

# STARGATE ATLANTIS™



## FROM THE DEPTHS

**A novella by Amy Griswold**

**Based on the hit television series created by  
Brad Wright & Robert C. Cooper**



STARGATE  
ATLANTIS™

**FROM THE DEPTHS**

**Amy Griswold**

**FANDEMONIUM BOOKS**

This book is set after book eight in the  
STARGATE ATLANTIS Legacy series.

## CHAPTER ONE

ELIZABETH WEIR unpacked the last of the pieces of pottery, placed it on the office shelf, and considered the effect. Through the window, a gray light filtered in from the chilly pier outside. It was summer in Atlantis's new home, but that meant only more cold rain than snow, and she missed the sunlit seas of their first home in the Pegasus Galaxy. The city of Atlantis hadn't changed since she left, but so much else about life in the city had.

"Settling in?" John Sheppard asked, leaning against the doorframe and regarding her efforts at interior decorating.

Case in point, one Colonel Sheppard, now the acting commander of the Atlantis expedition. The first week after they'd arrived in the Pegasus Galaxy, she would have given even odds that he'd wind up court-martialed. The first year after they'd arrived in the Pegasus Galaxy, she would have given even odds that he'd wind up dead. But now he was still here, a steady presence after years with the expedition while she had died, Ascended, and returned.

"I thought I might as well get comfortable," she said. "I'm still hoping to go back to Earth soon, but as long as I'm in limbo here..."

"...you need an office," John said. He shifted awkwardly. "You know that you could have your old office back."

"That's the Atlantis commander's office," Elizabeth said. "And since I'm not the Atlantis commander and you are..."

"For the moment." How long the IOA would take to name a new commander for the Atlantis expedition was as unanswerable a question as when they would pronounce themselves satisfied that Elizabeth was human, free of Replicator pro-

gramming, and cleared to return to Earth. Elizabeth wasn't certain that John would escape being named the next commander, and wasn't entirely certain that he wanted to escape the responsibility, despite his protestations.

It was strange not to be certain. Every day brought reminders that she'd missed three long years in the lives of the people she had once called her closest friends.

She shook her head briskly, reminding herself how fortunate she was. "I appreciate the SGC sending these boxes out to me, although it's a little odd: since most of my personal effects were sent back to my family, all that was left in storage were things from Pegasus that weren't cleared to be released. So I have this, from P2J-4215—" She held up a sculpted serpentine figure carved from a mineral not naturally occurring on Earth. "But not my coffee mugs."

"I could round some up for you."

"Thank you, but I think I'm up to tackling that challenge myself."

"They still haven't notified your family?"

"I asked Mr. Woolsey to wait until I was cleared," Elizabeth said. "As long as there's any doubt that I'm human —"

"Which there isn't."

"Or any possibility that my return will be significantly delayed," she went on, and John frowned, clearly unable to argue that the IOA was always efficient and prompt. "I can't put my mother through that. I'll send her a message when I'm on my way home." She set down the pottery snake and settled into a chair that she couldn't help noticing was less comfortable than her old one. "So, what have we got on the schedule today?"

"Not the Wraith, not the Vanir, and not the Genii. For a change."

"Do we ever actually schedule the Wraith?" Elizabeth asked dryly.

“These days it happens. My big excitement of the morning is meeting with the biologists who want to talk about...” He consulted his tablet. “‘Genetic anomalies in the local sea life.’ I’m guessing they want me to authorize more exploratory jumper missions to the ocean floor, which given that we’re not under attack this week I may actually be able to do.”

“You mean we could actually do some research on the Pegasus Galaxy?”

“I think we still do that. Want to sit in?”

It wasn’t really her area of expertise — she’d always focused on the cultural aspects of the mission, and her oversight of the science team had largely been to direct their efforts to resolve one crisis after another. Still, she couldn’t say she had anything more pressing to do, and she appreciated the effort to include her.

“Why not,” she said. “Just let me stop by the mess hall and pick up a regulation coffee mug.”

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The marine biology lab was damp and cold, the cold-water tanks seeming on the verge of icing over and the heated tanks sending up steam that dripped down the wall behind them. Dr. Moore seemed perfectly comfortable in his shirtsleeves, although John couldn’t help noting that several of the research assistants were wearing fingerless gloves and had layered turtle-necks under their uniform jackets.

“This has been a tremendous opportunity for us,” Dr. Moore said, leading them around tanks to the display screen on one wall. Fish milled around the nearest tank in a silvery school. “We finally have the chance to study a cold-water ocean ecosystem in the Pegasus galaxy at length without having to mount an expedition through the gate.”

