

SPHINX - EXCERPT

THE DEATH WAVE CHRONICLES
BOOK 3

ANDRE JONES



“IT’S ALL SO ... *ALIEN!*” Rhyll had no other words to describe what she was looking at. Everything inside the UFO control room had a uniform appearance; only the slightly varied shades of black gave it any depth or detail. *Black on black.*

“Any lighting?” She stepped inside warily, looking down as her shirt glowed and tiny specks of dust particles that she hadn’t known were there stood out against the fabric. “Black light?” Rhyll raised her hand, still unsure about the alien covering her hand like a glove.

“Very close to ultraviolet.”

It was an eerie feeling, having a voice directly inside your head.

The control room was devoid of anything recognisable as furnishings, and by her judgement, it took up half of the ship’s interior. The wall separating the rear half of the ship had no visible doorway. There was a blocky structure against the opposite, curved wall. Rhyll touched the surface, wondering if it was frictionless like the hull. She didn’t even know *what* she was looking at.

“The navigation console.”

“If you say so.” Rhyll could make no sense of the featureless surface. There were no monitors or gauges she could recognise, and no other doors apart from the one entrance outlined by a faint strip of light. Her eyes adjusted slightly, getting used to the dimness.

The interior became slightly more apparent when the light increased. “*That is the brightest I can make it.*”

“Thanks. It’s certainly better than before.” Rhyll looked up. The entire ceiling now had a slight purple glow. “Do these aliens sit, or stand? Do they have legs—”

Part of the floor distended, forming a black bubble as she spoke.

“Erk.” She stepped back, unsure.

"Your seat, and yes, they had legs as well as other appendages—"

"I don't need to know." Warily, Rhyll touched the bubble with her bare foot. It was softer than she'd expected, yet it appeared to be made of the same hard material that she'd been standing on. She reached out with her hand to push the *chair* experimentally.

"It's like a beanbag!" Rhyll said once she sat. When she looked to the console, the chair moved her closer. There was nothing like a viewport or window. With every surface a variation of dark shadow, it was hard to distinguish floor from wall from ceiling.

"Are we still in the hangar?" Rhyll realised part of her discomfort was she now had absolutely no perception of outside, even moreso than when she was a prisoner.

"We are stationary."

"Are the guards still there? What are they doing?" She was completely and utterly cut off from the Earth. It was not a sensation that appealed.

Like a curtain lifting, a viewport appeared. Rhyll could now see into the dim hangar through the hull.

The hoverpod lay in a crumpled heap against the far wall. Several more soldiers had arrived to join the others who'd begun to fan out, surrounding the flying saucer. There was no sound, but the bright muzzle flashes in the dim hangar indicated they were discharging weapons.

"Do not be alarmed. Primitive projectile weapons have no effect."

"Oh, yes, the frictionless surface." As she wriggled in the seat, the diamond dug into her thigh. She moved it to her breast pocket.

"Correct, among other things."

"Is everything primitive to you?"

“So far.”

“How old are you? Where are you from?”

“As you measure time, I first became sentient 1.2 million Earth years ago. You have no reference to my origin other than Andromeda.”

“Andromeda? The galaxy? How did you get here? In this craft?”

“The craft I journeyed on was destroyed emerging from a temporal rift.”

“You were on another craft? Then how—”

“I was adrift in space until the crew of this craft detected me. We later crashed here.”

“Is there another hangar? I only sensed the one.”

“That craft was at another facility.”

“Area 52? They said it was destroyed.”

“Correct. In a failed attempt to conduct research on an antimatter propulsion system.”

“And the owners? The other pilots?”

“Are no longer functioning.”

“Functioning? Oh ...” *Dead.* “But you survived?”

“I function. My self-repair capabilities are advanced, but very limited in this location.”

“You mean in Area 53?”

“I mean this world.”

“Oh.” Rhyll tried to fathom all of this. “How long were you adrift in space?”

“The equivalent of 103.4 Earth years.”

Rhyll’s face paled at the thought of a century drifting aimlessly in space. If the things that had happened to her hadn’t happened, she doubted she’d believe any of it. “I’ve only been missing for several days. My friends will be worried sick, but I can’t contact them.”

“Friends?”

“Dan and Nala. Good people.” The glove remained silent. Rhyll waited, realising the silence meant it was working on something. There was a sudden booming hiss all around her. She winced, cupping her ears tightly and looking around worriedly. “What’s that?” she yelled.

“An attempt at communication. Incompatible primitive interface—”

“He ... He ... I ... lo ... lo?” The volume reduced until it was bearable. The sound was badly garbled at first, but quickly resolved into audible speech.

“Dan?” Rhyll sat up, gradually recognising the voice. She looked at the glove in amazement.

“Rhy ... ll? Where t ... he hell are you?”

