

THE DARK CONSPIRACY

José Monteiro

THE DARK CONSPIRACY

2026

The Dark Conspiracy José Luís Santos Monteiro

First English-language edition, August 2026.

All rights reserved.

Reproduction of this book for commercial purposes without the author's permission is prohibited.

CONTENTS

Chapter 1 - The Collapse of Australia	11
Chapter 2 - AlienSpecial	18
Chapter 3 - Invitation into the Unknown	24
Chapter 4 - First Contact	36
Chapter 5 - Traitor!	46
Chapter 6 - Spulve	56
Chapter 7 - The Truth About Chernobyl	66
Chapter 8 - Ukraine	89
Chapter 9 - Prophecies	105
Chapter 10 - The Price of the Future!	113
Chapter 11 - The Heiress's Choice	117
Chapter 12 - Postwar Ukraine	122
Chapter 13 - Legacy of the Stars	127
Chapter 14 - The Most Powerful Man in the World	135
Chapter 15 - Between Secrecy and Truth!	160
Chapter 16 - The New Empress	167
Chapter 17 - The Day the World Changed	174
Chapter 18 - The Spulve Crown	194
Chapter 19 - The Inferno of Porto	201
Chapter 20 - The Calm Before the Storm!	245
Chapter 21 - The New World	252
Chapter 22 - Bound for Washington	270
Chapter 23 - The Guardian of Humanity	276
Chapter 24 - The Traitor's Reward	298

Chapter 25 - The Mayan Testament	304
Chapter 26 - The Shield of Humanity	312
Chapter 27 - The Last Days of Peace	321
Chapter 28 - The Last Hope	332
Chapter 29 - The Man Who United the World!	340

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are people who, directly or indirectly, help shape a work, whether through ideas, inspiration or simply by sharing opinions that open up new creative paths. To everyone named on these pages, my heartfelt thanks. Thalita Villas Boas For being the first reader in Portugal to buy my poetry book, a gesture that touched me deeply, and for all your help in promoting it. Your encouragement gave me a genuine boost on this journey. Alberto Alves A human accomplice of the reptilians in this story, he inspired me to create the villain the book was missing: Alberto Costa, better known as Azarado. Our conversations, exchanged ideas and shared visions were fundamental to building this dark and complex plot.

Igor Santos

For also reading the ending of this volume and offering valuable ideas that made the narrative even more compelling. Your help was important during this final stretch.

To all of you, my deepest gratitude.

This book also bears your signature, even if only between the lines.

Why do we always look towards the horizon... when the real threat may be living among us?

From the first flame to the stars, Humanity believed that every discovery brought it closer to the truth. But what if every answer merely concealed an even greater question?

We spent centuries perfecting the art of war. We raised borders. We created enemies. We divided a single world into thousands of competing interests. We called it civilisation.

But the Universe has never recognised borders.

Out there, there are no nations. There are no religions. There are no ideologies.

Out there, you survive... or you disappear.

And if one day we discover that we are not alone... will we be ready to face something that has never known our rules?

Perhaps evolution was never about becoming stronger. Perhaps it is about learning to see what everyone else insists on ignoring.

Because, throughout History, Humanity's fate has never depended on the majority.

It has always depended on the one person with the courage to believe that the impossible... was merely a truth waiting to be discovered.

My name is José Monteiro.

And this is my story. The story of a man who realised that Humanity's greatest enemy never came from Earth.

CHAPTER 1

THE COLLAPSE OF AUSTRALIA

The heat of that Australian winter was suffocating.
The air felt heavy, charged with an invisible tension.
At first, no one took the virus seriously.
They said it was merely a "tropical flu", something that
would soon pass.
But then doctors began to disappear.
Hospitals overflowed.
And then came the screams.
The virus did not kill in the usual way.
First came the tremors.
The victims' eyes rolled back and their bodies convulsed
violently.
Then their hearts stopped and, for a few seconds, their
bodies lay still, as though dead.
But then... their eyes opened again.
There was no humanity left in them.
Only hunger.
The first images to circulate showed people biting one
another in the streets of Melbourne.
The authorities tried to contain the chaos, but the contagion
soon spiralled out of control.
The infected felt no pain and kept coming even after being
shot dozens of times.
At the military bases, orders were confused and desperate.
Lieutenant James O'Connor of the Australian Special Forces
shouted over the radio: - Bravo Seven, fall back!
Fall back now!
But no one answered.
The sirens and gunfire drowned out everything.

