

# DNA

The Alex Cave Series book 6

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Edition 1

# Chapter 1

## SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH:

Zane Simons looked up from the computer monitor and smiled to himself. *This is going to change the scientific community's theory of our evolution*, he thought.

He had spent the last six hours in his advanced genetics lab verifying the results from the DNA sample. It had been extracted from a twenty-five hundred year old tooth found at a dig site in Colorado.

He turned off his equipment and tossed the printed report into his briefcase, then grabbed the handle and his car keys as he headed out of the room. He hesitated before climbing into his vehicle, wondering if he should call the archeologist to let her know he was on his way to her dig site, then grinned and climbed in. "I hope she likes surprises", he said to himself as he inserted the key and started the engine.

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## SEATTLE, WASHINGTON:

His trip home had turned out to be the opposite of what he had expected, and Alex Cave was reading a magazine in a business class seat on the aircraft, hoping to take his mind off recent events with his nephew, Derek. A rift had formed between them and it was like a dagger through his heart.

He looked up when a woman with short dark hair sat down in the seat beside him. He gave her a courteous nod hello before returning to the article, and moved his leg out of the way when she bent down to shove a small bag under the forward seat.

Mya Austin straightened up and looked over at the ruggedly handsome man with wavy black hair sitting beside her. "I'm sorry about that. They never give us enough room."

It was the first time he could study her features, and other than her soft hazel eyes, she had an unremarkable face and her tan skin was slightly weathered from being outdoors a lot. He guessed her age to be around forty. "I know what you mean."

Alex continued reading an article in the magazine. It was an interview with the owner of the Discover New Ancestors program. The geneticist Zane Simon had made some incredible discoveries. Alex thought about his last mission, where he had become familiar with some aspects of genetics, and found the interview intriguing.

Alex hadn't heard the pilot welcoming them aboard or the safety instructions, but looked up when the plane began moving. Once it took off, he returned to the article until he noticed Mya trying to look out the window, which was even with his head. He set the magazine on his lap and leaned back so she could see.

Mya smiled at the man, then leaned over his knees. "I'm sorry again. I was just trying to see Mount Rainier."

Alex could not move back any further, and her face was only inches from his. "That's fine."

Mya turned her head and could see deep into Alex's dark blue eyes. "Hi. I'm Mya Austin."

Alex notice a few flakes of gold in Mya's irises. "It's nice to meet you. I'm Alex Cave."

Mya turned her face back to the window. When the mountain disappeared from view, she leaned back in her seat. "Thanks."

Alex noticed the medallion hanging from a beaded leather necklace around Mya's neck. "Is that Sioux Indian?"

"Yes, I'm an archeologist for the Sioux Nation, and I'm currently working at a dig site near Fort Collins, Colorado."

"You're a long way from home. What brings you out this way?"

"A friend of mine at the university was helping me with some research."

Alex knew he couldn't tell Mya that he worked at Area 51, but didn't want to lie. "I used to be a geophysics instructor at a small college in Montana, and now I'm a NASA consultant."

When she heard he worked for NASA, Mya wondered if this might be a fateful encounter. “I’ve just made a discovery in a cave on tribal land that will change the world.”

Alex could see the excitement and sincerity in Mya’s eyes. “How is that?”

“If the local tribe is correct, what they call the vanishing stone should appear at the dig site any day now.”

“I’m sorry. Did you say vanishing stone?”

“Yes, that’s what they call it. Inside the cave is a drawing of a box shaped object with two human figures standing beside it. According to the legend and cave drawings, the vanishing stone magically appeared above the cave twenty-five hundred years ago and the visitors left two new people with the tribe. The visitors promised to return in exactly twenty-five hundred years, then left in the vanishing stone. That’s this year, Alex.”

“How can you be so precise?”

“I’ve read about similar drawings in caves all over the world, and carbon dating of the various mediums used for the images indicate all the drawings were made twenty-five hundred years ago.” Mya could tell she had gotten his attention. “Since you work for NASA, is there any chance there might be a satellite taking pictures of that part of the United States?”

“That’s not my area of expertise.”

Mya wasn’t about to give up. “All I need is an overhead view of the dig site.”

“Well, a friend of mine might be able to get you some pictures. Give me your contact information and I’ll see what I can do.”

Mya smiled, reached into her purse, and handed Alex a card. “You can have them sent to that email address. I’m usually at the dig site, so use the mobile phone number if you want to call me.”

Alex was somewhat intrigued. He decided to help her out. “All right, Ms. Austin. I’ll try to arrange for you to get some satellite images.”

Mya smiled. “Thank you.”