“Modulating signal now.”

“You won’t believe me. I’m in an alien spacecraft.” She was relieved the sound was far less garbled.

“Quit ... pulling my leg. We almost died in a plane crash and I’m not in the mood. My phone just started making a crazy noise. It’s weird. No number showed—”

“Plane crash? Why are you in a plane?” In the background she could hear the wail of sirens and people yelling, and thought about the plane they’d almost crashed into.

“Scenic Air Tours,” Dan was saying.

“I’m missing for days, and you’re taking a scenic tour? Where’s Nala?” Feeling frustrated, Rhyll had to get up and pace. As she tried to stand the *bubble* expanded and contorted, pushing her into an upright position. *What the—!*

“I’m here, *chica*.” Nala could be heard over the background noise. “So glad to hear your voice. We were so worried—”

“So worried that you went on a tour?” Rhyll started pacing. It didn’t seem to matter where she spoke, the sound was all around her.

"It was part of the plan to find you ... sort of."

"Your plan, or Dan's?"

"Hey!" She heard Dan protest. "Thurston said you had a drone with you. He traced the GPS to Sedona. We arrived—"

"That's where *I* am!"

"In Sedona? Seriously?"

"I did see a sign with Sedona Airport on it. How many Sedonas are there with a secret research facility underneath?"

"It's really not so secret," Dan laughed.

"You were kidding about the UFO thing though, right?" Nala asked.

"Oh ye of little faith. Just wait and see."

While she spoke, the hangar disappeared as the craft whisked up and outside. At no stage did she feel any movement. She was now looking at trees and sky. There was a blaze to one side, and she recognised the airport buildings to the far right as the same ones she saw near the car park.

"I took the liberty of tracing your friend's location." The craft quickly glided to a barely perceptible landing among the cars.

"You said a plane crashed. Did it catch fire?" Rhyll asked. The airport fire brigade were now in attendance.

"No. Those sirens you're probably hearing are for a substation that just blew up. We're okay."

"I blew that up!" Rhyll replied as the door irised opened. It was both fascinating and uncomfortable to see segments of the wall spin and retract into itself.

Surprised the walkway between the ramp and the entrance was no longer frictionless, Rhyll stepped outside and looked around wildly.

"I'm in the car park," she said.

Two familiar figures moved away from the crowd, first at a walk, then they began running as they saw her, calling her name. Dan's loping gait suggested he might have injured a leg.

Other spectators of the fire turned to the shouts. Upon seeing the alien craft, they started yelling and pointing. Some people screamed and ran away, but a third of the crowd surged forward, now videoing the alien craft and not the blaze. Others were speaking earnestly into their phones and gesticulating.

Dan and Nala ran to the edge of the craft, sharing equally amazed glances between Rhyll and the spaceship.

"It really *is* a UFO!" Dan said, flabbergasted.

"He catches on quick, doesn't he?" Nala laughed. She jumped back nervously when a ramp started to emerge from the hull, then rushed up it to join the girl at the top.

Rhyll gave her a huge hug.

Dan strode briskly up the ramp, eyes as wide as his gaping mouth.

"Quick, follow me." Rhyll led them inside before the crowd got too close.

Her friends stared in disbelief at the interior, too stunned to be scared.

"How long have you had this?" Nala asked, looking around in fascination.

"About ten minutes, but I've been in Sedona for a couple of days."

"Black on black ... I don't see it catching on." Dan looked dubiously into the darker recesses. "Where are the lights?"

"The visual range of the previous occupants was different than yours." The sound of the alien entity was all around them now.

“What the fuck!” Nala and Dan jumped, looking around for the disembodied voice.

“Utilisation of audio is now logical for efficient communication.”

“It’s ok, it’s ... a friend.” She pointed to her glove.

“And here I was thinking you were starting a fashion fad for the new world.” Dan looked at the glove curiously when Rhyll raised it. He was cautious not to touch it. “Where did you find it?”

“It found *me* really. I was in a lab looking for a diamond and this sort of ... melded onto me.” She showed Nala. “I don’t know why, though.”

“I felt a worthy presence, and I sensed you were wanting to depart. It was a beneficial melding.”

“Yes, but why me?” Rhyll asked.

“There was no other likely candidate until I felt your presence. My goal is to return to my place of origin, but I owe you a debt.”

“I thought you said this craft wasn’t capable of getting you to Andromeda.”

“Correct, but it is quite capable of getting around this galaxy. I may find a more suitable craft, or even another temporal rift. In the meantime I will continue my repair. The components required cannot be located in this sector.”

“You came from Andromeda?” Dan repeated, incredulous.

“It did. I can only assume getting to Giza in Egypt would be easy?” Rhyll asked.

“29.9772962 North, 31.1324955 East.”

