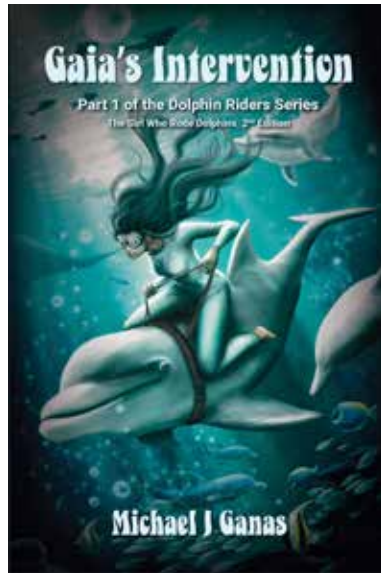


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**Reader Sample**  
**of**  
**Gaia's Intervention**  
**Part 1 of the Dolphin Riders Series**

(Reader Note: The Gaia Hypothesis is the notion that the Earth is a self-regulating system in which the living and non-living parts interact to maintain the conditions necessary for life. This system is often referred to as Gaia, after the Greek goddess of the Earth.)

The girl had hoped the rescue would go unimpeded, but all her senses told her otherwise. Jacob still lagged far behind and the pinnacle would be needed to bring the incapacitated dolphins to safety. She felt deep compassion for her ailing friends, understanding completely their fear and revulsion of drowning at sea or becoming a meal for the predators that abounded in it because they were too weak to escape or defend themselves. When sick or significantly injured, or when death was inevitable, a deep-seated primeval calling always drew them unrelentingly to the land, the place of their primordial origins where their ancient ancestors once flourished. They would much prefer to perish under the light of the sun or moon on a remote sandy shore rather than

in the cold, dark depths of the ocean. The land always beckoned under such circumstances and accounted for the beaching of untold numbers of dolphin ever since they first ventured into antediluvian seas in eons past. By beaching themselves or entering the very shallow water of a protected estuary or lagoon, they at least had a chance to recover from their illness, secure from the threat of sharks and other predators. But out here in these waters she knew there was no immediate safe haven where they could bring the enervated dolphins. She was quite familiar with the nearby island, knowing that its surrounding cliffs rising directly from the sea provided no shelves, beaches or inlets. What the island did hold, however, was the key to the ultimate salvation of the dolphins. That it might also benefit the future welfare of the human race was also a strong possibility, for the secret it held was truly a blessing.

As Hercules breached, the girl looked around hopefully. Although she could feel Jacob's presence, there was still no sight of him. The outline of another vessel in the distance caught her eye. Different in configuration from the pinnacle and much larger in size, she realized it was the same vessel the pod had overtaken a short time earlier. Although the proximity of a strange vessel would typically make her feel uneasy, she sensed that it posed no threat. Under normal circumstances, the pod would have exercised caution and steered clear of marine traffic, knowing that a human observer might consider the sight of it highly unusual considering a human female rode one of the creatures in its midst. Such an event might induce a curious sailor to pursue the pack for a closer look, something Jacob had warned her about. According to him, one could never be fully sure of the intentions of strangers since they might potentially bring harm to members of the pod. Therefore, it would be prudent to avoid contact with unknown humans at sea altogether. But this was an emergency, and the pod had felt it necessary to take a direct route to its stricken cousins if they were to have any chance at all of saving them. Although passing in full view of the strange boat's crew had been a risk, it had nevertheless been one worth taking.

A strange feeling had come over her when the pod had come close to the other boat. She remembered the name painted on its stern. It was an odd name, a contradiction. Angels were supposed to be endowed with goodness, perfect spiritual beings that were kind and loving. Avenging implied a retaliatory punishment or

payback for harm received, an act of evil, of wickedness. How could an angel harbor such a malicious trait? Wouldn't it be incongruous with a morally pure nature? Didn't Jesus tell everyone to turn the other cheek? Wasn't he the one who promoted the golden rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you?

