

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
THE EXTINCTION SERIES

THE FIFTH KIND

AWAKENING



JAMES D. PRESCOTT

THE
FIFTH KIND

Δ W Δ K E N I N G

JAMES D. PRESCOTT

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The Fifth Kind: Awakening

The Fifth Kind: Ascension

Dedication

A special thanks to my editor, RJ, my dedicated and amazing beta team (honorable mention: L.W., R.D., L.VC., G.H., M.L., Don S.). And to you, dear readers, for making all of this possible.

Character List:

Dr. Katherine Shepard: Civilian expert in languages and exobiology.

Colonel Devon Peters: Liaison between the UFO crash retrieval program (CRP).

Commander Bradshaw: Replaced Admiral Jameson as head of the CRP.

Dr. Debra Mercer: Medical research director at Joint Base Andrews.

Special Agent Dwight Douglas: FBI agent. Runs the Washington, D.C., field office.

Desiree Douglas: Dwight's elder daughter. Drax agent.

Monique Douglas: Dwight's younger daughter.

Special Agent Sue Keller: FBI agent. Washington, D.C., field office.

Anastasia Petrova: Computer prodigy.

Miguel Alvarez: Delta operator. Marksman.

Jake Thompson: Delta operator. Communications specialist.

Nash: Delta operator. Heavy weapons.

Dr. Rajan Singh: Lead scientist for the CRP.

Dr. Miho Yamada: Japanese scientist loaned to the CRP from Trident Technologies.

Dr. John Caldwell: Lead engineer for the CRP.

U.S. Senator Donovan Ravencroft: Drax replacement.

Isadora: Thalasian assassin and operative.

Dr. Ben Mitchell: American scientist. Part of the team that discovers a fifth fundamental force.

Dr. Mateo Vargas: Colleague of Ben Mitchell.

Dr. Tanaka Mio: Scientist studying the Chilean anomaly.

Yuki Nakamura: Founder of Daimyo Defense Systems.

Saito Kai: Member of the yakuza.

“Human beings are under the control of a strange force that bends them in absurd ways, forcing them to play a role in a bizarre game of deception.”

— Jacques Vallee, pre-eminent UFO researcher

Act 1

The Anomaly

Chapter 1

Japan, Hitachi Province, 1803

The boy scampered along the beach, his tanned bare feet splashing through the receding waves. His gaze, sharp and alert, was fixed along the shoreline of Harato-no-hama—a launch point for many of the fishermen in the small village where he lived.

For as long as he could remember, the locals had refused to use his given name, instead calling him Taneuma, a nickname meaning “seed of imagination”, a title he had earned on account of the fanciful stories he often told. Many of these tales he wove together from odds and ends he’d found washed ashore. Driftwood covered in seaweed became a “sea monster’s maiden”. Half-empty bottles of sake, discarded by careless sailors, contained secret messages from exotic lands.

On this particular day, Taneuma watched as a bank of dark clouds appeared on the horizon, accompanied by the distant flash of lightning. A storm was approaching.

Soon, the water too began to roil, churned by the growing winds far out to sea. Taneuma was preparing to hurry home, disappointed at the prospect of leaving empty-handed, when he spotted a strange object bobbing in the water. The young boy grew still, his eyes straining to make sense of the sight before him. It resembled two silver rice bowls set rim to rim, forming something like a sphere. A short lip ran along the center and it seemed to be blinking, red and green. Could he be seeing a reflection from the sun? He scanned the skies above him. The sun, however, had already disappeared behind a blanket of storm clouds.

He wondered whether it could be a fishing boat from one of the nearby villages, and yet it was unlike any he'd ever seen before. As the object grew closer, Taneuma saw it had a row of darkened square patches that looked like windows. The waves were tossing it up and down, in and out of his sight.

Suddenly, the object became still, the waves crashing against it like an outcropping of rock. As though suddenly aware of his presence, the object turned and began cutting through the water, heading directly for him.

Rooted in fear, Taneuma realized he'd been wrong about the object's size. It wasn't at all like the local fishing boats he'd seen come and go his entire life, occupied by one or two men at a time. This was many times larger. In fact, he was now quite certain this was even bigger than the home he shared with his parents and three siblings.

Taneuma struggled to wrench his feet free, but his legs were paralyzed, his eyes locked on the approaching metallic sphere. It blinked red and green as it barreled onto the beach, carving a deep furrow in the sand, before coming to an abrupt stop not ten feet from where he stood. Pelted by clumps of falling wet sand, Taneuma raised his hands, crying out with fear.

The object was close enough that he could have hit it with a rock, but he knew better. Instead, he simply watched, mesmerized by the darkened panels as they flashed red and then green in rapid succession.

Then came the whooshing sound and for a moment, his vision was obscured by a cloud of green mist. Waving it away, he saw that a figure was now standing beside the sphere.

A woman.

She had long dark hair, her skin golden brown. She looked strangely beautiful, her features so perfect he couldn't help wondering if she was wearing a mask.

