

# Keyweilder

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*A portion of a chapter from my Science Fiction Novel - called "Dreamland: Fortress Earth."*

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<b>Chapter 1 - Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Chapter 2 - Keyweilder</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Chapter 3 - Encounters</b>	<b>11</b>

# 1 - Introduction

Howdy

The selection gives a taste for what the whole novel is about, and happens somewhere in the middle of the story. I hope to avoid ideas being stolen before I can get the book published, yet I am looking for criticism and thoughts at the same time, so I am taking a risk and revealing this to you folks. Please help me by adding comments, and keep in mind this is very much a rough draft and will be edited

## 2 - Keyweilder

### Chapter 7: The Keywielder

Chapter 7: The KeywielderChapter 7: The KeywielderDuke moaned and sat up slowly. The air was strangely cool. He opened his eyes, startled, and looked down at himself. Duke rubbed his hands over his bare chest and realized he was wearing nothing but a rather skimpy loincloth.

A cool breeze hit him again and Duke stood slowly to look at his surroundings, lit by the silvery light of an enormous blue full moon in a starry sky. The moon appeared as large as Duke's own arm span, as if he could reach up and hug it from the sky. Duke felt his feet sink into the soft sand of the violet beach he was on. A dark body of water lay to his right stretching out into blackness but reflecting the moonlight and stars perfectly, without even a ripple.

The violet beach was littered with conk shells of a deeper purple, and it stretched on as far as his eye could see, curving slightly to his right. A monstrous cliff wall that also ran as far as Duke could see in the light of the giant blue moon bordered the beach. The cliff wall sparkled as tiny gleaming gems and other larger crystals protruded from the face. Duke was awestruck at the sight.

Duke was not sure if he should move, but he began to walk anyway. Slowly Duke began to remember where he had been. He thought of the battle, the sudden alien attack, the odd hover tank as it had fired on the one he was in, and he remembered the pain of loss . . .

"I must be dead," muttered Duke to himself.

The wind shifted, and on it Duke swore he heard a female alto voice giggle.

Duke spun one eighty.

"Hello!" Duke called.

There was no answer. Just the soft breeze blowing that somehow did not disturb the water. He was completely alone.

Duke walked down to the waterfront. The sand became damper, and he bent over to look at his reflection in the moonlight. He peered thoughtfully at the reflection.

To it he said, "Will we see them again soon, pal?"

To Duke's utter surprise, his reflection smiled back at him and winked, but Duke was not smiling. Duke gasped and fell backwards onto the sand.

What was going on here? What was this place?

Duke forced himself to relax, and noticed that his footprints from before in the sand were rapidly disappearing. He sat there for several moments, contemplating this strangely beautiful place. He pinched himself, trying to determine if he was awake.

Duke looked up at the moon again, its strange features were unfamiliar. Looking closely, Duke could make out a spiral pattern in a darker gray hue working its way out of the center of the moon.

"I guess I'm stuck here," Duke muttered.

The laughter that Duke had heard earlier rang out again, only this time crisper, and more directional. Out over the dark placid sea a white light appeared. It was headed towards him, and as it grew larger Duke could make out the figure of a person. This person was *emitting* the light.

The figure approached to within a hundred yards, and it became clear that the figure bathed in an aura of light was a woman. Duke could not help but stare as he stood slowly. As he did so, the sand fell from his body neatly back into place without sticking to him. Duke was barely aware of this because he was even more amazed when it occurred to him that the woman was walking on the water. Her footsteps made single light splashes on the water, but no ripples appeared outward from her feet.

Duke blushed as he realized the woman was completely nude, the only modesty provided by the pure white curls of her hair falling neatly over her breasts. From ten feet away Duke could tell the woman was about a head taller than he was, with bronzed skin and piercing silver-blue eyes that glinted in the moonlight. The woman wore a coy smile as she approached, and Duke heard himself stammer for a greeting.

Duke managed one single syllable "*helk!*" sound as the woman gracefully bounded in three floating leaps of a master ballerina on the balls of her feet, and then kissed Duke full on the mouth as she pressed her body to his. Her arms clutched gently around his waste and pulled him onto his toes so she would not have to stoop to deepen the kiss.

