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The Atlantis Revelation

Thomas Greanias

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THE CALYPSO DEEP

IONIAN SEA

Conrad Yeats started having second thoughts as soon as they anchored the fishing boat Katrina over the discovery.

It wasn't just that he hated the water. Or that it was three miles to the bottom at the deepest part of the Mediterranean. Or that his Greek crew believed these waters were cursed. It was the words of a former U.S. secretary of defense warning that what Conrad sought didn't exist, but if it did, he was not to disturb it or else. Maybe it's time you gave it a rest, son, and let the damned past rust in peace.

But he had come too far on his journey to recover a real-world relic from the mythological lost continent of Atlantis to turn back now. And he would never rest until he found out exactly what kind of damned past everyone would just as soon bury simply because it threatened their own vision of the future.

Conrad pulled the black neoprene wet suit over his shoulders and looked over at Stavros, his diving attendant. The big, strapping Greek had hauled up the sonar towfish that a team of sidescan sonar experts from the exploration ship had used to get a fix on the target only hours ago. Now he was fiddling with Conrad's air compressor.

"You finally fix that thing?" Conrad asked.

Stavros grunted. "Think so."

Conrad glanced up at Polaris, the brightest star in the constellation Ursa Major, and then at the silvery waters. This location wasn't on any charts. He'd found it by using ancient poems, ships' logs, and astronomical data that only an astro-archaeologist like himself would take seriously.

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Yet he wasn't alone.

The black cutout of a megayacht loomed on the dark horizon. For a pleasure palace cruising the Ionian Islands on an Easter holiday vacation, the six-hundred-foot vessel boasted an impressive communications array, a helicopter, and for all Conrad knew, even a couple of submersibles. It was probably all for show, but Conrad still didn't like someone else with that kind of firepower near his find.

He planned to be long gone before the sun came up. "I need forty minutes of air to the bottom and back," he told Stavros.

Stavros threw out a small buoy tied to two hundred meters of line. "If she's still sitting on the edge of the trench, like the robotic camera showed, you'll be lucky to get twenty minutes of bottom time," Stavros said. "If she's slipped into the Calypso, then it doesn't matter. The Baron of the Black Order himself will grab you by the leg and drag you down to hell." He shivered and made the sign of the cross over his heart.

Conrad could do without a Greek chorus to remind him that tragedy haunted these waters. In the light of day, the surface of the Ionian was among the most serene for sailing in Greece, surrounded by easy anchorages and safe bays for cruise ships and private yachts alike. But in the darkness of its depths was one of the most seismic areas in the world.

There, three miles down at the bottom of the Hellenic Trench, lay the vast Calypso Deep. It was the point where the African tectonic plate subducted the Eurasian plate, pulling anything too close under the plates and into the earth's magma. Even, some had argued, something as big as a continent.

"You worry about my oxygen, Stavros. I'll worry about the curse of the Calypso." Conrad slipped on his full-face dive mask and stepped off the bow, fins first, into the sea.

The cool water enveloped him as he followed the anchored buoy line to the bottom. His high-powered Newtlite head lantern illuminated the way through the darkness. Halfway down he met a school of bottlenose dolphins. They parted like a curtain to reveal the startling sight of the legendary Nausicaa rising out of the depths, her 37mm antiaircraft guns pointing straight at him.

The German submarine was imposing enough, which Conrad had expected. After all, it had belonged to SS General Ludwig von Berg—the Baron of the Black Order, as he was known to his friends in the Third Reich. Among other things, the baron was head of Hitler's Ahnenerbe, an organization of academics, philosophers, and military warriors sent to scour the earth to prove the Aryans were the descendants of Atlantis.

That mission had taken Baron von Berg as far away as Antarctica, where decades later, Conrad's father, USAF General Griffin Yeats, had uncovered a secret Nazi base and ancient ruins two miles beneath the ice. But any evidence of that lost

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civilization—Atlantis—was wiped away in a seismic event that killed his father, sank an ice shelf the size of California, and may well have caused the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 that killed thousands in Indonesia.

Ever since, Conrad had been trying to find some proof that what he had found under Antarctica wasn't a dream. Clues left by his father on his tombstone at Arlington Cemetery had told Conrad as much and more. Soon he had discovered that his father's successor as head of the Pentagon's DARPA research and development agency, Max Seavers, had developed a weaponized flu virus from the infected lung tissue of dead Nazis found frozen in Antarctica.

Those discoveries ultimately led Conrad to the mysterious Baron von Berg. Classified American, British, and German intelligence files from World War II recorded that the SS general's U-boat, Nausicaa, was returning from its secret base in Antarctica when it was sunk by the British Royal Navy in 1943.

