

There's No Way

Part IV

Forever's as Far as I'll Go

Chapter 42

The Story of Michael's Discovery

As he was leaving her apartment Saturday evening, Amanda told Michael that she had a surprise for him and she wanted him to arrive as early as possible the next day so they could spend as much of the day as possible doing what she wanted to them to do. She also told him to dress as casually as he could. When he asked why, she said that where she wanted to go could be a bit muddy and definitely not paved.

The next morning, Michael arrived at Amanda's apartment at 0130. Much to Michael's surprise, she was already dressed and ready to go. She was wearing a flannel shirt, jeans, and canvas style shoes. When they saw each other, they laughed because, except for the color of the shirt and shoes, Michael was dressed almost exactly like her.

Amanda walked up to Michael, wrapped her arms around his neck, and gave him a big kiss. As Amanda kissed him, Michael slipped his arms around her waist and held her close to him and, despite the physical reaction he was having with her so close, continued to hold her as long as she kissed him. Michael was more than a little surprised that she didn't mind or even comment about what she was feeling. However, after Amanda pulled away from him, she looked at him with a sexy smile on her face as she said, "I'm glad to know that I have that kind of effect on you, Michael. I hope I can continue to do that as long as we live."

Michael smiled and said, "I'm sure you will, Princess, I'm sure you will."

Since Michael had arrived so early, for the first time since he brought Amanda home from Bruno's Bar shortly after they met and early the next morning, Michael wasn't accosted by a naked Angelique as he arrived at Amanda's apartment and as they were leaving. They reached his car and got in. Michael cranked the car, pulled out of the parking space, and headed to the main road.

"Which way?" He asked when he reached the road.

"Take a left." Michael turned and headed down Pecan Orchard Road.

After a few miles, Amanda said, "Turn left onto 17th Street." When Michael arrived at 17th Street, he turned and Amanda said, "When you reach 303rd Avenue, turn right."

About 5 miles down the road, he reached 303rd Avenue and turned right. When he turned onto 303rd Avenue, Michael said, "Why do those two streets sound familiar?"

"If you had turned right when you reached 17th Street, you'd pass the Catlanna Medical Research Center and 303rd Avenue eventually turns into Mysterious Mountains Highway. It

passes within sight of 'The Mysterious Mountains'. That's where you were found."

"Really?"

"That's where we're going. I'm sure the tour guide there will be more than a little shocked and surprised to meet the person that made those ruins famous."

After leaving the city proper, the name of the road changed to Mysterious Mountains Highway. On the left side of the highway, a small river flowed. Michael noted that the river was, perhaps, 50 yards wide and seemed to be relatively shallow since the water flowed rather quickly. After driving for another 30 minutes, they arrived at a bridge that crossed the river. Amanda told Michael to turn and cross the bridge. Approximately 100 yards from the bridge, they approached a fenced area with an open gate. On a sign outside the gate Michael was shocked to see the following written:

MICHAEL THOMSON-
MYSTERIOUS MOUNTAINS
HISTORICAL SITE

He turned and gave Amanda, who had a smug smile on her face, a quick look. "Are you serious?" He asked.

"About 250 years ago, the president of the the UPA signed a proclamation renaming the Mysterious Mountains National Park. I'll let the tour guide tell the whole story."

They found a parking space and got out. Michael took Amanda's hand and they walked to a medium-sized building. Above the door was a sign that read:

Historical Site Entrance

They entered the building and approached a desk. Behind the desk was an attractive young raccoon with dark brown shoulder-length hair. She was wearing a blue uniform with green collar, pocket flaps, and epaulets. Just above the left pocket was a name tag that read Melissa Tvattbjorn. On the left sleeve was a UPA Historical Site patch. She was also wearing a blue baseball style cap with a green brim and a UPA Historical Site patch on the front. Michael was smiling as they approached, a fact that didn't go unnoticed by Amanda.

"Welcome to the Michael Thomson-Mysterious Mountains Historical Site. Are you here for the tour?"

Amanda said, "Yes, ma'am."

"That'll be 40 Yenars. The tour starts in 5 minutes. You'll tour the battleground and the cave where Michael Thomson was found. You'll also be told about the archaeological site and how Michael Thomson was discovered."

