

Chapter 1

“Did you just say UFOs?” My voice rose in surprise. I was pretty sure I heard him wrong.

Maggie’s eyes narrowed and she frowned. “As in...alien ships?”

Our new friend looked from me to Maggie and nodded his head so hard his shaggy brown hair flopped over his eyes. He pushed it back behind his ears, grinning. “Yep. If we get a chance later, I’ll show you some pics my dad’s picked up over the years. They’re totally awesome! I’m telling you, man, they’ll blow you away.”

A tall slender man walked up to us. His khaki pants, black T-shirt with the slogan *I believe* written in giant green letters, and mountain-man beard made him look like a character out of that old *X-Files* TV show my dad used to make me watch on Netflix.

“Orion,” he said and placed his hand on our friend’s shoulder. “Come on, son, our room is ready.”

“Okay, Dad.” He turned to us and smiled. “Maggie...JJ...I’ll hook up with you guys later. Trust me, you guys picked the right time to come to Geneva.”

After he disappeared from view, Maggie turned to me and crossed her arms. “Wow, JJ, really? Of all the people you had to make friends with on the airplane, you chose the guy who believes aliens are on their way to visit the Earth?”

“Hey, it could happen.”

She rolled her eyes and shook her head. Across the lobby, her mom held up a room key and motioned for Maggie to join her. She left, promising to be ready for the exploration of our newest home in half an hour.

As I watched Maggie and her mom enter an elevator, I bit my lip. She did kind of have a point. Orion was pretty out there. Even his name was weird. Seriously, who names their kid Orion? And, yes, he and his dad believed that aliens visit Geneva, Switzerland around this time every year. But...at least, Orion was a dude. Maggie was my best friend and all, but after spending a month in Paris with her, her mom, and all those museums and shopping, I really needed some guy time. And Dad already warned me he'd be pretty busy for the next few days, so alien-dude or not, I'm spending time with Orion.

I plopped down on a couch and took a good look at my surroundings. This hotel wasn't quite as glamorous as the last couple ones we stayed at, but it was still pretty awesome. Outdoorsy stuff decorated all the tables, and pictures of mountains and ski resorts hung on the walls. Through the giant windows, I could see the large, snow-capped mountains surrounding the city, and part of the fountain shooting up from Lake Geneva. Maggie's mom, aka our tutor, promised that if we worked a little extra hard on our schoolwork, she'd take us out and teach me to ski. Maggie already knew how.

"Jeremiah, Junior," a familiar voice cut into my thoughts.

I looked up and smiled. "Hey, Dad."

Sitting down next to me, he handed over a room key. "Alright, JJ. We're all checked in. Maggie and her mom are in the room right across the hall."

"Nice." It was convenient having Ms. Hernandez and Maggie close by. In Paris, we were on different floors.

He leaned forward with his elbows on his knees. "Listen, son, I know I already told you this, but I wanted to remind you again that we won't be able to spend much time together here.

My work is down in Bern, that's about eighty miles away, so I'll be gone most days before you even get up."

I put my feet up on the table in front of me. "How come we're not staying in Bern if that's where you're working?"

He pushed my feet off the table. "There's nothing for the three of you to do in Bern. Geneva has a wide variety of activities and places to visit. The downside is we won't be able to eat lunch together like we did back in Paris."

I shrugged. "That's okay. I've got Maggie to hang out with. Besides, I met a kid named Orion staying at the hotel. We're supposed to meet up later."

His face broke into a grin. I knew he'd be excited about me making a new friend. He worried about me because we traveled around so much.

Dad worked for the CIA as a "computer tech." Jeremiah Ethan Bennett, Senior, Computer Repair Technician. At least, that's the story he gave me. But, I figured out the truth – he's some kind of spy. Not a going-undercover-type spy, but something that requires him to travel to U.S. Embassies around the world and fix the CIA's problems. I don't let on that I know his secret.

