

JAMES D. PRESCOTT

EXTINCTION SERIES

THE COMPLETE BESTSELLING SERIES

EXTINCTION CODE

1

EXTINCTION COUNTDOWN

2

EXTINCTION CRISIS

3

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Books by James D. Prescott

The Genesis Conspiracy

Extinction Code

Extinction Countdown

Extinction Crisis

Coming Soon!

Augmented

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Dedication

A special thank you to Dr. Ricki Lewis ([DNA Science blog](#)) and Joel Rubin for helping to make sense of the incredible and often mystifying world of genetics. To Lisa Weinberg and the rest of the beta team for all of your terrific feedback. And finally, to my editor RJ, for your considerable prowess and never-ending patience.

Note to Readers:

As you may have already noticed in the table of contents, I've included some reference material on Salzburg along with a description of what each of the genes do and a short glossary of important terms. Feel free to flip back and forth as you make your way through the story.

*Any sufficiently advanced technology is
indistinguishable from magic.*

—Arthur C. Clarke

*The day science begins to study non-physical phenomena,
it will make more progress in one decade than in all the
previous centuries of its existence.*

—Nikola Tesla

EXTINCTION CODE (BOOK 1)

Chapter 1

Yucatán Peninsula—5 miles off the coast of Mexico

Chief Scientist Dr. Jack Greer watched through high-powered binoculars as the helicopters drew nearer. It was early morning as he stood on the upper deck of a repurposed oil rig, his cheek fanned by a warm Gulf breeze. He drew in a lungful of salty air, feeling his pulse begin to quicken.

A geophysicist in his early forties, Jack was blessed, or some might say cursed, with a shock of dark wavy hair that, much to his elderly mother's chagrin, was often kept hidden away under a ratty old Houston Astros baseball cap.

His attention soon returned to the two choppers. They were about ten miles out, both little more than twin white dots pressed against a powder-blue sky. The second was larger than the first, a tandem-rotor heavy lifter. Swaying gently beneath the aircraft was a bright orange shipping container, secured by four taut cables. Rajesh Viswanathan from MIT was almost here. The final member of the team, he was already a week late.

Lowering the binoculars, Jack listened to the drilling team working below. They'd been here a month, boring a hole deep into the earth's crust. He and his team were on the hunt for the remnants of something no one had expected them to find: the asteroid that had slammed into the earth sixty-five million years ago, wiping out the dinosaurs and causing one of the largest mass extinctions in history.

At least that was the story most of the scientific community had come to believe. While the space rock theory was by far the strongest hypothesis, a growing chorus of scientists were beginning to wonder whether increased volcanic activity hadn't really been to blame. The team's goal was simple enough. By carefully studying the limestone deposits around the impact, as

well as what was left of the meteorite itself, Jack hoped they might settle the debate once and for all.

But getting the research grants to embark on such an audacious expedition had proven far more difficult than he had ever imagined. Plain old-fashioned ridicule was the biggest obstacle. The crux of the problem was this: when a slab of iron, rock or ice slammed into the earth, most of it was instantaneously vaporized. And any remnants were flung up into the atmosphere and dispersed across the planet.

The laughing stopped abruptly once Jack's seismic surveys revealed a giant magnetic anomaly five hundred meters beneath the earth's surface. It didn't matter that the data on the meteorite itself was somewhat vague—the actual readings revealed a dark splotch in a sea of wavy horizontal lines.

Fuzzy or not, it was enough to pique the interest of DiCore, one of the largest mining operations on the planet. To them, the initial readings indicated the possible presence of diamonds and lots of them. In the 1970's, a similar discovery had been made in Siberia, at the Popigai crater.

In more practical terms, DiCore's funding had meant that a research project that might have lasted two weeks with grants from the US Geological Survey could now go on for months. For its part, DiCore's conditions were predictable enough. Once the scientists were done studying the remnants of the meteorite, DiCore would move in to extract whatever diamonds were present.

