

# ANOMALY

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## CHAPTER ONE

*The following tale of alien encounters is true. By true, I mean false. It's all lies. But they're entertaining lies, and in the end, isn't that the truth? The answer is no.*

-- Leonard Nimoy, Actor (Dr. Spok in Star Trek)

Hat Creek Radio Observatory  
Hat Creek, California

"If extraterrestrial life exists, and I'm positive that it does, this is one of the few places on Earth that it could be first detected."

Henry Redmond grinned hopefully as small wrinkles creased the corner of his aging eyes.

His thin gray hair hung tight in the light wind. He looked at a small group of visitors who had traveled two hundred miles north of Sacramento, deep into the Lassen National Forrest. They came to see the only observatory in the world developed for a single purpose: to detect signs of intelligent extraterrestrial life.

After forty years of searching unsuccessfully for a signal from space, Henry still did not doubt the outcome of the epic pursuit. He knew that if he was not the one who saw further, he would be one of the giants whose shoulders they stood on.

Behind him were dozens of white satellite dishes pointing upwards in different directions and spread across a leveled area several times the size of a football field. Framed in the background were barren mountains dotted with coarse brush.

Located on ranchland seventy miles northeast of Redding, California, Hat Creek Radio Observatory is home to the Allen Telescope Array, a field of forty-two dishes perched on a mountain plateau that work together as one giant eye looking to the sky.

The visitors gazed at the array as Henry continued. "These dishes collect radio waves coming from all over the sky. We point them at galaxies to try to find evidence of intelligent life through what are called technosignatures. Those are anything that appear to be intentional signals or indications of an advanced technology, like very fast flashes of light or repeating bursts.

Even the chemical composition in an exoplanet's atmosphere could evidence some technological process."

"Why are there so many dishes?" A woman asked.

"The array uses a process called interferometry." He repeated it slowly, sounding out the syllables. "That means the dishes are connected, and the radio waves captured by each one are added with the others, acting like one really big satellite dish. The more dishes there are, the more light can be collected, and the brighter the light is."

"Just like out here," he motioned around, "the brighter the sun, the more you can see. And that means we can see farther back in time. There is an array like this one in the desert in Chile that has sixty-six dishes and can see back to when the first stars and galaxies were formed!"

When he looked over the array, he always remembered Frank Drake's proclamation about radio waves from other intelligent civilizations raining down on us from space. Sometimes, he imagined that he could feel them. He was proud to have been part of Project Cyclops, which energized a generation of scientists to build bigger and bigger arrays to listen for them.

Growing up in rural Norman, Oklahoma, the blanket of stars above comforted Henry when his father worked late, which was just about every night after his mother passed.

He made up his constellations to always have imprints of his dreams in the sky. Sometimes, he imagined that the stars outlined vicious dragons and heroic warriors. Patterns in the tiny dots formed visions of idols in his young mind. He would often wonder whether there was another young life form on another planet out there, looking up at the night sky and doing the same thing. The stars became Henry's escape, which he would never return from.

In 1971, NASA was only thirteen years old. At that time, it was a fledging, underfunded government agency in Washington, D.C. But that unforgettable summer set the course for the rest of his life. For the next four decades, he published dozens of books, wrote hundreds of scientific papers, and educated thousands as a pioneer in a lifelong search to find evidence of intelligent extraterrestrial beings.

A small boy in the group raised his hand politely.

"Do you have a question?" Henry motioned to him.

"When you say radio waves, do you mean like a radio station? Like one that plays music?"

"Good question, young man. A radio station uses the same radio waves to send music to your radio. Those radio waves have an amplitude and frequency that your ears can hear. What is your favorite kind of music?"

"Um," the boy pondered, "probably, maybe . . . rock music. My mom likes to play it really loud when she's driving."

The woman holding his hand blushed and tried to hide a smile.

"All right then," Henry grinned, "just like the radio waves that carry rock music to your mom's car, these dishes are listening for radio waves coming from deep in space. We have to listen very carefully, which is why we asked you all to turn off your cell phones near the

observatory. And we need all these dishes so we can turn it up really loud," he winked at the boy.

"But unlike rock music where you can understand the words, well, at least some of them, these deep space radio waves carry messages we don't understand yet. Like the words in a song. Maybe they don't mean anything and just happen naturally in the universe, or maybe they were sent intentionally by some intelligent life out there. That's what we're listening for. We turn and move these dishes just like trying to tune a radio station so we can hear the music. Does that make sense?"

The boy nodded up at Henry and gazed at the dishes, silently searching for a tune in the sky.

