

# PROLOGUE

The story that follows, up to the beginning of the final chapter, takes place in the first three weeks of December 2009, during the period leading up to the Winter Solstice on December 21<sup>st</sup>.

The year 2009 begins the three-year lead-up to 2012, when it is predicted that the poles of the sun will reverse (according to astronomers) and a year when several ancient calendars forecast global devastation.

*Dolmen* — from Breton (French). *Dol-* table, *men-* stone.

A single-chamber megalithic tomb, with three or more upright stones (megaliths) supporting a large flat capstone. In larger structures often just the standing stones remain. Erected during early Neolithic period, 4,000 BC to 3,000 BC. Usually covered with earth or smaller stones to form a tunneled cairn; due to weather or theft outer stones are gone, leaving just the stone “skeleton”.

*Menhir*: Breton, (French). *Men-* stone, *hir-* long.

A large upright standing stone, alone, or in a group — as in Avebury Circle. Widely distributed across Europe, Africa, and Asia, but primarily Western Europe — Brittany, France and the British Isles. Originating in the long megalithic period, during pre-recorded

history. Thought to have been used by Druids for human sacrifice, as territorial markers, and early calendars.

\* See glossary at the back of the book for a full definition of the terms used in this novel.

# 1

The moon was nearly full, looming large and bright overhead. In a field in southern Brittany, France, visibly pregnant Emily Thompson spread her arms and felt like an albatross, floating across an ocean of moonlit grass. Around her, a circle of menhirs stood, casting shadows across the shimmering grass. Her laughter echoed among the cold stones as she moved between them. Nothing in the world could stop her; she had waited months to experience this.

Emily slowed and turned her face into the winter breeze; it seemed as if one of the dark obelisks moved its massive head towards her, in the shadow cast by the moonlight.

Suddenly, gripped with fear, she moved more quickly, now moving across the field. She looked around at an endless sea of stones.

She heard a rustle from behind and then a large shadow appeared before her — a cloud obscuring the moon. This wasn't a cloud; it was a huge bird flying towards her at great speed. It crashed into her and pressed her rigidly to the ground, overwhelming her with claustrophobia, and the odour of death. She tried to scream, but her throat was constricted, she couldn't to move.

Emily didn't understand where she was. Was she dead? Had her body been consumed by the terrible creature and her soul left floating in limbo? The pressure had lifted and she was able to breathe again. Her

## DOLMEN

heart was thumping wildly in her chest. She was still alive, but was this a dream?

Then recollection flashed into her mind — the stones, the alignments, had tried to tell her something, but she didn't understand. Fear and hopelessness filled her like ice, as her consciousness started to drift.

“Help! Someone please help me!” she cried softly, before passing out...

Michel Lachard had come to complete an important mission. He placed his flat palm near the icy surface of a menhir, remaining about ten centimetres away, to avoid touching it. It gave off a faint but distinct low vibration of energy, emanating from deep below. Sacred stones in this corner of southern Brittany were the most powerful, having a life of their own.

Michel preferred moonless, cloudy nights; bright constellations and especially the moon made him tense, nervy. The relentless gaze of the stars and planets created anxiety in his mind. Just as the energy of the full moon forces water to be pulled up through the roots of trees, the same energy made Michel's hair stand on end, as if charged with static electricity.

All of this, however, was nothing compared to the havoc that the sun could cause. To him the most detestable colour of all was the blinding blueness of the sky.

Ever since he was a child he had a fear of the day, an aversion to the sun, suffering from a rare allergy to sunlight. Whenever Michel spent time exposed to sunlight his skin would swell up and blister, especially around the eyes and nose, which would puff up so much that at times he would become virtually blind.

However, the reason he was chosen for this mission, was his extreme sensitivity to the energies of the Earth.

## JIRO OLCOTT

Michel was escaping from the murmuring menhirs, after verifying some energy alignments that were affected by the full moon, when things changed for the better. At a distance, he spotted something exquisite: a girl, all alone, unaware, innocent.

He hid behind a large stone, watching. His excitement grew in pitch until he had to hold his clenched hands between his thighs and squeeze as hard as he could to contain himself. He could feel her Life Force; no, it was Life Forces, emanating from her body, even at seventy-five metres. She was young, and clearly pregnant — which suited his purposes perfectly...

