

SKYGUARD-1 THE AEGIS

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Prologue

JUNE 30, 1908 – 6:31 AM

At sunrise on June 30, 1908, the area near the Tunguska River in Siberia was the site of a tremendous explosion that had the force of a modern hydrogen bomb. Although the explosion flattened trees for kilometers in all directions, no crater was formed, and aside from some microscopic nodules extracted from the soil, no recognizable fragments of an extraterrestrial object remain. Space scientists with Skyguard, the U.S. government agency responsible for cataloging and tracking asteroids, comets, and other near-earth objects, generally agree that the explosion was caused by a small comet that disintegrated in midair. Various UFO enthusiasts in Russia and elsewhere, however, have suggested that the blast was atomic and was created artificially...

Chapter 1

MONDAY, JUNE 14 – 4:52 PM

Diane Colston had promised she would be at her granddaughter Jennifer's soccer game without fail. She had every intention of being there, but she had badly underestimated the time it would take her to deliver Mrs. Kane's wedding cake.

The mother of any debutante living in Bartlesville, Oklahoma knew that having a wedding that wasn't catered by Diane Colston would be a serious *faux pau*. Diane's wedding cakes, as well as her other pastries and confections, were the heart of her catering business, and her services were so sought after that the lead time on a "Reception by Diane" was six months. It seemed to most clients that six months should be more than enough time to plan and deliver food for a wedding reception, so they were hard put to understand why she was always running behind. All agreed, however, that Diane's services were worth waiting for, even if it meant slipping the nervous bride-to-be another tranquilizer or two.

In fact, Diane Colston was late for everything, which prompted the old joke about being late to her own funeral. Because of her attempts to be reasonably on time to various events, she was also known as a lead-footed bitch when she got behind the wheel of her Suburban Utility Vehicle.

Jennifer's soccer game had already started by the time Diane left the Kane estate on the east side of Bartlesville and headed for the sports complex, which was located on the southwest edge of town. As she raced south on Price Road, she ran through a mental list of the various routes she could take to cut down her drive time. She had done this so often that her selection was based mainly on which streets she could grossly exceed the speed limit without being spotted by patrolling police cars.

The sports complex was accessible by two major roads. Diane knew that these roads would be clogged with soccer traffic, but she remembered a route which might allow her to avoid the traffic. It wasn't a paved street, but rather an asphalt and gravel road which wound through what Bartlesville residents presumptuously called "Circle Mountain," which was a range of large hills encircling the town—hence the name—and ended up just south of the sports complex.

This road had been particularly popular in Diane's youth because of its many twists and turns, its isolation, its suitability for car racing, and especially for a legend associated with the road. The legend concerned a slave who had escaped during the Civil War and had hidden—and been brutally murdered—on that road. It was said that a lantern carried by his ghost could be seen bobbing up and down along the road at certain times if the moon was just right. (A variation of the legend had it that this slave had lost one of his hands which had been replaced by a hook, which device had ended up stuck in the door handle of a car, etc. etc.) The Underground

Railroad, which was a foot trail running from Texas to Kansas used by runaway slaves, did indeed pass directly through this area, so the legend had some basis in fact, and the road had been known as "Nigger Gap," back in the days before it became unacceptable to use the "N" word; modern city maps listed it simply as "The Gap."

One of the more popular pastimes in Bartlesville during the 60's—besides parking along the road and watching for the bobbing light, among other in-car activities—was to "Shoot the Gap" from one end to the other, driving as fast as possible, and then boasting about it at school the next day.

All these memories ran through Diane's mind as she turned at the eastern entrance to the Gap. It was in much worse shape than she remembered; years of non-use and neglect had reduced it to not much more than a rutted dirt road. She wondered if anybody still shot the Gap and who the current record-holder was. From the looks of it, nobody ever drove down there any more.