Duke had to admit that woman was firm yet curved in all the right places, and as he forced himself to breathe Duke caught the faintest scent of honeydew in the air. Duke was stunned and confused, but finally he found the presence of mind to push away, and he staggered backward.

"Hey!" He gasped. Listen you're hot and all but this is a bit fast for me.

The woman merely smiled playfully and strode toward him again.

“Now I *know* I'm dreaming,” said Duke. “Girls are never *this* interested in my just by looking at me.”

The same alto laugh rang out on the wind, and then it physically came from the woman who was now twirling herself around behind Duke. The woman embraced Duke from behind, palming his chest with both hands and giggling.

“It's no dream, love,” purred a voice in Duke's ear that made his spine tingle.

The woman kissed Duke's neck softly, and Duke immediately grabbed her hands and freed himself from the embrace. He turned to face the girl, holding her hands to keep her at arms length.

“Listen,” Duke said. “Dream or not I'm not ready for this, you see I just . . .”

The woman giggled again, cutting Duke off.

“You seem ready enough to me,” the woman said with a laugh, her eyes and smile indicating the place where Duke's loincloth was no longer hiding his excitement.

“That's not fair!” Duke said with an embarrassed whine as he turned away and tried to cover himself. “How do I dream me up some clothes?”

“I said this is no dream,” purred the woman again. “We have called you here.”

“And I'm not dead either,” said Duke matter of fact-ly.

The woman shook her head and smiled. “Not yet, anyway.”

“Then, where am I? What is this place? Who are you?”

As Duke asked this, the woman pushed towards him again, with a mischievous glint in her eye. Duke matched her by stepping backwards.

“Why so many questions?” cooed the girl. “All will be answered in time, and here we have all the time we need. Let us *enjoy* this time, love.”

She flipped her arms over and stepped back all at once. Duke felt himself be drawn onto the tips of his toes, and he began to fall forward towards the woman. As he fell, Duke let his left knee relax, and he regained his balance at a forty-five degree angle to the girl instead of falling on her. This movement pushed the woman back on her heels. The woman astonished Duke when, instead of taking a step backwards, as Duke wanted, she pivoted on the balls of her feet and rotated her hips into Duke.

Duke would have fallen flat on his face, but instead fell forward and lowered his left arm and shoulder into a roll. Duke came neatly to his feet and faced the girl, who was already walking toward him.

"You've trained in Aikido?" Duke asked curiously.

The woman giggled. "No but you have."

"Well of course I have!" said Duke exasperated as the woman bounded forward, her hand brushing down his stomach and searching.

Duke pivoted backward like a swinging gate, drawing the woman forward a step. Duke placed his arm behind the girls and continued her motion forward as he said, "but what does that have to do with what you know?"

The woman recovered her balance after several stutter steps. The woman made no move to continue toward Duke. She merely regarded him with a mischievous glint in her eye. "You have a fascinating mind dear Duke," the woman said. "Among other things"

The woman licked her lips slowly, and then she sighed and shook her head in resignation. Yet the lustful glint in her eyes remained as she scanned Duke's body.

"Very well," the woman said. "We are within what would best translate as a Time Seal."

"Translate?" Duke asked, frowning his brow.

The woman nodded. "I am not of your world, love," she explained. "We are connected within your mind for purposes of communication, but this place is beyond telepathy. You see, we are in an extremely small instant in your mind. The instant is so small that in this place, time has in effect stopped. The technology that allows me to be here holds open that space between our dreams and reality."

Duke nodded, thoughtfully. "So then where are you really? Who are you really? You probably don't look like . . . like . . ." Duke gestured at the woman with a sweep of his hand. "This. Do you?"

The woman laughed a genuine laugh, no longer the playful giggle. She raised her gaze to the moon thoughtfully.

"Our language is a bit musical in nature, love," the woman said after a moment, "but you can call me Luna. Yes, I think I would like that."

She gazed at the giant silver orb of the moon for a moment longer, before looking back at Duke.

"And I do look like this, for the most part. You share my mind after all, just as I share yours. In fact, this place is from my mind. But you are correct in a way; I have been hiding something. Please forgive the deception, but your people have a tendency to mistake us for religious figures. I will show you now."

The woman spread her arms straight out to the side palm down and tucked her chin in with her eyes closed. Nothing happened for many moments, but the breeze began to blow heavier than Duke had ever felt it before.