All of a sudden, Michel Lachard observed a strange reaction in his quarry. For no apparent reason she was abruptly filled with alarm and she wasn't even looking in his direction. One of the stones must have whispered a warning in her ear. However, to his relief she turned, and started towards him.

He moved to a position about fifty metres to her right, well hidden behind a stone. Now it was only a matter of time, but he would have to act swiftly and precisely. He felt light headed as his heart pumped his head full of blood and he had to restrain himself from laughing hysterically.

In his excitement he brushed his hand against one of the stones. It made his skin freeze. He jerked his arm away violently as if he had been scalded. When he looked up the girl had turned and was moving away from him, towards the road.

What was he to do now? He put his hand into his mouth anxiously and bit into it. This was a golden opportunity he couldn't let slip through his fingers. His life was so full of failure and disappointments, he had been unable to achieve much on his own. Here was the moment he could prove himself and bathe in the glory of recognition from Monseigneur. Being praised by him for doing something worthwhile was what he really longed for. There was nothing else for it; he would skirt around the hill and cut her off before she reached the road.

## 2

Kiernan de Molay stepped slowly to his right between two massive stones spaced about eight metres apart. There was a definite change in the energy as his body crossed the axis line; he could feel the suggestion of a build-up of pressure in his sinuses that worked its way down his spine. With practice over the years his senses became more in tune with Earth energies around megalithic sites. Today however, the emotion he felt from these silent guardians was disturbed.

A student, hanging from one of the sacred stones, interrupted his reflections.

“Er... Simon, please don’t climb up on the menhir,” he growled. “As you are aware, visitors are not even allowed to step near the sacred stones, as they may fall out of alignment after thousands of trampling tourists.”

“Sorry sir.”

Ten thousand years and the only advancement has been that the antelope loincloth has been replaced by Nike boxer shorts, Kiernan reflected; and only because antelopes have been virtually wiped out.

Kiernan waved his arms, corralling his second year archaeology students around him. He appreciated his students — after all, if it weren’t for them he would have probably have ended up with a boring corporate job.

## JIRO OLCOTT

Beneath a mop of thick sandy hair and broad forehead that seemed permanently lined with thought, his thick eyebrows grew straight across his brow, beneath which were questioning dark blue eyes.

“Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to the Alignments of Carnac; as you have all read, these are the finest example of megalithic standing stones in the world. The population of these sacred menhirs, dolmens and tumuli is the densest found to date, at over 3,000. An interesting note, not mentioned in text books, is that legend has it that the wizard Merlin turned an entire Roman legion into stone. However, as you know, these giant stones are much older than Merlin or the Romans; they have stood here, withstanding the elements and abuse by man, for over sixty-five hundred years.”

An indecipherable murmur reverberated around the huddle of students from the archaeology division at the University of Durham, as they gazed at the giant stones strewn across the countryside in lines as far as the eye could see.

“The sites have been seriously studied since the beginning of the sixteenth century,” he continued. “But no one has yet understood the real reason why the Neolithic people spent millions of man-hours over thousands of years carefully placing these stones, some weighing up to two hundred tonnes, in the very precise positions in which they still stand today.”

When Kiernan was a child he spent many summers at his grandparents' holiday home in southern Brittany in the seaside town of Carnac. His grandfather took him on many weekend hikes among the megalithic stones in the region. He felt at home among them.

The last time he had visited the famed Alignments was during his final year as a graduate student in archaeology, to study the Earth energies or telluric currents along which the stones had been placed. The dissertation he had written compared the architecture of the stones from a cosmo-geometric and Earth energies perspective.

## DOLMEN

During his childhood Kiernan was fascinated by ancient civilisations, but he had not considered archaeology as a career until later on. This fascination was something personal — primeval stones simply seemed to speak the truth to him.

Unfortunately the only two jobs he was offered when he graduated with first-class honours from Lincoln College Oxford were as a Financial Risk Analyst at JP Morgan or as an Oil-Well Logging Engineer at Schlumberger. It was the latter he accepted in the end, since it promised more adventure. The thought of a nine-to-five (plus, plus) job in *the City*, in London, horrified him.

