

# APOCALYPSE DAWN

AARON SEVEN



A SHORT STORY BY  
DENNIS CHAMBERLAND

## APOCALYPSE DAWN

By Dennis Chamberland

The plague was not just uncontained – it was *uncontainable*. It had originated from a Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency laboratory as a genetically modified organism and was euphemistically tagged as a virus that was ‘inimical to higher life forms’. The Defense Department’s own under-speak was partially responsible for the lack of judgment when it came time to keep the insidious little strand of RNA safely locked inside its glass tubes and dishes. But after three very wrong moves in what the investigation described as “a serial failure of containment”, the little bastard ended up on the bottom of Staff Sergeant Polly Markus’ high heel, and eventually in a downtown Manhattan bar on Ladies’ Night Out. In a mere 72 hours, more than 25,000 people were dead in the Naked City. By the seventh day – and a fierce debate over whether or not to nuke the city (as they should have done no-later-than the 96<sup>th</sup> hour) – it was far too late for the planet. The nervous-Nelly politicians and all the hand wringing in the world could no longer reverse what had become history’s ultimate *fait accompli*.

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Aaron Seven stood in the study of his mentor, Dr. Raylond Desmond, deep in the Tennessee forest. Two hours before, Seven had been plucked out of an horrific jam in Atlanta traffic by a military helicopter. It was a total mystery to Seven how they had found him at all. Even he had not had a good idea of where he was when the long wire sling was lowered to him from the hovering chopper. Had he not already been stuck in the endless grid lock for more than four hours, he would never have accepted the ride on the end of the long rope for reasons he still did not at all appreciate.

The military men were steely and efficient but altogether uncommunicative. No matter how many times Seven asked the ‘why’ question, they did not answer. They simply flew him fifteen short minutes northeast of Chattanooga and left him standing alone on an uninhabited bluff overlooking the Sequatchie Valley. Less than ten minutes later, a yellow and black civilian Hummer driven by a large, enigmatic man in gargoyle sunglasses, picked him up, navigated back roads through the deep woods and delivered him to Dr. Desmond’s study at his estate called Stonebrooke. The man briefly identified himself as Joseph Blake – aka ‘the Commander’ – and then abruptly left the room where Seven was left alone, once again.

“Ah, Aaron, so good to see you,” Desmond announced sincerely, entering into the large, well apportioned room whose glass wall overlooked a frothing, white stream just a few feet outside the crystal, clean windows.

Seven nodded with as much decorum as he could muster but could not shake his flat, tense smile. “And you, Professor,” he responded with a nervousness he could not hide.

“Sit, please!” Desmond said, as he settled himself opposite Seven.

Seven took a seat across from his mentor, a Nobel Laurite and one of the most famous physicists in the world. He had not seen or spoken to Desmond in nearly three years but time had been kind to the older man. His beard was slightly greyer, but the professor wore the same confident and winning smile he always had.

Desmond stared back at Seven, a 30ish man of lean build, well apportioned and athletic in appearance. Inquisitive brown eyes peered intensely at Desmond from beneath the brown hair falling lightly across Seven's intelligent brow. His countenance bore a natural smile and exuded a confidence he could not hide. Seven was dressed in what those who knew him considered his 'uniform of the day' – blue jeans, a long sleeved cotton T-shirt and a pair of New Balance sneakers.

"Aaron," Desmond began earnestly, "please forgive the drama of the military evacuation, but time is of the essence."

Seven nodded his pardon, adding, "I should thank you, Professor. I was definitely looking for a way out of that traffic jam. A helo with a sling was somewhat more dramatic than I had considered, but a very effective way out nonetheless. However, there are two considerations..."

Desmond had anticipated the first issue and handed him an envelope. "Inside are enough funds in the form of a cashier's check to purchase a replacement for your automobile. I am sorry if this has seriously inconvenienced you."

Seven looked inside the envelope and whistled. "Wow! You must not have done a Bluebook lookup on my car!"

"We wanted to be fair, Aaron," Desmond replied with a smile that strongly hinted he never expected Seven to actually cash the check. "And what was your other consideration?"

"The doughnuts," Seven stated flatly. "The dozen freshly baked Krispy Kreme glazed doughnuts."

Desmond shook his head, a puzzled expression begging the question.

