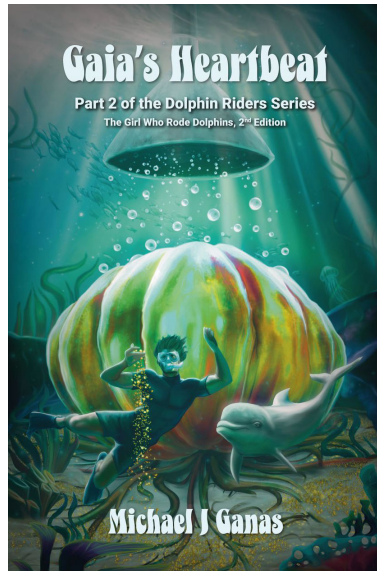


[Click Here
to See Buying Options](#)

[Click Here to View
Entire Series](#)



Reader Sample
of
Gaia's Heartbeat
Part 2 of the Dolphin Riders Series

*T*he damp sand felt cool under Jake's bare feet as he strolled along the beach, making him revel in the comfort it gave him. There was something about wet sand between his toes that always seemed to give him a sense of serenity. No, serenity was not quite right, he thought, reflecting on the word. Freedom. Yes, that was the lemma that stuck in his mind now that he rolled it over introspectively.

Some distance behind him, the intermittent glow of a fire added enchantment to the fragrant night air, rich with the sweet scent of wildflowers and hibiscus. As he walked, he became aware of the cataracts pounding the water at the far end of the cove. At his present distance, the sound was reduced to a dull roar that hung in the background, ceaseless and soothing to the soul. Sometime in the last hour, spray from the falls had caused a cloud of vapor to go swirling across the cove, shrouding the waters in fine mist.

Continuing to follow the shoreline, Jake angled slightly left of where

the brine met the sand, inexorably drawn beyond the juncture. He loved the water and hated being away from it for very long. Water was an elixir, invigorating and mind cleansing. As he entered it, tiny wavelets rife with moonbeams swashed a golden luminescence around his ankles. The strange place entranced Jake, blanketing him with a gentle yet powerful embrace, giving him a sense of unfathomable peace that reached down to the farthest recesses of his being. Filling his lungs, he took in more of the pervasive atmosphere, unable to get enough of it. Thoughts of Shangri-La raced through his mind, an imaginary idyllic hideaway depicted in James Hilton's classic novel, *Lost Horizons*. If ever such a place existed, this was it, he reckoned.

Though his spirits were greatly uplifted, there was something missing, an empty place within him that was unfulfilled and yearning for something more. He couldn't put his finger on it. Earlier on this evening he had become restless. Growing weary of the endless discussions and debates that continued to persist around the brazier, he had needed to get away. At least that was the excuse he had given himself.

Jake had deemed it best not to mention the gold he had seen lying at the bottom of the cove. He had heard stories about what gold could do to some men. Gold was an alluring temptress, a beckoning seductress that tended to twist and corrupt weaker souls. The abundance of wealth he had seen residing beneath the water was enough to make the man called Jacob one of the richest men in Haiti. Yet Jacob appeared to ignore the enormous potential it offered, preferring to live a simple existence here in this place. Jake had not allowed himself to be misled by Jacob's grizzled outward appearance. He had seen the stacks of books and periodicals piled high inside the man's cottage. The brief contact he had made with the Haitian had shown the man to be exceptionally intelligent, possibly one of the smartest individuals he had ever run into. Like the girl, Jacob was an enigma. The fact that Jacob saw value in the hydrogen gas rather than the gold only added to the mystery the Haitian posed. And though Jake could only speculate, he sensed that Jacob harbored some well-guarded secret, something that would make the *thurentra's* ability to produce gold and platinum appear insignificant by comparison.

The girl had failed to join the gathering, continuing to remain missing. He looked out over the water in the direction he had last seen her, wondering if she was still there. It was darker in that part of the cove, the moon's golden disk eclipsed by one of the chasm's towering walls. Where he now stood, the sandy shelf of the beach had ended, merging with some rock outcroppings.

Without giving it conscious thought, he waded out into the water

and began to pull himself along in an easy sidestroke, trying to see through the veil of mist. Swimming out into deeper water, a soft chittering came to his ears, and as his eyes probed the shroud of darkness, he could make out two wraith-like objects moving toward him.