The very lucrative tax-free job lasted for three years, with travel throughout the countries around the North Sea, the Middle East and South East Asia. But in the end, he felt spiritually and emotionally burnt out and tired of keeping company day-in, day-out with nomadic personalities within the industry. Intense and dangerous work, cooped up in the armpits of the Earth (where oil is found), was followed by periods of equally intensive debauchery in the famous capitals of bacchanalia like Bangkok, Jakarta and Manila. He decided to devote his life to his real love — ancient civilisations and archaeology.

With the money he had saved he bought the Georgian country house of his dreams, overlooking the Tyne Valley in Northumberland, along with a new BMW, and enough cash left over to cover expenses for a Masters Degree and PhD at Durham University.

Now he was subsisting on a lecturer's salary and his BMW was getting on, but he felt emotionally and spiritually fulfilled and was able to wake up each morning looking forward to the challenges of the day ahead; modest as they were.

“Text books tell us that the structure of the stones is related to celestial geometry — movement of the sun, planets and stars — and used for astronomical predictions and calendars. I think though, that the stones are also aligned along telluric currents and underground



## JIRO OLCOTT

streams. The stones act to protect the region against harmful energies and create better health and overall well being for people in the region. This may sound rather farfetched, but these philosophies are closely aligned with acupuncture, chakra-clearing, dowsing, Feng Shui and even homeopathy.

“Although it’s difficult to compare these alternative practices with standard archaeological practices, it’s my belief that all of these are valid and useful. At the most fundamental level everything is linked to the energy of the solar system and cosmos around us.

“During our field trip we will be looking for clues in the megalithic architecture that point to these different philosophies.”

Kiernan talked to his class while his eyes slowly surveyed the semicircle of students around him. Then a thought touched the perimeter of his senses; a strange inkling of something missing; there was an imbalance there this afternoon. Kiernan looked up at the sky as a cloud moved in front of the morning sun.

“Let’s move over now to the Menec Alignments, in the field to our right, where we can examine their remarkable celestial geometry ...”

As the group moved down the grassy path Kiernan’s eyes met Mildred Summer’s. Mildred was a first year PhD student and his assistant on the field trip. She was a bright student and had worked with Kiernan through her master’s degree in megalithic archaeology.

“How’s it going?” he asked, with a small but encouraging smile.

“Fine,” she replied, lacking conviction.

“Did everyone make it to the Alignments this morning?”

“Actually, I wanted to talk to you about that; Emily Thompson didn’t manage to join us. I tried to let you know earlier but you were so busy with the organisation after breakfast, that I...”

“What happened to her?”

“Her friend Katy Hutchins thinks she was feeling under the weather.”

“‘Thinks?’ Did you call her room?”

## DOLMEN

“I let the phone ring a few times but there was no answer after breakfast so I thought I’d let her sleep a bit. I was going to go up to her room later, but...” Mildred bit her lower lip. “Well, I forgot.”

Now he knew... This was the missing part he had experienced earlier when talking to the class. An image of Emily Thompson flashed through Kiernan’s mind; one of his better students, with doting parents who came to see him at the end of every term.

She was a slender wraith-like girl, but towards the end of her first year he noticed that she was wearing long cotton frocks tied loosely at the waist and seemed different somehow. Later he realised it was because she was concealing her pregnancy.

“Does she have a mobile phone?” he asked Mildred.

“I tried that from the bus, but I only got her message service. Don’t worry, Kiernan, I’m sure we’ll find her when we go back at lunch.”

“I suppose you’re right. But even though they’re all adults, we do have responsibility for the welfare of students during these field trips, and I don’t want any trouble.”

“Yes, I fully appreciate what you’re saying.”

The driver swung the coach expertly around the driveway of the Hotel Manoir de Kerdréa. As soon as the door opened Mildred sprang out of the car and walked determinedly towards the main entrance of the hotel.