Slowly something unfolded from Luna's back to either side of her, and it took Duke a moment to realize he was looking at wings. They were beautifully feathered in white and streaked in glittering silver, and as the unfurled completely they reached about meter and a half to either side of Luna. She folded them gently around her body, demonstrating flexibility and control.

Luna flung them open with a snap, and with a mighty flap took to the air. She hovered in front of Duke, then glided around him in a slow circle.

"You are staring," remarked Luna. "Do you like what you see?"

For emphasis, Luna caressed herself seductively from her waist to her breasts as she floated lower above Duke.

Duke averted his eyes and turned away, embarrassed.

"I've seen a lot of things recently I never dreamed of," replied Duke softly. "But you didn't call me to this . . . place . . . just to give me a show. Did you?"

Duke shaded his eyes with one hand and turned slightly back toward Luna to speak as directly to her as possible.

"I mean . . . really . . . would it have hurt to let me wear some more cloths? Now is not exactly the best time for hanky-panky, even with stopping time and all, or, err, whatever."

When after a short moment there was no answer, except for some heavier breathing, Duke risked a glance up at the strange immodest woman.

Luna had floated higher, and had apparently decided not to stop touching herself at her breasts. She had her eyes closed and was biting her lip. She was giving no indication that she was paying Duke any attention at all.

Duke tried very hard to be annoyed, and cleared his throat loudly.

"Excuse me!" Duke said loudly. "Do you mind?"

Luna's eyes flew open with a start.

“My apologies, love,” Luna said as she floated herself back to the ground. “I am not used to such rejection, and I often try to ignore the fact that your kind does have that strange affinity for clothing.”

“It's not really rejection,” Duke began. “It's just that . . .”

Luna had folded her wings in front of her for a moment and tucked her chin to her chest. Presently as she unfurled her wings she revealed she was now wearing an impossibly tight shimmering silver body suit. The suit opened just below her navel to expose her bare abdomen. A criss-cross pattern of thin silver was enough to barely cover her nipples.

There was no way she would not be popping out of that suit as she moved, thought Duke. Yet as Luna folded her wings behind her and walked a few steps toward Duke, the material clung to her body without being disturbed.

“Is this better, love?” Luna asked casually.

“Well . . .” Duke hesitated. In a way it was almost worse, inviting a little too much imagination, but he just nodded.

“What about me?” asked Duke.

“It's as you suspected, love” Luna answered. “Just *dream you up* something. We are in your mind. Simply be in what you wish to wear, and you shall be.”

It was easiest for Duke to return himself to the flight suit he had been in, only clean and crisp and not covered with the grime of battle.

Luna frowned and shook her head slowly.

“Hmm, Pity.” She pouted. “A great many women of your world proclaim such love for men in garments such as this. I still do not understand.”

“About our world,” Duke gently changed the subject. “I get the feeling you brought me here to let me know what the hell was happening to it.”

Luna nodded.

“I have come to tell you that you are in great danger, love”

“No kidding. Thanks a bunch,” Duke remarked dryly.

“You were chosen for a great responsibility,” Luna continued ignoring Duke's sarcasm. “Your enemies will mark you soon as a special target of interest, if they have not done so already.”



“Chosen?” Duke asked. “Listen, if you mean the thing that alien gave me it sort of fell on me by accident, I certainly wasn't chosen!”

“Yet you were chosen. It was a great risk that pilot took to crash his ship on your world. Her people observed your fight in the air, and with little time available to them, chose you as a keywielder.”

“Right,” said Duke, who was beginning to feel more and more confused as the conversation went on. “I'm a keywielder now. Got it. What's so special about that?”

“There are secrets that have been kept hidden on your world,” said Luna. “Many secrets that were not supposed to be kept, and some that were. I can not reveal them to you now. You hold the power as a keywielder to unlock those secrets, and perhaps save your people.”

“What do you mean you can't reveal them to me?” Duke asked, feeling almost insulted. “Couldn't you just save me a world of trouble?”

“I am forbidden by our own laws,” Luna replied. “The peoples of this galaxy have agreed upon laws based on the level of advancement of civilization. We are far too advanced to be directly involved in this conflict without consequence.”

