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GIBBINS



ATLANTIS
G O D

A NOVEL

ATLANTIS GOD

a novel

DAVID GIBBINS



DELL
NEW YORK

Atlantis God is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

A Dell eBook Edition

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Published in the United States by Dell, an imprint of The Random House Publishing Group, a division of Random House, Inc., New York.

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eISBN: 978-0-440-33870-3

Cover design: Carlos Beltran

Cover illustration: Mike Brian

www.bantamdell.com

v3.1

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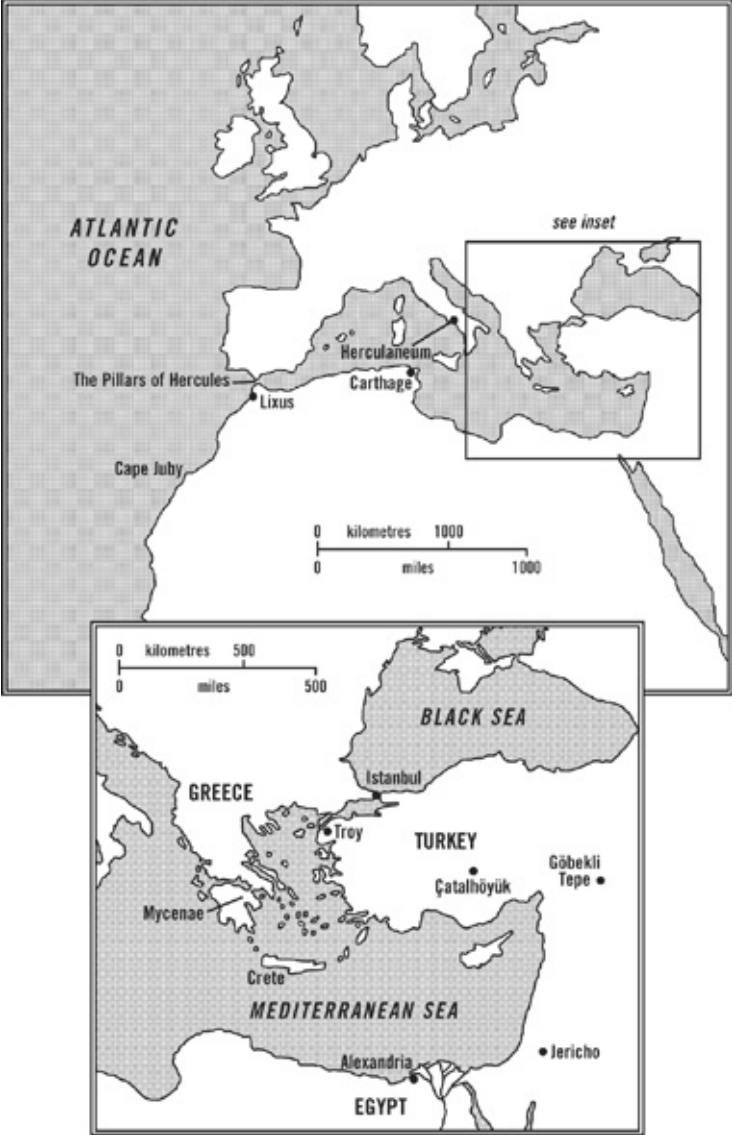
The Inspiration Behind My Novels

Other Books by This Author

The books I write are fast-paced adventure thrillers, but always, at their heart, there's a kernel of historical truth. My novels are like real expeditions for me, full of the thrill and adrenaline and danger I've experienced myself around the world. The factual backdrop of this novel is discussed in my author's note at the end of the book.

—DAVID GIBBER

Map of the Mediterranean region



In 1933 Heinrich Himmler—the second most powerful man in Nazi Germany—bought Wewelsburg Castle, a medieval stronghold perched high above the valley of the River Alme in Westphalia. Himmler associated the region with the mythic origins of the German nation, and saw the castle's triangular shape as a “spear of destiny” pointing north. The castle had a sinister history: Legend held that thousands of accused witches were tortured and executed there, and an inquisition room still survived in the basement. But nothing in its past could equal the plans that Himmler had for it.

He set about transforming Wewelsburg into the “order castle” of the SS, the ideological center of the Nazi cult. Slave laborers were brought to a new concentration camp near the castle, and more than a thousand of them were worked to death quarrying and transporting stone. A circular chamber was created, the SS Generals' Hall. In the center of the floor was a twelve-spoked sunwheel, leading out to twelve pillars and window niches. Directly below lay another chamber, a domed vault based on the tombs of the Bronze Age Mycenaeans, whose semi-mythical ruler Himmler admired—Agamemnon, the conqueror of Troy. At the zenith of the dome was an ancient symbol that had been found on pottery at Troy and on golden decorations at Mycenae, a symbol the Nazis expropriated for their own baleful ends—the crooked cross, or swastika.

What went on in those rooms may never be known. Wewelsburg became a focus for Nazi archaeological research, to fulfill Adolf Hitler's desire to “return to the source of the blood, to root again in the soil, to seek again for strength from sources which have been buried for 2,000 years.” Yet Hitler himself never visited the castle. It was to remain Himmler's preserve, central to his obsession with prehistory and the occult. From there the Ahnenerbe—the Department of Cultural Heritage—sent expeditions to Tibet, to Peru, to Iceland, to places still unknown today, searching for Aryan origins and for the greatest prize of all, the lost civilization of Atlantis. Underlying everything were Himmler's racial theories, and Wewelsburg became a springboard for some of the greatest crimes against humanity ever conceived. It was there that he began to formulate the Final Solution—the mass murder of the Jews. And it was there in 1941 that he assembled his top SS generals before the invasion of Russia, the most destructive military campaign in history—one foretold to Himmler in a legend, and fueled by his doctrine of Aryan racial superiority over the Slavic peoples of Russia.

Yet even while these terrible events were unfolding, Himmler continued to be obsessed with the symbols and artifacts of the past. He envisaged Wewelsburg Castle within a huge semicircular complex, the Center of the New World, its plan reminiscent of the circular prehistoric monuments that he associated with mythical Aryan forebears. He planned a huge archaeological collection at Wewelsburg, to make it part of SS indoctrination. The placing of the sunwheel and the swastika in the SS Generals' Hall and the vault below show how he drew power from ancient symbols, and incorporated them into the very core of Nazi ideology. And just as he saw those prehistoric monuments as evidence of a new order, of a new race arisen, so he saw his new world as one where the only gods were the gods of the Nazis, the gods they themselves had become.