A warbling gently cut the air, whistling softly like a hushed whisper being forced between the teeth. Jake immediately recognized the sound and the entity emitting it. "We have been waiting for you, Jake Javolyn," Achilles said.

Jake stopped stroking, peering at the shapes before him. As his eyes adjusted to the dim light, he was able to discern the huge head of Hercules floating beside that of the juvenile albino. "Is Destiny still out here, Achilles?" Jake asked.

"Yes, Jake Javolyn," Achilles trilled back in that strange signature lilt, speaking more quietly than when Jake had first conversed with the young dolphin. "Come, I will take you to her." Achilles abruptly turned, presenting his dorsal fin. "As before, I offer myself as an object of conveyance, Jake Javolyn," the juvenile added.

Jake latched onto the proffered fin, letting himself be whisked forward. Liquid tendrils tugged at him as the dolphin transported him across the water, and as he looked into the foggy dusk, the mist abruptly parted to reveal the outline of the floatation mats. Destiny was on one of the floats, her body stretched out horizontally beside the gray bottlenose lying adjacent to her. She was stroking the dolphin gently as the other dolphins hovered nearby, her head resting against the side of the injured creature. As Achilles pulled Jake abreast of the float, the girl continued to run her fingers gently along the gray's flank.

"Is there anything I can do to help?" Jake asked, keeping his voice low in the same manner as demonstrated by Achilles. He had no way of knowing it, but he was certain the young dolphin had not wanted to disturb the sanctity of this place.

Destiny shook her head slowly, turning her face slightly to acknowledge Jake's presence. "Thetis must decide to help herself. There is nothing more any of us can do for her. We have done all that is within our power."

Jake released his hold on Achilles and grabbed the float. "What's wrong with her?"

"She is unhappy and confused. She does not understand why humans would bring harm upon her and the others."

Jake himself was confused. "Then she is not ill?"

"Physical damage still resides within her, but it can be healed. She chooses to block our efforts."

"But why?" Jake asked, not knowing what else to say.

"She is not sure whether she belongs in this world any longer and feels that perhaps now is the time to make the spiritual transition to the next realm."

Jake recalled the scene when the *Avening Angel* had first come upon the injured dolphins, remembering how distraught the juvenile albino was about one of the grays in particular. He posed another question. "Is Thetis the mother of Achilles?" Destiny answered with a small nod.

"These dolphins...I've never seen anything like them," Jake said. "Are they all able to speak?"

The girl continued to stroke Thetis. "Only the white ones have developed such an ability. They are fluent in several languages."

"And do they all possess what some people would consider the equivalent of hands?"

"Thetis is the only gray here at Gaia who has such appendages, though all of the whites are endowed with them."

Jake looked over at the other two floats tethered to the one he was holding. "How're the others doing?"

"They are still weak but will recover." Destiny seemed preoccupied with something as she said this. "Thetis has been waiting for you. She would like you to place a hand on her."

Jake was perplexed. "She's never met me. Why would she be waiting for me?"

The girl peered intently at Jake, holding back a response. She suddenly sat up, letting her legs dip into the water. "Thetis wishes to discover who you are. Your touch will give her this knowledge."

Jake found the request unusual. "Getting to know someone takes time. How can a person's nature be perceived from a touch?" "Thetis will know," the girl said softly.

Jake hesitated with uncertainty, but not wanting to refuse the girl he reached out and placed the palm of his right hand on Thetis' flank.

Keeping it there for several seconds, he noticed that the creature's skin was smooth and rubbery.

As Jake did this, Destiny watched him closely, her eyes boring into him as if searching for something. "Thetis believes you are the one," she said at last.

Jake stared back, unable to discern her meaning. "I don't understand."

The girl turned her gaze to the heavens, then met Jake's eyes again. "Thetis had a dream, what some would call a vision. In it there was a man. She is now certain you are the man she saw, a person the pod can trust, the one to which her offspring will bond."

This was all getting to be too much for him to handle. "Offspring?" he uttered, a bit off balance. "Does she mean Achilles?"

"Yes."

Jake shifted his eyes to Thetis. The dolphin's right orb, the eye facing him, was scrutinizing him with a deep abiding interest. Taking in the moment, he turned back to the girl. "Thetis is not well," he reminded her. "Perhaps she's mistaking me for someone else."

