

## Chapter 3

### THE DIG SITE. THIRTY-NINE MILES WEST OF FORT COLLINS, COLORADO:

Alex drives his rental SUV off the highway onto a two-lane road and up the slight grade. The aroma of dry grass and evergreens streams in through the open windows as he drives through a sparse forest. He passes a nearly deserted campground just before the asphalt is replaced with gravel, then the road begins to meander back and forth up the side of the mountain.

He slows down as he drives past an open steel gate and enters a narrow canyon filled with massive gray boulders. The road makes a sharp right turn, and he sees two vehicles near a large tent with screened windows. He parks and climbs out, and as he walks around the corner of the structure to find the door, he realizes it is on the edge of a seventy-foot wide oval shaped meadow. He hears soft snoring and turns to see a Native American man sitting in a reclined chair.

From this vantage point, Alex has a beautiful view of the side of the mountain. There appears to be a flat area partway up the side, which is unusual for that type of rock formation. Not wanting to disturb the man, he looks inside the tent through one of the windows and sees three tables with artifacts and some electronic equipment in the large room. He doesn't see anyone inside and is about to walk over to wake the sleeping man when he hears a car door slam shut in the parking lot.

A slender man studying a sheet of paper suddenly rushes past the corner of the tent, oblivious to his presence. Alex clears his throat to get the man's attention. When the man stops and turns to look at him, Alex gives him a friendly smile. "I'm looking for Mya Austin."

The man smiles, exposing widely spaced teeth beneath a bulbous nose and light brown eyes. "You came to the right place. What can I do for you?"

Alex thinks the man looks familiar, but can't figure out where he has seen him before. "I'm Alex Cave, a geophysicist from Montana. She asked for my help at this dig site."

"Mya told me you were on your way here. She made an amazing discovery. I'm Zane. Let's go."

When Zane begins to walk away, Alex follows a few steps behind him. After several curves through fractured rock formations, they enter a small clearing, about fifteen-feet below a flat area on the side of the mountain, the same one he saw from the meadow. They wander along a string-lined trail on the outer edges of a twenty-foot square excavation, and he sees Mya kneeling over something at the bottom of a five-foot deep pit. She is wearing a tank-top shirt and shorts. When she looks up and smiles as she waves at him, Alex notices the swirls of dark hair growing from her armpits and wonders if she shaves her legs. He waves at her before following Zane down into the excavated area.

Mya stands and reaches out to shake Alex's hand. "Your timing is perfect. We may have discovered something that will change our understanding about the evolution of humans."

When Alex notices the long hair on Mya's legs, he stifles a smirk and quickly looks down at the remains of a human skeleton protruding through one section of the dirt floor. It appears to have been wrapped in some type of cloth. "What am I looking at?"

Mya notices Alex's reaction to her leg hair. "According to our estimation of when *Homo sapiens* first arrived in North America, this woman is far more developed than normal evolution would have allowed. She is several inches taller than most humans were at the time." She sees the piece of paper in Zane's hand. "Well? What did you find out?"

Zane smiles at her. "The DNA from the tooth is viable. She has zero percentiles Neanderthal, European, Eurasian, or African DNA markers. That means that not all of us are genetically connected back to Africa. Also, carbon dating indicates she is close to twenty-five hundred years old."

The mention of DNA jogs Alex's memory. "You're *that* Zane? The geneticist?"

"That's correct. As you know, the DISCOVER NEW ANCESTERS program I started several years ago has given me access to an enormous amount of genetic material. I've also been working with the GEN9 DNA

Synthesis Lab in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and we were able to isolate what I named the GC117 gene. Only a small percentage of the samples sent to me from around the world had that genetic marker, and I found that same gene in this woman. By the way, the samples containing the GC117 gene came from some of the smartest people on Earth.”

Mya stares down at the woman. “If this information is correct, then a new lineage was brought here to North America twenty-five hundred years ago. It is as if she came out of the vanishing stone, just like the legend.”