Nobody knows how close Himmler may have come to realizing his dream, and what artifacts might have been brought there. Deep within the castle lay another chamber, Himmler's private vault, but when American soldiers captured Wewelsburg in 1945 they found it empty, its contents unknown and seemingly lost forever to history.

One artifact might have been at Wewelsburg, an artifact of extraordinary power that could have unlocked the greatest obsession of all: the dream of the lost civilization of Atlantis, and of Atlantis reborn ...

Then, as dawn first glimmered, from the horizon rose a dark cloud, and Adad the storm god was raging within it. Then Nergal, god of plague and war, wrenched out the boats' mooring poles. Nunurta, god of the earth, made the dams overflow; and the Annunaki, dread gods of the underworld, their torches brandished, shriveled the land with their flames. Desolation from Adad spread over the sky, and all that had been bright was turned into darkness. Like a bull he charged the land; he shattered the land like a vessel of clay; for a day the raging winds flattened the land and then came the flood. Like a tide of war it swept over the people. A brother could not distinguish his brother; from heaven the people were not to be seen ... For six days and seven nights it raged: the wind, the storm, the flood; it flattened the land. On the seventh day the wind abated, the storm that had ravaged the land like a war; the sea was lulled, the gale was spent; the flood ended. I looked on the day, and all sound was stilled; all the people had turned to clay. All around me the waters were flat like the roof of a house. Then I opened a hatchway in the boat, and on my cheeks streamed the sunlight. I bowed down and wept, my cheeks overflowing with tears. I gazed into the distance, to the furthest bounds of the ocean, and saw land arising. On the mountain of Nisir the boat ran aground; the mountain of Nisir held the boat fast, and would not release it ... I brought an offering and made a sacrifice, and I poured a libation on the peak of the mountain ... so it was that the gods took me and caused me to dwell in this place, at the ends of the earth ...

THE WORDS OF UTA-NAPISHTIM TO GILGAMESH FROM TABLET XI OF *HE WHO SAW THE DEEP*, THE BABYLONIAN VERSION OF THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH (LATE SECOND MILLENNIUM BC AKKADIAN, BUT DERIVED FROM A STORY FIRST WRITTEN DOWN IN SUMERIAN IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM BC AND PROBABLY ORIGINATING MILLENNIA EARLIER)

PROLOGUE

THE VOYAGE OF UTA-NAPISHTIM

THE MAN GRIPPED THE EDGE OF THE BOAT and squinted at the western horizon, trying to see past the blinding glare of the sun. Earlier he had sensed a flickering in the sky, a strange smell in the air, but he no longer knew whether it was real or a dream. He tensed his hands and heaved himself up, then leaned over the side and stared into the depths. His knuckles were raw and bleeding from sunburn and salt, but he no longer felt the pain. In the weeks since they had been marooned in this windless, weed-choked sea he had taken to staring down, pulling his tattered leopardskin cape over his head to shade the water, letting it form a cover that had stiffened with the salt.

The sea was deep blue, and he could see far down, to where blue became black. He glimpsed flashes of silver, and sparkles of light. He knew that something was down there shadowing them, a shape that lurked on the edge of the underworld. If only he could fix it with his eyes, then he would be able to draw on the power of its spirit. He had spent hours looking, days. Even his brother Enlil no longer called him by the nickname they had used as boys, Noah, but now addressed him, half mockingly, by his shaman-name, Uta-napishtim, he who sees the deep. The others in his boat were too far gone to help him look, only four of them now, paralyzed by thirst and hunger and fear. But he was their spirit traveler, the shaman. They might see the earthly form of the monster, but only he could touch its spirit.

He picked up his obsidian knife and ran his thumb along the blade, feeling it cut into his skin. He remembered going with Enlil and their father Ra Shamash deep into the volcano to find the sacred black stone, and watching the old man make the rippled flat of the blade by pressing off tiny flakes with a piece of antler. Noah had a cache of blades here now, in a basket under the thwarts, but this knife made by his father was the most sacred. That had been the day their father had taken them for the first time to the spirit cave and given them their shaman-names, and taught them to inscribe their names into the rock using the ancient symbols, beside the paintings of bulls and leopards and vultures. But their father had gone to the spirit world years before, and now only Noah could give the others in his boat the strength to raise the paddles and seek out the shore he knew lay somewhere ahead. Three cycles of the moon ago, as the floodwaters rose up the walls of their city, his dying mother Nisir had closed her eyes and seen it in a vision: a thunderbird flying toward her, then two peaks on the edge of the western sea, lofty like those of the sacred mountain of Atlantis that had been drowning all around them. And now he was sure he had seen it, too, through a crack in the horizon the day before, framed by distant breakers like those that skirted the land they had sighted weeks ago, the great cape that jutted out from the desert shore. If they could survive this malevolent spirit that would drag them down, if he could tame the beast and ride it into the spirit world, then they might reach that shore. *Atlantis might be reborn.*

A man's voice came over the water. "Noah Uta-napishtim, my brother." Noah put down the knife and shielded his eyes. He saw the raft of seaweed they had drawn in from the sea, tendrils of green and yellow that had been filled with small crabs and fish that had sustained them, until they had consumed them all. His eyes moistened in the glare, and he lifted

finger to them, wiping his eyelids and licking it, and then put his thumb on his lips, feeling the wetness of the blood that had been drawn by the knife. They had swallowed the last of the fresh water days ago. That morning his cousin Lamesh had drunk seawater and the malevolence had entered him, and they had lashed him down over the crossbeams at the front of the boat. Lamesh had consumed the lifeblood of the underworld, but before appeasing the spirits with the knife, Noah knew he must see the malevolence himself, must fix the monstrous shark that lurked below them with his own eyes.