Jack was still contemplating the project when his co-chief on the expedition, Gabby Bishop, exited the main superstructure and crossed to where he was standing. She was an astronomer, but more than that, she was a friend of many years. A decade older than Jack, Gabby had shoulder-length silver hair and a pleasant, round face. She had also been the first to renege on their shared commitment to stop smoking. And as if to prove the point, Gabby fished a hand in her pocket and came out with a pack of Marlboro Lights. She started to offer him one and then stopped.

“Sorry,” she said, lighting up. “Forgot you’re still on the cigarette wagon.”

Jack glanced over and tugged at the brim of his ball cap. “I’m trying to be good and you’re not helping things.”

“Am I detecting a crack in Jack Greer’s infamous willpower?” she said mockingly. “Maybe you should stop fighting the inevitable.”

He grinned. “Right now I’ll settle for you blowing some of that smoke in my face.”

They shared a burst of uneasy laughter.

The helicopters were less than a mile away now.

Gabby shook her head, unable to hide her own deep concern. “They must have gotten tied up with bureaucratic red tape,” she said. “I’m sure that’s why they didn’t call.” She found Jack’s gaze and held it. “You know, given the situation out here.”

The situation Gabby was referring to could best be described as Murphy’s Law in action. Last month, as the rig was being towed into place, political tensions in the Gulf of Mexico had risen to an all-time high. A recent decision to step back from open relations with Cuba had quickly led to the reimposition of sanctions. Not surprisingly, the Cubans had retaliated by calling up dredging machines to form artificial islands along the edge of their maritime borders. It was a trick no doubt learned from China and undeniably part of an attempt to increase the scope of Cuba’s exclusive economic zone. Whether or not the move was designed to strengthen their seat at the bargaining table wasn’t clear. What *was* clear was that as a result, both countries had begun beefing up their military presence in the region. So long as Mexico remained neutral, the license granted to the expedition from that government remained in place. But Jack hesitated to even consider what might happen should the situation escalate any further.

The walkie on Jack’s belt belched out a burst of static.

“Boss, it’s Billy. We just hit a real coarse layer. Much harder than granite. I’m gonna need to pull up and swap out the tungsten carbide roller-cutter.”

Billy Brenner was their sometimes impetuous chief drilling engineer.

Jack’s gut told him they were getting close. When the meteor had first impacted the earth’s crust, it had created a massive tsunami, eventually depositing layers of sand over the impact area. The largest bits had been the first to settle, followed by ever-smaller pieces. The result was rock layers of increasing density. That meant the harder the layer, the closer they were.

“Give me a depth reading first,” Jack insisted.

There was a pause as Billy checked the digital readout on the drill’s control panel. “Fourteen hundred and fifty-two feet.”

The meteorite sat at around fifteen hundred feet.

“Push through it,” Jack urged him, rubbing the pads of his fingers together as he tended to whenever his stomach coiled with nervous energy.

The hesitation in Billy’s reply was hard to miss. Jack’s order would surely put the engineer’s baby at risk, but there was more to Billy’s reaction and Jack knew it. Deferential as he sounded, Billy wasn’t asking Jack—he’d been telling him, or at least trying to. Jack repeated the order and replaced the walkie-talkie, deciding he would deal with Billy and his temper later.

Gabby’s brow furrowed as the cigarette slipped from her fingers. Jack watched the wind take hold and spin it in endless circles as it fluttered down to the crystalline waters below. The cautious wisdom she brought to the table was often a nice counterbalance to Jack’s eagerness to take giant risks.

“You understand that if Billy loses that drill bit, we may be done,” she told him in a tone few others could get away with.

The helicopters were overhead now, the wash from their blades kicking up a fierce wind and an even worse racket. Jack held the baseball cap tight to his skull. He leaned in. “How can we stop now when we’re so close?”

Chapter 2

While the larger helicopter lowered the shipping container onto the deck, the other settled gently on the landing pad. The chopper's side door slid open and out came a plump Indian man with round glasses. Stepping onto the platform, he stumbled before quickly regaining himself. Dressed in a tight-fitting burgundy button-down shirt and white slacks, he looked noticeably out of place and uncomfortable.

