

THE FIND

A Novel

by

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“Some of the biggest men in the U.S., in the field of commerce and manufacturing, are afraid of somebody, are afraid of something. They know that there is a power somewhere so organized, so subtle, so watchful, so interlocked, so complete, so pervasive, that they had better not speak above their breath when they speak in condemnation of it.”

—President Woodrow Wilson

“Part of me suspects that I'm a loser, and the other part of me thinks I'm God Almighty.”

—John Lennon

“The truth shall spring from the earth.”

Psalm 85

“The most dangerous enemy is the one that is not perceived, yet whose presence is everywhere.”

The Ancients

PROLOGUE

*The Grand Canyon
4784 feet below the South Rim
Present day. Dawn*

Dr. Jensen Reinhardt awoke in his sleeping tent, his head pounding and a sharp ringing in his ears.

This was unusual. He rarely got headaches, and had never experienced ringing like this before. Not that he could ever remember.

He sat up on the air mattress and rubbed the grit from his eyes. *My God.* It felt as if a cactus had sprouted inside his skull during the night, with needle-sharp spines knifing the backs of his eyeballs.

A harsh, metallic taste lingered in his mouth. *Is it from something I ate last night?* He tried to remember what he and his crew had eaten for dinner.

Tried. But nothing came to mind. Strange. The pain was clouding his thinking. *Did I have a stroke in my sleep? After all, I'm . . . I'm . . .how old?*

He sucked air deep into his lungs, trying to clear his head. The polyester tent smelled like tar. He never noticed this smell before. It made him dizzy. *How old am I?*

Canned black beans. Millet. And tuna fish.

That was a relief. He'd remembered what he'd had for dinner. But for the life of him he couldn't remember his age.

Numbers flicked through his mind: forty-four, fifty-three, forty-eight . . . Intuitively, he knew none were his current age.

He hoped like hell it wasn't a stroke. The archeological camp was situated in an isolated, dried-up basin, a mile below the rest of the world. There'd be no calling 911 down here.

He slowly rose from the air mattress. Put one bare foot forward. Same foot back. Stood on one foot. Waved his arms. Wiggled his fingers. Probably not a stroke.

A sudden dark intuition clawed at his chest. *My crew. Something is wrong with them, too!*

Ignoring the pain in his head, Reinhardt thrust his legs in his pants, and yanked on his boots.

The gun. I should bring the gun.

He always carried a gun on archeological digs. Snakes, hungry animals, and other undesirables were a given. He reached under his backpack, felt the leather holster, and ripped his Ruger from it. Turning toward the exit, he caught a glimpse of himself in the small mirror Velcroed to the tent wall. His eyes were a mucousy web of bloodshot veins.

My God. . . What's happening to me?

Gripping the gun in his fist, he stepped outside. Shrouds of dreary gray mist encapsulated the campground, and black granite buttes rose skyward on either side of him like walls of a great medieval fortress. The wind whistled in his ears, down from the Colorado River valley not too far off.

Or is it the ringing?

He headed out and lumbered past the gaping mouth of Re's Cavern. For the past three weeks, he and his crew had been conducting their excavation deep within the limestone cave. They had been searching for . . . for *what?*

Fifty-five. No. Fifty-six. I'm fifty-six years old.

His pace quickened as he passed in front of the three sleeping tents for the crew. But as he drew closer to the larger, yellow-domed excavation tent, his coordination waned. Just putting one foot in front of the other became a challenge. Everything seemed to happen in slow motion: his breathing, his thinking, his movements . . . Becoming desperate to reach his team, he forged clumsily ahead, ignoring the spastic movements of his legs. The crew would be in the tent, making plans for the day. After all, today was *the* day. All they had

done over the past three weeks would culminate in today's activities. In fact, everything Reinhardt had done over the last six months—no, over his entire professional life—would culminate today. He knew this to be true. Yet for the life of him, he couldn't remember exactly what they were scheduled to do.

As he approached the main tent, the ringing intensified: an endless, high-pitched shriek that scratched at his eardrums.

Re-gripping the cold handle of the gun, he entered the large excavation tent. As he'd anticipated, the others were there. What he didn't anticipate was that they'd be stumbling about like tranquilized animals, their eyes void of life, saliva dribbling from their mouths.

What the . . .

By now, he had lost his ability to form logical thoughts. Within moments, he, too, started dribbling from the mouth. A feeling of utter hopelessness and desperation spread through him like a deadly virus. He suddenly had an insatiable craving for death—his own.

A voice commanded Reinhardt to release the gun. It hadn't come from outside him, but inside. Someone else's dark booming voice in *his* head: *Release the gun, now!*

The weapon fell from his fingertips.

Suddenly a handful of men wearing black helmets with reflective silver eye protectors entered the tent. He wanted to fight them but was helpless. In his futile mental state, he held only one desire—that they kill him and the others. Death didn't represent an end but a new beginning. But the men didn't kill him. Instead, they gagged and handcuffed him. Drove a stake through the tent floor, then another, and yet another. They tightened a chain around his neck, attached to the stakes. A helmet was thrust on his head. The world darkened through the silver glass, and the feeling of desperation left him. His coordination returned. The headache disappeared, as did the ringing in his ears.

He began to think straight again.

What madness is this?

He struggled to break free. But his movements worked only to tighten the chain, cutting off his air.

He coughed, and out of the corner of his eye caught a man entering the tent, carrying a cooler. He hauled it up onto a table and starting filling Styrofoam cups from the spigot. Handed the cups to his crew. *Dear Lord.* “No,” Reinhardt cried. “Don’t drink it!”

Only two heads turned toward him: Din Morton and Karen Stoltz. They looked at Reinhardt with deadened eyes. Like the others, they seemed to follow the orders of an invisible dictator. They each took a cup and drank, as if obeying the same internal commands—*the voice.*

One by one, his crewmembers collapsed to the floor like puppets whose strings had been cut. At first, Reinhardt thought—hoped—they had only passed out.

But they weren’t just unconscious. Bodies convulsed on the floor, and death rattles filled the air. The cups from which they drank obviously contained poison. He was witnessing the mass murder of his archeological crew.

Rinehart’s trembling body jangled the chains. His eyes burned tears under the helmet.

These were student archeologists who had volunteered for the dig. He pictured their mothers and fathers getting the news of their children’s deaths. Saw their grief-stricken faces and terrorized eyes. Heard them cry, and heard their endless questions:

How? Who? Why?

What unseen force had seized control of their children’s minds?

Reinhardt’s blood boiled, and again he struggled to break free. The soles of his shoes skidded on the canyon floor. The chain tightened around his neck, and everything started to go black. He fell to the rock-hard ground, gasping for air.

Who were these men?

And why? W-h-y?

He knew the answer.

He remembered now. Remembered what he and his team had excavated from Re's Cavern, only three days ago. This is what had brought these men to their campground. It's why they had killed his crew. They had come for the find.