Alien Gods

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«Автор»

2026

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Alien Gods / А. А. Чечитов — «Автор», 2026

The thousand-year sleep is over. The awakening turns into a nightmare: instead of a bright future, Jerry Kerry finds himself in a cult of giants, where death is a duty and sacrifice is the highest honor. In a world where rituals matter more than life and the will of the gods is beyond question, Jerry is the last one still able to cry out the word no.

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A sharp, crawling pain spread through every limb of Jerry Kerry—waking up felt like a refined form of torture. It made sense: hed slept for nearly a thousand years and now had to pull himself together as quickly as possible to make up for lost time.How long have I been here? Jerry asked, almost as if talking to himself.Nine hundred and sixty-three years and twenty-two hours, a nearby voice replied obligingly. And now its time for your purification rite! the tall man standing by the head of the electric capsule bed declared in a flat tone. His height seemed excessive to Jerry.He must be about eight feet tall, Jerry thought. Does anyone even get that tall?Im the smallest in my family, the giant said, as if reading his mind. But it doesnt matter. In your time, humans were tiny. Now even children are born nearly half your height, so to speak.Jerrys head throbbed. He remembered the other people frozen in time alongside him and only briefly wondered how easily the giant had read his thoughts.Where are the others? The ones who fell asleep at the same time as me?Unfortunately, three major accidents at the power station supplying this sector destroyed most of your contemporaries. You and a few others survived only by a fortunate coincidence…Jerry lowered his head. Inside him, it felt as if invisible, double-edged threads had stretched taut. He wanted a drink, and at the same time, he wanted nothing at all. It seemed his very existence was now a ridiculous mistake. But he couldnt bring himself to say that out loud.Do you have a name, big guy?Thirty-two, forty-five.Is that some kind of puzzle? Jerry snorted. Do names like that even exist? Put on the clothes prepared for you, Thirty-two, Forty-five ordered, ignoring the irony.

Enough time has passed for your body to adapt to the new conditions.In the giants right hand, Jerry noticed something like a rosary, with square and triangular shapes alternating along the string. The giant kept fiddling with it as he spoke.Listen… thirty, what was it again?Thirty-two, forty-five, the giant reminded him impassively.Never mind! I cant keep repeating those numbers every time, so Ill call you Fifth.It makes no difference to me, he replied.So, Kerry continued, tell me where the rest of my contemporaries are.The giant frowned.Theyre already undergoing the rite, as I said. And youre ready for it too. Get dressed—quickly!And if I dont?Youre asking stupid questions.Jerry stayed motionless. The giant seemed to think for a moment—and suddenly Jerry felt his will slipping away. He just wanted to end this conversation by doing what he was told.They walked down long corridors painted in bright colors. On the walls hung dried heads that looked like charred skulls. The giant wore a light garment resembling a robe; Jerry was dressed in a pale red robe.What are these? Jerry couldnt help asking, staring at the blackened skulls.Dont worry. Youll know everything soon, the giant muttered, once again guessing his thoughts.I want to know now!Patience isnt your strongest suit. Thats fine—well fix it.When the giant led Jerry out of the flat, disc-shaped building, holding him by the right arm, they stepped into a wide square enclosed by a palisade of thick, sharpened logs set vertically in two rows. Several hundred tall people, similar to Fifth—some even taller—stood facing Jerry. The warmth of daylight mixed with the heat from bonfires: flames danced in stone and metal bowls mounted on pillars and ledges. No matter how hard he looked, Jerry couldnt spot any power stations or anything resembling familiar energy sources.How did you preserve the language exactly as it was when I fell asleep? Jerry asked. What do you mean?As far as I remember, languages tend to change over time due to external circumstances, even within short periods. Yet were talking as if I never slept at all.Its simpler than you think, Fifth replied. Our species is capable of mimicry. Today, we can find common ground with any being in the entire universe. Drums began to sound from all sides. The square, swarming with giants, slowly swayed to the pulsing rhythm. Fifth was dancing too.

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