When Mya brought out an electronic tablet, Alex returned to reading the article. During the rest of the flight, he didn’t say much to her, until they got off the plane in Las Vegas and he held out his hand. He hadn’t realized how tall she was, and estimated her to be about five foot nine. “It was nice meeting you, Mya. It shouldn’t take long to get you those images.”

Mya accepted Alex’s hand. “I appreciate it. Listen, since you’re a geophysicist, would you like to come out to Colorado and see the cave? Maybe you can verify the age of the rock strata.”

“No promises, but that might be interesting.”

“I’ll look for you.” Mya indicated a walkway. “My flight home is down there.”

“I’m afraid mine’s the other way. I hope to see you again.”

Mya stared after Alex until he disappeared around a corner, then turned and began walking toward her departure area.

Alex left the air terminal and took a taxi to a remote hangar on the far end of the tarmac. He showed his identification to a guard at the gate, who let him through to board a special plane.

## Chapter 2

### GROOM LAKE, NEVADA:

The sun was dropping over the western horizon when the private jet stopped in front of the small air terminal. Alex opened the side door, lowered the stairs, and grabbed his tote bag. At the bottom of the stairs, a tall man with shaggy blond hair and green eyes stood grinning up at him.

Okana (O’Kaw-nuh), Alex’s best friend, always seemed to know where he was going next and made it a point to be available whenever possible. He and Alex had shared a number of hair-raising adventures together and were bonded closer than brothers. “Hello, Alex. Have a nice flight?”

Alex smiled back and slapped his friend on the back. “Good to see you here. Guess you got a call as well?”

“Yeah, I got here about half an hour ago. Jadin is waiting for us inside the terminal. She was upset about something, but she wouldn’t tell me what’s going on until you got here.”

The two of them sauntered over to the security station, doing a bit of catch up on the way. Once Alex cleared the checkpoint, he saw a petite red haired woman waiting for them on the other side of the room. He could tell by her posture that something was bothering her, and hurried over. “What’s going on?”

Jadin Avery looked up into Alex’s dark blue eyes. “A woman named Holly Blake arrived earlier this morning and began moving into one of the offices. She wants to meet with us right away. David is already waiting for us in the conference room.”

Alex walked out of the building with his team members, and they climbed into a waiting golf cart. He turned in his seat and looked over his shoulder at Jadin sitting in the back seat. “Do you have any idea who she is?”

Jadin leaned forward between Alex and Okana. “No, but she had the right security clearance to get through the checkpoint.”

“Did you come from the Jet Propulsion Lab in Pasadena?”

“Yeah, it keeps me busy between missions.”

Okana drove around the corner of a building and glanced over his shoulder at Jadin. “Did she tell you what the meeting was about?”

“No, she wanted to talk to all of us at the same time.”

Okana parked in front of the main building for this area of the base and they all climbed out. They entered through the front door and continued along the hallway to the secure conference room. Alex held the door open while Jadin and Okana walked in and over to the table, saying hello to David who was already waiting. As he started to close the door, a small woman pushed past him into the room. “I’m sorry. I didn’t see you.”

The woman stared up at the man with wavy black hair. “I know, Alex.” She turned to Okana, Jadin, and David. “I’m Holly Blake, and I’ll be running your missions from now on.”

Alex looked at his friends, who were staring at him with questioning expressions, and turned to Holly. “I thought someone here at the base would take over.”

“Director of National Security Martin Donner asked for my help.”

Alex crossed his arms as he locked stares with Holly. “I don’t know you, and Martin never mentioned it to me. When did this happen?”

“It became official two hours ago, but I was already on my way here.” She sat down in one of the chairs and looked at the young man with short brown hair and brown eyes. “Let the Director know we’re ready, David.” She noticed David’s hesitation to follow her orders as he stared at Alex for approval.

Alex thought Holly’s demeanor was as curt as her attire. Just plain tan slacks and shirt. She had straight shoulder length brown hair with a few strands of gray mixed in, and wide-set hazel eyes. He looked over at David, who was waiting for his okay. “Go ahead and see if Donner is available.”

A moment later, Alex saw Donner’s image appear on the screen. As usual, the Director was wearing a plain white shirt, open at the collar with the sleeves rolled up past his elbows. “I wish you would have told me about this earlier, Martin.”

“I know, but Henry’s death was rather sudden and I had to move quickly on an urgent matter. I didn’t want some desk jockey with no fieldwork experience in charge of your operations.”

Alex wondered what type of fieldwork Holly had done, but decided to save the question for later. “Why the urgency, Martin?”