"That was why I left my apartment in the first place," Seven continued. "I was out after a dozen doughnuts. I had slept in, then woke up and was planning to take Interstate 85 as a shortcut to the closest Krispy Kreme. I had no idea I would end up in terminal gridlock. I figure if you knew where I was in traffic and knew how much my car was worth that you could at least take care of the doughnuts," he quipped, smiling back at the professor with his infamously wicked sense of humor.

"We estimated your car's value and located you by cell phone triangulation. We had no idea where you were actually heading or why," Desmond retorted with what could have been slight irritation. He looked behind Seven and spoke to an unseen figure, "Serea, can we possibly locate some doughnuts for our guest?" Looking back to Seven, now having lost all sense of gentleness, Desmond stated flatly, "May we get down to business?"

Seven nodded sheepishly with a nervous smile.

"I take it by your comments that you have no idea of the mounting crisis?" Desmond asked.

Seven shook his head. "Sorry, Professor. I returned from a week on the Appalachian Trail late last night. I slept in then woke up and drove out on I85 immediately. I forgot my SIRIUS-XM radio and the car's radio died years ago so I haven't heard any news in about a week. Does the crisis have anything to do with the traffic jam?"

Desmond sighed and smiled a patient smile. “Then you really have no idea?” he asked Seven.

Seven shook his head again.

“A cover story has been released by the government – against my most adamant advice – to the effect that New York City has been attacked by a terrorist biological weapon. Unfortunately, rumor has spread faster than the government can control it and it is also now widely circulating that other cities have been attacked – such as Atlanta. That was the reason for the traffic situation. Unfortunately, the simple truth would have prevented much of this unbridled chaos, which is probably only going to get worse. And now, as I warned them would happen if they followed this course, the government has absolutely no credibility at all.”

“Do *you* know the truth?” Seven asked inoffensively.

“Yes, unfortunately I do,” Desmond responded. “New York City was not attacked with a foreign biological weapon. As far as we can tell, the biological agent was unintentionally spread to the city by a DARPA laboratory technician.”

“So the crisis *is* biological and the organism is one of *ours*?” Seven pressed.

“Yes,” Desmond admitted.

“And the antidote?” Seven followed up as a simple, logical, matter-of-fact detail.

“There is none,” Desmond responded with a full scowl. “They were working on that.”

Seven smiled and nodded his head slowly, more out of irony than humor. “*They were working on that...*” he whispered loudly enough for Desmond to hear. Seven looked up at Desmond and leaned toward him. “What is the plan to stop it, Dr. Desmond?”

Desmond sighed deeply and looked down at his desk. He shook his head slowly and then returned Seven’s stare. “There is none. This is an honest-to-God E.L.E. – in the parlance of Homeland Security – an ‘extinction level event’. It is far too contagious and moving far too fast to ever contain. I’m afraid we’ve screwed the proverbial pooch this time, Aaron.”

Seven looked back to his mentor, but his eyes were focused elsewhere. “Is it infective to humans only?”

Desmond nodded. “As it was designed, yes.”

“And what are the numbers on natural resistance?”

Desmond looked pale. “There isn’t any natural resistance. It is 100% fatal to 100% of those who are infected. It is specifically targeted to the genius *Homo sapiens*. It was intentionally designed for absolute lethality.”

Seven nodded slowly, then looked back to Desmond. “So exactly why did you pluck me out of permanent gridlock and bring me here? I’m a bioengineer of macro systems, not a bioengineer of microorganisms. And you are a physicist. I don’t get any of these connections.”

“Your doughnuts, Dr. Seven,” interrupted a seductive voice from behind him. Seven turned to see a tray of doughnuts held by the most astonishingly beautiful woman he had ever seen. He opened his mouth to speak but a large part of his cerebral cortex had just been roasted by a massive surge of testosterone. The fact that the world was melting down outside the windows suddenly lost any consequence. He just sat there

staring at the tray held by the angelic vision and it was all he could do to keep from actually drooling.

“Ah, Aaron, I would like to introduce you to my daughter, Serea. And Serea, this is Dr. Aaron Seven of whom I have been telling you.”

Serea nodded and smiled at Seven, looking him directly in the eye.