“Fine for you,” one of the research assistants said, rubbing her hands together. “That’s what you’re interested in. My dissertation research was on tropical reefs.”

“There are some unusual reefs on M7J-44X3,” Moore offered, the light from the tanks throwing blue shadows across his face. One of the few science specialists from the original Atlantis mission who hadn’t either died or returned to a more normal life on Earth, his close-shaved hair was beginning to gray, but he retained his enthusiasm for icy oceans.

“Through the gate,” the assistant muttered.

“What have we got?” Elizabeth said, and then shot John an apologetic look. “I’m sorry, that’s your line.”

He shook his head to show no apology was needed. “What *have* we got?”

“We’ve been working with the genetics team to do some gene sequencing on the samples we’ve taken so far,” Dr. Moore said. “Most of the results were interesting but not particularly surprising. We’re mapping out the relationships between various species in a number of local ecosystems.”

“But...” John prompted. In his experience in Atlantis, this was the point at which someone usually said “but we found out that the water is inhabited by jellyfish that suck out people’s life force,” or “but we discovered that some of the fish are actually robot spies for an alien threat we haven’t even got on our radar yet.”

“But one of them stands out in complete contrast to the rest. The giant squid — or, actually, they may be more closely related to colossal squid — you’ve observed them near Atlantis?”

“I think everyone’s seen them,” John said. The creatures were apparently curious, and tentacles had been observed snaking out of the water to snatch unsecured gear, unguarded lunches, and on one memorable occasion, Jack O’Neill’s fishing pole.

Dr. Moore brought up video footage on the display screen. Underwater, the creatures made an impressive display, brilliant patterns of color dancing across their skins, shifting

and changing as they moved. “They’re an apex predator, and one of the few large aquatic predators we’ve seen since we arrived. We suspect that if there were native large predatory species, the squid hunted them to extinction shortly after... as we hypothesize... the squid were introduced.”

“You think they’re not native to this planet,” Elizabeth said.

“Almost certainly not. Their genetic makeup is radically different in significant ways from the native species on this world, and we’ve found no species that could possibly be close relatives. There are general similarities to squid on Earth, but those are the types of similarities we see on all the planets where the Ancients seeded life. Wherever this species evolved into its present form, I don’t think it was here.”

“So how did they get here?” John asked. “This planet didn’t have a Stargate until we got here.”

“It might have been accidental,” Elizabeth said. “A ship fills water tanks on one world, expels wastes on another... invasive species have been transmitted that way on Earth.”

“You’d think they’d notice a ten-meter squid.”

“It’s certainly possible that they were transported here accidentally, perhaps in a juvenile form, or as fertilized eggs that had been deposited in water being transported,” Dr. Moore said. “However, there is another possibility that’s a little troubling.”

“We’re listening,” John said.

“We know this was one of the planets where the Ancient scientist Janus experimented with humans and Iratus bugs and ended up creating the Wraith,” Dr. Moore said. “He transported the Iratus bugs here in order to do that. Finding another type of non-native life on this planet does raise the question of whether there might be some connection.”

“You think Janus might have been trying to combine humans and squid?” John wished he could rule that out as something that no one could possibly have wanted, not even

the Ancients, but he had learned not to put a whole lot past them. Personally he wasn't a fan of things with tentacles, except in fried and crunchy form.

"I couldn't begin to speculate what he might have wanted to do, except... cephalopods on Earth are remarkably intelligent, but constrained by their relatively short lifespans. Most live only a few years, and many species die immediately after mating. We know that one of the things Janus wanted to achieve from his experiments was to prevent humans from aging. Working with squid might have provided an interesting way to test whatever mechanism he intended to use."

"So, you think he might have been trying to combine the squid and the Iratus bugs." That didn't sound better. In fact, it sounded significantly worse.

"I think it's possible the squid were originally brought here as subjects for Janus's experiments. I won't commit myself more than that. But if that's the case, it increases the importance of closely observing the creatures and their behavior."

"So that we can find out if we're sharing the planet with life-sucking Wraith squid," John said.

"We probably aren't," Dr. Moore said. "At least, there's no definite evidence to suggest that we are."

"Even so," Elizabeth said. "Let's find out." She looked sideways at John. "If we have the resources to proceed with this research project."

That wasn't exactly asking him for permission, but it still felt weird to have Elizabeth asking him for permission in the first place, so he figured it would do. "We do right now. Better make the most of it. If Janus had anything to do with this, we need to find out what he was up to."

"His experiments did tend to have an amazing potential to go wrong," Elizabeth said.

"And you'd think that messing around with people's DNA trying to turn them into super-beings would work so well,"

John said dryly.