“Our new President doesn’t know all the details about your missions, and I need some time before I tell him that we have a working spaceship. Henry did a good job, but as you’ve already proven, things can change in a hurry. Sometimes I need plausible deniability, especially when I’m talking to the politicians. Holly is the only person I can count on when things get bad. I’m sorry I can’t talk longer, but I need to go. Believe me, Alex. You can trust Holly.”

Donner’s image vanished, and Alex looked at his new boss. “I guess we’ve gotten off to a rough start, Ms. Blake.”

Holly grinned at Alex. “Understandable. I don’t care for titles, so call me Holly.” She reached into her pocket, brought out a small digital storage device, and slid it across the table to David. “Bring this image up on the monitor and you’ll get a better idea of what we’ll be dealing with.”

Holly waited while David did as instructed, and a moment later, the monitor showed a hazy image of the moon. “You’ve probably heard that MUFON, the Mutual UFO Network, claims it’s a picture of your spacecraft approaching this base. It was only a reflection of light off the ship, but it was enough to go viral on social media. From this moment on, if the cloak is not working, the ship doesn’t leave.”

Holly stood and looked at David. “I have a feeling we’re going to need it soon, so get it working as soon as possible. The rest of you do whatever you like until I contact you.” She opened the door and stepped out of the room.

Jadin leaned back in her chair. “Wow. That was intense. I wonder what she did for fieldwork.”

Alex stared at Jadin, thinking the same thing. “I guess we’ll find out eventually. By the way, if you have time I need a favor.” He explained the situation with Mya and gave her the business card he had received on the airplane. “Could you set it up to send her updated images whenever we have a camera in range?”

“I’m sure I can arrange something. Well,” she sighed, “I don’t see any reason to wait around here, so I think I’ll head back to JPL. What are your plans, Alex?”

“Ms. Austin invited me to her dig site. I’ll leave early tomorrow morning, and should be there by late afternoon.”

Okana knew the look in his friend’s eyes. This was the first time Alex had taken an interest in women since he broke up with his cousin, Fala. “I think I’ll head home and see my family until Mike needs me back on the *Mystic* or Holly needs us.”

Alex smiled and stood. “I’d better call Mya and let her know I’m coming.”

Jadin watched Alex leave the room, then grabbed Okana’s arm before he got up. “Did Alex tell you much about Mya?”

“Enough that I know he seems interested in something she found at a dig site. I guess she’s a Native American archaeologist.”

“Did he say she was attractive?”

Okana shrugged his shoulders. “He didn’t say. Why are you so interested in what she looks like?”

“Just curious, is all. It’s a woman thing, so I’m sure you wouldn’t understand.” She glanced at David. “How is the work on the ship coming?”

“Well, I’m having an issue with the artificial intelligence. I guess I shouldn’t have called it a circuit board. I think I need to do a little sucking up so I can find out what’s wrong with the cloaking mechanism. If I didn’t know better, I’d think I had hurt its feelings.” He noticed Jadin’s frown. “Not that I’m insensitive or anything.”

Jadin stopped frowning. “No, you’re right. I’ll bet you did hurt its feelings.” She winked at him. “Bring it some flowers. It always helps with apologies.”

David stared at her. “It’s a spaceship, not a woman. Flowers won’t mean anything to it.”

Jadin smiled. “It couldn’t hurt,” she called over her shoulder as she walked out the door.

David shook his head in bewilderment. *It’s just a spaceship*, he thought. *Maybe I’ve been working too hard.*

## Chapter 3

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

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

He slowed down as he drove past an opened steel gate and entered a narrow canyon filled with massive gray boulders. The road made a sharp right turn, and he saw two vehicles near a large tent with screened windows. He parked and climbed out, and as he walked around the corner of the structure to find the door, he realized it was on the edge of a seventy-foot wide oval shaped meadow. He heard soft snoring and turned to see a Native American man sitting in a reclined chair.

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

A slender black man studying a sheet of paper suddenly rushed past the corner of the tent, oblivious to his presence. Alex cleared his throat to get the man's attention. When the man stopped and turned to look at him, Alex gave him a friendly smile. "I'm looking for Mya Austin."

The man smiled, 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 thought the man looked familiar, but couldn't figure out where he had 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 began to walk away, Alex followed a few steps behind him. After several curves through fractured rock formations, they entered a small clearing, about fifteen-feet below a flat area on the side of the mountain, the same one he had seen from the meadow. They wandered along a string-lined trail on the outer edges of a twenty-foot square excavation, and he saw Mya kneeling over something at the bottom of a five-foot deep pit. She was wearing a tank-top shirt and shorts. When she looked up and smiled as she waved at him, Alex noticed the swirls of dark hair growing from her armpits and wondered if she shaved her legs. He waved at her before following Zane down into the excavated area.