Seven’s rational mind refused to cooperate. He stared back at this woman of approximately his own age, with crisp grey eyes and long, flowing dark hair. Her face was perfectly formed, her nose slightly upturned and her body and breasts appeared to have been symphonically arranged by a supernatural presence just to force the male organism into permanent excitation. Her sheer image demanded fecundity and demanded it *now*.

“I’ll just set them over here,” she said to him with a sparkle in her eye, ignoring his temporary paralysis, obviously recognizing the intensity and depth of his anguish.

Desmond stood to his feet and announced urgently, “Dr. Aaron Seven, I have called you here to join me in saving a remnant of humanity until this plague runs its course. The disease cannot be contained. But we can engineer an isolated community of survivors and you have the unique talent to help us build a bioregenerative life support system that is completely self-contained.”

“It won’t work, Professor,” Seven responded flatly, returning his eyes to Desmond with much effort.

“And why not?” Desmond snapped.

“Because you cannot seal any facility, however well conceived, against a weaponized airborne viral attack, no matter where you attempt to conceal this hideout. This agent of death is less than microscopic – no filters are truly effective. And all you need is for one of those microscopic bastards to get inside – *just one*. The odds *will* catch up, and no matter where on earth you position it, the virus *will* get inside. It’s the perfect nightmare and certainly no rational human or government would *ever* permit *any* work on such a doomsday weapon,” Seven added sarcastically.

Desmond relaxed and sat down. He smiled and looked back at Seven for several uncomfortable, irrational seconds. Then he said bluntly, “Ah, I forgot to mention – our facility isn’t on earth!”

Seven blinked twice, his mind not fully comprehending this newest assault on rationality.

Desmond stood and held up his hand, circumventing Seven’s inevitable onslaught of questions and abruptly ended the interview with the statement, “Aaron, meet here in the morning at 0600 when we will depart. Joseph, please show Dr. Seven to his quarters.”

The Commander was now standing in the place where Serea had stood. The angel with the Krispy Kremes had simply disappeared.

Seven turned around to speak just as Desmond left the room.

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The next morning, Desmond, Seven, the Commander and Serea departed Stonebrooke aboard Desmond’s private executive helicopter on a northerly route with no announced destination. Seven sat beside Serea and directly across from and facing

Desmond and the Commander. Serea was reading some papers but occasionally stole a glance at Seven, which made him more than just a little nervous.

“Aaron, let us discuss the details of your assignment. I am certain you wish to know the answer to the ‘where’ question. After detailed consideration of the many possibilities, we have decided our colony will be located on the surface of the moon.” At that point, Desmond stopped speaking to allow his words to sink in.

“The moon...” Seven responded mockingly. “You’re just gonna load up your ark and fly away to the moon – just like that? With no notice and no warning and the most infectious agent ever unleashed on planet earth right on your heels?”

“Yes; that’s partially correct,” Desmond replied confidently.

“And what is your crew size?”

“127, counting yourself and one relative or friend of your choosing.”

“What am I missing?” Seven asked, still stunned. “The Apollo lunar lander weighed in at 15 tons. It was all the Saturn V could handle and only allowed two men to live on the lunar surface for three days max before they had to return to earth or die. The upgrade unit is the Altair Lander which is three times the mass and handles a crew of four astronauts. But its lunar surface stay time is still only up to 210 days – and that’s only if the site is pre-loaded with supplies.

“So if the Saturn V is a museum piece and the Altair Lander is the penultimate technology, then how are you planning to transport 127 humans to the lunar surface and keep them alive indefinitely?”

“I always appreciated your frankness, Aaron,” Desmond responded, settling back in his cushioned chair and smiling like a man ensconced permanently in the catbird seat. “But you have set up a scenario of suggested truth that is, in reality, not at all the whole case.”

“Go on,” Seven said, now settling himself back for what was turning out to be the most amazing ride of his life.

“First, Altair is most certainly not the penultimate technology in lunar systems.”

“You have something better?” Seven quipped sarcastically.

“Yes, as a matter of fact, we do. Further, the Saturn V is not a museum piece. And the idea of stacking a landing site with consumable supplies for a long term mission is primitive and stupid, as *you* should be lecturing me by now.”

Seven simply stared back at his old professor with a blank look on his face.

