

# **THE CHOICE**

**BOOK IV OF THE EARLY YEARS**

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# **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 100<sup>th</sup> 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."

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