

# IARA'S CROSSING

Diana Pomeroy

### About the Author



Diana Pomeroy (*she/her*) is an adjunct professor of Earth science at Cypress and Santa Ana College. She studied dinosaurs and birds, notably *Sapeornis chaoyangensis*, during her MSc at CSU Long Beach. She has been infatuated with all things dinosaur-related since she was 4 years old. Her first published novel is *Iara's Crossing*, a science fantasy novel that intersects the academic world of dinosaur paleontology with magical fantasy. Her other published stories and artwork can be found on DeviantART, Archive of Our Own, and on her website, [warriorfeathercreations.weebly.com](http://warriorfeathercreations.weebly.com). She lives in Southern California with her Russian blue cat, Mochi.

## ***Iara's Crossing-Preview Only-Diana Pomeroy***

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ISBN: 979-8-9860473-0-0 (Paperback)

Front cover image and all artwork presented herein by Diana L. Pomeroy.

All traditional artwork is illustrated with Spectrum Noir-Jazza Pro Artist Series Markers and Ink Pens.

The map was created in Inkarnate, based on the USGS Map of the United States of America during the Late Cretaceous period.

Some images and photographs are modified from Pexels and PowerPoint royalty-free images.

Front cover font: Dragon Fire from Girinesia on CreativeFabrica.com.

Internal text font: Calibri from Microsoft Word.

Printed by Lulu, Inc., in the United States of America.

First printed edition, 2022.

[warriorfeathercreations.weebly.com](http://warriorfeathercreations.weebly.com)

**Content Warning**

*Lara's Crossing* is a dinosaur fantasy novel geared toward people between the ages of 10 and 100+ years old. It contains elements of violence, gore, infertility, and emotional/verbal abuse/manipulation. Reader discretion is advised.

To those who resonate with Lara's journey, remember this always: *Tibi ipsi crede, et longe fortior*. And thank you.

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**Prologue-Clepsydra's Oasis**

*Circles within circles*

*Lines within lines*

*Endless spirals*

*From small to great*

*The path lies ahead*

*Where destiny awaits*

The runes of the ancient inscription were carved out of weakening limestone as part of a crumbling gate. The centerpiece of the gate was an enormous relic, a huge ammonite fossil. Vines twisted around each column of the limestone gate, moss and algae filling in the cracks. A forest of ginkgo trees lined either side of the path beneath the gate, worn by countless twin and three-toed footprints, indicating endless comings and goings. This was the avians' Oasis—their origin point west of the once vast sea that divided an entire continent.

The ammonite that indicated the Oasis's entryway was once alive, bobbing within the currents of its vast watery home. The tentacled behemoth lived for hundreds of turns, its shell growing ever larger with each change of the seasons. It died peacefully on the soft silts of the bottom of the shallow inland sea, its shell enrobed in particles of mud. The shell transformed into solid rock over thousands of turns of time, its sections infilling with mineral crystals. The seas gave way to the land below as the turns slowed to the present, lifting the ammonite from its watery tomb and exposing it to the sunlight.

An avian in muted yellow and olive plumage shuffled his scaly gray feet around the dirt that encased the relic in the center of his bower, preparing for the Lek. The Lek was the avians' instinctual ritual and the rite of passage from initiated fledgling to matured adult, where a potential mate or mates could be chosen and kept for as long as the avians survived. Some avians built bowers to impress future mates, others simply strutted, sang, and danced. The bower this avian had constructed was made with dozens of bent ginkgo branches, intricately woven together with saliva and mud. It had taken him many sunrises to prepare his bower for the first moonrise of warm sunlight and greenery—when the Lek happened every turn. The avian paused in his construction, staring wide-eyed at his prize—he had unearthed a massive ammonite shell!

A beautiful female avian arrived on the scene as the bower builder stumbled across the ammonite. His bright yellow eyes dilated on beholding her—her plumage was like nightfall, an intense cyan blending into indigo, speckled with bright iridescent white spots. She chittered her jaws at the bower builder, impressed with him.

The pair became exceptionally long-lived for avians, blessed with many seasons of hatchlings, and consequently, they became the leaders of their flock. The ammonite became an omen of immortality to the flock—any avian who discovered another would have a legacy that would last for all eternity. The ruling pair marked one another and avians in their flock with their claws, carving the shape of the ammonite in one another's faces as a sacred sign of longevity and prosperity.

The area the flock inhabited—the Oasis—was protected from invading tyrants by the surrounding fire-river mountains and vast desert. Avians from other lands traveled to the Oasis in pilgrimage, to catch a glimpse of the massive ammonite relic the pair treasured as much as their offspring.

The distant fire-river-mountain, however, had other plans.

The fire-river-mountain closest to the borders of the Oasis sent a shockwave of energy toward it. The earth below them shook, and the hot wind blasted toward them as if an impending sandstorm. The avians stared in disbelief and horror as rivers of fire coursed down the mountainside. The ginkgo stands and evergreens of the Oasis began to burst aflame as the fire-rivers flooded the area, and the avians fled in droves, some flying, others running for their lives, terror gripping them tightly.

The speckled avian and her mate ran toward their shared bower, preferring to pass into the void together than alone. They held one another close. The fire-river coursed through the Lek site, catching the surrounding ferns and cycads quickly. The smoke and gas from the fire-river started to make the pair cough and choke.

Suddenly, the male avian's foot slipped on the hot slick surface of the ammonite they were clinging to—the leg that twitched violently as he aged—and the speckled avian shrieked. She tried to snag him by his feather crest, but he screamed in agony as the fire-river turned his foot from scales and flesh to sinew, bone, and ash in moments. He gazed deeply and lovingly at his mate, his eyes fully dilated, her speckled plumage like the stars in the evening sky, as the fire spread to his tail and lower half of his body.

