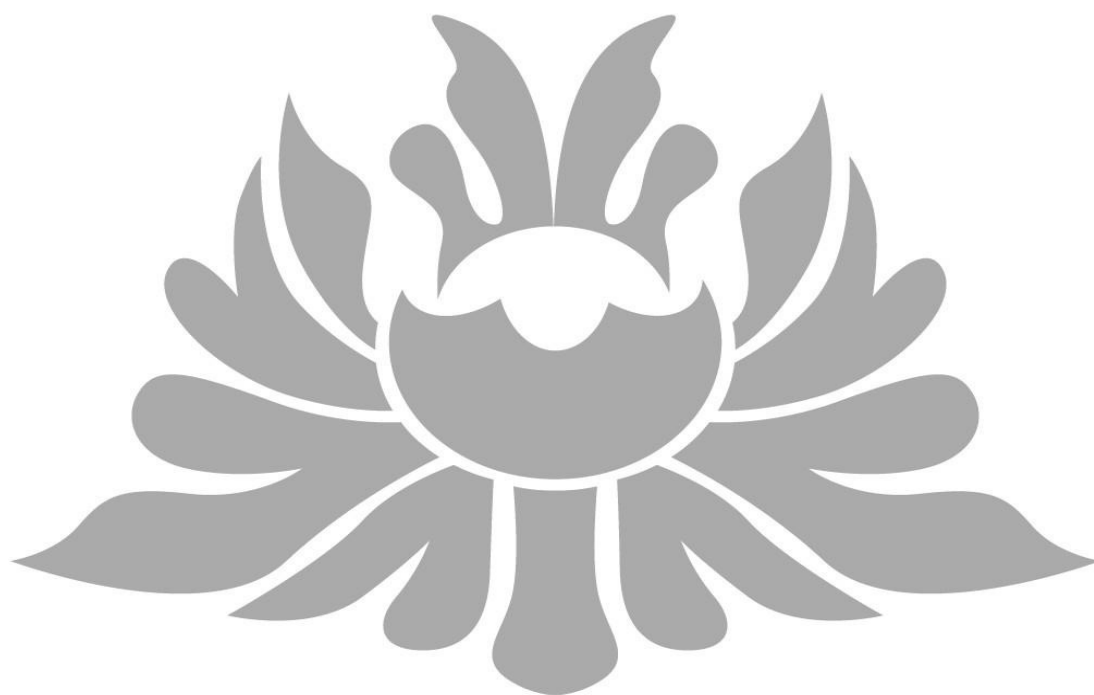


THE
ATLANTIS
WORLD



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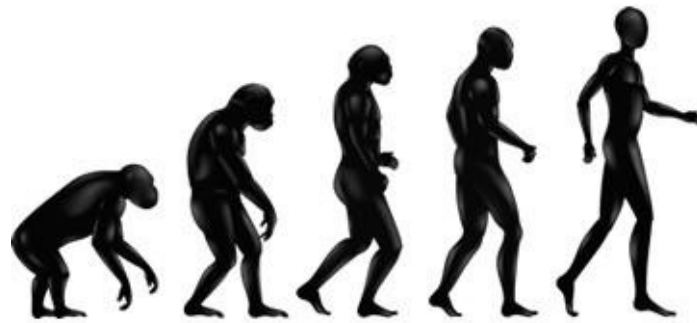
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ABOUT THE ATLANTIS WORLD

**A GLOBAL CATAclySM BEYOND IMAGINATION...
A MYSTERIOUS SIGNAL FROM SPACE...
AND ONE LAST HOPE TO SAVE THE HUMAN RACE:**

THE ATLANTIS WORLD.

As the clock ticks down to humanity's extinction, a team of scientists will risk it all to unravel the secrets of the past.



Northern Morocco: Dr. Kate Warner cured a global pandemic, and she thought she could cure herself. She was wrong. And she was wrong about the scope of the Atlantis conspiracy. Humanity faces a new threat, an enemy beyond imagination. With her own time running out and the utter collapse of human civilization looming, a new hope arrives: a signal from a potential ally.

