

Chapter 6: Secrets

"Good to be back in school, but these extra duties we signed on for sure are crimping my time." Jim opened his car trunk and handed Pat a pair of work gloves. "I'd rather be other places. Church, studying, well, just about anywhere but here."

"Me, too. I need to be at the library doing research for that paper I have due in a couple weeks." Pat slid on his gloves, and they walked up to the door of the Center for Astrophysics and Space Astronomy.



"We'd better clean up that mess in the Cleaning Lab. Who knows if they'll use it tomorrow." Jim pulled his keys from his pocket. "We need some things out of the supplies closet."

He unlocked the closet door, then stopped. "I wonder who that is. I didn't think anyone would be here this late."

Pat cocked his head. "I don't hear anything. Wait. I do hear someone."

They heard the door slam and the shuffling of steps.

"Shh... get in here!" Jim grabbed Pat's jacket, pulled him into the closet, and turned out the light. He held the door slightly ajar, just far enough that they could see through the crack. Five men were walking toward them.

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"I don't see why we couldn't meet in your office, Chancellor. It would have been more comfortable," complained a middle-aged man carrying a large briefcase. He transferred it to his other hand and hurried to catch up to the stout, bearded man in front of him.

"I wish we could have. But with the Colorado Athletic Board meeting in the Conference Room, I thought we'd have more privacy here."

"That's Dr. Durand. I know it!" Jim whispered in Pat's ear. "I remember his funny mustache. Yep, that's him!"

"And Chancellor Frank Valencia. And that's Dr. Mitch Tedrow, one of my professors. And Dr. Kenneth Allen-Spears, the Dean of the Astrophysics Department. But who's the other guy?" Pat whispered.

"Don't know, but I'd like to know what they're doing here." Jim dared open the door a little wider as the men crossed the foyer and stood in front of the wall map of the building.

"I think we can talk in the Administration Office," said Dr. Allen-Spears. "Come on."

Jim pulled the door nearly shut.

"Not enough chairs, Ken." Valencia turned on the office light and looked around.

"Then let's go down to the Bull Pin. I hope it's halfway clean, but it has computers we can use." Allen-Spears turned left down the hall, and shortly, they turned left into another hallway.

"Let's follow them," Jim whispered. He and Pat stayed close to the wall. The sound of the men's footsteps ceased. Jim held up his hand, and they stopped where the group had turned left.

Jim peeked around the corner. "Yep, they're going into the Bull Pin." He motioned for Pat to follow. They reached the opened door and stood pressed tightly against the wall near the door where they could see and hear but not be seen.

"I'm out of breath." Chancellor Valencia sat in one of the computer chairs. "Not so much because of our short walk over here, but because of what you've just shown us at the Observatory. Sorry, but this is probably the best place for us to talk. I don't think anyone will find us here. Besides, from here we can conference with Odderhouse." He turned to the slim, dark-haired man beside him. "Dr. Fadez, can you make that possible?"

"Of course. Just give me a few minutes, and I'll have everything ready."

Valencia turned to Durand. "Andre, can you tell us when you first saw the space craft?"

"Let me see my notes." Durand reached into his briefcase, pulling out a thick notebook. "Here we are. It was New Year's night." Flipping through the tablet, he pointed to a page. "Here it is. You see, I was at the Haute Provence Observatory in France with one of my friends. We were the only ones there since the others had gone away for the holidays. It was late at night, almost midnight, when we decided to go home. Before leaving, I wanted to look at the moon. Why, I don't know. But that's not important."

He stopped to peruse his notes. "That's when I saw it, a huge ship in front of the moon. You can't imagine my surprise. Never had I seen anything like it. I showed it to my friend, and he drew this picture." He pulled a large sheet of paper from his briefcase and held it up.

"I wish we could see." Jim could hardly contain himself but settled down when Pat put a restraining hand on his shoulder.

"Me too," Pat mouthed.

Dr. Durand lowered his voice. "We watched it for a few minutes, and then it disappeared behind the moon. Of course, we told no one. One has to be careful with things like this. Before we did anything, we wanted to do some research. Maybe another country had some sort of spaceship up there. We stayed up looking all that night, but the more we searched, the more we realized that what we saw was not from Earth. Of course, we haven't seen Ouima's ship."

"Then what happened?" asked Dr. Tedrow.

"My friend was killed in a strange car accident on the way home." Durand shook his head. "Ahh, my friend. The police don't know how it could have happened. Anyway, only I knew about this, and it made the burden so much greater. The French government officials don't care for this kind of talk, so I came here to the Observatory. Night after night I watched to see if it would reappear. I was like a madman, determined. A few came to use the telescope, but after midnight, no one was there but me."

"Did you ever see it again?" queried Valencia.

"Yes. Last night. That's when I thought that I should come to you, Dr. Valencia. We should contact the Air Force or someone."