Mya stood and reached 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 noticed the long hair on Mya's legs, he stifled a smirk and quickly looked down at the remains of a human skeleton protruding through one section of the dirt floor. It appeared to have been wrapped in some type of cloth. "What am I looking at?"

Mya had noticed 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 was several inches taller than most humans were at the time." She saw the piece of paper in Zane's hand. "Well? What did you find out?"

Zane smiled at her. "The DNA from the tooth was 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 jogged 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 stared 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 remembered her talking about the drawings she had found when they had first met on the plane. “Can I see the cave illustrations?”

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

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

Just inside the entrance, Mya stopped and grabbed two battery-powered headlamps. She handed 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 slipped the elastic band over his head, turned it on, and followed her further inside. They stopped when they reached a thirty-foot diameter room with a high ceiling and continued across to a mural on the wall. He studied the illustrations, but didn’t see the square object she had mentioned. “Is this the drawing?”

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

Together they made their way to the back of the cave. As Alex stepped through a five-foot wide gap in the rock, he noticed 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 followed Mya into an eight-foot wide room and looked at the paintings. On one side was a drawing of a square block with two human figures standing in front of it. He turned around and studied 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 had already seen the drawings and remained in the pit when Mya and Alex left. He knelt down close to study the jawbone and upper pallet of the female skeleton. “You must have known about oral hygiene,” he said softly. He looked up when he heard a voice chanting, climbed out of the pit, and ran back to the meadow. When the man near the tent pointed up at the side of the mountain, he ran to the entrance of the cave and cupped his hands around his mouth. “Mya!” He hollered. “There’s something going on above you!”

Zane jogged up a trail along the side of the rock, and abruptly stopped in front of a massive twenty-foot square cube. He slowly reached out and placed his finger against the pewter colored surface, and it was cool and smooth. He pressed his palm against the side and it felt solid, then he tapped his knuckles against it to confirm that it wasn’t hollow. He spun around when he heard footsteps, and grinned at Mya and Alex. “Here’s your vanishing stone.”

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

Alex recognized the swirled, pewter color of the surface. He walked along the side and around the corner to the front and looked up at the top. It was made from the same material as other ancient alien artifacts he had discovered. "It's not a stone. It's a metal alloy, and it's something you don't want to mess with." He looked at his wristwatch and the numbers were frozen at 10:27 AM. "We need to leave the area immediately."

Zane's mouth hung open for a moment as he stared 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 slapped his palm against the surface of the cube. "You see? There is nothing dangerous here. It appeared out of nowhere, and it has something to do with the GC117 gene. I'm sure of it."

Alex brought out his cellphone, but when he couldn't get a signal, he looked 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 put away his phone. "Let's go back down to your campsite and maybe we can call from there."

Zane wasn'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 smiled 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 pointed 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 is part of their history."

Alex looked 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 clenched into fists at his sides. "You're not planning on cutting us out of this discovery, are you?"

Alex stared 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 let his fingers relax. "Of course."

When Mya gave him a nod that she agreed, Alex led 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 were that it will be this year, and they were 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 looked up at the side of the mountain and could see Zane standing in front of the cube. He brought out his phone and looked at the screen. "I still can't get a signal."

Mya reached into her car and brought out a satellite phone. "This should work." She turned it on, but nothing happened. "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 noticed that a large area of the stone was swirling and looked down at Alex and Mya. "There is something happening up here."

Alex ran up the path with Mya right behind him. When he reached the top of the trail, he saw Zane lying on his back on the ground. He knelt down beside him to feel for a pulse and check his breathing. He looked up at Mya. "He's just unconscious." He shook the man's shoulder. "Zane? Can you hear me?"

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

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

With Alex's help, Zane slowly sat up and looked around until he saw 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 grabbed Zane's hand and hauled him onto his feet, but didn't let go. "How do you feel?"

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

Alex looked over at Mya. Her eyes suddenly went wide as she looked past him at a large opening that had appeared in the side of the cube. What seemed to be a man and a woman wearing black one-piece suits stepped out of the opening and stopped in front of him.

A knot formed in Alex's stomach as the woman held out her hand. This wasn't the first time he had met someone from another race of humans.

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

Vesta's speech had an odd stilted accent that was disappearing even as she spoke, as if she was practicing a new language.

Mya noticed that Alex didn't accept the handshake, but she held her hand out to the woman. "Hello, I'm Mya."

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

Mya realized this situation was 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 pointed up at the sky. "Yes. We came from another solar system to save some of your species from extinction."