When the United States received the request for help, it immediately sent a force of Navy SEALs led by Commander Ethan Walker. The plan was simple, at least on paper: rescue civilians, contain the infection and evacuate the safe zones.

But nothing went according to plan.

Darwin Military Base, Northern Australia

The thrum of helicopters filled the air. Hundreds of civilians formed endless queues, desperate to enter the quarantine zones. Dust and dried blood covered the ground. Children cried as they clung to their parents. Soldiers, drenched in sweat and coated in soot, shouted to maintain order.

- Next group, move! Come on!

Sergeant Lewis ordered, pushing the crowd towards the metal gates.

An elderly woman collapsed among the throng. Lieutenant O'Connor ran to her and tried to lift her.

- Come on, ma'am. We have to get you out of here.

Before he could help her, she began to shake. Her body arched and a guttural sound rose from her throat. O'Connor stepped back and drew his weapon.

Her eyes opened, black and lifeless.

- Shit...

he muttered before pulling the trigger.

One shot. Then another. But it was already too late. The crowd panicked. Screams engulfed the camp.

Three weeks later

The Australian government declared martial law. The major cities were lost. Communications with Canberra, the capital, became unstable. The SEALs and special forces fought day and night to keep the survivors alive.

According to military records, more than ten million civilians had been rescued and moved to safe zones inland, then transported in naval convoys to the United States. It was a historic exodus.

But the cost was devastating.

Commander Ethan Walker received a mission in Sydney: find the survivors and take them to the Royal National Park before it was too late.

Sydney was no longer the same city. Skyscrapers stood in ruins, streets were flooded with abandoned and burnt-out vehicles, and the screams of transformed people echoed without end. A genuine zombie invasion had consumed the Australian metropolis.

Commander Ethan, leader of the Navy SEALs, looked through the window of the helicopter hovering above the city. Beside him, Australian Lieutenant Harris adjusted his tactical equipment.

- Ethan, according to the satellite feed, the infestation covers almost the entire city.

- Yes... and our objective is simple: find survivors and take them to the Royal National Park before it is too late.

The helicopter descended carefully between ruined buildings. The instant the doors opened, the soldiers smelled death and sensed the danger closing in.

- Zombies ahead!

Miller shouted as the first horde poured out of an alley.

Ethan gave the order:

- Form a line! No panic. Maximum precision!

Gunfire echoed between the buildings, mowing down creatures that lunged forward in their hunger. Among them, civilians hidden beneath the rubble tried to escape.

- Commander! Two survivors on the roof of the building to the left!

Harris warned.

Ethan signalled to the team.

- Miller, go with them. Harris, cover the rear. We'll get the others.

The rescue was tense. Every floor they climbed could be their last. When they found a group of children and elderly people, Ethan managed a smile despite the chaos.

- Stay together. We're getting you out of here.

But as they reached the exit, the horde grew. Human screams mingled with the moans of the dead.

- Concentrated fire! Clear a path!

Ethan shouted.

Within seconds, the group reached the extraction point. The helicopter rose, leaving Sydney behind beneath a sea of ravenous zombies.

Meanwhile, in Porto, Portugal, José Monteiro and his friends discussed the crisis on the other side of the world. Sitting outside a café with several beers, José could not get one thought out of his mind.

- Have you seen the videos from Australia? This isn't just a virus...

he said, pointing at his phone screen.

- Zé, it's just a viral outbreak, mate... - Tiago replied with a laugh.

- No, it's aliens! - José insisted, his voice already trembling with excitement.

His friends laughed, but João shook his head.

- Zé, that makes no sense. It's only a virus. Give it a rest before the beer goes completely to your head.

José took a long drink and thought aloud:

- If it really is a virus... someone has to prove aliens aren't behind it. I know they are... There has to be a way to investigate this.

Hours later, back at home, José staggered around the living room, talking to himself.

- Someone has to tell the world this isn't normal... aliens, mate... zombies... aliens...

The room was dimly lit, and the bottle in his hand was still half full. Outside, the silence of the night seemed too calm, almost conspiratorial. He was alone, but a storm of ideas raged inside his head.

He picked up his laptop, rested it on the coffee table and opened the browser with trembling fingers. He typed: European Parliament.

- All right, then... let's show the world what they don't want to admit,

he muttered.

José opened the European Parliament's official website. He thought that if the people in Brussels saw the images, recordings and videos of the Australian zombies, perhaps they would finally

understand: this was not merely a viral outbreak. It was an alien experiment.