“Whatever,” huffed Duke. “Those creeps attacking our world are obviously way more advanced than us. So much for the law.”

“I speak not of a few hundred years difference,” replied Luna. “but thousands or even millions of years difference. It is regrettable that your world has been caught in the middle of a conflict between the Drag'oos and the Gnesis. We can not interfere directly, but we have interest in your people's survival. Therefore, I have been authorized to warn you, and serve as your guide.”

Now Duke really was starting to get annoyed. Even angry. He had not expected to be still alive, let alone met in this strangely beautiful place. Yet this Luna seemed to be just wasting his time with more riddles than answers .

“Alright,” said Duke. “So I'm in great danger and the thing I'm carrying is a key to unlock secrets. None of this is really new to me. Unless you can help me destroy the Dragoons or the knee-sees or whatever took everything from me, I'll just thank you for your time and be on my way. And in case you hadn't noticed, my way is about to be very dead very soon, so all of this is pretty much for nothing anyway, isn't it!”

A look of true sympathy on Luna's face made Duke realize he was shouting, and began to take some deep breaths to control his breathing.

“Your friends will not let you die here as you has planned,” Luna said solomnly. Luna stepped toward Duke, her face more urgent.

“And you must please realize how important you have now become, and

you must not give up! More is at stake than can possibly be understood by you at this point, but in time, you too will come to understand. I ask for you to trust me for the time being.”

As she said this, Luna had stepped forward and placed her hands on Duke's shoulders. Duke had only stared back, unblinking. After several moments, Duke sighed and smiled at Luna.

“I suppose you do *look* trustworthy enough,” commented Duke. “But it would be nice to know *something* about how to fight these aliens.”

“There are more threats than the Drag'oos, the ones who attack your world for its power. Watch the shadows, love, for there is more at work on your world than it seems. Avoid using satellite communication. Your enemy can exploit this, and has left you your satellites in hopes of doing so. Your destination is correct, but I would advise traveling by vehicle as little as possible. This is all I can tell you for now. I will contact you again when the time is right. Do be careful love”

“Hold on,” Duke said quickly as Luna began to back away.

“Where are you really? Why are you really helping me?”

Luna smiled and waved, ignoring Duke. “One more thing, love. Try not to be so upset about what you have lost. Weapons such as the Drag'oos used tend to not just destroy but transport things elsewhere.”

Duke stopped, furrowing his brow. “What are you trying to say?”

“I am saying that all may not be lost for you, love,” Luna said with a smile.

With that Luna spun and vanished. Soon after, the sand began to blow, and the waves rolled in. The crystal violet world collapsed back into darkness for Duke

### 3 - Encounters

The flattened forest had provided plenty of timber to choose from. Duke had easily constructed a crude travois to carry his friend. He dragged her across the loose ground, careful not to fall into another sinkhole. Duke lost count of how many times he tripped. His legs and ankles were becoming sore. Duke paused to check on his friend.

Mindy had been slipping in and out of consciousness, but had not been able to converse clearly. Her breathing was still very shallow, and Duke felt he was running out of time for her. If he could just make it to the highway, which should lie just a few more miles to the south, he might find a ride and give Mindy a fighting chance.

Duke wasn't only worried about his friend. He was beginning to feel a sense of urgency to get back to Eglin. Whatever had the power to shake the earth as it did, and flatten the forests had surely caused unimaginable damage to the nearby cities. His wife and son lived on the base, and he feared for their safety. He pressed forward.

As he resumed his trudge through the broken swampland, a strange feeling slowly came over him, growing steadily in intensity. The hair on the back of his neck stood on end, and he had the feeling of being watched. He stopped and glanced around, but saw nothing. Just flattened pine forest. He heard nothing but the wind and his own labored breathing.

Then something was *calling* him. A soundless voice, beckoned him to come east. Duke did not know why, but he felt compelled to follow. It felt like a cry for help. He began to see images in his mind, as if he were daydreaming. He saw in his mind's eye an image of a craft he had become all too familiar with recently. The image of a half-buried, bent and broken black triangular spacecraft came to him. East was not the direction of the road. Mindy did not have time for Duke's mind to play tricks on him, but the call was so strong. The *feeling* Duke had was too urgent. He could not refuse.