Smiling, Michael said, "Thank you."

Michael took Amanda's hand and they walked out of the Site Entrance building and walked to where a ranger, a black-footed ferret woman in her middle 20s, was standing along with a small crowd of about 10 other Humanimals. Michael received a few somewhat disgusted looks but no one said anything untoward to him. The group made small talk as they waited for the tour to start. Finally, after 5 minutes, the ranger said, "Hello, my name is Erica Alnims. I'll

be conducting your tour of the Michael Thomson-Mysterious Mountains Historical Site. If you'll follow me, we'll start the tour."

Miss Alnims led them toward a tall straight sided mountain. As he looked at it, Michael frowned as if he was trying to remember something that was in his memories but he couldn't recall it. However, he whispered, "That looks like the ruins of a tall building rather than a mountain."

Miss Alnims said, "First of all, I should let you know that this area is known as the Mysterious Mountains. According to legend, the Mysterious Mountains got their name because they don't look like normal mountains. Each mountain is an individual mountain and the sides of the mountains are almost perfectly straight. Also, the valleys between the mountains are almost perfectly straight. For the longest time, it was believed that the mountains were haunted because moans could be heard regularly. It was later discovered the the so-called moans were actually the sounds of the wind as it blew between each of the mountains."

The group walked toward the mountains and stopped about 40 yards from one of the mountains. As they stood there for a few seconds, a soft moaning sound could be heard. Miss Alnims started the tour saying, "About 400 years ago, a team of archaeologists decided to follow up on rumors of a major Ice Age battle site here in front of this mountain. The archaeologists requested permission to excavate this area to verify the rumors. After several test digs, what was believed to be a grave was found. Naturally, this raised expectations among the archaeologists. If you'll look around, you'll note numerous stakes. Each of these stakes indicates a place where the remains of a warrior was discovered. If you'll follow me, I'll show you a particularly interesting grave."

Everyone followed Miss Alnims as she approached a stake that was larger than the others. "At this site, all that was found was a couple of burned skulls, pelvises and femurs. The interesting thing about these bones is that one skull, one pelvis and two femurs were human and the other bones were from a hyena Humanimal. The pelvises indicated that the human was a male and the hyena was a female. After studying the skulls for a few months, it was noted that both of the skulls belonged to young people who were probably in their middle teens possible 14 and 15 years old. Ever since the discovery of these bones, there has been a debate as to what happened to these two victims. Many in the archaeological community believe that these two were sacrifices and were the victims of cannibalism. However, today, there is a growing voice that says these two weren't cannibalized but were cremated as is the tradition of many societies throughout the world today especially the more primitive ones. The debate has continued for the last 100 years. The reason that many in the archaeological community believe the cremation theory is because these were the only two bodies that were burned. The other bodies were either buried as is or were left to rot where they lay. Many of the other bodies had broken bones and several had arrowheads in their bodies. The two burned bodies also had several arrowheads in them.

"If you'll look around you, you'll see that about 30 bodies were buried very close to one another in an area of about 100 square feet while another 20 bodies were scattered over an area of about two acres. It's believed that the 20 scattered bodies were killed during the battle and the 30 were prisoners that were tortured to death. While we can't verify it, it's believed that the two burned bodies were not a part of the other 50 warriors scattered about the battle site. Now, let's take a walk into the cave behind me and we'll tour the cave where Michael Thomson was discovered."

Everyone followed Miss Alnims into the cave opening in the side of the mountain. As

they entered the cave, Michael gave an involuntary shudder. Amanda said, "What's wrong, Michael?"

"I don't know. I just got a sense of deja vu when I walked through that door."

"Deja vu?"

"The sense of having experienced something before. But, I guess I actually have experienced this before since I was found in here somewhere."

Miss Alnims could hear that Michael and Amanda were talking to one another. "Is there something wrong?" She asked them.

Michael said, "I'm sorry, Miss Alnims. I got a bad feeling when we walked through that door."

"Door? There's no door there, sir."

"There was a door there 20,000 years ago, Miss Alnims. That's why the entrance is rectangular."