With alcohol guiding his fingers across the keyboard, he began to compose a formal, if clumsy, message:

Dear Members of the European Parliament,

I am writing to warn you about a serious problem: the zombie invasion in Sydney, Australia, is not simply a pandemic, but part of an alien experiment. I have watched the videos and studied the signs. This is not a coincidence.

I ask the appropriate European institutions to investigate this possibility.

Yours faithfully, José Monteiro, European citizen

José smiled to himself, convinced that he was about to drop a bombshell in the corridors of power. He clicked Send and, before closing the laptop, declared dramatically:

- They will have to listen to me. They will have to understand.

He tripped over the rug and fell onto the sofa as the television showed footage of a rescue helicopter over Sydney, surrounded by the undead in the midst of the zombie invasion.

He closed his eyes and murmured:

- It's up to you now, Parliament. Let's see whether you have the courage to do something.

Little did he know that, elsewhere in Europe, two AlienSpecial agents were already preparing an operation that would take them into his life. Not to disprove his theory, but to discover whether his ravings contained "more truth than madness".

While José slept, the secret agency moved through the shadows. And so a new stage began: José Monteiro, an ordinary Portuguese citizen frequently ridiculed by his friends, unknowingly became a key piece in a far greater game, a board on which zombies, aliens and conspiracy theories intertwined.

In the silence of that night, something within AlienSpecial was already whispering: perhaps at last we are close to a great revelation.

Meanwhile, in Australia

One morning, Commander Ethan Walker was summoned to the main tent. Standing before cameras and officers, the Australian Prime Minister delivered, in a broken voice, the announcement that would change everything.

- People of Australia... we have saved ten million lives. But we have lost a continent. The situation is beyond our control.

Our borders are sealed. This will be the last flight, the last ship.

I ask all our allies to withdraw. Let the world protect itself, because hell now has a name - and that name is Australia.

Silence. None of the soldiers dared applaud. Ethan looked at O'Connor.

- It's over, isn't it?

The lieutenant stared towards the smoke-covered horizon.

- No. This is only the beginning.

CHAPTER 2

ALIENSPECIAL

Three months later José Monteiro was not an extraordinary man.

At thirty, he worked as a data analyst, lived alone and spent his evenings reading obscure forums about extraterrestrial civilisations - or drinking beer with his friends.

Ever since the collapse of Australia, something had troubled him deeply.

- It isn't natural, he would mutter to himself.

Nothing about this virus is natural.

Social media was full of censored videos, and José collected every fragment of information he could find.

He believed something no one else wanted to hear: the virus was not a product of nature or of a human laboratory, but had come from beyond Earth.

Meanwhile, in Brussels, inside an unmarked and discreet building, a secret agency called AlienSpecial existed - an ultra-clandestine European organisation dedicated to investigating

strange phenomena: extraterrestrial activity, sightings and anomalies. Few people knew it existed.

Inside the agency's meeting room, the director, an austere and calculating figure, read José Monteiro's message on a projection screen. Beside him, two agents, Sofia and Rui, watched attentively.

- So this José Monteiro believes the zombies were created by aliens? - the director asked, adjusting his glasses.

- Yes, sir - Sofia replied. - He sent a formal email to the European Parliament. He appears to believe it completely.

- Interesting - Rui said, leaning forward. - If he is so convinced, perhaps we can use him. He might become an ally.

The director considered this.

- We need to contact him, but he must not know who we are. I want a covert interview. Find out what he knows, what he believes and whether his theories have a genuine foundation or are merely the product of drunken paranoia.

Sofia nodded.

- I can invite him to take part in a research group interview about global crises and human behaviour.

- And I can join her - Rui suggested.

The director smiled, a narrow smile laden with intent.

- Do it. But be careful. If he is right, he could become an extremely valuable source. If he is wrong... well, he may still give us clues about where to look.

It was a Tuesday afternoon when José received the email. The subject line read:

Invitation to participate in a research group:
Global crises and human behaviour

Curious and flattered, José clicked the link and joined the video conference. Two formal, smiling faces appeared in separate windows before him.

- Good afternoon, Mr Monteiro - Sofia said in a calm, convincing voice. - Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in our study.

- Good afternoon. It's a pleasure - José replied. He was still slightly suspicious, but proud to have been invited.

- My name is Sofia, and this is Rui. We are conducting research into how citizens perceive global crises, pandemics, international conflicts, and political and social change. We want to understand the views of engaged, critical-minded people - Sofia explained.