Now he saw his brother's boat, shimmering in silhouette, a pair of carved wooden leopards facing each other on the pointed upswept prow. Theirs were the last two boats of the flotilla that had set out from the drowning city, the ones that had carried on past the cataract that was flooding their sea, and reached the safety of Troy, their outpost on the edge of the Middle Sea. For one full cycle of the moon they had paddled on, past rocky islands and great stretches of desert shore, until they had reached another narrowing of the sea and a towering rock the local people called the Pillar of Herakleos; then they had been on the western ocean. They had raised sails of deerskin, and the wind and current had taken them south along the desert shore. Before the great cape that had been their last sight of land they had alighted at Lixus, at the Garden of Hesperides, where the priestesses called the Ladies of the West had fed them with golden apples and honeyed almonds, where Noah's brother had fallen under their spell and been tempted to stay and found their new citadel.

But just as they had done at Troy, they inscribed a pillar with their names in the ancient symbols and continued sailing west, over a vast open ocean with no landfall in sight. When the days were overcast, Adad the navigator had stood in the bow of his brother's boat and held up the crystal sunstone; it, too, had come from the volcano, pried from the spirit cave generations before, and used many times by Adad and his forefathers to navigate the spirit lines of their own sea. Its light had dazzled Noah's eyes, as if it were drawing in the rays from the dawn, leading them on over the ocean. And at night Noah had traced the line of the Great Bear to the polestar, keeping it on the right, just as he had watched his father do when he had aligned the pyramid of Atlantis to the rising and setting of the sun: his father Ra Shamash, the who gave the light, sun shaman, whom they had laid to rest in the chamber inside the pyramid, surrounded by the sacred obsidian blades and ironstones from the sky that had been brought across the ice by their ancestors. But Noah need hardly have bothered to chart the heavens. It was as if they were on a river on the ocean, being swept inexorably west, a river like those of his dreams in the cave that had become the flow of his own spirit journey.

The planks in their boats had held, their sewn seams caulked with boiled animal fat. The sweet foods of the Ladies of the West had sustained them, along with the flying fish that leapt into their boats. But then they had been beset by fearsome storms and mountainous waves. Six boats had become four. And finally they had entered this flat ocean, where there was no wind to fill the sails. They had paddled on until they were exhausted. Men desperate for food had scraped and licked the animal fat from the seams, and the boats had leaked and wallowed. They had made fire with flint and boiled their deerskin sails for broth; Enlil alone had insisted on keeping his sail. They had gnawed the boars' teeth they wore as necklaces and scraped the marrow from the bulls' horns that adorned the prow of Noah's boat. That had kept them strong enough to fish, using nets made of twisted seaweed. But even that had proved too much. They had sickened, their gums swelling and bleeding and their teeth falling

out, and they had become listless. They had begun to die.

Noah saw his brother clearly now, heaving on the cord that lashed the two boats together, compressing the floating weeds in between. Enlil stopped, panting and coughing a terrible dry cough, and then tottered upright with a club in one hand and a spear in the other. He was unrecognizable as the muscle-bound giant who had once guarded the holy of holies, the chamber in Atlantis where they had kept their most sacred objects. Now he looked like one of the scarecrows they had made together in their father's fields, naked except for the tattered remnants of his lionskin cloak. Like Noah's, his skin was peeling off in blistered layers, his face a puffed mass of sores surrounded by matted hair and a beard. He stared across, trying to lick his lips, and then shook his spear. "Noah Uta-napishtim," he croaked again.

"Enlil, my brother," Noah replied, his voice cracking. "If you call me that, I will call you by your shaman-name, Gilgamesh, he who would stand above men."

Enlil slapped the club, then dropped it and stumbled, trying to stand upright, holding himself with the spear. His boat tilted, revealing the repairs they had made after the last storm: thick bulls' skins taut over the wooden frame, hemp rope sewn through the planks and lashed around the hull. Enlil had taken care of his boat. Noah saw the other matted and blistered bodies inside, men whose skin was gray beneath the sunburn, whose eyeballs had shrunk into their sockets, whether dead or alive he could not tell. Enlil went down on his knees against a thwart, still holding the spear. "My brother," he said hoarsely. "Your animals are all gone."

Noah turned to look at his own boat. Enlil was right. They had left with breeding pairs of animals: goats, sheep, boars, and aurochs, the giant cattle that had lived in the marshlands near the shore where they had grown up, animals he and Enlil had corralled as boys and fattened for the blood sacrifice. But now the animals had all died, and they had devoured their flesh. The bull had been the last, killed as it lay on the thwarts bellowing with thirst and hunger. Noah had plunged the knife into its chest and drawn out the heart as he had done with bulls many times before, on the altar of their ancestors outside the spirit cave. Its hooves were still tied to the crossbeams, and the skull lay in the scuppers of the boat beside him, stripped of every morsel of flesh, the bone plastered over and painted in red ocher with the horns facing the bow. They had fed on the bull in a great feast after they had passed through the storms, and had drunk its blood in huge gulps. But that had been half a cycle of the moon ago. Since then there had been nothing more to eat. Only a few of those who had feasted were still alive now.

"My brother," Enlil croaked again. "You seek strength in the spirit world of our ancestors." He shook his head, then rattled the spear. "This is my strength, the metal that made the spear strong, the spear that has given us food."

Noah squinted at the copper spearhead glinting in the sun. He remembered that day in the volcano as boys when they had searched for the obsidian. Enlil had gone farther than any among the shamans had dared to go before, into the deepest chamber where the red-hot molten rock seeped out of the underworld. He had seen a golden stream flow among the molten red, and had watched it blend with silvery rock and form a hard metal. He had sworn Noah to secrecy, had not even told their father; only Enlil knew where it was to be found. Years later, as a man, he had emerged one day from the volcano and stood in front of the people, brandishing weapons of metal that made his shaman-name seem like a prophecy.