Alex remembers her talking about the drawings she found when they first met on the plane. “Can I see the cave illustrations?”

“Yes, they’re in a cave a short distance away. Follow me.”

Alex follows Mya out of the pit and along a trail through a maze of large boulders to a fifteen-foot wide opening. He notices that the trail continues up the side of the mountain as he follows her into the cave.

Just inside the entrance, Mya stops and grabs two battery-powered headlamps. She hands one to Alex before sliding the elastic strap of the other one over her head. “Out of respect to the native tribe’s beliefs, I didn’t run any electrical cords into the cave so you’ll need this to see what I’m about to show you.”

Alex slips the elastic band over his head, turns it on, and follows her further inside. They stop when they reached a thirty-foot diameter room with a high ceiling, then continue across to a mural on the wall. He studies the illustrations, but doesn’t see the square object she mentioned. “Is this the drawing?”

“No, those are less than a thousand years old. Follow me.”

Together they make their way to the back of the cave. As Alex steps through a five-foot wide gap in the rock, he notices the remains of a clay-like material attached to the stone surface. “Was there a wall here at one time?”

“Yes. The tribe thought it was just clay plastered on the surface, but a mild tremor six months ago caused it to crack open. They pulled the rest of it down, and after they saw what I’m about to show you, I was called in to research this new cave.”

Alex follows Mya into an eight-foot wide room and looks at the paintings. On one side is a drawing of a square block with two human figures standing in front of it. He turns around and studies the symbols on the other wall. “Do you know what these smaller pictures represent?”

“Yes, they tell the story of the vanishing stone magically appearing above this cave. I’ve had samples of the material used to make the drawings analyzed by a private laboratory and it is twenty-five hundred years old. According to stories passed down through generations of Native Americans living near this cave, the stone should appear sometime this year.”

“On the plane, you said you found more of these drawings.”

“That’s right, but only in European countries. This is the first one found here in North America.”

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Zane has already seen the drawings and remains in the pit when Mya and Alex leave. He kneels down close to study the jawbone and upper palate of the female skeleton. “You must have known about oral hygiene,” he says softly. He looks up when he hear a voice chanting, climbs out of the pit, and runs back to the meadow. When the man near the tent points up at the side of the mountain, he runs to the entrance of the cave and cups his hands around his mouth. “Mya! There’s something going on above you!”

Zane jogs up a trail along the side of the rock, and abruptly stops in front of a massive, twenty-foot square cube. He slowly reaches out and places his finger against the pewter colored surface, and it is cool and smooth. He presses his palm against the side and it feels solid, then he taps his knuckles against it to confirm that it isn’t hollow. He spins around when he hears footsteps, and grins at Mya and Alex. “Here’s your vanishing stone.”

Mya can’t believe her eyes. She slowly moves over to the gray colored block and turns to look at Alex. “Are you familiar with this type of stone?”

Alex recognizes the swirled, pewter colored surface. He walks along the side and around the corner to the front and looks up at the top. It is made from the same material as other ancient alien artifacts he has discovered. “It’s not a stone. It’s a metal alloy, and it’s something you don’t want to mess with.” He looks at his wristwatch and the numbers are frozen at 10:27 AM. “We need to leave the area immediately.”

Zane's mouth hangs open for a moment as he stares at Alex. "What? You can't be serious. This is a monumental discovery. You don't have the right to make us leave. We need to get a film crew up here to document everything."

"I'm sorry, but that's the way it needs to be."

Zane slaps his palm against the surface of the cube. "You see? There's nothing dangerous here. It appears out of nowhere, and it has something to do with the GC117 gene. I'm sure of it."

Alex brings out his cellphone, but when he can't get a signal, he looks at Mya. "I thought you had reception up here."

"I do. Your phone should be working. Do you think it might have something to do with this cube?"

"Possibly." Alex puts away his phone. "Let's go back down to your campsite and maybe we can call from there."

Zane isn't about to let the cube out of his sight. "I'll stay here just in case anything changes. Don't forget to bring the video camera. I want to document everything."