"Welcome aboard," Jack said, fighting the wash of the rotor blades.

"I am Rajesh," the man said, shifting his backpack to his other shoulder. He was flanked by a young man and a petite Asian girl whom he introduced as Adam and Leah. They looked like grad students.

The helicopter lifted off, ushering in the sound of the drill and a flock of seagulls flying overhead.

"You're a week late," Jack told him, turning and starting along the walkway. Rajesh followed, struggling to keep up. The wobbly state his legs were in was no doubt making it difficult.

"Please accept my sincerest apologies, Dr. Greer," Rajesh stammered, looking to Gabby for reassurance. "We were ready to leave, but the government would not allow us to travel through a potential conflict zone." His shirt was beginning to stick to his wet skin.

Jack stopped and spun around. "I understand and I sympathize, but you never called to tell us you'd been delayed. So consider this your first and second strike."

"Second strike." Rajesh repeated the words as though examining an unknown artifact. "And on our third strike? What will happen then? I'm not trying to be obtuse, but as sports go, I much prefer cricket."

“Strike three and you and your posse of grad students will be on a chopper, heading home.”

Rajesh grimaced. “You have my guarantee, sir, there will be no strike three.”

An involuntary grin formed on Jack’s lips. Late or not, there was something he liked about the guy. “Look, we’re glad you’re finally here. Least now we can finish what we started.”

Gabby took over, explaining the rig’s layout as she pointed to the various modules.

The rig went by many names. Conoco Phillips had christened her TOR. But to the scientists, engineers and deckhands, she was known as POS—an acronym involving excrement.

In the months that preceded the expedition, most of the unnecessary modules had been stripped away. What remained was the drilling section, as well as a ten-story superstructure with living quarters, conference rooms, a mess hall and several quaint spots where off-duty personnel could unwind.

On a portion of the open deck was a stretch affectionately called Fifth Avenue. It was here that a series of shipping containers—doubling as labs—were arranged in two neat rows, forming a kind of street. At the end of the strip was Rajesh’s orange container.

Just then, Jack’s walkie sprang to life.

“What is it?” he demanded, heading purposefully toward the superstructure. Below them Billy was waving his arms like a pedestrian desperate to flag down a passing cop car. Jack caught sight of him and skidded to a stop.

“I’m not sure,” Billy said. “I think we’ve hit some kind of air pocket.”

The grin that grew on Jack’s face said it all. They were through.

Chapter 3

A burst of sunlight streamed in through the porthole windows, illuminating the normally dark and dingy conference room. The dominant decorative theme inside was fake wood, once a prerequisite for every basement in the eighties and early nineties, long before anyone knew better. Above them hung a suspended tile ceiling lined with rows of neon office lights, the kind that gave everyone a vaguely jaundiced complexion. Hard hats hung from hooks on the wall. Nearby was a fifty-inch flat screen and a whiteboard.

That was where Jack stood, surveying the entire team. “What do you say we go around the room, since I’m sure our newest arrivals haven’t had a chance to meet everyone yet?”

Dr. Grant Holland smiled and gave Rajesh and the others a funny little wave. Long and gangly, Grant was nearly sixty with rosy cheeks and slightly thinning hair. Although he considered himself a scientist, some of his theories on morphic fields and interspecies communication were pretty far-out. “You might say I’m the biologist on board. A native of Bath, England, I studied at Imperial College London. My role here is to look at how life slowly came back after the asteroid impact. And if I was a betting man, which I’m not, I’d say the role of volcanoes in the mass extinction has been grossly overlooked.”

Dr. Dag Gustavsson was next. A square-jawed Swede sporting a thick red beard and a penetrating stare, he could easily have passed for a Viking warrior were it not for the tie-dye and Birkenstock sandals. He clasped his hands and offered a slight bow. “Pleasure to meet you. I’m a paleontologist by training, but for this mission, I’ll be channeling my inner zoologist as I chart the rise of mammals following the cataclysm.”