



The 4400: The Vesuvius Prophecy

By Greg Cox

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With no memory of where they've been.

And they haven't aged a day.

Some have returned with startling new abilities...

Eleven-year-old Maia can see the future, and she's never wrong. So when she has a vision of Mount Rainier starting to erupt, the National Threat Assessment Command takes her warning very seriously. But to track down the unknown returnee who may trigger the volcanic eruption, NTAC agents Tom Baldwin and Diana Skouris must uncover the astounding truth behind one of the greatest unsolved crimes of the twentieth century....

And they've got competition. Ruthless enemies are working against them and somehow managing to keep one step ahead of the desperate agents. With the future closing in on them, Tom and Diana must foil a lethal conspiracy -- before Seattle and the entire Pacific Northwest go the way of ancient Pompeii.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Greg Cox is the *New York Times* bestselling author of numerous *Star Trek* novels and short stories. He has also written the official movie novelizations of *Godzilla*, *Man of Steel*, *The Dark Knight Rises*, *Daredevil*, *Ghost Rider*, and the first three *Underworld* movies, as well as books and stories based on such popular series as *Alias*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *CSI*, *Farscape*, *The 4400*, *Leverage*, *The Green Hornet*, *The Phantom*, *Roswell*, *Star Trek*, *Terminator*, *Warehouse 13*, *Xena: Warrior Princess*, and *Zorro*. He has received two Scribe Awards from the International Association of Media Tie-In Writers. He lives in Oxford, Pennsylvania. Visit him at GregCox-Author.com.

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ONE

The majestic white peak of Mount Rainier was one of the first things Maia Skouris had seen when she'd Returned. The snowcapped mountain had loomed above her on that misty morning almost three years ago, when the eight-year-old girl had suddenly found herself standing on Highland Beach, alongside exactly 4,399 equally baffled souls. Maia remembered being scared and disoriented, not knowing where she was or what had become of her parents. Those feelings came back to her as the huge white glaciers grew steadily larger in the windshield of the chartered bus carrying her up the side of the mountain. She shuddered involuntarily in her seat. Maia was used to seeing the future, but sometimes the past sneaked up on her as well.

One minute I was picking flowers in California, she recalled. The next minute there was a great big mountain on the horizon...

"All right, everyone," Alana Mareva addressed Maia and the other children from the front of the bus. A hint of a foreign accent colored the teacher's voice. Maia knew the elegant, dark-haired woman from outside school as well; Alana was Maia's mother's partner's girlfriend. "We're almost there."

The bus had left The 4400 Center over three hours ago, on a daylong field trip to Mount Rainier National Park. Towering green fir trees seemed to rush past outside as the bus full of kids climbed a steep mountain road toward the upper slopes of Rainier. A bright blue sky, dotted with fluffy white clouds, could be glimpsed above the treetops. The class had lucked out, weather-wise. It was a perfect day for an outdoor excursion.

Cheers greeted Alana's announcement. The hubbub of dozens of excited voices filled the interior of the air-conditioned bus. Ms. Tobey, the other teacher leading the field trip, clicked off the mounted TV set that had been entertaining the young passengers with a series of educational videos. Many of Maia's classmates had chosen to occupy themselves with their own books or computer games instead. Looking at the seemingly ordinary students and teachers, you would never guess that each and every one of them was, like Maia, one of the 4400 -- unless, of course, you noticed that Billy Hulquist was juggling marbles without actually touching them, or that Rory Plummer was drawing brightly colored designs in her notebook using only her fingertip. Duane Foxworth blinked repeatedly as he peered at the wilderness outside; Maia knew he was capturing snapshots of the scenery in his photographic memory. Sumi Price swayed in her seat, snapping her fingers to a rhythm only she could hear. Sumi's ears could pick up radio signals from as far away as Bucharest.

Pretty neat abilities, Maia thought enviously. *Too bad I can't trade mine for one of theirs.*

Precognition was seldom any fun.

Maia tucked her journal into the backpack resting at her feet. Despite her unpleasant associations with the mountain, she was looking forward to arriving at their destination. Her mother had insisted that Rainier was beautiful this time of year, and Maia had to admit that it would be kind of cool to see actual snow in the middle of May. Pushing her painful memories aside, she firmly resolved to have a good time. After all, she reminded herself, this sure beat being stuck inside a classroom all day.

"As we've discussed," Alana lectured, "Mount Rainier is the highest peak in the Cascades, rising to over fourteen thousand feet. That's almost three miles high. On a clear day, it can be seen from over one hundred and fifty miles away, all the way from Portland to Seattle. It is a dormant volcano, less than a million years old, and is part of the so-called Ring of Fire, a chain of seismic activity that stretches around the Pacific Ocean all the way to New Zealand."

Tyrell Hughes raised his hand to get the teacher's attention. "The volcano's not going to erupt while we're up there, is it?"

