

THE CHOICE

BOOK IV OF THE EARLY YEARS

**By: J Barrett
November 2012**

PROLOGUE

Shining brightly against the dark of space, the smooth silver spaceship slowly orbited the dark green world of Argosi. The fourth planet from her Sun, this newly emerging planet was evolving and producing a variety of animal and aquatic life. Seemingly friendly and inviting with her lovely green hills and her seas of deep blue water; she hid her dark secret well. Studied for nearly five hundred years by a race of scientists from the planet Sa'tol on the rim of the Artesian Galaxy, she was just now evolving life forms worth their effort. Sa'tol was an ordered world, populated by a race of peaceful and intelligent beings; beings that possessed an insatiable curiosity about the universe they lived in. They traveled that universe exploring the galaxies in search of emerging intelligent life forms.

Five years previously an exploring team assigned to Argosi landed on the 'safe' planet to gather specimens and explore; they were never heard from again. Ever curious, the High Council of the Scientific Guild sent a rescue party to find out what happened to them. Commanded by a young and unconventional Sha'el, the planet gave up its secrets when she found the remains of the first ship and retrieved its recording device. Safe in space she played it and discovered the fate of the first scientific party. This world held a forbidding secret - a life form best left alone. A creature cunning and deadly inhabited the seas of this world. It had the capability of leaving those seas and roaming the planet in search of food; and apparently, as far as it was concerned, every living thing was food. A creature so powerful it could attack an unsuspecting exploration party and render their spaceship wreckage in a matter of minutes. In reward for her success, Sha'el was given the singular honor of First Explorer, quite an achievement for one so young. She took over the post of exploring Argosi and keeping a record of its evolutionary progress.

On the other side of the galaxy was a similar world with one exception; it was the third planet from its Sun. It was evolving at an accelerated pace, the same as Argosi; but Sha'el was convinced it had a different evolutionary path to follow. She studied the records of the planet in fascination, keeping copious notes on its progress, often comparing the two worlds. Argosi had a high nitrogen atmosphere during its nightly cycle. But when it received the sun's rays during its brief day cycle, the oxygen content rose dramatically. On the other hand the new world, which they named Gaia, was oxygen enriched and already supported a wide variety of life forms, including humanoid.

Orbiting and studying the different life forms on the planet Argosi was extremely exciting for a novice like DuGan. Just being asked to be a part of Sha'el's team was honor enough for anybody; but DuGan wanted to prove that she was a valuable asset to the team. She desperately wanted to impress Sha'el with her knowledge and professionalism. As far back as she could remember she knew what she wanted to do with her life. She had entered the Scientific Academy at an early age and graduated at the top of her class.

After watching the monstrous creature rise from the seas for the umpteenth time, DuGan decided to take a small sample and try a controlled experiment. She sent a robot retrieval device and waited until the creature was returning to the sea to take the sample. She informed no one of her experiment, deciding that she would complete it and return the sample before anyone was the wiser.

She was deep in thought in her laboratory when Sha'el received clearance to use the wormhole to make the trip to Gaia. Long distance travel was done thru wormholes when available. Studying a planet like Gaia had priority over all others. For the scientific community this planet was a dream come true; to actually observe a developing world, evolving and producing intelligent life. The last planet that was observed to full potential had become the pariah of the galaxy. Their inhabitants were so aggressive that they were banned from Space. They would not be allowed into outer space until they evolved past their violent tendencies.

As First Explorer, Sha'el could choose any project she wanted; she had chosen Argosi and Gaia. Her on-going studies resulted in radical ideas about their evolving life forms. Anxious now to observe the changes that had taken place on Gaia during the past 10,000 years (Gaia time), Sha'el called her team to the bridge and ordered them to make ready to leave. DuGan started to object, but Sha'el put off her protests and promised they would return when finished studying Gaia. DuGan decided to keep quiet about her little project, rationalizing that no harm would be done, and no one would know of her breach of protocol.

Exiting the wormhole they immediately began their survey of the beautiful blue planet with an emphasis any changes since the last visit. It was immediately evident that there were less of the large reptilian life forms; the dinosaurs seemed to be located only on one continent. It appeared that since their last visit there was a tectonic shift in the planet resulting in a division of the large landmass into five separate continents. The most amazing change was the emergence of intelligent humanoid life forms; cavemen. Amazed, they followed several clans of these from far above in space as they stalked a herd of mammoths. Copious notes were taken and seemed to confirm Sha'el's belief that these were not brutes, but an evolving intelligence.

The ship now continued on to another continent, mountainous and seemingly cut off from the rest of the world. Large flying creatures could be seen off in the distance; curious, Sha'el ordered them to investigate. From their ship far above, they used their telescopes to zero-in on the landmass below them. What they saw took their collective breath away. Once over the huge mountainous ridge that appeared to encircle this continent they found a fertile valley nestled between two large mountains. Their telescopes made out rows of crops, and a thriving community. High above at the tops of the mountains was what appeared to be another community; a settlement of Dracona; and riding on their backs were humanoids! After watching the Draci and humans interact for an hour, Sha'el suddenly called off the study. She decided to leave the Dracona and this community alone for the present time and concentrate on the rest of the planet. Sha'el made several notes indicating that it appeared as if there were several different levels of evolution taking place at the same time.

The scientists retreated to the Arctic and the base that had been established by the previous teams. Located among the large ice continent were a series of huge icebergs. In the center of one was hidden their base of operations-a tropical island. They landed their spaceship, set up their equipment, and now concentrated on the seas and the developing life in them. They spent several months studying the various samples of plant and animal life, noting the evolutionary path that was taking place. They had several craft with them allowing them to explore the oceans and new life emerging in them unobserved.

They found another thriving community on an enormous island in the center of a large ocean they called Oceania. This society appeared to be highly advanced using crystal energy directly from the Sun to power their city. Theirs was a peaceful society and the people seemed to live in harmony with the sea around them. This was another unexplainable anomaly on this very strange planet.

After four months, they gathered together all their notes and began to prepare a report on all they had found. As was custom by Guild Law, each scientist retired to their quarters to prepare their reports.

Seated at her desk, Sha'el was trying to decide if she should include the discovery of the Dracona in her report when she was interrupted by a loud rumbling sound followed by the ship shaking. She ran to the control room and flipped some switches and peered out of the opening front viewer. Far off in the distance smoke was billowing up in big black columns; the volcano on this island was erupting. Huge explosions were spewing up giant geysers of molten rock; boulders the size of small puddle craft. The earth was erupting, giant quakes were toppling everything as tectonic plates shifted beneath them. A series of wide cracks in the earth appeared and was heading straight for their base. The ships' gyroscope steadied it, as Sha'el was running about pushing buttons and yelling to the decks below. She called the others forward and they attempted to lift off, but before they could rise up they were bombarded with boulders from the exploding volcano. One of the scientists shouted a warning and then they were hit again with a huge boulder that caused them to smash onto the side of the mountain. As the ship ricocheted off the mountain, a large breach was torn open in the vessel; and it spun out over the open ocean. The gyroscope steadied the ship and it sealed itself off immediately; rising up it positioned itself a safe distance from the disaster below. Recording devices immediately kicked in and began keeping a record of the eruption and noting the effects it was having on the surrounding sea.

And then the nightmare began as DuGan burst into the room and shouted the one word that everyone feared the most; "Contamination!" Everyone froze and looked to Sha'el. She turned with an expression of horror on her face and asked one question. The answer only doubled the look. She turned and looked out at the sea and back at the volcano. In the space of several seconds she had assessed the situation and made a decision. She went to the control panel and shifted some levers and pushed a button. A beam shot out of the ship and hit the volcano; it slowly quieted. She flew the ship over the island, and every hundred feet or so a beam of white light shot out of the ship to the earth below; the island settled itself as the horrified crew looked on. The great ship settled back on the base and there was a flurry of activity. All of the scientists raced below.

There were three levels; the cockpit, the living quarters, and the bottom level where the laboratories and scientific equipment were located. They stopped at the doorway to DuGan's lab and it slid open. There was a crushed rear wall and a gaping hole held together by a force field. The captain walked to the rear and inspected the opening; she turned and scrutinized the lab and the tables with their specimens. She pointed to the table at the crushed wall; it was empty. She looked at DuGan questioningly.

DuGan stepped forward and with tears in her eyes and explained what she had done before they left Argosi. Her fellow scientists gasped and the stunned look on their faces told it all. When the ship was pummeled and thrown against the mountain an opening had been torn in its underbelly. The specimen had fallen out into the ocean.

The look on her face conveyed the over-whelming guilt DuGan felt, for she knew that she had condemned this beautiful world to extinction. In this oxygen enriched atmosphere the creature would grow to an enormous size, capable of destroying all life on this emerging planet.

Sha'el's mind was racing at the complications this created. This was unimaginable, the worst thing that could possibly happen to a scientific research team. She knew she should report all of this quickly; but she kept remembering what had happened on the planet of Gamut. The horror she witnessed there had stayed with her all her life.

Sha'el decided in an instant that she would not allow that horror to happen here, not to this beautiful world.

SANCTUARY

A flock of seagulls soaring high over the deep aqua blue ocean lazily circled the dock area of Anderson Warf in hopes of finding an easy meal. Bright sunshine highlighted the pristine white decks of the Glacier Queen as she sat at the dock overshadowing the similar cruise ships docked with her; patiently waiting for her passengers to arrive. Once the top of her line, traveling the world's ports with the rich and famous; she was now relegated to taking three-week excursions up along the Alaskan coast and into the Aleutian Islands.

Her captain was a striking man, tall and robust with flaming red hair, though nowadays it was interspaced with a great deal of white. He sported a full beard, which he always kept neatly trimmed. His features were pleasant, and only the blue of the sea he sailed upon rivaled the blue of his eyes. Many a young matron flirted with the possibility of his affections on these journeys; and often his table was filled with women of all ages vying for his attentions. Captain Ian McGregor was a hardy man who had spent his life sailing the seven seas; he was never quite at ease unless he was at sea. When offered this command, which he knew would be his last, he accepted gladly; as long as he was on the sea, it mattered not to him. He had made his home aboard the Glacier Queen these past 10 years and never regretted it. He ran a tight ship; his men were top notch, and all the crew held him in high regard.

The Queen was due to set sail in the morning with a host of scientists aboard. This was the one journey of the year that Ian looked forward to with great anticipation. For three weeks he would be in the company of extremely intelligent and interesting people. He looked forward to evening dinners that he knew would be lively and entertaining. These people were educated scientists who had chartered his ship for private research these past five years. He had made lasting friendships with these people. They were geologists, marine biologists, archeologists, and oceanographers.

The conversations at the dinner table were always lively, spirited and very argumentative; he always enjoyed the ensuing debates and on several occasions had actually joined in. Each year this group got together for a few weeks to work on a pet project of theirs. They firmly believed, and mounting evidence was beginning to agree with them, that an island existed in the middle of the Arctic Ocean - a tropical island.

The archeologist among them, Jonas Waite, had stumbled upon an ancient Rune during an archeological dig some years back. It had been carbon-dated and certified authentic. It referred to an island of green within a wall of ice. After several months of intense searching thru piles of ancient books that produced little, they were ready to give up. Then a strange occurrence took place – the rune was confirmed by an ancient Asian haiku which translated as; ‘the jungle land in the ice that only the young may enter.’ And then from the cold land to the north came a tale handed down thru generations of a sea-faring family - a tale of shipwreck, starvation, and wild ravings of a land of green in the center of a wall of ice and fire. After conferring on all the evidence, their interest was definitely peaked enough, and so the hunt began!

These scientists brought their own children with them as they did every year. Captain McGregor had watched them grow up with a great deal of fascination. They were all extremely intelligent and well behaved. He always enjoyed their discussions and their unique perspectives on the world around them. Their parents were quite proud of them and the interest they took in ‘the work’.

Captain McGregor had become the mysterious and adventurous ‘Uncle Ian’ to these young children. In their early years he would regale them with tales of the sea each evening. These were exceptional children with exceptional intelligence, quick to recognize that the Captain experienced a great deal of joy in telling these tales; so they quickly stopped correcting him and instead simply enjoyed the stories. They all loved the old sea captain and indulging him seemed the right thing to do.

This particular year the scientists had been asked to take a group of orphans with them. The Scientific Guild had seen the potential in these children and felt that they had a special destiny. Both parties would benefit from the experience.

Standing on the upper deck, Captain McGregor watched as his friends approached the ship. First was Professor Robert Horton and his wife Amanda, followed by their two sons, Josh and Thomas Jon. Laden with their luggage, they began to make their way towards the gangplank. Waving to the captain they boarded the ship with help from two stewards. They immediately went to the Captain’s Deck and greeted him warmly. In the next few hours the rest of the scientists arrived and proceeded to their rooms to quickly drop off their baggage and gather on the upper deck. They greeted Captain McGregor warmly and all warned him of the impending arrivals.

“These aren’t your run of the mill everyday kids Ian,” warned Prof Horton, “No, no, hardly. All of these children have seen, shall we say, the harsher side of life. Some of them have even been touched by it.” He became quiet and somber as if remembering all the teachers had told him of his young charges.

“But they are all extremely intelligent,” continued Amanda Horton, marine biology was her field of expertise. “Ian, you should have seen their faces when we spoke to them. They were soaking up everything; you could practically see the wheels of their minds racing. When we told them that they would be coming with us, there was absolute bedlam.”

Amanda Horton smiled brightly at the memory. Amanda was what one called a ‘natural’ beauty. She never paid much attention to her looks; she didn’t put much store in outer appearances; she always looked beneath to the person within. Amanda stood about 5’6”, with long red hair that she kept in a single braid down her back. Her fair features revealed her Nordic heritage with striking blue eyes, high cheekbones, and full lips. She also had a smile and personality that was very engaging; you couldn’t help yourself, you just liked being around her. It was no wonder that Robert Horton was still as much in love with her now, as the day they first met.

Robert was her other half; tall and wiry, a mop of sandy brown hair and rumpled clothes and large eyeglasses perched at end of his nose. There were always volumes of books lying about on every table and chair wherever he ensconced himself. He was a geologist; immersed in his books and uninterested in anything else; until the day he looked up and saw Amanda. From then on, his life was a whirlwind. If ever there were two people who complimented each other, it was Amanda and Robert. He idolized her, and she found in him the stability she had been looking for. They both had a passion for the unknown. They married and in time had two sons, Josh and Thomas Jon, TJ for short. Josh, a strapping 16 year old with his mother's good looks and demeanor and his father's mind was a natural leader. He possessed extraordinary intelligence and also exceptional common sense; together they made for a very knowledgeable and grounded young man.

His younger sibling TJ had his father's looks and his mother's insatiable curiosity. TJ was extremely intelligent for a 9 yr old, his mother often referred to him as her 'wise old man'. He was also touched with extraordinary psychic abilities; TJ 'saw' things he couldn't explain. Over the years, with his mother's help, he learned to control, and accept his unique ability.

The rest of their small group was a smattering of marine biologists, archaeologists, one mathematician, and two oceanographers. They arrived aboard ship and stored their things quickly; then they climbed above to greet each other. They were a close and tightly knit group. As they talked and caught up on current events, the students arrived. Shouts and calls from below brought them all to attention and all conversation stopped as they gazed below to the scene before them.

These were not your sweet fair-haired youths; these were hardcore children of the street. They had seen too much of the darker side of life, and it reflected in their appearance. All races were represented as they stepped forward; each group proclaiming his or her ethnic background in dress and attitude. At first appearance it seemed that the only thing that linked them together were their grades; each had excelled in the sciences; exceptional minds in powder-keg bodies. At a signal from a tall thin youth they all grabbed their luggage and lined up.

Captain McGregor watched as the scientists went below and warmly greeted these young people. *Like lambs to the slaughter*, he thought to himself. As he watched, he began to notice that these strange looking youngsters treated the scientists with great gentleness and courtesy. Almost like a parent indulging a favorite child. They joked with them and teased them to some extent about their clothing. The only change in attitude came when they practically vied with each other for a word or two with Amanda and Robert. Remembering the dreams that had been plaguing him, Captain McGregor thought; *this is going to be a very interesting trip, very interesting indeed.*

After that, everything changed.

During their weekly gathering in the ships' lounge they first became aware of the danger and the dragons. Years ago the scientists had agreed to a weekly check on what was going on in the world, and so, on this trip, kept to the routine. As they gathered to watch the noon report, none were prepared for what they saw. Normally bored by the weekly sessions, this week all eyes were on the big screen TV as Fox News showed again, for the 100th time, video of the dragons firing on Reno, Nevada. The female reporter then warned of raw footage they just received from either a very brave, or a foolhardy cameraman. On the large screen was the grainy and obviously hand held camera footage of the beasts attacking a military division in the desert at Palm Springs. They destroyed tanks and melted missiles with their red-hot fiery breath and the military barely injured any of them. The savage ferocity of these beasts was chilling to watch.

Discussions started almost immediately among the scientists. Questions raised and answered and questioned again. While they were busy analyzing and hypothesizing about what little information they could get, they were oblivious to the effect all this had on the youths in their charge.

The students watched in fascination, totally mesmerized. Over and over again they viewed the tape. The tall thin inner city youth, who referred to himself as Rain, had already seen all this in his dreams. He arrogantly baited Josh, mainly to find out what kind of person he was and also what he knew. Momentarily taken off guard, Josh saw thru to his true motives and told him so, impressing Rain, who valued honesty above all else. These boys had highly intelligent minds that quickly assessed the situation. Both groups sized the other up in a matter of seconds. At this first meeting between these youths, they openly discussed the differences between them and called for an understanding. The borders went down and they began to discuss the TV images.

Rain began to tell them of the 'dreams' he and his group had had for the last six months. Josh admitted that they also were having the dreams, and expected some kind of 'event' to occur. The inner city youths recognized a deadly enemy quickly, and they had heated discussions about how they should handle the adults. They united in agreement that the grown-ups had to be told; they had to prepare for what was coming. All agreed that they had to get into the Bering Straits as soon as possible.

At first glance, Rain appeared to be your typical 'Goth-type' teenager in appearance; thick black spiky hair, black around the eyes, and on the fingernails, pale skin, pierced brow, and nose. Arrogant, of course, but behind those dark eyes was a highly evolved mind. He had seen and done things in his short life that most people only see in movies, or read about in books. A weaker soul would have broken under the pressure, not so with Rain. He faced the evil head on and spit in its face; and then dared it to send more. He wasn't afraid of life and the hardships it could inflict on him. Strife made him even stronger, but he was no fool, he allowed himself no illusions. He saw the danger approaching and knew that they had to get to shelter. Rain was one of those people who possessed unique communication skills, when he spoke people stopped and listened. Now was the time for him to apply that skill to its full use.

Josh and Rain approached the lounge and went in. The group of scientists all but dismissed them, some not wanting to be bothered by ‘children’ right now. Josh asked his father to listen to what they had to say, before they made any comments.

Rain then proceeded to tell them where he thought the monsters came from, and where they were going. He explained about the dreams he knew everyone was having. He explained what he thought was happening, that he had been expecting it; he would explain later on that point. He told them that they had some time before the monsters would come up this way; but not to doubt it, they would come. Then he told them they had to find the island before then, if all of them were to survive. He had their attention as he explained that if they turned back now and headed for the mainland, all they would accomplish was to give the monsters a hardy meal. He was impassioned as he spoke. He implored them to search their souls. They could not deny the fact that they all felt like something momentous was about to occur. Who had guided them all to this point, he wasn’t sure.

Little TJ came into the lounge and agreed with him, much to the surprise of his parents. He had seen it all already. He begged his mother to confirm it; he had been going to her with all his visions. He warned them that the dragons would come up the coast in search of them. He said they had to find the island, it was not a myth, it really existed. He also said that Rain had brought someone else along on this voyage, someone who could confirm all this and more.

Rain threw his back and laughed, “There’s no hiding things from you, is there half-pint?” Rain turned to Amanda and said, “Yes, we brought Ruby along. She said she had to come with us and we knew better than to ignore her. Besides, if we left her, well... the jackals would have devoured her in no time.” He turned around and told no one in particular, “Bring Ruby up here now.”

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than the crowd behind him parted, and there stood a small, thin, little waif of a girl. She couldn’t have been more than 8 yrs old. Large black eyes overshadowed her face completely, quite haunting when they fixed upon you. If eyes were the doorways to the soul, then this little one was ancient. Creamy white porcelain-like skin and short black curly hair, ringlets surrounded her face, all combined together to make a very sweet-faced little girl.

“I’m already here Rain,” she said softly looking up at him.

Rain’s demeanor changed in an instant. No longer the arrogant teen, instead, his whole attitude softened as he turned towards her. Going down on one knee he smiled and asked in a soft voice, “What do you see little one? Tell us what we have to face?”

She looked at him with those big eyes of hers and smiled, and he visibly melted before her. She held up her hand, “one minute Rain,” and she turned around and spoke directly to TJ. “Do you see them too; the Dragons, and the Dolphins and Orcas? Tell me you see them too?”

TJ looked at his mother questioningly, at a short nod from her he answered quickly, “I’ve seen the Dragons for six or seven months now. But the Dolphins only showed up in the past 3 weeks, ever since we started this trip.”

TJ became very excited; someone else saw the things he did! “They’re coming to show us the way, but we have to get into the Bering Sea past the Aleutian Islands.”

The scientists in the room all stared at the two young seers. All were aware of TJ’s ability, and easily accepted the fact that Ruby possessed the same gifts.

“Yes, yes,” said Ruby excitedly grabbing TJ’s hands in hers, “thru the Amchitka Pass and into the Bering Sea. We must sail towards the Bering Strait; they will meet us there and lead us into the Chukchi Sea, and to the island.” She turned to the grown-ups who were all staring at her incredulously.

TJ added, “They will come after us you know;” he said turning about the room to the adults, “they will try to stop us from getting to the island. Look at the TV again, and really see what is coming for us! We have to begin to move now.”

“Yes, yes,” Ruby agreed shaking her head in confirmation, “we must hurry!” She let go of TJ’s hands and made her way to Rain. She took his arm and squeezed, “you were right Rain, we will have to use the ‘Ring’ to conceal our getaway.

Rain turned and looked at the scientists and the captain. “Ruby here is our secret weapon, she can ‘see’ things that are about to happen. We’ve looked after her for years; protecting her from those who would use her gifts for no good. She’s the one who warned us six months ago about the dragons coming and burning everything. Told us we were to be saved because we had a special task to perform. Told us how to prepare for your visit to our school; how to pass your tests so we would be chosen for this trip.” He had the full attention of all the scientists as he continued. “And now, I see that you have one of your own,” he said nodding towards TJ, “so you too have been warned about what was coming. Near as I can figure, the world as we know it, is about to end. Or maybe those of you with weaker constitutions would prefer ‘about to change.’”

Robert and Amanda shook their heads in agreement. “We have discussed the aspects of all this information Rain, and the many scenarios that we ‘expected’ we would face. It wasn’t until we met you and your fellow students that we realized the scope of all this. You see Robert and I dreamt of all of you.”

“Now you know why we were all brought together. We’ve been preparing for all of you for the last six months. Little-bit there,” Rain said pointing to Ruby, “has been warning us about the dragons. Tell them what is happening on land, Ruby, they need to know the truth.”

“They are burning the land and everything on it. There are some survivors, yes, and they are being prepared just as we are. They will join with the First of the Ancients and rid the land of the monsters. Our task is to make it to the Bering Sea; we have to be there when the Dolphins show up.” Ruby looked up at Rain frightened.

“She has never been wrong in her predictions. If she says we are to run, then I suggest we do so, and do so quickly.” Rain looked about at the faces of the adults. “You are intelligent people, use that intelligence now.” No one moved.

“You know we are telling the truth; you have all been given a piece of the puzzle. You saw what happened when you all put your dreams together. Scared the hell out of you didn’t it?” Looking down at TJ and Ruby he asked, “How much time do we have before they find us?”

Both children answered without hesitation, “less than two weeks!”

Josh looked at Rain and said, “Finish it Rain, tell them everything.”

“Professor Samson,” Rain addressed this to George Samson, the volcanologist of the group; “we just passed the Shumagin Islands; so I’d say we are just about positioned at the top of the ‘Ring of Fire’ correct?”

“Yes Rain, all along the islands here and down into the Pacific are a series of semi-dormant volcanoes. Together they form the ‘Ring of Fire’, why do you ask?” George felt a cold chill start to snake up his back; this was like his dreams of the past few nights!

“What would it take for one of them to erupt?” He asked the startled geologist.

Visibly shaken George asked his friend, “Robert, a word please.” They talked among themselves for a moment discussing the situation. “We have all had dreams of varying degrees Robert; I myself have seen things in my dreams that point to this very situation. This young man knows far more than he should.” George had an uneasy feeling, but dared not put into words what he was thinking.

It was Josh who realized what Rain was going for, “you want to cover our tracks. Make them believe that we’re not even here.” Rain looked at Josh and smiled recognizing a fellow leader. Josh smiled, “Good idea, real good idea, Rain.”

“Explain it to rest of us Josh,” asked Amanda clueless.

Josh looked at his mother and smiled, for all her smarts she was still slow on the uptake.

“Mom, if we can set off a volcano, the resulting ash and smoke will cover our trail from prying eyes from above. It could buy us enough time to get into the Chukchi Sea to meet up with the Dolphins.”

“Josh,” several of the marine biologists and oceanographers explained, “dolphins couldn’t possibly come all the way up here; the water is too cold for them. They’re mammals and not suited to water this cold. The Orcas have a layer of blubber to protect them from the frigid temperatures; the dolphins don’t have this protection. They couldn’t possibly survive in these waters.”

“That’s not quite true,” TJ blurted out, “they’re already here, I’ve seen one.” He told them about how he had watched the beautiful dolphin swimming alongside the ship for hours; how as he watched he began to ‘see’ many pictures passing thru his mind. He said that they came so fast he had a hard time keeping up with them. He was convinced the animal was sending them, and admitted that he had tried to send some back.

Ruby looked at him, "I've tried it too!" she whispered to him. TJ squeezed her hand in acknowledgement.

The door flew open and the first mate came into the lounge wide-eyed and went straight to the captain. "Sir... excuse me sir," he said looking about the room, "sir, we're receiving all kinds of crazy messages from the mainland. It's all garbled and doesn't make any sense. Several ships are sending S-O-S's. We need you on the bridge, sir."

The captain stood and made his apologies, "We will continue this later, I have a feeling that these youths are telling the truth," he said solemnly as he left the lounge. He didn't mention to them that he had been having dreams himself; dreams that had turned into nightmares. He had 'seen' fire raining down on his ship, large Orcas in the water, and Dolphins pointing the way. He had seen himself in a ship of gold. He had awakened in a cold sweat many times; fearing something monstrous was about to happen.

Back in the lounge the scientists were trying to come to grips with all this new information. "I don't hold with fairy tales and such," said Robert, "but I have to admit that we all have been having some very strange dreams. And yes, we did put them all together." He looked about the room and several heads nodded in agreement.

Jeffery Hyde-White, a master linguist, picked up the conversation. "I can tell you it was a frightening scenario, and now today we see it being played out on the news. I don't know about you, but I keep wondering if we're dreaming all this; it can't possibly be real."

Josh looked at his father's friend, "Jeffery, Dad," he began with a calm even voice, "it's real, believe me. Don't you all see - something has happened? Something has changed the balance in the world. I don't pretend to know the answers, but I feel this very strongly. If we are to survive we have to take action quickly; we can't sit around here discussing this to death; we can't delay any longer. We have to follow the information we have been receiving in our dreams."

"Say you are right son," began Amanda, "and mounting evidence says that you just may be," she said pointing to the TV screen, "what can we do?"