- Right... - José said, adjusting himself in his chair. He could already feel the rush that came whenever he spoke about what he truly believed.

Rui began with the first question:

- Mr Monteiro, how do you view the way recent pandemics have been managed? Do you believe the global response has been adequate?

José smiled, took a sip of water and began to speak enthusiastically.

- Look... when we examine the pandemic, everything seems... predictable, almost as if it were planned. Don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying it happened by chance. There is something greater at work. A species, or an intelligence, is manipulating global events to test Humanity. In recent years, we have witnessed the manipulation of information and crises, and we cannot ignore the old signs of infiltration...

- Old signs? - Sofia asked, maintaining a neutral tone.

- Yes! - José replied, now animated. - There are historical records, symbols and secret cultures. There are rumours of an alien species, the reptilians, which has infiltrated Earth for centuries. They manipulate governments, financial crises, wars... everything, shaping society according to a plan that we have only just begun to perceive.

Taking discreet notes, Rui continued:

- Interesting. And what about wars and international conflicts? Do you believe there is a connection between these crises and global human behaviour?

José took a breath, considered his answer and replied with precision:

- Absolutely. Global conflicts are rarely only about territory or resources. There are patterns. Leaders who appear to choose the path of war repeatedly make decisions that benefit

invisible forces. Look at what is happening in Australia now... the zombie invasion. Most people think it is a viral pandemic, but I believe it is the first stage of a larger plan, an experiment designed to test how societies respond to a threat. It clearly shows that we are not dealing solely with natural or human events. There is an intelligence behind it.

Sofia leaned forward, showing genuine interest.

- Fascinating... And what about international politics? Do you think major decisions are influenced by these external forces?

José smiled, his eyes bright.

- Without question. Look at the coincidences between crises, financial decisions and the manipulation of information... It is not simply corruption or human error. It is a carefully choreographed design. We are pieces on a chessboard controlled by others, and most people do not even realise it. What we see in Australia is merely a public demonstration. The zombie crisis is symbolic, a warning, and a test of our reactions.

Rui and Sofia exchanged a subtle glance, almost imperceptible on screen. AlienSpecial had already understood that José Monteiro was not merely a drunken conspiracy theorist. He spoke with clarity, coherence and insight, drawing connections that could prove vital to the agency.

- Thank you very much, Mr Monteiro. Your answers will be extremely useful to our research - Sofia said, bringing the meeting to a polite close.

José ended the call with a satisfied smile, unaware that he had just handed AlienSpecial a

complete map of his reasoning about aliens and global crises.

At the agency's headquarters, Sofia and Rui exhaled.

- This man knows too much. He may truly be the key we have been looking for - Rui murmured.

- Yes. He is intelligent enough to discover what we are missing - Sofia said.

And so AlienSpecial began preparing the next step, using José Monteiro's confidence to discover whether the rumours about the reptilians were merely theories - or something far more real.

A few hours later, José received an anonymous message:

Congratulations. You have been selected to join a special AlienSpecial project.

Public designation in certain countries: EuroSpecial.

Await further instructions. Tell no one.

CHAPTER 3

INVITATION INTO THE UNKNOWN

A few hours after receiving the anonymous message, José stood on the private apron at Porto Airport.

The terminal was almost deserted.

Only a small white executive jet waited near the runway, surrounded by a discreet security detail.

A woman walked towards him.

- José Monteiro?

- That's me.

She smiled and extended her hand.

- Agent Clara Mendes.

Welcome to AlienSpecial.

José shook her hand.

- I admit I still have no idea why I'm here.

-You'll find out in a moment.

But first, let's board.

They climbed aboard the aircraft.

The interior was surprisingly luxurious, yet functional.

Four scientists sat around a table, wholly absorbed in laptops and documents.

They glanced up long enough to greet José before returning to work.

Clara showed him to a seat.

- Before we begin, I brought you dinner.

It will be a long flight.

While an attendant served the meal, José discreetly studied the other passengers.

- Who are they?

- Specialists in virology, epidemiology and genetics.

José frowned.

- So this mission is connected to the Australian virus?

Clara merely smiled.

- In part.

She waited until he had finished eating, then produced a black folder.

- Before I explain anything, I need you to sign this document.

José opened the folder. The first page read:

PERMANENT NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

He skimmed the clauses. The agreement prohibited him from disclosing any information related to the mission, even after it ended.

- This is very serious...

- Far more serious than you can imagine.

José signed. Clara immediately put the document away.