Ten minutes later, Kiernan saw Mildred standing at the front desk trying to communicate something to the reception clerk, who was blinking in response. A ‘bit rusty but passable’ was her description of her ability in French. He soon learnt that she was not even capable of progressing to the rusty stage, thus he ended up doing most of the communicating and negotiating with the locals.

Although most of his education had been in English boarding schools he had spent much of his youth in France at his father’s country house in Fontainebleau, and mastered the language well. Once he left school he regretted not taking his father’s advice and

## JIRO OLCOTT

attending the French *lycée*; he was too interested in spending time with his school friends in Canterbury. However, he made up for it by doing his masters in history and archaeology at the *Université de la Sorbonne* in Paris.

Mildred noticed him hovering over her shoulder and turned her head. She smiled nervously. "Oh, hi."

"Any news?" Kiernan asked, but he already knew the answer.

"I was just asking the receptionist if they had seen her."

"So I take it she wasn't in her room?"

Mildred spoke nervously through her fingers. "There was no answer at the door and I just tried her mobile again."

Kiernan looked up at the receptionist, who appeared relieved that she could discuss the issue with him.

"*Pardon, Mademoiselle*, I'm sorry to bother you, but I'm looking for one of my students who seems to have gone missing. Would it be possible to take a look in her room?" he asked.

The receptionist was a young, pretty sandy blonde with a sincere smile, but obviously new to the job.

"*Un instant s'il vous plaît*. One moment, Monsieur. I'll ask the duty manager if he can help you," she replied then turned and disappeared into a back office.

Moments later, a squat, powerful-looking man stepped into the foyer, with the receptionist trailing behind him. He removed his horn-rimmed glasses and peered up at Kiernan then Mildred.

"*Bonjour Monsieur*. I am Dubois, the duty manager," he said, switching effortlessly from French to English.

"Kiernan de Molay." Kiernan shook his hand.

"Chantal tells me you would like to visit the room of a student who appears to have gone missing?"

"We haven't seen her since late yesterday afternoon." Kiernan glanced across to Mildred for confirmation; she nodded vigorously.

"I see." Dubois hesitated a moment with pursed lips then looked

## DOLMEN

at Kiernan with a serious brow. “I understand that you are the group leader, Monsieur de Molay?”

“Yes, that’s correct. I’m a professor of archaeology at the University of Durham and in charge of this field trip. I have overall responsibility for the students here.”

“In that case I can accompany you up to the room. Two hundred and ten isn’t it?” He tapped a few keys on the computer in front of him. “Mademoiselle Emily Thompson?”

“Yes, that’s her.”

“Please, follow me.”

Kiernan, Mildred and Dubois stood outside Emily’s room. After a moment’s hesitation Dubois knocked authoritatively on the door.

“Hotel management, may we come in please?”

Kiernan held his breath, listening intently. There was no response. Dubois slid the credit-card size key into the slot above the door knob and pushed the door open slowly. They all stepped in. After a moment of silence Mildred stated the obvious.

“She didn’t even sleep here last night.”

The bed was untouched and Emily’s belongings were neatly folded inside her suitcase which lay open on a stand in the corner of the room. Kiernan walked over to the bathroom while Dubois lifted the telephone receiver by the side of the bed and pressed a button. In the bathroom, Kiernan observed that everything was spotless. The towels lay neatly folded on the towel rail. Emily’s toilet bag was still zipped up on the white marble countertop. As Kiernan left the bathroom, a black woman in a navy checked uniform with a ‘no-nonsense’ expression on her face, walked into the room and Dubois talked quietly with her. He turned his head towards Kiernan.

“Room service has confirmed that the room is just how they saw it this morning. The room was unused last night and they didn’t even have to change the towels.”

## JIRO OLCOTT

Kiernan walked over to the desk next to the window and saw a few course books neatly arranged on the side. He noticed, next to the books, a brochure map of the Carnac Alignments. The map had several scribbles on it. He took it and slipped it into the side pocket of his jacket.

### 3

The late morning clear winter light gradually warmed the landscape of le Val de Loire. Referred to as the 'Garden of France', the Loire Valley is a land of vineyards and rolling green hills, with over a thousand chateaux, situated south of Paris. Le Château de Brissac stood secluded in its 300 hectare forested estate, on the southern slopes of the valley, overlooking the river.