"Mom," whined TJ, "you never listen! We have to get to the Bearing Strait as fast as possible; it's our only chance."

Robert and George conferred for a moment and then Robert said, "We have some dynamite on board, but I don't know if it will be enough. You're asking for the impossible Rain, you don't just 'set-off' a volcano."

"You do if you find one that is ready to go. There have been recent rumblings in the area for the past several months," Rain said with certainty. "Several volcanoes, Fisher, Akutan, and Bogoslof, are ready to blow. I've studied them all, and Akutan is the most promising."

Robert looked at this youth with new respect and incredulity, “and how do you know so much about volcanoes, young man? I know the earth well, yet even I would find it hard to pinpoint an area for such a thing as you suggest.”

“No offense Professor Horton, but I am far ahead of you on that scale.” Robert was flustered by this announcement. “Where I got all this knowledge from, I don’t know, but suddenly I find that I’m a genius in this area. I believe that a large charge placed on the side of Akutan, in the lava tube that leads down into the heart of it will cause the desired effect we seek.”

“He’s right Robert,” said George incredulously, “Akutan is the perfect candidate for what he proposes.” He turned and stared at Rain, “Amazing!”

“Dad, please believe him,” Josh implored his father, “I know all this sounds crazy, but Rain is right. I’ve plotted our course too, and I would have picked Akutan myself. Look, you and Mom have always taught us expand our minds, to learn, and accept new truths when we saw it. Well this is the truth; they are going to come after us. Why, I don’t know yet, but they will come. We have to make it to the Bering Strait; the world will be depending on us to do so.”

“Amen!” said several of the youths, who had quietly entered the lounge and listened.

Robert thought for a long time. This Rain was way too knowledgeable for one so young. Yet he had seen the test score results of each of these youths; they were perfect. And the feeling of dread wouldn’t leave him. He knew his son was telling the truth; he had seen enough in his dreams and it had left him frightened.

“Two weeks you say?” He said turning around and scrutinizing the two youths. All of the young boys and girls nodded staring at him, waiting for an answer. Robert looked at each of them and then turned back to his fellow scientists,

“George, would you get the thermal maps of Akutan and the surrounding area?” He turned to Rain, “I hope I’m making the right decision here young man.”

Rained smiled, “you are sir, I guarantee it,” he said with complete certainty.

“OK, all of you gather around, lets see what we have here....,” said Robert in resignation as the youths gathered around the large table. He and George spread out the thermal maps, and they conferred for almost an hour. George was the best as far as setting charges around an unsettled site. After checking their data they found that Rain and Josh were right, Akutan was indeed ready to blow; all it needed was a small push, and they were going to give it that push. They checked to see how much dynamite they had aboard, and had agreed on a plan when the Captain came back into the lounge somber-faced.

“The news is not good ladies and gentle men. It seems that the dragons have increased their number dramatically. The reports we saw are only the half of it. We have received word that they are now along the East coast as well. They have all but destroyed New York, and Washington is under fire as we speak.”

He took a deep breath and continued. "The military can't touch them with any of their weapons; nothing seems to stop them. They are spreading across the country and headed towards the West coast as well. It is only a matter of time before they head this way."

A soft little singsong voice spoke up, "they know where all the dormant hatching grounds are," all eyes were riveted on the tiny little girl as she continued; "they are waking their brothers and increasing their numbers. They will burn their way across the country before they turn their eyes on us. Hopefully we will not be here when that time comes."

"Yes, well," the Captain continued a little ruffled, "I have increased our speed and laid in a new course for the Amchitka Pass. What else can I do to help?"

Robert answered him immediately, "How close can you get us to the Akutan volcano?"

Ian looked at Robert visibly startled. *What the hell was he panning?*

"Well, let's see," he pulled out a map of the area and studied it. "I can get you damn close, but you'll have to take one of the longboats. The lava flow from the last eruption went into the sea forming a ring around the island itself. It could rip thru the keel of a ship this size like a hot knife thru butter. Just what are you planning Robert?"

"We're going to blow it Ian, or at least try to." Seeing the alarm on Ian's face, Robert quickly continued, "We're going to run like hell for the pass and hope that the smoke and ash covers our trail. Can the ship do this, Ian? Will she be able to take the resulting high seas? Can we get to the pass and thru it quickly?" Robert stepped back and stared Ian, in a softer voice he said, "I believe there is more at stake here than you or I are privy too, my friend. I feel very strongly that if we are to survive, we have to get thru the pass and up to the Bering Strait."

"I can have you at Akutan within an hour," Ian sternly stared at his friend and then at each one of the youths, as if deciding something. "You are not the only ones who have had dreams of impending doom," he blurted out in a booming voice. "I believe I have been put here, at this time and this place, for just this reason. My Queen will get you there my young friends, you can count on it." He left the lounge and made straight for the bridge. Once there he began barking out orders and the Queen began her final perilous journey.

Back in the lounge Rain pulled Josh aside and confided, "Your father is not to go with George to set the charges. He has other duties to perform here with us." He gripped Josh's shoulder tightly and stared intently into his eyes. "You understand my meaning Josh?"

"Yes," Josh answered with a sigh, "I understand, don't worry I'll tell my father. Rain, I know sacrifices have to be made sometimes, but George? He's such a gentle man, I mean Rain, he's one of the good guys. Oh God, this is all coming too fast."

"It's all right Josh; I do understand your reluctance." Rain looked away and continued, "But you have to understand that there is more at stake here than our feelings about the deaths of so few, while millions are dying."

Less than an hour later they were lying off the Akutan volcano, loading one of the longboats with its deadly cargo. Robert and George had conferred with each other and prepared the charges that they hoped would set off the volcano. Rain took George aside and gave him detailed directions as to where the lava tube was located, describing the landing site in great detail. Still a little in awe of this remarkable youth, George listened carefully to all his instructions, the truth slowly dawning on him.

When they were finished he looked at Rain for a moment and then asked the youth in a soft voice, "I won't be returning, will I?" Rain was surprised that this little bespeckled man had seen thru to the truth so fast.

"No George, I don't believe that will be possible," he told him in a voice devoid of feeling. "When you get to the island you will see that there is no way to 'set' the charges; you will have to carry them down into the volcano yourself and set them off." Rain watched in amazement as George shook his head in agreement. He continued gently, "You are the one who can buy us the time we need. You, and only you, will see that when you get on the island. That charge has to be set just so, and we must be in the Amchitka Pass when it goes off. You'll have to look inside yourself, George. You have to freely choose to stay and see that it is done."

George thought about what Rain was saying and realized that that was what his dreams had been trying to tell him all along.

"Thank you for being honest with me, Rain." The little man placed his hand on Rain's forearm and squeezed it lightly, "Is Robert aware of this change yet?"

"No, his son is going to tell him." Rain stared at George with new respect and smiled, "you will have to convince him George; he won't want to let you go alone. He's that sort of man; which is why we need him with us."

George patted Rain's arm, "I see, I see; mmm... well, don't you worry dear boy, I'll take care of it." He looked about the room and said in a low voice, "I should have liked to have seen how this all turns out." Then he looked at Rain and eyes dancing, he asked smiling, "The dreams I had of you riding on a large Orca; were they true?"

Rain's head snapped up quickly, "That part I don't know about," he answered in surprise. "But if you say it is so George, then I believe you. Apparently you've been given more of the picture than I have at this point."

"All right then, let's get this show on the road," he said picking up a headset and trying to put it on. "My hands are shaking so bad," he looked at Rain with tears in his eyes, "can you help me with this silly device?" Rain stepped forward and put the headset on him and positioned the mike for him. George wiped his eyes and took a deep breath, "all right then, lets go."

For the first time in his short life Rain actually felt emotionally conflicted.

“You must keep in constant contact with us George. We’ll let you know when we begin to go thru the pass.” For no reason he could think of Rain suddenly hugged the little man to him and whispered to him, “I think you are the bravest man I ever met George!”

George disentangled himself and wiped his eyes quickly. “Always wanted to be hero,” he said under his breath, but Rain had heard him. As George made his way to the waiting group, he saw the look on Robert’s face and knew he had been told. Summoning all his courage he approached with a smile on his face.

“Cheer up Robert; I know exactly what I’m doing.” Taking his hand they shook and George leaned in and whispered to his life long friend, “Take the children and make for the pass, I have seen what is coming Robert; it’s monstrous! You have to get them thru the pass before I blow the damn thing.”

Robert had tears in his eyes for his friend, “George... I wish ... I... I,”

George interrupted quickly, “No Robert, no-no! You must remain here for the children. I have enjoyed our friendship Robert; you’re a good friend and a good man. These children need you right now, and I am best qualified to get this job done. Take them and go, go quickly my friend!”

Taking a deep breath Robert pulled himself together, “Right you are George, the best man for the job. All right then, lets get you in this damn boat, careful of your step.”

Robert helped his friend into the boat and they checked his headset to make sure it was working. The boat was lowered and George waved once and then started the outboard motor and headed off towards the island and his fate. The children lined up all along the railing and watched as he raced across the water towards the island. Each was sending him their love and their thanks for his sacrifice.

As George approached the island he found himself suddenly filled with a sense of well-being. He wasn’t afraid anymore, in fact he felt very calm; he knew he was doing the right thing. He knew, with a certainty, that he was giving them a chance at a possible future. He approached the rocky shore and sailed around the shoreline looking for the area that Rain had described to him. Not thinking about the headset he wore he began to talk to himself, oblivious to the fact that the men in the radio room back aboard ship were hearing him.

“Ah, there it is; just like Rain described. My, my, that boy is truly remarkable. Let me see, ah, here we go, right up this narrow way. Yes, there’s the lava tube. Oh my, this is going to be a bit tricky.”

An hour later George had dragged the boat to the top of the lava tube, he stood there looking downward; it appeared to go all the way down the volcano, ending in a reddish glow. “Mmm..., let me think for a moment here; well, ... ah yes, I can sort of ride it down into the damn thing. Yes, yes, this would do just fine!”

Back on board the ship they were well underway, headed towards the Amchitka Pass. Ian was kept informed of George's progress. Robert had stationed himself in the radio room; listening to his friend with mounting dread.

Amanda kept the younger children busy helping her prepare sandwiches for everybody. Little snack trays she called them; each filled with a sandwich, a coke, chips, and a pickle. The children went about the ship passing them out to the crew.

Rain and Josh were busy for the rest of the day preparing for the journey thru the pass and into the Bering Sea. They had discussed the ramifications of the eruption and the ensuing effects it would have on the sea. With all of the older charges helping, they kept them busy so they wouldn't think of George. They were making ready for rough seas, storing loose items, putting everything away. The children would all be placed in the lounge, the safest place for them during this part of the journey. Some of the older children were sent below to the staterooms to fetch all the blankets and pillows and bring them above. Everyone would sleep in the lounge together this night.

Both TJ and Ruby were fitted with headsets, as was Rain and Josh; they were in constant communication with each other. The two young 'seers' were given explicit instructions; any visions or 'feelings' were to be relayed to the older boys. Ruby was keeping them abreast of George's progress.

They arrived at the entrance to the Pass just as dusk was settling in. Rain and Josh made their way to the radio room to let George know they had arrived. Rain spoke to him in a calm and soothing voice.

"All right George, your journey is almost finished now. We are beginning to pass thru the Amchitka Pass and into the Bering Sea. You've done very well George, we are all so proud of you." Rain's voice shook as he continued, "I only wish I had had you for a father George, you would have been the best."

George's voice was also choked up as he answered, "I would have been proud to have had you for a son, young man. You are truly remarkable." There was some static breakup and then they heard George warning them, "It seems that our large friend knows I am here; he's stirring up some trouble for me. Are you thru the pass, I can't hold on much longer."

Rain looked beyond the door of the radio room, searching for the captain, "are we through the pass yet, Captain?" A short nod confirmed that they were now in the Bering Sea.

Robert took the radiophone from Rain and answered, "We made it George, we are thru the pass and in the Bering Sea. You can let go now; God's speed my friend and thank you for your sacrifice." This last said with tears in his eyes.

They all listened as George bade them fare well, "it's been a pleasure and a privilege to know all of you. Do not cry for me, I do this of my own free will; I do this for the children!" Nothing but static filled the radio room.

“Robert, you and the boys go below,” the captain ordered. “When that monster goes off there is no telling what kind of seas I’ll be facing.” Ian watched them leave the bridge and then barked out a series of orders. He called the engine room and prepared them for rough seas; all watertight doors were closed and locked.

George had positioned the long boat at the top of the lava tube. The pathway led straight down into the volcano itself. He was balanced at the top and all he had to do was kick off and slide all the way down into the volcano. He planned on setting off the charge when he couldn’t stand the heat any longer. He took a deep breath and was surprised at how calm he felt. Knowing the end was coming allowed him to enter a state of profound peace. He pushed off and began his descent down the lava tube at a pretty good clip. If anyone could have heard above the loud roaring, they would have picked up the words to the Lord’s Prayer being said in a calm even voice. George’s last thought was; *please Lord, protect them*, then he pressed the button.

Rain and Josh ran to the starboard railing and looked back towards where Akutan was located. Suddenly a low rumbling could be heard all around them; it seemed to grow and fill the very air; louder and louder it became until it like a living thing. And suddenly a bright flash of light and the night sky was illuminated. They could see the explosion way off in the distance. Several minutes later the sound caught up with them; it was deafening.

They returned to the lounge just as the ship began swaying back and forth violently. Rain sat down next to Ruby, and Josh beside his brother TJ. The next hour was one of absolute terror for everyone in the room. There were many screams, and several had started to pray. Robert made his way to the lounge and was literally propelled thru the door towards them. Josh reached out and caught his father before he plowed into a wall. He settled himself beside Amanda and held her to him. They were all in the grip of terrible fear, and panic was not far behind when the ship suddenly lurched up in the air, slammed down, and all the lights went out. Lightening was crackling about them with several strikes on the ship itself. There were loud shrieks from several of the children.

In the midst of this pandemonium Ruby’s little sing song voice could be heard clearly. She began to allay their fears, calming them. “Don’t be frightened, it’s going to be just fine. This part of our journey is almost finished. Close your eyes and listen and see. There will be peace, and a new world to explore. The Dolphins and Orcas will come to teach us and protect us.” Her voice was soothing, putting them all into a deep sleep, where new dreams were sent to prepare them for a new world.

And while they slept, the Glacier Queen made her way thru the Bering Sea under cover of a thick black cloud of soot and ash. She sailed along at a fast pace slicing thru the waters and finding no resistance. Unknown to all she was shadowed by two very large shapes deep below her.

Rain and Josh woke at the same time; the others still in a deep sleep. They rose quietly and went outside to have a look. As they stepped outside they saw Ruby and TJ at the railing and joined them. Far below they could see two giant Orcas keeping pace with the ship.

“They came to greet us!” Ruby said excitedly. “Aren’t they beautiful? Oh Rain, they are here for us!” She was obviously overjoyed at the sight of the two great beasts.

Rain leaned over and looked below to get a better view. He had to admit that they were magnificent to watch. The larger of the Orcas came closer to the ship and began leaping out of the water, apparently checking them out. His black and white colors wrapped about his muscular body giving him a regal bearing. They came together on his massive head with a pattern that appeared to be a crescent. Rain watched him in fascination with growing excitement.

Suddenly the Orca propelled himself out of the water and was, for a split second, eye to eye with Rain. In that split second recognition and contact was made. Rain was startled, but held his ground as something passed between them. Rain wasn’t sure what was going on, but suddenly he had an overwhelming urge to be in the water with the large mammal. He spun around, eyes wide, searching for Ruby.

“Ruby, what’s happening?” He grabbed her by the shoulders, “I know him! I’ve seen him before... in...” memory dawned “... in my dreams!”

“Yes,” she reassured him, “he’s for you Rain. You will ride him, as all of us will ride the other Orcas; but you and he will lead.”

TJ turned to Josh, “We are not of the Soldier Pods Josh; we will ride the Dolphins; the Teachers and Planners. Oh, it’s so exciting; I can hardly wait till we get there.”

Josh and Rain stared at each other, each just now aware of what Ruby was saying and how it applied to them. The clouds parted and a beam of sunlight shone down on the two youths; knowledge began to flow and fill their minds. Both gripped the railing to keep from falling.

Rain suddenly shouted, “Of course! God I can be so thick sometimes!” He slapped the side of his head and raised his hand to Josh’s shoulder and squeezed, “No offense, but you’re not a fighter Josh, not like us. We’ve all been through stuff you couldn’t even begin to understand. You wouldn’t know how to fight dirty. All that’s happened up to this point, it was all in preparation for this; I can see it now. If the Orcas are the soldiers of the sea, who is better fit to ride them than us?”

“Yes, I understand Rain, I see it all now. My God, all of us, we’ve all been prepared to play a part in something. The dragons are destroying our old world; pretty soon nothing will be left.” Josh sat on the deck and held his head in his hands shaking it back and forth. “The world we knew is gone; a new world about to begin and we, somehow, are part of all of it. Damn Rain, this is too much to take in all at once! How can you be so glib at a time like this? Aren’t you the least bit scared?”

“Scared? Listen up pretty boy; you’ve lived in a little cocoon all your life; nicely insulated from the real world. I’ve lived with fear as far back as I can remember; it’s get tough or die. That’s how I’ve managed to survive all these years; that’s how we all have managed to survive. You’re just gonna’ have to get tough and pull it together; the real world doesn’t give second chances. You have been shown the same as I have, that we are to be leaders....” Rain explained giving no quarter.

Josh cut him off quickly, “I am no leader, Rain; I barely know what’s going on. I think that they may have made a mistake there...they have the wrong guy. You are more suited to leadership than me. Damn, I wish I knew more.”

“I don’t have all the facts either,” Rain began, **“but I do know one thing for sure, and that’s that the Man upstairs has plans for the both of us. So get off your pity pot and snap, man!”** Rain shouted, and then continued, **“Look, ya got it in you; you just got to find the right password to turn it lose. We just have to wing it from here till we find out more.”** Rain stood above Josh and extended his hand smiling; Josh took it and he pulled him to his feet.

“We’re in this together Josh, like it or not. Maybe we can help each other over the ‘hump’ till we find out more.” He extended his hand and they shook, both laughed and hugged each other as equals. **“Good!”** Rain said throwing his head back and letting out a loud whoop. **“Come on,”** he said patting Josh on the back, **“let’s go see the captain and tell him to follow the Orcas.”**

They headed off towards the bridge with Josh in the lead. Rain looked at this young man walking before him and remembered his dream; the dream that showed Josh as his leader.

For the next three days they followed the Orcas through the Bering Sea. They passed thru an area with a lot of debris in the water and many signs of ships that sank. There were many bodies floating in the water. They kept the younger children in the lounge not wanting them to see this sight. They made their way past the Bering Straits into the Chukchi Sea without further incident. There was still no sign of the Dolphins.

The weather became frigid overnight and most couldn't stand being outside for short periods of time. The wind blew constantly, and frostbite was an ever-present worry. Yet, each day Rain would bundle up and go out to the bow of the large ship where he would scan the water below for the large Orca. Josh joined him many times and began to notice that Rain was becoming distant, lost in his thoughts. Guessing what his friend was thinking, Rain explained that he was trying to communicate with the large mammal telepathically. Josh could see the sense in this and decided to leave him alone and let him continue trying. And then one morning he looked out and saw his friend standing on the bow without a coat, or any shoes on his feet. He rushed out in a panic calling to him.

"Rain... Rain, have you gone mad? You'll catch your death out here." Josh rushed to his friend and threw a blanket around him. Rain looked at him and threw his head back and laughed like a madman. Then he grabbed him about the shoulders shaking him.

"I can't figure it out Josh. Why won't he talk to me? I've done everything I can think of; nothing works. He won't talk to me." He began to cry, great heart wrenching sobs as he crumbled into his friends arms. "What am I doing wrong, doesn't he like me?" Josh held him and let him cry it out. Then he took him below to his room and tucked him in.

"Get some sleep Rain, I'll find out, I'll get your answer." Rain looked up at him and knew he would. He had been up for days and now let his body go. He slipped into a deep sleep knowing his friend would find the answer.

Josh went above and cornered TJ and Ruby in the dining room. He took them to a table at the back and explained what had happened. He wanted to know what they knew.

Ruby answered him a little frightened, "He has to make physical contact first; they have to touch each other Josh. That can't happen until we're at the island."

"Yeah, well that won't happen if the damn Dolphins don't show up pretty soon!" he snapped at her.

"The Dolphins will be here in the morning Josh," TJ quickly added. "They had some trouble getting here. Something came up from the deep ocean; it was trying to stop them." TJ's eyes filled with tears, "Many Orcas died so they could make it here; so don't get all uppity on us!"

Josh sat back and for the first time noted their somber faces, "I'm sorry kids, I didn't know," he said softly. Both of the little ones reached for him and hugged him telling him they were scared too; not sure of all they were feeling and seeing. Josh calmed them down and then went out on deck himself.

Overwhelmed by all that was happening he shouted into the wind, "You wanted us here, we're here; you said jump, we jumped!" Josh turned about on the deck, his arms wide, "You sent the dreams, you warned us," he angrily shouted into the wind. "Well, we're here! If you want me to lead, you're going to have to tell me something, soon."

The next morning the sea was filled with Dolphins. They were leaping out of the water as if to exclaim, "Look at me! Look at me!" They gathered together and made a visible arrow in the water, pointing the way for the great ship to follow.

Josh woke Rain and told him the good news. "And the other question, Josh, did you find out the answer?" he asked quickly.

"Yes, Rain," Josh smiled, "you have to touch each other first. And, I am told, that can't happen until we arrive at the island. Now that the Dolphins are here, that will be very soon."

"Best news I've heard in days. Man, I am starving! Let me get dressed and we can go get something to eat." Rain was up, showered and dressed in a half hour.

As they entered the dining room the other students, who had automatically accepted by both boys as leaders, greeted them warmly. They filled their plates from the buffet and were sitting at a table finishing up when Robert and Amanda came into the room. They asked them to join them and were soon deep in conversation.

Some time later on the bridge, the radar man shakily called the captain over. "Sir, I'm picking up something headed this way. In... in the air sir, fo... four no, fi...five of them," his voice cracked as he continued, "I... I don't think they're planes sir."

Below in the lounge Ruby and TJ burst into the room shouting, "the dragons are coming!"

Above the captain quickly asked the radar man, "how far away are they?"

"An hour, hour and a half at the most, sir," he answered in obvious alarm.

"God in heaven," the captain yelled as he ran for the PA system and all heard his voice booming out a warning: "Dragons are headed this way; radar is picking up five of them! If any of you have a solution you'd better get your asses up here damn quick!"

Robert, Josh and Rain, rushed for the bridge with TJ and Ruby in tow. They burst onto the bridge and were greeted with the terrified stares of the crew on duty. They headed towards the helm where the Ian was standing.

Ruby immediately ran to him tugging on his coat, “Captain Ian, you have a door down below that opens to the sea; it’s just a couple feet above the waterline. Can you open it for us?”

“Yes little one, but why? He asked in bewilderment.

Ruby grabbed Josh by the arm and dragging him made for the door, “please have them open it now,” she shouted. “Rain, you come with us too!” TJ grabbed his arm and off they went. They raced below and were led to the open door by one of the crew. Outside, they could see a large pod of Dolphins waiting.

“No time to explain right now guys,” said an apologetic TJ, “just do as Ruby asks.”

“Rain, you have to hold on to Josh.” Ruby was very excited, “Grab him round the legs and don’t let him fall into the water. Can you do that?”

“Yes, but,” he knelt down and wrapped his arms around Josh’s legs and held on.

“Josh, listen to me,” Ruby seemed terrified but she continued anyway, “you have to reach out and touch the leader of the pod. He will come to you, do you understand?”

Josh shook his head in acknowledgement.

“OK,” she took a deep breath and continued in a shaky voice, “when you touch him you will feel a bit of a shock, and then you will feel him in your mind. You will be able to communicate with him, Josh. You must tell him what is happening and ask for his help. Can you do that?”

Josh shook his head quickly and looked out to the sea. He saw the Dolphins lined up; then as he watched they rose out of the water in unison. A rather large one slowly made his way towards the door, then rose out of the water and stared at Josh for a moment. Josh felt a chill go up his back and he shivered involuntarily. He knew with certainty that everything would change after this; there would be no going back. He watched as the Dolphin came closer and closer to the doorway.

As Josh was hanging half out of the doorway extending his hand and stretching as far as he possibly could, the Dolphin swam up and leaned into his hand with his head. Josh felt a jolt go right thru him.

“Aaargh!” he screamed as he arched his back.

Rain held on tightly as Josh thrashed about for a moment. Then just as suddenly, he quieted. Josh felt that first jolt and for a split second thought he was dead. Then he felt the soothing waters around him and he wasn’t afraid any more. Josh was filled with a joy he had never known; he could feel the love emanating from the creature before him, wrapping itself about him.

A strong male voice filled his mind.

I am T’kai of the E’lan Pod. You are my rider and I am your teacher. Why do you break protocol?

The Dolphin's strong voice brought him out of his reverie; he knew he had to warn the Dolphins of the impending arrival. He concentrated and began to tell him what was happening.

There are five dragons headed this way, he began. We have about an hour before they reach us. What can we do?

Almost immediately all the other Dolphins began jumping in and out of the water. Even the great Orcas leaped into the air, as if confirming this. T'kai rose up out of the water and relayed to Josh:

Young one, there is a great iceberg not far from here. We have been preparing it for you for a long time. It has a large opening and your ship will pass thru it easily. It will shield your ship from the burning devils. We will lead you, but you must go very fast.

With that he leapt into the air and was off towards the bow of the ship. Rain pulled Josh into the ship and they made a mad dash up the stairs towards the bridge. They burst in with Josh shouting at the captain.

“Follow the Dolphins Uncle Ian, as fast as your ship can go. They knew the dragons would be coming, they have a place carved out for us beneath a large iceberg.”

Without even questioning Josh, Ian moved his speed to ‘full ahead’ and called down to the engine room. “All the speed you can give man, and be ready to cut the engines off when I give the word.”

Rain pulled Josh aside. “What was it like Josh, what did it feel like?” Rain asked.

“Like nothing you can ever imagine.” Josh's face was shining at the memory. “We'll talk later,” he said intently gripping Rain by the shoulder, “after we get to safety,” then he smiled.

Both boys stood on the bridge of the Queen, each lost in their own thoughts as they followed the long line of Dolphins. The Captain scanned the sea ahead and was at a loss when suddenly the giant berg began to make its presence known; like a great mountain rising out of the thick mist that enveloped it. It was like a floating country of its own; the height and length of the berg could only be guessed at. As they got closer he saw the Dolphins head around to the right side of the huge mass where he made out an opening of some kind. He followed quickly and sailed straight for it. He called down to the engine room just as he was about to come to the opening.

“Cut the engines!” he barked out as the Glacier Queen slowed and coasted into the opening with room to spare. *Hmm...Ian thought to himself, they planned well.*

Everyone came out onto the deck of the ship and stood silently watching as the great ship glided silently into the large cavern. Up ahead it looked like the opening went on for miles thru the large berg. The blue white lighting within the cavern gave it an eerie glow. The glistening walls of ice rose way up and arched over them to the other side.

Josh and Rain looked back towards the bow and saw the large pod of Orcas stop at the opening. They began leaping out of the water and crashing down creating huge plumes of water that cascaded around in giant splashes. In his mind Josh heard T'kai telling him that they were erasing the ship's wake, so the dragons would not detect their presence in the area.

The captain noticed that the 'trail' began to curve towards the right and he quickly took the helm and steered the ship ever so gently and continued to follow the dolphins.