Arecibo Observatory: Mary Caldwell has spent her life waiting, watching the stars, looking for signs of intelligent life beyond our world. When that day comes, Mary finds herself in the middle of a struggle older than the human race, with far greater stakes. She must decide who to trust, because there's nowhere to hide.

Antarctica: In the wake of the Atlantis Plague, Dorian Sloane finds himself a puppet to Ares' mysterious agenda. As Dorian prepares to take control of the situation, Ares unleashes a cataclysm that changes everything. As the catastrophe circles the globe, Ares reveals the true nature of the threat to humanity, and Dorian agrees to one last mission: find and kill David Vale and Kate Warner. There will be no prisoners this time. The orders are seek and destroy, and Dorian has been promised that his own answers and salvation lie on the other side.

With Dorian in pursuit, Kate, David, and their team race through the ruins of the Atlantean ship left on Earth, across Atlantean science stations throughout the galaxy, and into the past of a mysterious culture whose secrets could save humanity in its darkest hour. With their own lives on the line and time slipping away, Kate, David and Dorian are put to the ultimate test.



ABOUT:

The Atlantis World is the third and final book in A.G. Riddle’s Origin Mystery trilogy. This adventure across space and time explores the history of the Atlantean homeworld and culture, a topic readers have asked about since the first novel in the series, The Atlantis Gene.



NOTE: All three books in the trilogy are now available:

Book 1: The Atlantis Gene <http://amzn.com/B00C2WDD5I>

Book 2: The Atlantis Plague <http://amzn.com/B00GR5JZHQ>

Book 3: The Atlantis World <http://amzn.com/B00JVUQ2H0>

THE
ATLANTIS
WORLD

THE ORIGIN MYSTERY
BOOK 3

A.G. Riddle

CONTENTS

[Copyright](#) • [Dedication](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Part I: Rise & Fall](#)

[Chapter 1](#) • [Chapter 2](#) • [Chapter 3](#) • [Chapter 4](#) • [Chapter 5](#) • [Chapter 6](#) • [Chapter 7](#) • [Chapter 8](#) • [Chapter 9](#) • [Chapter 10](#) • [Chapter 11](#) • [Chapter 12](#) • [Chapter 13](#) • [Chapter 14](#) • [Chapter 15](#) • [Chapter 16](#) • [Chapter 17](#) • [Chapter 18](#) • [Chapter 19](#) • [Chapter 20](#) • [Chapter 21](#)

[Part II: The Atlantis Beacon](#)

[Chapter 22](#) • [Chapter 23](#) • [Chapter 24](#) • [Chapter 25](#) • [Chapter 26](#) • [Chapter 27](#) • [Chapter 28](#) • [Chapter 29](#) • [Chapter 30](#) • [Chapter 31](#) • [Chapter 32](#) • [Chapter 33](#) • [Chapter 34](#)

[Part III: A Tale of Two Worlds](#)

[Chapter 35](#) • [Chapter 36](#) • [Chapter 37](#) • [Chapter 38](#) • [Chapter 39](#) • [Chapter 40](#) • [Chapter 41](#) • [Chapter 42](#) • [Chapter 43](#) • [Chapter 44](#) • [Chapter 45](#) • [Chapter 46](#) • [Chapter 47](#) • [Chapter 48](#) • [Chapter 49](#) • [Chapter 50](#) • [Chapter 51](#) • [Chapter 52](#) • [Chapter 53](#) • [Chapter 54](#) • [Chapter 55](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Author's Note](#) • [Acknowledgments](#) • [About the Author](#)



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RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

Books for a better world.

This novel is fiction, except for the parts that aren't.

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For my parents, who encouraged me to never give up.

PROLOGUE

Arecibo Observatory
Arecibo, Puerto Rico

For the last forty-eight hours, Dr. Mary Caldwell had spent every waking second studying the signal the radio telescope had received. She was exhausted, exhilarated, and sure of one thing: it was organized, a sign of intelligent life.

Behind her, John Bishop, the other researcher assigned to the observatory, poured himself another drink. He had gone through the scotch, the bourbon, then the rum, and all the other booze the other researchers had stockpiled until he was down to the peach schnapps. He drank it straight since there had nothing to mix it with. He winced as he took the first sip.

