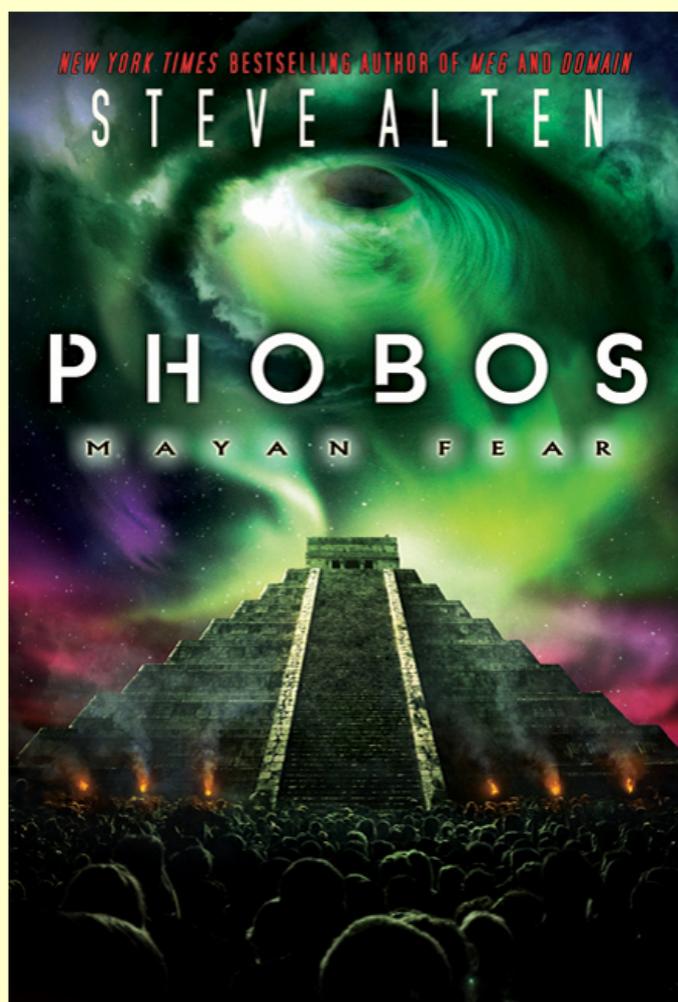


READ IT FIRST



This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

PHOBOS: MAYAN FEAR

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2047
**(Thirty-five years after the prophesied
Doomsday Event)**

ATLANTIC OCEAN
107 NAUTICAL MILES SOUTHWEST OF BERMUDA
(BERMUDA TRIANGLE)
APRIL 16, 2047

Displacing 130,000 tons, the cruise ship *Paradise Lost* knifes through the deep blue waters of the Atlantic, its twin propellers churning a quarter-mile-long foamy trail. A thousand feet long, with a 120-foot beam that supports thirteen guest decks, the ocean liner is powered by the latest in NiCE (Nonpolluting i-Combustion Engineering) system design. Replacing the old steam-driven turbines (a gallon of fuel for every fifty feet of propulsion), the ship's turbines draw power from the primary phase of the NiCE system—a five-megawatt solar plant. Occupying an acre of upper deck space in the stern is a water tower, surrounded by seventeen hundred rotating solar

mirrors. As sunlight strikes the mirrors, the magnified heat is redirected to the tower and its built-in boiler, raising internal temperatures to a superhot 875 degrees Fahrenheit. The generated steam is used to turn twin turbines located in the engine room, driving the ship's propellers.

Phase two of the NiCE system kicks in once the boat is under way. Smokestacks that once belched toxic plumes of carbon dioxide have been replaced by wind turbines. As the ocean liner moves forward, these towering lightbulb-shaped blades capture the steady supply of wind, converting the kinetic energy into enough electricity to power every device on the floating hotel.

Like all cruise ships, *Paradise Lost* is first and foremost a pleasure boat. Inside the massive craft, virtual reality suites augment the boat's five-star restaurants, Broadway-caliber shows, and casinos. Outside, the six open-air decks are dominated by "hydro-leisure activities," at the center of which are two cascading waterfalls that churn a lazy river, rapids, and pit stops at open buffets.

For guests preferring something a bit more sedentary, "smart chairs" are situated around the lagoon and adult-only privacy areas. Designed to levitate eight inches above a grated deck that generates a maglev (magnetic levitation) cushion, these lounge chairs not only are luxurious but also eliminate seasickness. Rollers and robotic fingers housed within the chairs' micro-fiber cushions deliver everything from a soothing massage to deep-tissue shiatsu. Dial up the chair's "body spritzer" and one can cool off with a pure water mist or, for an additional fee, apply a vitamin-rich emollient (dermal dips having eliminated the need for SPF lotion applications a decade earlier).

For the 2,400 passengers aboard the *Paradise Lost*, the eight-day round-trip cruise from Fort Lauderdale to Bermuda is paradise found.

The privacy decks surrounding Dolphin Lagoon are filled to capacity—five hundred passengers stretch out on lounge chairs, drifting in and out of consciousness while they await the next cattle call for first dinner.

