

LOST SECRET OF THE ANCIENT ONES



The Manna Chronicles
Book I

By Chris Reynolds

PROLOGUE

High above the Caribbean

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Alex Harrington surveyed his situation – shackled, under guard, and aboard his enemy’s plane. There was no turning back. Headed for certain torture and probable death, he had put everything on the line.

He measured the power amassed by his captors and the great lengths they had gone through to remain hidden. He considered the perils hurtling towards an unsuspecting world, and he pondered destiny, the hidden road that had brought him to this moment. How his actions would have irrevocable consequences.

As a scientist, it had taken some time for him to change his way of thinking, but eventually he had come to accept his fate.

The question was, would his daughter?

His eyes swept the cabin as he prepared himself for what was to come. The polished mahogany table and soft leather chairs of the luxurious jet contrasted with the cheap suits worn by the two thugs who watched over him. He tasted the dry processed air while his fingers caressed the cool metal shackles that bound his wrists. As the craft streaked high above the earth, he took a final look out the port window and steeled himself.

It is time.

“Victor,” he began with more authority than a man surrounded by enemies should have. “Do you know why I am here?”

“Do I know why?” his kidnapper questioned in a tone of condescension. “You’re here because your time has run out.” Victor appeared ebullient. He had hunted Alex for months and now had him cuffed, corralled, and at his mercy.

Alex studied the man. Much smaller than himself, with unflinching eyes and leathery skin, he looked reptilian. But within those eyes, Alex recognized the smug arrogance of one who believed their organization was invincible.

“I think,” Alex said dismissively, “it is your time that is running out.”

Victor’s face creased. A hint of worry? Whatever Alex had seen in his captor’s eyes shifted away when Victor gazed at the two guards behind him and his shackled wrists. Haughty confidence now poured out of Victor like a cat toying with a mouse caught with no escape.

“Alex, one way or another you are going to tell me everything. So let’s skip the unpleasantries and just get to the point. What is it you know?” The question was vague, but the implications were clear.

“Hmmm, what is it I know?” he mused. “I know about the clandestine meetings in Virginia, Scotland, and Paris. I was there, watching and listening.” With a rustle of the chains that bound his hands he raised a forefinger and tapped the side of his head as if to express, *I have it all right in here.*

Victor’s eyes widened. Alex sensed the worried question lurking behind the other man’s gaze. *How could he possibly know about our organization?*

“I know the structure, the leadership, and the end game. And you know what, Victor? I am a light that is going to shine into the darkness, illuminating truth for all the world to see.” Alex leaned back into the soft leather seat as if he didn’t have a worry in the world.

“Bullshit,” Victor exploded. The smell of fear soured the sterile air. “If you had so much as an inkling ...”

“I am here because I know the secret,” Alex interrupted. “That’s what you really want, isn’t it? The secret that has remained hidden for all these centuries. Something so world-changing that few have dared to grasp its power.”

His words had the desired effect — Victor fell silent, his mouth agape. Gone was the cat’s confidence. One moment passed, then another. The lull stretched from seconds into minutes, and the oxygen felt sucked from the fuselage, but still no one spoke. The hum of the plane shooting through the sky only made the silence weigh heavier.

Finally, in a low voice, Alex asked, “Are you a God-fearing man?” He waited, but when there was no answer, he rose to his feet, raised his hands to his chest, and miraculously his shackles slipped off and fell to the floor.

The guards moved to intercede. But Victor held up his palm for them to wait.

Alex could see he was desperate for him to finish what he had to say. Knowing that if he really had unraveled the lost secret of the Ancients, then that is all that mattered. Whatever he knew about their organization would be inconsequential to the answers Victor hoped to have finally found.

“Here,” Alex said, pulling a flash drive from his pocket. Victor hesitated. His hands were trembling as if the item was toxic.

“Take it, Victor,” Alex said forcefully, extending his hand to compel his captor to take the data stick from him. “It will show you the power of what you are looking for, the power that until now, has remained hidden ...”

The only sound was the soft hiss of the air conditioner.

Alex again considered the danger his daughter would be in, but that risk had been measured long ago. With so much at stake, he had no choice — he only hoped when the time came, she would understand.

Given what he had discovered, he didn’t have the luxury of time. And with that realization came the clarity of what needed to be done. He had put all the pieces in place. He had set the path before Maya, and now he had to trust and let events unfold.

She has such passion for solving ancient mysteries.

The thought reinforced his belief that she would take up the hunt. Each clue he’d lain down would lead her to the next, but each also had a firewall, just in case the adversary breached her path.

The two guards fidgeted, not knowing what they were supposed to do. In the hesitation, Alex, the man who was thought captive, had the final words. The words that would set everything in motion.

“Goodbye Victor.”

“What the...” Victor blinked and blinked again. He waved his arms into the empty space, but it was like trying to touch a mirage. His captive was no longer there. He looked to the two guards, but they were as perplexed as he was.

He looked at the flash drive still in his palm.

This was no illusion.

But what was he going to tell his masters? Without sound or sensation, Dr. Alex Harrington was gone. He had vanished right before their very own eyes.

Is that the secret?