It was nine A.M., and his revulsion at the liquid would only last another twenty minutes, until his third drink.

“You’re imagining it, Mare,” he said as he set the empty glass down and focused on refilling it.

Mary hated when he called her “Mare.” No one had ever called her that. It reminded her of a horse. But he was the only company she had, and the two of them had reached an understanding of sorts.

After the outbreak, when people across Puerto Rico were dying by the tens of thousands, they had holed up in the Observatory, and John had promptly made his first pass at her. She had brushed it off. The second followed two days later. After that, he made a move every day, each more aggressive than the last, until she had kneed him in the balls. He had been more docile after that, focusing on alcohol and snide remarks.

Mary stood and walked to the window, which looked out on the lush, green Puerto Rican hills and forests. The only hint of civilization was the satellite dish that lay recessed into a plateau in the hills, pointed straight up at the sky. The radio telescope at Arecibo Observatory was the largest radio telescope in the world, a triumph of human engineering. It was a marriage of sciences that represented the pinnacle of human achievement embedded in a primitive landscape that symbolized humanity’s past. And now it had fulfilled its ultimate mission. Contact.

“It’s real,” Mary said.

“How do you know?”

“It has our address on it.”

John stopped sipping the drink and looked up. “We should get out of here, Mare. Get back to civilization, to people. It will do you good—”

“I can prove it.” Mary moved from the window back to the computer, punched a few keys and brought up the signal. “There are two sequences. I don’t know what the second one is. I admit that. It’s too complex. But the first sequence is composed of a simple repetition. On-Off. 0–1. Binary digits.”

“Bits.”

“Exactly. And there’s a third code—a terminator. It appears after every eighth bit.”

“Eight bits. A byte.” John set the bottle aside.

“It’s a code.”

“For what?”

“I don’t know yet.” Mary walked back to the computer and checked the progress. “Less than an hour before the analysis is complete.”

“It could be random chance.”

“It’s not. The first part, what’s decoded, begins with our address.”

John laughed out loud and grasped his drink again. “You had me for a minute there, Mare.”

“If you were going to send a signal to another planet, what’s the first thing you would put in? The address.”

John nodded as he dumped more schnapps into the glass. “Uh huh, put the zip code in too.”

“The first bytes represent two numbers: 27,624 and 0.00001496.”

John paused.

“Think about it,” Mary said. “What’s the only constant across the entire universe?”

“Gravity?”

“Gravity is constant, but its measure depends on the curvature of spacetime, how close one object’s mass is to another. You need a common denominator, something that any civilization, on any planet, no matter its mass or location, anywhere in the universe would know.”

John looked around.

“The speed of light. It’s the universal constant. It never changes, no matter where you are.”

“Right...”

“The first number, 27,624, is Earth’s distance from the center of our galaxy in light years.”

“That distance could apply to a dozen planets—”

“The second number, 0.00001496, is the exact distance of earth to the sun in light years.”

John stared straight ahead for a long moment, then pushed the bottle and half-empty glass out of his vision. He focused on Mary. “This is our ticket.”

Mary bunched her eyebrows.

John leaned back in his chair. “We sell it.”

“For what? I think the malls have all closed.”

“Well, I think the barter system is still in place. We demand protection, decent food, and whatever else we ever want.”

“This is the greatest discovery in human history. We’re not selling it.”

“This is the greatest discovery in human history—at the moment of our greatest despair. This sign is hope. Distraction. Don’t be a fool, Mare.”

“Stop calling me Mare.”

“When the plague broke out, you retreated here because you wanted to do something you loved until your time came. Me, I came here because I knew it was the biggest stockpile of booze anywhere within walking distance, and I knew you would come here. Yes, I’ve had a crush on you since I landed in San Juan.” He held his hands up before Mary could say anything. “That’s not my point. My point is that the world as you know it is over. People are desperate. They act out of self-interest. Sex and alcohol for me. For the folks you’re going to call, it’s about preserving their power. You’re giving them the means to do that: hope. When you’ve delivered that, they won’t need you anymore. This world isn’t

the one you remember. It will chew you up and spit you out, Mare.”