Jennifer Ventrice lies on her back facing the late afternoon sun, her assigned recliner situated between the starboard rail and the lazy river. The seventy-three-year-old Brooklyn native is awake, watching an opti-vision movie projected inside her wraparound i-glasses. Despite her sensory comforts, Jennifer is nervous. It has been fourteen years since she and her husband were forced to flee the United States, and though her passport and embedded smart chip reflect her new identity, she knows her spouse's en-

emies have long tentacles and other “less conventional” means of tracking them down.

Relax, Eve. You already made it through international checkpoints in London and Miami without any problem, security in Bermuda should be—

No! She clenches her eyes shut, the self-scolding inflection causing the movie to pause. *It’s Jennifer, not Eve. Jennifer . . . Jennifer!*

She powers off the movie, momentarily blinded by the sunlight reflecting off the ocean until the smart lenses adjust their tint. *This was all Dave’s fault. Why couldn’t he have allowed me to use my real first name as an alias? Didn’t he realize how hard it was to think of myself as anything but Eve?*

For the thousandth time she thinks back to the date—November 25, 2033—the day Evelyn Mohr ceased to exist, the day Lilith Mabus forced Evelyn’s husband and the rest of their entourage into exile. Only twenty years old at the time, the unleashed widow of the late billionaire Lucien Mabus had firmly entrenched herself as CEO of Mabus Tech Industries and its space tourism company, Project H.O.P.E. Within months, Lilith had used her newfound influence in Washington to coerce President John Zwawa into allowing MTI to take control of Golden Fleece, a covert NASA project overseen by Evelyn’s husband, Dave.

What Lilith Mabus sought was access to zero-point energy, a warp-drive propulsion system that powered the extraterrestrial starship excavated back in 2013, which she hoped to use on her Mars Colony shuttles.

What she found instead was her long-lost soul mate, Jacob Gabriel.

Jacob and his twin brother, Immanuel, had faked their deaths years ago. Intoxicated by Lilith’s pheromones, Jacob submitted to the one act his father had expressly warned him about—copulating with his schizophrenic Hunahpu cousin.

Jacob and his mother had left the Earth aboard the extraterrestrial starship on November 25, 2033, leaving behind Immanuel Gabriel, his two bodyguards, and the Mohrs as fugitives from Majestic-12 and Lilith Mabus. Identity changes accompanied relocations in Canada, Mexico, Honduras, and Peru, Evelyn Mohr playing the dutiful role of supportive wife while her husband continued to advise and tutor Jacob’s still-evolving dark-haired Hunahpu twin.

Six years ago Evelyn declared she had had enough. While she understood Manny was “special,” she yearned to stay rooted and establish a life, something the earthbound twin, still filled with anger and angst, was loath to do. Dave finally relented, agreeing to leave his protégé with the two bodyguards so that he and Eve could live out their days in peace.



Sigerfjord was a barrier island, one of hundreds surrounding the coast of Norway. Isolated from the mainland, with a population that rarely exceeded eight hundred, the remote location seemed beyond even Lilith Mabus's long reach. Dave quickly endeared himself to the local community after repairing a malfunctioning turbine at Sigerfjord's geothermal plant, while "Jennifer" used her legal experience to find gainful employment at a law firm.

Peeking beneath her smart glasses, Evelyn Mohr steals a glance at the young woman lying topless in the lounge chair on her right. May Foss is her employer's daughter, a daddy's girl from the neighboring island of Gjaesingen. As a present for graduating law school, May's father had promised his daughter and her best friend, Anna Reedy, an all-expenses-paid, two-week vacation anywhere in the world, and the twenty-four-year-olds chose Miami.

The entrepreneur had agreed, with one stipulation: Foss's American assistant, Jennifer, would serve as escort.

Dave had naturally protested, but to deny her boss's request would have sent up red flags. The job was good, and relocating again was risky, so the former Mrs. Evelyn Mohr packed her bags, assuring her husband she'd be safe.

After six years living in Norway, the South Florida heat was heaven.

"May? May, where are you?"

May sits up, waving to her friend. "Over here."

Anna Reedy hurries up the aisle, the dark-haired Italian beauty flush from running. "May, I'm in love!"

"Again?"

Evelyn smiles to herself, eavesdropping on the girls' conversation.

"His name is Julian. He's tall, six feet six, with long brown hair and the physique of a Greek god. And those eyes—"

"How old is he?"

"Twenty-nine and single. And he's traveling with a friend."

"Have you seen the friend?"

"No, but so what? They want to meet you. You too, Jen."

Evelyn's skin tingles. "Me? Why me?"

"I don't know. I showed him our photo, the one of the three of us in South Beach, and he asked me to introduce you."

May nudges her. "Maybe the Greek god likes older women."



Fubitch! Lilith has our images streaming everywhere, along with offers of a sizeable reward. What if. . .

“Wait here, I’ll go get him.”

“Anna, wait!” Evelyn is about to go after her when the buzz of the i-glasses’ phone reverberates in her ears. She taps the control by her right temple, accepting the call.