- Now I can explain. AlienSpecial is an organisation dedicated to investigating events that may show signs of... non-human origin.

José remained silent.

- I'm not saying that we know extraterrestrials exist. The truth is, we don't. But there are too many events without a logical explanation. Incidents, disappearances, atmospheric phenomena, biological changes... too many coincidences to ignore.

José folded his arms.

- And you believe they might all be connected?

- We suspect it. Nothing more.

She paused briefly.

- That is precisely why we invited you. I read your report about Australia, among other things. The way you analysed the case caught the attention of our superiors.

José looked out of the window.

- Where exactly is your headquarters?

- In an isolated building close to the European Parliament.

José seemed surprised.

- Then you are a European Union agency?

Clara slowly shook her head.

- No.

- No?

- Officially, many people believe we are. It is convenient for them to do so.

José regarded her with curiosity.

- Then who runs AlienSpecial?

Clara smiled.

- If I knew, I would tell you. The truth is that even I don't know the answer.

José fell silent.

- We receive orders. We carry out missions. And we know only what we need to know.

In some countries, we use the name EuroSpecial. It helps maintain the illusion that we are merely another European agency. Elsewhere, we use our true name: AlienSpecial.

- But the mission is always the same?

- Always.

She lowered her voice slightly.

- We are an ultra-secret organisation. Very few people in the world truly know that we exist. They include several heads of state and a very small number of senior government officials.

José rested his elbows on the table. He thought for a few seconds, then spoke calmly.

- I need to ask you for something.

- Go on.

- I want you to investigate who really controls AlienSpecial.

Clara was taken aback.

- Are you joking?

- No.

She studied him closely. José continued:

- What if extraterrestrials exist... and they are the ones truly responsible for the agency?

Silence settled over the cabin.

Clara finally answered.

- I had never considered that possibility.

- I would.

She smiled faintly.

- You're asking me to investigate the organisation I work for?

- In secret. No one can know - José said.

Clara reflected for a moment. Finally, she extended her hand once more.

- All right.

José shook it.

- Agreed. We won't speak about this again until one of us has something new.

Clara smiled.

- I sincerely hope that never happens.

José arched an eyebrow.

- Why?

- Because it would mean that the organisation I have worked for all these years is not what I always believed it to be - Clara said sadly.

José leaned back in his seat.

- Or it would mean that we had finally discovered the truth.

Clara gave a quiet laugh.

- You've only just joined AlienSpecial, and already you want to investigate AlienSpecial itself.

- An investigator must never rule out any possibility - José replied quickly.

- Not even the most absurd ones?

- Especially those.

She shook her head.

- José, you are building a theory without any evidence.

- No.

- No? - Clara asked.

- I'm building a hypothesis.

Clara folded her arms.

- Is there a difference?

- A great one.

She watched him.

- Explain.

José rested his elbows on the table.

- You told me a few moments ago that you don't know who actually runs the agency.

- That's true.

- You also said that most agents know only the part of the operation that concerns them.

- Yes.

- And that some countries use the name EuroSpecial merely to create the impression that it is a European agency.

- Exactly.

- You also told me that its headquarters are near the European Parliament, but it does not belong to the European Union.

Clara nodded.

- Correct.

José smiled.

- Then notice something. You have just listed four facts.

She waited.

- None of them proves that extraterrestrials exist.

- Of course not. But none of them proves that they don't.

Clara was silent for several seconds.

- There is still no logical connection - she said.

José tilted his head slightly.

- The connection is simple. If an extraterrestrial civilisation wanted to observe Humanity without interfering directly, it would do exactly this.

- This?

- It would create an organisation that investigated strange phenomena - José said enthusiastically.

- That's speculation.

- Of course it is. But tell me something.

She waited.

- If extraterrestrials intelligent enough to reach Earth existed... do you really think they would introduce themselves to the world by saying, "Hello, we're aliens"?

Clara smiled.

- Probably not.

- Then they would hide.

- Perhaps.

- And what would be the best hiding place?

She shrugged. José answered for her.

- An organisation whose very purpose is to investigate inexplicable events.

Clara took a deep breath.

- You're imagining a very complex game.

- The Universe tends to be complex.

She smiled again.

- You still have no evidence.

José nodded.

- I agree.

- Then why do you insist, José?

- Because an investigator does not work with evidence alone.

- What else does an investigator work with?

- Questions.

Clara looked at him with curiosity. José continued:

- Most people search for answers.

- Yes.

- I search for questions no one else has asked.

