

Chapter One

Dr. Alex Jamison has given this lecture at least 20 times over the years. He could recite it word for word without his notes. This particular topic was one of great interest to him. So much in fact that he spent much of his off time continuing to do research.

He was at the point of the lecture when he would start the slide show. He was sure that the class, like all the classes before them, were by now trying their hardest to stay awake and take just enough notes to get out of this class with a decent grade. Archaeology wasn't one of the most popular majors, so for most students this was just a mandatory class they had to take to gain science hours. But that was fine with Dr. Jamison. His greatest pleasure was watching a student take his class and discover a passion for the field that he had devoted his life to. And if the class had no interested students in it, like the current class he was in front of, so be it. He would get lost in his own thoughts and come up with new ideas and theories of his own that he would spend many hours each day researching. He was in the middle of one of those moments right now.

“There is a phenomenon known as OOPART, or Out of Place Artifacts. These are man-made objects that have been discovered and believed to belong to a certain period of time. What makes these objects interesting though, is that the technology that it would have taken to create such a thing, wasn't believed to exist at the time the object was made. Over the course of time, most of these findings are eventually explained away as having been either a natural occurrence or an outright hoax. There are a few though, that just can't be explained away. Either we were wrong about the technological capabilities of the people of that era, or there has to be another

explanation. Take for example the Viking sword Ulfbehrt. This sword was discovered and dated to be from around 800 to 1000 A.D. But when the sword was examined further, it was found to be made of iron so pure that it had to have been heated to at least 3000 degrees. The only problem is, the technology required to do that wasn't invented until the Industrial Revolution some 800 years later. Another example is the Antikythera Mechanism. Described by some as the first 'computer', it was discovered at a shipwreck site in 1900, but actually dates to around 200 B.C. It was a mechanical device used to calculate the positions of planets and the sun, had dials that counted days and even calculated the timing of the Olympics. The complexity and the workmanship involved in such an instrument would not be seen again for at least a thousand years. These are just two examples of this phenomenon. Now, as I said earlier, most respected members of the scientific community have their own explanations of these objects, and they look down on any alternative explanations as 'pseudoscience'. But the true answer is actually a statement that all scientists hate to say. "I don't know." We honestly don't know the real answers to these questions, and maybe we never will. But to write off anyone who dares to think outside the box as a 'pseudoscientist' is not only insulting, but it's counterproductive. Some of the most rock solid, respected scientific truths that we know today were also once seen as 'alternative', 'pseudo' or just plain crazy. That's why a real scientist always keeps an open mind."

As he was preparing to go to the next slide and continue on with the lecture he had given so many times, he was surprised when a student in the front row asked a question.

"So how did those artifacts get there?" The question came from a student that up until this point in the semester, Dr. Jamison couldn't recall asking a single question.

"Well, Mr. Lopez, how do you think they got there?"

The young man gave it some thought for a few seconds before replying with a smirk, “Aliens.”

There was laughter throughout the classroom, interrupted only when Dr. Jamison raised his hand to gesture them to quiet down.

“Care to expound on that theory?”

Obviously now slightly embarrassed, the student replied, “My guess would be that aliens visited the planet at some point and gave them these devices and other technology.”

“Okay, I see a lot of you laughing at Dylan here. I wouldn’t be so quick to dismiss his idea. There have been some very competent scientists who believe that he may be right. The so called ‘Ancient Astronaut’ or ‘Ancient Alien’ theories. There’s even a popular TV show about that. There were even depictions of what appear to be astronauts found on petroglyphs in Italy. But since all of you obviously think that idea is absurd, I assume someone else has an alternative theory?”

The class was silent for a few seconds until another student chimed in.

“What about time travel? Maybe someone found a way to travel back in time and brought these devices or the knowledge of how to create these devices with them.”

“Believe it or not, that theory, according to some people, actually ties in with Dylan’s alien theory. There are some in the scientific community that believe that the so called UFO sightings in Roswell were actually future human beings that have mastered the art of time travel and have come back periodically throughout history to visit their ancestors.”

Dylan raised his hand again, this time a little hesitant to speak up after being laughed at the first time.

“So, Dr. Jamison, what do you think is the explanation?”

Dr. Jamison paused for a moment before replying, knowing he had the full attention of the class for the first time this semester. “Dylan, believe it or not, I think I know the truth. But if I were to say what that truth actually was, I’m afraid this would probably be my last class. There are some ideas so outrageous, no matter if they’re true or not, that just aren’t spoken out loud by a respected professor such as myself. Besides, I only have two more years before I can retire at my full salary. Maybe I’ll write a book about it then. Or, if one of you catches me at one of the local watering holes after a few whiskeys, I’ll probably tell you every hair-brained, half-cocked theory that I’ve had rattling around in my head for the last 30 years.”