"I wouldn't worry about that." Alana gave the boy a reassuring smile. "Rainier hasn't had a major eruption for over five hundred years. It's bound to erupt someday, but there will probably be plenty of warning signs first. When Mount St. Helens erupted back in 1980, it was after months of preliminary tremors, bulges, and discharges of steam."

Even still, dozens of people got killed, Maia thought. She had read about the 1980 eruption, which had taken place while she was still missing. Alana didn't seem to be in a hurry to mention that part.

"These days Mount Rainier is carefully monitored for any signs of increased volcanic activity," the teacher continued. "They wouldn't let us into the park if it wasn't safe."

"But it *could* go off today," Tyrell persisted. He seemed morbidly fascinated by the possibility. "Couldn't it?"

Alana sighed softly. "The odds are very much against it, Tyrell." The bus pulled into the parking lot outside the visitor center, and Alana looked grateful for the distraction. "Here we are, kids. Everyone ready to get off the bus?"

Another chorus of cheers testified to the children's eagerness to set foot on the mountain. Maia peered out the window at the breathtaking vista before her. A sign welcomed them to the Paradise area, elevation 5,400 feet. Acres of wildflowers carpeted the sloping green meadows ascending toward snowier slopes farther above. Granite boulders jutted from the verdant fields. Hiking trails led up and away from the visitor center, a futuristic structure that resembled a flying saucer. Maia remembered Marco telling her that the very first modern UFO sighting had taken place near Mount Rainier in 1947, only a year after Maia had disappeared from California. Marco had speculated that many such UFO reports had been inspired by the glowing balls of light that had abducted the 4400 over the years. *Makes sense to me*, Maia thought, *although we'll probably never know for sure.*

Alana and Ms. Tobey herded the kids off the bus. "All right now, everybody stay together." Maia waited patiently for her turn to disembark. As she stepped down onto the pavement, the crisp mountain air carried the fragrance of heather and huckleberries. She took a deep breath, savoring the refreshing aroma. The sunlight, reflected off the icy glaciers above, was so bright that it made her eyes water. Lifting a hand to shield her eyes from the glare, she observed the winding paths leading up to the snow line. She wondered

how high she would have to hike to reach all that frozen whiteness. It didn't seem that far away. Maybe there would be time to explore the trails after they checked out the exhibits at the visitor center?

Without warning, the future intruded on the present:

The snowy mountainside shakes. Hot steam vents from cracks in the earth. Maia's mother, Diana Skouris, confronts a nearby figure whose face Maia cannot see. Diana is wearing an NTAC vest over her snow gear. Tremors rock the ground beneath her feet, so that she can barely keep from falling. A deafening roar rises from below. The jets of steam smell like rotten eggs. "You have to stop this!" Diana shouts urgently. Maia glimpses a masculine figure in a flannel shirt, his face turned away from hers. The man seems to be trembling in sync with the shuddering mountain. "You don't want to be remembered this way. D. B. Cooper never hurt anybody!"

Melting snow starts to bubble and boil...

"Maia? Are you all right?"

The future faded from view, just like it always did, and Maia found herself looking into Alana's worried brown eyes. The teacher was crouched in front of Maia, examining her student with obvious concern. Maia saw her own face reflected in Alana's eyes. She looked pale and frightened. "What is it, Maia? Did you see something?"

Alana was very familiar with Maia's ability.

Maia nodded. She stared up at the crest of the mountain, half expecting to see an explosion of heated gases and lava blowing the peak apart. Despite the warm sunlight, a familiar chill came over her as she spoke with utter certainty. "The mountain is going to wake up."

Alana gulped. Her dark eyes widened in alarm. She glanced around anxiously to see if any of the other children had overheard Maia, only to discover a circle of frightened kids surrounding them, obviously hanging on Maia's every word. Ms. Tobey tried to steer the onlookers away, but it was too late; some of the younger kids were already crying and begging to go home. Tyrell looked like he was about to throw up.

I'm sorry, Maia thought guiltily. The terrified expressions of her classmates tore her up inside. It wasn't fair; even in the company of her own kind, she still ended up feeling like a freak. I didn't mean to spoil everything. I can't help what I see.

"Are you sure?" Alana asked, loudly enough for the other kids to hear. She seemed to be trying to calm them as much as Maia. "It's impossible to predict exactly when Rainier might erupt."

"It's not impossible," Maia said. She had learned from experience that lying about her visions only made things worse. Like the time she hid her predictions from her mommy and all the 4400 got sick. "I just did it." The memory of what she had just seen was burned into her brain. "And I know who is responsible."

"Responsible?" Alana's brow furrowed in confusion. "Maia, people don't cause volcanoes to erupt."

"This one will." She remembered her mother shouting at a faceless figure in a flannel shirt. "His name is D. B. Cooper." ® and © 2008 CBS Studios Productions LLC. All Rights Reserved.

Users Review

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Jena Alvarez:

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Joe North:

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Edna Spalding:

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