His mind was racing also, *this berg has to be enormous, but the dolphins show no sign of stopping, they're still pointing the way. I guess we'll find out soon enough, he mused. Funny, I don't remember any of this in my dreams. In fact all I remember is the island and a golden ship. It seems a higher hand than mine is guiding us. I think I'll just sail along with the current and see what happens.*

The radar man called to the captain, his voice calmer now, "Sir, come see, sir," he said pointing to the blips on his screen. Ian came over and watched as the radar swept around, "that's them; they're not but 15 minutes away. We got in here just in time," he said nervously.

"Indeed we did young man, indeed we did!"

Ian McGregor went over and sat heavily in the Captains Chair overlooking the helm. He knew when he was in over his head. He raised his eyes and stared at the two youths standing there looking out over the ship, they both seemed elated. "What's next," he wearily asked. They both turned around and stared at him with those infernal smiles on their faces he thought.

"Why, we follow them till they say stop," answered Josh quickly. Josh suddenly reached out and grabbed Rain's shoulder, "it's happening, it's all coming true!"

"I have a feeling this is only the beginning," Ian said quickly under his breath.

Both boys went out on deck and watched silently as they drifted along. Rain turned to Josh and asked, "So, what happened? I want to know everything."

Josh looked at his new friend and knew what he was referring to immediately. "I was scared, but somehow elated too. All through my body, there was a tingling of sorts, and then a deep electrical shock. Thought I was dead there for a minute. And then," Josh smiled at the memory, "a warm sensation, and a feeling of ... of... peace, and acceptance, and then overwhelming love. I can't explain it Rain; you just have to feel it. He was in my mind and I was in his. It was so powerful!" Josh stared off into the distance.

Rain envied him every bit of it.

Josh turned and saw the look on Rain's face. "Don't worry Rain; you'll get your chance. You'll see and feel what I'm talking about. Of that I am sure."

Two hours later the Glacier Queen was still coasting gracefully along. The cavern, with its tightly packed icy walls, caused every sound to reverberate and echo about it. A slight scraping on the deck sounded like a loud screeching. The lounge door slammed shut and the whole ship shook from the loud retort. The Dolphins sent word thru Josh and asked that they be quieter, Ian just chuckled.

Most returned to the lounge and a small lunch was prepared. Conversations were going on between bites of sandwiches. The youngsters were all elated and discussed the different aspects of their dreams. Putting them all together gave them a clearer picture of what was waiting ahead for them.

The adults, being scientists, stayed on deck and tried to chart their way. Having no point of reference to go by, they were forced to simply enjoy the ride. As they went along they began to notice that the walls of the ice held a picture show of sorts of the earth's evolution. All along their path, embedded in the ice were creatures long dead. Frozen for all time, a splendid view of this planet's evolution thru the centuries. Various marine life long extinct, were displayed to the delight of the oceanographers. Further along, they spied a hideous creature, similar to a T-Rex, but smaller. Its mouth open and rows of white glistening teeth left no doubt that this was a dangerous predator. They stood at the railings waiting breathlessly for the next 'treasure' the icy walls held. Still further down the way, a small mammoth, which no doubt fell thru the ice on one of its long treks across the tundra, was perfectly preserved; they all studied it in fascination.

And then Amanda let out a scream and jumped backwards. Before them, perfectly preserved, embedded in the ice for thousands of years no doubt, was their enemy. Huge beyond belief, it's black form captured with wings outspread, head reared back as if in the process of flaming some unknown target, hideous and frightening even in death. The sight left them all in a somber mood.

On and on they continued, by all accounts they had come miles, and yet the view up ahead showed no sign of ending. They went to the bridge and asked the captain if radar or sonar could pick up anything. He told them that their screens ceased working after they were about a mile into the gigantic cavern.

During this time Josh and Rain took turns standing at the bow and the stern of the large ship. Rain kept his sights on the large Orca trailing the ship. Every now and then it would leap high out of the water as if to say, 'Here I am, I am watching you!' Each time, Rain was filled with elation at the sight. He also noted that it felt like it was getting warmer.

Josh on the other hand was in contact with the Dolphin leader. Simple images were being relayed to his mind. Finally he could stand it no longer and summoning his courage he concentrated and asked; *what do you wish us to do? Can we be of any help?*

He heard a series of clicks in his mind and then he heard loud and clear; *your help is not needed at this time, simply enjoy the ride to the island. Your future will appear soon enough, young one.*

On thru the day and into the night they continued their trek. The only instructions the Dolphins gave was that they were not to turn on the lights of the ship when darkness came. Ian stayed at the helm and found that there was just enough light for him to navigate in the dark. Throughout the night, one by one, his crew fell into a deep sleep. Grumbling about the ineptness of his men he continued along. Sometime during the night, he too could no longer fight the urge and he slipped into a deep sleep.

The Glacier Queen continued on its way thru the iceberg passing many mysterious sights imprisoned in the ice. All thru the night and into the long day, a ghostly vision gliding along, the great ship continued, silently following the Dolphins.

All aboard were deep asleep as the large ship passed thru the force field effectively cutting them off with the rest of the world. During the early mornings light of the third day, she silently glided out of the great cavern and entered the warm aqua blue waters of the island. Slowly she came to a stop in the middle of a large, very deep river. There she rested, waiting for her passengers to awake to a new world.

Josh awoke on deck to the sound of a parrot squawking loudly, it seemed as though it were calling out, "Get up! Get up!" He lay there for a moment listening to the sound as reality suddenly dawned on him; he sat up with a start and looked about. He was burning up, his large parka felt like a sauna. He quickly took off the coat, and rubbing sleep from his eyes stood up. It took his mind a moment to take in the view. A lush green jungle was laid out before him, and a large clear blue river stretched off into the distance. He spied the noisy parrot; he was beautiful, a bright green plumage with a yellow chest, and dark black beak. He spread his wings and took off and Josh watched the graceful bird fly to another tree and disappear in the green leaves. He turned about and behind him, far off in the distance he saw the opening to the large cavern they had passed thru during the night; he was stunned.

"Josh!" Rain's voice brought him about quickly as his new friend came down the deck, a huge smile on his face. "We're here man; this is it, the island in our dreams!" Both youths walked the entire deck of the ship looking out at the island.

"Look," Rain pointed towards the island, "out over there." Off in the distance they both spied a something glistening in the sunlight. "What do you suppose that is?"

Josh cocked his head to the side as if listening, "that, my friend, will keep the adults busy while we are all away training. T'kai says it is the remains of an ancient temple. Once they decipher the language, and he has no doubt that they will, it will answer all their questions." The two youths looked at each other and burst out laughing as they ran towards the lounge.

They woke everyone and announced that they had arrived at the island sometime during the night. There was much jubilation as everyone walked the deck of the ship looking out at the strange land. Sure enough, just as the Dolphin predicted, the scientists all spoke of mounting an expedition to explore the place. They took out their binoculars and searched over the jungle, each commenting on the strange plant life.

"Robert, look there," said Jonas Waite, the archeologist of the group, "something's shining brightly out there in the sunlight. A building perhaps, maybe people live here?"

"I doubt it Jonas," Robert answered quickly; "They would have come here to see who we were by now. But, perhaps you're right; maybe we should explore this place while we are here. I have a feeling we're going nowhere for a long time."

Ian came down from the bridge and joined them. He looked around and announced in a voice filled with resignation, "Ladies and gentlemen, we are moored in the middle of a very deep river; sonar gets no ping from the bottom. And I have to admit that I have no idea how we got here." Ian coughed and cleared his throat and then continued, "Sometime during the night I fell asleep at the helm; I give you my word I have never done that before. When I awoke this morning I was in my cabin. How I got there is beyond me; my entire crew admits to the same thing."

Many shouted out “yes, me too!” And, “I don’t know how I got to my cabin either!” There was a general sense of mystery. They looked to Ian for an answer and he had none.

“Calm down and listen for a moment,” he said asking for their attention. “I don’t think there is enough room to turn the Queen around and get out of here. I have a feeling we will be here for awhile. But don’t be alarmed, we have plenty of supplies on board, so we wouldn’t go hungry.” He waited for all this to sink in and then he continued; “I haven’t seen the Dolphins or the Orcas this morning. But I don’t think they have abandoned us; I firmly believe they will be back when the time is right. I think they are letting us get used to our new home.”

The rest of the day was spent in speculation by the scientists that they must mount an expedition and explore the island, much to the protests of the captain. He believed they should stay on board the ship until the Dolphins and Orcas returned. After hours of listening to the reasoning’s put forth by the scientists, Ian finally relented and ordered three of their longboats lowered to the water and brought around to the docking platform on the side of the ship. It was lowered to the water and the boats were tied up there. It was decided that two groups of scientists would go ashore in the morning and explore a short distance into the island. But, and he would not relent on this, three of his men would accompany each group with arms. His philosophy, better safe than sorry, prevailed.

The evening meal was a boisterous one; at Robert’s insistence the crew joined the passengers in a large feast. They were all in this together now, and each one knew it. Friendships were made between each group, and all joined together later singing songs and regaling each other with stories of the sea. A giant of a man, who was the ship’s engineer, Mr. McMullen, was a favorite of the children. The fact that he resembled Santa Claus, in looks and personality, might have had something to do with it. The gathering went on late into the night and finally everyone adjourned to his or her rooms, happy and tired.

Josh awoke just before first light. He dressed quickly in shorts and a tee shirt and was stepping on deck just as it was beginning to get light. He took in a deep breath and swore he could smell something sweet. He was trying to figure it out when Rain joined him.

“Do you smell it?” Rain asked, “I’ve been up here for a half hour trying to figure out what it is. Look at all the flowers hanging off all those trees.” Rain was dressed in shorts and a tee shirt also, accentuating his pale skin. “I don’t know what they are Josh, but they smell so sweet, it’s almost overpowering.”

“I agree, maybe they’re orchids of some kind. My mom would know what they are.” Josh looked about the ship. Both boys heard the sound of splashing in the water. They ran to the railing and looked below.

Rain shouted out, “Let’s tell the others they’re back!”

“Wait a minute,” Josh said suddenly stopping. “Not yet Rain, T’kai says that we have a task to complete,” Josh looked at Rain and smiled, “you must meet and connect with your ‘brother’.”

Rain’s eyes lit up as his face broke into a giant smile. “Once connected, as I am to T’kai, we must then draw up a list of all the children; naming and describing them all. Being connected to us, they will then know the children as we do.” Josh looked at Rain to make sure he understood.

“I understand Josh,” he said nodding his head; “they will need to know how to pair up each one with his counterpart in the sea. Well come on, let’s go and do this,” he said excitedly. Both boys went to the railing and undid the clasp that held the stairway leading down to the platform. As they ran down the steps they saw the Orca and the Dolphin waiting below. Both boys stepped onto the platform and knelt down.

Josh asked, *what do you want us to do T’kai?*

T’kai clicked several times and then Josh heard, *explain to your friend what to expect, and tell him the shock will be larger. Then tell him he must remove his clothing and enter the water. Their connection must be made in the water.*

Josh explained all this to Rain, who listened to every word without comment. Rain stood up and began to remove his clothes, all the while staring intently at the great Orca.

“He says to dive into the water and swim to the Orca, he says to follow your instincts Rain; you’ll know what to do.” Josh patted Rain on the back. “You can do this.”

Rain backed up three steps; then he ran forward and dove into the water swimming straight for the Orca. The huge mammal leaped into the air and dove below coming up under Rain. Rain looked about and then took a deep breath and dove below. The Orca was lying on its back, flippers extended towards Rain. He swam to just above the great beast and reached out with both hands and grabbed hold of his flippers. He immediately felt an electric jolt so strong that all the air was forced out of his lungs, “aaiee...!” he screamed, arching his back, never letting go of the flippers. The Orca propelled himself along and shot out of the water rising high into the air with Rain still holding onto his flippers, bracing himself against the large beast with his feet. The Orca spun in the air and dove below again.

This time he settled in the water vertically and Rain heard clearly in his mind the deep resonating voice; *I am B’nal, leader of the Z’ndi pod; we are the Soldiers of the Sea. You are my rider; I was chosen for you and you were chosen for me. Together we shall free the seas once again.*

Every fiber of Rain’s being was suddenly filled with something he had never known in his short life; pure unconditional love, total acceptance. His spirit rose in ecstasy as contact took place and their minds merged; he would never be alone again. Tears filled his eyes in happiness as they shot out of the water as one. Rain propelled himself off the great Orca and dove into the water with him.

This time as they swam below a bright light engulfed them both and he began to feel changes taking place in his body. His legs and arms became more muscular, his lungs changed and he found he didn't need to rush to the surface for air. As the light dimmed he looked at his newfound friend, and love filled his heart. Knowledge flowed quickly to his mind and now he understood his purpose.

They came up out of the water together and spiraled into the air and arcing backwards entering the water again. As they surfaced Rain swam to the platform. His face was glowing with happiness as he approached. Josh reached down to offer him a hand but Rain instead propelled himself out of the water and stood on the platform facing Josh. Water dripping off his now muscular body, he smiled at his friend.

“Josh, you didn't tell me how wonderful this was!” He said in a deep masculine voice. I feel so fantastic, so complete; I'll never be alone again,” he shouted with joy. He was totally oblivious to the changes in his body and the effect it was having on Josh, who stood staring at him in wonder.

The Orca swam to the platform and raised himself out of the water resting on its edge. *Your leader must also complete the ritual of bonding. Tell him he must do the same.*

Rain looked at Josh, “his name is B'nal, and he's a soldier of the sea. He says that you have to complete the ritual of bonding; you have to do what I just did.”

Josh turned around and sought out T'kai. He saw him waiting for him about 20 feet out, in the center of the river, *yes young one; we must finish what was started days ago. Come join me so we may be complete.*

Josh began to remove his clothing quickly. He stood at the edge of the platform and looked back at Rain once more, marveling at the changes in him. Anyone looking would have seen a smile play its way across his face as he dove headlong into the water.

As Josh reach T'kai, the other Dolphins now rose to the surface forming a circle around them. Josh reached out and grabbed T'kai's dorsal fin and they began to turn in a circle spinning at a rapid rate. A blue white light began to surround them as they both rose out of the water still spinning.

I am T'kai, Ancient of the Sea from the beginning. You have been chosen for me as leader, and I have been chosen for you as teacher. Together with our brothers, the soldiers of the sea, we will destroy the menace that has risen from the depths and restore order once again.

Knowledge began to flow into Josh's mind at a rapid pace. He flung his head back and spread his arms wide and received it willingly. As he was suspended in mid air, both he and the dolphin began to change physically. The dolphin grew larger, more muscular, almost matching the size of the Orca. And Josh too felt his body change as his legs, torso, and arms were filled out. He was no longer a boy, what appeared now was a young man filled with a sense of purpose. They were slowly lowered back into the sea as the light dimmed and disappeared.

The dolphins surrounded them; all leaping into the air shouting out a chorus of clicks and warbles. Josh found he understood what they were saying, *Hail to T’kai, Hail to the Ancient’s return!*

As Josh turned and swam for the platform, he looked above and saw that everyone was at the railing looking down at him. They had all seen what had taken place and were, for the moment, stunned. As he reached the platform he simply leapt out of the water as Rain had done; it seemed so natural. He turned and looked out at T’kai.

Go and prepare your lists of the children. Include all your knowledge of each one. You now know what you must tell the adults, prepare them for tomorrow’s leaving. With that T’kai turned and sped off down the river with the other dolphins in hot pursuit.

Josh grabbed his clothing and put on his shirt and pants. His mind was racing, and as if guessing his thoughts, Rain said, “We’ll have a devil of a time explaining all this to the adults.”

Josh smiled, “In case you haven’t noticed Rain, we’re the adults now too.”

Rain looked at his friend strangely, and then was visibly startled as he suddenly realized the changes that had taken place in him. He reached out his hand to touch Josh’s shoulder and suddenly noticed the difference in its size and shape. He stared at his arms and legs, and looked up at Josh. “How,” he asked as the knowledge began to flow.

“All part of the process my friend. Search your new memory, your answer is there.” Josh finished dressing and proceeded to climb up the stairway, Rain was right behind him. As they both stepped onto the deck, the entire group was standing there in stunned silence. Robert and Amanda came forward; eyes wide as they stared at their son.

“Josh?” Amanda asked hesitantly, bending her head and looking into his eyes.

“Yes mother, it’s still me,” he answered in a deep voice, surprising himself.

Amanda reached out and touched her son’s face and looked deep into his eyes, “Yes, yes, it is you! My God, if I hadn’t seen it with my own eyes, I never would have believed...” She was shaking her head back and forth trying to deny what she had just seen.

Robert put his hand on his now 6’ tall son’s shoulder. “Son, what is all this? I saw... but... how?”

Josh answered in a calm confident voice, “It is the blending with the Dolphins, or Orcas. It’s what happens when we join as one. Our bodies, minds, and spirits are brought to perfection. It is the only way we will be able to do the things that we must do to save the seas. Without the seas, all life will end. We have been chosen father, and I for one take it very seriously.”

Robert looked at the young man before him and felt a sense of pride in his son.

“Yes, you have been chosen. Everything your mother and I did in raising you and your brother has led to this point in time; I can see that now, quite clearly.” Tears in his eyes, Robert looked at his son with pride and said softly, “I am proud of you son.” He held him close for a moment and then let him go.

Amanda touched her son’s arm, “Josh? Your brother, TJ, will the same happen to him?” She looked at all the children who were now staring at her, “and all the other children, them too?”

“Yes mother, if they choose to become a part of this.” He watched as her face changed, she was horrified at the thought. “Mother, this is war; a war for survival, and we are not the only ones involved here. There are countless others going thru the same thing; preparing to fight a battle for our very existence. Evil is running rampant over the whole world.” He took her hand and led her to the railing as the others gathered around.

“In joining with T’kai, I received a lot of knowledge I wasn’t privy to before. This is an age-old battle mom; last fought thousands of years ago. After the last battle, man was given a chance to go it alone, to see how he would evolve. I’d say we messed it up quite badly, wouldn’t you?” Josh looked around at everyone gathered there. “Look at what our world had become,” he began again, the passion showing in his voice. “There are people blowing each other up in the name of a religion? Genocide taking place on the African continent; wars everywhere you look; it’s surprising that we haven’t blown ourselves up by now. Somehow we have all lost our way. There is nothing but war and hatred in the world. I don’t think that that was how it was supposed to go.”

“I agree with you on that,” Rain added somberly, “and believe me; we’ve seen first hand just how low man has really sunk. Every one of us here has been touched in one way or another by man’s ‘generosity’,” he spat out the last words with contempt.

“That’s enough Rain,” Josh raised his voice, “don’t let hatred enter your soul and cloud your mind. Would you have all we are striving for here be destroyed by the very thing we are trying to end? There is no room for hatred in the new world we will help create. Search your new memories; you will see it all there.”

“I’m sorry Josh, my temper got the best of me,” apologized Rain. “I think I’ll take a walk to clear my head. If you’ll excuse me,” he said as he passed thru the crowd and headed towards the bow of the ship.

“Rain wait,” shouted little Ruby as she called after him.

“It’s all right Ruby, let him go,” Josh called to her, “he has a lot of thinking to do.”

Josh now turned to the young children gathered there. “Tomorrow the dolphins will return to take all who are ready with them to the teaching grounds. This is what we have all been dreaming about, but the choice is still yours.”

Turning around he faced the adults again, he raised his hand and pointed out to the island while he told them, “There is an entire island over there for you all to explore. Three miles from here is the remains of an ancient city. There is a large pyramid there in the center of the city; it holds the answers to all your questions. There is nothing on the island that can harm you. You will find plenty of fresh fruit, and dates, and nuts. T’kai warns of only one thing; do not go beyond the jungle to the far mountain range. And don’t worry about us; we will all return when our training is finished.”

“Josh, you must realize that we can’t just let you all go off,” Amanda was just now realizing what Josh was proposing. “You’re just children for God’s sake; we have a responsibility to keep you all safe.”

“Mother, I love your noble thought, and I thank you for your concern,” Josh began gently. “But as you can see, I am no longer a child. And when the rest of us bond to our prospective brothers in the sea; well, you get the idea.”

“Oh this is all happening too fast. Robert, do you approve of all this?” Amanda looked to Robert to back her up, but was dismayed when he refused to join her in her concern.

“I’m sorry to disagree with you dear, but Josh is right. They will be perfectly safe with the Dolphins and Orcas.” Amanda started to say something but was cut off by Robert as he continued. “Amanda, we just stood on the deck and watched as Rain joined with that huge Orca. Did you already forget the look of joy on his face as he stepped back onto the platform? Have you already forgotten what we all saw with our own eyes happen to Josh? You saw the look on Josh’s face, he was ecstatic.”

Amanda looked at Robert with disbelief. “Robert, it is our duty to protect...”

Robert came to her side and put his arm around her. “Amanda my love, it is time to let them go. We all had the dreams; we all knew this would happen sooner or later. As Josh said, it is a new world, and they are an important part of it. Besides, we will have plenty to keep us occupied. Think of it, Amanda, a whole ancient civilization to explore; we will be the first people to step foot on these shores in what, thousands of years!”

“Well, if you put it that way, I guess I’m just being a tad over-protective,” Amanda replied.

“A tad, duh!” shouted TJ loudly as everyone burst out laughing.

In the end, it was decided that none of the adults would interfere with the children leaving. There were things at play here that all agreed were out of their hands. Each remembered the bright light, and the changes that took place in Josh and Rain before their eyes. Being scientists, they decided to take Josh’s advice and explore the island. They all returned to the lounge and began to plan their expedition ashore.

Josh asked all the children to remain on deck. Then he sat them all down and began to explain to them what was about to take place. He related what they would feel when first contact was made. He explained, as best he could, the feeling of total love that would engulf them. He explained that they were going to be part of a new world, and their task was to protect the seas. The children were all mesmerized and sat in rapt attention, listening in awe as Josh continued to tell them of the new life that awaited them.

When he was finished Sam came up to him and asked softly, “Uh Josh...,” unsure she forged hesitantly ahead, “am... am I included in this too?”

Josh guessed what she wanted to know and answered reassuringly, “Only if you want to be Sam, it’s entirely up to you.” He smiled as he watched her face light up in joy.

While Josh was busy with the children Rain stood at the bow of the Queen staring into the water below. His mind was racing with all that had happened, and with all the new knowledge his mind now held.

Josh is right; I have to find a way to get rid of all this anger. I don't want to screw this up. I want to be a part of this; I want to help create a new world; one without hatred, without pain. Lost deep in thought, Rain did not notice the Orca swimming below him.

Young one! B'nal called to a startled Rain; your spirit is in much turmoil. Come to B'nal, come now and we will help set your spirit at peace.

Rain looked below at his new friend and without a moment's hesitation removed his clothes and dove into the water.

Back on deck, Josh looked towards the bow of the ship and suddenly smiled knowingly.

Rain surfaced and swam to B'nal quickly. *Climb on my back, we will go for a cleansing ride.* Rain climbed on the back of the huge mammal and they sped off down the river.

Lean forward and rest your head my young friend. Let all thoughts go, and hear only B'nal. I see your scars and feel your anguish at what was done to you by man. Rain gripped the Orca tightly, hearing his words as the past filled his head for a frighteningly short second. *I see the wall you have placed around your heart.* Rain squeezed his eyes shut tightly at the memories. *You must understand something young one, there will always be good and evil in the world. They are the balancers. It is you who decides how it will affect you. If you allow the darkness to overtake you, then it has won; hatred and anger will continue. But... if you choose to rise above it, it loses its power and disappears. You are strong young one; you have survived much cruelty; and you have cared for and protected those young ones with you. You have tried to shield them from those who would cause them harm. You possess much good in you; this is why B'nal was chosen for you.*

They slowed and Rain raised his head and looked about him. They were in a beautiful lagoon, complete with crystal clear waterfall. Lush greenery surrounded the clear deep pool they rested in. There were colorful birds sitting in the trees, and he saw a flutter of wings and watched as the most beautiful bird he had ever seen spread its wings and fly to a branch right in front of him. She lifted her iridescent green head and throwing her slender neck back opened her beak. Rain listened to the throaty mournful warble of the enchanted bird. As he listened its simple beauty seemed to touch his very soul. Rain fought the effects of the beautiful sound, but it was too powerful and he slowly bowed his head and released all his anguish in gut-wrenching sobs.

B'nal felt his pain and began to speak softly. *I too have been touched by the worst of man. My whole family slaughtered before my very eyes. There was great anger and rage at first. But I have learned over the many years since that anger and hate only breed more anger and hate. I have learned that in refusing to allow these things to fester in my heart, it has no hold on me. And I have found a peace that few experience. I am a Soldier of the Sea, and yes I destroy when it is necessary; but I do so without hate. So can you, R'an.*

Rain slipped into the water and waded over to the front of the giant Orca. He stared into the eyes of the majestic beast for a long time. Something took place between them; a connection of two sorrowful souls, for Rain suddenly felt the weight of the world lifted from his heart. Then he smiled and spontaneously threw his arms about the Orca and laid his head beside his huge mouth.

Thank you, oh God, thank you so much, B'nal. Rain cried tears of relief at last; *you have saved me from myself, my friend.*

They remained in the grotto till evening and bonded strongly, each pledging the other their loyalty and love. Theirs would be a strong link, one in which all the sea would rally about when the final battle took place.

Back on board ship as evening came, Josh sent all the younger children to bed. He went above, pulled back the railing and walked down to the platform, to wait for Rain to return. He sat listening to the jungle about him, and to the water. He felt the tremor in the water signaling they were on their way. He looked off into the distance and spied them coming down the river way. Rain was riding B'nal as naturally as riding a horse and Josh marveled at the sight. As they came closer he became aware of the change in Rain's demeanor. He smiled, knowing instinctively that Rain had passed the test. As they approached the ship Rain dived off B'nal and swam to the platform; gracefully propelling himself out of the water he landed facing Josh.

They stood facing each other for a long moment when suddenly Rain smiled, went down on one knee and bowed his head in respect.

"I am a Soldier of the Sea; and I have freely sworn to protect it. B'nal and I pledge our loyalty to your leadership." His voice was clear and strong.

Suddenly the sea around them erupted in a chorus of clicks and warbles as the Dolphins and Orcas all leapt upward in praise. *Hail to R'an! Hail to B'nal!*

Josh stepped forward and placing his hands on Rain's shoulders bade him to rise. He looked deep into Rain's eyes and saw only peace there.

"I accept your pledge, on behalf of those who came before me. You're going to make one hell of a general, Rain! I pity the fools that tangle with you." Josh added laughingly. Both young men embraced and then turned to their fellow warriors in the sea.

B'nal came forward and rose out of the water as Rain laid his hand on his nose. *B'nal claims R'an; oaths have been given and received! Woe to the enemies of the sea.* B'nal turned and joined the others as they swam down the river. *We shall return in the morning for the young ones,* he told Rain as they disappeared from view.

Both young men climbed above quickly joking with each other. As they stepped on the landing Josh reminded Rain, "We have a chore to finish before dawn; I suggest we get to it." They went to the now deserted lounge and each grabbed a pad and pen and sat down and began to make their lists. Both brought to mind each of their young friends and vividly 'saw' them in every detail. They noted their strengths and weaknesses.

Josh's list:

TJ: He's my brother in blood; he's fearless, instinctively knows right from wrong. Gifted with the 'sight' at an early age and embraced it with our mother's help. Has an inquisitive mind. Needs reassurance every now and then; likes a challenge and wants to prove himself.

Kamryn: Bossy, assertive, standoffish. She questions everything; I think she fears that she won't measure up. She can't stand not knowing something; she always has a book in her hands, always reading. This keeps her from interacting with anyone; a self-defense of some kind. I have seen her with the younger children and she is very patient and caring.