She momentarily puzzled over these fleeting thoughts, vaguely aware that her musing didn't go unnoticed by the other members of the clan. Her mind was still linked synchronously with them and she sensed their confusion over the diametrically opposed and conflicting concepts, particularly the latter idea. Such turpitude went against the grain of their inherent makeup.

She recalled that there had been six men aboard the *Avenging Angel*, three of them gawking oddly at her from the open doorway of the pilothouse. Other than her mother, Jacob, and the villagers of Malique, she had seldom run into others of her kind. Jacob had instilled in her that most of the world's ills were caused by human greed. Was it not man who was slowly but methodically killing off the dolphins and whales, he had often reminded her. Were not humans responsible for overfishing the oceans with vast nets and poisoning the waters with toxic wastes, garbage, and organic pollution? Man was an out-of-control virus that, if left to his own vices and thoughtless actions, would eventually consume the earth, ultimately destroying all its beautiful wonders.

During her young life, the girl had seen many of her aquatic friends injured and killed by the abuses of man, most often due to carelessness and ignorance, but sometimes because of a thing Jacob referred to as sadism. Although it was a trait indigenous to some human beings, it was something she was ill prepared to conceive of, a notion totally alien to her. Jacob had tried to explain it to her but it was a concept that escaped her like water slipping through her fingers. The idea that a person could experience pleasure by deliberately inflicting pain or death on another living creature was a notion she had trouble grasping. But as she glanced over at her debilitated comrades, a dawning comprehension took hold of her and she suddenly knew they had been disabled by such an act.

As the girl watched the approach of the strange vessel, Jacob's words rang clearly in her head. We humans are still fighting each other, destroying more than we are creating. There are some people who want to gain, not only at the expense of other humans,

but other living things. Mankind has evolved to the point where it has made great strides in many things. It has sent men to the moon and the deepest part of the ocean, it has made tremendous breakthroughs in physics and medicine, yet it has failed miserably in mastering its own human nature. Humanity is using its abilities incorrectly and causing terrible damage to our planet and all its inhabitants in the process. Man is still insufficiently developed to protect and care for the world we live in. She was only six years old when he told her this, but the words stayed with her as if he had uttered them yesterday.

She vividly remembered the place where he had given her this moralization. She had been sitting in the pinnacle as it chugged along the coast many miles south of the cove. She had looked questioningly at Jacob. "What is that?" Jacob had shielded his eyes from the sun and followed her gaze. A vast quantity of plastic containers and garbage littered the nearby beach, most of it washed in with the tide. A look of distaste crossed Jacob's features as he eyed the waste. "This is Haiti, little one. If the land could speak it would tell of tragedy and abuse, of power and greed, violence and bloodshed." She realized then how ugly the world could be beyond the beautiful sanctity of the cove.

It was shortly thereafter that her real education had begun, but it wasn't until she turned ten that they had initiated the project. "You and your playmates were put on this earth to fulfill a profound and far-reaching purpose," Jacob had told her solemnly on her birthday. "Mother Nature is a wise old lady. Perhaps in her infinite wisdom she has seen fit to place the care of this planet in the hands of more responsible creatures." He had paused and let out a great sigh. "And I believe she has chosen you and your friends. The time for intervention has arrived." Even then, at so young an age, she had instinctively comprehended what he had meant.

With the exception of her mother, she was certain she was the only human on the planet that truly understood the mind and soul of the dolphin, to revel in the joy of simply being. She was completely aware of their dual existence, knowing that these incredible creatures simultaneously dwelt within two realms, one of the mind and one of the spirit. For some inexplicable reason, this duality was also indelibly ingrained in her, and like her companions, she understood the multifaceted light of love, the most powerful force in creation. She fathomed its pure energy

that was capable of transcending all barriers, both material and ethereal, perceiving its endless flow from an eternal, infinite waterfall. It was a ceaseless, all-encompassing radiance that set no conditions or boundaries, streaming forth unconfined and without limits. And it was firmly rooted in who she was, integrated into her soul, her very essence.