She said nothing. José went on:

- Imagine that, fifty years from now, we discover that extraterrestrials have always existed.

- All right.

- What will be the first question Humanity asks?

Clara thought for a few seconds.

- Perhaps... Where were they?

José shook his head.

- No.

- Then what?

- How did we fail to notice them sooner?

She considered his words. José continued:

- And when people ask that question... someone will answer: because we never investigated who controlled the investigators.

Silence settled between them. Clara now stared at the table. Finally, she spoke.

- I had never thought of that.

José smiled faintly.

- I know.

She looked up again.

- But it still seems almost impossible.

- It also seemed impossible for a virus to transform people into violent creatures - José said.

Silence.

- It seemed impossible to receive a message from an ultra-secret agency that almost no one knows exists.

She sighed softly.

- When you put it like that...

- I only ask that you keep an open mind.

Clara studied him for a long moment. Then she laughed.

- Now I understand.

- What?

- Why you were chosen.

José looked surprised.

- What do you mean?

- When your file reached my desk, it came with only one note.

- What did it say?

She smiled.

- This man asks questions that others cannot even imagine.

José laughed for the first time since boarding the aircraft.

- That doesn't sound particularly special.

- You're mistaken.

She leaned slightly closer.

- It was precisely your intelligence that made them recruit you.

José shook his head.

- Not intelligence.

- No?

- Curiosity.

- Is there a difference?

- All the difference in the world.

She was intrigued. José explained:

- Intelligence allows us to answer. Curiosity compels us to keep asking.

Clara was silent for a few seconds, then smiled.

- I have to admit something.

- Go on.

- I was convinced this conversation would be over in five minutes.

José glanced at the clock on the cabin wall and smiled.

- How long have we been arguing?

Clara looked too. Her eyes widened in surprise.

- Three hours and twenty minutes...

José laughed.

- It seems we did manage to talk for a little while.

- A little while?

She laughed as well.

- I think we've just had the longest argument of my career.

The tension vanished completely. From that moment on, they stopped talking about the agency and began talking about their lives. José told her stories from his childhood in Porto, about his passion for investigation and the doubts he had always harboured concerning apparently inexplicable events.

Clara spoke about her career at AlienSpecial, missions in several countries and the difficulty of maintaining a normal life when almost everything she did was protected by absolute secrecy.

They discovered a shared passion for History, astronomy and Humanity's greatest mysteries.

For a while, they completely forgot that they were travelling towards a high-risk mission.

Then the pilot's voice came over the cabin speakers.

- Ladies and gentlemen, we will begin our descent shortly. We expect to land in thirty minutes.

José looked out of the window. The clouds were beginning to part.

Without knowing it, he was about to take the first step into a reality that would change his life for ever.

CHAPTER 4

FIRST CONTACT

The humid heat and the stench of decay were suffocating. José, now officially a member of AlienSpecial, was travelling with Agent Clara Mendes.

- Do you know why we're here?

- she asked as the jeep followed a dirt road.

- To investigate whatever is killing the people on this island -

José replied, looking out of the window.

-Correct.

But there is something else.

This disease is not like the Australian virus.

It seems... controlled.

The village of Ambalavao was almost deserted.

The few people who remained displayed strange symptoms: greenish skin, vertical pupils and a fever that no medicine could reduce.

José watched one of the patients while a local doctor tried to explain.

- They call it the "water sickness".

People drink the water and, within a few days, they begin to change.

Their veins turn dark.

Then the hallucinations start.

In the end, they either die... or disappear.

Clara gave José a grave look.

- And this is the strangest part: the well water was contaminated with an unknown substance.

The laboratories say nothing like it exists on Earth.

José frowned.

- This is their work. This is how the reptilians test humans: through the water.

That night, while Clara slept in the tent, José heard footsteps outside. He emerged armed and saw a figure standing on the riverbank.

She was a tall woman with bronze skin and eyes of an almost impossible green.

- You shouldn't be here - she said without turning.

- Who are you? - José asked tensely.

- Someone who does not belong here.

She looked at him. Something in her gaze disarmed him, a mixture of pain and ancient wisdom.

- Do you believe in extraterrestrials, José Monteiro?

He was startled.

- How do you know my name?

- Because fate wanted us to meet - the stranger said.

She smiled faintly, and José noticed small scales glinting on her neck in the moonlight.

- My name is Ja Ha Si.

He took a step back, his heart racing.

- You... what are you?

She held his gaze for a long moment before answering.

- I am what you have been searching for. I am a reptilian.