Gilgamesh, he who would stand above men, *he who would be a god.*

Now, on this voyage, the spear had brought down a great bird, its wingspan three times man's reach, and had jabbed and killed a turtle. And then a whale had circled them, one bigger than they had ever seen before, blowing spray high into the sky. The fishy smell from the whale's blow had left them ravenous. The old man Naher in Haran's boat had slipped into the water with a spear tied to a pig's bladder, and had used all his strength to drive it into the whale's head. Haran had lashed his boat to the carcass, and Noah as shaman had been given the first strip of oily skin. But then the blood in the water had attracted the sharks, more numerous and fearsome than they had seen before. The sharks had gorged themselves in a frenzy, ripping the whale to pieces, and then the great monster had reared up from the depths, leaping out of the water with its teeth bared. It had crushed Haran's boat and consumed them all, Haran and the old man and the others, dragging them down into the underworld, to the blackness Noah had seen in the depths below. He narrowed his eyes at his brother. *That was what spears of metal had done for them.*

Enlil swayed, leaning on his spear. "And we have no women." Noah felt his chest tighten. *No women.* It had been a week since sweet-voiced Ishtar had died, a terrible, rasping death from the bottom of the boat, taken by the malevolence that now stalked them. The sea had seethed and sparkled, and then a vast welter of bubbles had erupted on the surface, swallowing Ishtar's boat and leaving her floating unconscious, wrapped around with the thin, glistening tentacles of the blue jellyfish that infested these waters, filaments that tingled to the touch and sent agonizing jolts through the body. They had hauled her into Noah's boat still alive, and after she had died he covered her in red ocher and laid her on a raft of seaweed. She had worn her boar's tusk necklace, and held her wooden staff with the vulture skull on top, in her eyes made from the sacred blue rock the hunters had brought from the mountains far to the east. Ishtar was to have been their mother's successor, trained as a shaman, but then she had been swayed from the old ways by Enlil and his followers, those who had set up idols in the shape of men, gods they fashioned after themselves. Noah had stared at her body in the knowledge that he was now the last shaman of Atlantis, the last who knew the rapture of the spirit journeys and how to spill blood on the altar of sacrifice.

He had watched the birds swoop down, tearing off strips of flesh from Ishtar's body, just as the vultures had done in Atlantis where the dead had been exposed in the stone circle above the city. After two days he had severed her head, filled her eye sockets, and covered the sinews of her face with plaster he kept in a pot in the bow, placing cowrie shells in the hollows where her eyes had been pecked out. Her skull was there now, embedded in plaster below the prow, half in and half out of the spirit world. Noah had told his brother that the birds were the spirits of their ancestors taking her among them. Enlil had replied that the birds were hungry. Enlil had lost touch with the spirit world, spending all of his days in Atlantis inside the city. Noah had still walked past the fields their fathers had learned to cultivate, and had lived in the forest where their grandfathers had hunted, at one with the animal spirits. He had only ever entered the citadel to mount the steps up the volcano and perform his duty as sacrificing shaman, a duty that Enlil and the others had come to scorn.

Noah remembered the monster of the deep, lurking below; what it had done to Haran's boat, how it enslaved them with fear. Out here, the spirits of the beasts still ruled, not the gods that Enlil and the others thought they themselves had become, wielding their spears

metal.

Enlil banged the thwart again. "There is no land ahead."

Noah raised his arm to the west, pointing. "But my brother, I saw it. Through a gap in the storm clouds before the great calm. Twin peaks on the horizon, exactly as our mother prophesied, the mountain she called Dû-Re. I saw distant breakers, and I felt a change in the rhythm of the waves. We will go there if we summon all our reserves and paddle west. We will find new animals, new pasture. We will find women."

"Your visions are mere dreams. The flat sea is like the desert. The sun reflects off it and blinds you to reality, creating phantasms on the horizon. And for half a cycle of the moon since the storms ended, we have seen nothing."

But Noah knew what he had seen. And two nights before, there had been another sign. He had succumbed to hunger, and had devoured the strip of whale skin that had been given to him when they had cut into the carcass. Eating it had given him terrible sickness, as if the spirit of the whale were punishing him. But when he awoke, the sickness had passed and the torpor had lifted. His mouth had stopped bleeding, and the swelling of his gums had receded. It had been a sign of what he must do next. Now he squinted at Enlil. "I must offer blood to the spirits."

Enlil waved his arm dismissively. "If you pour blood into the sea, the great shark will come for you. He is hungry, like those gulls."

"Then you can kill him with your spear of metal."

Enlil snorted. "I would not waste it. This spear and others like it will make gods among men. When they escaped the deluge, our cousins Adad and Nergal and Ninurta and Annunaki set forth south over land to the great rivers beyond the mountains, and Ishmael and Sethi and Minos sailed through the islands south from Troy, toward the far shore where the great river rises through the desert and waters the oases along its banks. They will found new citadels in those places. But I am the only one with the secret of the new metal, of the alloy that creates the strong copper."

"You swore that you would never reveal it. I warned you of its dangers. Men will use it to kill one another."

"As long as I alone have the knowledge of the metal, others will bow toward me. I will use that strength to keep peace among men."

Noah looked at Enlil. He remembered how his brother had seemed a pillar of strength in his lionskin, its torn head and tattered mane now hanging over his shoulders. Herakleos, the Ladies of the West had called him, after the great rock that marked the edge of the Middle Sea, as they showered him with adulation that Noah feared would go to his head. For all Enlil's bravado, Noah knew that his brother was afraid of what might lie before them, afraid because he had spurned the ways of the shamans who saw the ocean in their spirit journey for whom the unending horizon brought not terror as it seemed to bring Enlil and his followers, but instead the rapture Noah felt in the journeys of the mind he took in the spirit cave, journeys where he floated toward the world of their ancestors. "We are close," Noah said. "Look to your own signs. The crystal lights the way forward. The palladion has become heavier, just as our mother prophesied. When the spirit bird flies out from Dû-Re toward us when the palladion becomes as heavy as it felt in the spirit cave in the volcano, there we will find our new Atlantis."

Enlil put down his spear and lifted a package from the floor of his boat, swaddled in bearskin. He struggled to hold it, then raised one leg on the thwarts and rested the object on his knee. He pulled a lump of quartz out of a pouch on his belt and held it up, averting his eyes from the glare. "The crystal shines because it draws in the sun's rays through the clouds and when the sun is setting in the west the crystal shines on that side," he said, shoving it back in the pouch. He pointed at the swaddled package. "The palladion fell from the sky and was brought from the snows of the north by our ancestors. It becomes heavier now because we are approaching the edge of the world, where the earth meets the heavens. Soon it will become so heavy that it will sink my boat."