And yet everything else about her was foreign and puzzling. Instead of a kosode—a simpler version of a kimono, but with shorter sleeves—she wore a shiny and tight-fitting bronze-colored suit. Positioned over her left breast was the emblem of a double-headed serpent.

She regarded him intently, her gaze pulling him toward her and repelling him all at once. Her lips were moving and from them came a soft melodic language he had never heard before. It sounded like music, but she didn't appear to be singing.

In her right hand was an ornately carved wooden box. She tapped something on her forearm. Suddenly her voice changed. It was just as melodic and just as garbled. But Taneuma swore he caught a word or two of what she was saying.

"... need... you..."

There was a flicker in his eye. When she caught it, she tapped again and suddenly Taneuma understood exactly what she was saying.

"I need your help."

...

Taneuma stood, shocked and bewildered, his mouth hanging open, flashing the gap where his front teeth once sat.

"Me?" he asked, certain she had the wrong person.

Glancing over her shoulder, the woman came toward him, the box held out before her.

"Keep this safe," she said, a pleading quality to her melodic voice. The smooth skin around her eyes was wrinkled with sadness.

"But what is it?" Taneuma asked, taking the heavy box from her, struggling under its weight.

"Something you must keep until I return."

"I'm not sure," Taneuma said, his thoughts filling with doubt. Lactic acid was starting to tingle inside his biceps.

The woman glanced behind her again. The clouds were drawing closer and from out of them emerged a light that blinked like a distant star. It seemed to be heading toward them.

The box was secured with a metal lock. Taneuma shifted his weight to open it.

But the woman laid a hand over his. A warm burst of energy emanated from her palm. "You are the box's guardian now, young one. But you must

never look inside. Ever.”

Taneuma’s eyes grew wide and fearful.

“Promise me.”

“I promise,” he replied.

“Now go,” she said, a hint of desperation in her voice.

“But what must I do with this?” he pleaded, not entirely certain he could handle the responsibility.

She straightened her back and tapped her wrist. “When the time comes, you will know.”

A second later, she vanished, and in the blink of an eye the sphere followed suit, fading into nothingness.

Taneuma stared down at the beautiful box in his hands, apprehension and disbelief coursing through him in equal measure. And with that he hurried home, eager to outrun the approaching storm, trying to make sense of what he’d just experienced.

Chapter 2

Joint Base Andrews

Dr. Katherine Shepard stretched, preparing for her early morning run. The exercise field at Andrews could rival any major university in the country, but that wasn't why she had chosen this particular location for her five-mile jog. The near-fatal encounter at the indoor gym a few months back was never far from her mind. Being trapped in a cage had been a terrifying experience she wished never to repeat.

Plus, there was something to be said for having the sun's rays on your face, even on a chilly November morning. She glanced briefly at the bloated fusion reactor anchoring their planetary system, its unusual size an ever-present reminder of the importance of her mission. But in the last few weeks, the sun had begun showing other signs of distress, in particular by releasing solar storms that bombarded the Earth every few hours, causing chaos among global electronics and communications.

She wondered if this had been part of the reason Commander Bradshaw had called her last night, telling her to come in. His tone had made it sound deadly serious, which meant there was no telling how long she'd be gone for this time. Her son Ryan had pretended to be fine with it, but she could tell by the way his upper lip had been twitching that he was putting on a brave face.

The whole ride over, she'd been left to wonder whether her on-base summons had anything to do with the growing levels of tension in the world. A part of her had hoped the Drax defeat at Atlantis might have put more than a dent in their operation. And yet judging by the chaos around the globe, it seemed, if anything, their reaction had been to step things up.

A shocking number of third-world nations were either at war or close to it, not to mention that a handful of first-world nations were also inching closer to open hostilities. This newer development cast a far more worrisome shadow over the planet, since this was no longer a game of soldiers and tanks. Modern war was a game with nukes.

Fortunately for humanity, they had the Council fighting by their side—a loosely knit group of humanoid aliens united in their opposition against the Drax. An even more unsettling prospect to consider was that without the Council's guidance, they might never have made the connection between the never-ending conflicts that had plagued the human race for eons, and the vile alien species who had imprisoned them in the first place.

They had learned how *Homo sapiens* had been bred as incubators for dark matter, or what the Drax called *Drahk'noth*. That much was now beyond doubt. As Lysandros had explained during their trip to the Overwatch station on the moon, suffering was the process by which those dark matter particles were refined by human minds into something even more potent. And it was this new, exotic energy that powered all of the Drax technology, from their ships to their weapons.

Shepard bent her right leg, catching her foot and pulling it toward her glutes. She grimaced, relishing the pain as her muscle fibers lengthened.

Still, soldiers killing one another wasn't the only measure of strife in the world. Perhaps the most tangible change was the sharp rise in cynicism. Any trust that had once existed between citizens and governments was now about as dead as floppy disks and payphones. Average citizens were busily self-sorting into silos defined by belief systems and ideologies, labeling any who disagreed as evil and suitable for execution. Sometimes these assassinations were virtual. Sometimes they weren't.

Regardless, the end result was often the same. The world was rapidly approaching a dangerous juncture, where folks could no longer agree on an objective reality. And all of this at precisely the moment when unity was needed the most.