Hayden: A happy guy, he jokes and keeps the others spirits up. He is fearless, but not in a negative way. He sees things in their basic forms. He believes that what is happening to the world is justified, and needed to happen. He has the uncanny ability to know when someone is lying about something.

Chloe: Sixty pounds of pure dynamite. She loves life and everything in it. She embraces change with gusto; has a very adaptive personality. She's very intelligent, and found her passion in the study of the seas and all the life it holds. Her parents are oceanographers and introduced the ocean to her at an early age. She is not afraid to fight if the cause is just.

Richard: thought he was a bully at first, but soon discovered that that was just his way. He is fiercely loyal, and a good follower, and totally unselfish. He listens carefully and asks questions if he is unsure. He takes on any task asked of him and completes it. He is not one to take chances unless he can see no other way. He would easily sacrifice himself if he thought it would help the others.

Nicholas: 13 years old and full of angst. Not very sure of himself, needs a lot of encouragement. His parents are archeologists and absorbed with their work; they don't give him enough of their attention, which is why he is constantly in trouble for one thing or another. I am going to make a suggestion here, if he is given a strong personality, I believe the real Nicholas will emerge.

Samantha – Sam: Strong well-rounded personality, aggressive but not bossy. She is definitely a survivor. She lost her parents to a drunk driver when she was four, has been raised by her mother's brother and his wife. They were a loving couple that gave Sam the stability she needed. She sees all that has happened as a natural progression; man screwed up and now must pay the price. Her only flaw is that she is grossly overweight. I do not know if it is glandular or not; she really doesn't eat all that much.

Leslie: I don't know what to say about him. He is quiet and very shy. He watches everyone else and does not participate in activities unless asked. He is a bit effeminate for a boy and does not like confrontation. He is an enigma to the rest of us. We try to include him in all we do, but many times he begs off and goes his own way with his nose in a book.

Zoë: what can I say about her... she is wild and carefree. Nothing seems to bother her; she loves life and everything in it. She wants to experience all there is challenging and scares us with her antics. She will definitely need a strong personality to rein her in.

Allen: he's always got his head in a book. Photographic memory; has stores of knowledge on any topic in his head. Even tempered and all around good guy. No evident hang-ups.

Rain's list:

Rebecca: Likes to be called Bex. She is a fierce fighter, not afraid to jump in and protect the young ones from the bullies; totally loyal to the group. Think she was molested when she was young, as she has spurned advances from anyone. Saw her go ballistic on a guy trying to force himself on a young girl; she tore him up pretty good before I could stop her. I think she would have killed him. Lots of anger there, you guys are going to have to address that before you can turn her lose.

Tristan: Deadly with a blade - there's history there but he refuses to discuss it. Makes a good scout, takes in everything and leaves without being seen. Not afraid to stand up for what is right. I've seen him calm a feral cat and move her and her kittens to a safe place. The guy has a way with all creatures.

Ruby: Sweet Ruby and her visions; she saved us all. Some see her as a timid little mouse, but I know her inside; there's a tiger in that little body somewhere just waiting to come out. She has the sight all right, and it frightens her some. Meeting TJ and seeing him with his ability has helped her a lot. She's not afraid to say what she sees, just still in awe of it I think.

Esparanza: Espy is a born fighter; has that Latino personality, complete with all that machismo crap. He isn't afraid to fight when he knows he's right. Shows no fear in battle, does what has to be done. If you tell him to hold an area, he will hold it.

Sophia: Typical spitfire, she has a temper of monumental proportions, she is very acrobatic. She and Espy are twins. They have this ability to communicate with each other that's spooky. They make a good team in battle, Espy tosses her around and they cut down the enemy before they realize what happened; she follows his lead.

Summit Paul: SP for short; what a name to saddle a kid with; his parents were hippie types, thought it was cute. Needless to say he learned early how to take care of himself; very self assured, no illusions. He's our resident philosopher, good mind, intelligent; helps me see both sides of a problem before I take action. Good man, he looks out for the little ones.

Juan Pablo: JP is our resident Romeo, or so he thinks. Good looking, big muscular body he works on all the time; has all the ladies a twitter. Not big on the intelligence, sees things as black and white; it's either good or bad. He's a good fighter, but needs leading.

Dylan: Quiet, but not shy, just thinks a lot. Good planner leaves nothing to chance. Seen him in action many times, he is quite deadly, totally emotionless.

Skylar: Loud, boisterous, full of life; loves a good fight. She has that love 'em and leave 'em attitude that is generally reserved for men only. She is a rowdy one all right, but you can count on her in a fight; she always has your back covered.

Kristina – Kris: loves a good knock down fight, but won't go looking for one. Good-natured and offers help without being asked. She shows no emotion or remorse at taking the life of someone who had hurt the children, simply says 'it had to be done.' She would be deadly if ever aroused to anger.

Both young men retired to their cabin after completing their lists. Sleep came quickly as they were exhausted by the task. While they slept T'kai and B'nal went over their lists again and again, studying the young ones. As Josh and Rain were making their lists they had brought to mind a picture of each person they were describing. Seeing thru their links' eyes, T'kai and B'nal were able to get a better picture of each child.

It never ceases to amaze me at the cruelty man inflicts on his own young. These are very good candidates for your army B'nal. They will make good fighters. T'kai told his long time friend.

Yes my friend, R'an's group has much promise. And Zoë from the first group, she is Orca material. I am not sure about Chloe, but I believe she is a possible candidate also. Hayden would prove most useful with his ability, but I leave that call to you. B'nal finished his assessment and waited for T'kai to comment.

I think we will hold off on Leslie and Tristin also, wait and see how they progress in training. See if either of them shows a preference towards one of the Dolphin or the Orca. I believe one of these may possibly be the Link. T'kai looked to his friend and clicked several times twisting his body around.

You think it will be a human this time, a human to bond with that one? B'nal puffed and spewed out water in disgust. *Well, stranger things have happened. This Tristin does seem to have a gift with wild things. Ah, we shall see. Well, that is it then; tomorrow we will begin again.*

Both left the river area and swam down to the secluded lagoon and dove below. Down, deep down they went in the glistening blue waters until they came to an opening in the side of the mountain. They swam into and thru a short tunnel that connected to another pool of crystal clear water. They swam upwards emerging in an underground cavern that was shining brightly. Four great giant urns were positioned at the four corners of the pool and huge flames burned brightly in the center of each illuminating the golden walls and ceiling of the hidden grotto. Displayed on these walls was the history of a noble race of beings. Beings who gave up any chance of returning to their home world; instead choosing to stay and protect the seas of this world from the danger they had accidentally brought with them.

This was the initiation pool of old, used by the Ancients in times long past. This was where the first blending took place. The first Teacher enhanced, the first Soldier awakened. Now, once again the teachers and soldiers have been called forth to do battle. Once again the pool will be used to change and bind human and Orca, human and Dolphin. Once again they will join forces with the great Dragons of the air to free the seas of the ancient beast that had reawakened and risen from the depths.

Rain woke early full of energy and feeling great. He dressed quietly not wanting to wake Ruby, who had slept in the same room with him since she was a small toddler. He tiptoed out the door and went to Josh's room and woke him. Both young men went above to the lounge for breakfast. They filled their plates with fruit, grabbed a large OJ, and went and sat down. They spoke to each other in hushed tones. Anyone listening would remark that they almost resembled clicks and warbles.

They didn't notice Ian McGregor sitting in the corner, sipping his morning tea, intently studying them. In all his years at sea, he had seen some pretty strange things, but never anything like the two young men seated across the room. The change in them was nothing short of phenomenal. If he had not witnessed the entire event with his own eyes, he never would have believed it. Yet here he sat, staring at two young men who just yesterday morning were two 16 yr old boys.

And now the damn dreams informed him he couldn't leave here for a long time; suggested he make himself at home and enjoy the chance to explore with the scientists. Well, this was just getting out of hand. He had no intention of going with them; he would remain on his ship. And if he felt like leaving by thunder he would!

The two young men stood up and were headed towards the buffet table when they spotted him. Josh smiled and greeted him warmly, "good morning Uncle Ian," he said with a nod of his head. "Quite a bit of excitement around here isn't there. I hope you will consider joining my parents on the expedition. T'kai tells me you of all people will be able to read the ancient sea charts they will find in the great city."

"Charts you say," Ian McGregor snapped up his head, his interest peaked.

Josh nodded and continued, "Yes sir, and I understand there are also plans of some kind of great ship they built and used against the monster from below."

"A ship?" Suddenly Ian found himself eager to go. "Well," he began clearing his throat, "I planned on joining them for awhile anyway; thought it would help pass the time."

Josh and Rain bade him good day and left the lounge smiling slyly.

Ian's mind was racing, making plans. He would speak to Mr. McMullen; yes, he would be perfect to leave in charge of the ship. He knew the Queen would be safe with him. As Robert and Amanda came into the lounge Ian rose and greeted them warmly, inquiring about their expedition.

After breakfast, the children all gathered on deck and waited for Josh and Rain. As they approached questions were thrown at them from many.

“Are we to leave today?”

“How are we going?”

“Should we get all our gear?”

“Easy, easy, we have plenty of time,” Josh told them laughing, “there’s no rush. Tristan, would you be so kind as to go below and retrieve the duffel bag Rain told me about?” Tristan looked to Rain questioningly.

Rain laughed, “Don’t look to me for approval, he’s our leader now, go!”

Tristan ran below and was back in five minutes with the large duffel bag. He sat it on the deck and then joined the others.

“Thank you Tristan,” Josh said in a firm voice as he turned and faced everyone. “Today begins a new life for all of us. But,” he began holding up a finger, “and I stress this, you must chose of your own free will. You will not be forced to accept this; it must be your decision. The Dolphins will return shortly; when they do we will use only one of the longboats below.”

“What’s it going to be like Josh,” asked Chloe.

“They’ll be taking us to a place of training; once there we will all be instructed in the ancient history of this planet. Apparently there is a whole lot more than you could possibly guess. We will be trained to fight in the seas in the ancient way. When they feel we are ready - we will be paired with our brothers.” He turned around and looked out at the river before continuing.

“This is no game people; this is real. If you chose to continue it will be all or nothing. Some of us could die before all this is over.” Josh turned around slowly and faced them, “what say you?”

They stood there in silence, each going over what Josh had just said. Little Ruby came forward with TJ right behind her.

“You can count on me Josh,” she said brightly.

“Me too!” echoed TJ excitedly.

“I’m in all the way,” said Tristan in an emotionless voice.

“We are with you,” said Espy.

“Yes,” whispered Sophia quickly.

They all stepped forward one at a time, and each accepted what Josh had told them. Each agreed, some a little more hesitant than the others, but in the end they all agreed.

“Good,” said Josh with obvious pride. “If any of you want to say good bye to anyone, now is the time. I want everybody back here in 15 minutes.” They quickly scattered and headed below or for the lounge.

“Is there anything you need to take with you Rain?” Josh asked as he headed towards the lounge.

“No,” Rain answered softly, “there’s nothing here I want; I’ll wait for you here.”

Josh entered the lounge and looked around, everything was surprisingly calm; there were no loud hysterics. He saw the parents of the children calmly wishing them well; several were hugging; they were all basically accepting the choices their children had made. Josh sought out his mother and caught a glimpse of her hugging TJ tightly. He was scanning the room for his father when he suddenly felt a strong hand on his shoulder. Josh turned around quickly and his father stood before him smiling.

“I guess this is it then,” Robert said as he stared into his son’s face searching for the young boy he was so familiar with. “Son, this is all very strange, but I accept it, mainly because you accept it. I saw it happen with my own eyes, I watched you change, and I understand now that you are destined for something totally out of my understanding.” He hesitated for a moment and then said in a shaky voice filled with emotion, “I am very proud of you Josh, very proud.” He put his arms around Josh and hugged him.

“Thanks Dad, it means a lot.” Josh held onto his father and his mind was suddenly flooded with scenes of his childhood: riding on his Dad’s shoulder, racing along a sandy beach, studying a giant beetle in the Amazon rainforest; roasting marshmallows at a campfire in the Ural Mountains. His father had taken him with him on all his expeditions. He had taken the time to teach him, at a very early age, everything he knew. He had exposed him to the other scientists as well; and Josh drank up their knowledge. He was so grateful, grateful for all the knowledge he now possessed.

“I love you Dad, more than you could possibly understand. Thank you for being such a good father to me and TJ.” Josh’s voice cracked with emotion.

Amanda came over to Josh and took him in her arms. “I love you son, and I am proud of you. You watch out for your little brother, you hear? We’ll be right here when you’re finished, waiting.” Amanda looked about, “where’s Rain, Josh. Didn’t he come in with you?”

“He’s on deck Mom,” Josh told her, “waiting for us. He has no connection with anyone – he thinks.” Amanda smiled at her son and turned and headed to the lounge door while Josh smiled behind her.

Rain was standing at the railing when he heard someone coming. He turned around and was visibly surprised when he saw Amanda approaching. “Mrs. H, is something wrong?”

“Do you really think I would let you go without a hug and a fare well young man?” Amanda came forward and slipped her arms around Rain and pulled him to her.

“I have enjoyed meeting you and getting to know you, Rain, you are one of a kind. I love your intelligence, and the gentle way you care for the children. I think you are an exceptional human being.” She held him out for a moment and then kissed his cheek and embraced him again. “Watch over my sons please, and the others as well,” she whispered softly in his ear.

Rain was in total shock; he didn’t know what to do. He stammered out a “thank-you,” and “I like you too Mrs. H,” and disengaged himself. Never having received any warmth growing up, Rain found it a difficult and awkward situation. Josh stepped on deck and saved him.

“Jeez Mom, give a guy a break; you’re going to embarrass him!” Josh grabbed his mother and swung her around and then hugged her. Amanda responded by pulling her eldest son to her tightly. Josh nestled his head in her hair and whispered in her ear, “thanks Mom, he won’t say it but it meant a lot to Rain that you cared. I love you Mom.”

Both Rain and Josh suddenly looked at each other and said simultaneously, “they’re on their way!”

“We’ll send messages to keep you informed; though I have a feeling you guys are going to be very preoccupied.” Josh told his mother.

The children came up on the deck and Rain unclamped the railing lock, lifted the bar and led them all down to the platform where the boat was tied. They climbed in, stored their gear, and took their seats, hardly filling the boat. They placed Sam in the center of the boat.

Rain then instructed Tristan about the ropes, explaining that he wanted him to see to it that the ropes were looped about the three dolphins properly. They would be pulling the boat down the river. “But you must not touch them in any way Tris, no skin on skin contact. Do you understand?” Tristan nodded and told him not to worry.

Rain looked above and called to Josh, “they’re almost here Josh, better get down here.”

Josh said a final fare well and jauntily hopped down the stairs to the landing. As T’kai came into the river area he shouted a greeting to Josh, who dove into the water and swam to him. The large Orca surfaced and called to Rain; in minutes he was on his back. Three large dolphins swam to the boat and slowly nudged it away from the platform. They carried it to the center of the river and turned it around; they then positioned themselves in front of the boat and waited. Tristan guessed that they wanted the loops of the ropes placed about them. He quickly took the ropes and placed them in the water and watched as the dolphins went below and surfaced in the center of the loops swimming a short distance to better position them about their bodies. Slowly the dolphins began to swim off, pulling the boat along with them.

Two hours later they entered the secluded lagoon; the dolphins nudged the boat along to a small docking area. Tristan helped everyone out of the boat and they lined up on shore all a bit apprehensively. The dolphins then turned the boat around and sped off quickly back towards the river pulling the now empty boat behind them.

Back in the lagoon Rain dove off of B'nal and swam to the shore. Josh stayed in the water with T'kai receiving his instructions for the children. After a bit he slid into the water and swam to shore.

“You’ll find a large adobe building off to the right of the lagoon, stow all your gear in there and orient yourselves to the lagoon and the surrounding area.” As they turned and headed towards the waterfall area Josh reached out and laid his hand on Sam’s arm.

“Sam, will you come with me, T'kai has something for you.” She was surprised but followed obediently. Josh took her around to the side of the waterfall and thru it into a hidden chamber. T'kai surfaced in the small pool inside and Josh brought her to him.

“He asks permission to speak with you Sam. He does so telepathically and so cannot enter your mind without your permission. May he speak to you?”

Samantha was surprised when he called to her at first, and inside fearful that he was going to tell her she couldn’t be a part of this; but she said yes anyway - better to get it over with and be done with the embarrassment.

“Come here Sam,” Josh said holding out his hand to her. She hesitantly took his hand, surprised at how strong it felt. He led her to the pool and stepped in, helping her step down into it along with him. “Come on don’t be afraid, this is for you, Sam,” he said reassuringly.

T'kai swam over to them and came close to Samantha. He stared her for some long minutes and then she heard a series of clicks and warbles. She turned to Josh questioningly as he smiled at her and reached out for her hand. He grabbed it and placed his other hand on T'kai’s head. Sam felt a small jolt and then a warm feeling of love and acceptance filled her entire being. She heard clearly in her mind:

Greetings young one! We bring you here to be cleansed. You have an imbalance in your body’s system; it has caused the great weight gain that you have experienced. Because this can only be done with your ‘brother in the sea’, you must undergo the selection before the others. Will you accept this?

Sam looked to Josh, eyes wide in surprise, “what should I do Josh?” she asked.

“Sam, this is your choice,” he told her firmly. “If you have questions, use your mind and discuss this with T'kai.”

Sam turned around and faced the dolphin, concentrating she asked, *what do you mean; what exactly do you wish me to accept?*

You must face the dolphin candidates and find your 'partner'; it will not be an easy thing for you to do in your present state. So we must bring you down below, to the initiation pool ourselves. Do you accept?

Sam stared at the dolphin and understood immediately, remembering her last dream she smiled and said; *Yes!*

Josh came over to her and quickly relayed instructions to her. They swam out of the waterfall to the center of the lagoon, T'kai pulling Sam along with him.

"Take a deep breathe and hold it Sam, we will take you below to the pool," urged Josh. Minutes later they were all in the initiation chamber, its golden walls shining brightly.

Sam looked about her in stunned silence, "*...I dreamt about this place! I saw this in my dreams, and there is a machine that I must pass thru... and... and...*" Sam's eyes flew wide as the clouds faded away and she now remembered the entire dream. She turned and faced T'kai smiling. *Yes! I remember now T'kai!*

She took Josh's hand and he led her to the dolphins waiting at the end of the pool. As they got closer a silvery gray with a small patch of white in a star shape on her head began to slap the water excitedly.

Sam smiled and called out, *I know you, I remember! You are T'kul. Oh you are so much more beautiful than in my dream!* The beautiful dolphin leaped into the air, did a summersault and dove back into the water coming up beside Sam.

T'kai swam over to them and explained; *you must follow your 'sister' to the machine and swim inside it. It will realign your body and balance your systems. When the machine opens, swim out and take hold of T'kul's flippers. You will receive a shock; do not concern yourself with it. Do not let go of T'kul; you must hold until she releases you, understood?*

Yes!

Sam was extremely excited, as she knew she would be changed somehow. T'kai swam over to the side and waited with Josh. The other dolphins clicked and shouted out approval. Sam slowly followed T'kul around the pool to a side antechamber. She saw the golden opening to the ancient machine. Her large weight made it very hard for her to move about but she swam-pulled herself along into the opening. She was no sooner inside when the doors closed and she heard a humming sound. There was a series of flashes, and then a bright light scanned her body. There were more flashes of bright light, and then the door rose up and she swam out of the machine heading towards the waiting dolphin, her mind racing with the possibilities of what was to take place.

As she reached out and grabbed hold of T'kul's flippers she felt the electrical jolt, only this time it was much more powerful. She arched and convulsed and began to sink down into the pool. But she did not let go of T'kul. Soon she felt the familiar warmth, and new sensation – connection! T'kul filled her mind with words of welcome.

At long last we meet my sister. I am T'kul of the E'lan pod, mate to T'kai. Long have I waited to join with you and become one. Because of your strong will, I have been chosen for you; together we will free the seas once again.

A bright light began to form around them as T'kul and Sam connected and knowledge began to flow. T'kul began to spin around. As she increased their speed they began to rise out of the pool. Sam was filled with anticipation at what was happening. She felt her entire body begin to tingle, and felt something more. T'kul was with her in this, she was helping her to accept this change. She felt pain in her legs and arms, but it was a different kind of pain. She felt her torso stretch and contract, and then a bright light filled her mind and she could think of nothing else except how beautiful it was. She let go and allowed it fill her completely. Suspended in the air, both human and dolphin began to change.

Watching from below Josh raised his hand to shield his eyes from the bright light. He could not see what was taking place, but his link to T'kai explained everything to him. Sam was being physically changed; she and T'kul were being brought to 'perfection', as T'kai called it. After a bit T'kai urged Josh to open his eyes and watch what was taking place. Ever so slowly Josh opened his eyes allowing himself to become adjusted to the bright light. He immediately noticed that they appeared to be wrapped in a cocoon of some sort. Sam's large body was shrinking; her legs were becoming shapely and long. Her body itself was becoming slim and quite curvy. Her tummy was flat and her breasts were firm and ample. He watched in growing excitement as her arms and legs became more muscular and firm. Her hair was long and flowing, shining brightly in the light, framing her beautiful face. Her face was still Sam, only more mature; her features quite appealing. What appeared before him was a lovely young woman in her early twenties.

Josh realized that he was very attracted to her, so much so that his body was showing it. This was something new to him; he had never felt the sexual urge before and was at a loss as to how he could control it. T'kai eased his mind telling him it was a natural reaction; he showed Josh how to control his physical emotions, and soon Josh had his body back to normal.

As the light dimmed Sam and T'kul were lowered back into the pool. Sam was spent, but still excited. T'kul eased over to her and she leaned on her new life long friend for support. They made their way to the stairs that led from the landing down into the pool. Sam rested on a step and looked about her. Josh swam over to her, as T'kai swam to T'kul.

"Sam," Josh said breathlessly, "my God Sam, you're beautiful! I always knew there was a beautiful person inside, but I never could imagine this!"

Sam looked at him and smiled, she stood up and climbed the stairs out of the pool. Totally oblivious to her nakedness, she inspected her new body with growing disbelief. She cupped her breasts with her hands, and grinning, raised her head and looked at Josh.

The effect on Josh was instantaneous; he came up out of the pool and went to her. Taking her hands he held her at arms length and surveyed her body with great appreciation.

“Josh, look at me...” she squealed.

"Yes...I see..." said a slightly aroused Josh.

“Oh my, this is so wonderful! I’m not big fat ugly Samantha anymore. Wait till the others see me; they’re not going to believe this,” she whispered, eyes shining brightly.

Josh went to one of the nearby stone boxes and opened it and removed a long white robe. He handed it to Sam and she wrapped herself in it, spinning around in a circle. Her happiness was catching; the Dolphins in the pool were spinning in time with her. Josh watched her as she danced around the pool in elation. The golden light of the pool played its way across her face and body illuminating her every curve and making her appear almost ethereal. Josh eyed her in fascination and growing excitement.

T’kai’s strong voice brought him back to reality. Now is not the time my friend. She must come to the awareness of her attraction to you before any mating may take place. Give her time to revel in her joy.

They stayed in the underground pool for another hour, exploring the several alcoves that led off of the pool area. It was a huge underground habitat complete with living quarters. Josh and Sam discussed this and with their new found knowledge realized that this was where the ancient beings lived long, long ago. They found an area with many of the stone boxes and opened them one at a time. Some contained clothing, but most contained weapons of varying degrees. Two of the boxes contained Trident shaped spears. Both realized that these were used in underwater battles.

T’kai called to them and told them they must return to the surface. They were to say nothing of the boxes to the others just yet. Sam went to the box with the clothing and chose a body suit of some material that seemed to glow an iridescent green. It fit quite well, much to Josh’s delight, and she said it felt like it was a second skin against her body. They returned to the pool and swam to their dolphins. Taking a deep breath, they swam down and out of the pool surfacing in the dark lagoon. The day had passed while they were below.

T’kai, it is night already? We were only down there for a couple of hours. Josh said in disbelief.

No Josh, time passed quickly here above, the day is over. In time you will get used to this happening. B’nal has kept R’an informed of all that took place. He has all the young ones in the initiate’s temple. Go and show them what they can expect to happen to them all.

Josh and Sam swam to the landing and propelled themselves out of the water as naturally as climbing a stair. They stood there for a moment grinning at each other in the bright moonlight. Sam grabbed Josh in a hug and whispered, “Thank you Josh, so much!”

Taken a back by the feel of her so close to him Josh uttered a weak, “its ok Sam, I’m happy for you. Hey, that’s why we are here right?” He disentangled himself from her embrace and smiled, “let’s go show them your miracle.” He took her hand in his and they headed off towards the temple.

The children were all sitting around a large stone table when they entered the temple. Rain rose to greet them and was visibly stunned at the change in Sam. The rest of the children all rose and ran towards them flinging questions wildly. Josh calmed them all down and explained all that had happened.

SHA'EL'S CHOICE

Back at the Glacier Queen, the adults sat about for some time talking quietly in hushed tones. Each had watched their sons and daughters climb down the stairway and enter the longboat. They had watched as the dolphins arrived, took the ropes about them and headed off down river pulling the longboat behind them. Less than an hour later a crewman came in and informed them that the dolphins had returned the longboat. Ian looked about and recognized what was happening and decided to take action.

“All right people,” he boomed out standing in the center of the room, “we have an expedition to get ready for. Now what do we need, what kind of supplies and gear do we need to take with us?”

It was just the jolt they needed to wake them from their approaching depression. Being scientists they quickly rose to the occasion and began to call out, “ropes, and plenty of water, picks and shovels, lamps and flashlights, sleeping bags, and the small pop-up tents.”

“Didn’t Josh say that the Dolphin told him there was plenty of food on the island? We can limit the amount we bring with us and maybe bring some extra things,” offered Jonas Waite.

Ian smiled, happy that he had accomplished what he had set out to do - get their minds thinking again. He gathered his crew and selected four men to accompany them. An hour later they had gathered all their gear together in the lounge.

Ian took the lead and suggested, “I’ve been thinking about what Josh said; I think we should stay together and head for the ancient city. He said we would find all the answers to our questions there, so I propose we start there. We can always go off in different directions later; but for now I suggest we stay together.”

“Agreed Ian,” Robert said quickly, “I was going to suggest the same thing.”

By 11:00am all their gear was loaded in one of the longboats and they were headed for the ancient stone pier. The water was calm and crystal clear allowing them to see a long ways down. As they approached the stone pier they spied some stairs on a lower landing leading up to the main walkway. They coasted close to the landing and two of the crewmen leapt out of the lead boat and tied it up. They walked over to the second and grabbed the lines tossed to them and tied it up too. All the scientists climbed out and everyone went to the second boat and unloaded it. Each grabbed something and they all turned and faced the stairway.

Ian and Robert took the lead and began the climb up the stairway. As they stepped onto the landing, a large golden catlike animal met them. It was sitting there staring at them with large violet almond-shaped eyes; the size of a large tiger, it blinked once and then threw its head back and let out a long howl. Both men froze in their tracks.

“You think it’s dangerous?” asked Ian under his breath.

“Well, the dolphin did say nothing on the island would harm us,” Robert answered shakily.

“Oh you two,” Amanda exclaimed in disgust. She had come up behind them and quickly taken in and assessed in the situation. She stepped between them and pushed them apart as she went down on one knee. Licking the back of her hand she extended it to the creature all the while saying in a singsong voice, “well hello there, my my, aren’t you beautiful! Come on, come here, I won’t hurt you,” she said stretching her hand.