Conrad's hope was that he would find on board a relic from Atlantis.

He kicked through the water toward the sunken submarine. The Nausicaa lay like a gutted whale along the cusp of the Calypso Deep with her tail broken off and her forward section jutting out over the abyss like a metal coffin.

Conrad swam to the mouth of the broken fuselage and studied its teeth. The British torpedo that had sunk the Nausicaa had taken out the entire electric motor room. But it wasn't a clean break. One little nick of his air hose would cut off his oxygen. He spoke into his dive helmet's integrated radio. "Stavros."

"Right here, boss," the Greek's voice crackled in his earpiece.

"How's the compressor?"

"Still ticking, boss."

Conrad swam into the abandoned control room of the forward section, keeping his eyes peeled for floating skeletons. He found none. No diving officers, helmsmen, or planesmen. Not even in the conning tower. Just an empty compartment with unmanned banks of instruments to his port and starboard sides. Had all hands managed to abandon ship before she went down?

The captain's quarters were empty, too. There was only a phonograph with a warped album. Conrad could still read the peeling label on the album: Die Walküre. Von Berg had been playing Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" over the loudspeakers when the sub went down.

But no sign of Baron von Berg himself. Nor a metallic Kriegsmarine briefcase. Maybe the legend was true, and von Berg never carried secret papers with him, telling everyone instead: "It's all in my head."

Conrad's hopes of finding anything were sinking fast.

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He swam up the cramped fore-and-aft passageway through the galley and officers' quarters. A creeping claustrophobia washed over him as he slipped through the open hatch into the forward torpedo bay.

At one end were four circular hatches—the torpedo tubes. The atmospheric pressure gauges, frozen in time, told him that the Nausicaa had fired off at least three torpedos and drained her tubes to fire more when the Brits sank her. Only the No. 4 tube was flooded. The Baron of the Black Order obviously had not gone down without a fight.

Conrad turned to the bomb racks and found a large protrusion. He fanned away the accumulated silt. An object took form, and he realized he was staring at a human skull with black holes for eyes.

The bared teeth seemed to grin at him in the eerie deep. The skull had a silver plate screwed into one side—the legacy of a bullet to the head in Crete, Conrad had learned in his research.

SS General Ludwig von Berg. The Baron of the Black Order. The rightful king of Bavaria. That was what the old top-secret OSS report Conrad had stolen had said.

Conrad felt a shock wave in the water, and the Nausicaa seemed to lurch.

"Stavros!" he called into his radio, but there was no response.

Suddenly, the black holes in the baron's skull glowed a bright red, and his skeletal arm floated up as if to grab Conrad.

Conrad backed away from the skeleton, figuring that the water was playing tricks on him. Then he noticed that the glow actually came from something behind the skull. Indeed, the Baron of the Black Order seemed to be guarding something.

Conrad's heart pounded as he brushed away more silt, revealing an odd hammerhead-shaped warhead. He shined a light on it and ran his hands across the torpedo's slick casing.

It had no markings save for a code name stamped across the warhead's access panel: Flammenschwert. Conrad's rudimentary grasp of German translated it to mean "Flaming Sword" or "Sword of Fire."

He recalled from his research that von Berg claimed to have developed a weapon that the Nazis were convinced could win them the war: an incendiary technology that allegedly was Atlantean in origin and could turn water into fire and even melt the ice caps.

Could this be the relic he was searching for that would prove Antarctica was Atlantis?

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The mysterious glow was coming from inside the hammerhead cone of the torpedo, outlining the square access panel like a neon light. But this was no mere illumination. The light seemed to be consuming the water around the warhead like a fire consumes oxygen.

Conrad's dosimeter gauge registered no radiation, so he put the fingertip of his glove to the glowing seam of the access panel. It didn't burn his glove, but he could feel an unmistakable pull. The warhead was sucking in the water around it like a black hole.

He sensed another shock wave through the water and turned to see four shadowy figures with harpoon guns enter the torpedo bay.

They must be after the Flammenschwert! he thought. He'd rather sink the sub than let this weapon fall into anybody's hands.

He reached up for the blow valves above the four torpedo tubes and twisted the wheels, flooding three of them. The sub tilted forward toward the Calypso Deep, throwing the others back. The rumbling was deafening. Breathing hard in his mask, heaving as he kicked, he was swimming madly to escape the torpedo bay when a harpoon dart stabbed his thigh.

Grimacing in pain, Conrad grabbed his leg as three of the divers swarmed around him. He broke off the harpoon dart and stabbed in the gut the diver who had shot him. The diver doubled over as a cloud of blood billowed out of his wet suit. The other two had grabbed him, however, and before Conrad could tear away, their leader swam over, drew a dagger, and sliced through Conrad's lifeline.