Miss Alnims looked at Michael and said, "Well, many renowned archaeologists would disagree with you."

Michael smiled and said, "Perhaps Miss Alnims, but archaeologists have continually had to change their beliefs when new evidence was discovered which was irrefutable proof of their mistake."

Miss Alnims smiled indulgently and said, "Of course, you're correct but, no such evidence has been discovered so far and you'll see why archaeologists don't believe the opening is a door when we enter the mountain."

Miss Alnims continued, "If you'll look to our left, you'll see several relatively large stones. It's thought that the occupant of this cave used those stones to block the opening to this cave to prevent dangerous animals from entering and attacking."

"In this chamber, the remains of a fire and what could only be described as bedding were discovered. A small cache of animal remains was also discovered. This indicates that the residents of this cave had been rather successful in hunting. Many different animal remains were found. Among these remains were deer, bison, squirrels, rabbits, and oxen. These five species comprised the largest portion of the animal remains but, several other species were found. Some people have asked why so much meat was in the cache and why it didn't go bad. The only answer that we've been able to come up with is the fact that the ice sheets were only about 100 miles from here which caused the air to be rather cool and dry, thereby creating a natural refrigerator here in the cave."

"Let's continue through to the next chamber."

Miss Alnims led them through another opening where everyone could see a pool. Miss Alnims continued with the tour. "This pool of water is interesting. If you'll note, it's perfectly rectangular. We've never found a perfectly rectangular shaped item in the last thousand years of archaeological exploration of Ice Age sites. So, we're fairly certain this pool of water is older than the most recent Ice Age."

"The pool is relatively shallow on this end," she pointed to her left. "The depth has been measured to be about 1 meter deep and it's relatively deep on this end," she pointed to her right. "The depth there has been measured at 3 meters deep. Also, if you'll note, there's a waterfall close to the deep end and a drain-off at the shallow end. The drain runs under the wall at that end of the building but we don't know where the water drains to. We do know that there is a small stream that exits the mountain directly beyond that wall of the cave so we're fairly certain that that stream is this drain off. The stream flows for about a mile until it reaches the small river

that you crossed entering the site.”

She led them to the edge of the pool and said, “If you’ll put your hand in the water, you’ll note that the water is warm.” Everyone put a hand into the pools and noted that the water was warm, about 100 degrees, but not overly hot. “No one knows why the water stays warm all the time, especially since the water from the waterfall is cool, perhaps 60 – 65 degrees.”

Michael said, “Nuclear reactor.”

“What?”

“Nuclear reactor. There’s a nuclear reactor below the pool. Nuclear reactors give off heat. Likely as not, if you swim to the bottom of this pool and touch the bottom, you’ll find it’s very warm. Somewhere through that wall,” Michael pointed to the wall where the waterfall entered the room, “there is a pipe that takes water to the reactor to keep it cool. The water cools the reactor by weaving through radiator fins attached to the reactor. The water never touches nor enters the reactor core so it doesn’t pick up any radioactivity and can be returned the stream that you mentioned.”

Smiling indulgently, Miss Alnims said, “People have swum to the bottom of the pool and found the floor to be warm but, they never said it was ‘very warm’. As for the nuclear reactor, none has, as yet, been found.”

Michael said, “It’s about three floors down from here.”

“Sir, there isn’t a third floor down from this one. There have been many explorations of this cave system and there has never been more than two floors found.

“Now, if you’ll follow me.”

As they walked away, Michael mumbled, “There is a third floor down from here. I know it is because I saw it.”

Miss Alnims led the group to a doorway that was blocked by a wooden barrier. When he saw the doorway, once again, Michael shuddered before he said, “Elevator shaft.”

Once again, Miss Alnims turned to Michael and said, “What?”

“I said, ‘Elevator shaft’. Through that doorway is an elevator shaft. It goes down three floors.”

“Sir, how many times have you been here?”

“This is the first time I’ve ever taken this tour.”

No longer smiling indulgently, Miss Alnims said, “Interesting that you know what this is having never seen it.”

Michael smiled and said, “I never said I’d never seen it before.”