“What would that be?” Dan asked.

“The coordinates for the Giza Necropolis.”

“That was a quick calculation,” Dan acknowledged.

“It was already in the ship’s nav-data.”

"They have been here before, haven't they?" Rhyll stated, not sounding surprised.

"Correct." Two more bubbles sprouted from the floor. "Please be seated."

Dan jumped back. "What the hell?"

"It's okay, Dan. They're seats — like beanbags." Rhyll flopped into hers to show it was safe.

"I hate beanbags." Dan sat tentatively, as did Nala.

"Oh. This is great." Nala settled in comfortably.

"Does it do massage too?" When it started vibrating, Dan smiled. "I could get used to this."

"Greater efficiency can be achieved by integrating with the craft. Do not be alarmed."

The glove dripped off Rhyll's hand. She wasn't distressed, though from Dan and Nala's screwed up faces they obviously thought it looked gross. The entity now formed a dark lump of jelly and flowed across the floor, sliding up the side of the console where it flattened to almost nothing on the top.

Rhyll found her tongue. "That was ... *different*. If you're not a glove, what are you?"

"In your terms, I would be a Quantum Molecular Assembler."

Rhyll thought long and hard, shaking her head. "Nope. No idea. What about you two?"

Nala and Dan shook their heads, still getting over the sight of the dark lump squirming slug-like across the floor.

"My function is to modify matter from one form to another as the need arises."

"Like an alchemist?" Dan suggested.

"We will begin," was all they heard in reply.

There was no discernible engine start; no vibration or noise. The Sedona airport receded at an incredible rate.

"Wait!" Dan abruptly tried to sit up and was nearly thrown out of the chair as it contorted to assist him getting up.

"What is it?" Rhyll asked, concerned.

Dan regained his balance. "Our gear! We need to go back to our hotel and get it."

"For a couple of burner phones and a camera?" Rhyll looked at him like he was crazy.

"We really, really do," Dan insisted. "Can you take us to La Auberge de Sedona?" he spoke towards the console.

Rhyll turned to Nala in confusion. "Seriously?" she mouthed.

Nala shrugged with a wink.

"Lauberge de Sedona."

"Yes. I'm not sure of the address, but — Oh." Dan looked stupidly at the resort's car park through the viewscreen.

The door irised open, letting in the cool night air.

Seeing what happened to Dan when he stood up, Nala made to climb out of her chair; it expanded and contorted. She calmly stepped over and nudged Dan, who was staring dumbfounded out the door.

"We'll be back in a few minutes," she called over her shoulder to Rhyll.

The ramp extended to the ground for them.

While she waited, Rhyll looked about the interior. "I assume once we get to Egypt, you'll be wanting to go your own way?"

"Only once I reach full functionality will it be possible to return to my origins. What you see here is only an insignificant portion of my full capabilities."

"I see."

"However, since you assisted in my freedom, I am at your service."

"That's great to hear. With your ability and this craft, I can complete my task much more quickly."

"Efficiency is part of my design parameters."

"Do you know what's happening here? What my task is?"

"I am aware of the information received on all frequencies, which gives me insight into your tasking."

"What do you think?"

"I think a culture that goes about destroying its own habitat is foolish; a culture that does this does not deserve the privilege of travelling to other worlds until it matures sufficiently."

With the reflections of a million-year-old entity coursing through her mind, Rhyll spied Nala and Dan returning briskly through the car park. They clambered up the ramp and strode inside. Rhyll again noticed Dan had a slight limp.

"Sorry about that." Dan was all smiles, placing a bulky bag as well as his backpack by the back wall. "Egypt, here we come."

"Boys and their toys." Rhyll rolled her eyes.

"Hey, I've been thinking; Quantum Molecular Assembler is a mouthful. How does Q sound for our new alien friend?" Dan asked as he flopped into the chair.

"Pfft." Nala placed her bag behind her seat. "As long as you don't start calling me R, or Nala N."

"He started a long time ago; don't forget he already calls your mother *Mrs E*."

"It's efficient," he argued.

The ramp had already retracted, and the door silently spun closed. Through the viewscreen, the resort receded rapidly as the craft moved at lightning speed. There was no sensation of movement. The craft had turned so the view was forward and looking down.

Uncertain what to expect, they all nonetheless gasped when the craft rocketed through the atmosphere.

“How fast can this thing go?” Dan asked.

“Velocity is relevant to requirements and dependant on location. Greater speeds are achieved the further the craft is from gravitational forces.”

“No heat from friction?” Dan asked. He’d expected the hull to glow from such a high speed through the atmosphere.

“The hull’s almost frictionless,” Rhyll told him. Like the others, she was both mesmerised and terrified, trying to take it all in.