Noah remembered what his mother had told him about the days of their ancestors when the glaciers had reached down almost to the shore of their sea. The palladion was the most sacred of the ironstones they had found on the surface of the ice. Noah remembered seeing Enlil disappear with it into the secret place in the volcano where he had learned to work metal, emerging with it days later in a shape that seemed to copy the circle of stone pillars with lintels that he and his followers had forced the old shamans to erect outside the spirit cave. Enlil had taken the most sacred artifact of their ancestors and made it his own. Now he unwrapped the skin, and Noah saw the crooked cross, its surface smooth and polished. Enlil raised it into the air. "I will meld the ironstone with gold to lock the strength within. Then the others will know that I am destined to hold its power." He nodded toward Ishtar's severed head in the front of Noah's boat. "You have your own idols. And you believe your destination is just beyond the horizon. If you know the way, you no longer need the crystal or the palladion to guide you."

"Throw the palladion into the sea, my brother. It belongs with the shades of our ancestors, not in your new world. Placate their spirits, and we may yet fulfill our mother's prophecy."

"I will tell your story far and wide, Noah Uta-napishtim, the story of one who had no animals because he had sacrificed them all, and no women." Enlil wrapped the palladion back in the bearskin and placed it out of sight, then stood up again with his spear. "I will tell how a star of heaven fell from the sky, but that it was too heavy for you, and only I could lift and use its power; and how I wandered through the wilderness in the skin of a lion and crossed the waters of death, how with my own strength I lifted the vault of the sky that covers the abyss. I will tell how the heavens roared and the earth roared too, how daylight failed and darkness fell, lighting flashed, the clouds lowered and rained down death. I will call the great fish Humbaba, toothed monster, but I will make him a bull-man of the mountains; when he roars, it will be like the fury of the storms we have sailed through, his breath will be like the fire of the volcano, and his jaws will be death itself. I will tell how Enlil Gilgamesh, slew the beast and rid the world of the spirit demons that your kind has nurtured for so long." He stomped the spear. "And as for you, my brother, I will tell how I led you to the ends of the earth, the last of the shamans, how I cast you away in darkness, to the place from which none who enter ever return, down the road from which there is no coming back. I will call your mountain not Dû-Re, but Nisir, after our mother, as it is for her memory that I have kept you alive and brought you this far, and because this mythic mountain is her creation."

Noah realized with a sudden empty feeling that his brother had been intending to leave him all along. Enlil had saved him from Atlantis, from horror and death, and had brought him f

from the reaches of Enlil's own vengeful followers who would extinguish all of his kind. "C
our voyage from Atlantis," Enlil continued, "I let you carve the old symbol of Atlantis on m
pillars, set up where we landed; but when I return, I will topple them, and they will b
buried in the earth, and new statues will arise, gods fully formed in the shape of men." H
heaved up the skin containing the palladion and unwrapped it again. "The old symbol w
die, but the new one I have fashioned in the palladion will endure through the ages to signi
the coming of the gods."

Noah looked at Enlil. "These are brave words, my brother, but perhaps in your story yo
will come back to seek me again, and I will tell you from my new spirit cave in the mounta
the truth about what you have become, that believing you have become a god does not sav
you from the certainty of death and the spirit journey we all must take."

Suddenly there was a white flash in the sky. Noah looked down at the water between th
clumps of weed. *Something was different.* He could no longer see into the depths. It was as
the cusp of the underworld had risen up, as if they were now floating on it. He glanced at th
sky. A darkness had come, a strange pall, as if they had been cast into shadow. Perhaps En
was right; perhaps they had reached the end of the world. Then he looked to the wester
horizon and saw a towering bank of cloud, billowing and shadowy, streaked with black. Th
surface of the sea, dead calm for so long, began to shimmer. He felt something they had n
felt for days, something coming from the west, ruffling the water. *It was wind.*

A flash lit the sky again, and a whiteness sped across from a central point like an expandin
corona. Noah watched in astonishment as the palladion seemed to catch the light and burn
the edges, a flickering blue aura that pulsed around the ironstone. Enlil swayed back, the
gripped the palladion with both hands as the phantasm disappeared. "That must be my sign
he shouted hoarsely. "I will go." He put the palladion out of sight in the scuppers and quick
cast off the rope that held the two boats together. He crawled over to the bipod mast lying o
the thwarts and heaved it up on its rope. One of the other men crawled over to help him. Th
mast came upright, and the tattered deerskin sail billowed out. The wind had already
strengthened and the sail cracked, taut and full. Enlil shouted across at Noah. "We will b
blown back to Lixus, and to the pillar at the edge of the Middle Sea. I will topple the stor
we left at Lixus to show your passing from the world of men. You have no sail, and yo
cannot follow. You will remain forever outcast here at the edge of existence, Noah Ut
napishtim. Farewell, my brother."

Noah watched the boat recede. Low, black clouds advanced toward him, constricting th
horizon, the spindrift shimmering in tendrils of white over the waves. The wind raised th
stiffened mass of his hair, and tugged at his beard. This was not like the dry wind that ha
come off the desert weeks before. This wind was moist. *There would be rain.* He lurched ov
to a basket in the center of the boat and drew a bleached animal skin over it, pressing
down to catch any rain that fell. As he did so, he saw the faded colors of a painting he ha
made on the skin: a mass of buildings, joined together with ladders on the rooftops, an
behind them the triangular form of the pyramid his father had built; above that was the lon
feathered figure of the bird spirit, and behind it the twin peaks of the volcano shaped like
bull's horns, the place where Enlil and the others had walled up the spirit cave of the
ancestors. He remembered his vision of twin peaks on the horizon ahead. He felt his cracke
lips with his tongue, then drew his thumb again over the obsidian blade, bringing the wetne

of blood to his lips. He looked at the emaciated body of Lamesh tied down in the front of the boat. Soon there would be more blood in the offering.

A violent gust tilted the boat, whining and howling over the sea, flattening the wave crests and streaking the water with foam. Lightning forked on the horizon, and he heard the dull rumble of thunder. Enlil's boat was already far to the east, a speck on a foaming crevice beneath racing clouds, and beyond that was the same wall of blackness. Noah twisted around. The blackness was on every side. His heart pounded. Shadowy streaks moved in the clouds with a frightening speed, gyrating around him in one direction. Now he knew why there had been no ocean swell: He was in the eye of a great storm. The waters that were surging around the horizon would soon reach him. It was a storm that had been set in motion when they had lured the malevolence from the deep, a storm that would encircle and engulf them like the ring of fire he had once lit around the altar of sacrifice, until all that was left of the bodies was the red-hot embers blown upward by the exhalations of the underworld.