As the students quietly chuckled, Dr. Jamison looked down at his watch, and for the first time in quite a while, he was disappointed that it was time to dismiss the class.

“Alright, I’ve bored you enough for one day. You’re dismissed.”

As the students were leaving, they were all talking to one another about the lecture that they had just listened to. Dr. Jamison looked on with pride and was now even more excited about the meeting that he had with an old friend this afternoon.

Chapter Two

“Where the hell is he?”, Stephen Phillips mumbled to himself as he waited on yet another park bench. “This is the last time I’m doing this, I swear.”

Stephen was waiting to meet a man that was recommended to him by one of his former colleagues at The Times. The two former co-workers hadn’t seen each other in years and while catching up on their respective current projects, Stephen mentioned something that he was working on in his spare time. His old friend, Jacob, remembered meeting someone on one of his past stories that he thought Stephen might be interested in meeting. At the very least he thought Stephen would get a kick out of it, even if he didn’t gain any useful knowledge.

‘Eccentric’ was the word that Jacob kept using to describe the man that he was now waiting on. ‘Unreliable’ was the word that Stephen was thinking about now. Jacob gave him a phone number for the guy, which after five attempts he finally answered. Three calls later and the man, Anthony Joseph, agreed to meet Stephen in a public place of Anthony’s choosing. Stephen waited at the designated meeting place the first time for an hour to no avail. The second time he waited two hours.

Today was the third and final attempt at a meeting. He doubted very seriously if the man had anything to offer, but Jacob insisted that he meet with him. As he checked his watch for the hundredth time, a beat-up old sedan pulled up and the driver rolled down his window.

“Get in.”, a voice from inside the car yelled at Stephen. From the wild-eyed look of the driver he had no doubt that this was the man his old colleague told him about. As he cursed

Jacob under his breath, he reluctantly stood up and got in the passenger seat. He was preparing to shake hands and introduce himself when the car suddenly took off.

Anthony Joseph kept looking over at his passenger, a little too often for Stephen's liking. He wasn't confident in this strange man's driving ability when he was watching the road, much less while he was staring him down.

"Did anyone follow you?", Anthony asked.

"Uh, no, not that I could tell. Why, are you being followed?"

Anthony just shook his head and laughed at his passenger. "Always. And now you will be too. You picked the wrong subject to take an interest in."

Finally, it seemed that they reached their apparent destination, which was just an abandoned parking lot where an old grocery store used to be. Anthony put the car in park and shut off the ignition.

Stephen, getting more uncomfortable by the minute, finally broke the silence.

"So, Jacob tells me you and I share an interest in the same subject."

"Hah, Jacob! That jerk basically laughed in my face while he was interviewing me. Some people can't handle the truth. What about you? You call me up to make fun of me too? Let me know now, so I don't waste anymore of my time."

"No, not at all. I'm not here to waste my or your time. Jacob told me that you had some good information for me. And he definitely wasn't laughing at you. He wouldn't have recommended that I meet you if he didn't take you seriously. He just doesn't understand the subject matter."

Anthony still looked doubtful, but he appeared to relax a little. “Okay, where do we start?”

“Let’s start from the beginning.”

Chapter Three

David Sanders wasn't easily impressed, but today was an exception. Forbes magazine listed him as one of the five richest men on the planet every year for the last ten years, and for good reason. He had made a fortune in the tech world over the past two decades, and was considered a pioneer in the rapidly growing industry. He advised Presidents, met with royalty and socialized with celebrities. But he could already tell his retirement party tonight was going to be hard to top. Some of the most recognizable and powerful men and women in the world were here tonight. Including the night's entertainment, rock legend Paul McCartney, his all-time favorite musician. David had no doubt who put all this together. His right-hand man for the last twenty plus years, James Ellison.

James had been there from the beginning, advising David every step of the way. A lot of the ideas that made David Sanders a household name actually originated from his best friend, James Ellison. He always tried to make sure that James got his share of the credit, but his friend was incredibly humble and wanted no part of the spotlight. But David knew that without James, he would not be standing here today. That's why it only seemed fitting that James would be riding off into the sunset at the same time as his long-time boss and mentor.

