

PANDORA'S EYES

Published by James M Corkill

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Edition 1

Chapter 1

GROOM LAKE, NEVADA:

Alex Cave set the last of his clothes into the wooden dresser drawer and took a moment to look around the sparsely furnished apartment. After selling his house in Montana, it had taken three weeks to pack all his belongings into storage, and now this was his new home.

An appropriate launching pad for new adventures, he thought. Since the discovery of an alien spacecraft right here on planet earth, his world had turned upside-down and was never going to be the same. The new location gave him instant access to personnel involved in the discoveries, a welcome source of support whenever alien technologies were explored.

It's a lot like putting nuclear technology in the hands of cave men, he mused. *Every time we discover something new, it has far-reaching consequences if used inappropriately. At least things have settled down for now.*

His phone rang, and he recognized the image of a man with curly gray hair, Doctor Henry Heinz, his good friend and boss here at the base. "Hey, Doc."

"I think you had better come down here right away," he said with a slight German accent.

"I'll be right there."

He hurried from the room, down the hall to the stairs, and moments later, stepped into his friend's office. "What's going on?"

"I have recently received a copy of a recording from the International Space Station. It was taken shortly after the launch of a new satellite called the SV1, for Space Vacuum One. I looked through their permits, and they claim it is a way to efficiently collect the space debris currently in orbit."

When Henry indicated to stand behind him, Alex moved around to see the image on the monitor. His eyes went wide as he stared at the strange looking contraption as seen from the ISS. A large, box-shaped platform with solar panels floated among the stars, but what got his attention was the pewter-colored torpedo in the center. "I see why you called me down here."

"That looks like one of your devices, Alex."

He leaned over his friend's shoulder for a closer look. "It sure looks like it, Doc. The other three should already be here."

Alex leaned back and thought about his best friend, Okana, who was searching for the last alien device in the Bering Sea. He was the engineer and submarine driver onboard the high-tech research ship Mystic. He and Okana were special agents and partners in the CIA, and his best friend had gotten him out of Russia in one piece after his wife's murder. Like him, Okana retired from the CIA, and was now working for millionaire Mike Tanner, a private researcher, and owner of the Mystic.

Henry entered a command into his computer. "The inventory shows we have three of them. One from the Pacific Ocean, one from the island, and one from the spacecraft in Hanger 5. According to this, they arrived nine months ago."

Alex stood. "Let's go, Doc. I need to see for myself."

He led Henry to the elevator, and once inside, waited for him to insert his key into the control panel.

Henry pressed a button and felt lighter as the car descended below the facility. "Why would someone want to put one in space? We do not even know what they do."

Alex shifted his weight to the other foot. "Uh, that's not exactly true, Doc. I know they're capable of great destruction."

The doors opened, and Alex hurried down the hallway. "The last door on the right, correct?"

Henry didn't answer as he tried to keep up.

Alex stopped in front of a large steel door and waited while Henry entered a code and stared into the retina scanner. When he heard the click of the lock, he shoved the door open, entered the room, and slid to a stop. There was only one of the twenty-foot-long cylinders in the room. He spun back to Henry. "Damn! The military security guards were supposed to protect them during transport here to the base. They must have been hijacked in route. Let's get back and see if we can find out how that company managed to get their hands on them."

Neither man spoke until they entered the office. Henry sat down and typed a command into his computer, and looked across at Alex while they waited. "You did not finish telling me about these devices, Alex."

"Oh, right. They were designed to attract pollutants from the atmosphere, but whoever is in control thinks it's going to attract the debris in space."

"Is that not a good thing? All that rubble has to be tracked, and it has already caused millions of dollars in damage to several satellites, other spacecraft, and even the International Space Station."

"You're right, Doc, if they know what they're doing. All the information about how they operate is onboard our spaceship. How could they possibly know what they're doing with that device? They don't realize they're meant to work in unison, all connected somehow."

Henry turned to the monitor. "One of our people here at the base signed for all the devices. Wait a minute. He quit eight months ago, right after the arrival date."

"That still doesn't explain how they know about its operating system."

Henry entered a command. An instant later, he sighed and leaned back in his chair. "I had David make a copy and I uploaded the information. Someone hacked into my computer and made a copy of the data."

