Frank Herbert once wrote: “A beginning is the time for taking the most delicate care that the balances are correct.” It is clear that he never had to write a thesis, because then he would have known that it is actually the very last piece of text you write that is the most delicate.

This thesis is the result of almost 10 years I have spend at this institute: first as a student, later working on my thesis. All the people I have met over the last decade have in some way shaped this thesis (and me in the process). Since I can not possibly mention everybody, let me start with a general thanks for everybody who helped my ending up where I am now: Thanks! There are, of course, some people I would like to address in a bit less general way.

My first thanks goes out to my supervisors, Willem Baan and Marco Spaans. We have been working together for about 6 years now, ever since my master project, and it has been an absolute pleasure. You have thought me a great deal about science, how to do science and, most important, how to enjoy doing science. I am sure we will work together again in the future. But it was not all science, I also enjoyed our personal contact. Willem, I will miss the marathon chatting sessions in your ofce and I hope we will go observing again in the future (to raid the Narrabri beer fridge together). Marco, I enjoyed our meetings and how they could range from science to science fiction and everything in between. I also have fond memories of the nice dinners we had, we should keep up that tradition. All and all, I think I can say that I started with two great supervisors and I ended up with two great friends.

Of course, my time here would not have been the same if it wasn’t for the people at the institute. Kapteyn always felt like home. First of all there are “the guys”. Erwin and Christiaan, I’ll miss the after lunch coffee breaks, even if Erwin would usually try to kick me out. They were a big part of the social life at the institute and I really enjoyed all the conversations we had. Niels, thanks to you I actually had somebody to talk to during the breaks, when Erwin and Christiaan were too busy. Also thanks for having a sense of humor so similar to mine that we would drive people crazy at some times. And of course, a very big thanks for your help with the cover of this thesis. Chris, the institute has not been the same since you left. I missed your subtle humor and the effect it had on Christiaan. Paul, too bad you left. It was always fun to share the funny games or cool programming tricks we found. I hope we’ll see each other more now that I am moving in “your” side of the country. Attila, thanks for showing me around in Sydney, it is nice to have friends all over the world.
Matthijs, good luck arranging your wedding. Trust me: you did the right thing, not waiting until your last year. To all of you I would like to say: It was a great time, guys, and I hope we’ll run in to each other often in the future.

I would also like to thank the other students. All those different cultures together made for fun and interesting discussions and made the institute a unique place to be. Next I would like to thank the people who made my life easier here: Eite, Martin and Wim, thanks for tolerating my annoying questions, and Gineke, Hennie, Jackie and Lucia thanks for helping me sort out all my administrative mess.

And how can I forget my room mate. Roberto, you are the best room mate and friend I could have ever wished for. I don’t think there was any day we didn’t have fun in the office. Or outside of the office for that matter. Thanks for making the last four years so nice. But, our office was not complete without our “permanent guest”, Seungyoup. SY, thanks for all the fun conversations, dinners and movie nights. I am sad you had to go so suddenly. I wish you all the best in the world and hope to see you again one day.

Ik wil uiteraard ook mijn familie bedanken. Jullie zijn de basis waar ik altijd op kan bouwen. Pap en mam, bedankt voor het onvoorwaardelijke steunen van mijn keuze voor een onzekere toekomst in plaats van een “echt vak”. Martijn, Janneke, Yno en Annemieke, bedankt dat jullie me met beide voeten op de grond houden door te laten zien hoe een “normaal” leven er uit ziet. Menno, Bastiaan, Teun en Daan, jullie zijn stuk voor stuk schatten!

The biggest thanks I saved for last. Ali, I owe you more than you can ever imagine. You have changed my life in a way I could have never thought of and made it so much better. Whatever will come on our path in the future, with you next to me it will all be easy. ¡MUA!

Edo Loenen
Groningen
September 2009