“We’re not selling it.”

“You’re a fool. This world slaughters idealists.”

Behind her, the computer beeped. The analysis was complete.

Before she could read the results, a noise from the other side of the building echoed through the hallway outside the office. Someone banging on the door? Mary and John’s eyes met. They waited.

The banging grew louder, ending in the sound of glass breaking, scattering across the floor.

Footsteps, pacing slowly.

Mary stepped toward the door of the office, but John caught her arm. “Stay here,” he whispered.

He picked up a baseball bat he had brought with him during the outbreak. “Lock this door. If they get here, the island’s out of food.”

Mary reached for the phone. She knew who she had to call now. Her hands shaking, she dialed the only person who could save them: her ex-husband.

PART I:
RISE & FALL

CHAPTER 1

Alpha Lander
1,200 Feet Below Sea Level
Off the Northern Coast of Morocco

David Vale was sick of pacing in the small bedroom, wondering if, or when, Kate would return. He glanced at the bloody pillow. The pool that had started as a few drops ten days ago was now a river that stretched from her pillow half-way down the bed.

“I’m fine,” Kate had said each morning.

“Where do you go every day?”

“I just need some time. And space.”

“Time and space for what?” David had asked.

“To get better.”

But she hadn’t gotten better. Every day when Kate returned, she was worse. Each night brought more violent nightmares, sweats, and nosebleeds that David thought might not stop. He had held her and he had been patient, waiting, hoping the woman who had saved his life, whose life he had saved two weeks ago, would somehow turn the corner and pull through. But she slipped away a little more each day. And now she was late. She had never been late before.

He checked his watch. Three hours late.

She could be anywhere in the massive Atlantean ship, which covered sixty square miles and was buried just off the mountainous coast of Northern Morocco, directly across from Gibraltar.

David had spent the last fourteen days, while Kate was away, learning how to operate the ship’s systems. He was still learning them. Kate had enabled the voice command routines to help with any commands David couldn’t figure out.

“Alpha, what is Dr. Warner’s location?” David asked.

The disembodied computer voice of the *Alpha Lander* boomed into the small room. “The information is classified.”

“Why?”

“You are not a senior member of the research staff.”

It seemed Atlantean computer systems were not immune to stating the obvious. David sat on the bed, just beside the blood stain. *What’s the priority? I need to know if she’s okay.* A thought occurred to him.

“Alpha, can you show me Dr. Warner’s vital signs?”

A wall panel opposite the small bed lit up, and David read the numbers and chart quickly—what he could understand.

Blood Pressure: 92/47

Pulse: 31

She's hurt. Or worse—dying. What happened to her?

“Alpha, why are Dr. Warner’s vitals abnormal?”

“That information is class—”

“Classified.” David kicked the chair into the desk.

“Does that conclude your query?” Alpha asked.

“Not by a long shot.”

David stepped to the double doors, which hissed open. He paused, then grabbed his sidearm. Just case.



David had been marching down the dimly lit corridors for almost ten minutes when he heard a figure moving in the shadows. He halted and waited, wishing his eyes would adjust to the faint lights at the floor and ceiling. Maybe the Atlanteans could see in less light or perhaps the ship—the piece of the ship they occupied—was operating in power-saving mode. Either way, it made the alien vessel seem even more mysterious.

A figure stepped out of the shadow.

Milo.

David was surprised to see the Tibetan teenager this deep in the ship. Milo was the only other person who shared the ship with Kate and David, but he spent most of his time outside of it. He slept outside, just beyond the inclining shaft that led from the buried ship to the mountaintop, where the Berbers left food for them. Milo loved sleeping under the stars and rising with the sun. David often found him sitting cross-legged, meditating when he and Kate went to join him for dinner each night. Milo had been their morale officer for the last two weeks, but through the dim light, David now saw only concern on the young man’s face.

“I haven’t seen her,” Milo said.

“Call me on ship’s comm if you do.” David resumed his rapid pace.