She recalled the Gap as being about ten miles long, with several sharp right-angle turns, several railroad crossings, and a one-lane timber-decked bridge across Sand Creek. This is not the way it used to be, she thought sadly as she sped down the road. Behind her SUV, clouds of dust swirled in horizontal tornadoes. Trees on either side of the Gap formed an opaque green canopy, creating a tunnel and blocking the view around corners. There was no traffic to be seen. She glanced at the LCD clock on the dashboard and noted that she was twenty-two minutes late to the soccer game. She accelerated.

As she flew over one of the railroad crossings, she noticed the dusty, X-shaped "Railroad Crossing Look Out For the Cars" sign and smiled at the old spelling joke. She saw that the tracks were brown with rust—even the train had abandoned the Gap.

In the same general vicinity as the Gap was another road which meandered through the woods, marked by white crosses painted on telephone poles along the way. On this road was another part of Diane's youth: Gravity Hill. Gravity Hill was really spooky because you could park your car at the bottom of this hill—a slight incline, really—turn off the engine, put it in neutral, and your car would slowly creep *up* the hill. Supposedly, one of Mr. Scott's high school physics classes had investigated this phenomenon as a class project and the results had been confiscated by the U.S. Air Force, who promptly classified them as Top Secret.

Diane was now twenty-nine minutes late to Jennifer's soccer game. She had no idea how long such a game was supposed to last but she knew that if she missed one more of them she would never be forgiven. There was no traffic anywhere in sight. She accelerated.

The road made a 45-degree turn towards Sand Creek and the one-lane bridge. After the bridge it was a four-mile straight shot to the end of the Gap at Highway 123. Diane remembered that you had to line yourself up exactly with the center of this bridge because spanning its length were two narrow sets of wooden planks which were just wide enough to accept your tires. Of course, there was an actual bridge floor under the planks, but this was made of small boards running crosswise and everybody knew that if your wheels ran off the planks and onto the boards, your car would break through the floor and the bridge would likely collapse. She laughed to herself as she recalled how young girls, including herself, lifted both feet off the floor as they crossed the bridge to avoid becoming pregnant (not by the bridge, of course.) Thirty-three minutes late.

Slowing slightly, she lined up the SUV with the bridge and prayed that no one was doing the same thing on the other side. She panicked momentarily as she wondered if the SUV's wheels

were too wide for the planks, but by the time she had completed the thought she was safely across the bridge. Damn, she thought. I forgot to lift my feet.

On the far side of the bridge, the road was extremely bad: the creek had been out of its banks on numerous occasions and had deposited several inches of silt across the roadbed; subsequent rains had eroded the silt and dug deep channels. Overhead tree limbs drooped and slapped the SUV's windshield; roadside foliage grabbed at its bumpers. Diane knew she should slow down but she couldn't—she had *promised*.

Abruptly the woods ended as the road passed a meadow. Sensing that she was nearing the end of the Gap, Diane floored the accelerator. She was now traveling at seventy-two miles per hour.

MONDAY, JUNE 14 – 5:23 PM

Charlie Redwing had been up since dawn with a sick dog. Spending long hours with sick animals was nothing new for Charlie; over the years he had nursed dogs, cats, cows, sheep, pigs, chickens and goats through all sorts of ailments. Zeke, the dog in question, was Betty Conkel's, and he had driven over from Pawhuska to "doctor" the mutt. Charlie was not a licensed veterinarian, but he had a way with animals and was well-known around Oklahoma's Osage County. He would not have bothered with Zeke except that Betty's long-dead husband Fred had been Charlie's friend and he knew the dog personally.

The dog appeared to be unable to move its hind legs; its breathing was raspy and labored, and its nose was warm and dry. All it could do was lie on its cushion, pant, and roll its big brown eyes at Charlie. Zeke was at least fourteen or fifteen years old and Charlie knew that there was nothing he could do, so he had spent the entire day making the old hound as comfortable as possible and waiting for the end.

Betty had driven over to the grocery, leaving Charlie and Zeke alone in Betty's ramshackle house along the Gap. Charlie lifted Zeke and carried him out to the front porch so he could at least see the outdoors he had so loved to roam in his younger years.

