

Chapter 1 of The Prophet Wars 4: Judgment Day

by Thomas Emson

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ROBBIE sat up. “What was that?”

“What did you say?” Tanya was sunbathing. She lay on her back in her bikini, her mind drifting.

“That noise. Something crashed into the sea.”

“Crashed? What are you talking about?” She didn’t get up.

“Crashed. Didn’t you hear it?”

“No, I didn’t. Relax, Robbie. It’s not the end of the world — just yet.”

Might be, he thought. Those prophets had been warning about our impending doom for a while, and there had been more and more disasters around the world recently. Earthquakes, storms, tsunamis, floods, wars.

But you wouldn’t think it if you were Robbie and Tanya, teenagers lapping up the sun on a blisteringly hot day at Wells-Next-The-Sea in Norfolk on England’s east coast.

The radio said this morning it would be the hottest day on record in the UK:

June 30, 2027 — 52C.

But this heat wasn’t a surprise. The weather had been all over the place since this all kicked off a few years ago.

And for the past few weeks, it had been rain, rain, rain. Tanya had been sulking about it for ages. She was a sun-lover and had been yearning for the heat. So now that it was finally here, she was not going to let her brother spoil it with either his practical jokes or his over-reaction.

“Could’ve been a comet,” said Robbie. He was looking out to sea. It looked calm, just a sheet of blue, reflecting a perfect summer sky. “Or a plane, or—”

“Or what?” She sat up, irritated. “I’m trying to relax, OK? I’m trying to forget about what’s out there in the world.”

Robbie got flustered. “Just because we live in a place like this doesn’t mean the world can’t get us, Tanya.”

At fifteen, he was a nearly two years younger than his sister. Some of those prophets were about the same age as they were. The prophets who had been helping the government to predict the terrible things that had blighted the earth in recent times. The prophets who they said could move things with their minds, could part waters. The prophets who went to war against each other — or so the story went.

It was hard to know what was true these days. Facebook and Twitter, places where you normally got the truth a few years back, were offline now. There were a few news channels, but you couldn’t trust the Mainstream Media — that’s what their dad used to say.

Tanya made a growling noise. She was so angry. Why didn’t everyone just leave her alone? She wanted to sunbathe, to chill out, to forget about the dying earth.

And now her brother, who was always going on about the end of the world anyway, had brought all the bad stuff with him to the beach.

She hadn’t wanted him to come, but she was a bit scared of going on her own. There were gangs of boys roaming around these days, robbing people, beating people up, taking girls.

To be honest, Robbie wouldn’t have been able to protect her: he was a weakling. But going as a pair made it a little less likely they would be victims. Rumour was that these gangs — especially the ones around here — were more likely to attack people on their own.

But now, with Robbie fantasising about falling stars or whatever, she reckoned she should have taken her chances and come on her own.

She looked at the sea and saw nothing but blue.

It was such a beautiful beach, with golden sand, rolling dunes, and behind them a thick pine forest. So tranquil and private, it made you feel as if it was your own private beach.

Today, Tanya felt like that - she and Robbie were the only ones here. These days, people didn’t venture out very often, so if you were brave enough, you got places like this to yourself.

“I can’t see anything,” she said, frustrated.

“Take your sunnies off, then,” said Robbie.

Tanya sighed, took her sunglasses off, stared out to sea then shook her head. “There’s nothing there, Robbie.”

“I heard something crash into the sea, Tanya.”

“You were dreaming or something.”

“I was wide awake.”

“You’re such a pain in the neck, Robbie.” She slumped back on her towel, put the sunglasses back on. “Just go home if you’re going to bother me.”

That shut him up. Peace at last, she thought. She relaxed again, enjoying the sun on her body. She could imagine her skin turning a golden brown. She’d look great. Shame there was no school so she could show off her tan, her long sun-kissed legs.

“Tanya, you’d better look at this,” said Robbie.

She swore at him and sat up, and then shut up really quickly.

She slowly pushed her sunglasses up her brow. Her mouth was open. She blinked, just to make sure she was not seeing things.

Way out at sea, the waves were rippling. It was as if a shark — a very big shark — was heading towards shore, its dorsal fin slicing the surface. Though you couldn't see a fin. And she didn't think there were sharks round here. But who knew these days with the oceans getting warmer, with the weather getting weirder?

Whatever it was, it was coming towards the shore — towards Robbie and Tanya — at a rate of knots.

“I told you,” said Robbie, “I told you I heard something. What is it?”

He was up on his feet. And that made Tanya tense. Pins and needles raked her, head to toe. She leapt to her feet, partly because Robbie had irritated her, partly because she was actually a bit frightened.

Whatever was coming through from the sea was still coming — and very fast. Heading right towards the beach, towards them.

“Maybe we should go,” she said, scooping up her towel, covering herself in it as if whatever was in the water might find her alluring — and delicious to eat. She started backing away, but Robbie was frozen, staring at the parting waves. She grabbed his arm and said, “Come on, we should go—”

He snapped his arm away.

“Robbie,” she said, panicking now, “Robbie, we have to—”

It was a ball of light, or that's what it looked like to Tanya — it exploded out of the water, shot up into the sky.

It was so bright, her eyes watered and she blinked.

She thought she saw a human-like shape in the light, but also wings — huge wings, like an eagle's. But bigger.

Her eyes traced the fiery ball as it first went up, and then came down, plunging towards the ground. And she held her breath, preparing for impact.

It smashed into the beach, causing an explosion, scattering sand far and wide.

Tanya and Robbie were sprayed, and she flinched as hot sand burned her skin, went in her mouth, her eyes, and she turned away.

And when she turned back, her guts nearly fell out.

The figure standing on the shore, some fifty yards away from the siblings, was at least eight-feet tall.

The creature was marble-white, head to toe, apart from its golden hair, which shimmered like the precious metal, and its ozone-blue eyes, gaseous in deep sockets.

Tanya looked it up and down. It appeared to be naked, but it had no genitals. It had muscles and looked like one of those ancient statues — Greek or Roman. The water seemed to fall off its body in droplets, as its skin were non-stick.

The apparition also had wings, golden ones, twice its height. They seemed to be made of feathers, and the creature fluttered them as if it were drying them in the warm air.

The word that came to Tanya's mind was: Angel.

Then Robbie said, “We should go now.”

It was Tanya's turn to be grabbed. Her brother yanked at her arm, and this brought her out of her stare. She looked at Robbie. He was pale, looked absolutely terrified.

“OK,” she said as calmly as she could. “Should we run?”

The look on his face said, Yes, we should, and as one, the siblings wheeled round, forgetting their stuff, and started to run.

Then a booming voice shook the ground. Tanya and Robbie stumbled and crashed down on the sand, which was scorching hot, hotter than she thought.

The voice came again. It was speaking, but it was low-pitched and sounded like a choir of voices, not just a single voice.

Tanya looked over her shoulder. She was crying now, afraid for her life.

The angel - that's what it was, she'd decided — spoke again, but it was no language Tanya knew.

Then it rose into the air, just a few feet — but it made it look as tall as a tower-block.

Robbie was whimpering and he got to his feet.

Tanya did nothing, just stared at this terrifyingly beautiful presence floating in mid-air.

The angel looked down on them and opened its mouth.

Tanya said a prayer, the last words she said.

Robbie screamed, the last sound he made.

White heat speared from the angel's throat in a cascading, spreading wave and it turned everything within half a mile into ash.

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