Alex remembered meeting the young physics student while he was an instructor. Since then, David had helped him with several discoveries over the past two years, and had resided here at the base. He was like a little brother, and the only person who had actually flown the alien spaceship.

Alex stood and pulled his phone from his front pocket. "I'll call Martin right away." On the first ring, the Director of National Security's secretary answered. "This is Alex Cave. Is Director Donner available? Okay. Please have him call me right away." He looked at Henry. "He's in a meeting."

"I wish to God we had left them in the ocean, Alex. I have a very bad feeling about all this."

"We didn't have a choice, Doc. In order to get rid of the devices; they all must be together in one place."

Henry leaned back in his chair and stared up at his friend. "Will you ever tell me your secret?"

Alex released a deep sigh. "I'm sorry, Doc. If what I suspect happens, I might need to tell all of my friends."

"Perhaps the Director can find out how they were stolen."

His phone rang and Alex recognized the picture of his friend on the screen. "Hey, Martin. You're on speaker with the Doc."

"Hi, Alex. Are you getting settled in okay?"

"I'm getting there."

"What can I do for you?"

"Three of my devices never made it to the base, and their operation manual was copied. Now one of them is in orbit, called the SV1. Do you know anything about the company who owns it?"

"Yes, they're a reputable company with several military contracts. Have you ever heard of the DAR Corporation?"

Alex's posture stiffened when he thought about his unscrupulous dealings with the owner not too long ago. "I have. I thought they were demolition and reconstruction contractors. Why?"

"That's only a subsidiary of the main company. Their goal is to collect the billions of dollars' worth of precious metals from space. In fact, they're doing the first orbital test tomorrow afternoon, about 4:00 AM your time. The crew on the space station will be sending a live broadcast of the event."

"You have to stop them, Martin. They have no idea how dangerous they can be."

"I believe you, Alex. I'll do what I can. One of these days you had better tell me more about them."

Alex shoulders slumped. "I know. In the meantime, could you send me all the data you have on DAR and the SV1?"

"I'll have my secretary send it to your private email account."

"Thanks, Martin."

Henry waited until Alex put his phone away. "Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Yes. Set up a remote video camera on that remaining device and monitor it during the test."

Henry thought about it for a moment. "If they are as dangerous as you claim, perhaps we should move it to the surface, away from the base."

Alex shook his head. "We're better off keeping it where it is. They were built to react with the environment, and there is less air in the vault."

"Very well."

"I'd better call Okana. I hope that he can have Bett pick me up in Seward."

Alex hurried back to his room and ripped open one of the cardboard boxes. He grabbed his satellite phone, and entered the number for the high-tech research ship, Mystic. A moment later, he recognized the voice of his best friend. "Hey, Okana. Where are you right now?"

"We've just refueled in Seward, and are headed back out to resume the search. Why?"

“Turn around and go back.”

“All right. How about a little more information.”

“Have you heard about the SV1?”

“Uh, no. Is there a problem?”

Alex told him about the missing devices and explained his concern. “The problem is the one in the water. When they activate the one in space, the one in the water will start freezing the ocean at an incredible rate. You don’t want to be in the vicinity, or you’ll get trapped.”

“How do you know about all this stuff, Alex? Oh, right. It’s super top secret.”

Alex heaved a deep sigh. “I’m really sorry, my friend. If things develop like I think they will, I’ll explain everything.”

“Is there anything I can do to help?”

Alex thought about the Mystic’s helicopter pilot, Betty Mason, a feisty little woman married to Joshua, the ship’s technical expert. “Is Bett onboard?”

“Yeah, do you need a ride?”

“As a matter of fact, I do, but not from here. I’ll meet you in Seward.”

“Okay, I’ll be waiting.”

Alex set the sat phone on the dresser and walked back to Henry’s office. “I need to borrow the jet. I’m meeting up with the Mystic in Seward, so I can keep an eye on what happens with the device in the Bering Sea when they activate the one in space.”

“Yes, of course. Would you like to take David with you?”

Alex shook his head. “No, he should keep working on the spacecraft. Okana and I can handle it.”

“Of course. Keep in touch.”

“I will.”

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