"Hah, some mentor", thought David. If anything, it was the other way around. It was usually James that was talking David down from the ledge when the stress of deadlines or bad media coverage got to be too much. As he stood backstage waiting for Sir Paul to finish his last song before being introduced to the crowd, he read over his prepared speech one more time. Of course, James was the one who was asked to proofread the speech, like always.

He really didn't know how he was going to manage his day to day life without James by his side. Wherever life would take James Ellison, David hoped that he would find peace and happiness. He definitely deserved it after years of babysitting the CEO of Sandcorp.

The emcee for the evening was a late-night talk show host that David had never heard of, but who he was told was very popular with the younger crowd these days. It was with that thought in mind that he looked out among the crowd, comprised mostly of his employees. They all looked so damn young. They probably had no idea who the old rock star on stage was, but seemed to be enjoying the night regardless. Of course, the open bar probably had a lot to do with that.

With the musical part of the show over, the emcee finally introduced the guest of honor. With the crowd giving a long standing ovation, David made his way to the podium.

When he had his papers in place, he looked out at the crowd and gestured for them to sit.

"Thank you, Jimmy, for that fine introduction." The crowd gave the late-night host a polite round of applause. "I'm a huge fan. And a big thanks to Sir Paul McCartney", which got an even louder reaction from the crowd, if only because they knew that their boss expected it.

"I'm not going to take too long with my speech. God knows all of you have heard enough speeches from me. But I did want to take the time to thank you all for coming tonight. I know it was hard for you to show up to a mandatory company event for a free concert and free booze. But seriously, thank you all. Not only for tonight, but for the last thirty years. It's been one hell of a ride hasn't it? I look out into the crowd tonight and I see faces that have been here since the beginning. And I also see faces so young that they probably weren't born when we opened the doors to this company. And that's fantastic. I know that I'm leaving this company in good hands.

I've had the privilege to work with some of you young people and I have no doubt that you will carry on the proud tradition of excellence that this company represents."

David scanned the front row while the crowd applauded itself. Then he finally spotted him.

"But I would be remiss if I didn't mention one man in particular tonight. Truth be told, he should be standing right here beside me, getting this same send off. James Ellison, get up here."

The crowd applauded loudly again as three of James' friends urged him to take the stage, which he finally did.

"Anybody familiar with the day to day operations of this company knows how important this man is. He's never allowed me to give him his proper credit in public, but tonight I'm not giving him a choice. James Ellison has an official job title of CTO, but that still doesn't do justice to the role that he plays. I am under no illusions that I or this company would be where we are today if not for the hard work and dedication of this man."

James, like always, looked uncomfortable with praise from his boss. He had always shied away from the spotlight, even when most Silicon Valley insiders considered him the brains behind Sandcorp.

"My wife, Anne, jokes with me and asks when I retire, what time will James have to come by the house to tell me what I'm supposed to do that day. You laugh, but I'm wondering the same thing myself. I know my name is on the building, and my wrinkled old face is the one on camera and in print, but make no mistake about it, we built this together. I'll miss a lot of things about this job, but most of all, I will miss seeing my friend every day."

David raised a glass for a toast, which prompted everyone else holding a drink to do the same.

“Here’s to James. Starting tomorrow, you’ll never have to listen to me ramble on about anything ever again. But I sure hope you stop by every now and then to talk anyway. To James!”

The two men shook hands as the crowd applauded. Then James left the stage and rejoined his friends, relieved for that scene to be over with.

“Touching moment”, snickered one of James’ friends awaiting him off stage.

“Knock it off Lynn. It’s an emotional night for the guy. For me too. We’ve been through a lot together. He may have his faults, but he’s a good man.”

“I know. Relax. I was just joking around. It is sad really. A lot of good things are coming to an end pretty soon I guess. But at least your buddy up there gets to go out with a few billion dollars and a Beatle performing for him. Thanks to you.”

“A few? I think the last figure I saw was a little more than \$60 billion. But who’s counting? That’s just part of the deal right? Besides, I’m not exactly going to be begging on the street. None of us will.”

The four friends sipped their drinks in silence, while watching the crowd enjoy the festivities. Each of the men had known each other for years and were each successful in their own right. Marcus Matthews was an executive VP of a major pharmaceutical company. Will O’Brien was a board member for a private security company that was contracted out by every branch of the U.S. military. Lynn Peterson was a Vice President of a major Oil and Gas company

out of Houston. Something else that each of the men had in common; they were all getting ready to retire.

Just then a waiter walked by and Lynn stopped him and got fresh beers for all four men. They each raised their glass for a toast.