“As a former ‘super-being’... not so much.”

John shrugged rather than replying, because he thought they’d come to some kind of unspoken agreement not to talk about the time she’d spent first frozen in space and then on another plane of existence as an Ascended being. You had to take that kind of thing in stride in Atlantis, but that didn’t mean you entirely got used to it.

“Pack your gear,” Dr. Moore said to his glum-looking assistant. “And let’s go look for some squid.”

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Evan Lorne had imagined a lot of futures for himself when he joined the Air Force, but submarine pilot hadn’t been one of them. As he steered the jumper through the crystal blue water a few meters beneath the surface, he wondered whether it might be worth looking for some Navy personnel with the ATA gene. It would have been nice to be able to hand over squid-searching duty to someone who could honestly say that oceanography was their specialty.

“All right, doc,” he said. “I’m reading some large life signs about 500 meters ahead. I’m going to bring us in closer.”

“Try not to disturb them,” Dr. Moore said.

“I’ll do my best,” Lorne said, although exactly how to bring the jumper in closer without disturbing whatever marine life was out there seemed like a good question. While the shield was engaged to turn the jumper into a submersible craft, it wasn’t possible to hide behind a cloak, as convenient as that might have been. He settled for advancing at a steady speed, while Moore and his assistant, Tatiana Ivanova, crowded forward to peer out the forward window in search of any sign of giant squid.

The first sign that they were on the right track was a flash of moving color in the distance. Lorne had seen the giant squid nosing around Atlantis, and had learned to classify them as

harmless, if alarming when they appeared unexpectedly while he was trying to make sure the underwater parts of Atlantis were staying free of ice. The flash of color was followed by another, and then another, lighting up the grey water.

“Are those what we’re looking for?” Lorne asked.

Moore leaned forward excitedly. “I think so. How many are you picking up?”

Lorne whistled. “A lot.” He could see the water swirling with them now, their bodies flashing a rainbow of colors in intricate patterns. “Are they actually glowing?”

“I think there’s an electrical effect enhancing their luminescence,” Dr. Moore said. “It would make their optical signals easier to detect, and it might also have the effect of warning away enemies or attracting prey.”

“These thing can’t zap us, though, like an electric eel?”

“That would be interesting,” Moore said, which didn’t really seem to answer Lorne’s question. “But, no, we’ve seen nothing to suggest that directly,” he continued, possibly in answer to Lorne’s expression. “Certainly their beaks seem well-adapted for hunting, and as apex predators, they have limited need for defense, unless it’s against other members of their species. Which is possible, of course. They may compete to mate, or over access to scarce resources... but we’re behind the jumper’s shields, in any event.”

“Which sounds like it’s probably a good thing,” Lorne said.

“How many of the creatures are you reading?”

“A hundred, maybe? This thing’s just picking up life signs and approximate size, though. If they’re gathering around a source of food, some of these blips on the life sign detector might be their prey, if their prey is also pretty large.”

“Mmm,” Moore said noncommittally. “This could be feeding behavior, of course, that’s a possibility. What do you think, Ivanova?”

It was the same tone that Lorne’s instructors at the

Academy had used to say things like “is that your answer?”, which generally meant “that’s the wrong answer.”

“That’s a lot of signaling for feeding behavior,” Ivanova said. “Look at those patterns pop.”

“I see it, I see it. I trust that we’re recording this?”

“Sure,” Lorne said, and checked that the jumper’s sensors were recording the riot of colors and patterns flashing through the water in front of them. The squid were moving in complex patterns, forming into little knots and then separating, some darting from group to group. On their sides, colorful patterns flashed in luminescent blues and reds, darkening to greyscale stripes and brightening to bold splotches that made them look like they’d been finger-painted by a little kid.

“Squid on Earth aren’t social hunters,” Moore said. “And if this were coordinated hunting behavior, I’d expect to see them driving a shoal of fish or some other prey in particular directions.”

“Aggressive behavior?” Ivanova suggested. “They could be competing for food.”

“So where’s the prey?” Moore squinted at the life sign readings now overlaid on the viewscreen in front of them. “There’s nothing here that looks like fish attempting to escape a predator. If they were feeding on something less mobile, like jellyfish, I’d expect to see them moving in, snatching food, perhaps displaying aggressive signals toward nearby individuals. This...”

“Could be mating behavior,” Ivanova said.

“I don’t think so. It’s too complex. Keep recording.”

“I promise, I’m recording.”