I also don't let on that I have a secret of my own.

A couple months ago, in the city of Prague, Maggie and I formed a group called the K-CIA, which stands for Kids-CIA. Sometimes, without him knowing, we help Dad out...give him a couple extra clues here and there so he can do his job. Because, honestly, there are times when adults, even the CIA, can just be completely clueless about stuff.

We talked for a little while about the hotel, then relocated to our room that was way simpler than the suite we had in Paris. This one had a pull-out sofa (which my dad said would be

his bed) in the front area and a small bedroom that would be mine. I tried protesting that I should have the couch, but it didn't work. Dad said he had to leave early in the mornings, and he didn't want to wake me up.

After unpacking my suitcase, I crossed the hall to Maggie's room and knocked.

"Hey." She motioned for me to walk in. "I'll be ready in a sec."

Their place was bigger than ours. It had a full-size living area, complete with a table and three chairs. I looked at the stack of books on top of the table and groaned. Ms. Hernandez already had our schoolwork ready for tomorrow's lessons. Why did she have to be such an effective tutor?

"Let's go." Maggie closed the door behind her. They had two separate bedrooms, one for each of them.

We made our way down to the lobby to do a little exploring. To the right of the registration desk was a door leading into a media room. A giant plasma TV hung on one wall and a bookshelf filled with DVDs leaned against another. Considering our rooms had no TVs, I figured we'd be spending a lot of time in here.

The door to the right of the media room led us outside where we found a pool surrounded by about fifty lounge chairs. Although the bushes close to us had small icicles hanging off the branches and the puddles nearby had sheets of ice on them, the pool lights glimmered underwater and the motor was running.

"It's freezing," Maggie said, pulling her beanie down over her ears and tucking her long black braid into her coat. "Who the heck would go swimming here?"

"Crazy people," I said, zipping up my jacket. "Let's go back—ow!"

Maggie had grabbed my arm as hard as she could.

I turned to demand an explanation but froze once I saw her face. She was staring into the sky, her dark brown eyes as big as Reese's Peanut Butter Cups. I let my eyes follow her gaze, and my mouth dropped open. Literally.

There, a hundred yards above us, were three giant floating objects, each about the size of two pickup trucks. Reddish-orange in color, they reminded me of ginormous, fat DVDs. They hovered around each other for a moment, then took off. Fast.

I wrapped my hand around Maggie's and pulled, trying to loosen her grip on my arm. She finally let go but kept her eyes focused on the sky.

"You saw that, right?" Her voice barely over a whisper.

"Yep." I squinted up at the darkness of night, still trying to process what we had just seen.

She looked at me. "What...what were they?"

I turned my eyes to meet hers, then shrugged. "I don't know."

Maggie waved her hands wildly in the air. "JJ, I am totally freaking out right now. I can't...I can't deal with this. I'm going inside." She began a very quick walk to the hotel.

I jogged to catch up to her, a million thoughts racing through my mind. Did we just have an extra-terrestrial experience? Were we being spied on by aliens from another planet? Maybe, they were trying to find some super-friendly Earthlings to make contact with and we somehow scared them away, condemning the Earth to a horrible, flaming spaceball of death.

Once inside, around the crowd of people in the lobby, Maggie seemed to calm down. She took a deep breath and released it slowly. "Okay, there has to be a logical explanation for what we saw."

Leave it to Maggie to have an alien encounter, freak out like a maniac, and then try to justify it with logic. I crossed my arms and leaned against the wall. “Okay. I’m listening.”

Maggie began to pace back and forth. “Maybe, the things we saw were some kind of experimental aircraft used by the local army to see at night. That’s why they were painted bright red. Red is an easy color to see in the dark.”

“Uh-huh. So, the Swiss army created a fleet of round, fat airplanes to fly at night and painted them the color of a dartboard so their enemies would have an easy target?”

Maggie stopped pacing and frowned. “Fine. Let’s hear your theory, genius.”