Charlie sat on the front porch steps and stuffed his pipe with tobacco, trying to figure out the best way to tell Betty, but he reckoned that she probably already knew that Zeke would be joining Fred soon, leaving Betty with no one but her cat. Charlie lit his pipe and ruminated about Fred and all the other friends he had lost in recent years. Hell in a hand basket, he thought.

He rapped the pipe against the stairs a couple of times to knock out the dottle and was just about to re-stuff it when he heard the explosion. "Wonder what the hell that was," he said to Zeke. Zeke didn't answer—he was snoring softly. Charlie stood up but could see nothing through the trees. He looked through the screen door and saw that Betty's ceiling fan was still whirling around so he ruled out a power transformer explosion.

Charlie stepped off the porch and walked down the driveway to the road. To his right, about a quarter mile down the road toward the meadow, a column of greasy black smoke was beginning to rise. His first thought was that something had happened to Betty's pickup and he began running toward the smoke. As he got closer he noticed that it was not coming from the road but out in the meadow about twenty yards or so. Charlie was not used to running—particularly a quarter mile—and by the time he got closer the smoke had increased its intensity. He could see that it was coming from some sort of vehicle which had left the road, because a portion of the barbed-wire fence was gone and he could see deep ruts in the meadow running from the road to the wreck. He started to cross the drainage ditch but the heat was intense, and

now a slowly-widening circle of grass around the wreck was burning. Seeing that there was nothing he could do, he walked back to the house and dialed 9-1-1.

MONDAY, JUNE 14 – 5:46 PM

Deputy Sheriff Ed Bagley received the radio call from the dispatcher as he was dozing in his cruiser behind a billboard on Highway 123. As he looked to the southeast he saw the plume of black smoke over the treeline. He pulled out onto the highway, hit his lights and siren, and headed for the smoke.

He swung left off of Highway 123 and into the Gap. As he pulled up abreast of the wreck, he saw Charlie and Betty standing on the roadside. He stepped out of his Crown Victoria, checking his reflection in the rear view mirror to make sure his ten-gallon Stetson and his sunglasses were adjusted just right. "Alright, people, what've we got here?" he said in his most authoritative voice.

"Not sure," said Charlie. "Didn't actually see it. I was sitting on the porch—Betty wasn't here—and I heard this explosion. Walked down the road and saw that thing burning in the field. Fire was too hot to get real close, so I came back and called you guys."

"Well," said Bagley, straightening his tie and loosening his gun in its holster a little, "I'm going to go have a look. You stay right here—this is official police business and I don't need no civilians messing up the crime scene."

"Whatever," mumbled Charlie.

Bagley got a Polaroid camera out of his trunk, crossed the drainage ditch and walked along the ruts toward the wreck. The fire had burned out, but wisps of smoke were still emanating from the charred grass around the twisted mass of metal. If this is a car, he thought, it's the shortest car I've ever seen—whole thing can't be more than five or six feet long. He saw no reason to radio for paramedics or an ambulance; if there was a body in the car it couldn't have survived the crash.

Something else about the crash site was even more strange: the charring did not form a circle around the vehicle but rather a perfect *semicircle* about 30 feet in diameter. Grass on the forward side of the vehicle—what would have been the other half of the circle—had not been touched.

Bagley walked slowly up to the fringe of the charred grass and stared at the scene. He did not want to step in the black ash because it was still smoldering and he knew it would mess up his carefully polished boots. He turned to his right and began walking around the border of the fringe, snapping pictures of the vehicle as he went. He looked back over his shoulder and saw that Charlie and Betty were still standing on the road.

A few more steps and Bagley would be able to see the front of the vehicle. He turned toward the wreck and began sidestepping to the right, camera raised to his eye. On his third step the right side of his boot struck something hard, followed by his leg and arm. He lost his balance and fell backwards, dropping his camera and his hat in the process.

More surprised than injured, Bagley stood up and looked around to see who he had run into, but the spectators were still up on the road. Must have stumbled over a rock, he thought. He picked up his hat and his camera and began retracing his steps around the fringe of the ash. This time he was watching the ground when his head struck the obstacle.

"What the hell's he doing out there?" Charlie asked, and began walking toward Bagley, who was rubbing his forehead. "Hey, are you all right?" Charlie called out.

