

About 2,720 words.

CHAPTER 11:
COMING OF THE STAR PEOPLE

Once inside the vault, Alberto rushed around madly and blindly, in a veritable tizzy of preoccupation. He had lots of preparations to make. He was in a superabundant ebullience of giddiness. Now that he had the mask, it was just a matter of finding the relics and putting the whole suit together.

His mind whispered secrets into his hubristic ear. "You can be a god on earth now. It was never Vick, you were chosen by destiny."

He ignored the others. He viewed them as gnats, gnats that he didn't personally want to kill, but which he hoped would disappear nonetheless. And they kept on staring at him, especially the small brown one which resembled the host.

Alberto put on the helmet, then a body suit and boots and gloves. Each item seemed to mold invisibly to his person—to attach itself to the "host".

Katy, Trent, and Mateo looked around the inside of the vault in wonder. There was gold and silver treasure everywhere. Dusty desert roaming craft, suits of advanced space worthy armor. As an appreciator of Mesoamerican ingenuity and artifice, Mateo was bowled over by the intricacy and detail of the pieces. It all confirmed what he had secretly believed for many days now, that the Toltecs were just stewards of this technology and these artifacts. That they had wisely hid them from the conquering Europeans, to keep themselves and everyone else in the world safe.

This technology, these relics, actually originated from a civilization that had lived in this area long ago, in the remote distant past. This vault and this structure were their handiwork.

Alberto was fully clothed in the suit now and was imminently awaiting godhead.

Suddenly he rushed towards the back of the vault where Katy, Mateo and Trent discovered an ancient elevator.

They got on with Alberto.

The elevator rose upwards for nearly two minutes.

Alberto was vibrating with intensity. His brain appeared to be running smoking hot. He could not control

his nervous energy, he was bouncing off the walls. The doors opened and they emerged into a sweltering jungle.

They were inside of the nose cone of Weaver's Needle now, and had entered the ancient aliens' greenhouse. Huge palm fronds and creepers blocked any sort of path through the long overgrown experiment in ancient terraforming technology.

Alberto swung madly with the Bowie knife he still brandished menacingly about himself, and like some ancient machete-mad Mexican peon, cleared a path for them. At the far end of the jungle was a stair up. They scaled this stair and emerged in the ancient command center.

It was a long room with a grated floor and a huge retractable dome overhead. Across each wall was a football field long bank of computer equipment, lit up with blinking lights, strange knobs, and dark screens. Above the computer banks were dark windows, as if they were shuttered. Alberto rushed around like a headless nutty chicken trying to get the whole apparatus up and running.

Trent similarly could not quell his curiosity and excitement in finding himself face to face with such advanced and inscrutable alien technology. He likewise started taking in all of the gadgets and gizmos in the bridge of the ancient tower.

Katy and Mateo watched in awe as the "shutters" outside the windows appeared to open. Alberto had got the primary power system up and running and Trent was powering down the security features. Through the windows sunlight poured in. Mateo looked out and saw the Superstition Wilderness on all sides. They were seeing the surrounding terrain like they had scaled the mountain's peak and for all intents and purposes they had.

The mountain was just a clever disguise. It was almost completely hollow and for ages it had been secretly housing an ancient alien fortress. But what purpose did it serve? And what was this ancient civilization? Had it just lived here, or had it been everywhere? What was the particular significance of this spot?

Alberto was randomly pulling levers along the floor. Finally he succeeded in his goal of opening up the massive domed ceiling above him. Like they were spectators at a baseball game at Chase Field, Katy and Mateo watched with awe as the two interlocking plates above parted and let the sun shine in on their heads. It was burning close at this elevation.

"We have to tell someone about this," said Mateo.

"I don't know," said Katy skeptically. "They may not be ready for this."

Mateo had to agree with her. They both felt like they were in a dream, and all of this terrifying stuff was happening, with such grand implications for the species, and all our notions of past and future, our origins and destiny, yet they were none of them all that surprised or afraid. Instead they were filled with a sense of wonder and anticipation. An expectancy almost religious in essence, that they were being treated to this display of applied superior cosmic intelligence, and there was a sense that they might come to inherit this more elevated wisdom and benefit by it.

Alberto continued flinging levers and pressing buttons. Beneath their feet, a circle opened up in the floor and out popped an enormous wide cylindrical steel object. It rose straight up from the floor and rose out the dome at a fast clip and soon stood a hundred feet in the air. It was an enormous radio antenna or transmitter beacon of some sort.