Count Etienne de St. Germain sat in the library of le Château de Brissac, at a leather bound walnut desk, with his elbows on the table and head down. His long fingers steadily massaged his head beneath thick grey hair. At ten a.m. he was still in his pyjamas, and long woven silk dressing gown, embroidered in deep rich pastels with mysterious birds of paradise.

He had been sitting since six a.m. thinking, and now his head was ready to burst with frustration. The symptoms of his problem were painfully obvious, but he was unable to bring the cause into focus.

He looked up and gazed thoughtfully out of the tall glass bay windows, across terraced lawns and flower beds of the Dutch gardens bordered by tall lime trees. He exhaled slowly out of his nostrils. It was usually calming to look across his garden, especially after he had been reading.

## JIRO OLCOTT

There was a faint knock on the thick library door, then the large brass handle moved down and the great oak panelled door opened about fifteen degrees. A smiling old head with wrinkled features, bulbous nose and wispy hair popped into view.

*"Bonjour Monsieur le Comte, I have brought you some tea."*

*"Merveilleux, merci Giles,"* the Count responded, still gazing out of the window.

Giles entered, wheeling a trolley with an antique silver teapot, and a fine china cup painted with a design that resembled the patterns on the Count's dressing gown.

"I have chosen Lapsang Souchong, this morning," Giles said, with an air of authority.

"The perfect choice for the mood I am in," the Count replied warmly, turning away from the window.

*"Oui, Monsieur."* Giles started to slowly and deliberately pour the tea.

"I trust all is well, Monsieur?" Giles asked.

"It's the same thing that has been troubling me," the Count sighed, moving his eyes towards the window again. "I now know where it is coming from, but I just cannot put my finger on exactly what it is. I just know that it is very powerful and highly threatening."

"It has been troubling you for many months now. Perhaps a gathering of the Council would be beneficial?" Giles ventured, placing the teacup deftly in front of the Count.

"It has been so long now, I do not know if I can generate the motivation," the Count replied, forlornly.

"But for something as mysterious and potentially dangerous as this, surely they would be willing?"

"First, I must understand the root of this," the Count said firmly and put an end to the conversation by lifting his right index finger about two centimetres above the desk.

*"Biansûr Monsieur."* Giles bowed his head again and withdrew.

## DOLMEN

Giles was now nearly 70, and had served the Count all his life at the chateau. He had never seen the Count so engrossed in his introspection. Maybe it was the great wheel of life that was turning, and Giles had not even noticed it. I will take care of the Count more carefully, Giles told himself, and take greater notice of the signs around me.

Over the years the Count had placed a considerable amount of responsibility upon his shoulders. As well as being the Count's manservant, Giles now administered much of his confidential activities.

He scurried off towards the kitchen, pushing the clattering trolley at a punishing rate.

The bibliothèque was a large hexagonal library, taking up two stories of the chateau. St. Germain had designed this room to serve as both a library and a modern communication centre. Bookshelves covered the 20-foot-high walls, containing a great variety of books collected over the years. In addition a computer centre was located at the rear of the library, discreetly tucked away so it wouldn't spoil the equilibrium of the room.

Against the wall, a Ming Dynasty Chinese rosewood cabinet housed flat-panel computer screens and keyboards. One screen showed a Reuters financial page with real-time updates that flickered news headlines every few seconds; another screen showed a Google Search with the word '*Nats*'. The search revealed 5,900,000 hits in 0.12 seconds, none of which had been viewed as yet. The Count scrolled through the list thoughtfully, without clicking on a single one.



## 4

Today was one of those crisp blue early December days in Paris that inspires *la politesse* — unusual courtesy among Parisians. Unfortunately, Commissaire Thierry Verlaine, who was staring down at the cars and pedestrians three floors below, moving in a dusty grumble along the road outside of his office, was an exception to the rule.

The window of his office in the *Direction Centrale de la police Judiciaire* (the DCPJ or commonly known as the FBI of France) looked down onto the *Quai des Orfèvres*, the quay outside his office, which ran along the River Seine in the heart of Paris.

