

Name _____

Date _____ Class _____

5 *The Andromeda Strain*

—Michael Crichton

Synopsis

The Andromeda Strain is a science-fiction novel about a biological disaster. An unmanned satellite contaminated with a microorganism mysteriously returns to Earth. The satellite lands in an Arizona town, and the organism kills all but two of the town's inhabitants—an elderly man and an infant.

A research team of four scientists, all experts in their field, is called to Wildfire, a secret laboratory located beneath the desert in Nevada. The laboratory is equipped with state-of-the-art equipment. Sealed off from the world except for a telecommunications link with national security, the scientists work to discover how the microorganism killed the inhabitants of Piedmont, Arizona. They also discover why two people survived. They work scientifically to prevent the spread of the Andromeda strain, but their work is riddled with mistakes.

Their desperate search for an answer to the puzzle of the Andromeda strain becomes complicated when the seal is broken in the autopsy room. This breach leads to the realization that Andromeda has mutated to a harmless organism. However, shortly after this realization, Andromeda dissolves the seals to the facility core. When contamination of the core occurs, there are three minutes to stop an automated atomic bomb that will self-destruct the laboratory. If the bomb goes off, it will spread Andromeda by providing it with energy to multiply and mutate again. The scientists race against time to keep the bomb from exploding. After the catastrophe is avoided, the scientists predict that the organism will move into the upper atmosphere and cause no further problems on the surface.

Student Focus

While literary topics such as plot and character development are important, you should pay close attention to the topics of scientific inquiry and method. What sort of errors are made by the characters? Notice that the author fails to address the question of whether Andromeda had nucleic acids.

Correlation to Subject Matter

Viruses, Bacteria, Disease, Mutations, Biochemistry, and Genetics