**Chapter 1 – Gone**

The bright yellow Jeep Wrangler Rubicon skidded to a stop at the outer edge of the site. Jim Grady opened the driver side door and hopped out, surveying the area, looking for signs of life. He found none. Not a single colleague or worker was anywhere to be found. The door flaps to their empty tents flapped in the breeze and their equipment lay strewn about the site. What had been a bustling archeological excavation spot a few days ago had turned into a ghost town and Jim was desperate to find the cause.

Jim closed the door to his Jeep and cautiously walked towards the main tent, which served as the dining hall and main meeting room for the project. He stopped at the entrance and gingerly lifted the door flap to look inside. Peering in, he saw that the dining hall was empty as well, but he was immediately overwhelmed by the stench of rotting food. Jim recoiled, letting the door flap close. His next stop was the main excavation area.

The day was warm and sunny, a beautiful summer day, but a chill still ran down Jim’s spine as he arrived at the main excavation area. Tools lay on the ground, waiting for workers to return and resume their routine. Had circumstances been different, the site would have simply looked like everyone was on break, but Jim knew better. Something had caused everyone to drop their tools and leave the area, but there were no clues as to why or where anyone had gone. It was as if the Earth had simply swallowed them alive, leaving no trace.

Jim suddenly felt very vulnerable. A mixture of concern and fear gripped him as he worried for the well-being of everyone who was missing as well as his own. He looked down at his hands which were trembling now. It had been three days since he had last spoken to anyone at the site or received a text. After failing to reach anyone on the second day, he had decided to make the trip out to the site and had left early this morning. He had been worried, but nothing could have prepared him for this.