"Okay, we have time for one more question because the Earth is spinning at a thousand miles per hour, and our radial point will soon traverse the gravitational bending of sunlight."

He heard a few people in the group say, "Huh?" and scrunch their foreheads.

Henry grinned. "That means it'll be sunset soon! You'll want to get to Highway 89 before the sun goes down. It gets pretty dark out here. You don't want to get lost."

Henry motioned towards an older man, raising his hands near the back of the group. His thin, wispy white hair could not hide a ring of dark age spots that dotted his temple.

"If you do indeed get a message from an extraterrestrial, how will you know if it is a pious being created by God?"

Henry paused at the question, and several visitors turned to see who had asked it. Throughout his career, he faced the question of whether religion should play a role in science. For many people, he realized that ingrained notions of human beliefs may be seen as antithetical to the concept of extraterrestrial life. Looking for sentient beings in the universe is inherently a search for non-humans. Henry understood that the possibility of such a discovery – of an unknown unknown – engenders fear in some people. So, he often resorted to a polite dodge.

"Well, we really just hope to find technosignatures of life instead of any message we can understand. And in any event, it would likely be coming from millions of light years away, so we don't have anything to worry about!"

He zipped up a light jacket, showing a backward "S" atop a small circle. It was the logo of SETI, the only non-profit organization in the world focusing solely on searching for intelligent extraterrestrial life.

"Thanks everyone for coming. I hope you enjoyed learning about the Hat Creek Observatory. Feel free to walk around the array, but do not touch it. Please sign the logbook at the Visitor's Center so we can put you on our email list."

There was light applause as the group dispersed and walked past a large wooden message board with a narrow-shingled roof that displayed information about the Allen Array. Nailed to one of the legs of the message board was an unmistakably terrestrial sign warning of active rattlesnakes in the area.

In his office in the Visitor's Center, Henry turned on his computer and waited patiently for it to start up. A calendar was taped to the painted cinderblock wall in front of him, displaying a colorful image of a galaxy radiating in different wavelengths. Several newspaper articles were tacked to a corkboard, one from the Shasta County Gazette and proudly announced: Famed Berkeley Astronomer Henry Redmond to Oversee Hat Creek.

There were two framed photographs balanced perilously on his stuffed bookshelf. One was of him, with a much fuller head of hair, accepting the coveted Rumford Prize for his research, etching his name on a winners list that included Thomas Edison. It was his springboard to fame in the exclusive and highly competitive astrophysics community.

The other picture showed him and his most coveted prize, his wife Eva. They were standing together, arm in arm, in matching NASA T-shirts. Behind them in the distance was a domed observatory perched high on a peak in Arizona. They were both astronomy students at

the time and had met in a graduate-level class on optic spectrometry. As he would joke way too often, it was love at first light.

He logged onto his computer and opened a detailed spreadsheet. The rows and columns were filled with various numbers followed by units, like parsecs, AU, and lux. To an untrained eye, there was no rhyme or reason for the numerical madness. But to Henry, the data revealed a glimmer of a possible pattern in the measurements.

Something that could not be explained by known natural processes. A signal that is unique and divergent. That is the holy grail for an astronomer—an anomaly.

Henry had spent the last six months validating the data, analyzing error rates, and testing all potential astrophysical explanations. But only one answer kept coming back: the array of diligent dishes in the California mountains may have detected an intentional signal coming from space.

He opened a new email and attached the file. After typing in an email address, he paused at the Subject line. For a moment, his mind wandered forward in time.

He realized that after decades of searching, the data he had found may be the most important of his life. He closed his eyes for a moment and exhaled deeply. Then he sent the email and called his wife.

"Are you still at Hat Creek?" she asked worrisomely. "I thought you would be on the road by now."

"I'm about to leave. I just sent the data to Nederland. I don't want to jinx it, Eva," he paused, "but this could be something. I have a feeling this time."

"That's great, honey. I'm ready for you to come home. You've been in California for nearly two months."

"I just needed a few more orbital cycles. But I got them last night."

"Well, if there is life out there, I hope they get in touch soon!" she said lightheartedly.

"This long-distance romance really stinks."

He smiled at her bluntness. There was never a time in the last thirty-five years of marriage that he did not know exactly where he stood with her.

"I know. I'll be home soon. And then we'll stay up all night looking at the stars.

Okay?"

There was a slight pause. "Okay.

Call me when you get to Sacramento tonight to say goodnight."

"Will do, love you," he replied.