Mya smiles at Zane. "I bet you didn't expect this to happen when you arrived."

"Not in my wildest dreams, but let's not allow people to know about this just yet. We don't want a mob of spectators showing up."

Mya points to the pickup truck racing out of the parking lot. "This is Indian land, and it won't be long until a lot more of them show up to see the stone. It's part of their history."

Alex looks at both of them. "The people I work with know how to keep a secret, and they are the only ones I trust to deal with this situation. Once I inform them, they'll close off the area."

Zane's hands clench into fists at his sides. "You're not planning on cutting us out of this discovery, are you?"

Alex stares back at him. "Of course not, but I've learned the hard way that an abundance of caution is necessary when dealing with unknown technology, and this certainly qualifies."

Zane lets his fingers relax. "Of course."

When Mya gives him a nod that she agrees, Alex leads the way back down the trail. "Your colleague seems to be a little on the demanding side."

"He's not my colleague. I sent a tooth to a university in Utah for analysis and he just showed up."

"How come you're the only one working here?"

"This land belongs to the Native Americans and is considered sacred ground. I only got permission because I'm half Sioux and I promised to be respectful of the site. That's one of the reasons the tribe members keep one person living up here at all times."

"To keep an eye on you?"

"Yes, that too, but the main reason is to be here when the stone arrives. That's how certain they are that it will be this year, and they are right."

"I'm glad you told me. That will make things more complicated for my people, but we'll do the same. Once we know what we're dealing with, perhaps you can talk to the tribal leaders and get their approval so we don't have to make a big issue out of this."

When they reached the tent, Alex looks up at the side of the mountain and can see Zane standing in front of the cube. He brings out his phone and looks at the screen. "I still can't get a signal."

Mya reaches into her car and brings out a satellite phone. "This should work." She turns it on, but nothing happens. "The stone must be interfering with the reception."

"All right. I'll drive down the mountain until I can get a signal. I'll be back as soon as I can."

Zane notices that a large area of the stone is swirling, and he looks down at Alex and Mya. "There is something happening up here."

Alex runs up the path with Mya right behind him. When he reaches the top of the trail, he sees Zane lying on his back on the ground. He kneels down beside him and feels for a pulse, then checks his breathing. He looks up at Mya. "He's just unconscious." He shakes the man's shoulder. "Zane? Can you hear me?"

Zane slowly opens his eyes and sees Alex staring down at him. "How long have you been there?"

Alex smiles at him. "We just got here. What happened?"

With Alex's help, Zane slowly sits up and looks around until he sees Mya. "I have one hell of a headache. I, uh. I heard a voice and saw you looking down at me."

"I was trying to wake you up."

"No, it wasn't your voice. It was someone else. Help me stand up, will you?"

Alex grabs Zane's hand and hauls him onto his feet, but doesn't let go. "How do you feel?"

Zane feels wobbly for a moment, then lets go of Alex's hand. "I'm fine."

Alex looks over at Mya. Her eyes suddenly go wide as she looks past him at a large opening in the side of the cube. What appears to be a man and a woman wearing black one-piece suits step out of the opening and stop in front of him.

A knot forms in Alex's stomach. This isn't the first time he has met someone from another race of humans.

The woman holds out her hand. "Hello. You must be Zane's friend, Alex Cave. I'm Vesta." She indicates the man standing beside her. "And this is Paul. It's nice to meet you in person."

Vesta's speech has an odd, stilted accent that is disappearing even as she speaks, as if she is practicing a new language.

Mya notices that Alex doesn't accept the handshake, so she holds her hand out to the woman. "Hello, I'm Mya."

Vesta smiles and shakes Mya's hand. "Yes, Zane's other friend. It's nice to meet you."

Mya realizes this situation is happening just as described in the legend. "Are you the ones who came here twenty-five hundred years ago? Are you from another planet?"

Vesta points up at the sky. "Yes. We came from another solar system to save some of your species from extinction."