"Stop!" shouted Bagley. "No, wait! Come here—but walk slow and don't step in the black area."

Charlie stumbled to a halt, then began walking slowly toward Bagley, who was now moving in slow motion with arms outstretched, like someone in a dark room feeling for a light switch. Suddenly Bagley froze. "Charlie," he said over his shoulder, "come up behind me and stick your arm out next to mine real slow. Tell me if you feel anything."

"Uh, feel anything like *what*?" Charlie asked.

"Just do it!" barked Bagley, still motionless.

What an asshole, thought Charlie, but he did as he was told. As his outstretched hand came even with Bagley's, his fingertips contacted something. He placed his palm flat against the "something." Whatever it was felt cool and smooth.

"What do you feel?" whispered Bagley.

"It's like a piece of slick glass," replied Charlie. "What're you whispering for?"

"Keep your voice down, I don't want *her* over here," Bagley hissed. He pulled his hand back and rapped the "something" lightly with his knuckles. It sounded and felt as if he were knocking on a concrete wall. "Okay Charlie, we both felt it so I'm not crazy. There's some kind of invisible wall here, and I think the car smashed into it. Here's what we're going to do: we're going to walk back to the road, just like nothing's wrong. I'll be damned if I'm going to write up a report that says a car crashed into an invisible wall in the middle of a field, so I'm going to call the sheriff, and while I'm doing that you're going to take the old lady back to the house. Make up any excuse you like—unexploded gasoline, maybe. I don't know what the hell's going on here, but this ain't no ordinary car wreck. And Charlie, don't you dare tell anyone about this—I'm deputizing you right now and swearing you to secrecy."

MONDAY, JUNE 14 – 6:54 PM

After calling in on his radio, Deputy Bagley returned to the crash site and checked to see if the invisible wall was still there. It was. He thought about feeling around to see if there was an edge to the wall, but the weirdness of the situation got to him, so he returned to his cruiser and rolled a joint while he waited for backup.

It took an hour for John Greyhorse, Sheriff of Osage County, to arrive at the crash site. Greyhorse was a rotund, cigar-chomping sheriff, but despite this stereotypical image, he was an honest and thoughtful officer. Although the Osage County Sheriff was an elected office, John did not play politics, relying on his excellent service record for continued reelection.

"Okay, Ed, this better be good—I was clear over in Nelagone on account of that fight at the snooker parlor last night. What's so damned secret you couldn't tell me over the radio? This isn't Homeland Security, you know."

"Yeah, well, if it ain't now, it probably will be."

"What the hell's that supposed to mean?"

"It'll work better if I show you."

Bagley showed him the wreck and had him feel the invisible wall. John lit a cigar and blew smoke at the wall. "Look at that!" he cried. "The smoke bounces right off!"

"Well, whoopty doo. So what is it?" asked Bagley.

"I don't know, but we better get these people out of here, barricade the road, and call somebody who knows what this thing is. Who else knows about this?"

"The old lady knows about the wreck, and Charlie knows about the wall, but I deputized him."

"Good thinking. Well, I'd like to keep this in our jurisdiction, but I think we're out of our league here."

"Yeah, but looky here: what if we call somebody in and that wall *vanishes* or something before they get here? We're going to look really stupid."

"We'll have to call *somebody*; some kind of professional, somebody *discreet*, that can verify this wall without blabbing it all over the place. Then, if it's still there, we can decide what to do."

"Do you have somebody in mind?"

"Yeah, I do. Fox Mulder, *The X-Files*."

"Who?"

"Oh, never mind. Go check on Charlie and Betty. And Ed—if you breathe a word of this to anyone, I'll add your scalp to my collection."

John Greyhorse knew that if there really were an "X-File" department at the FBI he wouldn't find its phone number in the blue pages of the phone directory, but he did know someone who might be almost as good. He also knew he had to do something quickly; whoever was still in that vehicle would be missed. If there were any remains, the chances of obtaining forensic evidence would quickly deteriorate.