The creature arched its back and stretched itself and then jauntily pranced to her. It sniffed her hand, licking it once, and then rubbed itself against Amanda almost knocking her over. Amanda scratched the creature’s head and neck and it purred loudly. The rest of the party came up onto the landing and watched as Amanda interacted with the creature. She ran her hand over its thick furred body stroking it gently; it looked up at her and purred even louder.

She laughed, “I bet it’s been a long time since someone gave you any attention, my sweet golden girl. Oh such a beautiful girl you are, yes sweetie-pie.” Amanda stood up, “well, we have to be on our way girl, would you care to come with us?”

The cat meowed once and, tail in the air, pranced down the pier to a pathway that led off into the jungle. There she sat waiting for the scientists to join her. Amanda laughed and headed off after her turning around to the others.

“Well, come on you guys, you aren’t afraid of a little cat, are you?”

With that she turned around, adjusted her backpack, and headed off down the pier to the waiting feline. Everyone laughed and joined her quickly.

As they moved along they could see that this had once been a road long ago; now overgrown with vines from the encroaching jungle. The cat-like creature continued on its way with unconcern. Amanda, in the lead, followed along commenting on the flora and fauna surrounding them. One of the scientists, Hilda Edelman, a veterinarian turned marine biologist, informed the group that many of the ferns they were passing were from long extinct species. Every mile or so and she would exclaim, ‘Look here’, and then, overly excited, revert to her native language of German, spewing out a long explanation. She begged them to allow her to camp in the jungle and examine it further. They promised her that once they reached the city and set up a base camp, they would allow her to return with two of the crewmen as guards.

It took them four hours to reach the city. One minute they were in the jungle, and the next they passed thru tangled grass six feet high into a clearing. Before them was a huge grassy plain, the pathway led up towards a hill, the cat waiting patiently for them at the top. As they approached, they could see the city laid out before them. Several commented that it reminded them of Machu Picchu. It differed only in that in the center of this huge city was a golden pyramid. All roads and side streets were centered around and leading to the great structure. They slowly made their way down the path and stood at the entrance to the city with mixed emotions. Fear, apprehension, and great curiosity filled them all.

It was Robert who took the first step thru the archway. Turning he called to his fellow scientists, “well what are you waiting for? This is a once in a lifetime chance, come on!”

They entered the city and moved thru its deserted streets quietly, almost in reverence. They followed the cat as it zigzagged along as it seemed to know where it was going. Looking around at the buildings they almost expected someone to come out and greet them. It was very eerie; there was no sound except for the shuffling of their boots on the stone ground. They came out of one of the side streets and found themselves in a plaza with the golden pyramid before them. There appeared to be a deep moat around the entire structure, long since dried up. The cat kept moving, following the roadway along the side of the structure. They pursued close behind, slowly looking about them carefully. As they came around the corner of the pyramid they could see the cat had stopped midway, waiting.

They came up to her and looked about and realized that they were standing at the archway to a long bridge that led directly to the doors of the pyramid. As the sun shined down on the two massive golden doors they could see there was something etched onto both of them. The closer they came the clearer the image became until they recognized the etchings; there was a giant Dolphin on one door, and an Orca on the other.

“Do you see Robert?” Amanda said breathlessly, “This all fits into our dreams, I think all our answers lay inside.” She looked about, “but how do we open it? I see no latch.”

They fanned out and inspected the door and the walls on each side. They found nothing to indicate a lever of any kind. It was Amanda who figured it out. As they were all looking for an opening, she watched the cat; it was sitting there as if waiting for something. After all that had occurred in the past several days, Amanda put it all together and came up with an idea. She knew if she said anything they would think her mad, so she simply acted upon it. As she was approaching the cat, Robert turned and watched. Waving his hands he called the others over and pointed to Amanda; they all watched curiously.

She went up to the cat and knelt down and speaking in a soft voice asked, “My we go inside and see the wonders waiting there?”

The cat rubbed itself against Amanda and stepped forward onto a golden plate in the floor. She threw her head back and howled loudly. There was a loud clicking noise, as if a series of locks were being released, then the doors began to slowly swing open. There was a hissing sound as the old trapped air escaped in a rush. They all stepped back and waited until the doors were wide open. Learning quickly, they waited for the cat to step thru the opening before they continued. They followed her down a long hallway and were taking out their flashlights when the place seemed to come alive. Giant urns at least ten feet tall, one on each side of the hallway, burst into flame illuminating the area. They found themselves in a long golden hallway.

The cat continued on and they followed her to another set of huge doors, these obviously led to a room of some kind. Amanda saw more etchings on the door and inspected them carefully. She noted that one resembled a handprint of sorts. She placed her hand on the print and the doors hissed and began to slide open into the room. They were standing on a landing, stairs leading downward. Six more gigantic urns around the room burst into flame allowing them to see what no man had seen in thousands of years.

For all intents and purposes, they were in a classroom of sorts, or possibly a library. There was no other explanation for the scene below them. They could see stone benches spread throughout in six different groupings. Each centered about a long stone table, and on each table were a stack of gold metal tablets. They all looked towards Jeffery for an explanation.

Jeffery Hyde-White was famous for his ability to read ancient languages and maps. He had an uncanny ability and often worked with Amanda on projects; so often, in fact, that they treated each other like brother and sister. He looked about the room, went to one of the tables and inspected the tablets saying he believed the tablets were books of some sort. But he did not think they were gold.

On closer inspection, Amanda and Robert both agreed that it was not gold, but metal. And they both insisted, like no metal either of them had ever seen before. All of a sudden Jeffery reached over and took the tablet out of Amanda's hand and turned it over.

"Look Amanda." On the tablet were a series of hieroglyphics. "Look here at this ideogram, doesn't it look familiar?"

Amanda looked at the tablet carefully. Her eyes flew wide in excitement, "I recognize this one and this one here too! Jeffery, there are ideograms from three, no, four different ancient languages! My God Jeffery, what have we found here?"

"That, my dear Amanda, is the million dollar question. This can only mean that there was a civilization that existed long before our recorded one." Jeffery was grinning like a wild man; he had an almost maniacal look in his eyes.

"Think of it Amanda, long before we ever began to record our history, this civilization was flourishing. Something must have happened, some kind of huge catastrophe, and it was split apart. That would explain the similarities between all the ancient languages we have come across around the world. My God, do you realize that if you combine Ancient Egyptian, Babylonian, Phoenician, and then Mayan and Aztec languages, it leads to one central language. It's nothing short of mind numbing. Do you think we could do this, Amanda?" he asked smiling.

"Amanda," Robert called in a loud forceful voice. She and Jeffery were brought out of their reverie and back to reality. "I can see that you and Jeffery will have your work cut out for you. If you have no objection, we will leave you here with two guards and continue on exploring this place, Ok?"

"Yes, yes Robert. Oh wait!" She walked around the large stone table and went over to the landing where the cat had laid down waiting for them to return. She knelt down and scratched its back once again, producing a loud purring.

"My little friend," she began, "would you be so kind as to show these people around your beautiful temple? I am going to remain here."

The cat stood and stretched itself and proceeded to go to the top of the landing. It turned around and meowed at the other scientists as if to say "Come on, follow me."

Robert chuckled and remarked, "Seems you have a way with our new friend, my dear." He kissed Amanda on the cheek and hurried up the steps and joined his fellow explorers as they headed down the hallway.

Amanda returned to the table that she and Jeffery were working on. They decided to turn over all the tablets and have a look. They picked one with several characters on it they recognized and began the process they had developed years ago. Amanda took out one of her notebooks and began. She took the ideograms she knew one at a time and wrote them down in the order they were shown, and left a space for the ones she didn't know. Several hours later they looked at what they had.

"This doesn't make any sense Amanda," Jeffery said, perplexed. "Generally we can get an idea of what they are trying to say, but this is all gibberish. We're doing something wrong here. Maybe it isn't a book, maybe its just signs; you know, to teach children. "

"No, it's not that Jeffery, no... let me think a moment. I've seen this before somewhere." Amanda was stumped; she lowered her head in her hands and sighed deeply.

"Look, we've been at this for hours." Jeffery was tired too, "Let's call it a day, we are both tired. Let's go and get something to eat and drink; clear our minds for a bit. We can come back refreshed in the morning. Besides my eyes are burning from the fumes from those urns."

"I think you may be right Jeffery. Let's go and find the others." They left their backpacks on the stone table and headed up the stairway inquiring of the two crewmen as to where the others had gone.

"Just follow the lights ma'am," he said pointing, "each place they went is lit up like a Christmas tree."

"Wilson, isn't it?" Amanda asked as the man nodded, surprised that she remembered his name. "Thank you Wilson, please come along with us, we're finished here for the night."

"Yes ma'am. Joe," he said calling for the other man, "come on, we're leaving." Joe came sliding out from behind the door; they never even knew he was there.

"Good protection," murmured Amanda approvingly under her breath in surprise.

They found their fellow explorers in what appeared to be a dining hall. There were many tables and several small alcoves with small chimeras in them. Private dining areas they guessed, for a more intimate setting. They were getting a fire started in one, and several of the MRE's they carried with them were on the table.

"Robert," Amanda called out as she came down the stairs, "we're calling it a day. It's just too much to take in all at once," she said exasperated. "We'll go back and continue tomorrow morning. What have you found so far?"

“Amanda,” he said smiling, “Jeffery,” nodding in his direction, “glad you’re here. This place is full of surprises; it’s an absolute treasure trove.”

Amanda looked around the room, “Robert, where’s Ian?”

“Oh, yes of course!” Robert became very animated, obviously excited, “yes, the best room of all; we couldn’t get Ian to leave. It’s a chart room Amanda! Rows and rows of charts, and it there was a giant mural on the wall of all the oceans of the world. The currents are all marked and there are some places Ian didn’t recognize. He was in heaven; flat refused to leave the room. He’s in there now going over the place with a fine toothcomb. I just didn’t have the heart to force him to leave; besides, we’re on no timetable.”

“I’m not arguing with you Robert,” Amanda chuckled. It had been a long time since she had seen him so excited.

“Of course not my dear, yes, oh, and we came upon one room they must have used as a bathhouse. The minute we came in and stood on the landing water began to flow into the large pool in the center of the room; it was crystal clear and warm!” He took her hands in his and spun her about. “We have a date for later my dear!” He whispered in her ear and the glint in his eye left no doubt as to what he had in mind; Amanda blushed and chuckled.

Robert caught his breath and continued, “Another room was an arboretum, the plants were still growing in there Amanda, all laid out in rows. Someone or something is still tending the m... all very strange. And then we found a hospital; at least we think it’s a hospital. We need time to explore it more. There is just too much to take in all in one day. We stopped here when we found it and decided to call it a day. We’ll have days to spend here and explore.”

Jonas Waite joined them, “Look at all the panels lining the walls around the room, Robert. This was definitely a kitchen or dining area of sorts.”

Amanda felt the cat rubbing her legs and looked down, it was purring loudly. She knelt down and asked, “Are you hungry Goldie?” The cat walked over to the wall and meowed. She sat and looked back at Amanda as if waiting then she meowed again.

Curious Amanda went over to her, “what is it baby, what do you want?”

Goldie looked up at the wall and meowed again. Amanda looked up and inspected the wall carefully; it looked the same as the other walls around this room. Then she noticed the panels on these walls went all around the room. There were pictographs, displaying various animals all down the side of the wall in front of her. The one Goldie was staring at so intently had a picture on it resembling her. On a hunch Amanda reached out and touched the wall panel. There was a clicking sound, and the panel slid open, a long tray came forward with some kind of food on it in a golden bowl.

“Look at this,” she yelled. The others came over quickly. Amanda took one of the bowls that was on the tray, and smelled it. “Seems okay,” she touched it, “it’s moist and fresh,” she placed the bowl on the floor and the cat began to eat greedily.

“This is just plain crazy!” Jonas blurted out, “I would venture to say that no one has been here for at least a thousands years if not more. Yet the food is fresh?”

“This only deepens the mystery about this place,” Amanda said to no one in particular.

Terry Blair, the mathematician of the group, stepped back and scrutinized the panels along the wall. There were pictures of a variety of species; birds, the cat, a dog-like creature, and a small mouse like rodent. She went to one of the other panels and pressed it; nothing happened. She watched Amanda open another panel; and then noticed the cat rubbing against her. *Aha!* She thought to herself in triumph. She turned and went to the back wall and stood there staring at the panels. There were pictures of different fruits on many of the panels; an apple, a pear, an orange-like fruit, a large one that resembled a cantaloupe. She touched a panel and nothing happened. She stood back thinking for a moment. She turned back and watched as Amanda was talking to Jonas, nonchalantly, she scratched the cat’s head. Suddenly, like a fog lifting Terry understood. *Aha!* She thought to herself in triumph as she began to laugh loudly.

“Amanda, Robert, all of you, come over here quickly!” They came in a rush to see what had happened.

“Terry, what, are you all right?” Jeffery asked.

Terry went over to the cat and knelt down, “Hello my pretty,” she said as she stroked the animal, “My beautiful secret agent. May we have some of the food here; we are a bit hungry and need to replenish our bodies too.” The cat meowed and leaned in and rubbed herself against Terry’s arm. Smiling, Terry rose and went back and joined the others smiling.

“Amanda, would you like a cantaloupe? Or...” she was scanning the pictographs on the wall, “perhaps an apple?” she hit the panel and they all heard a clicking and then it slid open. Lying on a golden plate was an apple cut neatly into six slices.

“Maybe an orange or a pear would suit you better?” She touched two panels and two trays slid out with an orange on one golden plate and a pear on another, sliced.

Amanda picked up the orange, it felt strong and pliable, she smelled it, “Oh my God, it’s fresh,” she exclaimed excitedly. She picked up one of the apple slices and took a bite. “It’s sweet!” she said as she shoved two more slices into her mouth.

The others scientists scanned the other panel and touched them, but nothing happened. Terry began to laugh. They looked back at her and waited for an explanation.

“It’s the cat!” They looked at questioningly.

“For some reason you have to make contact with the cat. Once you pet her, and she knows you, and accepts you, everything works!” Terry held her hands up, “It’s so simple, and yet so ingenious!”

Robert called them all to attention, “Look, I think we’ve had about all we can take for now. Sensory overload to our minds; there’s just too much to see here. Let’s call it a day and settle in here for the night.”

“I’ve got a better idea Robert,” Terry said with an amused look on her face, “let’s ask the cat where the living quarters are; I bet she knows.”

“Can’t hurt to try,” Amanda said walking over to the cat. “Hello Goldie,” she said as she went down on one knee. Scratching her head she asked sweetly, “Well, you heard what we were discussing girl, will you lead us to the living area? We really are tired and we would really appreciate it.”

The cat stood and shook herself, and then went to the landing. She turned back and meowed as if calling them. Amanda picked up her traveling bag and climbed the stairs with the others following. The cat set off down the hallway and turned left down one they hadn’t explored yet. After about 25 feet she came to a set of doors with water and flowers etched on it. Amanda came forward and placed her hand on the panel and the doors opened inward. This room had two wide levels; each level had six secluded cubbyholes of a sort. In the center of each was a large oval puffy mat, almost like a mattress. A shelf about twelve inches above encircled it and there were pillows and blankets folded on the shelf.

“Communal living quarters,” said Jonas, “similar to the Lamurians; or so the ancient scrolls indicate. If you notice, there are six alcoves on each side of the landing and they face to the landing below. That means twelve private rooms; what do you think? Perhaps only twelve people lived in this temple; maybe they were priests or priestess’s.” Jonas shook his head, “More questions, always more questions,” he lamented.

They decided to use the sleeping alcoves as they were all very tired. The day had been very exciting, and their minds were reeling under all the information that had been discovered. They were exhausted both physically and mentally trying to decipher the secrets of this place. After a quick discussion they decided to give it a rest for the night. Tomorrow they would continue to explore all the rooms of this amazing place.

They decided to take turns using the bathing room. The first to bathe was Jonas, who informed them that the water was warm and refreshing and added that there was a definite aroma of some kind of flower. Aromatherapy, he called it, he said he felt extremely relaxed after the bath.

Hilde was next and 25 minutes later she came in yawning loudly, agreeing with Jonas about the bath; she was asleep in minutes.

Bill and Beverly Swanson, the oceanographers, were next. They returned 40 minutes later grinning like two young lovers.

As Amanda was gathering hers and Robert's bathing things she noticed Terry slip out the door. She was about to call her when Robert pulled her back indicating she should watch. To Amanda's surprise, Terry greeted Jeffery in the hallway with a passionate kiss, and they both went into the bathing room laughing. Robert smiled saying he had suspected for some time. They returned together and Jeffery gathered his things and moved them to Terry's alcove. No one made a comment as it seemed so natural.

Robert and Amanda were the last to use it and stayed much longer than the others. They discussed the effect that this place was having on everybody, and the strange sequence of events that led them all here in the first place. Amanda commented on the sweet aroma coming from the steamy water. As she and Robert relaxed in the water she found herself increasingly aroused and filled with a strong desire for Robert; he obviously was feeling the same as he reached for her and she all but jumped him. Later, their sexual appetites filled, they commented that whoever built this place didn't leave anything out!

After everyone was finally settled in the different alcoves, the urns in the room dimmed. As they lay there staring at the ceiling, it became darker and darker. Suddenly it seemed to disappear, and the night sky was played out before them on the giant ceiling. They watched in fascination, relaxed and at ease, some drifted off to sleep immediately.

Amanda heard Jeffery and Terry arguing over the sky. Jeffery finally asked, "Is anyone else having a problem finding the Big Dipper, or Orion's Belt? I can't find any reference points."

"Jeffery," said Jonas sarcastically, "give it a rest, please?"

Amanda went up on one elbow, "wait a minute, he's right, I don't see any... oh my God! " She sat up quickly, "Jeffery! Jeffery this, this... isn't our sky at all."

"Right you are Amanda," he replied in triumph. "I don't know what galaxy it is, but it most definitely isn't ours."

"This place is full of secrets," said a sleepy Terry, "we need to explore more." She drifted off to sleep.

"Maybe we'll be able to find out more tomorrow," Amanda said yawning. She lay down once again, "mmm... let's get some sleep." She curled herself up next to Robert and was soon fast asleep.

Goldie waited till everyone was deep asleep, then she pranced over to Amanda and Robert's alcove. She sniffed once at Amanda, rubbed against her shoulder, and then settled herself. It had been a long time since humans had been in the temple. She was most pleased to have them here once again.

The next several weeks went by in a blur of activity for the young children. They were all taught new ways to swim, how to hold their breath under water for long periods, how to recognize potentially deadly sea urchins. Being young, they adapted and learned quickly; T’kai schooled them well in the ways of the sea.

Instructing them to be very careful not to touch any of the Dolphins or Orcas, he worked them thru a series of underwater tactics and moves. Pairings were becoming evident in many of the young ones. T’kai watched and studied all the children; when he felt the time was right, he and Josh took them one at a time to the initiation pool to join with their brothers of the sea.

The biggest surprise was TJ. During their training sessions, a large Orca kept pace with them. Just out of reach, the beautiful animal was always present, always watching. Well aware of his presence, TJ would watch excitedly as the Orca would cut thru the water with great agility, leap high and come crashing down. His rapt attention was not lost on the Orca, or on B’nal. B’nal spoke with T’kai on this and it was decided that he was ready to make the choice. TJ was brought below and asked if he felt a connection to any of the candidates; he quickly answered yes. Told to swim to the ‘brother’ that he felt an affinity for; he went straight to the large Orca with the curved dorsal fin and the crescent shape on the side of his massive head. The Orca greeted him with great excitement. Their bonding took place, and soon it was a very mature TJ that left the initiation pool; he was happier than Josh had ever seen him. And B’nal’s second in command, P’vel, had found a rider.

All the children found their counterparts in the ranks of the Dolphins and Orcas, with the exception of Tristan and Leslie. Both boys were brought to the initiation pool and questioned by T’kai and B’nal.

“Do you not feel a closeness or a bond to any of the Dolphins or Orcas here present?” asked an exasperated B’nal. Both said no, they felt no overwhelming urge.

It was then that T’kai observed Tristan eying the carving on the great door that led to the chamber beyond. Feigning disinterest, he went to the side of the pool and carried on a conversation with Josh and B’nal, asking them to observe Tristan.

Without realizing what he was doing, Tristan climbed the steps out of the pool and stood before the door. He stood staring in fascination at the etching of a huge creature on it. It was larger than the cruise ship that brought them here. Its body appeared to be in two large segments; it had a large bony exoskeleton, and two giant front claws. The etching showed it cutting a large whale-like creature in two with these claws. The etching was extremely ferocious in appearance. Tristan raised his hand.

Suddenly he heard T’kai shout a warning in his mind, *No Tristan! Do not touch that door!*

No one had noticed Leslie stiffen as Tristan climbed the steps.

Tristan jumped and turned to see what was wrong, the pool had emptied except for Josh and T'kai. *What is wrong?* He looked at T'kai and then at Josh. *I was curious about that creature etched on the door; I mean – it's fantastic!*

Tristan, if you choose to touch or open that door, you do so at great risk. T'kai was visibly shaken. I planned to tell you all the story of our coming to be, later this week. I see we must do so now. Josh, will you call all to the lagoon above.

Josh took Tristan and swam quickly above; B'nal and Rain were waiting for them. Josh explained what happened and asked Rain to call the others to the lagoon. When T'kai surfaced they were waiting for him. An hour later they all understood and when T'kai asked Tristan if he still wanted to open the door he received a weak 'no thank you' in return. Then to everyone's surprise Leslie spoke up.

T'kai, I am to ride the beauty behind those doors, Leslie quickly said and turning he motioned to Tristan, sorry Tristan, but she isn't meant for you. Your ride is coming as fast as he can. He was injured protecting the Dolphins on the way here; it's just taking longer for him to get here. He turned and faced Josh and Rain, and smiled a little nervously. I know I don't say much, he began, looking at all the young men and women, and you guys think I'm just a bit off... he held up his hands, it's ok, I haven't exactly been the friendly type. I could have helped to improve my image.

Josh tried to reassure him, *Les, its ok...*

No, no... I am sincerely sorry for that, I was sitting on my pity-pot for way too long. All my life, I always felt like I was apart from the rest of the world. You know, like a twin who lost their other half; always feeling like they weren't quite whole. When I saw, his voice cracked with emotion, saw the etching on the door... I can't explain the feeling that came over me. It filled me like nothing you can imagine.

He turned around and faced T'kai.

I owe you an apology T'kai; I broke your rule about going to the initiation pool alone. But please believe I couldn't help it, I had to know. Leslie took a deep breath and continued. I snuck down to the pool last night and leaned against the door.

Leslie's eyes filled with tears at the memory.

She knew I was there!

His voice cracked with emotion,

She was so happy that I had found her!

T'kai and Josh come to his side.

As for the change; it won't bother me at all. You see, inside, I've always been different. And to be perfectly honest with you, I look forward to it. Besides, if you look behind my ears you'll see the beginnings of gills already. He turned his head and raised his hair; sure enough there were two slits on each side. I can already stay underwater longer than any of you; including the Orcas. And in case you haven't noticed, my toes are webbed.

There were many "ah's" from the group as they looked at Leslie with new eyes. The young men and women circled Leslie and many apologized for not trying to be friendlier. They should have taken the time to understand, they said. Leslie admitted that he could have made it easier for them; that they should feel no guilt. It all ended very well, he was happier now than he had ever been. For the first time he was looking forward to the future.

The Dolphins and Orcas in the pool began a clicking sound that got louder and louder.

T'kai turned and leaped into the air and dove below coming up beside Leslie. *You are the Rider we have been waiting for; only the Rider would know she was female. Yes, there is no doubt. You may go to her whenever you wish. T'kai came forward and touched Leslie's forehead with his nose; we thank you for your sacrifice.*

It's not a sacrifice to me T'kai; it's a reunion of two lost souls. Leslie was actually smiling. T'kai, when I go to her may I release her? May I set her free? Leslie asked, concerned.

As long as she is with you, she will be allowed to roam free. B'nal said forcefully, but a word of caution, you must always be near to control her. Leslie nodded in agreement.

T'kai and B'nal and their riders swam down to the pool with Leslie. He shook hands with Rain and Josh, thanked T'kai and B'nal, and swam to the stairs. They watched as Leslie climbed the steps to the large golden doors. He placed his hands on the doors and leaned against them all the while speaking in hushed tones. T'kai went to one side of the pool, and B'nal to the other side. There were levers on each side; they pulled the levers and the long golden bar slid back to allow the doors to swing open.

Shield your ears R'an and Josh, shouted B'nal.

As the doors opened they heard a loud screeching begin. It filled the entire chamber echoing off the walls. Josh could feel it resonating about his body. Just before he passed out he looked towards the doors and saw a huge claw begin to emerge. T'kai brought him to the surface quickly with B'nal and Rain behind. Josh came to in a matter of minutes. He shook his head and opened his mouth wide trying to 'pop' his ears.

B'nal, what's with the screeching? Rain shook his head to clear his ears. *Defense mechanism of some kind - she may have been frightened,* B'nal chuckled. *She was frightened?* Josh blurted out, *what could possibly scare anything that big?*

B'nal chuckled again. *Did you notice T'kai that the young one was not affected? He truly is her rider.*

The water in the center of the lagoon began to churn and bubble up; great geysers shot up into the air as something very large was rising to the surface. They all turned and watched in disbelief as the monster broke the surface with a changed Leslie on its back. He appeared fish-like, a greenish blue color to his body. His hands and feet were fully webbed; his eyes had taken on a green color with gold at the center. The creature he rode was a mystery. It appeared to be a cross between a lobster and a shrimp, only bigger - a lot bigger. It had two segments; a reddish bony exoskeleton covered both. The claws were on the front segment; they were the size of a large jet plane. Long thick spider legs were on the back segment, four on each side. The head rose up on the top of the first segment, incased in the bony shell. Two large black eyes rotated 360 degrees with 15' long 'feelers', spreading out in all directions. Leslie stood and pointed to T'kai and the creature gently came forward and stopped.

They all heard a very sultry female voice greet them. *T'kai my handsome friend, S'ana is pleased that we meet again after so long. B'nal you are as strong and masculine as ever, a true warrior.* Both swam forward and bowed to the enormous creature.

Ah, I do so love your chivalry, gentlemen. She was being coquettish, flirting with them. *So, I understand the beastie has risen from his deep home once again.* She made a clicking sound, almost like a chuckle. *I shall have to destroy him this time T'kai; he cannot be allowed to remain on this planet.* She raised her giant claws skyward; *oh it is good to be free again!* The creature turned its eyes on Leslie and with obvious pride she said, *Ah, is not my rider a wonder? He fills me with joy and hope; we shall be unstoppable!*

T'kai came forward and bowed his head in respect, *My Queen; it is good to be with you again. The young ones are almost ready. They need only learn the use of the Tridents and we shall be ready to begin the hunt.*

One of B'nal's Orca suddenly came racing into the lagoon without warning. S'ana rose up and extended one of her giant claws. *Wait my sweet! He is with us, he brings news,* explained Leslie quickly. She settled into the pool purring, much to the relief of the Orca.

B'nal, he came forward and bowed and continued hurriedly, a wounded Orca is about to enter the waterway. He is injured badly and in need of help as he is very weak. May we assist him? The young Orca was eyeing the monster carefully.

Take your brothers and go; bring him here quickly. B'nal turned and called to shore, *Tristan! Come here, your brother has finally arrived!*

Ten minutes later the group came into the lagoon half carrying the injured Orca. There were deep lacerations all over its body, and a long 'S' shaped scar on the side of its head. It was obviously very weak, as they brought him before B'nal.

