

# GNOSTIC - EXCERPT

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DEATH WAVE CHRONICLES  
BOOK 4

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"SOMETHING'S APPROACHING FROM THE SOUTH-EAST." NALA pointed at the blip on the radar screen. "It's coming in fast."

Heads turned to watch. As there were six occupants and only four seats, they took turns sitting during the long journey from Giza. It was Cataleya's and Ileana's turn to stand; they were behind the seats, slouching against the side bulkheads.

"Anything to do with the two drones that have been following us?"

"Didn't we lose them?"

"There were four. So, yes and no." Dan shrugged. "They can track us by satellite as well."

As the dot on the screen closed in, it separated into two. In less than thirty seconds, a pair of fighter jets shot past.

"Who is it now?" Ileana peered out, but the aircraft were too quick to see any identifiers.

"We're over Iran, almost crossing into Pakistan." Dan looked up from his tablet. "I'm not sure what corporation is running this region."

"ICON?" Nala suggested.

"I don't think they have much sway here." The journalist shrugged. "Still too much friction from past aggression for any 'western corporation' to get a foothold, but maybe they're pulling the strings on another corp."

"Don't they ever give up?" Ileana asked.

"Not if they still think we've got millions in diamonds and ancient artefacts," Nala replied.

The jets came very close before banking sharply. Their roar was still faintly audible through the hull as they began to circle. The pod rocked in the turbulence of their wake. Amber lights flashed, and the auto-pilot adjusted altitude to avoid the worst of it.

"Is there some other way to get to Tibet?" Rhyllien looked at the small screen showing the topography within a one-hundred-kilometre radius.

"Sure ... it's not like we logged any flight path. I thought you

knew navigation AIs take care of it all. The sky is literally the limit."

"How about circling further north?" she suggested.

"North it is," Dan tapped the screen to begin changing course. "Going south takes us further away, too far east would take us over India. Much of that area is still too unstable."

"Can we go faster?" Ileana asked, watching the fighters as they circled. "And higher?"

Dan shook his head. "They can go much faster and higher than us."

"Then go as slow as you can," Cat suggested. "We don't know how far they flew to be here. Maybe a slower speed will be more of a deterrent. What about going lower?" She was peering over Rhyllien's shoulder.

"Is there some way you can lose them?"

"You do realise I'm not a pilot? The best I can do is up and down, fast and slow."

"*Idiota.*" Cataleya studied the controls briefly, then flicked a switch. "Autopilot, *sim?*"

"Umm, yep." Dan looked more embarrassed than annoyed. "We can do that." He typed quickly on the keys. "I'm programming it to maintain fifteen hundred meters above ground level at the slowest speed."

"Those mountains are much higher than that," Ileana remarked, looking at the vast rocky landscape in the distance.

"*Ground level*, not sea level. *Idiota.* As the ground rises, so do we, and with the slower speed, if need be, we'll have time to avoid any sudden rises or falls—meaning cliffs. But at a slower speed, it'll take us over an hour." Dan grinned at getting the opportunity to return the name-calling, but got a punch in the shoulder for his efforts.

The new beeping from the radar unit caught everyone's attention.

"Looks like we have more incoming. Slower. Not jets this time, and coming from the east."

"It's like they anticipated us."

"Who could know?" Dan prompted.

"Someone's following our progress—what we've been up to—and made some accurate assumptions," Cataleya said. "It's what I'd do."

"I very much doubt I'm the only one to know of chakra locations," Rhyllien agreed. "Someone somewhere has been brainstorming what we've been doing. They've probably come up with several scenarios, as there are hundreds of chakra points, but none as powerful as the ones we're interested in. Once we made a pattern of the chakras, they could deduce our next location."

As she spoke, several armed hoverpods appeared and closed the distance.

"I wonder if these people heard about the outcome of Giza the last time someone sent pods after us?" Dan asked.

Rhyllien sighed. "One way to find out, I guess." She closed her eyes, took several deep, slow breaths, and began her work.

Outside, sparks flew from the nearest hoverpod. It dropped from the sky, though from the looks of it, it was still under some control.

"I'm not killing anyone if I can help it," Rhyll gasped before turning her attention to the next one. "It's harder *not* to blow the whole power pack." She began concentrating again, but the remaining hoverpods quickly moved further away, then strafed the air around them as a warning.

"They're too far away now." Rhyllien wiped sweat from her brow. "Too difficult."

Nala, sitting up front beside Dan, turned and handed her a flask to drink.

There was static on the radio before a male voice with a thick Arabic accent spoke to them.

"By order of the Supreme Leader, Garaban Bin'Samanil, glorious and wise ruler of the New Arab League, you will follow us and land your pod in the designated area. If not, we will force

you to the ground at which time we cannot guarantee your safety.”

“*Merda!*” Cataleya spat, staring out the port.

Rhyllien reached out a calming hand to hold her mother. The trauma suffered over the last thirty minutes seemed to age her.

“Who the hell are these clowns?” Dan shook his head, bewildered, quickly tapping at his tablet.

“Whoever they are, they’ve a few armed hoverpods at their disposal.” Cataleya watched with foreboding.

Leaving her mother to rest, Rhyllien stood and stepped forward to the radio.

“We have urgent business in Tibet,” she announced. “Any delay will result in many needless deaths. If you approach again, I cannot guarantee *your* safety.”

Several minutes passed before there was any response.

“One of the hatches is opening.” Dan pointed to a hoverpod on their starboard side.

Others turned to look out the side window.

“Is that a spear?” Ileana speculated.

“It’s a harpoon,” Nala said, craning her neck over Ileana’s shoulder.