He shuffled his things and stuffed his laptop into a worn leather briefcase. After he locked the Visitor Center, Henry turned and looked up into the sky. It was a crystal-clear night, and the familiar constellations beamed brightly back at him, even the ones he had made up as a child. Far from any city lights to pollute the view, he could see tens of thousands of stars, which he knew was just a minuscule fraction of the trillions out there. He could not fathom that the only life in the universe resided on one rocky planet, orbiting one ordinary sun, in one of hundreds of billions of galaxies. He was convinced that intelligent life was out there.

As he slowly lowered his gaze, a man stood right before him. Henry jumped with surprise, and his chest thumped. The shock nearly caused him to fall back, and he held onto a post. He saw that it was the older man who had asked him the question about religion.

"Whoa! You scared me," Henry said, still catching his breath. "Are you okay? Can I help you?"

The man shifted his weight on a cane he was gripping. He looked into the sky.

"Are you familiar with the Days of Noe, Mr. Redmond?" the old man asked.

Henry looked at him curiously. "Um, no, I'm not."

"Most people today are unaware of those days." The man grumbled. "It was a time of great transformation. An epoch of archetypal change in mankind. It came to pass that the hearts of man went from being good to evil in the eyes of God."

Henry immediately tensed at the religious undertones.

"Do you need a ride somewhere?" he asked, glancing around the parking lot, which was empty other than Henry's car.

The old man ignored his question. He looked into the sky, and Henry saw on the side of the man's face that his age spots resembled a star.

"In the beginning, Genesis tells us that God blessed man and saw that everything he made was very good. He created us in his own image . . . the image of God." The man gazed upwards in reverence.

"But something happened to his divine love. Scripture tells us that he came to see that the wickedness of man was great on Earth. And the Lord said in Genesis chapter six verse five, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repented me that I have made them.'"

Henry slowly inched backward as a spark of fear raced through his nerves. The old man looked frail, but his rhetoric was becoming disturbing. They were deep in the California mountains and seventy miles from the closest city.

The man looked back down at Henry with a glimmer in his creased eyes.

"Do you know, Mr. Redmond, why God would turn away from his creation?"

"No, um, I'm not very religious," Henry stammered anxiously.

"The Scriptures point to one event. One event that directly precedes the Lord's indictment of mankind. After the fall of Adam and before he summoned the Great Flood to replenish the Earth. It was during that period when man fell from sin."

"Look, it's late, and I really need to leave," Henry said, starting to leave.



"Maybe you can come back tomorrow, and we can continue talking, okay?"

The man glared back at him. His stringy gray eyebrows quivered.

As Henry walked past him, the old man suddenly raised his cane and slammed it hard on the back of Henry's neck, thrusting him down onto the graveled parking lot. Henry screamed in pain, grabbed his neck, and rolled over. He tried to get to his feet and fell again as he nearly blacked out.

He yelled an obscenity and slowly worked his way to sit up. The pain radiated across his shoulders and down his back. As his head cleared, he looked around to see what had hit him.

The old man stood before him, leaning on his cane. But before Henry could say anything, he realized they were not alone. Two younger men were now standing on either side of him. They both had long, uncut hair draping down their chests, observant of grooming rituals from Leviticus. Each had a small tattoo of a star near his temple.

"Why did you hit me?!" Henry shouted, getting feebly to his feet.

"The event I speak of," the old man continued as if nothing had happened, "took place during the Days of Noe. The Earth was visited by beings from beyond, creatures not of this world, but of God's creation."

"Huh?" Henry grunted, rubbing his neck.

"In Genesis, the Bible speaks of Man fulfilling the Lord's command to replenish the Earth by having daughters. But then scripture tells us that these daughters of men were taken as wives by 'Sons of God.' Sons of God," he repeated with emphasis. "It does not say they married 'Sons of men,' but 'Sons of God. That means there is a difference between Man on Earth and Sons of God."

"Don't you see, Mr. Redmond?" the old man asked pointedly. "The Sons of God are not of an earthly origin. They are beings from beyond. Creatures created by God that came to Earth. They poisoned man with sin and brought about His wrath.

These things, these beings from beyond, were the ones that changed God's view of Man from being good to evil. It is in Genesis!"

"What do you want from me?" Henry blared, glancing around for an escape route. "We cannot allow mankind to know of the Sons of God. That they are out there, waiting to return. Knowledge of these extraterrestrial beings will summon them back to Earth. It is written in scriptures that allowing evil into one's mind summons evil to live in one's heart."