Milo fell in behind him, pumping his legs to keep up. David’s muscular frame and six-foot three inch height dwarfed Milo, who was a full foot shorter. Together, they looked like a giant and his young sidekick barreling through a darkened labyrinth.

“I won’t need to,” Milo said, panting.

David glanced back at him.

“I’ll be with you.”

“You should go back up top.”

“You know I can’t,” Milo said.

“She’ll be angry.”

“If she’s safe, I will not care.”

Same here, David thought. They walked in silence, the only sound the rhythmic beating of David’s boots pounding the metallic floor followed by Milo’s fainter footfalls.

David stopped before a large set of double doors and activated the wall panel. The display read:

Auxiliary Medical Bay 12

It was the only medical bay in their part of the ship, and it was David’s best guess about where Ka went each day.

He moved his hand deeper into the green cloud of light that emerged from the wall panel, working his fingers a few seconds, and the doors hissed open.

David crossed the room quickly.

There were four medical tables in the center. Holographic wall displays ran the length of the room—the empty room. Could she have already left?

“Alpha, can you tell me the last time this bay was used?”

“This bay was last used on mission date, 9.12.38.28, standard date 12.39.12.47.29—”

David shook his head. “How many local days ago?”

“Nine million, one hundred twenty eight thousand—”

“Okay, fine. Is there another medical bay within our section of the ship?”

“Negative.”

Where else would she go? Maybe there was another way to track her.

“Alpha, can you show me which sections of the ship are currently consuming the most power?”

A wall screen lit up, and a holographic model of the ship materialized. Three sections glowed: A 1701-D, Auxiliary Medical Bay 12, and Adaptive Research Lab 47.

“Alpha, what is Adaptive Research Lab 47?”

“An Adaptive Research Lab can be configured for a variety of biological and other experiments.”

“How is Adaptive Research Lab 47 currently configured?” David braced for the response.

“That information is classified—”

“Classified,” David muttered. “Right...”

Milo held out a protein bar. “For the walk.”

David led Milo back into the corridor, where he ripped the wrapper open, bit off a large chunk of the brown bar, and chewed in silence. It seemed to help with the frustration.



David stopped in the corridor, and Milo almost slammed into the back of him.

David squatted and examined something on the floor.

“What is it?” Milo asked.

“Blood.”

David walked faster after that, and the blood on the floor increased from a few drops to long stretches.

At the double doors to Adaptive Research Lab 47, David worked his fingers in the green light of the wall panel. He entered the open command six times, and each time, the display flashed the same message:

Insufficient Access

“Alpha! Why can’t I open this door?”

“You have insufficient access—”

“How can I get inside this door?”

“You cannot,” Alpha’s voice echoed through the corridor with finality.

David and Milo stood for a moment.

David spoke quietly. “Alpha, show me Dr. Warner’s vital signs.”

The wall display transformed, and the numbers and charts appeared.

Blood Pressure: 87/43

Pulse: 30

Milo turned to David.

“Dropping,” David said.

“What now?”

“Now we wait.”

Milo sat cross-legged and closed his eyes. David knew he was seeking the stillness, and in that moment, David wished he could do the same, could put everything out of his mind. Fear clouded his thoughts. He desperately wanted that door to hiss open, but he dreaded it as well, dreaded finding out what had happened to Kate, what experiment she was running, what she was doing to herself.



David had almost fallen asleep when the alarm went off. Alpha's voice thundered through the cramped corridor.

“Subject medical emergency. Condition critical. Access overrides executed.”

The wide double doors to the research lab slid open.

David rushed in and rubbed his eyes, trying to understand what he saw.

Behind him, Milo spoke in awe, “Whoa.”

CHAPTER 2

Alpha Lander
1,200 Feet Below Sea Level
Off the Northern Coast of Morocco

“What is this?” Milo asked.

David scanned the research lab. “No idea.”

The room was vast, at least one hundred feet long and fifty feet deep, but unlike the medical bay there were no tables in the room. In fact, the only things on the floor were two glass vats, at least ten feet in diameter. Yellow light glowed inside, and sparkling white elements drifted from the bottom to the top. The vat on the right was empty. The other held Kate.

