

A Ryan Cole Adventure

# A DARKER RAIN



CLAUDINE KAPEL

“Let me tell you, sir, I’ve worked in these parts most of my life. I’ve come across bears and cougars and pretty much any other predator you might encounter around here. Never, in all my years, have I come across anything like that.”

“Can you describe it?” Cole asked.

“It was like a big wildcat, but it was different somehow. When it growled, it sent chills down my spine,” Stapleton replied.

“At first, we thought it was a cougar. But it was bigger, and looked like a black leopard. I know we don’t have leopards here, but that’s what it looked like.”

“Was there anything else unusual about it?” asked Cole. He already knew the answer to his question, but he wanted to hear what the ranch hand would say.

Stapleton glanced down at the ground

before looking at Cole. “Plenty,” he said quietly. “The worst were its eyes.”

“Its eyes?”

“Yeah. They weren’t regular animal eyes. They were red. And they glowed.” Stapleton expelled a sharp breath. “Like something not of this world.”

That was precisely why Cole had come to the ranch to investigate the slaughter of the cattle. As second in command at Sigma Scientific, he was no stranger to the unusual.

Ryan Cole was the head of field operations for a firm that specialized in handling security threats. Sigma’s work included helping clients with sensitive or high-risk security issues and conducting investigations on security breaches. Sigma was also a leading designer of new security technology and field gear, with the U.S. military among its top clients.

Through its military connections, Sigma was also frequently called in to help respond to potential threats from other worlds. Anything that even remotely suggested alien technology was in play quickly became a top priority, both for Sigma and for Cole's military contacts.

Sigma was often engaged by the military to help recover and decipher alien technology that had made its way to Earth. They often came up against gunrunners and arms dealers trafficking not only in stolen military hardware, but also in artifacts from other worlds.

Cole had encountered a lot of unexplained phenomena in his career with Sigma and, before that, with the U.S. Air Force. He was privy to information that never made it to the evening news.

He understood there were powerful forces

on the planet—and beyond—that exerted influence from the shadows. In fact, he often played a role in protecting the welfare of a public that never even knew such forces existed.

Lately it seemed as though the flow of alien technology had increased. There were more black-market deals involving alien weapons, which was a major concern for the Pentagon and the CIA. Fortunately, there wasn't a lot of evidence of such weapons being used in criminal activities or by political extremists. But Cole's military contacts were worried it was just a matter of time.

Cole had therefore responded immediately to the request for help regarding the unusual, deadly wildcat. The ranchers around Hawkley Ridge had been reporting sightings of it for several days. But the attack the previous night

had prompted Randy Weyland to place a late night call for help to his friend Theo Warren, the head of Sigma. Cole and his team had been quickly dispatched in response.

Both Cole and Warren agreed that whatever was threatening the livestock of Hawkley Ridge was unconventional and possibly of alien origin. But it was not just the possibility of alien links that had Cole concerned about the leopard. The creature had turned up in a geographic area that Sigma was exploring as part of a separate investigation that also related to alien technology.

Cole's team was on the trail of some major alien artifacts, and one was thought to lay hidden in the U.S. Pacific Northwest. Even more significantly, the leopard had turned up in search quadrant Beta Fourteen, the very area they were investigating. Cole had little doubt that the ranchers were facing a much