“Aaron, my group has preserved the old Saturn V plans and has rebuilt them by the dozens. We launch two of them each year from secret platforms in the South Pacific and we have been for over a decade now. We have also integrated them with newer technologies to greatly enhance their power. And we have designed lunar landing systems that form a large human colony upon arrival on the lunar surface. In fact, Aaron, we have pre-staged our site with enough equipment and supplies to provide for all of us for at least four years – but our stay will certainly be considerably longer than that.”

“Wait....wait...” Seven said shaking his head. “You’re way ahead of me. I don’t know which question to ask first.”

“Pick one,” Desmond responded in a near chuckle.

“Who is “we”? What group?”

“It is called the League of the New Worlds. I formed it myself more than a quarter century ago. We have designed a failsafe system to protect the human race from

the seeds of its own insanity. Our group has prepared for this event that is now upon us. We never knew exactly when something like this would happen, but we did know it was only a matter of time.”

“And for over half a generation and through multiple government administrations, who had the foresight to pay out all these billions and then manage to keep everything secret?”

“Let’s save that for later. What is your next question, Aaron?”

“I may believe your story on rockets and hardware – regardless of its improbability – but I’m still waiting for the answer to your question on life support. No one has ever developed a workable advanced life support system with anything resembling actual effective recycling. In other words, since this is my expertise, what’s going to keep your system from crashing in a year or two, or even six years down the road...or when the first consumables run out, *as they will?*”

Desmond smiled confidently, nodded his head just once and then responded, “*You are.*”

Seven leaned forward and blinked several times trying to understand the logic of Desmond’s two word response which was received more like a kick alongside his head by a 500 pound mule.

“Me?” he stuttered. “*Me?*”

“Yes, Aaron; you. That is precisely why you are sitting here in this aircraft right now”

Seven smiled and laughed loudly, sitting back in his seat. “You know, Professor, you really had me going there! I thought for a minute that this whole story was real.” As he said this, Seven glanced at Serea who smiled sweetly in return. He then looked back to Desmond who was no longer smiling. It was the perfect response. His powerful, expressive face said it all.

“You mean... you mean... this isn’t a joke?”

Desmond shook his head slowly. “I wish to God it were...”

“Professor, I know you’re a Nobel Laureate Physicist, but let me explain a few elements of bioengineering of macro systems...”

“Aaron...” Desmond interrupted, laying his hand on Seven’s knee, “I know. I understand. You don’t have a system designed that will take care of these issues. I already know that. No one ever has.”

“Then...then what?” Seven asked in frustration with upturned palms.

“You are going to design and direct the construction of this system for us.”

Seven laughed loudly once again. “Is the ventilation system in this chopper circulating Thorazine or something? Professor, this would require a national effort involving billions of dollars over many decades with teams of engineers and scientists working together nonstop 24/7, night and day. When do you plan to launch your mission, for heaven’s sake?”

“A single fortnight: 14 days hence, and not a day later.”

“Professor, even if I had a genie in a bottle – which I do not – I couldn’t pull this off in 14 days. Hell, I couldn’t pull this off in 14 years!”

“Aaron,” Desmond calmly said leaning toward him, “you have 14 days to develop a list of required supplies and equipment. I never expected you to build this here! You are going to build it when we get there!”

Seven leaned his head back, perspiring heavily and out of breath. “This is just getting better and better. Why didn’t you call me last year – four years ago? Why now? Isn’t this just a little late?”

“I had planned to call you in at the end of the year. None of us had seen this coming so quickly and now we are out of time. The fact is, Aaron, we no longer have a choice. We have to launch with what we have. We cannot wait a day longer than the 14 days which our statistical models predict is when the virus will breach the defenses of our compound. We launch with what we have. Humanity’s only ace in the hole right now is your particular genius. If you can’t make it work, then we will all die on the moon and humanity’s last chance will have run out. It’s all very simple: we launch with what we have. We are out of time. And when we land there, you become our star or all of humanity will be lost forever.”

Seven sighed deeply as the first trickle of sweat ran down between his eyes. In frustration he looked to Serea who whispered, “No pressure, ace.”

Seven sat in his seat in silence. Although it was early in the morning, he was exhausted. He looked out the window and watched the tiny automobiles jam the roads below. Like ants whose hill was disturbed, they swarmed about in anger, fear and uncertainty, apparently without direction or reason.

