



The Alex Cave Series book 5.  
**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.

Since the discovery of an alien spacecraft here on planet earth, his world had turned upside-down and was never going to be the same. It had taken two-years to get over the death of his wife, and when he finally fell in love again, she too was nearly murdered. He realized that as long as he was in this dangerous line of work, celibacy was his only option. *At least things have settled down for now*, he thought.

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?"

Henry looked up at the tall man with wavy-black hair and blue eyes. "I have recently received a copy of a recording from the International Space Station. It was taken yesterday afternoon, 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."

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 ten-foot-long orange octagonal cylinder with solar panels floated among the stars, but what got his attention was the twenty-foot-long, pewter-colored torpedo protruding from the center. "I see why you called me down here."

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

"I think you're correct, Doc. The other three should already be here."

Alex 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 Hangar 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."

"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! Let’s get back and see if we can find out how that company managed to get their hands on them.”

\*

#### EASTERN WASHINGTON. SV1 CONTROL CENTER:

Paul Carter, the day shift supervisor, stood behind a young man and a woman sitting in front of the computer monitors. He looked up at the two large televisions mounted to the wall. One showed live images from SV1’s onboard cameras. The other screen showed the live video from the space station, about two-miles away. He placed his hand on the man’s shoulder. “All right, Scott. Let’s see what she can do.”

Teresa Tylor, the night shift supervisor, turned her head to look up at Paul. “So you’ve decided the SV1 has a sex?”

“Hey, I’m from the old school, remember? All right. See what *it* can do.” He looked down at Teresa. “Are you happy now?”

She smiled. “Yes, thank you.” She turned to Scott Brackenbury. “Ready when you are. Let’s fire it up.”

Scott grinned. “Thrusters on standby. Sending command now.”

Carter stared intently at the images from the cameras, but didn’t see anything happening. A moment later, the small end of a spinning funnel-shaped distortion appeared off the pointed end of the SV1. When he looked at the image from the space station, the distortion looked like a tornado in space. “Good work, people. We have a stable attraction cone. The debris we’ve selected for the test is within a 2,000-foot-radius of the field. Let’s start with the harmonic resonance frequency to attract carbon atoms.”

Scott entered the command into his computer. “All Set.”

Teresa studied the data on her monitor. “Verified.” She pressed a button. “It’s on.”

Carter stared intently at the wide-angle image from one of the SV1 cameras on the wall monitor. He noticed a flash of reflected light, and smiled when a slowly rotating silver object entered the cone. “That looks like some kind of wrench.”

Scott looked up from his monitor. “The field is holding. We’ve caught it!”

Teresa captured a still image of the wrench and did a recognition comparison. “It’s one of the tools used by the Hubble telescope repair team. It’s been floating around up there for several years.”

Carter’s eyebrows bunched together. “I wonder how it ended up in the debris cloud created by China destroying one of their satellites.”

Scott smiled and looked over at Teresa and up to Paul. “We’re attracting more material. It’s working. We should have this section cleared in a few hours.”

\*

#### EAST OF DARRINGTON, WASHINGTON:

State Patrol Officer Harry Clemens recognized the four dump trucks and construction equipment parked in front of his grandfather’s abandoned drive-in movie theatre. As far as he knew, his family did not intend to tear it down. He took the next off ramp, drove across the over pass, and headed back to the theatre down a side road. He stopped near a large motorhome, where a dozen men were sitting under the awning. He studied the men for a few moments before climbing out.

Paul Simms glanced at his men, and then stood as he waited for the Highway Patrolman to walk over. "Can I help you, Officer?"

"I was just wondering why you're here. Are you staging for a job?"

"Yes, but not for this property. I'm just waiting to hear from my boss. We shouldn't be here for more than a few hours."

Clemens was about to ask him more questions when a voice from his portable radio interrupted. He stepped away from the group to answer. "This is Clemens. Go ahead."

"We have a report of a tornado touching down just north of Monroe, and its headed south. We need you to help the local police shut down the exits off the interstate in that area until the storm passes."

"Are you kidding? We don't get tornadoes in this part of the Pacific Northwest."

"Listen, Harry. This is not a joke, now get moving."

"I'm on my way."

Clemens glanced at the truck drivers, then climbed into his patrol car and drove back to the interstate highway. He still couldn't fathom the idea of a tornado in Waynesville.

When the patrol car drove away, Simms sat down and looked at his crew. "It shouldn't be much longer now."

\*

#### SV1 CONTROL CENTER:

Scott sat up when he heard a soft beeping from the computer speaker. He typed in a command to mark that point in the recording, while he tried to find the cause of the alarm. It appeared to be a second resonate frequency, oscillating 180-degrees out from the one in use by SV1. A few moments later, it was gone. *That was strange*, he thought.

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#### NORTH OF DARRINGTON:

Rita Harrow stared up at the pewter-colored cylinder pointed up into space. When the seconds vanishing on the digital clock reached zero, she flipped a switch and the device shut down. She looked over at her partner, Steve Preston, the owner of the DAR Corporation. "The effect should be over."