Conrad watched in shock as silver bubbles rose up before his eyes like a Roman candle, literally taking his breath away.

Then he saw the dagger again, this time its butt smashing the glass of his mask. Water began filling the mask, and he inhaled some against his will. His life flashed by in a blur—his father the Griffter, his childhood in Washington, D.C., his digs around the world searching for Earth's lost "mother culture," meeting Serena in South America, then Antarctica ...

Serena.

His lips tried to repeat the prayer that Serena had taught him, the last prayer of Jesus: "Into Thy hands I commit my spirit." But the words refused to come. He could only see her face, now fading away. Then darkness.

When Conrad opened his eyes again, the phantom divers were gone. He wasn't breathing, but his lungs weren't filled with water, either—laryngospasm had sealed his airway. He would suffocate instead of drowning if he didn't surface immediately.

He looked out through his shattered dive mask to see the skull of SS General Ludwig von Berg smiling at him. The fire had gone out of the baron's eyes. Also gone was the Flammenschwert warhead, along with the shadow divers. But the divers had left

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behind something for him: a brick of C4 explosive with a digital display slapped next to the torpedo's open casing.

The numbers read: 2:43 ... 2:42 ... 2:41 ...

On top of the C4 was a metal ball bearing that glowed like a burning ember from hell. It must have been extracted from the Flammenschwert, which probably contained thousands of these copperlike pellets inside its core. The bastards were going to verify the design by detonating just one tiny pellet, simulating on a small scale the device's explosive power. In the process, they were going to destroy him and the Nausicaa.

Conrad mustered the last of his strength and tried to swim out, but his leg caught on something—the skeletal hand of SS General Ludwig von Berg. The baron, it seemed, wanted to drag him to hell.

Conrad couldn't break free. The clock was down to 1:33.

Thinking quickly, he grabbed the baron's steel-plated skull with both hands and broke it off the skeleton. Slipping his fingers into the eyeholes as if the skull were a bowling ball, he brought it down on the finger bones clasping his injured leg and smashed them to pieces.

He was free, but his fingers were now stuck like a claw through the skull as another shock wave hit the Nausicaa.

The entire forward torpedo bay dropped like a broken table—silt and debris sliding past him to the front, further tipping the submarine over the edge of the Calypso Deep. Conrad's back slammed against the bomb rack, and he saw the compartment hatch and entire fore-aft passageway beyond rising like a great elevator shaft above him.

The Nausicaa was about to go down nose-first into the Calypso.Conrad had only seconds left. He positioned himself under the hatch, forcing himself to resist the temptation to panic. He held his body ramrod-straight, like a torpedo, his hands arched together with the skull over his head. Then he closed his eyes as everything collapsed around him.

For a moment he felt like a missile shooting up out of its silo, although he knew it was the silo that was sinking. Then he was clear. He looked down into the Calypso Deep as it swallowed the Nausicaa with the tiny pellet from the Flammenschwert still inside its belly.

The powerful wake of the plunging sub began to pull him down like a vertical riptide. He knew if he fought it, he'd go down with it. Instead he made long scissor kicks across the wake and over the rim of the crater, putting as much distance between him and the abyss as possible. There was a flash of light behind him, and the water suddenly heated up.

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Conrad looked back over his shoulder in time to see a giant pillar of fire shoot straight up from the depths of the Calypso. The sound of thunder rippled across the deep. Abruptly, the flames fanned out and seemed to assume the form of a dragon flying through the water toward him. Conrad started swimming as fast as he could.

He surfaced a minute later into the dim predawn light of day, gasping for breath. Finally, as he was on the verge of passing out again forever, his larynx opened, and he coughed up a little water from his stomach as he desperately inhaled the salty air.

His groan sounded like jet engines in his own ears. He was sure he was experiencing some kind of pulmonary embolism from coming up so fast. Several deep gulps of air cleared his head enough for him to scan the horizon for his boat. But it wasn't there. In the distance loomed the silhouette of a megayacht, its decks stacked like gold bullion in the glint of the rising sun, turning away.

Debris floated around him—the remains of his boat. Poor Stavros, he thought. He swam toward a broken wooden plank to use for flotation. But when he got there, he realized it wasn't wood at all. It was the charred carcass of a bottlenose dolphin, burned to a crisp.

The horrific nature of the Flammenschwert sank in.

It works. It really turns water to fire.

Conrad stared at the dolphin's blackened rostrum and teeth. He felt some stomach acid rising at the back of his own throat and looked away. All around him were incinerated bottlenose dolphins, floating like driftwood across a sea of death.

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