The old man paused. "We are the Saviors of Noe, and there are many of us. We have been conscripted to suppress and destroy any evidence of the existence of the Sons of God. Evil cannot return to Earth without knowledge of the beings from beyond. We are the Saviors preventing the second fall of mankind."

Adrenaline raced down Henry's spine, dulling the pain in his back. He had been approached by extremist religious sects before, but he had never been threatened or feared for his life.

"Okay, okay," he stammered, trying to de-escalate the situation. "I understand your concern. All of our data is kept on a secure server. No one outside a very small group has access, and the data is not shared publicly. We keep everything confidential. Believe me, no one knows what we find here."

The old man shifted his weight on the cane.

"But you know, Mr. Redmond. You have the knowledge. We cannot allow anyone to propagate the existence of extraterrestrial beings."

The two men slowly started approaching. Henry immediately realized he was in trouble, and his instincts took over.

He lunged past the men and ran as fast as he could into the array of satellite dishes. The field was streaked with dark shadows blocking the moon's glow.

He raced past rows of dishes and crouched behind one of the support posts.

His chest pounded as he tried to calm his breathing. He did not know if the men followed him, and he tried to listen for footsteps over the buzz of cicadas. The round metal poles of the dishes would not shroud him, and he was surrounded by miles of rugged country ruled at night by predators.

He glimpsed around and saw two dark figures walking past the Visitor's Sign into the array. Thin beams of light danced in front of them as they approached with flashlights. Henry took a deep breath and ran further into the field, scurrying behind another support post. He watched the men looking around each dish, getting closer and closer. He raced behind another dish and huddled behind the post. There were over forty dishes in the array, but he could not evade them forever. His mind raced for an escape.

He reached down and felt for a large rock to use as a weapon, but the field had been cleared during construction. Instead, he picked up a small stone and eyed a dish on the other side of the array. Henry stepped out of the shadows and threw the stone, hoping to hit something and cause a distraction.

For a few seconds, there was no sound. Then he heard a loud clink from the stone hitting metal. One of the men turned, and Henry saw a flashlight beam bouncing towards the sound. A voice called something out, but it was lost in the night breeze. Henry watched as the men regrouped and began walking deeper into the array.

Then, their flashlights went out to hide their approach. He could not see them anymore, but he could hear their footsteps on the hardened ground, getting closer. He scampered to another dish and leaned against the cold metal support, waiting for the inevitable. He was running out of hiding places.

As he tried to quiet his breathing, he heard a repeating, shaking sound right next to him. But he could not tell what it was in the darkness. Suddenly, he recognized the familiar warning of a snake's rattle. He lunged backward, gasping, and fell.

Quickly shuffling to his feet, the commotion exposed his location. He heard voices race toward him.

Henry ran blindly between the satellite dishes without knowing where the men were. The thumping in his head drowned out the sounds of their pursuit. He just kept running, losing all sense of direction.

Rising above, the white concave curves stared obliviously into the sky.

As he rounded a dish, he suddenly came face to face with one of the long-haired pursuers. Henry slid to a stop on the dirt, nearly losing his balance. The man stood glaring at him in the moonlight like a possessed disciple. Henry froze as the scraggly man slowly started to smile.

"Wait, don't hurt me!" Henry pleaded. "I won't tell anyone about what I know. I promise!"

He began to inch backward without looking away from the man who stood motionless.

"I haven't told anyone about the anomaly," he lied desperately. "The data isn't even complete. There's probably nothing there." His voice cracked with fear.

Henry did not see the blow that came from behind him. The next thing he knew, he was lying on the ground face up. His head reeled as he tried to make out dark figures above him. He only recognized the old man's cane pointing down at him.

"You can't stop the truth!" Henry yelled defiantly as his head screamed with pain. "There are people around the world looking for life beyond Earth! Someone will find it. You can't stop the truth from coming out!"

The old man snorted. "Oh, but we already have. Why do you think not a single telescope has ever confirmed an alien signal? It's because we have followers everywhere, at every major observatory, secretly protecting mankind from the knowledge of the unearthly beings from beyond."

He paused and then added, "As I, too, must do."

He nodded at the two men, and they began kicking and beating Henry on the ground.

Standing off to the side, the old man preached up into the sky, "As it is written in Isaiah chapter thirteen verse five, 'They come from a distant land, from the end of the heavens, the Lord and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land.' Behold, we are the Saviors and seek forgiveness for what we do so that the Sons of God shall not return."

Just before he lost consciousness, Henry got a glimpse of the stars. For an instant, their brilliance radiated from above, and he felt nothing. The blanket of stars that had comforted him as a child became his burial cloth.