I shrugged. “Okay. How about this: we just saw Orion’s alien ships.”

She shook her head. “No way am I admitting that I saw UFOs. There has to be some other explanation.”

“Well, technically, they were UFOs. You know, Unidentified Flying Objects. U...F...Os.”

Maggie’s eyes narrowed and I was pretty sure she was shooting darts at me with them.

No matter what I said, she was not going to admit we just saw spaceships from another planet. I smiled, hoping to mellow her out. “Here’s an idea. How about we call Orion and have him bring down those pics he wanted to show us. Let’s see if they’re the same as what we just saw.”

Maggie nodded and I called our new friend. He told us he was busy for the next couple hours, but he’d give us a call later. We decided to take the time and finish our exploration of the lobby. The only other rooms turned out to be a business center, a small fitness room with two treadmills and a stationary bike, and the café. Maggie and I ordered hot chocolate then found a comfortable couch in the lobby to sip our drink and people watch.

After a few minutes, this man walked in who looked exactly like Abraham Lincoln, beard and all. He nodded at me as he walked by.

I tried not to laugh. “Don’t you feel like we should be saying the Pledge of Allegiance or something?”

“Shut up,” Maggie replied.

Her reaction took me by surprise. I turned to her. “What was that for?”

She clamped her hand over my mouth. Her face looked to be in deep concentration. Ten seconds later she released me and shook her head. “Forget it, I couldn’t make out the rest.”

“The rest of what?”

She pointed to this preppy dude in his early-twenties. His tanned face looked out of place in this city of massive coldness, and with his bleach-blond hair, he looked like the Ken doll my cousin Megan used to play with when we were kids.

“That guy over there. He just answered his cell phone by saying ‘my hovercraft is full of eels’ in Russian.”

I rolled my eyes. “Ha ha. Very funny. So you didn’t like my joke about Abe Lincoln. That’s no reason to—”

“JJ, I’m serious. I tried to make out what else he was saying, but he mumbled too much. He said something about meeting someone or waiting for someone, I’m not sure.”

The guy leaned against the wall then glanced down at his watch. His actions did match her story. Back in Prague, when we first started secretly helping Dad, we discovered that Russian spies sometimes used the “hovercraft” expression when talking to each other.

I frowned. “I don’t get it. He’s too old to be in the P-KGB, but too young to be a real spy.”

Maggie shrugged. “Maybe, he’s like a spy in training or something. Whatever his deal, we should keep an eye on him.”

I agreed. We took turns playing with our cell phones while the other watched the Ken doll. During our stake-out, we discovered that the Internet on our cells was ridiculously slow. Hopefully, the Wi-Fi on the laptops in our hotel rooms got better reception.

About fifteen minutes later, a family walked up. The dad spoke to our preppy dude in a hushed voice, too low for us to hear. The mom looked around, as though surveying the area. The two kids—one boy, one girl—both looked to be around twelve, our age. The girl had brown hair like me, and the boy was blond. They stood watching the adult men talk.

“What do you think?” I asked Maggie in a low voice.

“P-KGB, all the way.”

The P-KGB was the reason Maggie and I went into the spy business. A long time ago, back in the days when Russia was communist and called the Soviet Union, the KGB (the communist version of the CIA) created an organization to train children to be spies. After the Soviet Union dissolved and Russia became free, the organization went underground and continued training these kid spies to torment the U.S. They called themselves the P-KGB (ребенок—“kid” in Russian), and they were nothing but trouble.

My eyes narrowed as I watched the two kids. “What are they doing here?”

“Maybe, they’re here for the same reason your dad is.”

I shook my head. “Dad said he’d be working down in Bern most of the time. That’s like an hour-and-a-half away.” I held up my cell phone and casually took a picture of them. “What if they’re here for something different? Something the CIA doesn’t know about.”

Maggie turned to me. “Then it’s our job to figure out what it is and stop them ourselves.”