She could feel this same energy, its purity and simplicity, emanating outward from all the pod members, blanketing and imbuing the stricken dolphins, and she added that which was a part of her astral being into the discharge. On a spiritual level, unconditional love radiated forth and intensified, becoming greater than the combined total of their individual outputs. But on a physical level, the biosonar wave emissions originating from those closest to the wounded creatures created a cavitation, a rippling effect in the matter comprising the damaged flesh. The resonance of the impaired tissue changed and healing suddenly accelerated. Even Jacob could not provide a satisfactory scientific explanation as to why it worked, but she knew it did.

On both planes of existence, spiritual and physical, the girl and her clan avoided absorbing the greater portion of the pain of the injured, for a requisite amount of detachment on their part had to be exercised if their ministrations were going to be effective. She knew the danger of integrating too much pain and suffering into the minds and souls of the healers. Doing so could easily overwhelm, pulling the potential healer under tumultuous emotions that should not be their own to bear. This was a lesson carried down and expanded upon over the ages among cetaceans, and then further refined by the new breed. She understood that neither the healer's soul nor the one for whom they are absorbing the pain is ultimately served by such actions, for no soul can do this for another since we are all here to journey our own path. If this tenet were overlooked or ignored, then the assisting soul risks being pulled down and drowned in a quagmire of suffering, and the one they desire to assist is denied the life lessons they were sent here to learn. Thus, the need for an adequate level of restraint to take on the full brunt of the pain of another.

The girl was proud of her relationship with these noble beings. She knew it was unique, that a special bond existed between them that transcended time and space. Their boundless sensitivity and awareness continually amazed her. Her companions were fully awakened creatures who knew themselves to be one

with all things and they experienced this through the power of love at all times. Their minds transported them into unlimited consciousness, carrying them beyond earthly restraints. Their physical bodies resonated with unconditional love and limitless energy, filling them with ecstasy and unconstrained joy. They understood the key to oneness and harmony. They shared love at all times and held no judgements. Their use of sound went well beyond current medical technology, making them able to alter frequencies to create the most appropriate healing actions for the sick and injured in the water with them, seeing inside the being and manipulating the required energies perfectly. She knew without a doubt their blissful presence and loving nature was capable of healing wounds of the heart and opening the spirit to portals of boundless freedom. On spiritual planes, they were powerful and creative guides, using geometry, sound and light to inspire higher awareness, clear consciousness, and pure wisdom.

The girl's awareness was suddenly brought back to the strange vessel as it neared, and she studied it with a mix of uncertainty and ... something else. A transference of psychic warning echoed from Coral and Reef simultaneously. Hercules turned sharply and the girl looked below her. A dark shadow glided through the depths far below, holding to a course bearing directly at the island. Too deep for the sunlight filtering into the void of inky hydrospace to provide definition to the object, it remained indistinct to her human eyes as it traveled on a straight and level heading. Her current position was a significant distance from the island and the underlying water was still quite deep.

Biosonar emissions from her companions were quickly directed at the strange object and an image of the thing suddenly flashed into her mind. It was large, very large, having an overall length almost as great as that of a fully-grown blue whale and a configuration just as streamlined. But it lacked the characteristics consistent with living flesh. Rather than being soft and pliant in texture, the object was rigid and metallic, a thing fabricated by human hands, a submarine. The girl had never seen one before and wondered what such a machine was doing out in these waters. A thought suddenly galvanized her. What if the people piloting the strange craft were to find the undersea cavern and

discover its secret? A feeling of dread began to engulf her and she quickly shook it off. Her eyes followed the shadow a few moments longer before all traces of it vanished into the dark blue murk.

By the time Hercules again breached, the girl found herself looking up into the faces of several men leaning over the side of the surface vessel that had followed her pod. Sensing no menace from them, she stared silently back, not knowing what to do next.