As if to awaken him out of a deep slumber, he felt Serea’s fingers slip slowly around his left hand and grip his fingers. She did not look at him or even remove her stare from the papers she held in her other hand. Seven did not miss his opportunity and clung to her hand for the remainder of the flight, which mercifully gave him more to think about than his new assignment as humanity’s most unlikely messiah.

Seven watched out his window as the chopper sat down in a grassy field high upon the vast Cumberland Plateau. His eyes strained to make out any details, but it appeared as though they had landed in a brown prairie so wide he could not see its limits or any man-made structure.

As the blades of the chopper wound down, suddenly the entire craft lurched. To his astonishment, Seven realized that the grassy land on which the chopper sat was lowering. Within just half a minute, he could see that the aircraft was descending into a massive underground structure of enormous size. Almost immediately, the sky above them disappeared as the opening was covered over by another door and the aircraft platform settled some two stories down.

“Welcome to Nirvana!” Desmond announced, unlatching his lap belt and standing.

Seven smiled, recognizing that the name fit the actual mission of this place perfectly. But he was not prepared for what he would see as the black blades of the chopper wound to a stop and he stepped out from the aircraft. The metal platform was suspended near the top of an enormous underground city that stretched for what appeared to be miles in every direction and descended below him hundreds of feet. He could not see the full range of its length because it extended so far that its span was hidden in the natural fog of distance.

The huge, cavernous space was brilliantly illuminated from powerful ceiling mounted backlit sources and down the length of the long structural columns that rose to Nirvana’s upper limit. It was filled with countless structures arranged in perfectly

symmetrical rows and radiated circles in at least seven levels rising off the floor of the immense cavern.

But the most astonishing sight was the line upon line of massive rockets aligned in rows at both peripheries. They were obviously resurrected Saturn V missiles with cylinders strapped on each side that Seven immediately recognized as solid rocket boosters. It was such a powerful image that Seven looked back at Desmond with wide eyes. His mentor was staring at him, smiling like a new father holding his first child.

Then Seven looked at Serea who was gently smiling at him with an unmistakable look that had nothing whatsoever to do with rocket ships and huge, high tech buried cities deep in the Cumberland plateau.

A well dressed man in a black suit accompanied by a boy of around 8 or 9 years of age approached Desmond and shook his hand with a beaming smile.

“Ah, Senator Harrington! I would like to introduce you to the scientist I was telling you about – Dr. Aaron Seven,” Desmond offered, as the Senator turned toward Seven and extended his hand to him.

Seven accepted the hand of the smiling, perfectly groomed Senator with little enthusiasm. “Pleased to meet you,” he said guardedly and with a stern expression.

“And this is my son, David,” the Senator replied, placing his hand on the child’s head.

Seven glanced down momentarily to the boy and nodded curtly. “Professor, you said that 127 people were going to accompany you to the lunar base. You didn’t say anything about politicians and their families,” he added tensely.

“I see he is not just a scientific genius, but he is also a quick study of human affairs, as well,” Harrington said to Desmond with raised eyebrows.

“Don’t you guys have a ritzy hideout at Mount Weather, paid for by all those people who are going to die unprotected out in the open?” Seven retorted with unchecked anger rising in his voice. “I thought we were about the business of saving the best and the brightest. So what the hell are *you* doing here?”

Seven turned to Desmond with a red face. “Let me guess. No one is actually at Mount Weather; they’re all here. Am I right? Because if I am, I’m out of here right now. I’d rather take my chances with a weaponized virus than the likes of him and his elitist buddies!” Seven spat angrily, pointing his finger at the Senator. “How dare he and his ilk take the place of the finest minds and humans on this planet just because they can pull political strings! I’ve lost close colleagues – truly worthy, brilliant, self-sacrificing researchers willing to give up everything for the betterment of mankind – when politicians decided to conveniently ignore their existence and left them in the unmerciful hands of some temporary terrorist government in a hellish third world country because their coup was determined to be ‘advantageous for national purposes’ at the time!”

“Aaron, that is enough!” Desmond barked angrily. “Just who I invite is my business and mine alone. I have long held that exclusive authority, granted to me by Executive Order signed by the President of the United States. No one decides but me. It is not your call and will never be! How dare you repay me with this insult of my judgment!”

