

PARALLEL

The Alex Cave Series book 7

Chapter 1

GROOM LAKE, NEVADA:

The special jet stopped in front of the security checkpoint, and Alex Cave looked out the window as an unmarked vehicle drove up and stopped next to the plane. A knot formed in his stomach as he released his seatbelt and stood to grab his backpack. The attendant indicated for him to leave it on the plane, then she opened the exit door and lowered the stairs.

He slowly descended the steps and stopped in front of two armed men dressed in suits and ties. “What’s going on?”

“I’m Secret Service Agent Garcia, and we have orders to escort you to Director Blake’s office. Get in, please.”

Alex did as instructed and climbed into the back seat, then they drove past the security guards. They stopped in front of the admin building, and everyone climbed out, then Alex led the way inside and down the hallway to Holly’s office.

The door was open, so Alex stepped into the room, noticing the two agents remained in the hallway. He saw Holly sitting in a chair behind her desk, and a tall, masculine looking woman dressed in a US Air Force Captain’s uniform standing beside her.

His heart raced when he saw young Jadin Avery standing to one side of the room. She was part of his team, so he hoped she was not in trouble as he turned to Holly. “What’s going on, Director?”

“This is Captain Sharon Fargo. It seems our new President wants the military to take over operation of your spacecraft, and she’s in charge of the first training program.”

Alex stared at Fargo. “That ship belongs to me, and the government can’t just take it.”

Fargo moved around the desk and locked stares with Alex. “It’s done. Live with it.”

Alex’s hands clenched into fists as he turned to look at Holly. “You can’t let them get away with this.”

The look in Holly’s eyes told him she had no choice, so he turned back to Fargo. “On whose authority?”

Fargo grabbed a folder on the desk and held it out to Alex. “This is from the Attorney General, granting me the authority to claim the ship under the law of Eminent Domain. Meaning, if it’s for the good of the country, the government can take your spaceship.”

Alex didn’t take the folder and stared into Fargo’s eyes. “Over my dead body!”

“I hope it doesn’t come to that, Mister Cave.”

“What about my team?”

“Since Jadin officially works for NASA, she will teach us how to operate the spacecraft. I’m sure we can get by without you, so I revoke your security clearance and my people will escort you back to the plane. Your belongings in your apartment will be shipped to your designated location.”

Jadin saw the rage in Alex’s expression and his clenched fists, and wanted him to shut up before he got into more trouble, so she grabbed Fargo’s arm to get her attention away from him. “I think I can work with you on this, Captain Fargo. How about I start the training on Monday morning? That gives me three days to shut down my research project at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena.”

Fargo tossed the folder onto the desk. “That’s fine.”

When Jadin saw Fargo indicate for her men to get Alex back to the jet, she reached up to wrap her arms around his neck, pulling him close for a hug. “Call me later, okay?”

Alex put his cheek against hers, so he could whisper into her ear. “This isn’t over.”

Jadin noticed Fargo staring at them and slowly raised her hands up to Alex's face, then she cupped them over his ears to pull him close, covertly inserting a communication device into his right ear. "I have an idea, so don't do anything rash. I'll explain later."

When Jadin gave him a soft kiss on his lips and stepped back, Alex reached across the desk to shake Holly's hand. "It's been nice working with you, Director."

Holly didn't accept, and walked around the desk to give him a hug. When he bent down, she turned to him so Fargo could not see her face, then whispered in his ear. "I'll keep you updated on what happens here."

"Don't get in trouble over me."

Holly let go and stepped back. "Stay safe."

Fargo saw the moisture building up in Jadin's eyes. "Am I going to have any problems with you, Ms. Avery?"

Jadin wanted to tell her where to shove her problems, but her self-restraint won. "No, Captain. I'll meet with your astronauts at Hangar 5 first thing Monday morning."

Fargo indicated the doorway to Alex. "After you, Mister Cave."

Alex reluctantly left with the two men for the flight back to Las Vegas. Jadin stepped into the hallway and stared after Alex, finding it hard to believe he was leaving for good. She felt Fargo's hand on her shoulder and moved back into the room, then folded her arms across her chest and stared at the Captain.

"What about David? He can help."

"Mister Conway no longer works here and left four days ago."

Jadin's jaw hung open as her arms dropped to her sides. "That's ridiculous. He's the only person who knows how the engine works and needs to be here, too."

Holly locked stares with Fargo. "She's correct. If you have any problems, you'll need his help."

"I'll call him in as an advisor if necessary. I'll expect daily reports on the program's progress, Ms. Blake."

When Fargo spun around and headed out of the room toward the exit, Jadin gave Holly a troubled expression. "I don't think this will work. Even if I show Fargo's people how to use the ship, Melvin, the ship's AI, won't follow their commands."

"Will he follow yours?"

Jadin thought about it for a moment. "I have no idea."

Holly moved around the desk to sit in her chair. "I'm worried about David. Fargo was less than subtle when she fired him, and he took it hard. I haven't been able to contact him since he left the base."

"I'll try to locate him."

"All right. When will you leave for JPL?"

Jadin suddenly realized she could ride with Alex to Las Vegas. "Right now. I don't need to pack anything, so I'll ride with Alex. I'd better hurry, so I'll see you on Sunday afternoon."

"Wait a minute. I know how you feel about Alex, but you need to let him go. At least for now. Fargo will be on that flight and we don't want her thinking there is a conspiracy between you two. The plane will be back in an hour, so take care of things here before you leave."

Jadin realized Holly was correct. "All right. What do you know about my feelings for Alex?"

"That he thinks you two can't be lovers and work together."

"Is it that obvious?"

"To me, yes, but I can't speak for anyone else."

"At least that won't be a problem anymore. I'll start packing Alex's personal items in his room while I wait. I'll see you when I get back."

Holly leaned back in her chair and stared after Jadin leaving her office. "This should get interesting."