Will was the first to make a toast. “We’ve had a good run guys. I can’t say I’ll miss all of it.”

James replied, “I won’t miss any of it. Sure, I’ll miss some of the people that I worked with on a daily basis, but our thing? No, I won’t miss that at all. It’s time to let someone else deal with it.”

“And time for some other lucky sap to get the credit for it”, Lynn said, which got a sideways glance from James.

They all continued slowly sipping their beers, but said nothing else about it.

Marcus finally spoke up, “Speaking of, have any of you heard from our friend? It’s almost that time.”

“No, but I hear he’s making his rounds across the pond right now”, answered Will. “Won’t be long before he makes his way here. Then the real fun begins.”

Chapter Four

While the outgoing CEO of Sandcorp, Inc. was being lauded in Silicon Valley, a few hundred miles away, veteran investigative journalist Stephen Phillips was having coffee at his favorite diner. He was waiting on one of his closest friends to meet him here, a weekly ritual that both of them looked forward to. Just then Dr. Alex Jamison walked through the door, looking around until he finally spotted Stephen, who was waving at him from a booth near the back of the diner.

Stephen and Alex met more than twenty years ago, when each were trying to make a name for themselves in their respective fields. Alex was already a published author, having written a book about the Nazca petroglyphs in South America. Stephen was working on an article for a small magazine about ancient mysteries and something called oopart. Stephen was more interested in writing about politics and business, but he was new to the magazine and was in no position to turn down an assignment. He was absolutely stuck in neutral while trying to come up with an angle for the story, when he came across Alex's book. He could sense the young author's passion about the subject and quickly became fascinated with the topic himself. He reached out to Alex the old-fashioned way, by sending a letter to a P.O. Box that the publishing company had given him.

Not surprisingly, Alex didn't get much fan mail. He responded right away and the two began a correspondence with each other. This was during the early stages of e-mail and the two would share articles with each other about different artifacts that they came across. They even began to discuss working together to write a book about a theory that they were working on. A

theory that, as crazy as it sounded to them, was apparently not new in the world of conspiracy theorists.

They, along with a few other believers, thought that there had to be an advanced civilization that existed thousands of years ago, that was lost or destroyed, along with their technology and engineering ideas. That some great catastrophe had occurred which basically hit a reset button on civilization, and the ingenuity and advancements that these people had created were destroyed and not discovered or reinvented until thousands of years later.

Naturally, most credible scientists and historians dismiss this theory as nonsense, and the handful of men and women who have dared to even bring up the idea that this might be possible, are quickly shut down and cast as conspiracy nuts.

But at the same time, they offer no real explanation for certain artifacts' existence. That's what drives people like Alex and Stephen. There has to be an explanation, no matter how insane that explanation might be.

As Alex approached the table, Stephen was already flagging down the waitress to come and take his friends order.

Stephen shook Alex's hand and said, "I was going to go ahead and order for you, but I didn't know how long you were going to be getting here."

"Traffic wasn't too bad today. Class did run a little long though. Believe it or not, the students actually showed signs of life today. There may be a future archaeologist or two in there. Poor kids."

“Well, they would have a great mentor available if they did decide to go that route. You inspired me to learn about topics I didn’t even know that I was interested in. That’s what makes a great teacher.”

Alex, looking slightly embarrassed, was eager to change the subject. “So I assume you saw the spectacle going on at Sandcorp today right? Jeez, you would have thought the man cured cancer. All he accomplished was helping a generation of people to be controlled by their cell phones.”

“Spoken like a true curmudgeon. I seem to recall you being lost in your phone from time to time.”

Alex took out his phone, looking as if he just discovered it for the first time. “I guess it does come in handy sometimes. Although I think trading the convenience of modern technology for actual human interaction and conversation isn’t worth it. But enough of that.”

“I agree. So, you think Sanders is still a prime candidate? If so, I guess he should be looking at a replacement pretty soon. Without the access that being the CEO of a major tech company enjoys, it would be impossible to carry out his groups work.”

“That’s what I’m thinking. And it all fits in with the fact that our other suspects are going to be going through changes at their companies as well. If we’re right, then business is about to be picking up. If we were ever going to uncover anything about these guys, it would be now.”

It was then that Alex noticed a coy grin on his friends face.

“What? Am I missing something? I thought we were on the same page.”

“We are, we are. But that’s what I wanted to talk to you about today. There’s someone I want you to meet. A fellow believer I guess you could call him.”

