli, there were no bodies at the crash site. And the aerial

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attackers didn't look like anything he had seen before; alien almost. Though nobody, of course, had the balls to say so.

The road ribbon system took them directly to the front of the Caiguna police station, seaward of the Eyre Highway along dusty, unkempt side streets. Mother and son dismounted as one and strode resolutely up the path and through darkened glass doors. They found themselves in a featureless foyer where a single three-metre plant was placed strategically in the middle of a brown synthetic marble floor. A long black desk stood at the far end but there was no sign of any other exit door or, for that matter, any other person. The walls were sky blue, the ceiling white, and the effect austere.

Laura approached the desk and saw a white button labelled *Press for immediate attention*. She did as requested. A flat screen rose from the desktop and the face of Janice Mepunga stared out at them. An aura of total distrust immediately gripped Laura's mind, reinforced by unwelcome apprehension, but the image on the screen flashed a convivial smile and said, "Oh hello you two. I've been expecting you. Just one moment."

To the right of the desk, a mechanism hummed and a well-disguised door opened within the blue wall to reveal a brightly lit office beyond.

"Come through. Come through," Janice Mepunga called.

Jason seized his mother's hand and looked at her questioningly. There was a strange fear in his ashen face, and his eyes mirrored the foreboding that Laura felt within her own heart.

"It'll be fine," Laura said quietly and gently guided him through into the inner office.

Janice instantly took the wind out of Laura's sails by saying, "Look. I'm sorry about yesterday. An emergency came up. I had to leave. Sorry about leaving you with Robert, too – it was unavoidable. He tried to kill me. I knew Jason was around." Her smile grew broader. "I knew you would find him."

Shaking her head, Laura said sharply, "Maybe you did, but in what condition? It was absolutely unforgivable what you did." She threw a challenging look at the policewoman. "And Robert wasn't dead when I found him."

Janice's face hardened and Jason noticed she slowly worked her hand down to her pistol. "It was unavoidable," the policewoman repeated.

"Are there any other officers here?" Laura asked.

Janice shook her head. "My partner went to Perth this morning. It's normally pretty quiet around here, you understand, and there's plenty of air backup from Kalgoorlie." She cast a meaningful glance at her visitors before adding, "Should we require it?"

"What about a statement?" Laura asked. "Don't you want one?"

"I certainly do," Janice said, pointing to a terminal in the corner of her office. "Be my guest." She was all sweetness and roses again, in control of the situation.

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While his mother typed, Jason waited his turn. He was nervous, upset about Bradley Robert and about the loss of his photographs. His eyes hardly left Janice Mepunga, unsure in his own heart whether the alien creature was harboured inside her or whether it had moved to fresh pastures. On the drive to the station his mother had told him of Robert's dying words, and he had felt sick. He desperately wanted to know the truth but was afraid of another confrontation. And worst of all, there was no proof of anything.

"How did the ranger threaten you?" Jason asked abruptly causing his mother to pause her statement mid-sentence.

Mepunga glanced up, her face like stone. "He just did, and that's enough these days." She gestured to Jason to sit down on the chair across the desk. "Let's compile your statement together while your mother finishes hers." She initiated a recorder and leant back in her chair.

Jason shot a fleeting look at his mother and received a warning glance in return, accompanied by a small shake of the head.

"How did you get to Robert's house?" Janice asked.

"I was on the computer in the camp tourist centre," Jason replied. "He knocked me out and I awoke in a bedroom."

Despite the recorder, Janice typed as she said, "And then what happened?"

"He made me something to eat, just eggs and toast. Then he made me shower and took me into the basement."

"What about his sister from next door? Did you see her at all?"

"No," Jason said. "There was nobody else."

Janice raised her eyebrows. "Did you try to escape?"

With a shake of his head, Jason said, "He was always in my face, and twice my size."

"Even in the shower?"

Jason averted his eyes. "More or less."

"He was naked when I found him," Laura interjected. "In the basement."

The policewoman looked hard at Jason. "Did he touch you? Molest you in any way?"

Jason bit his lip. "No, he didn't."

Laura stood up. "I've finished. It's fairly short but to the point."

Janice walked over and glanced down at the screen. "Not exactly flattering behaviour on my part," she said, pursing her lips. "My statement will give my story."

Laura shrugged. "I'd still like to see—"

Jason interrupted her. "Can we go now, Mum? I need some air."

Laura saw he looked pale and distressed. "I'm sorry," she said to Janice. "Is that all for now?"

"Sure. We have your vehicle tag. Stick around the district though." She printed both statements and laid them on the desk. "Just sign these for now."

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After they had signed Laura turned to leave but paused at the door. “What happened to the body?”