“I’m seeing repeating patterns,” Ivanova said. “See that, red shifting to blue, like an arrow, always oriented in the same direction —”

“Migration behavior? We could be watching a migratory group form —”

“There are other repeating patterns, with variations. We’re looking at something at least as complex as birdsong here. At least.”

Both scientists were squeezing forward, their noses nearly up against the viewscreen. Lorne found himself craning forward to see, too, despite knowing essentially nothing about the biology of squid. One thing he’d discovered while ferrying scientists all over the Pegasus Galaxy was that enthusiasm for any subject, no matter how mind-numbingly boring on the face of it — plants, rocks, watching old ruins get older — tended to be contagious.

“Humor me for a moment,” Moore said, leaning back in his seat and squinting at the squid as they darted back and forth through the water, surprisingly swift for creatures their size. “Is it possible to run the footage we’re getting of their communication through the jumper’s computer and see if it suggests meaningful groupings of symbols?”

“You think it’s some kind of language?”

Moore shrugged. “The patterns we’re seeing are suggestive. So —”

“That’s not something that the jumper’s computers are set up to do,” Lorne said. “We can take this back and let one of the linguists take a look at it. This might be right up Lynn’s alley.” William Lynn had come out to Atlantis the year before as a civilian linguist, and while his specialty was analyzing the origins of the Wraith language in the language of the Ancients, Lorne thought he might be willing to take a break to figure out whether the squid were talking.

“Let’s get some more recordings,” Moore said. “Can you get us in closer?”

As Lorne edged the jumper cautiously closer, the squid veered out of his way. Many of them were longer than the jumper, and he tried to give them a wide berth. While they hadn’t proven aggressive so far, he wasn’t sure he liked the

idea of being swarmed by them. Near him, the creatures' flashing colors changed their pattern even more rapidly, and groups of the creatures circulated in tight knots before zooming off to other parts of the large shoal. The tentacles and arms trailing through the water gave the appearance of enormous, writhing knots of seaweed, or possibly something out of an old monster movie.

"I think we're upsetting them," Lorne said.

"Can't you use the cloak?"

"Not without dropping the shield, and unless you want to risk having to swim home, we're not going to do that." He backed the jumper away, still recording. "We're going to have to surface soon," he said. "Using the shield underwater eats power. In fact, it's dropping pretty fast." He frowned at the readings. "Actually, a lot faster than it's supposed to. I think we'd better take this jumper back and get it checked over."

"It would be ideal if we could bring one of the creatures back with us," Moore said.

"Considering their size, how are we actually going to do that?" Lorne asked, hoping he sounded more patient than he felt. He'd learned to expect the scientists to say things like "maybe we could bring the glowing tree back to the botany lab" and "it looks like it may have poisonous fangs, let's get a closer look!" and "it's possible that the radiation it's emitting is some kind of greeting, so if we put on radiation suits, maybe we can say a proper hello." He'd also learned that it was important to introduce practical considerations early and often if they were actually going to be heard.

"They're not going to fit in a bait cooler," Ivanova said. "We might be able to snag another tissue sample if someone goes out there in a wet suit." She sounded wearily sure of who that someone was likely to be.

"Let's go talk to the linguists first," Lorne said. "I don't like the idea of staying out here in a malfunctioning jumper,

and if there's any chance that we're dealing with an intelligent species here, scraping off samples of their skin isn't a great way to say hello."

He brought the jumper around, heading back toward Atlantis, and then frowned as the life sign readings changed. "It looks like we've attracted some attention."

"They're pursuing?" Moore asked. "Possibly trying to drive us out of their territory, don't you think?" The last was presumably to Ivanova, who shrugged. "In that case, they shouldn't pursue us for long."

"Let's put some distance between us and our friends, just to be sure," Lorne said. He surfaced, the jumper shedding water as it lifted into the air, and then checked the life sign readings again. "Ah — doc, they still seem to be following us."

"Ridiculous," Moore said. "They certainly can't see us now that we've left the water."

Lorne tested this comforting theory by setting a zig-zag course back toward Atlantis. While the squid didn't follow his zigs and zags, and quickly lagged behind the jumper's airspeed, they did maintain their own steady course in the direction of the city. And not just a few angry squid — it looked like the whole group of the creatures was heading directly for Atlantis.

"It could be a coincidence," Ivanova offered, leaning over his shoulder to see the life-sign readouts. "Maybe they're done with whatever they were doing, and now they're ready to move on."

On a hunch, Lorne had been expanding the radius of his life-sign scan, and he brought the readings up on the heads-up display. "I'm not sure how that explains this."

Around the city, from every direction, life-sign readings were arrowing toward Atlantis.

"It looks like we're going to have a whole lot of company," he said.