Seven turned to open the door of the helicopter and get back in, but it was locked. He banged his fist on the fuselage in anger. “Where’s the stairwell?” he demanded, turning back to them with a red face and a full scowl. “How do I get out of this most

expensive boondoggle in all of history?” Looking at Desmond, he then pointed his finger at the Senator. “Professor, you said that saving all of humanity was now up to me. So here’s how it all comes down. Either he goes – or I go!”

At that moment, Serea stepped up to Seven, gripped the front of his t-shirt in her balled fists, pushing him back against the helicopter, and pulled his face to hers, kissing him firmly on the lips. It was astonishing and unexpected. She pulled her lips away from his and whispered so that only he could hear, “How about we go back to my room, slip into something more comfortable and have a drink?”

Seven looked down at her and blinked. Her unexpected actions were far more effective than had she bludgeoned him on the back of his head with a five pound maul. He was breathing hard but he could not take his eyes off her beautiful face. Serea was Desmond’s strong-arm and he knew it. And she was vastly more effective than a 350 pound, angry Samoan bouncer. Her eyes had already arrested and cuffed him and now she was about to haul him away to confinement. The only problem was, he desperately wanted to go with her regardless of the affront he had just clearly laid out along with his bitter ultimatum.

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Seven walked out of his steamy shower in Serea’s apartment. He was dressed in a soft, white terry robe. With bare feet he crossed the carpeted floor of her bedroom, ignoring his clothing which lay on the bed, and walked into the outer room.

Serea was waiting for him in a chair that sat overlooking a large glass wall facing the panorama of the huge underground city. The view was breathtaking. She patted the chair beside hers and Seven sat down. Again, he was wholly arrested by her devastating smile and beautiful face. He knew he was supposed to remember his anger, but sitting so close to her, he could not.

She handed him a small glass of what was obviously a dark liquor.

“What is it?” he asked.

“My favorite,” she replied. “Drambuie.”

“Hmmm,” he responded sincerely. “I approve of your tastes.” Seven downed the contents of the glass in one quick shot, squinting as it burned its way down his throat. “Nice,” he rasped.

“So, Dr. Seven,” Serea began, nursing her own glass, “where will you go?”

Seven thought a moment and sighed. “I don’t really know. I don’t have any family. It’s just me and ...well, it’s just me, actually. I had a dog named Marbles once...but he died of stupidity.”

“Aaron, it’s all I can do to keep from dropping to my knees here before you and begging you to stay,” Serea suddenly said almost wistfully. “Father never even mentioned you before two days ago, so I don’t know anything about you. But I do know about people in general. Your display of anger out there was totally out of place, out of control, ill-mannered and quite far off the mark. You insulted my father and the Senator in front of his very impressionable young son. And yet, after having thought about what you said, you are, as a matter of fact, mostly correct. The Senator and the rest of the government officials all bought their way on this trip with taxpayer money. They have bumped the best and the brightest off the flight, and it isn’t fair at all.”

“Then why do you go along with it?” Seven asked sincerely, without anger.

“Because without the people that my father selected, including Senator Harrington, we would not be here at all. In fact, Senator Harrington alone has saved this project half a dozen times in recent years. If it were not for his truly heroic, behind-the-scenes efforts, this place would have been abandoned long ago. So, in a real sense, he and his family deserve their ride – humanity would have no hope right now if it weren’t for him. I can assure you, there was and is much pressure to include high, powerful government officials here; but father has allocated every space – all 127 seats – with pure integrity.”

Seven scowled. “Why should the rich and powerful have any better reason to live than any other citizen? It wasn’t their money that paid for this great, secret city! Those who actually made it happen worked hard and did without because so much of their salary went to pay for this place. So now they die while their money paid for some politician’s life.”

Serea looked him in the eye and replied, “Father has agonized over that question for years. And the answer is not simple. He will die wondering whether he made the right decisions – selected the right people for the right reasons. I might add that he agonized over you, as well. And right now he is grieving over that choice.