As disgusted and concerned as she was with these growing challenges, Shepard also had to give some begrudging credit to the Drax. They knew precisely what made humans tick. They were master manipulators and ninety-nine percent of the planet was playing right into their hands.

More than once Shepard had considered blowing off her top-secret clearances and the mountain of NDA's she'd signed in order to leak the story to the media. But something had always held her back. Perhaps it was the impact she was certain it would have on Ryan, now and for the rest of his life. Perhaps even more, she wondered in a world this divided, what good would it do?

"Excuse me, ma'am," a warm male voice said from behind her. "Stretchers shouldn't be blocking the track."

Shepard spun, her expression morphing from irritation to surprise and perhaps even shock. "Jake?"

The broad-shouldered Delta Force operator stood before her, his handsome face lit with a shit-eating grin. He raised his thickly muscled arms to either side of him. "In the flesh," he said. "Well, minus a limb or two."

Her gaze fell to the twin metallic devices where his legs had once been. A bolt from a Drax energy weapon during the battle for Atlantis had left him a double amputee. And yet here he was, back on his feet. Shepard was thrilled even more to see that his playful spirits had returned.

"Wow, they're terrific! Look out, T-900."

Jake laughed, lifting one of his new legs and rotating the ankle in a fluid three-hundred-and-sixty-degree motion. The robot foot, cased in a white Adidas shoe, whined as it made three rapid circles. "I won't lie—after my accident, I was hopelessly depressed. Then one rainy afternoon, Dr. Singh showed up with two nerdy-looking guys in dark suits from DARPA. They took some measurements and told me they might have something that could help." Jake took a few steps, walking in a tight circle. "And voilà. Doc Mercer says I should be cleared to re-enter active duty within forty-eight hours."

"I'm impressed," Shepard admitted, struggling to find the words to describe the technological marvel before her.

“Just wait until you see this,” he told her and tore off down the track at an incredible speed.

Shepard drew in a deep breath. As thrilled as she was for Jake, she couldn’t help but wonder. Was this where things were heading with the human race? And if so, how long before there was nothing left to distinguish humans from Drax?

...

Shepard had just finished several circuits around the track when she spotted two figures standing along the treeline watching her. A chill raced up her spine. Sweat running down her face, she scanned her surroundings, aware of the smattering of military personnel working out nearby. Jake, armed with his new legs, had lapped her several times and was now nowhere to be seen.

Glancing back at the treeline, she was struck with a sense of recognition. She knew them. But what were they doing here?

She headed over. “This is the last place I ever expected to see either one of you,” she said, pleased nevertheless at the sight of two friendly faces.

Isadora came out of the shadows and placed a hand on Shepard’s shoulder. As always, the Thalasian’s fine olive skin and dark, shoulder-length hair defied the stereotypical image of a deadly assassin.

Next to her was the FBI agent she’d met at the Lincoln Memorial, a handsome black man in his early fifties with sharp brown eyes and the wit to match. It was toward the end of that now-distant conversation that he had first mentioned Isadora’s name, only one of many shocks she’d received that day.

“Agent Douglas,” Shepard said. “I can only assume Isadora’s filled you in on what I do here?”

Douglas nodded. “She has. As well as what you and your team have done for all of us.”

She acknowledged his kind words with a nod. “I know anyone in our place would have done the same.” Shepard noted the strain on their faces. “Is something wrong?”

“Drax activity has been steadily escalating since Nordaustlandet,” Isadora told her.

“Yes, I’ve noticed,” Shepard admitted, dabbing the sweat from her brow.

Douglas let out a humorless little laugh. “Hard not to. Their handiwork is plastered all over the nightly news.”

“I see this has become personal for you,” Shepard noted, reading the pain in the agent’s voice.

“Believe me, you don’t know the half of it,” he replied.

“I’m afraid I have some more bad news,” Isadora cut in. “It seems the Drax offensive hasn’t been limited to stirring up conflict between humans. They’ve also launched a new and aggressive campaign against the Council.”

“But how can that be?” Shepard asked, confused. “I thought we defeated them in Norway?”

Isadora shook her head. “Turns out the Drax we fought were only a fraction of the forces arrayed against us. Over the last twenty-four hours, we’ve lost contact with Atlantis as well as the Council’s main base on the moon, Overwatch.”

Shepard covered her mouth. “Oh, no.” Could it be they had just lost their greatest ally? The mere thought horrified her.

“All signs indicate we have entered the final stages,” Isadora explained. “The Drax recognize they have no other option but to throw everything they have at us.”

“In other words,” Douglas said, deploying one of his famous analogies, “a cornered subway rat’s more likely to go for your throat than it is to run away.”

“And Lysandros?” Shepard asked. “Any word from him?”

“Complete radio silence,” Isadora replied, her features set and hard to read, but even Shepard could feel her seething anger. “Despite this, there are whispers that the Drax have something else up their sleeve.”

“And that’s why you came to me?” Shepard asked.

Isadora nodded slowly. “There is a Drax double agent who’s been drip-feeding us bits of intel for the last two weeks. He wants to make a proper