Dragging Mindy with him for another quarter of a mile he found it. A place where the ground had dropped away to form a new sloping cliff, the craft rested in a narrow ravine. From where he stood he could see into the cockpit in the forward section of the craft.

He stiffened. The being inside was looking back at him. The creature looked like every alien he had ever heard described by one of those people claiming to be abducted. It was the visage that was posted on t-shirts and every U.F.O. fanatic's convention button. Large dark moist eyes peered unblinking at him from a round gray head. There was no nose, and a small slit for a mouth completed the expressionless face.

Was this for real? Now Duke was convinced he was hallucinating. Duke recalled some show he watched on a cable channel about how aliens like this were supposed to be some kind of spooky scientist aliens,

tagging abductees like animals and inserting things into unpleasant places. Yet, this one had clearly been the pilot of the fighting spacecraft they had seen go down shortly before them. Duke understood that this being was a warrior by all accounts.

A trapped warrior. One who Duke understood now had been calling *him* for help. He looked at the alien, then at Mindy. He didn't have time for this. Besides, there was no guarantee this one was friendly just because they were enemies of the obviously hostile aliens in the red ships. As he thought this, an image appeared again in his mind's eye. It was an image of a healthy Mindy, and a feeling of goodwill.

Duke shook his head to clear it. What was going on? Suddenly he understood, staring into the dark eyes once more. The alien was *communicating* with him. A very strange way to communicate indeed, Duke thought.

Duke set down the travois, and started down toward the ship. The ship was half buried at an odd angle, and Duke realized this was not the original crash site. The alien had stayed inside the vessel during the attack of the weapon? Some sort of feeling he got looking at the alien as he approached confirmed his suspicions. So it was a weapon then. That meant\_. "Oh no," he breathed. Duke forced the negative thoughts from his mind and searched for a way to free the creature. He would have to break the canopy somehow. He picked up a good-sized rock.

Another image came to him, this time of Duke opening a compartment on the side of the spacecraft by touching the surface in certain key areas. Duke went to an area of the craft that looked similar and tried touching it in a few places. Nothing happened.

"Ummm, show me again, please," Duke said out loud timidly.

Nothing came to him. Duke closed his eyes and pictured himself in a bewildered shrug. The image came again, then and Duke was able to touch the spacecraft in the correct five places. A small door hissed open and a box the size and shape of a good sized brief case slid out into Duke's hands. The box was silver with a sort of weird star symbol on one side. He touched the star and the box opened. The next "hallucination", as Duke thought of them, was an image of himself using a small cutting tool. The tool looked like a dentist's pick and had a small green flame. Duke set the box down, grabbed the appropriate tool and set to work freeing the creature.

The job was done in moments. Duke cut a circle in the clear material. It was defiantly tough, whatever it was, and Duke's rock would have been a futile effort. The alien inclined its head to regard him.

"Eh, heh heh," Duke laughed nervously. "Alright you're free buddy. Climb on out."

The alien's dark eyes continued to stare, and then it looked down at its own body. The creature's four-fingered hands were clutching its side. Slowly the alien looked back up at him. Duke understood, and he was not thrilled.

"Awwwwww," Duke whined. "Alright. Fine. Sure. Whatever. You better not be heavy, or I swear I'll leave your alien a\_"

Duke cut off his tirade with a grunt as he hauled the alien up and out of the ship, grabbing the creature

under its arms. The alien was not all that heavy. The hardest part was done, and Duke easily carried the creature up the hill. It still clutched its side, and was wearing a dark black and silver jumpsuit of some sort.

He set the creature down and it sat. It pointed back down into the ravine at the box that Duke had retrieved the cutting tool from, and then it lay back onto the soft ground. As he went to retrieve the box, another image entered his mind. This time Duke saw an image of what he recognized as the inside of the cockpit of the alien ship. Duke saw himself touch another weird symbol about the size of his hand on a sort of side console. It was a triangle with strange squiggly lines inside it. Duke shook his head and rubbed his eyes with one hand. This sort of communication was starting to annoy him.

He turned and looked back up at the top of the barren hill at the Alien and Mindy.

“How long have you been watching us?” Duke called up to them. “Ever seen our movies? Ever heard of translation robots?”

Duke shook his fist in agitation as he said this. Then he strode towards the cockpit and did as shown.