He found some metal stakes in his trunk and wrapped crime scene tape around the crash site, then he walked up to the house. Charlie and Betty were sitting on the porch and Bagley was towering over them with his hand resting on his gun. "Good gawd, Ed," he said, "Charlie and Betty aren't vicious criminals; back off. Sorry, folks. Here's what we got down there: somebody came tearing along the road, lost control and ended up in the field. Standard crash and burn, not the first time it's happened. Used to have all sorts of kids racing through here. Problem is, there's a natural gas pipeline out there in the field and all sorts of spilled gasoline laying around. Could blow up any minute and start the whole place on fire. Hell of an explosion. So what we're going to do is, we're going to barricade the road about a mile either side of the field."

"John Greyhorse, we both know there ain't no natural gas pipes anywhere around here," said Betty. "We all got propane—what in the hell are you talking about?"

"That's just what I want you to tell anybody should they ask," replied John. "Now Betty, this is official sheriff business. Can you do that for me?"

"Well you're the Sheriff, so I guess you know what you're doing."

"Thanks, Betty—I appreciate it."

He instructed Bagley to block off the road at the Highway 123 end with his police cruiser. After Bagley left, he showed Charlie how to work the remaining cruiser's flashers and the radio. "Turn the flashers on as soon as you block the road, then take the shotgun and stand outside the car so you can see oncoming traffic. If anyone gives you any trouble, shoot them in the foot. Remember, now: big natural gas leak, gonna blow up the whole area any minute now. Don't let anyone headed this direction through except for a guy named Dave Powell—let him through when he shows up. Drives a black jeep-looking thing called a Hummer. Oh, and leave me the keys to your pickup."

As soon as Charlie was out of sight, John called his dispatcher on his portable radio to say that he and Bagley would be 10-10 at the scene of an accident until further notice. Then he went into Betty's house and made a phone call.

Chapter 2

On the northwest side of Bartlesville rises a series of large hills, part of the Circle Mountain chain formed over the millenia by the Caney River. In the early 1950's, the federal government appropriated the highest of these hills, blew off the top to form a plateau, and erected several strange, cylindrical buildings capped by huge white domes and a number of low concrete buildings festooned with various antennas and microwave dishes. A concrete bunker housed a generator which supplied electricity to the entire installation.

Halfway down the hill, the government built some houses, a small strip mall, a church, and a school. At the bottom of the hill, on the only road leading to the summit, a guard station was erected. A ten-foot high chain link fence topped by barbed wire surrounded the entire hill and completed the installation—a totally contained, self-sufficient compound.

The townspeople—they called themselves “Bartians” (not to be rhymed with “Martians”)—were told by the government that the compound was a "weather station" run by the Weather Bureau and had been built because of tornadoes. To date, Bartlesville had never been hit by a tornado, although Tulsa, some fifty miles due south, had been struck several times. Okay, thought the Bartians, so why not build the thing in Tulsa?

The workers on the hill rarely came into town, but there was a steady stream of traffic between the “radar base”—as it came to be known—and the airport, where the government had erected its own huge hangar. The workers all wore casual civilian clothes, as might be expected of weathermen, but the base was visited often by blue cars full of U.S. Air Force officers, and the guards were all Air Police—the Air Force equivalent of MP's. Military planes took off and landed at the airport at all hours of the day and night. Strange, thought the Bartians.

After a couple of years, amidst rising speculation as to the true nature of the radar base, the Air Force changed its story and announced that the base was really part of the "early warning network," designed to detect enemy (Soviet) aircraft laden with A-bombs. This startling revelation came as no surprise to the Bartians, who had suspected something of the sort all along.