“It’s been taken care of,” Janice replied. “Thanks for coming in.” It was the final dismissal. Laura and Jason left without further discourse. They moved through the stark foyer and once outside paused to breathe the fresh southern air, which was rapidly warming as the sun rose higher in the sky.

“No alien for the lady,” Laura said. “Thank God you didn’t say anything about that.”

“Not to her,” Jason said, looking at his mother fearfully. “I think it’s still with her.”

In her office, Janice read the statements again and put them through the shredder. She stood, swayed slightly, and pushed a floor panel with her foot to release the door into an adjacent room. Moving through, she closed the door behind her and stared at the uniformed body of her colleague. He was slumped face down on the desk, head resting in a pool of coagulated blood.

Suddenly, the winged alien was outside her, standing two metres away, observing with its head on one side. She sensed an instantaneous chill invade her body as the creature emerged but, once free of it, Janice felt warmer and strangely fearless. No words or other communication passed but Janice felt its mind boring into hers, trying to understand her emotions. At least she thought she did. She didn’t really want to see it anymore, was not interested in it at all, and wished it was light-years away.

“I’m sorry, Daniel,” she said to the motionless body of her partner. “I’m so sorry. I really could not help it.”

A tangle of meaningless images ran through her mind, and she turned to face her symbiotic disciple from another world. Something passed between them, intangible and outside her scope of logical thought. She asked the question anyway.

“What do you want from me? What do you want from us?”

[Get the complete novel Milijun here](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



As a youngster growing up in the cobbled streets of Stockport, UK, Clayton Graham read a lot of Science Fiction. He loved the ‘old school’ masters such as HG Wells, Jules Verne, Isaac Asimov and John Wyndham. As he left those formative years behind, he penned short stories when he could find a rare quiet moment amidst life’s usual distractions.

He settled in Victoria, Australia, in 1982. A retired aerospace engineer who worked in structural design and research, Clayton has always had an interest in Science Fiction and where it places humankind within a universe we are only just starting to understand.

Clayton loves animals, including well behaved pets, and all the natural world, and is a member of Australian Geographic.

Combining future science with the paranormal is his passion. ‘Milijun’, his first novel, was published in 2016. Second novel, ‘Saving Paludis’, was published in 2018. They are light years from each other, but share the future adventures of mankind in an expansive universe as a common theme.

In between the two novels Clayton has published ‘Silently in the Night’, a collection of short stories where, among many other adventures, you can sympathize with a doomed husband, connect with an altruistic robot, explore an isolated Scottish isle and touch down on a far-flung asteroid.

He hopes you can share the journeys.

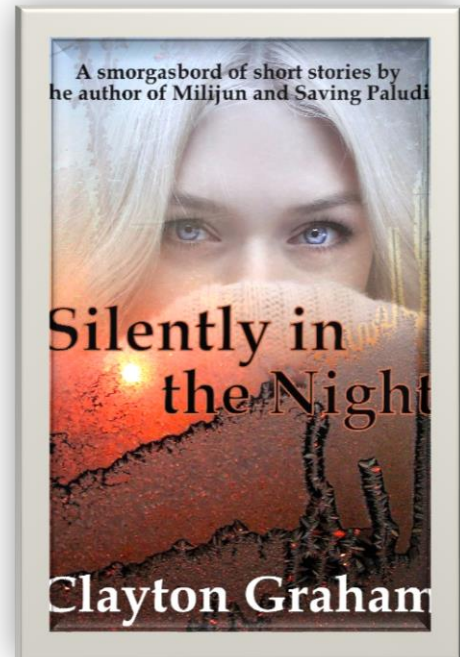
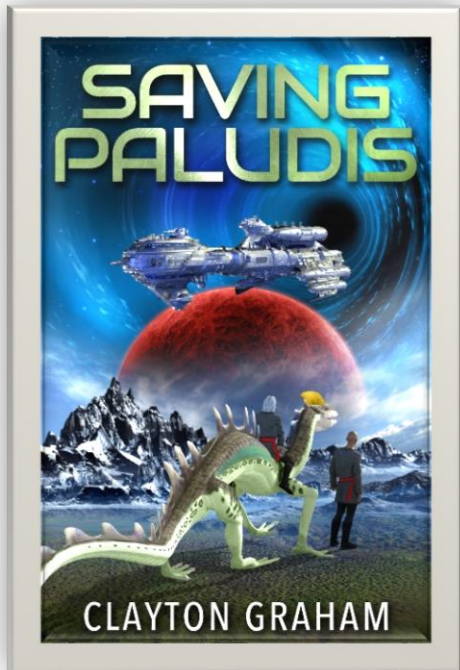
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