Now Alberto walked over to Trent and tossed him out of the way.

"What are you doing?" shouted Mateo.

Alberto ignored him.

He started pushing buttons now and whole banks of computers fired up, screens shot to life, and everything started whirring and humming.

It looked as if Alberto was trying to communicate with someone or some thing.

A globe of light now pulsed periodically up the antenna. Alberto was broadcasting some type of super-strong signal out into the sky or up into space. At the same time that Weaver's Needle was broadcasting, unknown to them, Alberto had also activated massive communications repeating towers on nearby Picacho Peak, our moon, Mars, and other even more far-flung and exotic locales.

Alberto was calling the Star People home.

They had not very long to wait.

Alberto was now looking around, searching for things, trying to make preparations. He found a closet where there was a rolled up royal purple carpet. This he unfurled at almost the exact center of the long hall. He brought out a dais for the Star People to stand on and set out some ancient alien beverages on a table nearby. Then he sat down on a chair to wait, a preoccupied look on his face, like some sort of man experiencing a half-dazed half-languid ecstatic expectancy.

Katy, Mateo, and Trent milled back and forth, pacing, in nervous anticipation of what might come through that dome.

Alberto was talking to himself, it appeared. Apparently he was receiving communications through the mask, beamed directly into his cortex, from the approaching alien host. He suddenly rose up and hit a button. All of a sudden they heard an enormous rumbling underfoot. Then the ground lowered beneath them as if it were on hydraulics. A groove along the ground appeared and sunlight shone through. Then a second floor below their feet started pushing its way out through the groove until there was an enormous platform outside seemingly hanging off the side of the mountain, supported by nothing. There were a door and a stair next to one of the computer banks which Alberto opened and they all filed out onto the platform out into the fresh air.

Wow, thought Mateo to himself, flush with pride and fear, We are to be the first humans in modern history to meet actual people from outer space, that I've ever heard of anyways.

I hope they're nice, he thought. It really bugged him though that based on everything thus far, they weren't likely to be.

They didn't have much longer to wait. Soon high up in the sky they could see a silvery saucer-shaped craft. It fell to Earth like a bullet and stopped on a dime a few hundred yards above their head.

Alberto was quivering in anticipation.

The craft hovered there for a solid minute or so, then it descended further and paused about six feet above the ground. A door opened on the side of the craft and a stair descended to the surface of the platform.

Then like it was a familiar dream suddenly come to life, familiar forms of the Katsinas descended the stairs one by one.

Corn Katsina, Eagle Katsina, etc. Just like in Mateo's dream. And just how they appeared in their reproductions—the Hopi dolls.

After eight of them had come out and arranged themselves on either side of the stair, another being emerged from the door.

Alberto was on his knees groveling and genuflecting in apoplectic joy.

An enormously tall being came out now and started to scale down the stairs. Eleven or twelve feet tall, thick, and completely white.

His robes were white, his arms a pearly alabaster white, his feet and sandals a marbly white. He was absolutely breath-taking but also very scary. Mainly for the fact that he had no face. Instead the pit where his face should have been there was a swarming and teeming of waving undulating long white tentacles, like sharp shiny doughy monster arms.

A voice filled all their minds at once, and enunciated in pure-toned English.

"I am Quetzalcoatl and I have returned for my belongings, and to wreak vengeance on those who destroyed my body and banished me."

Mateo gulped nervously. So far this didn't look promising.

Quetzalcoatl walked over to the prostrated form of Alberto. The two figures were melded into a ball of uniformly bright light. Mateo, Katy, and Trent had to look away.

When the light subsided several moments later, Alberto was slumped lifeless on the ground, and Quetzalcoatl was holding his mask again. After a thousand years, he had his relic back. It had been calling home and working its way back to him over the centuries, and now had finally and rather ruthlessly achieved its goal.

Mateo cried out and rushed to his brother's body.

Once Quetzalcoatl had fitted the mask back to his face, he now shone with great terrifying beauty. His face was fair and almost looked humanish, and impossibly archetypally kingly and benevolent. Almost guilty, too, about the pain Mateo was experiencing as a result of him reclaiming his property.

Quetzalcoatl walked over to the huddled form of Mateo and the sprawled out form of Alberto. He touched Mateo on the shoulder. "The penalty for wearing my mask is death," he said.