The triangle glowed a dull white as he touched it, and a low tone sounded. Through the center of the triangle an object seemed to phase directly through solid material. It was a small pyramid that began to float a few inches off the console, suspended by some unseen force. It was clear but sparkled with many different colors. Duke snatched the object up and climbed back out of the cockpit. He took the object and the box back up the hill.

As Duke approached the alien it turned its head to look at him, and another vision entered his mind's eye. This time he was shown how to remove an item that looked like a small tuna can without any markings. When he pinched it between his fingers, it expanded liquid like into a larger can. Tapping the top twice caused the can to open. He was to apply the gray jelly-like substance to all of Mindy's wounds and burns. When he had done all this, Mindy's burns began to steam and bubble. Rapidly, the jelly substance began to disappear, and the black and blistered skin progressively was replaced with fresh new bleach white skin where her burns had been. Moments later, Mindy's eyes fluttered open and she awoke with a moan.

She sat up slowly. She rubbed scratched at her shoulder and looked down at it, perplexed.

“Where Am I?” she asked. She noticed Duke first. Duke braced himself.

“Uh, Mindy, now don't freak out . . .” Duke began, but he was too late.

Mindy had seen the creature lying next to her. Her eyes flew open wide. She began a series of squealing screams as she crab walked backward; dirt went flying as her feet slipped on the dusty, shaken ground. She backed into a torn and frayed tree stump where she stopped and pointed at the alien.

“W-what is that thing?” she stammered, breathing heavily.

The creature turned its head to regard her, and she squealed again.

"It-Its alive!? Duke, did you see that, it mo- .."

Duke interrupted her, taking a few steps to squat in front of her.

"Hey! Hey! Cool your jets, Mittens."

Duke placed his hand on her knee and shook it gently, getting her attention as he spoke.

"He means us no harm. I helped him, and he gave me this stuff that healed you." As he said this, Duke gestured to the box next to the alien, and then back to Mindy. She calmed visibly, but she remained wary. She took a deep breath.

"How did it get here? How long was I out after\_" She trailed off, her eyes never leaving the aliens. She stared straight ahead for a few moments.

Duke frowned, he was about to try and snap her out of her thoughts, when she shook her head and wiped her eyes. Duke knew what that meant.

"Uh, that's the way he talks. You get used to it after a while."

Mindy regarded Duke thoughtfully, and then stood up. "Creepy," she said.

"What he tell you, or um, show you?" Duke asked.

Mindy walked over and knelt next to the alien, no longer afraid.

"He showed me how he crashed. He showed me his view of our planes. It was all like some weird instant replay. Ummm, I think he respects us, or something. He\_how do we know it's a he anyway?" She looked at Duke who shrugged.

Duke had a sudden and strange feeling of amusement that wasn't his.

"Anyway," she continued, "I think he's dying."

Duke started toward the briefcase-sized box. Mindy stopped him. "Umm nothing in there will do any good." She paused, considering. "Do you have a little pyramid thingy?"

Duke nodded, removing the small object from his pocket. It sparkled like a diamond. Mindy whistled low.

"Yep, that's it," she said.

At the appearance of the object the alien raised a slow tired arm and pointed at it. Duke knelt beside Mindy and presented the object. Instead of taking it, the alien placed his hand on Dukes wrist. What followed was the longest vision Duke had seen from the alien. It was so long that Duke felt he was in a dream that came of full sleep, not a daydream.

It started with the small pyramid object. Then the object morphed into a computer disk, which was being inserted into a personal computer. Then the floppy disk morphed into a large key. The key opened a silvery metallic door, which was floating in darkness. Light peaked out around the frame of the door. The door began to open, a white light shown brightly but before he could see what lay on the other side the white light flashed intensely causing Duke to shield his eyes.