David Mohr’s liver-spotted face replaces the eastern horizon of the Atlantic. “Jen, where the hell are you? According to my GPS, you’re somewhere in the *fukabitching* Bermuda Triangle.”

Her husband’s attempt to use streaming slang profanity elicits a smile. “Calm down, *Erik*. The girls wanted to take a cruise. It was either Bermuda or Cuba.”

“Oh, geez. No, you made the right choice. Cuba, gee whiz. If you have so much as a traffic violation, island security demands an anal probe.”

“I won’t ask you how you know about that. Miss me?”

“Intensely.”

“Know what I miss?”

“Jennifer—”

“I can’t help it. Being back in Florida . . . the warm weather . . . the palm trees—”

Without warning, the ship shudders violently, as if its keel has run aground. May screams as she’s tossed from her feet, along with hundreds of other passengers, everyone looking around, confused and fearful.

“Did we hit something?”

“Are we sinking?”

Dave Mohr yells to regain his wife’s attention. “Jen, what is it? What’s wrong?”

“I don’t know. It felt like the engines seized. Maybe we hit . . . whoa!”

Without warning, the ocean liner rolls hard to port. Passengers scream, the listing deck causing hundreds of levitating lounge chairs to flip like concentric circles of stacked dominoes.

Evelyn tumbles forward, landing hard against the starboard rail. Passengers are flung haphazardly across the shifting deck as the ship executes a radical course change.

After a long terrifying moment, the cruise ship levels out, continuing on its new heading—due west.

May helps Eve to her feet. “Jennifer, what’s happening?”

“I don’t know. Find Anna.”

The girl fumbles with her bikini top as she runs off.



Eve turns her attention back to her husband. Dave appears in her right eye lens, the physicist frantically operating his projection screen computer, the free-floating images of the ocean liner appearing via satellite feed.

“Dave, what happened? Why have we changed course? Was it a tsunami? A rogue wave?”

“No seismic activity. No telltale ripples. No other ships in the area. I don’t—” The scientist pauses, his already pale complexion losing color. “What in God’s name is that?”

Robert Gibbons, Jr., rushes into the bridge, the disheveled captain demanding answers. “Mr. Swartz, report!”

First Officer Bradley T. Swartz hovers over his navigation board, clearly baffled. “Sir, it wasn’t us. The ship appears to be caught in some sort of rogue current.”

Captain Gibbons focuses his binoculars on the surface of the Atlantic, now rippling like a swiftly moving river.

“Captain, ship’s compass has gone haywire. Zero degrees is now pointing . . . due west.”

“What?”

“Sir, lookout has spotted something! Requesting your immediate presence.”

Gibbons rushes out of the bridge, ascending a narrow flight of steel steps to the lookout post. An ensign steadies the deck-mounted scope, his eyes filled with fear. “It’s a mile straight off our bow, sir. Never saw anything like it.”

The captain presses his right eye to the spyglass’s rubber eye guard. “Good God . . .”

Neither whirlpool nor maelstrom, it appears simply as a hole in the ocean, its dark circumference several miles in diameter. The Atlantic Ocean drains down its throat like a 360-degree Niagara Falls, its vortex inhaling the surrounding sea—along with the *Paradise Lost*.

The captain grabs the internal phone. “Change course! Forty degrees on the starboard rudder!” Without waiting for a reply, he races down the circular stairwell to the bridge. “Mr. Swartz?”

“Executing course change now, sir.”

Gibbons stares at the ship’s bow. *Come on . . . turn!*

The cruise ship sways to the right, meeting resistance. The boat shudders but is unable to escape the gravitational forces in play.



“No change, sir.”

“Stop engines. Full reverse!”

“Full reverse, aye.”

The propellers shut down, the bow veering back to port. Gibbons focuses his binoculars on the massive anomaly, now looming seven hundred yards away, its edge spanning the entire horizon, *dropping off . . . to where?*

The *Paradise Lost* shudders as its twin screws reverse and fight to catch hold of the sea. The ship’s forward speed slows, but still they cannot break free.

The captain’s heart pounds in his chest. “Mr. Halley, send an SOS. Inform the Coast Guard we need emergency airlift choppers. Warn all seafaring vessels to stay clear of this area.”

The stunned radioman manages a raspy, “Aye sir.”

Deck officers line up by the bay windows, staring in fear and disbelief. A few attempt to call their loved ones—unable to get a signal.

A chorus of screams builds to a crescendo as passengers catch sight of what lies ahead.

Light-headed, his limbs shaking, Captain Gibbons finds his way to the command chair, a sickening feeling invading his gut as the 130,000-ton cruise ship slowly topples over the edge of the fourth dimensional vortex . . . into oblivion.



Screams of protest mute in Evelyn Mohr’s consciousness, the sudden silence accompanied by the strangely familiar angular face of a dark-haired man, his azure-blue eyes radiating intensely behind his sunglasses, his powerful arms lifting her away from the listing deck to somehow carry her inside the ship, his muscular physique moving in defiance of the laws of physics. She experiences a quantum second of weightlessness before gravity’s unleashed forces take over, simultaneously fragmenting and dispersing every cell in her body.



PHOBOS

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