She floated a few feet off the ground, her arms held straight out. She wore the same plain clothes she had left their bedroom in this morning, but there was something new: a silver helmet. It covered her entire face, even the bottom of her chin. Her recently dyed Brunette hair fell out of it and onto her shoulders. The small visor that covered her eyes was black, revealing no clues about what was happening to her. The only hint was a stream of blood that flowed out of the helmet, down her neck and stained her gray t-shirt. The stain seemed to grow with each passing second.

“Alpha, what’s... going on here?” David asked.

“Specify.”

“What is this experiment? Procedure?”

“Resurrection memory simulation.”

What does that mean? Is the simulation what’s hurting her?

“How can I stop it?”

“You cannot.”

“Why not?” David asked, growing impatient.

“Interrupting a resurrection memory sequence would terminate the subject.”

Milo turned to David, fear in his eyes.

David searched the room. What to do? He needed some clue, somewhere to begin. He threw his head back, trying to think. On the ceiling, a single small dome of black glass stared down at him.

“Alpha, do you have video telemetry of this lab?”

“Affirmative.”

“Begin playback.”

“Specify date range.”

“Begin the second Dr. Warner entered today.”

A wave of light emanated from the left wall, slowly forming a hologram of the lab. The vats were empty. The double doors slid open, and Kate strode in. She marched to the right wall, which lit up and began flashing a series of screens full of text and symbols David couldn’t make out. Kate stood still, her eyes darting slightly left and right, reading, taking in the screens, each of which remained for less

than a second.

“Cool,” Milo whispered.

David felt himself take a step back. In that moment, he realized some of what Kate had become, the growing gulf that existed between the power of her mind and his.

Two weeks ago, Kate had found a cure for the Atlantis Plague, a global pandemic that had claimed billion lives in its initial outbreak and countless more during its final mutation. The plague had divided the world. The survival rate was low, but those who survived were changed at the genetic level. Some survivors benefited from the plague—they grew stronger and smarter. The remainder devolved, receding back to a primitive existence. The world’s population had rallied around two opposing factions: the Orchid Alliance, which sought to slow and cure the plague, and Immari International, which had unleashed the plague and advocated letting the genetic transformation run its course. Kate, David, and a team of soldiers and scientists had stopped the plague and the Immari plague by isolating the pieces of a cure: endogenous retroviruses left by past Atlantean interventions in human evolution. The retroviruses were essentially viral fossils, the genetic breadcrumbs from instances where Atlanteans had modified the human genome.

In the final hours of the plague, with millions dying each minute, Kate had found a way to reconcile all the viral fossils and cure the plague. Her therapy had created a stable, unified Atlantean-Human genome, but she had paid a high price for the breakthrough.

That knowledge came from repressed memories within Kate’s subconscious—memories from one of the Atlantean scientists who had conducted the genetic experiments on humanity over the course of thousands of years. The Atlantean memories enabled her to cure the plague, but they had also taken much of her own humanity—the part of Kate that was distinctly Kate and not the Atlantean scientist. As the clock had ticked down and the plague had spread around the globe, Kate had chosen to keep the Atlantean knowledge and cure the plague instead of ridding herself of the memories and protecting her own identity.

She had told David that she believed she could repair the damage the Atlantean memories had done, but as the days had passed, it became clear to David that Kate’s experiments weren’t working. She got sicker each day, and she refused to discuss her situation with David. He had felt her slipping away, and now, as he watched the playback, Kate reading the screens instantaneously, he knew that he had underestimated how drastic her transformation was.

“Is she reading that fast?” Milo asked.

“It’s more than that. I think she’s learning that fast,” David whispered.

David felt a different kind of fear rising inside him. Was it because Kate had changed so much or because he was realizing how far over his head he was?

Start with the simple stuff, he thought.

“Alpha, how can Dr. Warner operate you without voice or tactile input?”

“Dr. Warner received a neural implant nine local days ago.”

“Received? How?”

“Dr. Warner programmed me to perform the implant surgery.”

Just one more thing that hadn’t come up during their nightly *Honey, what did you do at work today* discussion.