Preston walked up to the tall red-haired woman, gently touched her chin, and tilted her head up to give her a kiss. "Are you sure you have this thing under control? I mean, your first test altered the jet stream over the Northern Pacific Ocean, and now California is suffering a massive drought. Will it return to its original course?"

She crossed her arms and stared down at the ground. "I hope so. I didn't mean for that to happen."

"Are you ever going to tell me how you know so much about these devices?" He noticed the rage in her eyes when she looked up at him.

Her hands clenched into fists at her sides. "I was on a research ship off the coast of Washington, when a man named Alex Cave suddenly showed up and I was fired. I couldn't complete my mission and it pissed me off." Her hands relaxed. "A friend did a background check on Cave. It turns out he's a close friend of Martin Donner, the Director of National Security."

"And?"

"The ship I was on belonged to millionaire Mike Tanner, who evidently became Cave's good friend. I figured me being fired meant they were up to something big, and I've been keeping track of Tanner's different ships. It turns out one of them recovered another device like this one and we took it. That's the one you have in orbit. One of our spies working at Groom Lake told us

another one had suddenly arrived there, and that a third one was being shipped from Adak Island in Alaska.” She tilted her head toward the trailer. “You’re looking at it.”

“I see. How did you know what it does?”

“We managed to get our hands on the instruction manual.”

“Don’t tell me. Your spy at Area 51.”

Rita didn’t reply and pressed a button on the control panel. The twenty-foot-long torpedo shaped device slowly dropped back down into the custom trailer. When she heard a soft thud, she straightened her shoulders and turned back to Preston. “I can hit anywhere at any time.”

Preston stared back. “I’m not so sure.”

She put her hands on her hips. “Now that we have one in orbit, I can hit with pinpoint accuracy.” When his eyes remained uncertain, she turned back to the trailer. “Fine. Believe what you want.”

Preston looked at his watch. “I’d better get going. I need to be the first person to sign the contract to do the search and rescue, with a clause that my company gets the contract for the cleanup.” He smiled. “I’m going to make a fortune, controlling the weather.”

She grinned. “I know, and I get twenty-five percent.”

Preston’s smile faltered for a moment. “Even so, we’re talking millions of dollars.” He turned and climbed into his silver SUV.

When Preston drove away, Rita walked forward to the customized motorhome that towed the trailer, climbed inside, and headed north toward US Interstate 5.

\*

#### MONROE, WASHINGTON:

Mayor Carl Barstow scratched his head through his gray hair as he watched the patrol cars and ambulances begin to arrive from nearby towns. The three-story apartment complex just south of the small town was nearly destroyed. He looked over at his friend, Officer Clemens. “I can’t believe this just happened, Harry. Look how it ripped up the building, but nothing more than a quarter-mile away. Like it touched down for a minute and then just stopped.”

Clemens looked down at the dry flakes of blood on his fingers, and heaved a deep sigh as he shook his head. “I’ve found seven dead, and a lot of serious injuries. Many of the masonry walls held together, so there could be some survivors underneath the pile, but it’s going to take some time before we could get some equipment here to start digging through the wreckage.” He thought about all the construction equipment stationed at the theatre. This was an emergency, and he was going to put them to work. “I have an idea. I’ll be back in a moment.”

Clemens hadn’t taken a step before he noticed the silver Cadillac SUV leading the way for the construction equipment from the theatre. When the vehicle stopped beside his patrol car, a tall man wearing gray slacks and black shirt climbed out and walked over to greet him and the Mayor.

Preston held his hand out to the officer. “Do you need some help?”

The Mayor hurried past Clemens and grabbed the man’s hand. “I’m the Mayor, Carl Barstow. We sure could. We have people trapped in the debris, so you need to hurry.”

Preston suppressed a smile. “Sorry to hear about that. I’m Mister Preston, owner of the DAR Corporation. My people would be glad to lend a hand. Let’s go to my car and you can sign a waiver of liability for my company so we can get started.”

“You bet.”

Clemens found it extremely odd that this Mister Preston just happen to have his equipment waiting nearby, but there was no way he could have known this would happen. At least as far as

he knew anyway. For the moment, he needed their help, so he let go of the idea that this was not just a coincidence.

\*

GROOM LAKE:

Neither Alex nor Henry 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. But, 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 himself was an instructor. Since then, David had helped him with several discoveries over the past two years, and 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 could 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 could be."

"I believe you, Alex. I'll do what I can, but they have another test scheduled for tomorrow at the same time. 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 could 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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## Chapter 2

### BERING SEA:

Alex sat alone in the passenger compartment of the Gulfstream jet, oblivious to the soft whine of the engines. He just couldn't figure out how DAR could know about what the devices are capable of doing in only nine months. He thought back to the Red Energy operation. The recovery of the devices from the oceans was top secret. Not even the military knew what they were doing. Only the crew of the *Mystic* and his friends at Groom Lake knew what was going on. He looked up when Skip Johnson, the pilot, walked back from the cockpit.