Destiny was not to be dissuaded. "We have all experienced moments of inexplicable connection when events in a dream spill over into real life," she said. "There is an inner vision that exists in all of us that is often blurred, buried beneath daily stresses so that it is not readily apparent. Search yourself, Jake Javolyn. You must honor the wisdom of your inner voice, that part of yourself that knows what you are meant to do. If you deny it, you will destroy your spirit."

Jake was unsure as to what the girl alluded. The events that had taken him to this unusual place were strange enough. Attempting to make sense of the things Destiny was trying to communicate to him was like trying to unravel a riddle. And yet he had to admit there was a mysterious affinity that drew him to the juvenile albino, some genuine sense of connectedness that seemed to be awakening something deep within him.

Destiny came back at him with more words. "Thetis sees an inner conflict raging within you, an unfulfilled harmony between your conscious and subconscious states of awareness. If you are to reach the invisible worlds that lie just outside of ordinary reality, you must learn to access your own divinity and spiritual light to discover who you truly are beyond your own skin."

Though this bit of guidance continued to confound Jake, there was no need for him to dwell on it. He knew himself very well. He was a soldier of fortune, plain and simple, a person willing to accept whatever cards fate dealt him. And if per chance those cards threw hardship and suffering his way, he would meet such obstacles head on and without complaint. Whatever Thetis was seeing in him was clouded by her physical state, a condition that needed immediate rectification. "Thetis must overcome her fear of living and stop blocking your attempts to heal her," he snapped, surprised at the anger he felt. "She must engage in the direct experience of life regardless of how it may disappoint, frighten, or pain her."

Destiny looked away, unable to meet Jake's choleric eyes. "Thetis is not afraid for herself," she said, her voice almost a whisper. "She fears for the survival of this world. She does not wish to see the pod perish with it."

"Some creatures choose to die because they are too cowardly to live," Jake argued, his words coming out harsher than intended. Realiz-

ing this, he softened his tone. "Thetis must learn to fight back against the men that did this to her."

"Fighting back is not in her nature," Destiny gently asserted. "Her species lacks a willingness for aggression. She is incapable of harming or destroying, of striking back in anger."

The girl went back to stroking the injured dolphin. In the subdued light, Jake could see a faint glistening on one of her cheeks. When she finally spoke again, her voice was close to a sob. "She will not let us heal her."

Jake tried a new line of reasoning. "If that's how she's going to repay you for risking your life for her, then I will forego bonding with her calf," he threatened.

Thetis visibly flinched over this sudden declaration, letting out a loud squeal of protest. "Thetis begs you to reconsider," Destiny implored, speaking for the dolphin. "Failing to bond with Achilles will place the pod in immediate danger, setting it on an irreversible course of imminent doom."

"Why should this trouble her?" Jake asked irritably. "She's already told us she doesn't want to stick around for fear of seeing her pod perish along with the rest of the world."

Destiny stared at the gray as if listening to something. "She believes there is still hope, but only if you remain linked to Achilles. Without this link, the pod will cease to exist."

"Then the responsibility for such an outcome rests with her," Jake replied stubbornly. "I'll be leaving now." He pushed away from the float and began to swim toward the shore.

"Wait!" the girl called after him, her tone suddenly joyful. "Thetis will comply with your wish. She will allow us to heal her!"

Jake stopped in mid-stroke. Turning, he stared back at the girl and her charge, the smile on his face concealed by the near darkness. "Then I will bond with her calf," he said, still unclear about what that meant.

Now that Thetis no longer blocked them, the combined efforts of Destiny and the eight albino dolphins quickly healed the internal injuries the gray had sustained. From Jake's perspective, the albinos formed a tight circle around the float, lifting their rostrums above the edge of the mat and making contact with Thetis' prone form. Less than a minute had gone by when the girl finally raised her head from the gray's back, appearing satisfied with the outcome of their ministrations.

"You haven't eaten anything all day," Jake said, feeling deep concern for the girl.

"Jacob will prepare something for me when I go ashore," Destiny replied wearily. "He always..." Stopping in mid-sentence, she spun around

abruptly, directing her gaze to the cove's inlet. In that instant her manner changed, becoming tense and alert. "It approaches the reef," she stated sharply. "It nears your boat!"

Jake sensed an acute warning in her tone. "What nears my boat?"

"A submarine."

"How do you know this?" Jake asked incredulously, taken completely off guard by this sudden revelation.

"Apollo and Artemis are still out there watching it. It followed us most of the way from Navassa."

The two missing albinos, Jake thought. "Why didn't you tell me this before?" he demanded.