Milo cut his eyes at David, a slight grin forming on his lips. “I want one.”

“That makes one of us.” David focused on the holomovie. “Alpha, increase playback rate.”

“Interval?”

“Five minutes per second.”

The flashing screens of text morphed into solid waves, like white water sloshing back and forth in a black fish tank. Kate didn't move a muscle.

Seconds ticked by. Then the screen was off, and Kate was floating in the glowing yellow vat.

“Stop,” David said. “Replay telemetry just before Dr. Warner enters the round... whatever it is.”

David held his breath as he watched. The screen with text went out, and Kate walked to the rear of the room, just beside the vats. A wall slid open, she grabbed a silver helmet, and then walked to the vat, which slid open. She stepped inside, donned the helmet, and after the glass vat sealed, lifted off the ground.

“Alpha, resume accelerated playback.”

The room remained the same with a single exception: slowly, blood began trickling out of Kate's helmet.

In the last second, David and Milo entered, and then three words flashed on the screen.

End of Telemetry

Milo turned to David. “Now what?”

David glanced between the screen and the vat that held Kate. Then he eyed the empty one.

“Alpha, can I join Dr. Warner's experiment?”

The panel at the back of the room slid open, revealing a single silver helmet.

Milo's eyes grew wide. “This is a bad idea, Mr. David.”

“Got any good ideas?”

“You don't have to do this.”

“You know I do.”

The glass vat rotated, its glass opening. David stepped inside, pulled the helmet on, and the research lab disappeared.

CHAPTER 3

It took a few seconds for David's eyes to adjust to the bright light beaming into the space. Directly ahead, a rectangular display flashed text he couldn't make out yet. The place reminded him of a train station with its arrivals/departures board, except that there seemed to be no entrance or exit to the cavernous space, just a solid white floor and arched columns that let light shine through.

Alpha's booming voice echoed. "Welcome to the Resurrection Archives. State your command."

David stepped closer to the board and began reading.

Memory	Date	(Health)	Replay
12.37.40.13	(Corrupted)	Complete	
13.48.19.23	(Intact)	Complete	
13.56.64.15	(Corrupted)	Complete	

A dozen rows continued—all complete. The last entry was:

14.72.47.33	(Corrupted)	In-progress
-------------	-------------	-------------

"Alpha, what are my options?"

"You may open an archived memory or join a simulation in-progress."

In-progress. Kate would be there. If she was hurt... or under attack. David glanced around. He had no weapons, nothing to defend her with. It didn't matter.

"Join simulation in progress."

"Notify existing members?"

"No," he said on instinct. The element of surprise might preserve some advantage.

The lighted train station and board faded and a much smaller, darker place took form. The bridge of a spaceship. David stood at the rear. Text, charts, and images scrolled across the walls of the observation room, covering them. At the front, two figures stood before a wide viewscreen, staring at a world that floated against the black of space. David instantly recognized both of them.

On the left stood Dr. Arthur Janus, the other member of the Atlantean research team. He had helped David save Kate from Dorian Sloane and Ares in the final hours of the Atlantis Plague, but David still had mixed feelings about Janus. The brilliant scientist had created a false cure for the Atlantis Plague that erased seventy thousand years of human evolution—reverting the human race to a point before the Atlantis Gene was administered. Janus had sworn that rolling back human evolution was the only way to save humanity from an unimaginable enemy.

David felt no such conflicting feelings for the scientist standing beside Janus. He felt only love. In the reflection of the black areas of space on the screen, David could just make out the small features of Kate's beautiful face. She concentrated hard on the image of the world. David had seen that look many times. He was almost lost in it, but a sharp voice, calling out from overhead, snapped him back

“This area is under a military quarantine. Evacuate immediately. Repeat: this area is under military quarantine.”

Another voice interrupted. It was similar to Alpha’s tone. “Evacuation course configured. Execute.”

“Negative,” Kate said. “Sigma, silence notifications from military buoys and maintain geosynchronous orbit.”

“This is reckless,” Janus said.

“I have to know.”