"But he was just trying to serve you," stammered Mateo.

"Don't fear my son, for Death is not as bad as you've been told."

"I don't care. You've taken him from me."

A look of perplexed sadness crossed Quetzalcoatl's features. The Katsinas stood like stone-silent sentries. All their heads were tilted in the direction of this scene, however.

Quetzalcoatl called over a Katsina now with an extremely long neck, longer than that of a giraffe. It was the Hopi god of their harvest.

"Restore the corn-child to life," said Quetzalcoatl. The Katsina took Alberto in his arms, and before all their very eyes, Alberto stirred to life. His face looked more familiar and his body less drawn.

He looked into Mateo's eyes with rascally scoundrelly recognition—a look that Mateo had not seen in years, and hadn't missed one bit since they were both kids.

His heart unconsciously brimmed full of love at this moment. Love for his brother. He looked at Katy. Love for his bitchy girlfriend. He looked at the enormous white being and the generous katsinas arrayed at his side. Love for the universe. And inside, love for God.

"Tell us who you are," said Katy, in a strong self-assured voice. She held Mateo's hand. "What is your story?"

"We are you," said Quetzalcoatl, "Or rather you are us. Or have become so. Smaller shadows perhaps. We left this planet long ago, most of us. Some of us remained. Some of us have returned to visit every once in a while. You found one of our people in the desert sixty earth years before. Roswell, I believe you call the place. Long ago my race was punished by the Creator for our brutality and bloodlust. This world was temporarily covered in a flood which forever buried our beloved home continent in brine.

Those of us who weren't willing to meet Death decided to leave this world. We have traveled ever since as exiles. And our time of punishment, our wandering in the wilderness is not yet over. But in our travels we have finally learned what we always should have known. We have learned to appreciate the goodness and wisdom of this universe. It's a hard lesson to learn, believe us."

He smiled now.

"Are you coming back to stay?" asked Katy.

"No, not right now. I've erred with the people here, the corn-children as we call them. They grew tired of us few remaining overlords and they rose up and rebelled. Many still have that memory close to their hearts. It's not yet time to reestablish ourselves here. Besides there is still time for you to follow your path here."

"But what are we to do with this knowledge?" asked Katy again. The sun was beaming off her face and glinting dazzlingly in her earnest open eyes.

"That's up to you. We will leave soon. And we will resume our travels, but we will monitor you from afar. Don't fear. The kokopellis will close down this mountain and deactivate it for good this time. Neither you nor anyone else will ever be able to return. Do not test us on this point. For now, humanity continues to hold its own

destiny in its hands. Destroy the entrance that the evil mask-wearer Taylor created and tell no one about this place or what you've seen here. This is for your own benefit as well."

Quetzalcoatl rose to his full towering height now. He waved his arm in a long sloping farewell gesture. He rescaled the stairs and was followed by his coterie of katsinas. Then they were gone.

Back in the bridge, the kokopellis, or gremlins, were already at work dismantling the electronics consoles inside the Needle. Most of the bridge had already become a mess of smoke and frayed sparking wires.

They worked completely ignorant of the group's presence. Alberto was still very weak. They helped him over to the stairs and back out through the greenhouse to the elevators and back out the vault. A kokopelli showed them out through the door and closed it behind them. Then they heard the sound of explosions inside. Another kokopelli took them to the mine entrance. Here with Trent's help they rigged the whole cavern to explode with small mountains of dynamite. Kokopellis had drained the cove and now the group emerged into the sunny air on good

old terra firma again. Muddy sure, but firm enough for their grateful souls.

They walked up the ramp and back up to the dirt road. Halfway down their trek towards the main road, the Old Apache Trail, they heard the enormous explosion of over a ton of dynamite systematically breaching Vick's multi-billion dollar tunnel beneath the Superstition mountain range.

In Phoenix, twenty miles away, it registered as a rare and curious earthquake. The main road was by now crawling with Federal agents. Some agents brought the group to the Director of the Phoenix FBI, whom Mateo had already spoken with.

They were squawking left and right in their walky-talkies about the explosion. The dam was sluicing water into the cove and they wanted to know what the hell was going on.

As they zoomed down the windy road back to civilization, on their way to the hospital, Mateo thought to himself, *Ah, It was good to be free again.* It felt good to be alive, to be free, and to still be human, whatever that meant.

END FINAL INSTALLMENT. END...