"I believe you and your friends can use some help," the man in the middle called to her, a thick shock of white hair cascading down to his shoulders from beneath a baseball cap and a smile parting his lips.

Something about the man struck a chord deep within her, perhaps the lilt of his voice. Somehow it conveyed solace, reassurance. Without immediately realizing what she was doing, however, her gaze was drawn to the face of the man standing to the left of the older gent. She found it difficult to pull her eyes away from those penetrating green orbs.

"Are you a friend of Natalie?" the white-haired man asked.

The question stunned the girl and she stared back intently at the elderly man, sitting up straighter as Hercules floated docilely beneath her. Only a handful of people knew the names of her friends, including the man who had saved Natalie.

"Are you the man who rescued Natalie and tended her injuries?" the girl queried in a mellifluous voice. The man fit the description Natalie had given her and she studied him with newfound respect.

"Yes. My name is Franklin Graham...Doctor Franklin Graham," the scientist said exuberantly, looking hopefully to the other creatures floating close by. "Is Natalie with you now?"

Pivoting her head, the girl took inventory of the other men perched on the deck above her, her eyes flitting from one face to the next, seeming to gain some insight as to the true essence of each persona aboard the vessel. Her gaze came back to linger on Graham for several more seconds before settling on Jake once again. "Natalie is not among this group," she said at last, her voice containing an unmistakable sadness.

It was then that she lifted the goggles from her eyes, letting them rest on her forehead. Jake noticed that the goggles were actually a lowvolume face mask with a nosepiece that allowed the

wearer to equalize the air pressure behind the two separate eye plates with the surrounding water pressure. He also noted that even after prolonged immersion in the sea, there was a healthy glow to the girl's creamy complexion, which was smooth and unblemished. Amazingly, the goggles left no temporary imprint on the skin surrounding a large pair of doe-like eyes that glistened a sparkling brown and which stared back serenely as if regarding the world beyond from a strange and alien perspective. Gazing into them was like focusing on a revolving prism subjected to the light, mesmerizing the beholder with a variegated spectrum of endless mystery. On the whole, however, it was her eyes that gave definition to a face of protracted innocence and limitless compassion, uncorrupted by cynicism or the darker side of man's nature.

Silence hung heavily in the air a moment longer before Grahm spoke again. "If you'll allow us, my dear, we can bring your injured friends aboard and treat their wounds."

The girl continued to stare steadfastly at Jake, appearing inattentive to the offer. "Thank you, but that will not be necessary. Help will be here shortly." As if to emphasize this, she withdrew her eyes from Jake and glanced over her shoulder.

In unison, Jake, Grahm, and Zimbola looked in the direction of the girl's gaze. A tiny white dot sat on the eastern horizon, still a considerable distance away.

"Is there anything we can do for you?" Grahm persisted, disappointment apparent in both his tone and manner.

The girl shook her head, her eyes now fixed on the approaching boat.

"What is your name?" Grahm continued to press.

The girl brought those doe-like eyes to bear on Grahm once again. "My name is of no importance." Her voice was soft and melodious, almost childlike in timbre.

Grahm smiled warmly. "Sometimes names can be very important," he said tactfully, touching Jake's shoulder. "This gentleman, here, goes by the name of Jake Javolyn. He is the captain of this vessel." He looked to his left. "This rather large fellow is Zimbola, Captain Javolyn's first mate." Looking aft, Grahm indicated the other members of the crew, introducing Hector, Phillipe, and his two assistants. Turning back to face the



girl, Graham's manner became imbued with alacrity. "Now that I've introduced everyone, good social etiquette can only be satisfied if you introduce yourself, as well."

The girl studied Graham with renewed interest before replying. "I'm called Destiny."