They were beyond the atmosphere in a matter of minutes. The trio stared outside, gobsmacked at their first sight of space: the inky blackness, the brilliance of the stars, the moon in its last quarter, and the Earth curving below in shadow with the major cities clearly visible by their lights.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?” Nala gasped in awe.

Rhyll nodded. “And worth saving.”

“And it isn’t flat,” Dan chuckled. He had pulled his camera out and was busy snapping pictures.

“Might be easier if you record it,” Nala suggested.

“Of course. I can get stills off vid.” Dan smiled at his absent-mindedness. He set his camera on the console to record the screen. “I must remember to replace my tripod,” he muttered.

Overlaying the vista of the Earth below, a range of alien symbols appeared on the screen like a heads-up display.

“Does that show the speed and altitude? We can’t read it,” Dan stated.

“Correct. I will adjust...”

“Wow,” Dan gasped when the symbols changed to Earth

standard. He tried to do the math in his head. "That's over twenty thousand kilometres an hour!"

"5.79288 kilometres per second for optimal trajectory, reaching an altitude of five point five thousand kilometres."

The girls were also reading the display in awe.

"Minus a hundred and thirty; I might need a couple of jumpers outside." Nala shivered at the thought of it. "I wonder how hot it gets in the sunlight?"

"Wearing anything other than spacesuits would be fatal. This craft has several suits that will be suitable for your body type."

"Speaking of sunlight, here comes the terminator," Dan noted.

"Terminator?" Rhyll asked him.

"He's trying to show off. It's the line separating night and day." Nala pointed to the oncoming brightness.

Dan laughed when Rhyll stuck her tongue out at him.

The screen dimmed as a filter materialised to shut out the intense glare of the sun.

"Good morning," Nala said softly.

"There you go; one hundred, one-fifty ... two ... two-fifty-six degrees Celsius," he read as the craft crossed the terminator into broad daylight.

The unmistakeable landmass of North America drifted south, with Hudson Bay now below them.

"Why are we flying north?" Rhyll asked. "Egypt is further south."

"Due to the curvature of the planet, this is the most efficient route."

"How long before we get to Egypt?"

"Arrival will be in thirty-six minutes."

The trio watched, mesmerised as the southern tip of

Greenland, then Iceland and the North Atlantic Ocean came into view.

"I wonder how things are in England since we left?" Dan muttered when he saw the United Kingdom.

In a corner of the screen in front of him another image materialised, this time showing a news channel. There was a mass of people in the streets of London. Many police were in attendance, standing side by side with the various corporate militia.

"I can't believe it!" Nala shook her head. "You're in space for the first time ever and all you want to do is watch the news?"

"Hey. Don't blame me. I was just wondering. Q put the TV on," Dan defended himself.

"I was merely attempting to appease your curiosity."

The news broadcast continued, though muted, flashing to other hotspots around the world.

"Doesn't look like anyone is rioting this time," Dan observed.

"Looks more like someone's holding a rally. Shit!" Nala exclaimed. "Are you seeing this, Rhyll?"

Despite Europe now passing below, Rhyll was silently staring at the TV display.

There were crowds of people, but as Dan said, they weren't rioting. Dozens of placards were waving with her image clearly shown. Many signs with *Protector of the Earth*, *Messenger of Gaia*, and *What have you done with Rhyllien?* were also frequently displayed.

"At least they spelled your name right," Dan noted.

"What's going on?" Rhyll's face reddened at what she saw.

"Q, can we have volume?" Nala asked.

"... crowds gathering, all chanting the name of the myste-

rious redhead seen here at the Samhain Festival at Stonehenge.” The news showed clips of Dan’s video interview, Rhyll kneeling with the lions and walking among the druids. “Miss Rhyllien Ellis hasn’t been seen since. Many now believe the corporates might have her in custody.”

The images changed to other venues. One in particular had a large, snow-capped mountain as a backdrop.

Rhyll gasped. “That looks like Mount Shasta. I’ve not even been there yet.”

“I said you’d be a force to be reckoned with. Now you’ve got a world-wide following!”

Rhyll fell back into her chair in disbelief. “Why?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” Nala knelt beside her. “Your message is getting out, being listened to far more than what my grandfather could have achieved. He’d be proud of you.”

“Proud? Of me?”

“Of course, for doing what he couldn’t: saving the lives of those that matter, the ones that will live on as stewards of the living world, the future guardians of nature.”

“I ... I don’t know what to say ...”

Nala looked to Dan for a moment.

“There’s plenty of time. I’m sure something will come up,” he said.

“In the meantime, you’ve got the fourth diamond to place,” Nala encouraged, scowling at Dan.



If you like to read more, please click on the link to find
SPHINX - The Death Wave Chronicles in your favourite
store, along with my other novels.

Available in ebook and paperback.

books2read.com/u/4ApDep