The boat lurched sideways, then pitched into the water with a mighty crash. A huge wave crest rose high above the trough, and the boat tilted and yawed. He saw another shape ahead, a great swell, sucking them along in its wake. Then the shape swung around, and he saw a giant fin cut the water. The shark rolled, its white belly upward and its jaws gaping. In a flash, the huge rows of serrated teeth reared up at him, and he stared the monster in the eye. Then it was gone, sweeping the stern of the boat with its tail. *He had seen it. He had taken the spirit power of the beast. Now it was time.* He turned quickly and reached into a jar beside Ishtar's skull, taking out handfuls of red ocher powder and smearing it all over his face and body. He picked up a polished stone mace and lurched toward Lamesh. They had tied him to his back, over a shallow stone basin, his feet and hands lashed to the rails, and drugged him with the resin of the poppy. Noah saw the fin of the beast circling, menacingly. He raised the mace, but his arm was too weak. He dropped it, then picked up the obsidian knife and pressed both hands on the grip, holding it tight, shaking.

He remembered the last time he had held the knife like this. It had been in the spirit cave where they had exposed the bodies of the dead so the hooked talons of the spirit birds could rip the flesh and take it to the world beyond. It was there that Noah had tied down the bulls and cut their hearts out, giving the meat to the people and letting the blood gush into the stone basins for the old shamans to gaze into the world beyond. But with their spears of copper, the new priests had forced the shamans to build a wall over the sacred cave, to block it off except for a small entrance into the mountain, and then to cut huge pillars in the quarry and struggle with them up the mountain, heaving them into a circle. They had chiseled the new symbols over the old. And then Enlil himself had ripped the plaster-covered skull of the ancestor Anu from the ground, gouging out the cowrie-shell eyes and placing it atop the finials of the pillars; Enlil had carved hands into the lintel of the pillar, while the others of the new priesthood, those with braided hair and beards, began to rub and chisel away the sacred paintings on the cave wall and hack off the ancient symbols of their ancestors, leaving only those that Enlil and Noah had incised on the wall that day their father had told them the shaman-names.

And then the floodwaters had begun to rise. Enlil and the new priesthood had assembled the people and blamed the shamans, ordering them to go to the cave to appease the spirits. But once inside, the shamans had been blocked in, Noah among them, sealed inside

flickering world of shadows and red embers from the fire that was always kept alive in the inner recess. The old shamans had thrown the sacred leaves on the fire and taken the milk of the poppy to ease them on their journey to the spirit world, but fear had tainted their vision. Those who had once floated in water in the dream voyages of the mind were now terrified of drowning. Their visions took them on a journey of horror, to darkness and fire coming from within the mountain. An old man seized with terror had carved an image on a pillar, a swirling face that seemed to be caught in a scream. Noah himself had been half crazed by the smoke and twisting images, seeing men and women tearing at their hair and tossing their heads round and round. And then they had asked him to bring out the knife, to do what one could do. *The basins had filled with blood once again.*

He remembered what an old woman had said as she lay back over the basin, her eyes milky white with blindness, her hand holding his and pressing the knife against her heart. *You now have the bloodlust, Noah, she had whispered. You will never lose it, and you will doom yourself around you by your greed. In the times of our ancestors, when we were driven to seek the spirits of a river of human blood, he who spilled it was forced to kill himself to save the people from his bloodlust. You must kill yourself, too, or be cast out forever from the world of men. Your brother Enlil knows this, as I taught him the old ways.* When she pulled the knife in, Noah had tasted the blood that splattered from her mouth, and he had felt the exultation course through him. She had been right. *He had wanted more.* They had come willingly, the men and the women and their children, the boy with the flute. The knife had plunged in over and over again, and the stone basins had filled with human blood, overflowing and smearing the skulls of the ancestors still embedded in the floor around them.

And then Enlil had broken through the wall and come for him, unable to leave his brother behind in that chamber of death. He had forced the others who remained alive to a dark recess in the cave and had rolled the boulder in front of them, even as they screamed for Noah to kill them, too. Noah had gripped a basin and stared into the blood-filled pool. In his desperation to break the spell, Enlil had taken out the palladion from a pouch and dropped it into the basin, drenching Noah with blood. Noah had seen only the reflection of the pillar with the skull on top, advancing toward him in repeated visions, swirling round and round. He had fallen backward, wide-eyed and panting, just as the first water from the sea had surged into the chamber. Enlil had pulled the palladion out of the basin and put it in his pouch, then held Noah upright and hissed in his ear: *Atlantis is finished. We new priests will go to the four corners of the earth and found new cities. You, my brother, the last of the old, I will take you beyond the Middle Sea to the place where earth and sky meld, to where you and your spirit will be beyond the world of men.* Enlil had dragged him outside to the boats, but for days afterward as they paddled away, Noah could hear the screams of the shamans in his mind and see the blood he had been unable to wash from the cracks on his hands and under his fingernails.

Now the storm clouds swirled around the boat. Noah tried to stay his hand as he held the knife. He was trembling not with fear, but with anticipation. He had crossed the boundary of that cave, and now there was only one river of blood he could ride.

Now the spirits would be appeased.

He plunged the knife into Lamesh, deep and hard, drawing it savagely around, feeling the warmth of the blood as it gushed out. He reached inside, grasped the still-beating heart, and

pulled it out. He took the knife and sliced into Lamesh's neck, sawing hard at the bone, and then held the matted hair with one hand while he severed the head from the body. He dropped the knife and raised the head high, feeling the rivulets of blood pour down his arm and face. The storm was closing in now, twisting and swirling, the lightning flashing and the thunder cracking deafeningly. He dropped the head and scooped up blood from the wound, drinking it in great slurps, slaking his desperate thirst. He saw where the blood had poured into the small stone basin below the thwart, filling it to the brim. He stared into it, searching, seeing only the rippling concentric circles where the blood dripped off his face and fell on the surface of the pool. And then there was a flash in the sky and he saw it in the blood: two peaks spouting fire, the fabled mountain Dû-Re, appearing over and over again as the blood rippled with the motion of the boat. He looked up, letting the rain pour over his face. *The spirit of the beast had answered him. The river of blood had flowed to the realm of the ancestors.*

Suddenly giant waves were upon him. The roar of the wind drowned out the thunder, and the sea heaved the boat upward as if it were being forced up the ridge of a mountain, driving it far away from the circling fin of the shark. Noah clutched the thwarts, swaying, feeling the sweeping sheets of rain that blew in from the east. He suddenly realized what that meant. *The wind had turned. The boat was being blown west again.* They were on the crest of a towering wave, hanging still. There was another flash, and sunlight appeared through a hole in the darkness ahead. He blinked the rain and blood from his eyes, then followed the rays of the sun to where they lit up a narrow strip of sea to the west. A bird came into view, blown toward them on some easterly eddy of the storm wind, a bird with long trailing feathers like nothing he had seen before, colored like a dark rainbow. *A thunderbird, but a bird of the land, not of the sea.*

Then he saw it on the horizon. A raging line of surf, and beyond that, the twin peaks jutting against the blackness of the sky.