Speculation now shifted from what the radar base really was to whether or not its presence marked Bartlesville as a Soviet atom bomb target. To quell these fears, the Air Force went on a public relations campaign. They conducted tours and periodic open houses to show off the whole operation. A new, domeless antenna was built on a big concrete pedestal, complete with floodlights and blinking strobes. This antenna could be seen clearly from the bottom of the hill, so that everyone in town could see that the U.S. Air Force was doing its job of protecting the residents of Bartlesville from the evil communists. Periodically, this "public" antenna would abruptly cease its incessant rotation and slew to a distant point in the zenith where it would quiver with excitement like a dog on point. "The radar," explained an officially cute Air Force spokeswoman, "has now locked on to an aircraft and is precisely tracking its progress. Radar

operators, in the bunkers behind me”—she hooked her thumb back over her shoulder—“are determining its identification, configuration, and destination. At the same time, radar antennas located in the domes above us are tracking other...things. If the aircraft in question turns out to be friendly, as is usually (?) the case, the operators will disengage the aircraft and the antenna will resume its rotational search pattern.”

To further the public relations effort, the Air Force formed alliances with the local Civil Air Patrol, the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, and the ham radio club, and officers from the radar base were invited to speak at civil events, churches, and on KWON, Bartlesville’s only radio station. Gradually the base and its crew were assimilated into the local culture and the whole thing was essentially ignored.

Suddenly, in 1979, the Air Force announced it was closing the base because its equipment had become obsolete. The antennas were removed, the buildings were bulldozed, the fence ripped up, the guard house torn down, and the staff relocated. All that was left were the residential facilities, which were boarded up and abandoned. Eventually, someone bought the land, refurbished the houses, and opened Bartlesville’s newest housing division.

One of the radar base’s electronics experts had been David Powell, a brand-new lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force with a brand-new Ph.D. from the University of Kansas. Lieutenant Powell was placed in charge of a permanent team to research and recommend upgrades to the base’s complex radar systems. In 1971, then just twenty-three years old, he supervised the replacement of all the obsolete vacuum tube-based systems with modern solid-state electronics. In 1975, he was promoted to the rank of Captain and became the base’s Director of Operations, a post he held for two years until he was promoted to Major and became the Base Commander.

Powell was born and raised in Bartlesville and his wife Susan had grown up in Lawrence, Kansas—home of the University of Kansas. When the Powells were given the opportunity to move from Lawrence to Bartlesville, which was roughly the same size and social elevation as Lawrence, Susan was willing and Dave was thrilled. Bartlesville was home to Phillips Petroleum Company, Cities Service Oil Company, Price Pipeline Company, the Reda Pump Company, and the National Zinc Company—all very successful organizations which attracted highly-educated employees and pumped millions of dollars into the local economy. Bartlesville at the time was designated an "All American City," but it was also the subject of several tabloid articles with titles similar to *Bartlesville: City of Sin*. All in all, a very exciting little burg of 35,000 academically elevated and relatively wealthy residents.

The Powells had three children during the ten years Dave was assigned to the radar base, and after twenty years of military service, he retired from the Air Force with full pension, still young enough to start another career. The Powell children attended college, got jobs, and eventually moved from Bartlesville to start their own lives.

In 1989, Susan was diagnosed with cancer. Two years later, she succumbed. After her death, Dave sold their house and moved to an apartment in Bartlesville’s famous Price Tower, the only skyscraper ever designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Dave traveled for a year but soon became bored without Susan, so he set himself up as a technical consultant to various oil companies, where he spent most of his time engrossed in designing new seismographic equipment for oil exploration.

The Powells had been fascinated with the Native American culture in and around Bartlesville, and they had become close friends with several Osage Indians, including John Greyhorse and his wife Callie.

Shortly after Susan's death, John invited Dave to make several trips to Pawhuska, Oklahoma to participate in various Osage Indian activities and rituals. After one of these rituals, which had involved the consumption of copious amounts of firewater designed to lubricate the flow of information, Dave and John had a conversation.

"So Dave— what are you going to do now? What are your plans?"

"I haven't really thought about it, John. Susan has been my life. I mean, the kids are important too, but they're all scattered to the wind and they have their own families to take care of. When I worked at the radar base, I had my work to keep me occupied. Maybe I'll get back into something like that."

"I wouldn't think there'd be much call around here for a radar expert, would there?"

"Sheesh! Radar expert. If you only knew what I really did."

"What— you weren't a radar expert?"

"Oh yes, I was a radar expert all right, but that was just a smoke screen."