Welcome brother K'shi, you are badly injured and in need of healing. B'nal swam forward and nudged the side of the Orca's head. *We must go below to the healing chamber. Your rider is here and has much concern for you.*

Ah, then it was worth the effort! The Orca raised its head and looked about the pool stopping when it saw Tristan. *To be whole again is all I thought about; it urged me to go on when I thought I could not. My brother!* He called out in joy. Tristan swam to him quickly, oblivious to everything else.

Hold Tristan! He is too weak for the blending right now. T'kai explained, *we must get him to the healing chamber.*

They all dove below to the hidden pool.

Amanda awoke bursting with energy. She lay there looking up at the golden ceiling remembering all that had happened the day before. Suddenly Goldie's head was over her, her golden eyes shining brightly.

"Well good morning there beautiful," Amanda said sitting up, "and how are you this morning?" The golden cat meowed a greeting and rubbed against her. Amanda wrapped her arms around the large cat and scratched her and hugged her. The animal threw herself down and began to 'play'. Amanda laughed and Robert stirred and woke up watching them.

"I think she has taken a fancy to you, my dear," he said stretching and yawning. "It's probably been a long time since she's had any company."

One by one the scientists woke up, washed and met in the 'dining room'. They mapped out the different areas of the pyramid and set out to see what they could discover. Ian happily returned to the map room. Amanda and Jeffery went to the library. Hilda decided to go the infirmary and explore it further. The rest would explore the rooms still hidden within the large structure.

Amanda was looking forward to cracking the ancient language and finding out the secret of this island. She and Jeffery tackled the golden tablets with gusto. Two hours later they were no farther along than the day before.

"I don't understand this Jeffery," she was getting dejected, "we've tried all the conventional methods and still this language is a mystery. What are we doing wrong?"

"I think we have to rethink. Their language is totally different from anything we have experienced before. There has to be a clue somewhere that we are overlooking." Jeffery looked about the room. "Amanda, what if this isn't a library; what if this is just a lounge? You know, with books and magazines lying about. Maybe we have it all wrong?"

Amanda thought about what Jeffery said, "You could be right Jeffery." She looked around the room. The cat was off to the side, standing near a small alcove, as though she was waiting for something. "Jeffery, look at Goldie."

Jeffery watched the cat for a bit, he thought about what Terry had said the night before. "Amanda, I think Terry may just be right; the cat is the key."

Amanda turned and stared at the cat, her mind filled with possibilities. She slowly walked over to her. "Ok Jeffery, let's just see," and went down on one knee, "Goldie, can you help us girl; do you know what we are looking for? Where is the library located? Come on girl, show us the way."

"Here we go again," said a sardonic Jeffery.

The cat stared at Amanda for a moment and then she walked about ten feet down the alcove and stood before a wall. She meowed once, and then stretched her full length against the wall indicating a panel on the side of the wall. She looked at Amanda and meowed again.

Jeffery and Amanda looked at each other. "I think she wants you to touch the panel Amanda, somehow I don't think it would work for me. Go ahead; this may be what we're looking for."

Amanda took an unsteady step forward. She took a deep breath and placed her hand on the panel. There was a whirring sound and then a definite loud click, like a latch being released. The panel clicked and moved inward about an inch and then slid to the right, hiding itself in the wall. They stood there transfixed; inside was like nothing they had seen before. It looked more like the inside of some kind of flying ship. The entire inside was made of the same golden metallic substance as the pyramid, only this was far more advanced, and it appeared to be rounded.

"Jeffery, this..." she looked at him with disbelief.

"Yes Amanda, it's a ship or what's left of a ship," looking around Jeffery added under his breath, "or maybe I should say a flying saucer."

The cat walked into the room and went straight to the large chair in front of what could only be called a control panel and jumped up on it. She turned to them and meowed contently as if to say, "at last!"

Jeffery began looking around immediately. He noted all the dials and levers on one wall. There was a control panel laid out before the chair, and a series of buttons. He turned to Amanda, "I think this was the control room of the craft. See over there, there are four more seats, like the one here. So there were at least four of them. What do you suppose happened?"

Amanda was lost deep in thought. There was a button on the console that matched the pictograph on the wall of the main chamber. "Jeff, come here. Look at this," she said pointing to the button, "notice the pictograph next to it, hmm... I wonder?"

"One way to find out Amanda, push the button. We have nothing to lose at this point." Jeffery stood by her side as she hesitantly reached forward. She looked at the cat; it was busy licking its large paws, seemingly unconcerned.

"No," she said reaching for his hand. "Together Jeffery, we do it together."

They pressed the button and immediately heard a whirring sound. There were some clicks, and then a large screen lowered from the ceiling. The entire story was played out for them. The language was like nothing they had ever heard before, but they understood what they saw only too clearly. The picture showed a star galaxy unlike any they had ever seen. The ship was traveling at a fast pace across it. They stopped and orbited one world similar to earth; it had several deep green continents and seas of blue water. They circled it several times, their instruments taking measurements of some kind.

“Oh Jeffery, they were explorers, scientists like ourselves,” Amanda blurted out.

Jeffery agreed quickly, “They’re studying the planet,” obviously thrilled he continued, “Oh this is so exciting!” They continued to watch in fascination as several different pictures flashed across the screen of the planet.

The image shifted to the interior of the ship, and they got their first look at the explorers. The aliens were very tall, about eight or nine feet; thin and very graceful in their movements. Amanda and Jeffery watched as they glided about the ship effortlessly. Their faces were not unlike humans, only elongated. Their hands only had three long fingers and a thumb. The pilot was a female, or appeared so, as did the other scientists. Or perhaps their race all looked like this Jeffrey mused. Their hair, if you could call it that, was golden and unlike anything Amanda had ever seen. Almost like a lion’s mane. Huge almond shaped eyes looked back at the camera expressionless.

The scene shifted to a picture of Earth, from far away in space. As they got closer there was a flurry of activity onboard the ship. They seemed to be excited about something. The pilot, or captain, said something into the screen and then the camera shifted around till the earth filled the screen. It zoomed in on an area of landmass; as they watched the camera zoomed in further and the picture cleared. There was a small herd of mammoths on the plain below. As the camera panned out a bit, they could clearly see they were being stalked by a band of cavemen! The captain said something very excitedly, and they all watched as the cavemen singled out an old mammoth, separated it from the herd and took it down. It was all done very skillfully. The other mammoths ran off; and as they watched, the leader of the cavemen delivered the coup de gras; putting the animal out of its misery. Then a curious thing happened. They all gathered around the dead animal in a circle, and they performed some kind of ceremony. To Amanda, it looked like they were praying, or giving thanks for the large kill.

“What does that look like to you Jeffery?” She whispered curiously.

“It looks like we’re going to have to re-think what we know about cave men,” he said sarcastically. “They apparently were not mindless brutes.” He was grinning from ear to ear as he continued, “Terry is gonna love this!”

They continued to watch as the ship glided over the countryside below, clicking and observing everything. They seemed to be comparing pictures and data from previous trips. The ship now sailed over the white covered arctic and hovered over an area. The clouds beneath the ship seemed to part and dissolve and the island came into view. The ship began to descend and they could see a landing area. This was a base of some kind; they had been here many times in the past. For the next hour they watched as the scientists went about their daily routine of measuring the changes in the planet. They did not interfere with anything, simply observed.

The truth dawned on both Amanda and Jeffery at the same time; these scientists were studying the evolution of the planet.

“Amanda, they were studying our planet,” Jeffery exclaimed. She turned and looked at him in stunned silence. “Think of it, the actual evolution of life on the earth.” Jeffery’s voice rose in his excitement, “Think of it, my God Amanda, this is the find of the century!”

“Jeffery, take a deep breath, I think there is a lot more to all of this.” Amanda looked about the control room, Goldie was curled up and sleeping contently. “Let’s just keep watching.”

The scene now shifted and they appeared to be flying over a huge mountainous area. Interspaced between the mountains were lush fertile valleys. Valleys with areas that had towns and villages, and neat little rows of growing vegetables; these were farmers! The camera panned back and they took in the whole picture of the towns and the valleys. They were cut-off from the rest of the surrounding area, like a world of their own. And flying overhead they could clearly see were dragons; dragons with humans on their backs!

“Oh my God!” both Jeffery and Amanda exclaimed.

The lead scientist was now explaining something, and thru the pictures she kept referring to, Amanda and Jeffery got the idea that this particular group was apart from the rest of the world. Their area was so remote, and so far from the jungles and dinosaurs that they were evolving at a different pace. The scientist said something and they watched in fascination as the camera recorded three large reptiles, not unlike Raptors making their way up the mountain ridge. They must have been cut off from the mainland by an earthquake or something; they were way far from their normal habitat. They were having a tough time trying to make it up the side of the mountain. They fell several times before climbing over the top and descending into the valley below. They were obviously starving, as they took no caution in their descent, growling and roaring as they came down the mountain. The camera now recorded one of the humans sounding an alarm and all below rushed across the fields and into a large cave. Then from above the dragons swooped down and flames burst forth out of their mouths cutting down the three monsters. They circled around and fired again, until there was nothing left but three piles of ash. The ‘all clear’ was given and the people returned to their tasks.

Amanda stopped the record here. “Jeffery, this is... is... unbelievable! I can’t even begin to understand,” Amanda was reeling from information overload.

Jeffery agreed with her, this was too much, too fast.

“We have to limit this to small doses; our minds can’t handle all this information at once. I suggest we stop for now; take a break. And Amanda, we need Jonas in here with us; he’s the archeologist, maybe he can shed some light on some of this. And I want Terry in on this too; she has a different way of looking at things.”

They left the control room and went to the dining area.

They sought out Jonas and Terry and in hushed tones related what they had found and asked them both to return with them. Jeffery suggested that he and Amanda get something to eat before returning. Both Jonas and Terry were chomping at the bit to get going. They were like little kids who saw a present and wanted to open it right away. Once back in the control room Amanda brought up the screen.

“This is the find of the century,” said an excited Jonas, “Can you replay it from the beginning?”

“I think we need to, so you can get an idea of these people and what they were doing,” explained Jeffery, “The longer we watched, the more we seemed to understand what they were saying. I can’t explain it; you’ll have to experience it for yourselves.”

“How beautiful they are!” Terry exclaimed at the image of the captain on the large screen. “Look at how graceful they are; this is unbelievable.”

They continued watching up to the point where Amanda and Jeffery had stopped the record. “Well, what do think so far?” asked Jeffery.

Jonas was in shock. “This totally discredits those stiff shirts who claimed that cave men were just brutes. The species wouldn’t have evolved if that were so. Did you see how they gave thanks after killing the mammoth?” He looked up at Jeffery, “And the dragons...?”

“You know,” began Terry, “I once read about an account of a dragon and rider saving a town from an approaching lava flow. It was so long ago I can’t remember all of it.” She looked at Jeffery grinning.

“Oh no,” he said holding up his hands, “don’t get started on the dragon thing again.”

“I’m just saying that there are stories from every ancient culture having to do with dragons. You must admit that, Jeffery.” Terry’s passion for ancient stories of dragons was beginning to show in her voice. “The Aztecs, Incas, even the ancient Chinese cultures had dragons. They have found references to them in Egyptian, Phoenician, and Babylonian texts and art. The myth had to have started somewhere.”

“I suggest we continue the record,” interrupted Jonas. “And by the way Amanda, you’re right, I am beginning to understand some of what they are saying.” Eyes dancing in excitement he continued, “This is really quite interesting.”

Amanda continued the recording and they watched in silence. The camera panned back and seemed to be hovering over the area. They watched the daily routine of the farmers and their interplay with the dragons and riders. The captain came on and began to discuss this interaction between the two. They quickly understood what she was trying to get across.

“I think I just understood what she was trying to say,” said an excited Jeffery.

“So did I...” agreed Amanda.

“Me too!” joined Terry, wide-eyed.

“Not surprising,” commented Jonas. “Immersion, total and complete immersion,” he looked at their disbelieving faces, “well it’s not unheard of, you know.”

From what they could understand, this particular scientist believed that that there was a higher hand at play in all of this. She convinced the others that they should leave this group alone. This was not meant for them to observe. They had a heated discussion about it that ended with an agreement that they would keep clear of the dragons and their mountainous lands, for now.

They continued to explore the world and now concentrated on the seas. They had a craft that allowed them to explore under the oceans, unobserved. The screen was filled with wondrous sights of species now long extinct. They saw a barracuda-type fish that was at least 40 feet long; its razor sharp teeth cutting a whale in half. It was an enormous eating machine; feeding on everything it came in contact with.

“How’s that for a monster movie?” said a laughing Terry.

As the alien craft explored further they came to a thriving civilization. It was located in the middle of what we now call the Pacific Ocean, nothing around for hundreds of miles.

“Lumuria, it’s got to be!” shouted Terry triumphantly.

“Hush woman,” laughed Jeffery quickly.

They stayed out of direct contact, but observed nonetheless. The people lived in harmony with the sea around them. Theirs was a peaceful culture that seemed to center around the sun and the moon. Their entire city seemed to be powered by a huge crystal mounted in a strange device. The lead scientist seemed to be saying; another anomaly on this very strange planet. The ship returned to their home base and for several days they remained there studying some plant and ocean life. This scene played itself out for several days as the scientists reported on their various experiments and the results they yielded.

They were watching as the captain gave her morning report when suddenly everything started shaking about violently. The picture looked as if an amateur were holding the camera, shaking badly. The camera shifted to the console and a lever was pulled and the canopy in front of them slid open, revealing their location. Far off in the distance smoke was rising up in big black columns. The camera zoomed in to reveal a volcano erupting. Huge explosions were spewing up giant geysers of molten rock the size of tractor-trailers. The earth was reacting with quakes that were toppling everything as tectonic plates shifted beneath them. There was a series of wide cracks and the movement was heading straight for the aliens base. The ships’ gyroscope steadied it, and the scientists could be seen running a bout pushing buttons. They attempted to lift off, but before they could rise up they were bombarded with huge boulders from the exploding volcano.

Fire rained down on the island and it seemed to be breaking apart. One of the scientists shouted a warning of some kind and then they were hit again with a huge boulder that forced them to crash onto the side of the mountain. They hit with such force that there was damage to the underside of the ship. It sealed itself off immediately and they rose up, positioning themselves a safe distance from the disaster below. There was a collective sigh of relief from everyone watching in the room.

The scientists began recording the eruption and noting the effects it was having on the surrounding sea. Suddenly one of the smaller scientists burst into the room and shouted something, some kind of warning. Everyone froze and looked to the captain. She turned with an expression of horror on her face. She asked a question and the answer only doubled the look of fear on her face.

She turned and looked out at the sea and back at the volcano. In the space of seconds she had assessed the situation and made a decision. She turned and asked a question, the little scientist that burst into the room looked at her with tears in her eyes and nodded yes. The captain looked at all of her crew and said something; they looked at each other as if making a decision, and then nodded to her in agreement. The captain went to the control panel and shifted some levers and pushed a button. A beam shot out of the ship and hit the volcano; it slowly quieted. She flew the ship over the island, and every hundred feet or so a beam of white light shot out of the ship to the earth below; the island settled itself.

“Good Lord above!” Jeffery exclaimed jumping up. He began to pace back and forth. “The power this ship holds is astounding. Terry, she actually stopped the volcano from erupting!”

“Calm your self my dear,” answered Terry, “I think we’re about to find out what happened and why they remained here.” They sat down and Amanda continued the record.

The great ship landed back on the base and there was a flurry of activity. All of them raced below, and it was now that they were able to get a view of the interior of the ship. At a word from the captain, the camera seemed to come alive as it followed them below. There were three levels; the control room, the living quarters, and the bottom level. This was where the laboratories and scientific equipment were located. They stopped at a doorway and it slid open. As they entered it was apparent that this was where specimens were kept. There was a crushed rear wall and a gaping hole held together by some kind of force field. The captain walked to the rear and inspected the opening. She turned and scrutinized the lab and the tables with their specimens. She pointed to the table at the crushed wall; it was empty. She said something in a very commanding voice that ended in ‘DuGan!’

A small female scientist jumped and bowed and said something ending a word the modern day group was familiar with, ‘krakin’. Her fellow scientists took in a collective breath and the look on their faces was one of horror.

Terry grabbed Jeffery’s hand and squeezed tightly, the small group watching could tell that something was very wrong.

The small female called DuGan went to the center of a side wall and a screen dropped down. She brought up an ugly looking beast on the screen and pointed to it. Then she brought up a picture of a dark world, completely alien terrain, far different than earth. In one of its murky frothing seas they saw a horrible beast moving about on the bottom; undulating along, like an octopus, only this creature's legs appeared to be alive themselves. The one named DuGan was giving some kind of report about the creature. She pointed to the stats about the planet; and then she brought up the earth, with its stats alongside. She pointed to several things, and made a comparison of some kind.

"Good heavens," uttered a shaky Jeffery, "she's comparing the oxygen and nitrogen levels of both planets." Amanda stopped the recording.

Jeffery took a deep breath, "Amanda, I think this is too big to keep quiet. We need to inform the others of what we found."

"I agree Jeff," said an ashen faced Terry.

"I'm going to be sick..." Jonas fled the cockpit.

Amanda, visibly shaken, nodded in agreement, "... yes, we must inform the others."

Upon returning to they discovered that they had been gone for six hours. Time seemed to be shifted or altered in some way inside the pyramid. Two hours later they were all seated in the lounge area around one of the tables, quietly subdued, Ian and his crewmen included. Jeffery and Amanda had just finished telling them about what they had found; Terry and Jonas verified everything. They sat there in stunned silence.

“Amanda,” Robert began shakily, “You’re saying that aliens; all this...,” he said raising his hands and turning around, “is the work of aliens?”

“I know Robert, it sounds crazy,” she was feeling very silly right about now, “but I swear Robert, it’s the truth. All of you come with us and look at the records for yourselves.”

Jeffery stood, “Wait Amanda, look, the day is almost over. Let’s just get something to eat. We need rest right now; we can start over in the morning. I don’t know about any of you,” Jeffery smiled at her, “but my brain is pounding, I can’t handle much more today.”

“Amen!” shouted Terry loudly.

“All of you rest,” said Robert quickly, “You don’t have to go, I understand; but I’m going in there. Tell me what I have to do Amanda; I want to see this for myself.”

“I am going with you,” said a determined Ian, “Hell of a story Amanda,” he said giving her a wink.

“Well, you most certainly aren’t going without the rest of us,” piped up Hilda, with Bill and Beverly beside her.

When Amanda, Terry and Jeffery woke, they found their friends in the lounge drinking coffee; they all looked like they had been thru the ringer. They were just where Amanda and the others had been the previous day. Too much information to disseminate; the human mind can take in just so much before it overloads. Amanda went to Robert and kissed his forehead.

“I think we all need a break. Today we rest, lie about and do nothing.” She looked at them and her heart went out to them knowing what they were feeling. “Tomorrow we will begin again, together. Look, the information isn’t going anywhere, and we all need time for our brains to play catch-up.”

Robert arose wearily kissed Amanda on the cheek and headed off towards their quarters; Ian, Beverly, Hilda and Bill followed him quickly. They slept for 12 hours straight. When they awoke, they felt refreshed once again. They bathed and ate and then one of Ian’s crewmen, Dimitri, led them to the others in the atrium. Amanda spotted them coming down the hall and stood up and greeted Robert with a kiss.

“How are you feeling?” She said smiling, her hand on his chest.

“Much, much better,” said Robert kissing her hand, “thank God. I thought I was losing it there for a moment.”

“I know exactly what you mean,” piped up Jonas, “I did lose it! But I’m happy to say that I am much better. Things are in better order now, a new point of view, so to speak.”

“So,” began Robert, “is there a rule about discussing all this?” He was met with smiles from everyone.

“We were waiting for you guys to wake up,” said Terry smiling broadly.

They all sat down on the grass in the beautiful atrium and began discussing what they had seen. The implications of what they had seen were staggering. The part about the dragons seemed to have struck a special cord what with all that was happening in the world right now.

“So they’ve been here before, during the evolution of this planet,” said Beverly, shaking her head. “That would mean the dreams aren’t just dreams,” she whispered.

“Of course they have!” A voice boomed from behind them. They all turned and stared at the crewman, Dimitri. “You people don’t get out much, do you?”

As they continued to stare at him, Ian’s voice boomed out, “that will be enough Mister!”

Robert cut in quickly, “No Ian; he has as much right to speak as we do. We’re all in this together.” He turned towards the crewman, “Dimitri, come join us.”

Dimitri came over a little hesitantly, but after a word of encouragement from Ian, he joined them happily. Amanda asked what he meant by his remark.

“You people may be smart and professors in your various fields, but if you’ll pardon the expression, you don’t know jack. Not everything is written down in books. My great grandmother told tales she had heard from her grandmother, and she from hers. We can trace our family history back over 600 years before we began recording it on paper; and it goes back even further than that. And that’s just my family; there are many, many more.” He stopped and eyed them all.

Jeffery asked, “Go on, you have our rapt attention young man, please continue.”

He smiled at Jeffery and continued. “The rule has always been, ‘word of mouth only’, down thru the ages. Never rely on books and the written word. They can be changed...but the word of truth is always known. Pass it on so it will not be forgotten.”

"Go on..." they all urged him.

"The short version goes like this: In times gone past, ages and ages ago, man and the great beasts of the sky worked together as one. They were here to serve and protect mankind. One from our own family bloodline was called to serve, and did so proudly." He was beaming with pride. "My great grandmother also said that some kind of great calamity came upon the land and almost all were lost. A member of our family survived; she lived long enough to pass on the tale to her new family. And so it went until it came all the way down to me."

They sat staring at the young man for some minutes. No diploma or masters degree, and yet filled with the truth. They were all speechless, almost.

"Son of a bitch," blurted out Terry.

Everyone cracked up laughing spontaneously; which seemed to have the desired effect. They loosened up and were much more at ease with each other. After that they talked about the cavemen, and the creatures in the seas. They discussed everything, right up to the point of the volcano erupting.

The other crewman, Jimmy, came into the atrium, dripping wet. He was grinning like a little kid with a secret. He informed them that he had found a swimming pool in one of the other rooms. The water was clear, fresh seawater circulated about the pool. The roof opened when he stepped into the water and let the sun shine in.

"Anybody up for a picnic?" asked Terry laughing. After grabbing some fruit and such, they followed him to the pool and spent the remainder of the day there, simply relaxing.

The next morning everyone was up early. They were all filled with excitement at the prospect of finding out what happened to the alien crew. After a quick breakfast of fruit they all gathered in the ship's control room and made themselves comfortable. Amanda started the record from where they had left off.

The captain was still standing in the laboratory, listening to what DuGan was saying. Her face showed displeasure, but also something else; fear. Apparently when the ship was hit by the huge boulder and slammed into the mountainside, the back was crushed in. As the ship attempted to lift off and right itself a small opening was torn in the wall exposing the inside of the lab. When the ship lurched back, it did so over the ocean and it was then that the specimen slid out of the ship and fell to the ocean below.

The captain snapped a question angrily and DuGan answered with a nod, something, something, Kraki, something, Arbolis.

Jonas translated without even thinking, "I think she just said it was a Kraki from the planet of Arbolis."

"Nei!" The sound was a wrenching plea and broke the silence as the captain shook her head and looked about. She then turned back to the others wide-eyed, "Nei!" The record faded out here.

“Did you all get the feeling that she was scared shitless?” asked Terry in her unabashed way.

The next scene they had was the captain doing something to the recording device itself. She seemed to be adding something to it. When she was finished she went below to the living quarters and gestured everyone to the meeting room. She had several charts and notebooks with her.

“I call you all here for a vote,” she began.

Everyone in the cockpit jumped. “Did you all hear and understand that,” asked Jeffery quickly, looking about the room. Heads quickly shook on wide eyed faces.

“She must have put something on the recorder so that anybody finding it would be able to understand what they said.” Terry grinned, “She’s already decided to stay here.”

The recording continued. “I have placed a universal translator in the record keeper. Future generations will want to know what happened, to us and to the Kraki. I take no joy in saying this, I am sorry but the Kraki cannot be allowed to exist on this planet. In this oxygen enriched atmosphere the beast will grow to an enormous size; it could, in time, destroy all life here. We cannot allow that to happen.” She turned to the very frightened DuGan and asked, “How long before it becomes dangerous? Think, go over your records and get me an answer. We may still be able to save this world.”

The next few scenes were of them scanning the seas below, getting a fix and losing it just as quickly. There was a scene with the captain in the control room. She was talking into a device, a radio perhaps, giving her coordinates and sending a danger signal. She spoke very low and the recorder was unable to pick up what she said. Now the record showed all of them gathered in the living quarters. Apparently the situation was very grave.

“As explorers and scientists we have all taken an oath never to interfere with any of the worlds we study. Even though this was an accident on our part and we have the perfect right to interfere we have received orders from the High Council to stand down and return.” The captain took a deep breath and continued. “I cannot in all good conscience leave this planet to its fate. I vote to remain here and try to rectify our error. We have the means to do this, and perhaps, in time, we will be forgiven for interfering. Who votes with me?”

“It was my error from the very beginning. I never should have taken the Kraki sample off of Arbolis,” lamented a very sad DuGan, “I will remain with you, Sha’el.”

Amanda stopped the record, and said triumphantly, “We have her name, Sha’el. Does anybody need to go or anything?” Heads shook and she continued the record.

The other two scientists stepped forward and said, “We will all remain with you Sha’el. The mistake was ours as a group; and as a group we will correct it.” The graceful women joined hands, and a prayer was said in their native language, not translated by the recorder.

The next several scenes showed a jumble of activity. Several flew over the oceans of the world taking several samples of different fish. Sha'el observed the dragons and humans interplay; she spent several long days observing and taking notes; developing a plan of action. She returned to the ship and called another meeting.

“I believe I have a plan, but I must warn you all, it is very audacious. To even attempt such a thing is contrary to our beliefs.” She looked about the room at her fellow scientists.

“Please continue Sha'el,” they asked.

“I have studied the many species that inhabit the seas of this world and have found only two species that are suited for what I have in mind. The large black and white Oreki, and the Dofin, a smaller version of the first are the most promising.” She pulled out some charts and data. “They are both different from the other fish of the sea as they are mammals. Their brain mass is larger, and there is intelligence there.” She looked about at her crew and then continued. “I have studied the large dragons; observed how they and the humans interact; I have discovered that they are linked telepathically. I propose to do the same, using these two denizens of the deep and humans from the valley.”

There was a large uproar among the scientists. Sha'el called them back to order forcefully. “May I continue? We will infuse both species with all our knowledge. Train them in the use of weapons we will make for them. And then turn them loose to hunt the Kraki.”

They stared at her in shock. One of the older females leaned forward and asked only one question. “What are the percentages of them succeeding and destroying this mistake?”

“Good, I believe they can do it - with the help of the dragons.” Her zinger had the effect she wanted as they all began at once.

“Nei! Sha'el that cannot be allowed; it is direct interference with the evolution of this world. The law says we may not make contact. As it is, your plan is heresy!”

“If we do nothing, they have no hope! Need I remind any of you of the destruction of Gamut? Millions died needlessly, all because no one had the courage to do what had to be done.” Sha'el raised her voice gesturing with her hands. “Had the sniveling cowards observing that planet acted quickly and destroyed the monster that they themselves turned loose, it could have all been avoided. But instead they fled and left the planet to its fate. I will not allow that to happen here!” She pounded her fist on the table to the shock of the other women.

Composing herself she continued in a soft voice, “My friends, we must all agree to this, we must be united if we hope to succeed. There can be no half measures.” After a long discussion they analyzed her plan and came to the realization that her proposal was the only way. Each pledged that they would do their best and not fail her.

Several days later DuGan announced that the Kraki was growing. She explained that she was searching for it over the ocean when she stumbled on the remains of the island city they had found in the middle of the ocean. There was no sign of life anywhere on the island. The entire island was in shambles, the beast was on the move.