The prophecy had been fulfilled.

Atlantis would be reborn.

I

CHAPTER ONE

SOUTHEASTERN BLACK SEA, PRESENT DAY

JACK, YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BELIEVE WHAT I've just found. It's gold. *Solid gold.*"

Jack Howard twisted around and stared at the orange glow of the headlamp from the other diver below him, the form almost completely obscured by the swirling black cloud of sediment that filled the tunnel. He dumped air from his buoyancy compensator and dropped down, flexing his knees to prevent his fins from scraping the jagged lava wall, then angled sideways to avoid becoming entangled in the cable that snaked up to the submersible on the seafloor above them. He injected a blast of air into his suit to reacquire neutral buoyancy, catching a glimpse of Costas's face through his visor as he finned sideways to let Jack take his place. Costas was staring intently at the tunnel wall in front of him, aiming his headlamp on one spot. Jack followed his gaze, edging forward, keeping his breathing shallow to maintain his depth in the water, staring into the swirl of sediment. Slowly the particles settled, and he began to make out the wall beyond. He could see the twisted black lava from the eruption five years ago, its friable surface broken and exposed by the boring drill that had dug through the solidified flow the day before to create the tunnel. But then he saw something different embedded in the lava, a smooth rock surface cracked and mottled by the searing heat of the eruption. He peered at the polished surface, his heart suddenly pounding with excitement. There was no doubt about it. He was looking at a pillar, on some kind of plinth. *A pillar carved by human hands.*

"Yes." He punched his fist in the water, then turned to Costas, speaking into his intercom. "I'd begun to wonder whether this place really existed at all, or if it was just a figment of my imagination." He turned back to the pillar, seeing where the plinth had been carved out of the natural tufa. He had a flashback to the moment he and Costas had first seen the archaeological remains at this site five years ago from the Aquapod submersibles, watching in awe as the veils of silt dropped and the walls and roofs of the ancient city appeared, the most exhilarating moment to date in his career as an underwater archaeologist. Revisiting scenes of past triumph was sometimes a strange experience, recalling emotions and high drama long gone, but this time it was different, like entering a completely new world. The volcanic eruption that had engulfed the site and forced them to leave five years ago had created a totally unfamiliar environment, a seascape as barren and devoid of life as the surface of the moon. He turned to Costas. "This is the first proof we've had it was all real. You're right. It's archaeological gold."

Costas tapped his shoulder, and aimed his headlamp midway up the wall above the plinth. "Jack, I meant *real* gold. Have another look."

Jack followed Costas's beam and took a deep breath, holding it for a moment to rise a foot and a half in the water. The beam lit up a final swirl of volcanic particles that obscured the pillar, and Jack put out his hand and wafted them away. He let his hand drop, and then gasped in amazement. "Well, I'll be damned," he whispered.

"See what I mean?"

Jack stared, wondering whether his imagination was playing tricks on him. The object

front of him was remarkably similar to one they had found five years ago, the object that had first led them to this place. He saw the reflected shimmer of gold on the inside of his visor and he closed his eyes for a moment, half expecting it to be a phantasm, to be gone when he opened them. But it was still there, a golden disk about a hand's breadth across embedded in the pillar, the sheen of gold almost blinding him in the reflected glare of the headlamp. He reached out and carefully pressed the fingers of his glove against it, feeling the solidity. *It was real.* He felt the adrenaline course through him, and turned and grinned at Costas. "Now you really believe it."

"That's the Atlantis symbol, isn't it?"

Atlantis. It was the first time either of them had uttered the word since leaving *Seaquest* in the submersible two hours before, as if to say it aloud would risk the site closing up on them again. Jack searched with his eyes, seeing nothing but the golden reflection. "Where are you looking?"

Costas turned his head to move his beam away. "Use your headlamp, angled down, low beam. You should get more shadow."

Jack reached up to his helmet and activated the twin halogen lamps on either side, then ramped them down. Suddenly a symbol appeared on the disk, its lines deeply impressed in the gold. He stared in astonishment, his mind racing back to the extraordinary events of five years ago, to the excavation of a Bronze Age wreck in the Aegean Sea at the start of the quest. They had found a golden disk impressed with this symbol, alongside other symbols Jack had recognized from an ancient pottery disk found a century before at the Minoan site of Phaistos in Crete. The Phaistos symbols had baffled archaeologists for generations, but the disk from the wreck contained parallel symbols in the Minoan Linear script, an early form of Greek, which allowed the Phaistos symbols to be translated.

What they had revealed was astounding, the greatest revelation from an ancient text in the history of archaeology. One word had stood out, a word that had bedeviled archaeologists since time immemorial, a word spelled out in the syllabic script of the Minoans and represented by the symbol in front of Jack now: *Atlantis*. That had been remarkable enough, but then his colleague Maurice Hiebert had made another discovery deep in the Egyptian desert, a fragment of papyrus showing that the story of Atlantis told by the Greek philosopher Plato had not been a myth but was based on hard reality, on an account given to a Greek traveler by an Egyptian priest who had inherited secret knowledge stretching back thousands of years before the first pharaohs. Together the papyrus and the disk contained clues that had brought Jack and his team to the southeastern corner of the Black Sea, searching a shoreline submerged when the Mediterranean had cascaded over a land bridge between the present-day Bosphorus and filled the Black Sea basin, the last and most catastrophic event in the sea-level rise caused by the great melt at the end of the Ice Age twelve thousand years ago. For Jack, it had been the perfect archaeological quest, a marriage of textual clues, hard science, and intuition, and it had brought together all the skills of his team. They had revealed nothing short of the most dramatic archaeological site ever discovered, surrounding the twin peaks of a partly submerged volcano. It had been a spectacular vision of human ingenuity and achievement at the beginning of the Neolithic period, when people had built monuments that equaled those of the Egyptians and the Sumerians and the Mesoamericans thousands of years later.