The girl read Jake's flash of anger, searching his eyes closely before answering. "The vessel stayed far enough away, presenting no danger at the time," she explained demurely. "But now the pod sees it as a threat."

With all the other strange things Jake had seen of late, the possibility of a mental link between the girl and the missing albinos did not surprise him at all. "Zimbola must be alerted to this," Jake said hurriedly. "Please go ashore and let him know what's going on. Tell him I'm on my way to the *Angel*." Jake knew that if Destiny followed through on this, Zimbola would give Hector a heads up about what was going on via the walkietalkie he kept with him.

Jake turned and began to swim for the inlet leading from the cove, but before he had made more than half a dozen strokes, Achilles was at his side. The young albino squealed out in that odd warbling lilt of his. "I will help you, Jake Javolyn. Grab hold."

The speed at which the juvenile hauled Jake through the water amazed him. It was as if Achilles sensed Jake's immediate wishes and automatically responded to them. Without Jake even having to mention it, the young dolphin appeared to understand that, as of now, every second counted.

Jake needed to formulate a plan, and quickly. But before he could come up with one, he needed to know what he was up against. Unfortunately for him, he had left his mask, fins, and snorkel on the beach and, as far as he was concerned, taking the time to retrieve them was not an option.

In less than a minute, Jake was transported across the cove to the inlet leading to the sea. Keeping his head above the water, he watched as the rock walls flashed by, sporadically illuminated where moonlight was reflected off the craggy surfaces. Hanging on by one hand, he looked behind him and spotted the brazier still glowing eerily on the other side of the water. To his relief, he could see the silhouette of a person emerging onto the beach and moving quickly toward the fire.

As Jake was towed along, he focused his thoughts on the problem at hand. A submarine, the girl had said. What was a submarine doing here? A string of questions began to race through his mind, none of them having answers. Managing to take a quick glance at his luminous wristwatch, he saw that it was a few minutes past midnight. He could only hope that either Hector or Phillippe was still up and keeping a vigilant watch to discourage possible intruders from boarding the *Angel*.

The moonlit panorama of the northern Caribbean Sea opened up before Jake as Achilles sped past the final outcropping of rock. A short distance to the southwest, the outline of his boat lay at anchor, undisturbed on the other side of the reef. Scanning the shimmering waters, he could see nothing that would indicate the presence of another vessel.

Jake was about to tell Achilles to stop swimming when the juvenile suddenly slowed and came to a halt. "Do you see any large objects under the water, Achilles?" Jake asked.

"I do not, Jake Javolyn," Achilles ululated back.

The albino's response made Jake wonder if Destiny had been wrong about the submarine. If no such vessel was currently lurking below them, he had to be sure. Perhaps he had not phrased the question correctly. "Does the reef block you from seeing what lies in the deeper water?"

"Yes, Jake Javolyn.""

Jake felt like kicking himself for not initially considering something so obvious. If a large enough sub were skulking about, it could not possibly get through the reef. And the reef would interfere with dolphin biosonar, preventing speak-see signals from breaching it. "Are other members of your pod on the other side of the reef?" he continued to probe.

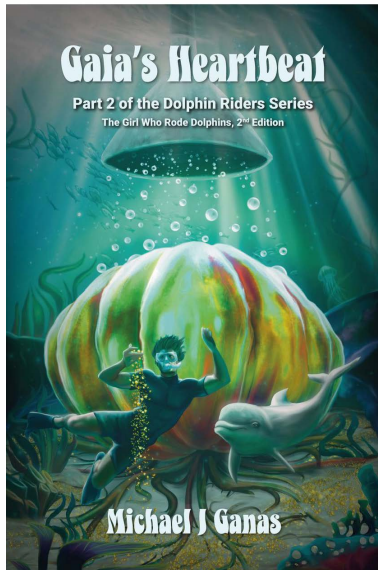
"Artemis and Apollo are there," Achilles squealed. "They are watching a large metallic vessel below the water surface.""

Jake assimilated this. "Achilles, are you able to communicate with Artemis and Apollo right now?"

"Yes, Jake Javolyn," Achilles confirmed.

"Take me to my boat, Achi-"

Before Jake had even completed the sentence, the albino shot away like a torpedo rapidly accelerating toward a target, and it was all Jake could do to maintain his grip and hold on.



[Click Here
to See Buying Options](#)

[Click Here to View
Entire Series](#)