David stepped closer to the screen. The world was similar to earth, but the colors were different. The oceans were too green, the clouds too yellow, the land only red, brown and light tan. There were no trees. Only round, black craters interrupted the barren landscape.

“It could have been a natural occurrence,” Janus said. “A series of comets or an asteroid field.”

“It wasn’t.”

“You don’t—”

“It wasn’t.” The viewscreen zoomed to one of the impact craters. “A series of roads lead to each crater. There were cities there. This was an attack. Maybe they carved up an asteroid field and used the pieces for the kinetic bombardment.” The viewscreen changed again. A ruined city in a desolate landscape took shape, its skyscrapers crumbling. “They let the environmental fallout take care of anyone outside the major cities. There could be answers there.” Kate’s voice was final. David knew that voice. He had *experienced it* several times himself.

Apparently Janus had as well. He lowered his head. “Take the *Beta Lander*. It will give you better maneuverability without the arcs.”

He turned and walked toward the door at the rear of the bridge.

David braced. But Janus couldn’t see him. *Can Kate?*

Kate fell in behind Janus but stopped and stared at David. “You shouldn’t be here.”

“What is this, Kate? Something is happening to you outside. You’re dying.”

Kate took two more long steps toward the exit. “I can’t protect you here.”

“Protect me from what?”

She took another step. “Don’t follow me.” She lunged through the exit.

David charged after her.

He stood outside. On the planet. He spun, trying—

Kate. She was ahead of him, in an EVA suit, bounding for the crumbling city. Behind them, a small black ship sat on the red rocky terrain.

“Kate!” David called, running toward her.

She stopped.

The ground shook once, then again, throwing David off his feet. The sky opened, and a red object poured through, blinding David and smothering him with its heat. He felt as though an asteroid-sized fire poker were barreling toward him.

He tried to stand, but the shaking ground pulled him down again.

He crawled, feeling the heat from above and the sizzling rocks below melting him.

Kate seemed to float over the shaking ground. She loped forward, timing her landings to the quakes that shot her up and forward, toward David.

She covered him, and David wished he could see her face through the mirrored suit visor.

He felt himself falling. His feet touched a cold floor, and his head slammed into the glass. The vat fell straight down, like a contestant in a dunking booth.

The glass swiveled open, and Milo rushed forward, his eyebrows high, his mouth open. “Milo, David...”

David looked down. His body wasn’t burned, but sweat covered him. Blood flowed from his nose.

Kate.

David’s muscles shook as he pushed himself up and staggered to her vat. The glass opened, and she fell straight down, like a contestant in a dunking booth.

David caught her, but he wasn’t strong enough to stand. They spilled onto the cold floor, her landing on his chest.

David grabbed her neck. The pulse was faint—but there.

“Alpha! Can you help her?”

“Unknown.”

“Unknown why?” David shouted.

“I have no current diagnosis.”

“What the hell’s it going to take to get one?”

A round panel opened, and a flat table extended into the room.

“A full diagnostic scan.”

Milo rushed to pick up Kate’s feet, and David gripped under her armpits, straining with every ounce of strength to lift her onto the table.

David thought the table took its sweet time gliding back into the wall. A dark piece of glass covered the round hole, and he peered inside at a line of blue light that moved from Kate’s feet to her head.

The screen on the wall flickered to life, its only message:

DIAGNOSTIC SCAN IN PROGRESS...

“What happened?” Milo asked.

“I... We...” David shook his head. “I have no idea.”

The screen changed.

Primary Diagnosis:

Neurodegeneration due to Resurrection Syndrome

Prognosis:

Terminal

Predicted Survival:

4-7 local days

Immediate Concerns:

Subarachnoid hemorrhage

Cerebral thrombosis

Recommended action:

Surgical intervention

Estimated Surgical Success Rate:

39%

With each word David read, more of the room disappeared. Feeling faded. He felt his hand reach out and brace the glass vat. He stared at the screen.

Alpha's words beat down upon him, smothering him like the heat from the fire poker on the ruined planet. "Perform recommended surgery?"

David heard himself say yes, and vaguely, he was aware of Milo putting his arm around him, though it barely reached the top of his shoulder.

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