Jack traced his glove over the symbol on the disk, up the central axis to where two symmetrical patterns extended outward like garden rakes, each terminating in a series of parallel lines. The text on the Phaistos disk had instructed them to follow the shape of the eagle with outstretched wings, and they had realized that the symbol was also a map, a plan of the submerged tunnels and chambers they had discovered under the peak of the volcano. Five years ago they had passed through extraordinary wonders: a huge chamber full of ancient cave paintings of the Ice Age, then a tunnel with carvings showing latter-day priests of Atlantis with conical hats, and then the holy of holies, the place where the tunnel ahead of them now might be leading. Yet that chamber with its huge statue of a mother goddess had been freshly carved shortly before the flood, and Jack was convinced that somewhere inside the tunnels and chambers lay other secrets, something that would link the holy of holies and the priests with those ancestral images from the Ice Age: perhaps an inner sanctum that would reveal how the belief system of the Ice Age hunter-gatherers had transformed into a religion of priests and gods and worship. The most likely location, the complex of tunnels ahead of them now, was a place they had only just begun to explore five years ago when the North Anatolian Fault had shuddered and the volcano surged to life again, forcing them away from the site seemingly forever.

Jack pressed his hand against the surface of the disk, wishing he could remove his glove and feel it against his skin. He had found gold before: gleaming coins of the Roman emperor, dazzling cups and jewelry on the Bronze Age wreck, gold fit for a king. But this disk was extraordinarily old, at least as old as the flooding of Atlantis more than seven thousand years ago. That was three thousand years before the earliest site elsewhere to produce worked gold, at Varna in Bulgaria. The gold in the disk could have come here with the first hunter-gatherers who had sought shelter in the caves on the slopes of the volcano during the Ice Age, who had painted the rock with images of mammoths and fearsome lions and leopards: a band of humans of precocious intellect and vision who had traveled south from the retreating glaciers with their most precious belongings. Their talent with metals was clear, their ability to collect and work copper and then to make an alloy to produce bronze, thousands of years before bronze technology reemerged and became widespread in the ancient world. They could have brought the gold with them from the nearest rich source, the gold-bearing streams of the Caucasus Mountains to the east, laying woolly mammoth skins in the water and collecting the precious flecks just as the Greek myths had Jason and the Argonauts do with the Golden Fleece. And they could have smelted and fashioned the gold into a disk bearing their sacred symbol, perhaps at the time they were transforming their world—moving beyond the natural caves in the volcano by cutting their own passageways and chambers in the rock, then fashioning mud, brick, lime, and volcanic ash into the walls of houses, creating the world's first civilization.

To Jack, the golden disk represented everything that was fascinating about this place: the symbol of a people on the cusp of the greatest revolution in human history, a symbol that allowed them to look forward to a new world and yet also back to the time of their ancestors. He wanted to feel what they had felt, to see the world as they had seen it, to look far back in prehistory to the time before the memory of the deep past had become clouded by the foundation myths that followed the first cities and the first dynasties; and he wanted to look forward to where these people were going, to understand what motivated them as the

poured all their energy into creating this place and then fleeing the oncoming flood. If he could see those things, then he would have found the greatest treasure of this place. He wanted to discover their past. Above all, he wanted to find out about their beliefs, how the people saw their existence at the dawn of modern religion. *He wanted to find the gods of Atlantis.*

Costas tapped Jack's helmet. "You happy?"

Jack drew his eyes away from the symbol and looked at Costas, his form now visible as the sediment cleared. Beneath a tattered boilersuit filled with tools, Costas was completely encased in white, like an astronaut. His helmet bore the anchor logo of the International Maritime University, partly obscured by a laser range-finding device that he had spirited away from the engineering department, one of numerous gadgets that always festooned him when he went diving. Underneath the white outer layer they were both wearing e-suits—Kevlar-reinforced dry suits with integrated buoyancy systems, back-mounted oxygen rebreathers, and dive computers with readouts visible inside their helmets. But the famed environmental resilience of the e-suit did not extend to diving in near-boiling water inside an active volcano, so they were entirely encased in thermal protection developed at IMU from the latest NASA and Russian spacesuit technology. Jack had to remind himself that they were not inside some lunar simulator, but under the Black Sea off Turkey, more than a hundred feet below a solidified lava flow and heading for a place that made outer space seem distinctly congenial.

He tapped the intercom on the side of his helmet. "Happier now I know we're on target. Lucky that pillar wasn't crunched by the borer."

"I was driving it, remember? Rule number one. Never trash the archaeology."

"You mean you got lucky."

"We used the 3-D terrain map of the site from five years ago, and put the borer dead on the entrance to the chamber leading to the holy of holies."

"I've lost all sense of direction. My compass has gone haywire."

"Did Lanowski mention the magnetic anomaly?" Costas said. "We noticed it yesterday when we did a magnetometer run over the site. The readouts showed some pretty spectacular spikes, centering over the likely location of the magma chamber. The Turkish geologic survey guy with us said he'd recorded a similar anomaly at several other places along the North Anatolian Fault, though nowhere as spectacular as here. You get anomalies like this at a few other places in the world where an upsurge in magma has a localized effect on the earth's magnetic field—along the Puerto Rico Fault in the north Caribbean, for instance. The guy said there's a lot of variation in how magnetic materials react to these field changes, but they'd noticed that meteoritic iron is the most dramatic. Several samples they had from one meteorite impact site in Siberia felt twice as heavy as normal at one place along the North Anatolian Fault where they tried them, and he reckoned it might even be more marked here."

"Sounds like fodder for the fringe theorists," Jack replied. "The people who still think Atlantis could only have been built by extraterrestrials. The truth is, everything we saw here is paralleled elsewhere in early sites, only on a lesser scale. And we only have to look at the Egyptian pyramids or Stonehenge to see that doing things on a colossal scale was never as much of a problem in the past as the fringe theorists seem to believe."

"Man makes himself," Costas said. "Isn't that the famous Jack Howard byline? Everything

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