“They’re shooting harpoons now?” Dan asked, incredulous as a bolt shot out. It struck the hull but glanced off the curved surface.

Another craft moved in as the previous hoverpod backed away, reeling in the spent harpoon.

“Seems they were serious when they said they want to capture, not kill,” Ileana observed. Like the previous pod, the side hatch opened, and a harpoon was visible.

Dan flicked off the autopilot and attempted to fly erratically to evade a successful hit. Before he could do so, the next shot was more accurate and penetrated the hull. Loud hissing emanated from the puncture.

“*Caramba!*” Ileana jumped back at the sudden appearance of the barbed steel tip of the harpoon nearby.

Now that the two craft were connected, both the hoverpods jolted as the line began to tighten with the buffeting of the flight. Those standing grabbed whatever was handy to prevent falling.

"After the artifacts and diamonds," Dan surmised.

"As I suggested, someone must've planned this, predicting our route." Rhyllien concentrated again, but before she could remove the next pod, another harpoon—this one on the other side—snagged them. Now their pod was strung between two larger and more powerful pods.

Dan attempted to increase power, but aside from a surge in the pitch and volume of their drives, it was not enough to counteract the combined pull of the two other craft. In a short time, they noticed the change in direction and altitude.

"Looks like we're in for a rough landing," Dan warned. "Everyone buckle up or grab something."

Cataleya undid the straps in the small cargo area and instructed Ileana to sit on the backpacks. "We use this webbing to secure us!" The moment her comrade sat, she joined her. Together, they clicked the straps into place, tightened them, and held on.

"Dan, don't fight against it," Rhyllien advised.

The three pods' descent was much smoother now, but at the last moment, one of the harpoons pulled free. The whiplash caused the other pod to veer sharply, making it roll upon landing. With no force to oppose its pull, the other military pod also swerved and landed roughly, snapping the remaining harpoon line.

With their pod's drives powered down, Rhyllien and her friends dropped the last meters, landing on the rough ground with a harsh jolt, causing alarms to start loudly beeping as the lights on the console flashed.

The occupants flopped like rag dolls. Imogen inhaled sharply, letting out a soft groan.

Quick as they could manage, the two Brazilian commandos were up and checking on the others.

The group were all shaken, but managed to unstrap themselves. Rhyllien went straight to her mother's side. In moments, she had assessed the chest injury and placed her mother into a calming, painless sleep.

Satisfied that no other serious harm had come to anyone, Cataleya drew her gun and moved to the door. Ileana squinted through the window while Nala kept her eye on the skylight above, used as an emergency hatch.

Faint voices, sounding like orders, could be heard as the other drives shut down.

"Comparing the size of those pods with ours, I'd estimate about ten soldiers," Cataleya advised them.

"I have an idea," Rhyll said.

"What are you going to do?" Dan asked, glancing towards Nala.

"I'm going to end this." Worried for her mother, but focused on the imminent problem, Rhyll sat back in her chair and closed her eyes. It took a few minutes for her calm to replace her anger.

Clouds of dust and sand swirled, and the viewable area outside quickly became obscured.

"I can see little through this mess," Ileana complained.

"It does look ... peculiar." Dan limped over to the window.

With all the drives off, the cloud of sand and dust should have abated, but instead it continued to swirl, with bits of dried vegetation and leaves mixed in.

"I think that was her plan." Nala went to Rhyll's side, watching her. "Rhyllien?"

Her friend was immobile and relaxed, though a look of concentration furrowed her brow.

"Is she okay?" Cat risked a glance.

"I think she's busy." Nala put a hand on her shoulder. "Yes. She is doing this."

"Doing what?" Dan asked.

"That." Nala pointed outside. "The wind storm."

"She can do that?" Ileana questioned.

Nala shrugged. "After what we've seen her do already, I'd not be surprised. She created her own death wave back in Winchester."

"She is 'nature incarnate', as your grandfather said," Cataleya reminded them.

Rhyllien's arm shot out. Her hand latched onto Nala's. There was the briefest spark.

"Ouch!" Nala winced, more out of shock than pain.

"It's getting stronger," Ileana informed them. She jumped back and drew her pistol as a black-uniformed man hit, then slid off the windscreen, leaving a smear of blood.

Their pod rocked slightly in the strong wind's buffeting.

"Look at that!"

They turned to Dan, who was staring straight up.

Above them, the sky was nearly clear, but it felt as if they were looking through a funnel, with a swirling spiral of sand and dust encircling them and rising higher and higher.

Amazed by what their friend was capable of, they instinctively ducked when they heard a loud explosion outside.

"Did she do that too?" Ileana asked, craning her head to see around the side of the pod through the window.

Dan turned to say something to Nala, but the words froze on his lips.

"Hey, Nala. You okay?" he asked a moment later.

The two soldiers followed his gaze.

"I ... think so." Nala shrugged, watching Rhyll.

More gunshots were heard, getting louder.

"Are they shooting blind?" Dan ducked, but there was no indication the pod had been hit.

Suddenly, there was a thump outside their hatch.

Cataleya moved closer and knelt by the bulkhead. "Everyone get down!"

The hatch was partially forced open, and Cat fired at the dark shape looming into view. They were so close, there was no way she missed.

She squinted to avoid the irritation from the thick dust billowing in.

Already activated, a canister rolled around her feet emitting a white vapour. She fired several more rounds before coughing at the choking dust and fumes.

“Gas!” she coughed. Dropping her weapon, she reached for her nose plugs.

Too late!

As she was the closest, she was the first to crumple to the deck. The others succumbed moments later.



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