"We'll be on final approach to Seward in five minutes, Alex. Do you want us to stick around?"

Alex stood to stretch. "That would be great, Skip. At least until after the test."

Skip smiled. "You mean the SV1? Yeah. They call it a space vacuum, but I doubt it will work without any air to suck the debris inside."

"Perhaps you're right. We'll know in about an hour." When Skip returned to the cockpit, Alex sat down, buckled up, and stared out the window. *I hope you're right*, he thought.

The jet swung around directly over the harbor to line up with the runway, and he could see the *Mystic* anchored offshore. She was a trimaran, and the blue-and-white contrasts of her paint job enhanced her sleek design. When she was underway, the central hull was supported by the two outside pontoons, which ended in a vertical V to slice through the water instead of going over the waves. She could easily cruise at 58 knots.

The jet made a gentle landing and taxied to the small private air terminal. When the whine from the engines dropped in pitch, Alex got up and walked to the front of the plane, pressing a button to open the door and lower the steps.

He glanced into the cockpit. "The test is in an hour, and I'll give you a call once I know the situation." He grabbed his small suitcase from the storage rack, and when he turned back to the door, a tall man with shaggy blond hair and light brown eyes was standing at the bottom of the stairs.

Okana looked up at the tall, dark-haired man standing in the doorway. "Hey, buddy. Good to see you again."

Alex went down the steps and walked beside his friend towards the blue-and-white, six-person helicopter. "I know you have a lot of questions, but I'd rather wait until we get on board the *Mystic* before I explain everything."

"Fine by me. Mike is in Seattle and won't be back for couple of weeks."

Alex set his bag down on the asphalt when a small woman with short blond hair reached up to give him a hug. "Hey, Bett. How have you been?"

Bett let go and smiled up at Alex. "Doing just fine," she said with a slight Texas accent. "Josh is looking forward to seeing you again. Hop in and we'll get you out to the *Mystic*."

Alex glanced at his watch. "How long until we reach the open water of the Bering Sea by helicopter?"

"About thirty minutes."

"Are you fueled and ready to go?"

"Yeah, why?"

“We shouldn’t stop at the *Mystic*. We need to head out right away if we want to get there before the test.”

She shrugged her shoulders. “All right, let’s get started.”

Alex tossed his bag into the passenger compartment and climbed in, while Bett climbed into the pilot’s seat. Since he was a good helicopter pilot himself, Okana sat in the copilot’s seat. When the copter leapt into the air, Alex put on his headset and leaned forward between the two seats. “Sorry to drag you guys away from watching the test of the SV1, but it’s important that we’re near the device in the water when it happens.”

Okana turned in his seat to look back at Alex. “So you’re expecting to see the ocean turn into a giant ice cube?”

“I hope not.” He noticed the concerned look in Okana’s eyes. “Is something wrong?”

“I was just thinking about all the commercial ships in the Bering Sea. Have they been warned to leave the area?”

“No, I couldn’t do that without raising a lot of unwanted questions. If I’m wrong, no one will be the wiser. If I’m right, they’ll be the least of our problems.” He leaned back in the seat.

No one spoke as the helicopter flew over the Aleutian Islands into open water. Alex kept looking at his watch. When it showed three minutes until test time, he leaned forward. “Take us up to a higher altitude so we can see more of the surrounding water.”

When the alarm on his watch began beeping, Alex began sliding back and forth across the bench seat to stare out the side windows. “Swing us around in a circle, Bett.”

\*

#### SV1 CONTROL CENTER:

Paul Carter stood behind Teresa and Scott, staring at the information on the monitor. He hoped this second test would go as well as the first one. “All right. Turn it on.” He looked across at the image on the wall monitor, waiting for the funnel to appear. When nothing happened, he looked down at the data in front of Scott. “Is that what I think it is?”

Scott didn’t look up. “Yes, it’s the second signal. It seems to be interfering with our controls. I suggest we shut it down until we can determine the source.”

“All right.” When Scott turned it off, the second signal disappeared. “That’s just too much of a coincidence. The problem has to be here on our end. Run a diagnostic on our software to find out where that second signal is coming from.”

Scott looked up at Carter. “I don’t think we’re causing it.”

“Just run the damn test.”

Scott entered the command into the computer, and a few moments later, the data on the monitor showed no malfunction or the source of the second signal. “I told you so.”

“Damn! It has to be us. Keep searching. I’ll call Preston and let him know what’s going on.”

When Carter left the room, Scott leaned back with his hands behind his head and looked over at Teresa. “I’m telling you, that signal isn’t coming from us.”

“I agree, but Paul is under a lot of pressure to make this work. We just have to figure out where it’s coming from.”

Scott released a deep sigh, dropped his arms onto the desk, and began typing commands into the computer. “I think our software has a mind of its own. An artificial intelligence.”

“That’s a scary thought.”

“Well, get used to it, because someday it’s going to happen and we’ll lose control of everything we take for granted.”

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