

LIGHTLAND

SYNOPSIS

The year is 2029. Cobalt, a deadly, worldwide viral plague, is about to reach American soil. Only one man on earth is immune—unfortunately, he’s been dead for six thousand years.

Archeologist CHRIS TEMPEST has just returned from Africa with a mummy unearthed near the Serengeti Plain. That in itself is remarkable, but he also returns with something even more incredible: the mummy’s bloody heart sealed in an alabaster canopic jar, its DNA miraculously intact.

At his offices in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Tempest makes an amazing discovery: the heart tissue is immune to the Cobalt virus. He eagerly shares his discovery with his girlfriend CATE SEAGRAM, a researcher at the CDC in Atlanta. Cate is part of the team attempting, unsuccessfully, to crack Cobalt’s complex genetic code.

Then Cobalt reveals its hellish face in Harlem, and terrified sufferers descend on Mt. Sinai Hospital near Central Park. Turned away, they set the Upper East Side on fire, including the Met. Chris fights his way through rioters and police cordons, descends into the flooded, dark basement of the burning museum, opens the drawer where the mummy is stored and finds . . . nothing.

Five years later, America is just a yellowing page in the books Chris burns to stay warm in Kalispell, Montana. Ninety nine percent of the country is dead, the few survivors living paranoid, isolated existences. Everyone Chris ever knew is gone, including Cate, he suspects.

But Cate is very much alive and working at a secret CDC installation, studying a black youth named Russell, who is apparently immune to Cobalt. Cate believes Russell to be a Cobalt survivor from Seattle, but in reality Russell is a clone, created from the mummy, which was stolen by SALLY CLOUDBURST, Cate’s boss. Genetic tampering and drugs have sped up Russell’s biological clock and though he is just five years old, he appears to be in his late teens.

The twist: Russell is actually K’TANU, the dead tribesman whose soul has been in Lightland, a paradise-like afterlife, for thousands of years. When the cloning succeeded, K’tanu’s soul was wrenched out of Lightland and thrust back into mortality. He has no memory of his true identity.

(over)

On a satellite TV broadcast, Chris sees Cate and begins searching for her, discovering the location of the research facility: the nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain, Nevada. He heads across the blasted moonscape of post-Cobalt America and is finally reunited with Cate, who introduces him to Russell, mankind's last hope, or so they believe.

But Chris recognizes the boy's features and tells her that Russell must have been cloned from the stolen mummy and heart. Cate knows nothing of this, but is finally convinced by Chris. When they reveal Russell's true origins to him, as evidence Chris holds out a scarab beetle amulet he found clasped in the mummy's hands. Russell touches the amulet and is instantly transported to Lightland, where he is surrounded by black tribesmen babbling at him in an unknown language, while a beautiful woman weeps in his arms and a small, frightened boy hugs his legs.

Thinking Russell is seizing, Chris wrests the amulet away, pulling Russell back to mortality. Russell tells them what happened and Cate and Chris, two skeptical agnostics, are overwhelmed at the stunning revelation: there *is* a soul; there *is* life after death—and that changes everything.

K'tanu's personality gradually emerges, overshadowing Russell's weak persona, insisting that he be taken back to Africa to return his mummy and heart to the family tomb. Otherwise, his soul cannot return to Lightland to be reunited with his loved ones. Time is of the essence, because Russell/K'tanu is dying as a result of the tampering with his biological clock.

Cate, Chris, and K'tanu escape from Yucca Mountain, pursued by Dr. Cloudburst and the U.S. military. A globe-spanning chase ensues, by helicopter through the Grand Canyon; overland to Matamoros, Mexico; by jet across the Atlantic to Egypt; by boat up the muddy Nile to Khartoum, Sudan; by air skirting the mist-shrouded Mountains of the Moon in Uganda; by ferry across the placid waters of Lake Victoria; by truck, bouncing across the dusty Serengeti Plains of Tanzania, finally reaching their destination: an immense collapsed volcano near Olduvai Gorge, where mankind began its remarkable journey 4.3 million years ago.

And the inevitable climax, a showdown between Chris, Cate, and Cloudburst at a bizarre volcano, while a dying K'tanu wearily trudges across the rolling caldera floor, carrying his own corpse in his tired and aching arms, toward the distant, sheer cliffs, to meet his final destiny.