Valencia stood. "My friends, I've contacted each one of you, my colleagues, to tell you that the CIA and the Department of Defense have asked us to watch the skies at the Observatory. They want us to report every spaceship that we see. I've also spoken to my friend Dr. Thomas Odderhouse, who is over the University of California Observatory in Santa Cruz. They have asked the university there to do the same, as well as several other universities that have observatories. He suggests that we contact the Department of Defense. Does anyone else have a suggestion?" He turned to Dr. Fadez. "Is Dr. Odderhouse with us?"

"I'm here, Frank," Odderhouse spoke via the computer link. "After spending much time going over the facts, I believe that contacting the Department of Defense when we see something unusual is the right thing to do. Do you agree, gentlemen?"

Each nodded his head. "This is something that needs handled at a national and international level," observed Mitch Tedrow. "Our governments need to know what World Eternal is up to."

"Then if we're agreed, we tell the government what you saw, Andre," urged Valencia.

Footsteps echoed along the empty hall behind Jim and Pat.

The security guard! Jim's eyes met Pat's in shock and dismay. How could they have forgotten him?

"What are you young men doing here?" His voice boomed through the corridor. Three long strides, and he was standing in front of them.

They couldn't run. They couldn't hide. In a nanosecond, Chancellor Valencia and the others were at the door.

"Who are you? What are you doing?" Valencia angrily grabbed Jim's shoulders and shook him.

Jim gulped. "We came here to clean the Lab. That's our job, right, Pat?"

"But you weren't cleaning the Lab. You were listening to us, weren't you?" Valencia scowled as he looked from one to the other.

Jim nodded. "I'm sorry, sir. We shouldn't have."

Valencia stepped back and surveyed them with disdain. "I think you two are no longer welcome here as students. You can go to your dorms and start packing because you're leaving tomorrow first thing in the morning." He turned to the security guard. "Thank you for doing your job."

Dr. Tedrow stepped between them and Valencia. "I can vouch for this young man, sir." He laid his hand on Pat's shoulder. "He's a student of mine, the top of the class. I've seen this young man around, too," he said, nodding toward Jim.

"I don't care what kind of students they are. They had no business standing out here and listening!" Valencia turned and walked away, and the others followed.

"Wait a minute! Please don't go, sir." Jim ran after him.

They stopped, and Jim stood in front of Chancellor Valencia. "You're right. We should not have stayed and listened. But we saw the same thing Dr. Durand saw on my new telescope my parents gave me for Christmas. We know it's out there, right, Pat?"

"Yes, sir, we do. In fact, we have seen it twice, but we haven't been able to check the past couple days." Pat searched for words to plead their case. "We saw it, sir, and we know what it looks like."

Valencia's eyes traveled from Pat's face to Jim's. "Prove it," he said. "How do I know you're not making all this up?"

Pat took his wallet out of his pocket and pulled out a folded piece of paper. "Look at this, sir. I drew a picture of it. Does this look like what Dr. Durand showed you?"

Durand took the paper. "That's a better drawing than I could do. That's exactly what we saw! When did you see this?"

Pat thought a minute. "Let me see, it was Christmas night. The other time was the Sunday night after New Year's, so it must have been the third of January. Right, Jim?"

"That's right, Pat. We were at the park with Christine and Marcy, trying out my new telescope."

"Did you tell anyone else?" Durand handed the drawing back to Pat.

Jim looked at Pat, then at Valencia. "My family. We told my family."

"Who's in your family? Who did you tell?" Valencia's face was kinder, and Jim could tell worry had taken the place of anger.

"My parents and my grandmother. My sister Janell and her husband, Mason. That's all."

"What did they say when you told them?"

"They didn't believe us. Really, they probably didn't even take us seriously."

Pat shifted his weight to his other foot. "Except Mason. Maybe Mason did a little bit."

"And what does Mason do? Whom would he tell?" Valencia's questions sounded like a military interrogation.

"He's in the Space Operations Command, sir."

"What branch? Where is he stationed? What does he do?"

"He was just promoted to Major. He works with Space Delta 9 at Schriever Air Force Base, Colorado Springs. He helps design new space crafts. That's all I know, Chancellor Valencia."

Valencia stood quietly for a few minutes, studying the ground, then the faces around him. "I think what you have told me changes things, young man. What did you say your name is?"

"Jim Darden, sir. And this is my friend, Pat Minden."

"Are you freshmen?"

"No, sir, we're first-year grad students." Jim looked at the Chancellor hopefully.

"I apologize for my outburst, Jim and Pat. You had no business spying on us."

"We weren't spying, sir. We..." Jim wanted to explain, but Valencia held up his hand.

"It doesn't matter. What does matter," Valencia's eyes met Jim's and Pat's, and then he faced the others, "is that no one, and I mean no one, hears about this. We must keep it a secret among ourselves. Do you all understand?"