After staring at Michael for a couple of moments, Miss Alnims got back into tour guide mode and said, “Okay.

“The archaeologists found this shaft when they were exploring this cave. The shaft was absolutely dark at the time.” She flipped a switch and the lights in the shaft went out. “This is what the archaeologists saw the first time they looked down the shaft. Some of the archaeologists left and returned with ropes. After anchoring the end of the ropes, a few of the archaeologists climbed down to the next opening which was about 20 feet down. When they reached the next opening, they realized that the Mysterious Mountains weren’t true mountains because the shaft was perfectly square and the room they entered was definitely man-made. It was then that they decided that the shaft was, as the gentleman already noted, an elevator shaft.

“If you’ll follow me, we’ll use the stairway that was later discovered that leads to the room where Michael Thomson was discovered.” The group followed Miss Alnims to the stairway and followed her down the stairs.

After going down two floors, they approached a door which Miss Alnims opened and they entered a large room with counters, desks, cabinets, and shelves.

As Miss Alnims was opening the door, Michael looked and saw a lot of debris but, the most important thing he saw was a step going further down. He was about to say something to Miss Alnims when she opened the door and everyone entered the room.

"After climbing down to this floor, the archaeologists entered this room through the elevator door. They were awestruck when they saw this room. On the wall behind me you'll note there's a very large screen like a cathode ray tube. However, it isn't a CRT. It's very thin and flat rather than curved.

"The archaeologists spread out and each looked at a different part of the room. One went back to the elevator shaft and called up that it was safe for more to come down. As he returned to the center of the room, the screen turned on and a human figure appeared. He seemed to look at each of them. When the head archaeologist saw this, he nearly fell over trying to get away from the human on the screen. The story I'm about to relate is directly from the head archaeologists memoirs."

Miss Alnims produced a small book and, opening the book to a bookmarked page, started reading, "The next thing I knew the image on the screen was looking directly at me and saying, 'Hello. My name is Doctor Alphonse Broadhurst and you are?'"

"I didn't respond and the image looked indignantly at me and repeated, 'I'm Doctor Alphonse Broadhurst and you are?'"

"Once again, I just stared causing the image to glare at me before saying, 'I don't know how things are in your time but in my time, if someone introduces themselves to you, it's considered good manners to introduce yourself to them.'

"I said, 'You can see and understand me?'"

"There are binocular cameras on each of the walls so I can "see" you. There are microphones all over the room so I can "hear" you as well.'

"I'm sorry. I didn't intend to be boorish but I was more than a little surprised to see a human on the screen. What are you?'"

"Please introduce yourself first. I'd rather speak with you using your name rather than saying, "Hey, you."'"

"I'm sorry, Dr. Broadhurst. I'm Dr. Leonard Marsu of the Catlanna Institute of Historical Studies. My colleagues and I had heard of a battle site on the plains outside of this cave and we were granted permission to excavate the site and learn what we can.'"

"There are plains outside of this building?'"

"Yes, sir.'

"I see. Well, to answer your question, I am an artificial intelligence that was downloaded into a computer on the floor above us by the original Dr. Broadhurst into this computer in the year 2091 A. D. I was programmed to respond when someone entered this room after Dr. Broadhurst's death and stood in the location that you are currently standing. According to my calculations approximately 19,000 years have passed since his death in 2093.'

"I'm not certain how long ago the years you know of as 2091 and 2093 A. D. is but our current calendar year is 6,656."

"I see. Well, as I said, my name is Dr. Alphonse Broadhurst. I was one of the science professors here at the University of Georgia in the year 2091. I had been studying the possibility of stasis as a method of food preservation. A young man by the name of Michael Thomson was an intern of mine. He was one of the most scientifically-minded young people I had ever had the

pleasure of working for me.

“It was in the year 2090 that the eco-terrorist group Earth First! released a genetically altered Human Immunodeficiency Virus which had been altered to make it an airborne virus for the purpose of infecting every human on Earth and causing the extinction of the Homo sapiens species. Is it safe to assume the human species is now extinct?”

