

Chapter One

When Skimif—an aquarian farmer of seaweed, a highly profitable business in his hometown of Tunya, a small town located not far from the larger city of Nemo—opened his eyes, he at first saw only darkness, but then a brilliant light shone forth, almost blinding him in its intensity. Yet he couldn't close his eyes, couldn't even look away, and soon the brilliant light disappeared, replaced by the rays of the sun that illuminated a barren earth hundreds of miles below him.

Then cracks in the ground began to appear and soon they burst, unleashing tons and tons of water, more water than Skimif had ever seen in his life. He saw the water cover the entire surface of the planet, rapidly growing until all that was left was a gigantic continent and thousands, if not millions, of tiny islands scattered everywhere.

Skimif blinked, and the next moment found himself standing in the middle of a huge jungle on the continent. He blinked again and saw a naked human lying curled on the ground before him. The human had brownish skin and appeared to be male. The human opened his eyes and looked around at his surroundings like a newborn baby seeing the world for the first time.

It took Skimif a moment to realize that he was seeing the human through his left eye. Through his right, he saw an aquarian—one who resembled a hammerhead shark, much like he did, except thinner—floating in the deep ocean, observing the world around her with the same expression that the human wore. Seeing both simultaneously made Skimif's head pound and his stomach churn, but he didn't throw up.

Then he was back in the sky again and he saw stars falling from the night sky, but they weren't stars at all. Instead, they were beings of all shapes and sizes. One being that flew past him was a woman who appeared to be made out of water; another was an octopus-like creature with a green humanoid head. There appeared to be hundreds of thousands of these beings, each one glowing as brightly as the next, as they soared toward the earth below.

And then Skimif was flying with them and he soon found himself standing in the middle of a desert, a barren plain that stretched for miles in every direction. But the plain was not entirely empty. The stars—the beings, the gods—had landed on the ground, but rather than co-mingling together, they took sides. Half of them stood on the north side of the desert, while the other half stood on the south side. And in between them were a handful of statues that looked just like humans and aquarians.

Another shift in reality found Skimif standing in the jungle from before, but things were different now. The trees burned with flames, while the jungle itself slapped away at the flames with thick wet vines. Yet with every flame the trees succeeded in putting out, a dozen more would spring up in its place. Skimif looked up and saw two beings—one a being wreathed in fire, the other a man with green skin—in combat in the area, their every movement mimicked by the fire and trees below.

One more shift and Skimif found himself hovering over the surface of the Crystal Sea, but the Crystal Sea was not its usual smooth, calm self. Hundreds if not thousands of gallons of water arose from the ocean, growing larger and larger, while a nearby volcano shook with a shudder. Then the volcano exploded, sending plumes of smoke and flame and magma hurtling toward the water. The volcanic projectiles struck the walls of water, evaporating much of it while simultaneously creating

a massive steam cloud. It looked like the volcano had won, but then the sea rose up again and fired toward the volcano, striking its base with enough force to crack it open.

As with before, Skimif noticed two beings. One was a woman whose body flowed like the ocean waves, while the other was a woman with lava for hair. The two females seemed to be in control of the sea and volcano, respectively, but before Skimif could see who would win, another blink transported him to the clouds above.

No; above the clouds. The whole world lay out before Skimif, like the fields of seaweed that he farmed. His eyes were drawn to the massive green continent directly below him, a continent that seemed to cover the entirety of the northern half of the world. Then he noticed huge cracks spreading through the continent's surface, which divided over and over again into smaller and smaller cracks until the whole thing exploded.

When the explosion cleared, the massive green continent was no more. In its place were hundreds of thousands of islands, some large, some small, but each completely independent of the others surrounding it. One thing all of the islands had in common, however, was the mass cries of pain and fear that seemed to reach up to the heavens themselves, as if the inhabitants of each island were crying out for the help of a higher power.

Then Skimif felt something behind him and he turned. He couldn't comprehend even half of what he was currently looking at. It appeared to be—and he couldn't even say this with one ounce of certainty—tendrils made of light reaching out from the darkness of the sky. They reached from beyond the sun, from beyond the stars, down into the planet below.

When Skimif turned to follow the tendrils, he found himself down in the world again, hovering over the sea. He was not alone, however. The gods from before—that had to be who they were, they couldn't be anyone else—also hovered above the waves that crashed below, but the waves were much more subdued now, as if they were tired and needed a nap. As earlier, the gods were separated into two groups: One in the north, one in the south.

But the gods looked different now. Though each side still had hundreds of gods, it was clear that both sides had lost a significant number of their fellow deities. Of those who were still alive, only perhaps a dozen altogether appeared uninjured. The rest looked like they had been through a war, with injuries ranging from the broken limbs to bashed skulls, as well as one god who was missing one whole arm and didn't seem to have grown it back yet.

A brilliant glowing line separated the two groups, which Skimif realized was one of the light tendrils from before. A god from each side approached the line, but it was reluctantly. The god from the northern side resembled a bald man with golden robes that shone brilliantly, like the afternoon sun, while the god from the south side resembled a strange octopus-like creature, with a green human-like head on top.

The two stopped just before either of them could cross the line. Then their right arms were jerked up, almost unnaturally so, and they shook hands, like they were putting aside their differences to become one. But it was clear that they hadn't forgiven each other. The two of them glared at each other and let go of the other's hand as soon as they could.

As soon as the two gods ceased their handshake, everything changed again. Everything moved quickly now. He saw all of history play out before him. Nations, empires, and kingdoms rose and fell; humans and aquarians alike discovered magic and its various uses; war spontaneously broke

out between humans and aquarians or between humans and humans or aquarians and aquarians; the gods intervened occasionally; and then Skimif saw a massive city on the edge of the world, jutting out into the endless void beyond creation.

Then the light tendrils from before extended from the Void. They wrapped around the city's massive buildings and began to tear apart the city itself. The gods appeared to combat the tendrils, but they were knocked aside as easily as if they had been annoying insects. Even worse, the gods did not get up.

Then Skimif gasped and his eyes opened, but for real this time. His arms were tied down by something, he didn't know what, but he thrashed about to free himself anyway, biting at his bindings. His sharp teeth cut through the thin bindings and he swam up through the water until he was well above the tendrils that had sought to hold him down.

His heart beating fast, Skimif looked down and realized that he had only fallen asleep in his seaweed field. A quick glance at his arms and legs told him that he had simply gotten his limbs tangled in the seaweed, which meant that he had overreacted slightly.

It took Skimif a moment to remember how he had gotten there. He had been swimming through the field, looking for any weed-gobblers after hearing of an outbreak of them just north of Tunya, when he had lost consciousness for no reason. It took him even longer to remember what he had seen in his dream.

No, Skimif thought, shaking his head. *Not a dream. A vision. A vision of the future.*

Skimif could not be sure why, but he felt a stirring urge in the pit of his stomach to act on his vision. But he didn't know what to do until a single sentence escaped his lips, a sentence that he was certain had not come from his mind, a sentence he was equally certain was true:

“The Day of the Gods is coming.”