"So what did you do all those years at the radar base?"

"John, you wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"Try me. I've seen a lot of strange stuff in these hills over the years."

Dave was silent for a minute. "Okay, John. Needless to say, this stays between us. Not that anyone would believe you anyway."

"Agreed. So tell me."

"Have you ever heard of something called 'Project Blue Book?'"

"No. What is it?"

"*Was*—Project Blue Book no longer exists—not in its original form, at least. It all started in 1947, the date of two flying saucer crashes in New Mexico*. The government got concerned about the possibility of extraterrestrial visitors and the threat they might cause. Because of all the flying saucer sightings—everybody calls them Unidentified Flying Objects or UFOs—the government created two projects: Project Blue Book to investigate all these sightings and determine if they were a threat to the United States, and Majestic-12 to collect and analyze alien material and technology.

"Project Blue Book collected over seventeen thousand reported UFO sightings. They investigated them all and stated that most were all either natural phenomena—ball lightning, genuine aircraft, weather balloons, Venus, swamp gas, and so on—or hoaxes. They issued a public report that in their opinion, UFOs did not exist and therefore did not offer a significant threat to the U.S., then they announced that they were closing down the project."

"But what does that have to do with the radar base?"

"I'm coming to that. Regardless of Blue Book's public statements, not all the sightings were explainable—over seven hundred were unknowns. The Air Force got tired of second-hand reports and decided to conduct its own search. The purpose of the radar base, and others like it, was to search for, and identify, UFOs, as well as other supposedly alien activities."

* Dave has summarized the history military UFO investigations. Specific details concerning Projects SIGN, GRUDGE, BLUE BOOK, and MAJESTIC-12 may be found in the *Afterwords* section at the end of this book. Reference material may be found in the *For Further Reading* section.

"I assume that since the base was shut down in 1979, no one never found any UFOs."

"Let's just say that the base was not shut down, just relocated. Project Blue Book went underground and became a part of 'Skyguard,' which is, to the public, another name for a governmental interagency group in Arizona called 'NEAT,' or Near-Earth Asteroid Tracking. Actually, NEAT is only a small portion of Skyguard. The base is still around; it's just out of sight."

"You mean it's still in Bartlesville? Where is it?"

"What's the *one* building that wasn't demolished when they tore down the base?"

John thought a moment. "The hangar! The hangar is still at the airport!"

"That's right—you have a good memory. The hangar has five levels above ground and four levels below."

"But doesn't that hangar belong to some commercial aviation company?"

"Yes—Pendragon Aviation; they're kind of a flying circus. They do a lot of air shows with classic and vintage aircraft, and they have a aerobatics team of World War Two P-51 Mustangs that do stunts and mock dog fights. Of course it's just a front for Skyguard."

"But where are all the radar antennas?"

"Radar technology has changed since the government built the original base on the hill. We use much higher frequencies so the antennas can be very small—small enough to fit in the penthouse of an aircraft hangar. All of our visible microwave dishes and antennas look perfectly normal for an airport hanger."

"Wow. Okay, so why was the base built in Bartlesville, of all places?"

"Several reasons: first, Bartlesville is fifty miles from the nearest interstate, so most traffic in and out of the city is by people who have Bartlesville as a specific destination. Tourism is not a significant part of the economy, so we don't have crowds of rubber-neckers roaming around. Second, we picked Bartlesville originally because of its somewhat mountainous terrain, which was important for the old radar systems. Third, Bartlesville is significantly more upscale and liberal than most cities its size, and a sophisticated radar base was more likely to be accepted there. Those reasons were important, but they weren't the main one. You said you've seen a lot of strange things in the hills around here, John. What sort of things have you seen?"

"Oh, lights in the sky, lights that flash on and off and follow your car at night, strange noises, stuff like that. I've even had a couple of people claim that they were kidnapped by aliens from outer space. I could go on."

"No need—I've heard about, and investigated, them all, including some incidents you *really* wouldn't believe, and I'm not talking about crop circles. The tri-state area—Oklahoma, Kansas and Missouri—has been a hotspot over the years for strange activities. That's the main reason we built the base in Bartlesville."