“‘Actually, sir, the alteration of the virus caused it to be significantly less virulent. It still infected every human on Earth, and still does, as they had hoped but, less than ½ of 1 percent of people died from the virus and slightly more than ½ of 1 percent of people were sterilized. As you can no doubt calculate, this has still been enough to ravage the human species. We estimate there to be around 16 million on Earth.’

“‘Thank you for your correction.

“‘If you’ll look behind you, you’ll see a large sarcophagus. Inside the sarcophagus is Michael Thomson. Michael had contracted the virus rather early in the release and shortly after he was graduated from the University of Georgia with a degree in Computer Information Technology, he was diagnosed with what was eventually called the Human Extinction Virus. Since he had worked with me working on the stasis field, he contacted me and requested to be a, uh, a, uh,” the person on the screen gave a small shrug and continued, “human guinea pig and be put into stasis until a cure could be found. I wasn’t certain that the field would work on a living thing and I told him so. But, he was willing to accept responsibility for any negative effects of the stasis field. After he and his parents arrived, we signed release forms and I put him into the stasis sarcophagus.’

“I turned and looked into the sarcophagus and saw a young looking human lying there. He looked like he was asleep. The screen continued, ‘I will tell you how to move Michael so that you won’t cause him harm. I don’t want Michael to die now that someone has found him. I must say that, as soon as Michael is removed from this room, this program will self-destruct and will be unable to be used.’

“‘Why?’

“‘Because Dr. Broadhurst, my programmer, believed that if you are to gain knowledge of Artificial Intelligence, you should learn it on your own. I’m sorry, good sir, but, that’s the way it’s going to be.’

“‘Is it possible to cause you to override that programming?’

“‘No. Dr. Broadhurst was adamant. As he was programming my looks, I all but begged him to reconsider but, he wouldn’t even listen to me. In fact, he muted my speakers to prevent me from continuing trying to change his mind.’

“After this conversation, the Artificial Intelligence icon of Dr. Broadhurst gave us the instructions necessary to remove Michael from the power source that ran the stasis field which we dutifully wrote down. Every now and then, we would stop the A. I. and show it the instructions that we had written down and the A. I. would make necessary corrections. After the instructions were written down properly, the image smiled and said, ‘Thank you for finding Michael. Please get him to a medical facility and connect him to a power source to keep him alive until the cure for HEV is found. You won’t regret saving his life. He might be able to prevent your people from making mistakes that we humans have made.’

“After saying this, the screen went dark and all of our efforts to restart it were fruitless.”

Miss Alnims closed the book and said, “All of our efforts to restart the program for the last 400 years have been fruitless.”

As Miss Alnims was talking, Michael was looking around the room. He had a look of

concern on his face. In fact, the look was so strong that Amanda squeezed his hand and whispered, “What’s wrong?”

Michael, however, didn’t whisper. “Amanda, this room is set up incorrectly. Nothing is in its proper location.”

Miss Alnims, now more than a little exasperated with Michael, asked, “What’s wrong now, sir?”

“I’m sorry, Miss Alnims. But, this room is set up incorrectly to be a ‘shrine’ to Michael Thomson’s discovery.”

“What makes you so certain?”

Michael paused for a few seconds before saying, “Because I’m Michael Thomson.”

Miss Alnims stared at him for a couple of seconds before she smiled and said, “Right. You had me going there for a second, sir.”

“I can prove it.”

“How?”

Michael reached into his pocket and withdrew his wallet. He opened the wallet and withdrew a driver’s license. Miss Alnims took it and looked at it before saying, “Sir, I’m sure that the name Michael Thomson isn’t unheard of among humans.”

“Look at who issued that driver’s license and the expiration date.”

Miss Alnims looked at the information that Michael suggested she look at. The more she looked at it; the more shocked she got. Out loud, she read the information, “State of Georgia. Expires on July 20, 2093.” She looked at Michael for a long second before she said, “You really are . . .”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Now, more than a little friendly with Michael, she said, “What is wrong with this room?”

“Do you have a map of the room?” Miss Alnims nodded. “May I look at it?”

“Of course.”