“But may I also point out that he was entirely correct in his decision to ask you along and completely accurate when he says that if you don’t know how to build our life support system, then we will all die on the moon anyway. He doesn’t want you to leave... and for many different reasons, Aaron, neither do I.” Sitting her glass down, Serea then took his hands in hers and lowered herself to one knee before him. She kissed his fingers tenderly then looked beseechingly up into his eyes. “So I beg you, my prince, please stay. We need you. We all need you. *I need you.*”

Seven gazed back at her, stunned and mesmerized, just as her doorbell rang. Serea closed her eyes for a moment, then stood, gently squeezing his fingers before releasing them as she turned and walked to the door.

Seven sat staring out the wide windows at what must have been humanity’s greatest human achievement. It was more magnificent than he had ever dreamed possible. And, ironically, it would soon be abandoned.

In a minute Serea gently laid her hand on his shoulder and said softly, “You have a visitor, Aaron.”

Seven looked behind him and there stood the Senator’s son, David, with a trembling lip and a very frightened expression on his face.

“Dr. Seven, may I say something?” he asked in his small boy’s voice.

Seven nodded, feeling suddenly ashamed to the core of his being.

“I want to trade my place here for my dad’s,” David blurted in a broken voice. “I’ll leave so he can stay. My father told me before you arrived that you were the most important person on this mission, so I know that you have the power to send him away. If you say he has to go or you’ll go, then they’ll send him away and he’ll die. I want to take his place. I can go stay with my aunt in Atlanta. But please, don’t send him away. He’s very important. Please, sir, please send me away instead. My daddy has to live,” he sobbed.

Seven looked up at Serea as she brushed a tear away from her cheek. He lowered himself to one knee, facing David as the boy fought to regain his composure, gulping

back the sobs that racked his frame. The child blinked two wide blue eyes as he waited for Seven's sentence to be pronounced on him.

"Nobody's leaving here, David. Not you and not your father. I'm sorry and I'd like to ask your forgiveness," Seven said feeling the tears well in his own eyes.

David's eyes widened in surprise, then he suddenly leaned forward and embraced Seven tightly. "Thank-you, sir! You'll like my dad. He's really a nice guy," he said in a small voice in Seven's ear.

Seven pulled the boy away and tenderly wiped the child's tears from his face with his fingers.

"Do you know what a jackass is, David?" Seven asked.

David knit his eyebrows as he pondered the question, then replied, "I don't know for sure."

Seven breathed deeply. "Well, lad, you're looking at one right now – a certified jackass."

The boy smiled brightly and blinked away his tears. "Really?" he asked.

"Really!" Seven said nodding. "And I want you to know that if we're going to pick just 127 people of the human race – the very best and the very finest among us – I am most honest in saying that I would pick you first. As far as I'm concerned, David, *you* have just proven to be the most important person on this mission – certainly not me."

The boy smiled innocently. "Thank-you."

"Can you take me to your father?" Seven asked. "I want to introduce him to the biggest jackass on the planet in the company of the most important person on the mission – and I'm going to tell him just that way."

David nodded and turned to leave. As he did, Serea embraced Seven and kissed him deeply. "I'm glad you decided to stay," she said passionately, brushing away her own tears.

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Exactly 14 days later, the bottom fell out of the Cumberland Plateau as the fires of hell roared in towering flames from the pit. Twenty four missiles streaked skyward carrying the hope of humanity outward on a nearly impossible mission – to preserve and protect the dreams and destiny of humankind. The odds were clearly against them – and they all knew it. But on the slimmest of hopes they had pinned their future and the expectations of everyone to follow on uncommon genius and extraordinary courage.

## **APOCALYPSE DAWN**

**by Dennis Chamberland**

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Author's Note: Apocalypse Dawn is a short story that introduces the Aaron Seven adventure novel, Apocalypse Morning. The plot line here is the same as in Apocalypse Morning but the story is condensed and leads the reader through the first one third of the novel. My risk in introducing an entire book in this way is, obviously, rushing the story because the novels are considerably more detailed than in this brief story. Here the first 200 or so pages are condensed in just a few pages, but I feel it gives you, the reader, a good idea of how the Aaron Seven stories are developed and a look at the personality and dynamics of the major players that are featured in every book. It also gives you a good feel of how each Aaron Seven story is developed and how they unfold. Other Aaron Seven stories are available right now from Quantum Editions at:

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