When he opened them, Duke found himself alone on a highway at night. It stretched as far as the eye could see in both directions. He held the pyramid in his hand. Dark figures rose from the ground on either side of him. The figures crazed the item in his hand. Duke involuntarily felt his hand close around the pyramid, no, the key. His knees relaxed and he readied himself. He would protect the key at all costs. The dark shapes became shadowy figures of men. They were not to be trusted. Then Duke was in space, high above the earth. Duke recognized the landmass that was North America. Suddenly he was falling. His gut twisting as he descended quickly through clouds. He was over the western United States. He fell even further; memories of Air Force Red Flag exercises came to mind. He was over Nevada, descending into the same airspace used for Red Flag. The fall continued. He was over an area of land he did not recognize, but he was over an airbase, a shape no pilot could mistake. Specifically, it was a military airbase. He was standing at ground level at that airbase, and he moved quickly into a large hanger. He passed quickly by several sleek looking aircraft of a design he had never seen before. Alone at the back of the hanger was a small console that was blank except for a small square hole.

The vision shifted. Suddenly the dream became a nightmare. A nightmare of what to Duke felt like memories. So varied was the parade of images though, that it would have been impossible for them to be memories of a single person. He saw through the eyes of alien pilots and witnessed through the cockpit battles that raged on many worlds. The worlds involved ranged from the orbits of gas giants, worlds with pink, purple, or even green skies, even worlds with more than one sun. He danced through these skies at speeds he could barely comprehend. He fought with and around ships of all sizes and shapes. Many were similar to the ones he had encountered in the skies over the gulf, but there were many others. From gigantic dark pyramid shaped ships to small silvery ovals and saucer shaped designs. The blood red organic shaped ships were the constant, engaged in every battle. Then the pace shifted away from dogfights to glimpses of events both spectacular and terrible.

Duke got just a glimpse, one at time and in rapid succession, of strange structures, crystalline cities, and underwater habitats before some unseen tremendous force obliterated them, twisting and bending into nothing. Species after species became engulfed in fire and destruction. Surprisingly to Duke, many of them were human looking. A massive malevolent ground force hunted them down. Large spiked turtle shell shaped vehicles hovered close to the ground, spewing forth green flashes from several sharp looking turrets. Next to these a sea of beings clad in scaly blood red armor marched forward. They were shooting any living being that they saw with what looked like a deadly black claws that were grafted into the top of the forearm of the armor. The claws stuck out at least a foot past each hand and spat the same familiar green energy blasts from tips that looked menacingly sharp. Gloved hands concealed long fingers that looked sharp at the tips. The armor seemed durable but light, covering the entire body of the beings and capped off with a fearsome helmet. The helmets were streamlined and tapered down into a pointy cone where the "mouth" would have been on a human. The tip of the cone had slits that could have been some sort of breath filter, making the helmet appear as it were a mini rocket-launching pod. Whatever wore the helmets apparently saw through a shaded visor in the helmet, which consisted of two large circles nearly on the sides of the helmet which were connected by a thinner rectangular strip across the front. These warriors had the support of various types of close air support and artillery. Duke

understood he was seeing a race of beings that conquered and destroyed, and left nothing behind in their wake. It was obvious that Earth was next, and mankind listed for extinction.

Duke came back to himself with a start. He checked his watch. They had lost nearly an hour. He was breathing hard and was sweating. So was Mindy. Duke looked at her curiously.

“You saw that too, huh?”

Mindy nodded.

Duke turned back to the alien.

“No.” Duke shook his head. “Uh Uh. No way! No! Get someone else to be your little errand boy. I've got a family to find, I've got to keep them safe, I've got to\_”

He stopped. The alien's hand went limp, and dropped from his wrist. Duke knew it was gone. There were no eyelids to close. Mindy helped Duke bury the creature in the loose earth-shaken ground next to its ship. Duke didn't know what sort of beliefs the alien had, but he erected a small marker anyway. All this was done in silence. After a few moments Duke turned and looked up at the sky.

“What do you think it all means?” he asked Mindy.

Mindy hesitated, and then said, “That pyramid must be important, and we need to take it somewhere, and put it in the control box. I didn't get that whole fall from space part.”

Duke began to walk back up the hill, fingering the small pyramid. “I recognize the area. It's the Red Flag range. You missed the last go around didn't you?”

“Yeah. My in-process date for Eglin was delayed a little. So what?” Mindy shrugged as she asked this.

“So.” Duke let the word drag out. “There is a particular air base out there in that range that is so off limits it has a no fly zone over it.”

Mindy stared. “You mean\_”

Duke nodded. “Where Elvis lives. Dreamland. Area Fifty One, whatever you want to call it.”