Miss Alnims handed him a piece of paper with a map on it. As he looked at the map, Michael went into teacher mode and said, “All maps have an orientation. Most are oriented to the north but, others are oriented to a specific item. In this case, because the map is of this room, it’s oriented to the elevator shaft behind me. The elevator shaft is indicated by the square with an X in it. If you’ll note, with the elevator shaft behind me, the sarcophagus should be oriented with the feet toward the elevator. The mechanisms that control the sarcophagus’ stasis field are on the wrong side, too. They should be on the left side.”

“But, Mr. Thomson, if they were on that side, they would interfere with you leaving the sarcophagus.”

Michael laughed and said, “Normally, that would be true but, Dr. Broadhurst was left-handed. So, he built everything to operate for a lefty.”

“Ah. I see what you’re saying.”

“The desk against that wall should be against that wall over there. The cabinets should be on either side of the desk. On that wall there,” Michael indicated the wall to his left, “there should be four shelves, one about hip high to me, the next one about waist high, the third about shoulder high, and the last slightly higher than my head. Next to the stairway door, there should be a counter that goes all the way to the corner. Dr. Broadhurst did almost all of his lab work on that counter. Along the wall with the elevator doors, there should be another counter with a sink and faucet. Dr. Broadhurst used that sink and faucet to obtain water to distill for his experiments.”

“Wow! I’m glad you’re here today, Mr. Thomson. Is anything in our presentation incorrect?”

“Actually, yes. As we were entering this room through the stairway door, I noticed a lot of debris next to the door. As I studied it, I noticed a step leading down. I believe that, if the debris is cleared away, the nuclear reactor I told you about will be discovered. However, before anyone approaches the reactor, proper preparations should be made just in case there’s a leak after 20,000 years.”

“I’ll introduce you to our tour guide trainer and you can tell him of the mistakes and I’ll suggest that this debris be cleared away to see if the reactor is usable.”

“If the pool upstairs has warm water, the reactor is usable but I wouldn’t use it unless Humanimal society has discovered nuclear power.”

After talking to the tour guide trainer for a couple of hours and making the necessary changes in the tour, Michael and Amanda got back in his car and drove away.

“How did you like the tour, Michael?”

“I must say that I was more than a little surprised to see something named after me. I never considered myself to be more than what you see. But, I guess being the oldest living thing on Earth would make me a bit of a celebrity.”

“A bit?”

Michael laughed and said, “Okay, a big celebrity.

“It’s getting late, where would you like to go for dinner tonight?”

“Hmm. How about ‘The Blue Deer’?”

“Sounds good to me. We haven’t seen Mr. Barker in a few months.”

A couple of weeks later, Michael received a letter from the Historical Site. It read:

“Dear Mister Thomson,

After investigating the information you provided in our interview when you were here two weeks ago, we removed the debris that had collected in the stairwell leading from the main cave to the next floor. After removing the debris, we discovered that you were correct in that there was a stairway leading further down. When we cleared the stairway completely, we found a room with a rather large, self-contained nuclear reactor in the center of the room.

Next to the door leading into the reactor room, we found a shelf with a book similar to a diary in a hermetically sealed box on it. We opened the box and read the contents of the book. It was written by Dr. Alphonse Broadhurst. In the book, he explained that the fuel for the nuclear reactor was three different radioactive isotopes that fed off of and recharged each other. By his calculations, the nuclear fuel should last a minimum of 500,000 years before needing to be replaced. He never said what isotopes he used to fuel the nuclear reactor.

He also explained that, as he was writing the book, he was dying of the HEV and he didn’t believe that he could draw up the design for the stasis sarcophagus before he died. He said that, if the cure for the HEV was ever found, he wanted us to tell Michael Thomson that his

parents continued to visit him once a week until they both died of the HEV themselves.

We appreciate your assistance in correcting our tour guide information. All the information you gave us was very enlightening and has been incorporated into our updated tour guide. We're including two lifetime passes to the historical site and invite you and your fiancé to return as often as you'd like. We also invite you to join us on an excavation that is taking place about 10 miles from the Mysterious Mountains. We've found the remains of a village that could possibly be the home village of one of the two burned skeletons discovered at the Mysterious Mountains.

Allow me to thank you once again for your assistance in correcting mistakes in our original tour.

Sincerely,
Carlos Comadreja