The name did not surprise Jake. As a matter of fact, it provided the missing piece of the puzzle he had been mulling over concerning Graham's conversations with Natalie. The future of her kind was in the hands of Destiny, Natalie had told Graham. This had not gone over Jake's head and he had not ruled out the possibility that the reference to destiny might involve a person. With mild amusement, Jake watched the expression on the doctor's face unfold. The false assumption Graham had previously harbored lifted like a curtain on a Broadway stage to reveal a hidden truth, and the doctor nodded at the girl with sudden understanding.

Graham let his eyes drift over the other nearby sea mammals. "Tell me, my dear, did you teach all of these dolphins to speak English as fluently as Natalie?"

Destiny's face turned passive. "I didn't teach them anything."

A cloud of confusion swept across the scientist's countenance. "Then how did Natalie acquire this ability?"

"She..." the girl started to say, but stopped abruptly. Her eyes seemed to glaze over in that instant, as if listening to an inner voice. Although she continued to stare directly at Graham, the doctor had the impression she was not seeing him at all, that she was looking right through him.

"Natalie's in trouble," she said suddenly, her voice carrying an edge of urgency. "I must go to her."

As Jake and the others watched, the large white dolphin the girl rode began to turn away, but Destiny glanced back at the three men grouped together next to the pilothouse. "A man will be here shortly. His name is Jacob," she cried out, her tone almost pleading. "Please help him recover my injured friends." Her eyes singled Jake out as she said this, as if speaking to him alone. Refitting the face mask over her eyes, she hunched forward and reached down on each side of Hercules broad body to grasp a rein looped over the base of each pectoral fin. She quickly sped away on a southwest heading, unattended by her previous retinue.

Jake ducked into the pilothouse and retrieved a pair of binoculars, bringing them to his eyes and aligning them with several objects far away. He didn't need the spyglasses to distinguish the outlines of the three ships hanging on the horizon, estimating the nearest one to be only two miles distant. The binoculars, however, confirmed something else. Satisfied, he lowered the glasses, handing them over to Zimbola while continuing to keep his gaze locked on the closest vessel. "You recognize anything about that ship?" he said.

Zimbola lifted the binoculars to his eyes and scanned the vessel, the instrument looking ridiculously small in his huge paw. The big man nodded. "It is the Colombian tuna trawler we saw in the harbor yesterday. Her crew is just beginning to drop her net."

Without wasting another second, Jake craned his head over the gunwale and shouted aft, calling to Hector and Phillippe. Both men stood gawking at Destiny's receding form. "Prepare the Kawasaki," Jake ordered.

"With everything?" Hector shot back, clearly perplexed. The crew knew that Jake only used the Kawasaki during a Code One which, based on experience, always occurred at night. Code One implied fully armed.

"Everything!" Jake growled. "I want it fully locked and loaded."

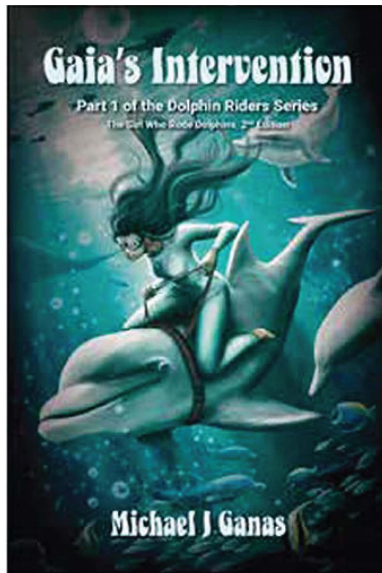
Zimbola appeared taken aback, and he stared down at Jake questioningly.

"What are you doing?" Gram asked.

Jake halted in mid stride. "I don't know what's going on, but something tells me I better help that girl before she buys herself a whole heap of trouble she's not ready to take on." As an afterthought, he turned back toward Zimbola. "After I launch, stay here on station."

Eyebrows rose up on the big man. "You do not want me to follow?"

"You heard the girl," Jake bellowed. "She wants us to assist a guy called Jacob."



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