The scene now shifted again. Sha'el came into the cockpit and gave an order to the recorder. She then went to one of the flying runabouts and took off heading towards the continent. She headed straight for the mountainous area where the dragon community was located. She hid herself on a neighboring mountaintop and observed for two days. On the morning of the third day, Sha'el settled herself down and appeared to place herself in a trance-like state. She stayed that way for several hours.

“What do you suppose she is doing?” asked Jeffery.

Terry laughed, “Duh! She’s trying to contact the dragons telepathically. This is one strong woman.”

“Do you really think she can do such a thing?” asked Hilda in disbelief.

The scene now panned back to take in a much larger area. Off in the distance a black dot appeared and it seemed to be headed straight for the recorder. As it neared it took on form and there was no doubt as to what it was. A very large dragon was headed straight for the mountaintop. As it came closer they could make out a rider on its back. It approached and circled slowly. Sha'el stood and faced the enormous creature and bowed slowly.

The rider indicated a mesa and they flew off to it. Sha'el climbed on the skiff and followed quickly, settling it nearby she stepped off and walked directly to the large dragon.

He was at least 40 feet in length, black as night with a touch of purple on his wings and on the ridges of its massive head. Its rider dismounted and stood by its side. The dragon rose up to its full height and spread its massive wings. It then lowered its head and stared at Sha'el with eyes that left no doubt as to the intelligence behind them. They stood there for almost an hour. Several times the rider came forth and it seemed as though he were addressing her. But no words were spoken. Several times Sha'el gestured with her hands.

“They’re communicating telepathically,” whispered Terry informing everyone.

It was apparent that she was relating what had happened, and asking for their help. At one point Sha'el shook her head up and down, indicating assent to something. The dragon brought its wings forward and wrapped them around her.

“Holy shit!” exclaimed Terry.

“Terry!” Jeffery answered in exasperation.

A bright light began to form and became so intense that the device was unable to record what happened. As the light faded, Sha'el stood there before the dragon, a sublime look of peace upon her face. She bowed again and returned to the skiff. She took off and headed back to the island. Upon arrival she called a meeting and related what had occurred.

"They are going to help us," she said softly, smiling. "They are a part of something far greater than we ever suspected. I cannot relate anything more - I gave my word. But I can tell you this; this planet is blessed by the One who made us all."

Suddenly the scene shifted to a close up of Sha'el. "Our battery power is needed for other things right now. I am turning off this recorder while we construct the devices we will need. I will turn this device back on when we are finished and have powered up and recharged again." The screen went blank.

"Is that it?" Robert got up and came over to the console. "Amanda, is there nothing more?"

"That's all there is Robert, it turned itself off." Amanda was just as surprised.

"Well, we know that whatever they did," said Terry, "it must have worked. We're all still here and the planet is filled with life."

"Still," added Jonas, "I would have liked to have known what happened to the m."

They headed back to the lounge and sat about discussing what they had just seen. Ideas were thrown out and guesses made about the fate of the aliens.

Amanda and Terry discussed their intuitive feelings and finally said what was on their minds. "I don't think they killed it; Terry and I think they pushed it down into deepest part of the ocean and imprisoned it there." Both women looked about the room.

Terry continued, "I agree, with Amanda on this. I think it's broken free somehow and is on the prowl again." Jeffery started to disagree but Terry continued quickly, "Think about it, everything that's happened recently, the dragons return, the dreams, and the children. We all saw the changes that took place in Josh and Rain. I think it's all happening again."

Amanda agreed, "I believe our children are going to be the ones who fight this monstrous thing; and it will be on the backs of the giant Orcas and Dolphins."

"My God!" exclaimed Hilda.

For two hours Terry tossed and turned trying to rearrange herself into a comfortable position. She couldn't seem to get settled, her mind wouldn't turn off; and as tired as she was, she could not fall asleep. Giving up she rose and went to the dining hall and found Amanda sitting at one of the tables.

"Couldn't sleep, huh?" Amanda nodded and Terry continued, "yeah, me too! I guess it's all caught up with us, I mean, it's just too big to imagine."

"Terry, this goes beyond imagination," shaking her head back and forth Amanda continued, "and what makes it all so strange is that I feel there is something more." She looked at Terry for confirmation, "I can't put my finger on it, I just feel like I'm waiting for the other shoe to drop."

"I know what you mean; I thought it was just me!" Terry threw her hands up and her eyes got wide as she made a face, "You don't suppose that they're still alive, do you?"

Goldie came into the room and leapt onto the large stone table, both women jumped. She sat and meowed to Amanda, and then moved to Terry and did the same.

"What is it girl, do you want something to eat?" Amanda went to the panel to get food, but the cat remained on the table. "Okay... no food. What do you want girl, you're going to have tell us something."

"Maybe she wants us to follow her," offered Terry.

Both Amanda and Terry stood up; the cat rose and jumped off the table and went to the landing, turning around she meowed at them to follow.

"Uh-oh..." Terry looked at Amanda, "...here we go again!"

They followed her down the hallway where she stopped at a wall and indicated that they should press a stone that was protruding from the wall. They did so and the wall opened inward revealing a long hallway. Goldie passed thru and continued on her way. They tagged along for almost an hour in silence, passing thru a series of locked panels that slid quietly out of the way, all the while going in a downward direction.

"You and your ideas, 'can't hurt to follow'," Amanda chided Terry jokingly.

Sometime later Terry commented, "Hey Amanda, do you smell that?" Terry was sniffing the air, "it smells like salt water, I think we're near the ocean."

Amanda took a deep breath and agreed, "Yes, salt air...!?"

They stopped about twenty minutes later as they caught up to Goldie. She was sitting before a large door; there were no markings to indicate what lay beyond. Both women looked all about and could find no lever, or panel of any kind. Goldie rose and stretched out and pressed the door and it slid open. It was a small four by four room.

“An elevator!” exclaimed Terry triumphantly.

The door shut and it whisked them down for almost 2 minutes and then it sped along horizontally at a fast pace for about three or four minutes, Terry guessed. It stopped with a grinding screech and the door slid open. They were in a huge cavern, the walkway led from the elevator to a door built into the cavern wall. Terry examined the area and in doing so she looked below and realized that they were on a walkway high above the cavern and below was a pool of some kind. She could make out a large Dolphin swimming about.

Amanda and Terry followed the cat to the door, where she stretched and pressed against the door to no avail. She meowed piteously, as if she were calling for someone or something; Amanda tried to comfort her.

“Amanda, come here a minute,” Terry whispered, “shh... look below.” She pointed and Amanda looked and quickly snapped her head up staring questioningly at Terry. “Your guess is as good as mine; let’s see if we can get this door opened.”

Both women pressed on the door in several different places finally hitting on the correct panel. It slid open to reveal a long hallway arching around behind the walls of the cavern, again on a downward slant. Goldie ran by them down the hallway and quickly out of sight. They looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders, and started after her. They came to a series of rooms with large windows that allowed them to see in. Apparently these were their workshops as there were long tables and strange tools lying on them. Further down the hall was another room; this one held several devices that resembled prosthetics of some kind. On a nearby table they spotted the recording device.

“Amanda look..!” exclaimed Terry pointing.

“Terry, the device!” Amanda said at the same time.

“Lets see if we can get in there,” said Terry as she began pushing on the wall and looking about.

“Over here,” called Amanda with a wave of her hand. “This looks like the doorway, help me push here.” The door clicked and slid open into a slot in the wall. Both women went directly to the recording device.

“How do we get it to work? I don’t see any buttons,” Amanda said studying the device.

Terry scanned the room for a screen; to one side was a small table with a strange device on it. It was shaped like a large thick ‘U’, with a bar shape on the top, two small prongs extending from it.

“Amanda, take a look at the bottom of the recording device; see if there are two holes.” Terry looked at her hopefully, “I think it fits on this thing.”

Amanda picked up the recording device and looked, “yes! Okay, let’s see if it fits.” She placed it on the device and waited; nothing happened.

“No power?” Terry asked unsure. “Maybe we have to turn it on, or give it a command of some kind?”

“I don’t know,” Amanda was at a loss, “I don’t know what else to do. Damn it!” Amanda’s frustration was beginning to show.

“All right, let’s take a minute here,” cautioned Terry. “We’re both intelligent enough to figure this out; we just need a minute to get our thoughts in order.”

Terry stepped back and looked around the room. *Ok, this was some kind of a workroom, she thought to herself, the recording device was here, so they had to have some kind of a screen so they could check out what they had recorded. There’s got to be something around here somewhere...* She looked about and up at the ceiling, at the far end of the cave wall was a small dark indentation. *Aha, this maybe it.* She went over and inspected the ceiling carefully.

“Amanda, over here, take a look,” Amanda walked over and looked as Terry explained her thoughts. “What do you think?”

“See if you can grab anything to pull down,” urged Amanda.

As Terry was stretching and searching the ceiling for something to grab, she lost her balance and began to fall. She quickly reached for the outcropping next to the slot to steady herself, when she did so a screen slid down. Terry fell to the floor and both women shouted, “Whoa!” and grinned at each other.

Amanda went back to the recording device and lifted it off the holder, turned it around facing the screen, and placed it back on it. The screen came to life.

A very haggard looking Sha’el was facing the screen. She had a large jagged scar down the left side of her face. Her left arm was a metal prosthetic, like the ones they had seen on the tables nearby. DuGan was in the background and she looked no better; Sha’el was speaking.

“We lost Ku’el and Ta’ka to the beast two days ago; they are with our ancestors now. By giving their lives they allowed my children to surround the beast and push it to the depths of this ocean. It is imprisoned there, held by a force field. Our experiment has been a success; our debt has been paid.”

The screen now shifted to a different room. There were four long golden tables in it, nothing else.

On two of the tables were the remains of the other two aliens. They were chewed up pretty badly, one was missing a leg and had a huge hole in its torso; the other had no face and both arms were gone. The picture went black and then it suddenly came back on, they were back in the workroom, Sha'el was speaking.

Amanda and Terry looked at each other, "My God, what a price they paid," whispered Amanda.

"It has been five days since the last recording. DuGan, my faithful and gentle DuGan, has gone to our ancestors," she took a deep breath and continued, "I fear I shall be following her soon."

She suddenly had a coughing fit and held a towel to her mouth, when she pulled it away it was spotted bright green. She rose and poured herself a glass of some kind of pink milky liquid. She waited a few seconds for it to take effect, and Amanda could see that she was in terrible pain.

"The medicine barely helps anymore, and in a way it is a good thing. Jake has offered a healing, but I have declined. Perhaps I seek a penance of some kind for what I have wrought on this planet. I do not know anymore, and to be honest I look forward to the long sleep." She began coughing again and ended with long gasps.

Amanda and Terry watched with tears in their eyes, feeling the pain the alien woman was going through.

"I have ensured that the island will continue, unseen by even the most advanced technology. If ever the beast should free itself; T'kai and B'nal will know what to do. Along with all our knowledge, I have given them very long lives. The dragons imparted part of their wisdom to these two and it shows in their caring for the humans and this planet. They are kind and gentle, yet do what must be done to protect. There is no way to impart how I feel about these two; they are truly amazing sentient beings. I go to my sleep in the knowledge that we did the right thing. These two shall protect this planet if ever the beast should rise again. I leave this record here for future generations so they will know what happened here, what we did to correct it."

She began coughing again; at the end she took a long slow drink of the liquid. Her breathing had become much labored. She shakily turned and called out, "Ay'a, come here my sweet."

There was a sharp intake of breath from both Amanda and Terry as the beautiful golden cat they had come to adore now appeared on the screen and pranced to Sha'el's side.

"Come my beauty, you must seal the room when I go to sleep. I am so sorry I cannot take you with me my sweet. But you must stand guard and wait till others arrive. This island is yours to run and play in. T'kai and B'nal will look after you."

She bent and rubbed her face against the side of the golden cat's head. Ay'a meowed and rubbed against her purring loudly.

"Oh, I am so very, very tired." She reached out and the picture went dark.

Both women sat there for a moment crying.

"She sacrificed everything she had to protect our world," said a somber Terry, "and nobody will ever know."

Amanda stood up, "let's find Goldie, or should I say Ay'a. She seems to be the key to everything here and I have a feeling that she has more to tell us."

Both women left the workroom and went further down the hallway. They passed several more rooms, but did not go in. They found Ay'a sitting by another doorway, and both women knew what was in there. Amanda went down on one knee and gently stroked the large cat.

"Is this where your mistress sleeps my sweet?" Amanda hugged the large cat; "you have been a faithful friend all these years Ay'a, she would have been very proud of you."

The cat rose up and stretched her full length, pressing on a panel. There was a whirring sound, but nothing happened. Amanda placed her hand on the panel and pressed with all her strength. Again a whirring sound, but this time the door slid in and to the side. There was a faint glow inside, just enough to illuminate the four caskets in the room. Each was covered with a glass like top. Perfectly preserved all these years, displayed for all to see were the bodies of the four who gave their lives to protect this planet.

"She's still as beautiful as ever," whispered Terry, staring in awe. Both women stood there staring at the perfectly preserved body of Sha'el.

"I half expect her to open her eyes and tell us to get busy," murmured Terry.

Amanda stared at the remains of the alien woman and her mind filled with all that had happened as a result of her decision to stay and rectify the horrible accident that had occurred. She felt wanting in her presence.

"Terry, I don't think we should be in here," said Amanda suddenly. "I don't feel worthy of her. Let's leave them in peace."

They backed out of the room, and the cat followed. Both women took a moment to pull their thoughts together. Ay'a rubbed against Amanda and beckoned her to follow. She pranced off down the walkway back the way they had come. They followed her all the way back to the elevator and then returned to the temple.

Once there Amanda and Terry went in search of Robert and Jeffery. After asking a bout for them they were directed to a new room that they just found. When they entered they stood there staring at the walls and ceiling. There were giant pictorials of different colored dragons displayed all over the walls.

“Ah there you are, my dear. Come in, look at the treasure we found,” said a gleeful Robert. Amanda and Terry stepped down and looked about the room at all the pictorials. “Oh you haven’t seen the best one. Come over here and look at this,” said Robert extending his hand.

They walked over to Robert looking in the direction he was pointing. On the side wall to the right of the doorway was a huge portrait of the large black dragon they had seen in the recordings. He was magnificent. It was obvious this portrait was done with a great deal of love. Every tendon, every muscle, was shown in detail as the great beast stretched his wings in flight. His eyes revealed the intelligence that they had seen in the recordings.

“This is breath-taking Robert, he’s absolutely beautiful.” Amanda could understand now how Sha’el must have felt about the mighty dragon.

“We’re calling this the Dragon Room,” said Jeffery proudly. “There are all sorts of writings on the beasts, and as you can see many, many drawings.” Both women turned slowly about studying the walls. “And over here,” he said going to the back of the room, “here are the Blue Dragons. Terry, you will get a kick out of this. Come on girl, over here.” Jeffery taunted her, “Look my sweet, aren’t they magnificent? There are twenty-two of them; and I gather from the way they are shown,” he said pointing to several pictorials, “these are the Dragons that aided them in their fight with the Krakin. They are called the Blue Dragon Clan.”

Terry reached out her hand and touched the walls with reverence as tears streamed down her face.

Jeffery was beside himself as to her reaction, “Terry, are you all right,” he softly asked her.

Terry bent slightly with one hand on her heart and waved her other hand in a backward motion.

“We’ve just come from finding out what happened to them. Oh Jeffery, the sacrifice she made was a huge one. We... we watched her die... comforted by the knowledge that her experiment was a success. She left T’kai and B’nal here to confront the beast should it break free from its prison.”

Amanda joined in, “we found their resting place Robert. The cat was the key; she was around when Sha’el and her people were alive. She was left as a guardian of sorts to show us the way. It was so heartbreaking; she gave up everything, even her life, to restore order to our Earth.”

“We figured you must have found something very important,” Robert added, “You’ve been gone over eight hours. Next time let us know something.”

“Oh Robert, we couldn’t have gone more than four hours at the most,” said Terry indignantly.

Jeffery quickly added, "Sorry old girl, but it's been over eight hours. It's night out side if you bother to check. We were about to call it a day in here and go look for you two."

Amanda and Terry looked at each other quizzically. "I swear to you, we have only been gone three or four hours at the most," began Amanda. "Robert, we both couldn't sleep and Goldie; oh her real name is A'ya by the way; well, she beckoned us to follow her. So we did, and she took us to the place where they worked on their machines and we found the final record and something else. Then we came back here."

"Time displacement," said Jeffery "could explain a lot of things."

"Yes," said Robert thinking, "Maybe the whole island is that way. The aliens seemed to have thought of everything. Hmm..." Robert went to Amanda and took her hand, "Well, let's go gather up the others and you can tell us what you found."

Amanda and Terry related everything they found to the others at dinner. There were many questions, which they answered as best they could. They explained how they felt upon finding the remains of the four aliens. And no, they would not show them where they were located. They earned their peace.

They discussed the time displacement and also how they knew they had been gone only four hours by their watches. Yet, eight hours had passed in the temple at this end. In the end they decided that it was a mystery that they would have to deal with later. There was still a lot to find out about this place. Everyone promised from then on that no one would go off alone without informing the others.

The next day they descended on the Dragon Room and began an in-depth study of the information there. It seems that when Sha'el met with the large Dragon, she called him Jake; he agreed to help her. He sent the Blue Dragons to aid them in their battle with the Krakin. There were many notes about battle plans, the interaction of the beasts with the Dolphins and Orcas, and reference to a creature called 'S'ana' which was still a mystery.

Towards late afternoon Robert and Jeffery came to a startling conclusion. They conferred for a time pouring over several records and many notes. Then they went off by themselves and could be heard arguing. After a while, Robert called for a break. Both men had something on their minds, as they appeared to be pre-occupied with something all during the lunch break. At dinner that night both seemed to be lost in their own thoughts. The next morning they went off together to "check on something"; and refused to say any more. By lunchtime neither had returned, and Amanda and Terry were beginning to get worried.

Terry asked the others if they had received any word from them and when they said 'no', both women began to be concerned. They were informed that they saw them head off in the direction of the control room of the spaceship. The women found them both in the control room, out on the ledge, scanning the island with binoculars.

Amanda marched out there and stood with her hands on her hips, tapping her shoe; but before she could say anything Robert spoke.

“Before you say anything, I want you listen. Jeffery and I have made a discovery of sorts and we’re trying to confirm it.” Robert’s tone was deadly serious. “We’ll be back as soon as we know for sure. Please Amanda, let it go for now.”

The next morning found Robert and Jeffery in the dining room waiting for everybody. They announced that they had made a discovery and had confirmed it.

“Everything that is happening now, all of it,” Robert looked about at his friends, “it has all happened before. Thousands of years ago, there is no set time that we can give you. Just believe me, it has all happened before. The black dragons burning the earth; the other more colorful dragons coming to the rescue; the sea being defended by Orcas and Dolphins; all has happened before. And during all of it, man has been there in the thick of it fighting alongside the Dragons and the Orcas and Dolphins.

Jeffery now continued, “We all saw what happened to Josh and Rain; it’s the exact same thing that happened when Sha’el began this quest.” He waited for a moment and then continued. “We have all had the dreams in one-way or another. I know mine started to include visions of me riding a dark blue dragon. And I am sure others of you have had similar dreams. It is almost as if they were preparing us for something.” Both men looked about at their friends and then Jeffery dropped the bombshell.

“Well, Robert and I had a hunch about all this, and we went to take a look this morning. We spent the better part of the day confirming what I am about to say.” He looked about the room and then said; “There is a band of deep navy blue colored dragons in the mountains to the north of us. The very same mountains that the Dolphin leader said we must stay away from for now. The Blue Dragon Clan is what Sha’el called them.”

Questions were flying from everyone when Robert turned to Jeffery with a bow, “you may have the honor on this one Jeff..” All eyes were riveted on Jeffery.

“I believe that we, ladies and gentle men,” Jeffery looked about the room at all of them, “are meant to be the riders of those Blue Dragons.”

“What the hell...!” yelled Ian loudly.

“All right!” said a delighted Terry grinning.

“Oh my God!” exclaimed Hilda.

“Are you sure?” asked Amanda.

“Count me in!” shouted Dimitri.

They argued and debated late into the night, which continued into the next day. In the end, as impossible as it sounded, they all agreed that there could be no other explanation for all the information that they had been given in their dreams. Their children had embraced their call to service; as their parents how could they not agree to help and be part of this?

As the sun rose over the island, Josh, Rain and their entire group stood waiting on the sandy beach. The Blues were due to arrive in the early morning hours. T’kai had explained all about these strange dragons and how they would help in the fight against the Kraki. The part about their parents being the ones who would fly on these Blue Dragons was a bit hard to take. Both Josh and TJ chuckled at the idea and even Chloe laughed at the thought of her parents, Bill and Beverly, riding dragons.

Remember your dragon etiquette and all that I have instructed. It is most important we do this correctly. T’kai received word from one of his dolphins that the dragons were approaching. They come!

They looked above and counted 22 large midnight blue dragons. The young men and women below gave an audible “ah!” at the sight of the large blue beasts. They circled once and one broke away from the others and dove on the group standing on the beach.

Stand your ground; do not give way my young warriors! T’kai urged, all the while calculating Wolf’s strength.

As the dragon got closer they could all see a golden goddess standing on its back; she was laughing loudly, which took them all off guard. As they passed barely three feet over the heads of the warriors, Diana waved and Surfman yelled out, “The Blues have arrived!” Rain and Josh burst out laughing and waved back.

The Blues landed on the open beach and lined up awaiting Wolf. Six of the Blue dragon riders were the children of John and Diana they were told. Surfman landed and Diana dismounted and stood by his side. Wolf, about twice the size of the other Blues, landed and Big John dismounted. He made quite an impressive sight to the young warriors of the sea.

Wolf went to the waters edge bowed his large head in respect and greeted T’kai. “Hail to the ancient T’kai, first of his kind from the beginning. The Blue Dragons greet you as fellow warriors. The First sends his regards and wishes you good hunting.”

We are honored that the First has remembered us. We are pleased you have agreed to help us hunt the Kraki. We are almost finished training the young ones. Their elders do not yet know that we will be calling on them for help. T’kai explained to Wolf as Josh and Rain had moved to the side of their partners.

And what say you Josh, Wolf suddenly addressed him telepathically, do you think that Amanda and Robert will be willing to ride one of my warriors?

Josh was stunned; he assumed that Wolf could not communicate telepathically. *Oh... sir. I, I uh, think my mother and father will be shocked. But I believe that Terry is the one who will make the best rider, she always believed that you all existed on this planet at one time.*

Many times, young one, many times, chuckled Wolf. He raised himself up and turned to his dragons. May I present my rider, Big John. John stepped forward and bowed to T’kai. And this is my second in command, Surfman; and his rider Diana, mate to Big John, and our sister. Diana came forward and did the same. Wolf then introduced six of his dragons and their riders, the children of John and Diana.

T’kai introduced Josh, and then B’nal and Rain. After pleasantries Wolf informed T’kai that the adults had spied on his camp that very morning and he believed that they were just now realizing that they were to be riders of the Blue Dragons.

“Has the First informed you that Enaj has awakened and is on the way here?” T’kai said he was aware. “Has the beast grown since he has risen from his prison?” Wolf asked.

We will not know until we see it. T’kai further explained, if it has not grown too large, we will be able to slice it into smaller pieces and destroy it quickly. While we battle the beast below, the rogue dragons will try to stop us from above. That is why you are needed so badly.

Wolf came closer to T’kai signaling a closed conversation. *T’kai, have you informed your people of the time displacement within the island? Do they know that seven years have gone by on the outside?*

Not yet, but they will all be told soon. T’kai clicked and echoed and then continued; Your Diana is welcome to train with my warriors. I see her eyeing them already, and I know of her reputation.

Good, then I will not need to apologize for her actions. Wolf chuckled, she keeps us hopping, but she and Surfman are formidable in the air; and I have no one else who will be able to converse with Enaj.

Ah! Of course! My apologies, I did not make the connection before. T’kai now knew why he felt so protective towards the young woman. She is an innocent, is she not? Wolf nodded. She shall have no trouble making contact with Enaj and S’ana.

Speaking of S’ana, where is she now? Wolf remembered what Jake had told him of the giant and he knew the unpredictability of his dragons. I should like to keep my dragons out of her general vicinity, best for both of us I think.

She sleeps in the bottom with her rider. She is most infatuated with him and does his bidding, T’kai smiled as he remembered how easily Leslie controlled her. You need not fear, she has been told of your coming and will not attack any Blue Dragons.

Most efficient T’kai, I salute you! Well I must be off to greet and prepare my new riders. Wolf bowed again and turned to his dragons and said something. He turned to T’kai, We shall return in a couple of weeks ready for battle. They took off and headed inland towards the golden pyramid.

Diana remained behind with Surfman. She bowed to T'kai and walked over to Josh and asked, "May we train with you; Surfman is looking forward to it and I would also enjoy it." Josh smiled immediately realizing she was indeed a child.

"Of course you may, we would love to be able to train with you both. Please come this way," Josh bowed and led her to the dock area. Surfman followed along making comments here and there keeping Rain in stitches. Ruby and TJ fell over themselves vying for his attention.

T'kai handed out the Tridents and began teaching his warriors in their use. As they progressed he sought out Diana and asked if she and Surfman could fly above the water as if they were giving cover in a mock battle. In the process pandemonium reigned supreme. Ruby let loose with a shot that sliced thru the water and scorched Surfman's right claw; he in turn howled at the sudden pain and let loose a huge flame, scaring the daylights out of S'ana, who leaped up and turned midair and dove into the depths of the lagoon. Considering her size, it was quite a splash. Amidst all of this, B'nal and Rain's loud voices could be heard laughing.

It took a great deal of coaxing, but T'kai finally got S'ana to the surface and got things back under control. Once on the surface Leslie begged an introduction to Surfman and Diana, for S'ana. Thus it was that S'ana met Diana; and realizing she was a child, her motherly instincts kicked in and they became instant confidants. From then on, S'ana was no longer afraid of the 'flying ones' and their fire. The fact that S'ana could communicate with Diana was a mystery to all.

Wolf and his dragons returned to the mountains and waited. Kyra kept him informed on the progress of the humans and their slow acceptance of what was expected of them. Finally one morning she informed him that they had come to terms with this and had gathered to set off on foot towards the mountains.

"Now would be a good time to pay them a visit, Wolf." She said grinning.

He looked down at her and chuckled, "what have you been up to little one? You cannot interfere with their thoughts. They must decide of their own free will."

"I have done nothing, my word Wolf, I am aware of the Law." She smiled sweetly and then added, "Maybe just a little enhancement of their dreams is all."

A deep chuckle could be heard rumbling thru the mountain.

“Okay, we’re all agreed on this, right?” Robert stood on the stairway and looked back at his longtime friends, “There will be no going back from here on in. If we do this, it’s all the way or nothing.”

“If Sha’el could give her life for a planet that wasn’t even her own,” said Terry defiantly, “can we do no less?”

They began walking down the long hallway out of the temple; each lost in their thoughts. They had all agreed that their dreams had insisted that their help was needed. They could ensure that the planet would go on; that life would go on. The dreams they were all having now were the clincher. The old world was gone; this was a new and different world with new and different rules.

To their surprise A’ya was waiting for them at the entrance; she raised her head back and let out a howl and the doors opened wide for them. They began walking across the archway bridge when they became aware of the moving shadows on the ground. Raising their heads they looked up and stared in surprise; the Blue Dragons were flying overhead. They stopped dead in their tracks.