Alex looked uneasy at this prospect. During the last few years of their research they had met plenty of people who had similar ideas about an unknown ancient society. There were a few who had some interesting opinions and insight, but they were seriously outnumbered by the wackos. But Alex trusted Stephens’ judgement.

“Okay. Who is it? Or more importantly, where did you find him?”

“An old contact of mine from The Times told me about him. He didn’t take him very seriously, but he thought I might get a kick out of meeting him. My contact has an idea of what I’ve been working on, but I haven’t told him any details. I think we’ve both seen what looks we get when we actually let people know what we’re researching.”

“Yeah, understandably. You have to have a pretty open mind to consider some of the theories that are out there.”

“You’re right. And that’s okay. When we finally uncover the truth, it will all be worth it. Which is why I met with this guy. I only talked to him for a few minutes, but I knew he had something that we were missing. He’s willing to go into more detail with me, but I told him to wait until you joined us. He agreed to meet us whenever we were ready.”

“Great. I’m ready. When do you want to go?”

“I’ll make the call when we leave here. But Alex? Just be prepared. I’m pretty sure this guy hasn’t left his house in a few years. He’s out there.”

“I’d be surprised if he wasn’t a little off. But if you say he has something to give us, I trust you. Set it up. Just wish we knew more about this guy.”

Chapter Five

Alex wasn't the only person who didn't know much about Anthony Joseph. He was raised as an only child by his mother. He knew his dad, but really didn't see much of him. The talk around town was that Milton Joseph wasn't all there. Not that he wasn't intelligent. In fact, most people that knew him said he was too smart for his own good. He never held jobs for very long and spent most of his time alone, working on various 'projects' that never amounted to anything.

Rumors varied from being an escaped mental patient to a cult leader. Anthony's mom was in no rush to defend her ex-husband either. She sometimes seemed to feel sorry for him, but mostly she was upset that he offered no financial support for Anthony. She never tried to keep him from seeing his father but hoped that he didn't take after him.

Those hopes were dashed as soon she saw them together when Anthony was barely a teenager. His dad, Milton, was always going on and on about government conspiracies and mind control experiments that were being done in underground labs. When he was drinking, which was quite often, he would even claim that he knew secrets that would get him killed. That there were certain groups of people that were always following him, which was his excuse for not staying in the same place for too long. Of course, she knew it was all nonsense. He was just a guy who was a serial underachiever and created a fantasy world in which he was more important than he really was.

She had to admit that he was charming and eccentric when they first met and his wild stories and imagination were entertaining if nothing else. She made the mistake of getting pregnant with his child though and that changed everything for her. But not for him.

Where she once was amused by his antics, now she was just tired. Anthony needed her and she needed help from his dad. But she soon gave up on that. Luckily Milton's dad, Anthony's grandfather, would stop by and leave cash in hidden places around the house. Some months she didn't know how she'd make it without his help. She wished that Anthony would take after his granddad more than his father, but she didn't hold out much hope.

If someone told her that Arthur Joseph knew top secret information, she would be more apt to believe it. Whereas Milton was lazy and full of himself, Arthur exuded a quiet confidence. When you talked to him you always got the sense that he knew something you didn't. Which was probably true.

Throughout the years she began to see more of Milton in her son than Arthur. His granddad always stayed in the picture though. Luckily his dad was as absent as always while he was growing up. It killed her that Anthony still got excited when he did bother to show up. For all of his faults, Anthony, like any kid, wanted to look up to his dad.

When he was in his early twenties, she got the phone call that she had been dreading. Arthur was dying. She called Milton to make sure he knew, but he was so incoherent, that she just gave up and focused on Anthony.

A great sadness swept over her when she heard the news. Not only for the loss of Arthur, but for the loss of the only good man in her son's life. She wanted him to go see his grandfather one last time, so she called and made arrangements to go see him.

When they arrived at Arthur's house, the nurse let them in and let them know that he was excited to see his grandson one more time. She and Anthony went to his room and they spent over an hour talking, laughing and crying with him. Sensing that he was getting tired and needed his rest, they got up to go. Before they could leave though, Arthur spoke up.

“Please, I need to speak to Anthony alone. If that's okay with you.”

Not wanting to deprive either of them of this moment, she said of course it's okay and left the two of them alone.

She sat in the foyer for about half an hour before Anthony came out of his grandfather's room. He was holding a large envelope that he clutched to his chest. Assuming it was some type of family heirloom, she didn't press him to find out what it was. The only thing she knew was that from that point on, her son was never the same.