

Siren's Song: Book III of the SOFAR Trilogy - Prologue and Chapter One

PROLOGUE

The pilot activated a series of scanners on the control panel. The sensors detected a tiny vessel moving slowly in the direction of the scout destroyer. The destroyer altered its course and drew a new heading on the approaching object.

Sensors indicated that the ship held no life forms. It appeared to be a probe. The technology was crude.

The copilot downloaded files from the probe into the destroyer's data banks. Within minutes, sounds were amplified throughout the huge destroyer. The sounds coalesced into pieces of dialects, many dialects, from a planet light years ahead. The copilot relayed the audio information to the following fleet.

As the ship's tractor system pulled the probe in, the pilot noticed a strange insignia displayed on one of the solar panels. The insignia was composed of three colors: red and white-alternating lines with a blue rectangular field and fifty white pentagrams housed within the field. Underneath the bizarre insignia were the unrecognizable symbols:

*Phoenix Project LRIS - 013
United States of America*

A clawed finger moved over the ship's flat control panel and lightly tapped an icon that glowed yellow. A sudden flash of white light erupted from a cylinder on the ventral side of the destroyer. The probe was blasted into atoms.

CHAPTER ONE

March 9, 2012 - Punta Chueca, Sonora, Mexico

The screams from the next room brought Enrique Morales out of bed, landing on his feet before he had time to find his balance. They were the types of young, high-pitched screams that would set your hair on end. Stumbling, he crashed into the bed frame, barking his shin. He swore loudly in Spanish, massaging his bruised leg. His wife, María, threw the covers off and started to get out of bed.

"No," muttered Enrique, his voice still thick from deep sleep. "I will go to her."

Enrique lit a kerosene lamp and limped into the small bedroom where his six-year old daughter Anita lay sobbing on her bed. He sat down next to her and swept her up and held her tight, blankets and all. The little girl pushed her face into her father's shoulder and began to wail. Enrique rocked her gently until the wailing gave way to sobs, then to hiccups. After a time, he heard the regular, even breathing of his daughter and thought she had fallen back to sleep.

As Enrique gently lowered her back onto the bed, Anita pulled herself closer to her father's chest. Her little hands held on tightly. Enrique could feel the tenseness run the length of her slender arms.

"It is all right, *mija*," he said. "I am here with you."

Through the wrapped around her, Enrique heard the tiny muffled voice.

"I had the bad dream again, Papá."

"Sometimes, when you talk about them, the dreams become less scary."

Anita pulled her face away from her father's chest and looked into his kind black eyes. Streaks of fresh tears lined her cherubic face.

"It was *Moosnípol*, Papá. *Moosnipol*, the great turtle, came to see me in my dream."

Moosnípol, the giant leatherback sea turtle, had long been a good omen for the Seri people. The ocean's largest turtle was believed to be present at the beginning of time and was incorporated into many of their ceremonies, especially the *camóilcoj* circle game. This four-day celebration of singing and dancing was performed during a girl's puberty rites. A leatherback was brought to the beach, placed under a shaded awning and painted with ceremonial designs. Following the ceremony, the turtle was released. It was said among the Seri that one who eats the flesh of *Moosnípol* would go blind.

"To dream of the great turtle is a good thing, Anita. It means good fortune will come to our village from the sea," responded Enrique.

"But, Papá, this time *Moosnípol* didn't come from the sea. He came from the sky. And he was bigger than any turtle I have ever seen. And there were giant turtles all over the sky. They covered the sun."

Enrique looked at his daughter. "Tell me what happened next."

"All the turtles were lying on the ground. They looked dead. Then they opened their mouths wide . . . and . . . and bugs came out!"

"Bugs? What kind of bugs?"

Anita shivered. "Biting bugs. They crawled all over me, biting me. They were in my eyes, my mouth. Everywhere there were bugs." Anita buried her face in her father's chest once more and began to cry. "Please, Papá! Don't let the bugs bite me any more!"

"I won't let any bugs bite you, my little one. That I promise you."

In his peripheral vision, Enrique saw movement in the doorway. His wife stood in the entrance, her arms wrapped around their nine-year old son, Jorge. María Morales looked plaintively at her husband. In the orange glow from the kerosene lamp, Enrique could see the tears in her eyes.

After an exhausted Anita had finally fallen back to sleep, Enrique stood up and tiptoed out of her room, extinguishing the lantern as he went. Entering his own bedroom, he recognized shapes in the dimly lit room that were comfortably familiar: the wooden table that held María's hairbrush and mirror, the framed pictures of the children - gifts from Cooper Ridley from two years ago, and Enrique's own medicine pouch. When his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he saw his young wife sitting upright in bed, leaning against the wall, her arms folded across her chest. She stared at him. Enrique sat heavily on the edge of the worn mattress, facing away from her.

"She had the dream again, didn't she?" said María, even though she already knew the answer.

Enrique heaved a great sigh. "Yes. It was the same dream. Some new details, but the sequence is the same."

"Enrique, you must do something about this! This is the fourth time in two weeks."

"What would you have me do?"

"A cleansing ceremony. Bring in some of the other shamans. Anything to make the nightmares stop."

Enrique turned to face his wife. “María, she has the gift. I thought it would be passed to Jorge, as it was passed to me through my father, and to him by his father. I am sure now that Anita has the ability to see events in the future.”

“But she is only a child –.”

“She is a seer. Of that I am certain. It was at around her age that I began to see without the use of my eyes.”

María’s tone softened. “These dreams raise great fears in me, my husband. Small children should not be witness to such images.”

Enrique placed his hand on his wife’s shoulder. “What I can do best for our daughter is to teach her how to understand and interpret these dreams. With new understanding, the dark fear recedes.”

“But what could these dreams mean? *Moosnípol* has always been a good omen for the Seri. The creatures in Anita’s dreams are horrible monsters.”

Enrique crawled back under the covers to escape the chill from the early morning sea air. He wrapped his arms around María, and she nestled close to him.

“I am not sure,” he spoke quietly. “But something important is about to happen.”

They lay quietly for several moments, breathing almost in unison.

In a few hours, the village would be stirring, preparing for another day of the rhythms of a life centered on fishing. The pangas would launch before the sun was up. The fisherman would head for the *Canal de Infiernillo*, their nets coiled loosely in the prow of their boats. In the village, people cooked and washed, wove baskets and mended nets, while small children chased each other, laughing, on the white beaches.

Enrique thought about his daughter’s frightening dreams. She had overheard the elders speaking of the great migration of gringos from the north, buying up all of the coastal lands for development. Their high-rise hotels, restaurants and luxury homes would soon line the coastline from Mexicali to *Bahia Concepción*, each with its own personal boat dock. Enrique had seen some of the brochures put out by the developers. At the time, he had smiled at their foolishness. Boat docks for individual homes in the gulf would be disastrous. The Gulf of California had one of the highest tidal ranges in the world. The new highway was slated to cross directly through the three major Seri villages. There was great concern among the Seri people that their livelihoods from the sea would totally disappear, and they would be relegated to filling service jobs in the booming tourist onslaught. Even now, their craft business in woodcarving and basketweaving was slowing down.

Was this what Anita’s vision meant? Was *Moosnípol* the symbolic messenger, the one who beckons thousands of sun-burnt, pale-skinned white people to come and forever change the landscape and way of life of the Seri? And what of the bugs?

There was another possibility. And this thought sent a bolt of dread down the length of his spine. Enrique’s heart pounded in his chest, and in the cold stillness of his bedroom, he began to sweat under the covers.

The end of time has come.