Verlaine took a careful sip of his scalding cup of espresso, which he held with his thumb and third finger; the index and second finger of the same hand were busy holding his half smoked unfiltered Mahawat cigarette. Verlaine sighed, and ran his other hand through his receding wavy grey-peppered black hair.

Over the constant busy rumble of police activity beyond his office door, he heard footsteps approaching. There was a single knock and the door swung open. Verlaine turned his head towards his visitor, showing his strong stubble covered chin, thick black and also infused with grey. No one was sure if he was trying to grow a beard or simply that he shaved when it suited him.

## DOLMEN

“*Qu’est-ce qu’il y?* What is it Vincent?” Verlaine asked, looking not at his young lieutenant, but at the apparently insurmountable pile of papers on his desk.

Lieutenant Vincent Cleppe, a tall stooping figure, stood at the door one hand still on the handle and the other waving a manilla folder. He had a short brush of brown hair, crafty beady brown eyes and long pointed nose.

“The fifth missing girl, Isabelle Savin; I have the file from the *Police Nationale* in Nantes.”

Verlaine walked slowly to his desk and dropped into the swivel chair, the tired springs squeaking. “Let’s have a look.”

He still hadn’t looked up at Vincent, but Vincent was fine with that; it was only when *le Commissaire* looked him straight in the eye that he had to worry. Under normal circumstances the muscles in Verlaine’s face hardly moved. His lips wore the defiant pout of a spoiled child.

Verlaine opened the file slowly and purposefully by the corner, careful not to drop the two centimetres of ash from the end of his cigarette. After leafing through the third fax he exhaled slowly and turned his eyes up toward Vincent who was standing in front of the desk.

Vincent gave a nervous laugh by letting out a burst of air through his nostrils.

“She was pregnant too; eight and a half months.”

“Why the fascination with pregnant women, I wonder?” Verlaine commented, exhaling smoke as he spoke, gently touching the tip of the ash against the edge of a yellow ashtray advertising *Pernod*.

“There seems to be a pattern emerging now. The elapsed time between kidnappings is consistently forty days.”

“The press has been snooping around,” Vincent added.

“We need to keep a lid on this for the moment. Otherwise every pregnant woman in France will start running around in hysterical

## JIRO OLCOTT

panic and we'll end up being responsible for miscarriages next," Verlaine stated firmly.

"Yes, *Commissaire*." Vincent let out another nasal laugh.

Verlaine closed the folder, stood and walked over to a grey metal filing cabinet. On top was a compact Breville espresso maker and above it a slightly mildewed, picture of President Jacques Chirac. He took two small white cups and proceeded to make espresso. As the machine gurgled and spat, filling the room with warm aroma of Arabica he shook his head slowly, looking at the picture of the President, though addressing Vincent.

"We have nothing as yet. No clues, motives, weapons or even bodies. That means we mustn't jump to conclusions. Keep interviewing family, friends, acquaintances, anyone who may know where these women may have gone to. Something will turn up soon — it always does."

"*Oui, Commissaire*. By the way when are you going to update the photo?"

Verlaine threw Vincent a dirty look.

The cases of the missing women had been passed to the *Direction Centrale de la police Judiciaire* and to Verlaine, after the third young woman had disappeared. Although there was no evidence at the time that these women had been kidnapped, it was the potential sensitivity of the situation that raised its profile — all the women were pregnant.

Now, three months down the road, another two women had disappeared under similar circumstances. There was no trace, or obvious motivation behind the disappearances that the investigation could identify. It was therefore assumed that the women were abducted, although no ransom notes were ever sent.

Verlaine had dealt with kidnappings, but if this was indeed the work of a serial kidnapper then he had never worked on a case of this

## DOLMEN

genre before. Verlaine preferred solid, brutal crimes with substance, where he could really sink his teeth in and uncover the perpetrators. He had a sickening sensation in his groin that this was one of those fathomless crimes where the motivation of the criminal was somehow detached from his or her inner persona — an unholy crusade.

Verlaine handed Cleppe his cup of espresso. “The number forty; I want you to do a computer search for any association. Look at all cults, religions and societies, anything where that number bears some significance, especially if pregnant women are involved.”