Wolf hailed Robert, “I see you are prepared for a long trek, we thought we would save you the trouble. May we land and speak with you and your people, Robert?”

Robert stood there looking up at Wolf with his mouth agape in stunned shock. Terry and Amanda tried to snap him out of it.

Terry called out to Wolf, “Please, join us; there is a clearing over there I think,” she said pointing off to the right. “My apologies, I believe you shocked him out of his wits.”

Amanda tried to get a response from Robert and when that failed she shook him and slapped him as hard as she could. Reason returned and he shook his head several times. He coughed once and sputtered; “he’s talking... talking... to me!”

They watched as the four large beasts landed on the grassy clearing. Big John climbed down off of Wolf and came forward smiling. “Hello there!” he called out, “no need for alarm.”

Smiling, Terry came forward with her hand extended, “Hello to you,” her handshake was strong and firm. John smiled down at her and she quickly added, “My but you’re bigger than life!”

John laughed heartily, “all of you, please, come over. Come...come on, I don’t bite, I promise.” he laughed good-naturedly.

Hesitant at first they made their way to him, all the while keeping an eye on the large Blue Dragons. John looked directly at each one, instilling a sort of confidence. Their fear vanished quickly and their steps picked up.

John began by introducing Wolf to the gathered scientists.

“I would like you all to meet our leader Wolf, Sixth of the Ancients to return, The Hand of Justice.” He bowed to Wolf with a flourish.

Wolf stepped forward and rose up and then lowered his head to them. “Welcome my new riders, I have been waiting for you.”

There was an audible intake of breath from all of them, and then a collective “Ah...!”

“Yes, I speak, as does many of my clan. You have all seen the chronicles of Sha’el, and you all know by now what is happening in your world. You also know what is required of you. Are you all prepared to become Riders of Light in this war with the evil ones?”

Terry stepped forward and bowed to Wolf, as John had done, and said, “you can count on me sir.”

Wolf chuckled loudly, “Josh said you would be the first to accept.”

Jeffery came to Terry’s side and slipping his hand in hers, said, “Me too!”, as he bowed to Wolf in respect.

“Ya, I want to do this too,” said Hilda stepping forward and bowing slightly.

Robert and Amanda came forward hand in hand and bowed, “we are with you Wolf.”

Dimitri stepped forward and proudly announced, “My family history includes a long line of dragon riders, I am honored to be chosen to be in your service.” He bowed low and received a slight nudge from Wolf.

“Yes, your family has sent several riders to our cause in the past. I welcome you into the clan, Dimitri of Urkanski.” Wolf bowed his head slightly to Dimitri, who was grinning from ear to ear.

William and Beverly stepped forward and did the same as Robert and Amanda. “We are with you all the way, Wolf.”

Ian stepped forward bowed slightly and said, “I am sorry sir, but I do not see myself as a rider of dragons. I cannot explain it, but I know it is not for me.”

“Right you are Captain McGregor. You have another task, that of piloting the great golden undersea ship of Sha’el’s. T’kai and Josh will lead you to it when the time is right. You should return to your ship in the lagoon and wait for them to come to you.” He turned to the others and continued, “As for all of you, we will take you to our stronghold in the northern mountains to begin your training.”

John broke them up into four groups and explained all that entailed approaching a dragon and requesting a ride. He explained about dragon etiquette and how important proper manners were to the dragons. He saw to it that they were all mounted properly and then climbed upon Wolf and they set off for the mountains. Below, Ian watched as they rose into the air and headed north.

He laughed as he heard Terry's voice shouting, "Yee-ha!"

The next three weeks were a flurry of activity as the scientists and several of Ian's crewmen were paired with the Blue Dragons. Terry was the first to be impressed, no surprise there. She was paired with Tosaki, an independent telepathic dragon. Both could be heard laughing and chuckling quite a bit, and left no doubt that Terry was being her old self again.

Amanda impressed Akita, a similar dragon in personality to herself. Quite the scholar, his speech held an accent that left her enthralled. She found she had never been happier.

Robert, ever the skeptic, impressed Rutan, who was not quite sure of the humans. They had heated debates over the usefulness of humans and dragons and eventually formed a lasting bond.

A perfect match, thought Wolf, they will keep each other busy and out of my way.

Perhaps the proudest of all was Dimitri, who had told them all of his family's history with the dragons, when he was accepted by Sergei to be his rider.

Even Hilda impressed a dragon. Hirohita was a telepathic dragon, and the change he brought about in her was dramatic as she could be seen smiling most of the time now.

The dragons began intensive training with their new riders for the next two weeks. They were given a copy of the Dragon Chronicles and told of the time displacement. After reading all that had occurred during their time on the island they were glad they had decided to join the Blue Dragons. They were all introduced to Diana, they had learned of her thru their Dragons, and reading the Dragon Chronicles. They were quite surprised at her childlike manner; but soon learned that when fighting, she was unbeatable.

When Wolf was satisfied he brought them to T'kai for training with the children of the sea. Both he and T'kai enjoyed the interplay between the 'children' and their parents once again. The surprise of each at the changes that had taken place respectively was interesting to the dragons. In the end each accepted the other as an equal; something that both were seeking.

T'kai was relentless in their training; he knew what was at stake and planned for every possible contingency. As T'kai and Wolf watched them in their training exercises they began to see their confidence grow. They worked as teams and each covered the other. This is what T'kai had hoped for. He complimented Wolf on his choice of dragon and human pairings. Wolf explained that he had let his dragons choose after interaction between them all.

When T'kai was finally convinced of their abilities, S'ana was allowed to surface and was introduced to the Dragons and their startled Riders. All were amazed at how easily a very changed Leslie controlled her; he was more fish now than human.

Training now began with the large creature, and all soon realized that she and Leslie would be the ones to take the Kraki down.

Ian was taken by B'nal and T'kai to a secret cave and shown the golden warship. Rain and Josh walked with him as he inspected the craft. They explained that Sha'el had instructed that the four underwater crafts the aliens had were to be scrapped and their various parts used to make one massive warship. A submarine like no other, it was swift, maneuverable, and possessed all their weaponry. They asked Ian if he thought he would be able to captain her. Grinning broadly, he said he would be honored to do his part.

It was then that T'kai and B'nal told their charges about the time displacement on the island, and explained that seven years had gone by on the outside. After a few minutes of discussion between themselves and their parents, they began to realize that quite a lot had occurred since they had come to the island. They were all given a copy of the Dragon Chronicles and soon were aware of all that had happened in the world since their arrival on the island.

All was in readiness now for the arrival of Enaj.

Surfman and Diana were flying patrol out over the Aleutian Islands with Terry and Tosaki. The sky was clear, and the water below bright blue. They soared above and dove below gliding above the water, searching for Enaj. Terry loved to watch Diana and Surfman in the skies. They were flawless in flight and fierce in battle.

“There is nothing here Surfman,” she said petulantly, “why do they send us out every day?” Diana was bored, a dangerous thing in itself. “Perhaps we should go further down, below the Aleutian peninsula?”

“No,” Surfman said forcefully, “you heard Wolf, only go in this area, do not go below.” Surfman did not want to get into any trouble this close to battle. “We will do as we are told this time Diana,” he said forcefully.

“Oh, you are no fun! I am bored with all this,” she turned to Terry, “We are accomplishing nothing here.”

Terry laughed at her, “Diana, we can’t have a battle every day. Wolf said we must stay here in this area. Enaj will surface here some where when he is ready.” Remembering what Kyra had told her, Terry used all her wiles to keep Diana from taking off.

A faint darkening of the water below caught Surfman’s eye. The darkness was very deep, and it was moving along thru the Bering Straits. He remained above but continued to follow it to make sure that his eyes weren’t playing tricks on him.

“Surfman, look below,” cautioned Diana suddenly, “there is something down there moving below the water. Terry,” she called to her, “look below,” she said pointing.

“I know, I just spotted it myself. It’s very deep, but it casts a large dark shadow nonetheless. We should follow for a bit and see if it is Enaj.” Terry flew along keeping tabs on the dark shape. “Ah, it seems to be getting bigger,” alarm showed in Terry’s voice. “Perhaps we should call to Wolf.”

“No, not yet; I think it is surfacing, that’s why it is getting larger.” Diana observed. They continued to watch from high above.

The thing, or whatever it was, was gigantic in size. As it got nearer to the surface it began to take on a shape. Diana and Terry watched in fascination as the shape became clearer. It had two huge flippers, or wings, extended from its body; much like a dragon’s wings. There was a long tail that appeared to be propelling it thru the water. There was a long graceful neck and a huge head. It appeared to be greenish blue in color and seemed to glow in the water. Diana was curious about the strange creature.

“Let us go below and take a better look,” Diana said curiously.

“No, I will not risk your life before we know what it is,” replied a cautious Surfman.

Enaj’s head surfaced in the Chukchi Sea, its huge body now changed to deal with the cold ocean it swam in. It raised its massive head and opened its mouth. A small child scampered out and climbed up the side of its large head and sat on the ridge just above its eyes.

Diana squealed with delight. “Oh no,” exclaimed Surfman knowing full well that that squeal meant trouble.

“We must get closer Surfman,” Diana was enthralled with the size of the creature.

“No Diana,” Terry said sternly, “Wolf said to just observe and report back to him.”

“We have observed, you go back and tell Wolf Enaj has surfaced. I will stay here.” Diana said defiantly.

Come Tosaki, we must hurry and tell Wolf before Diana does something crazy, Terry told her dragon as they raced for the island.

Diana should not be left alone with the large beast for long, Tosaki commented. There is no telling what she might do.

“Please, Surfman, just a quick pass, and then we will go,” Diana begged.

“Oh all right,” Surfman relented, “but a very quick pass.”

He banked right and flew below, and as they got closer they saw the child stand up and wave. Diana waved back, and before he could stop her, she dove off of Surfman and into the water below.

“Diana, no!” screamed Surfman in horror.

He circled back and looked below, searching for her. Diana surfaced and swam towards the colossal creature. As she got closer a giant wing/fin came up under her and raised her up to the child waiting above. Diana stepped off the wing and went to the child dripping water and smiling broadly.

“Hello! I am Diana of the Blue Dragons, you and your friend are wonderful!” She said excitedly. The child smiled and laughed at her childlike way and greeted her warmly.

“Enaj bids you welcome,” she said smiling. From below they heard a deep rumble, “see he greets you!”

Diana squealed again in delight.

“We have been waiting for you. Flying above is Surfman, he is worried about me.” She turned and waved at Surfman to reassure him.

“Oh good Lord,” he said in despair, “what have you done now Diana?”

Enaj surfaced his long back out of the water and the child said, “Tell your friend he may land and pick you up. We know how to get to the island from here. Please tell T’kai and B’nal we will surface in the deep lagoon.”

Diana turned around and waved to Surfman, beckoning him to land. He did so after a bit of hesitation. She climbed on his back and they were soon off, waving goodbye to the child as they sped away.

“They have a message for T’kai and B’nal. We must hurry, Surfman.”

They raced for the island. When they landed Diana jumped off Surfman and ran to a stern-faced Wolf and John. She quickly gave them the message. Wolf immediately flew over the inlet to the lagoon and relayed it to T’kai. T’kai and B’nal swam to the large lagoon where the ship was docked and warned Ian of the arrival. The ship was moved from the center of the large lake and placed to the side of the mouth of the large ice cavern.

Ian stood on the deck of the Glacier Queen and watched. Wolf inquired if he could land on the large deck to observe and Ian gave him permission gladly. Ian and Big John had become fast friends in the previous weeks; and Ian had to admit that he liked Wolf’s way of thinking.

“So how big is this Enaj-thing supposed to be?” Ian asked curiously.

“Very big,” said Wolf dryly.

Ian looked at John questioningly, with raised eyebrows. Big John laughed and said, “Enaj is supposed to be the biggest thing on this planet; makes S’ana look small by comparison.”

“And this creature we fight is bigger than him?” John nodded and Ian whistled, “Now that I want to see!”

Suddenly the ship lurched backwards and began to rock back and forth as thousands of gallons of water were displaced by the rising creature; a great churning began in the center of the lake. Ian’s face drained of color as he and John held onto the railing of the great ship as she was tossed about.

They could hear Wolf laughing behind them. “Enaj rises!” he shouted loudly.

A large head broke the surface slowly, and Ian almost fainted. It was the size of the Glacier Queen. He watched in stunned awe as it opened its mouth and a small child stepped out and climbed to the ridge above its eyes. The child stood and looked about and then bent and gave a command. The rest of the body of the large beast slowly came to the surface.

“Good God Almighty!” exclaimed Ian incredulously. “Is... is it a dragon?”

“It will be when we are done with the Krakin,” said Wolf. “It will change when it is finished here and will go with us to free the lands of the East from the black menace.”

Enaj reared back its head and a loud rumbling could be both heard and felt throughout the area. The dragons lined up along the beach all reared back their heads, roared and shot a flame into the air.

The Dolphins and Orcas, with their riders on their backs came forward and approached the large behemoth. Enaj lowered his head and the child stood and greeted them all.

“Enaj thanks you for your warm welcome,” she said in a singsong voice smiling, “We are honored to join you in your hunt. The deadly Krakin now swims in the depths of the Indian Ocean.” Enaj rumbled long and the child translated. “Enaj asks if S’ana will be joining us in the hunt.”

T’kai swam to the large beast and Enaj lowered his head allowing the child to come forward. She knelt and bowed, *Greetings to the great T’kai, we are honored.*

Little one, you and Enaj do us the great honor. You may tell your friend that S’ana had found a rider and she will join in the hunt. T’kai clicked several times and continued, my soldiers are ready, and the rest of the sea is prepared. The Orcas have over three hundred sharks on the beast’s trail. They keep it moving and herd it to the place of our choosing. We have kept it from feeding so it would not grow; it is not happy. We are prepared to begin immediately.

The child smiled, reached out and gently touched T’kai’s head with her own; *you have done very well Prince of the Seas. Enaj believes that together we will be able to destroy it easily. A good nights rest and we will begin the hunt tomorrow morning.*

T’kai and B’nal greeted the dawn with the knowledge that Enaj and S’ana had left during the night to take their places in preparation for the coming battle. T’kai and B’nal had many years to prepare a battle plan in the event the Kraki returned. They used this time to plan for every possible contingency, every twist and turn and then formed a solid plan. They and their fellow brothers of the sea would herd the creature into the Marianas Trench where Enaj would block its escape. S’ana would rise up, slice it in half, and take the head down with her to the bottom of the Challenger Deep where Enaj would then blast both to oblivion. The power it would take to destroy the creature completely would pull on all the reserves Enaj possessed; it would leave him half his size.

T’kai and B’nal woke their charges and gave them the news. B’nal’s soldiers were all given the golden Girdles of Battle along with their Tridents. These girdles contained the power source for the tridents when in battle. As Rain came into the lagoon on B’nal, he looked very much the commander Josh had seen in his dreams. Rain raised his Trident in the air and his soldiers rallied about him.

A large humpback whale, carrying a message for B’nal, asked permission to come into the lagoon. Rain winced when he saw the huge welts that circled the whale’s body. The Krakei was approaching the Pacific Ocean; it had lashed out several times and they had lost about a hundred sharks and at least twenty to thirty whales; three of them were sperm whales. B’nal ordered the sperm whales off the hunt. There were only about twenty of them left in the world and they could not afford to lose any more. The humpback was given his orders and departed quickly.

B’nal called his soldiers to order and joined up with the Dolphin band. T’kai came forward and addressed them all about the battle plan.

My children, we leave for battle this morning. If all goes well, by this time tomorrow we will be free of the menace forever. The sharks and whales are herding the monster into the Pacific. It will try to balk when it realizes that it is being herded to the Trench. We will be the rear guard; it will be up to us to stop it from breaking out.

You all saw the marks of battle V’tol bore upon his body; the Kraken will be even deadlier for us. Make each of your strikes count; be constantly aware of its tendrils. We must keep it moving to the Trench. Once there, S’ana will rise from the Deep and cut it in two. She will then take the head down with her and Enaj will obliterate it. We must then destroy the other half before it can feed. If it feeds, another head will form and we will be right back where we started. This must end here and now. Sha’el’s courage my soldiers, Our Father’s protection be with you all!

Wolf woke his dragons and riders and informed them that the Orcas and Dolphins were on the move. They would require cover as soon as they reached the California coastline and headed out to sea. They listened silently as he gave them the details of T'kai's plan. Then he added his own; they would meet up with the Samurai Clan of Japan once they were finished with this task.

These dragons were to be treated with the greatest respect, as in the old times. All were female dragons, warriors from long ago skilled in the Samurai Jujitsu of eons past. They were twenty-two in numbers and had no riders. Wolf cautioned his dragons; these dragons viewed riders as a hindrance; they were unaware of the strength gained from a link with a human rider. It was a lesson the Blues were meant to teach them. Wolf warned his dragons and riders not to interfere with these dragons in any way. They knew how to fight and regarded the Dragons of Light as mere helpers in the coming battle. Their arrogance would be dealt with by example. Their leader was Miomi, of the fabled Osaka Dragon Family; the protectors of Asia.

About two hours later Wolf received the call from T'kai and he and his warriors mounted up and took off. Amanda, Terry, Robert and Jeffery were prepared and eager to begin; Dimitri and Diana flew scout position. As they flew over the coastline of California the riders got their first look at the damage done by the black fire dragons. San Francisco was burned to a cinder; The Golden Gate Bridge was damaged so badly that they doubted it would be repairable. Los Angeles was unrecognizable; the once beautiful coastline was a drab black scorched plain. Further down the coast they began to see some areas were coming back; and along a stretch of beach, much to their surprise, they saw people waving and cheering them on.

They turned out to sea and began the flight to the rendezvous point. About an hour later they began to see signs of battle. There were two large humpback whales floating belly up in the ocean below them. Their bodies bore the marks of the beast they had fought and their wounds showed the force of the monster. Great red welts covered them and patches of skin were completely removed in some areas. One lone sperm whale limped along with two grey whales steering it to safety. The large mammal's back was a testament to the fierce struggle it had had with the ominous monster from the deep.

As they continued on their way they spotted five black dragons beginning a dive on the ocean below. They could make out a churning in the water and realized that there was a battle going on just below the water surface. Wolf called for attack formation and the Blue Dragon Squadron was sent to join the fight. They came in with the sun at their backs and attacked the black dragons who never saw them coming till they were upon them. The Blue Dragons made quick work of the monsters and then took up their positions above the ocean.

Wolf cautioned all his dragons not to get too close to the surface of the water, as they were unsure of how far the creature could reach with its tendrils. Unfortunately the warning came too late for Hilda's dragon Hirohita. A long red tendril burst out of the water and wrapped itself around his leg burning and pulling the dragon down. The alien poison burned the large dragon like nothing on this earth; the pain was excruciating, Hirohita screamed in agony. All turned and looked his way at the sound of his screams.

Wings out stretched he held his own against the tugging tendril. From below suddenly Rain burst out of the water on Ba'nal's nose. Up, up he came pointing the golden trident at Hirohita's leg. A beam shot out of the trident that sliced thru the tendril, freeing the dragon. Just as quickly they turned in mid-air, dove below and were gone, only seconds had passed.

Hilda leaned over her dragon and hooking her foot in the stirrup stretched out and tried to remove the remaining tendril. There were huge red welts on the dragon's leg where the tendril was wrapped. She managed to remove it at the cost to her hands. They too were covered in red welts, and she also screamed at the stinging effects of the poison.

Wolf directed her to return to the island and seek out a large plant that resembled a century plant. *Cut the leaves from the plant and boil them well. It will produce a thick salve that will neutralize the poison and give immediate relief. Hurry Hilda, Hirohita is in much pain.*

Hilda and Hirohita raced back to the island. She begged help from the remaining crew on the Glacier Queen explaining what had happened and what she needed to do. Mr. McMullen quickly agreed and set about building a huge fire on the shore. He sent his men with Hilda and once she found the plant they began to cut the large thick leaves from the huge cactus. They chopped them up and threw them into the boiling water. The mixture began to thicken and soon they had their first batch of salve.

Hilda reached into the mixture to scoop it into a large bucket and she felt instant relief from the pain in her hands. Realizing how quickly the salve worked she ran to Hirohita and began to apply the salve to his damaged leg. The large dragon sighed in relief and thanked her for the respite from the agonizing pain he had been in for the past two hours. Hilda knelt by her dragon and cried tears of relief that he would be okay.

Leaning against Hirohita, she looked out to the large lagoon and spied a sperm whale in the center; his huge body was covered in large red welts. She was sure she could feel its pain, and hear it moaning. Moved by his pain, (which she herself knew only too well), she was empathetic to the whale's plight. Rising, she asked Hirohita if he was able to speak to the whale. She explained that maybe she could ease the poor creature's suffering with the salve. Hirohita said he would try and flew out over the lagoon and called to the large creature and explained what his rider proposed. The whale answered that at this point any help would be most welcome.

A short time later, Hilda was on Hirohito's back hovering over the whale. She politely asked permission to step on the whale's back to administer the salve - he agreed quickly. She went about her work and spread liberal amounts of the salve over the wounds and rubbed it in gently. The worst injuries were on the large mammal's head and around his blow hole. There was a huge sigh of relief from the whale when she began to work on the area. He thanked her profusely saying he would remember her kindness always.

Hilda quickly surmised that there would be many injured animals coming to the lagoon and she went to Mr. McMullen and asked him to prepare more salve and make extra. She explained her reasoning and he quickly agreed. He set his men to work right away and started two more fires to accommodate the amount of salve they would need.

Not long afterwards the large whale called to Hirohito saying two grey whales were approaching and they were in pain also. With the sperm whale acting as go-between, Hilda went to work on them quickly. Soon the lagoon was filled with Orcas, Dolphins, and even a large whale shark; all seeking relief from the terrible pain. The large whale insisted that he be by her side when she treated the whale shark saying that his presence would insure her safety as they were very unpredictable emotionally. She and Mr. McMullen worked tirelessly for hours bringing relief to the injured.

And then Tristin and T'kata came into the lagoon. Tristin's legs were scarred by the red welts and he was screaming in agony. As he came closer they all saw the large red welt circling his upper chest. T'kata was also covered in the red marks of battle; but his concern was for Tristin.

Hilda went to work on Tristin immediately, she covered his chest area first fearing his breathing would be in jeopardy. His relief was immediate and he cried tears of thanks to her for her kindness. She continued on and applied copious amounts of the salve to his legs. Watching her as she worked, Mr. McMullen went to the large Orca and nodded holding a handful of salve before him. T'kata understood and turned bringing himself closer to the red haired man. McMullen covered his wounds in the salve easing his pain immediately. The Orca turned and gave him a slight nudge of thanks producing a look of sublime happiness on the large man.

During all this time Hirohito kept Wolf informed of his brave rider's efforts to ease the suffering of their brothers in the sea.

In the end, the final battle was anti-climatic. The huge beast was herded to the Trench and as predicted by T’kai, the creature bolted to hide in the Challenger Deep. S’ana was waiting and rose up and cut the beast in half just as T’kai had planned. She held onto the writhing mass and took the head below. T’kai heard her final conversation to her rider.

***It is a good day to die my prince, she purred, as long as you are with me.
Yes my sweet, were the final words spoken by Leslie, I will always be with you.***

Enaj waited till she was far below before he let loose with a blast so powerful that it completely disintegrated them both. The huge effort left him spent and half his size. Two humpback whales dove below and positioned themselves under his wings/flippers and brought him to the surface quickly.

The other half of the beast was now more dangerous than ever. With blasts from their tridents, the Orca army was able to push the swirling mass into the Trench where Ian was waiting with the golden ship. He quickly made use of the powerful weapons that Sha’el had created and destroyed the mass entirely. They searched the ocean floor for several hours to make sure that every piece of the creature was gone.

Then Ian began his long journey to the pit where the beast had been imprisoned. Once there he searched the area carefully. Drawing on his instincts, he slowly covered the area peering in every nook, every cranny. He searched the massive cave inch by inch not wanting to miss anything. After many hours, and the help of the many lantern fish he found what he was looking for.

Hidden deep inside the cave was a small mass of the creature wrapped about a gelatinous mass. Instruction from T’kai told him what to do and he immediately used the weapons Sh’ael had provided. The creature would leave a small mass behind to insure the continued survival of his species. Ian disintegrated the small writhing mass that the beast had left behind and continued to search. After many more hours he was sure there was no more of the mass to be found.

“Now it is truly over!” he said forcefully.

Hours later T’kai and B’nal led their tired and spent army back to the island. Several of the humans and many of the mammals were injured and in pain from the lashing they taken from the tendrils of the mad beast.

Hilda was waiting for them and quickly went to work administering to their wounds. Tristin was there by her side helping her as she went from rider to Orca, to rider, to Dolphin. Only when she was sure that all had been cared for did she finally agree to her dragon’s request to rest. Exhaustion finally overtook her and she slept for 10 hours straight.

T’kai learned from the large sperm whale all that took place in the lagoon while the battle was raging. Sperm Whales do not care for humans, and rarely even acknowledge their existence; but this one was very impressed by Hilda’s untiring efforts to ease the pain of the suffering.

He introduced himself, (which sperm whales never do), Orion of the D’omi Pod. He told T’kai that Hilda’s empathic care of the injured mammals impressed him greatly and he was indebted to her for her kindness. It was large praise coming from one who had been hunted by humans, almost to extinction. T’kai discussed this with Wolf at great length and praised him on his choice of dragon and rider.

Hilda finally awoke and rejoined her fellow riders, she was surprised at the praise they heaped upon her. T’kai asked her if she would accompany him to the lagoon. The sperm whale wished to speak with her. He quickly explained that this was a great honor as sperm whales consider most humans to be unworthy.

In her mind she heard Wolf’s voice; you are to receive a gift for your selfless act of kindness. Sperm whales rarely give gifts, and never to humans. Accept it with humility Hilda, it is a great honor.

T’kai took her out in the lagoon and told her to swim to the side of the whale by his eye. She did as instructed, and suddenly felt his large fluke come up under her. As she sat there she stared into the eye of the whale and suddenly heard him in her mind.

You saw my pain and it moved you to tears. Came a voice of such magnificence that Hilda was in ecstasy. Unafraid you wanted to ease my pain; so you came to administer to my wounds. A selfless act of kindness and a remarkable one for a human. I give you a gift small one, so you may always be in contact with the sea, and with me, Orion of the D’omi Pod.

A bright light suddenly enveloped Hilda and the whale. Suddenly, softly at first, she became aware of the sea around her; she began to hear the sea.

How wonderful for the healer.

She is different from most humans.

Yes, she is kind and gentle.

I am thankful for her healing, I was in agony...

Hilda could suddenly differentiate the many sounds and knew which species were saying what. She turned to the whale with tears in her eyes and thanked him for his generous gift saying she felt unworthy of such an honor.

The large whale chuckled, *precisely why you have earned it little one. Return to your people; and if ever you should need my help, simply send a message.*

He released her to the water and she swam around to his head and kissed the large area around his eye. There was a deep rumble as she impressed him even more. Then she turned and swam to T'kai and he returned her to the shore. Only T'kai, Wolf, and Hirohito were aware of the gift she had received.

Wolf remained on the island for three weeks. T'kai offered him the use of the Tridents and Girdles in the battle he would be facing. He thanked him but declined. His dragons and riders were prepared and knew what they were facing. This must be accomplished in the old way, he told him. T'kai understood and wished him well and good hunting.

The 'children' all said they wished to remain on the island with their 'brothers of the sea'. They explained that they preferred the company of the sea, and asked their parents to accept this decision. They asked them to return when the battle was finished and regale them with all the details.

Three weeks later Wolf and the Blue Dragon Clan rose over the island and headed off into the thermals to face their fate.

And that will be the final tale of the early years.