"Yes, sir." Jim and Pat answered in unison.

"Of course, you will both stay as students. Are you ready to accept more responsibility?"

"More responsibility?" Jim asked.

"Dr. Durand will be staying here for a while. He will be teaching one of our new classes on the search for earth-like planets, and he will need two young men to help him."

"We'd be glad to help him, sir. Any time. Thank you, Chancellor Valencia." Jim breathed a sigh of relief.

"Do you two know these other men?"

"I know Dr. Tedrow," volunteered Pat.

"And we know Dr. Allen-Spears," added Jim.

Valencia motioned to a tall, thin man wearing thick glasses. "Yes, Dr. Kenneth Allen-Spears, the Dean of the Astrophysics Department. And Dr. Andre Durand, of course. And this is Dr. Shar Fadez, Communications Chief at UC Boulder. Dr. Thomas Odderhouse, with whom we spoke via computer, is at the University of California Observatories in Santa Cruz, California. As far as we know, we are the only ones who know about this."

Jim and Pat shook hands first with Allen-Spears, then with Fadez. Jim wanted to ask both of them questions, and he knew Pat did.

"Let's get out of here before someone else discovers us." Valencia led the way out the door and down the hallway. "Let me remind all of you, and especially you two," and he nodded toward Jim and Pat, "that we must be very careful that we don't say a word to anyone. Any activities anywhere on or off campus must be cleared through me. Not through my office, as going through a secretary, but through me and me alone." He stopped walking and turned to face the rest, but his eyes rested on Jim and Pat following in the rear. "Do you understand what I've just said?"

"Yes, sir."

"You will report to me at my office here at 9:00 in the morning," Durand instructed. "Room 109. I can use your help on a project. That is, if you don't have a class then."

"Don't forget our meeting in my office at 8:00 tomorrow morning," Valencia reminded them. "You two don't need to come."

"Yes, sir." Jim glanced at Pat and could tell that he, too, was disappointed that they could not be at the meeting. He would have loved to see the face of whoever they were going to contact. He longed to hear what the Department of Defense would say when they heard that an alien spaceship was hiding behind the moon. He wanted to ask permission to be there, but he knew they were fortunate not to be dismissed from the university.

Jim and Pat hurried to open the doors for Chancellor Valencia and the others. As the doors swung open, two officers from the Air Force entered.

"Chancellor Valencia? I'm Colonel Brett McDowell, and this is Major Carl Jimenez, Space Operations Command. We need all of you to come with us."

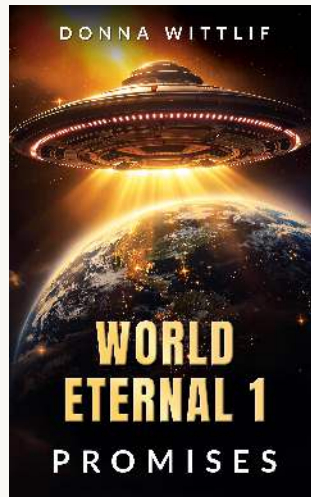
They didn't give the Chancellor or any of the others the opportunity to protest. Colonel McDowell turned and led them toward the parking lot, and Major Jimenez brought up the rear. Jim noticed the gun in the holster around McDowell's waist. In the parking lot, lit by overhead lights, he could see a dark gray, paneled van. No words or identification embellished its sides. McDowell unlocked the doors and motioned for them to get inside.

Jimenez climbed into the front passenger seat as McDowell got behind the wheel. He turned and faced his passengers. "I apologize, gentlemen. I couldn't speak outside for fear we would be heard. Major Jimenez has secured your office building, Chancellor."

"Secured my office?" Valencia asked. "What does that mean?"

"We cleared the building, that's all."

Jim dared not talk. A hundred things were going through his mind. The afternoon they spent with Christine and Marcy watching the space craft. Their sharing what they had seen with their family, and what Mason said. Mason! Who did he tell? His slightest mention of this, even in jest to one of his friends, could have set the wheels turning and gotten them into this mess.



Do You Believe in Aliens? In God Our Savior? Can You Believe in Both?

World Eternal 1: Promises is a book that combines elements of science fiction and Christian faith. When aliens arrive and promise to solve all of Earth's problems, how will Christians react? Will they trust in those promises or the guarantees of God? Preacher James Darden, his wife Nell, his son Jim, and the Christians they lead discover the frightening truths about the aliens' promises.

The world's future is at stake. Will the Christians be able to convince people that they are doomed if they follow World Eternal? Can mankind and Christianity survive? Or will the fierce aliens take over Earth, enslave its people, and grab its precious resources? The blend of suspense, faith, and moral inquiry ensures that this story will stay in your mind long after you have finished reading. <https://www.amazon.com/dp/0999254340>