"Jeez. That's amazing," said John. "I never would have guessed."

"Nor has anyone else, so far. I probably shouldn't have even told you, but I know I can trust you to keep this to yourself. Well, it's late and I think I've said enough—the booze has worn off enough for me to drive, so I'd best be going. Remember, I told you nobody would believe you if you told them!"

Chapter 3

MONDAY, JUNE 14 – 8:07 PM

The sun was beginning to sink as Dave Powell pulled his Hummer up behind Charlie Redwing's old Ford F-150. John Greyhorse walked over as Dave climbed out and shook his hand. "Hey, Dave— thanks for coming, I appreciate it."

"Anything for an old friend like you," replied Dave. "Whatcha got? No oil wells around here, so it must be something else."

"It's something else all right," said John. "Remember that conversation we had in Pawhuska about the old radar base and Project Whatever-it-was?"

"Project Blue Book. Yeah, gosh—that's been several years ago. Why— you see a flying saucer or something?"

"Not exactly. You weren't kidding me about that radar base, were you?"

"No, I wasn't. What's going on, John?"

"Follow me."

The invisible wall was right where John had left it. Dave felt its smooth surface, then slid his hands around. "My god," he whispered. "It really exists."

"What? What really exists?" asked John. You know what this is?"

"If it's what I think it is," replied Dave, "it's something called an 'energy shield' or 'force field.' As far as I know, we're not even close to having the technology involved to make one."

"Energy shield? What the hell is that?"

"A kind of wall created out of energy. Science fiction authors love to write about these things. Maybe their predictions were correct."

"Come on, Dave—science fiction?"

"Sure, like the shield around the USS *Enterprise* on *Star Trek*. Don't you watch television?"

"Only when Callie makes me watch those stupid reality shows. So you're telling me that we have some kind of wall made out of energy here?"

"Maybe, although it wouldn't be a flat wall—probably a dome with some sort of generator or projector at the center." He slid his hand along the surface until it contacted the ground. Finding a stick, he dug down several inches adjacent to the surface. "Doesn't stop at ground level— keeps on going. Not just a dome—maybe a sphere." He stepped back several yards and hurled the stick at the surface. It bounced off and fell to the ground. He retrieved the stick and hurled it at the wall as high as he could throw; again it bounced off the surface. "It's at least thirty feet high," he said. He retrieved the stick and placed its end against the surface. He slowly pushed on the stick, trying to puncture the surface, but the stick did not move. "Completely opaque— not appreciably permeable or elastic."

"Opaque? Come on, Dave—I can see right through it!" cried John.

"Opaque to matter; in other words, nothing material can get through. Because we can see through it, it's not opaque to light. Makes me wonder about the wave/particle duality theory."

"Well, theories are great," said John, "but I'm in deep shit here. Bartlesville Police Department had a call from"—he checked his notebook—"a Ron Colston about his wife, who was supposed to be over at the sports complex. She never got there. Judging from the time, I think that wreck is all that's left of Missus Colston and her car. It's been two hours since the police got the call, and I've been sitting on this until you got here—at some point I've got to call it in. Also, I've had the road blocked off for over an hour and people who live around here are going to start asking why. Natural gas leak is fine except that there is no natural gas in this area, and there aren't any gas company trucks around."

Dave thought for a minute. "I realize that this is a tragedy for the Colston family, but Missus Colston is going to have to go missing for awhile. If this got out, I can guarantee that there would be ten thousand people in Bartlesville inside of twenty-four hours, not counting every news agency in the world.

"Okay, John; first thing we do is, you get more deputies over here to make sure *nobody* gets in or out of this area; keep them at the barricades, don't let them come down here. It'll be dark pretty soon, so I don't think we have to worry about anybody wandering around this field at night, but I'll stay here just to make sure—I keep a sleeping bag in the Hummer. Keep up the story about the natural gas leak for now. We're going to have to call the federal authorities—best we do it now, because they'll be here soon enough anyway. I still have some contacts in Skyguard, so I'll make the call."