

DISCOVERY

"That's enough!" Carson Burnright put an end to the squabbling around the table. The corners of his mouth pulled down into a forbidding frown as heated gazes turned toward him. "It's time we quit acting like children and look at the facts, what we have here is unprecedented."

Where he moved, they watched. His hand ushered at the screen behind him. The discus shape lay buried beneath thousands of years of sediment.

"Someone give me the age results," cold blue eyes skimmed the various faces as they turned to one another. "Now, please."

"Carbon dating puts it pre-glacial," a timid voice spoke up. Carson's gaze drilled into the mousy archeologist.

The corners of his mouth only tugged down further, "I want more tests. More samples." He shifted in his seat and pulled up, "What of the camera shots from inside?"

"There seems to be a... well... a stairwell inside," a gentleman in back piped up. He tugged at his suit as if to remove the wrinkles from the sleeves. It was hard

to tell which was older- him or the prehistoric blazer."The cameras are too clouded. It's hard to tell exactly what we are seeing on them, and we can't get anyone inside,"

He ran a wrinkled hand through fly-away silver hair. "The corridors are too narrow to walk a man through, let alone a diver with gear."

Carson sat back in his chair, "What about that SR unit?"

A young man with a startling shock of red hair leaned forward, "Actually, that's not a bad idea. It's been in retirement for a while, but it might work." Every head at the long table turned toward him, "You see, it sweeps away the sediment, separating it from the sea water and storing it in narrow tanks. You couldn't really mount a camera on it, but it could clear the passageways."

Carson's eyes leveled on the boy. He could hardly be more than twenty. His voice cracked when he spoke, but there was confidence in his knowledge.

"Can you pilot the SR?"

"I haven't before. Like I said, it's been retired for-" a bit of a flush obscured a number of freckles, "Well, most of my life, actually. But I can learn."

"How fast?" Carson asked.

"How fast do you want me?"

"End of the week."

The camera floated behind the tall SR unit, flooding the narrow corridor with light and sending real time footage back to monitors in a dozen different laboratories. Ellis kept an eye on Sir, the SR, from the ship that hovered above.

"What do the tanks look like?" Carson leaned in from the side. The expedition was going well. With the sediment cleared, they could see the smooth lines inside the ship. "I want to get every second out of this we can."

Ellis didn't look away from the camera roll, "I've got half an hour left before we have to drop them."

"No dropping. I want the sediment brought to the surface for testing."

Carson leaned forward as Ellis took Sir around a corner. The camera was filled with sharp angles. Everything seemed to be made of one single piece of material. It wasn't quite metal, and it wasn't truly stone.

"That's a door," Ellis' brows knitted as Sir began to clear the unexpected dead end. All around, the camera was filled with dull grey walls.

"I'll be damned. Can we get in?"

"I'm not sure, I'll see what the SR can do."

An arm began to protract from the "chest" of Sir, reaching out. The camera swept over the surfaces in its view, searching for irregularities. Sir's mechanical hand ran over the edges of the doorframe.

"I don't see any kind of latch. We may have to back out."

"No. Keep looking. I want past that door."

Ellis shook his head, but he kept working the controls. Nothing changed. No matter where he dragged Sir's appendage, there was no trigger. The wall and the

door were completely smooth. The tension in his movements began to seep into the silence of the room. The tapping of Carson's fingers on the table distracted him and he rolled his chair back a few inches.

"I'm sorry, there's no way."

Sir began its retreat from the door, the arm retracting into its chest.

"No! I said-" the display went black, "What the hell?"

"We lost the camera," curses poured from Ellis as he parked Sir, moving his full attention to the cam controls. His hands flew over the keyboard in his lap as a secondary screen scrolled diagnostics. "It says everything's online. I don't understand."

"It's not the camera." Carson sank back in his chair, his eyes locked on the camera roll. Ellis' turned to see what he was looking at, and blanched.

"My god."

Sir was sucking a heavy black substance from the water, once more clearing their view. The door that had stood before them was gone. Had they looked, there would have been no sign of it. They did not look. Sir rolled forward, alarms going off as its tanks began to reach capacity.

The camera scrolled, and everything went silent. In the clearing darkness a light shone from nearly twenty feet away. It throbbed and intensified, then faded, and came back. The source, at first obscured, shifted. It appeared, momentarily, only to be a shifting of shadow, then the light surged and the camera died.

The room was still. Hearts stopped.

Carson shook his head, his eyes wide and his usually stolid face blanched.

"What was that?" Ellis was slack in his own chair, Sir's controls forgotten.

The answer came as a single, grinding word came from speakers that had, until then, been silent.

"Death."