*Let my body be carried by the river until the last sunset and moonrise, if we are separated and you are gone* was their mating ritual mantra. And the speckled one felt her throat swell in a

strangled dirge of that mantra as her mate was washed away by the cruel, fast-moving fire-river.

The speckled avian watched the fire-river flow around the ammonite where she sat, awaiting her shared doom. The fire-river instead ignited the dust that covered the edges of it, revealing bright specks of red and yellow amongst the brown of the shell's surface. The speckled avian felt a deep hum in her chest, a thrumming like wingbeats, and in an instant, she found herself safe in a tree high above what was once her home.

The tyrants from the north strode into the burning enclave, chasing out the last avians, forcing the few that survived to flee up the trees. Tyrants were harbingers of death for saurian and avian creatures alike, claiming destroyed areas as their territorial boundaries and favored kill sites. The speckled avian gasped for breath, closing her eyes, shaking in fright--but the tyrant closest to her moved past her, not even noticing her as it led its mate into the forest along with the fire-river.

Those who remained in the speckled avian's flock—a total of ten avians altogether--were stunned by the speckled avian's ability to change form: Her feathers had become fur, her eyes able to take in darkness, and her wet nostrils quivered in fright. She shrieked a hideous rasp and curled her tail around the trunk of the ginkgo she was perched in for balance.

The flock named her Clepsydra, for the hissing sound she made, and she became an avian once more as soon as the tyrants had made their final rounds. Clepsydra ensured they were gone, and then led the remaining members of the flock to safety, tending to their wounds. New groups were established by Clepsydra—the only surviving mated pair became the Nesters, de facto leaders of the avian flock. All chicks were under their care from then on. Clepsydra became the first Shapechanger and Warriorfeather in the region. She took it upon herself to protect the remaining avians in the Oasis until the bitter end with the hidden power of the ammonite. The Healers ensured the survival of the avians in the coming turns.

A fortuitous bout of rainfall cleansed the burned husk of the once proud and lush enclave the avians called home for several suns, floodwaters carrying the last remnants of the old Oasis away. Clepsydra and the flock ensured the fire-river had become ash and rock, then dug the ammonite from the ruins of her bower and made it part of the symbol of Clepsydra's new enclave a considerable distance away from the old site.

The ammonite in the gate sat for hundreds of turns after the new Oasis had been established. Beyond the gate, safe in an ancient marble cavern resided Clepsydra. Her mind was shrouded in meditational bliss, a comatose Nirvana. Her breathing was so shallow, any of her current flock members could have declared her dead. Her body was weak, her once lustrous plumage



molting at a terrifying pace. Each iridescent blue feather caught on the warm breeze of the nearby desert, escorted gently toward the path away from the temple. Each feather traveled away from her body, toward destinations unknown.

## **Chapter 1-From Hatchling to Fledgling**

One of Clepsydra's feathers buffeted about on the warm spring breeze ten turns later. It lazily spiraled down and gently touched the surface of a clear lake. The lake was in the center of a clearing in an enormous forest enclave, thousands of paces away from the Oasis. Ripples radiated outward as Clepsydra's feather landed on the mirror-like surface of the lake.

A quadrupedal creature awoke from its suspended slumber. The saber-toothed cat recalled her instructions as she stood in the coolness of dawn, leaving the comfort of her limestone den and running toward the forest enclave's nest site to the west.

*I have offered a final challenge in your training as Shapechangers. When the time comes for me to leave this world, my feathers will travel far and wide. When you find one, you have been summoned to protect and to train a Warriorfeather in all I have taught you, and to bring them to me.*



She was always moving in circles.

At first, they were slow and soothing, a gentle loop while ensconced in the darkness and the warm fluid surrounding her. All she had to do was push her head up a little, enough to throw her body off balance and into a spin. She kept it going by kicking her legs a little.

When the fluid became less, she realized she was trapped in a tight cocoon. So, she stayed curled up as she grew.

*What's going on?* she wondered as her whole body began to spin while trapped in the cocoon. It started slow, reminiscent of the gentle turns she made herself when the cocoon was wider. Then, absolute panic set in as she began to spin faster. She cried, "Help! I'm stuck!" in soft squeaks, but no response occurred as she continued her ceaseless, out-of-control turning.

Just as quick as the disaster began, it stopped.

She twisted around in her cocoon, writhing like a fish out of water. She had to end the spinning in her head and break free!

Several sharp jabs from her nose tore an opening in the cocoon. Cold air wafted in. Her nostrils tried to open, to take in the scent. She struggled again, nipping at the hole with her tiny jaws.

The hole was now large enough to accommodate her head and neck. She wriggled her body upward, her muscles aching and body jerking in spasms.

Another barrier was beyond the cocoon. She huffed and snapped at it, ramming her nose into it, the cold air stronger on her skin.

She pushed and pushed. She eventually tired and stopped to rest. Several openings surrounded her, letting in more air and something new—something bright, from the world beyond.

After a few moments of rest, she gathered her strength and pushed upward again. The openings of the cocoon widened slowly, letting in the cold, the air, the brightness of dawn.

Her muzzle peeked out of the egg. She was enshrouded in the mist of a cool morning, surrounded by a forest enclave she would call home.

She widened the opening with sharp jabs of her head, the cocoon that surrounded her at last shattering. She took in her first rapid breaths in the open air. A pair of pale green orbs were revealed beneath soft brown lids. They darted to and fro. Her eyes opened and adjusted as if her body was uplifted from underwater. The world suddenly came into focus.

The hatchling squealed a piteous little shriek that made the main Nester female, Wadjet, cease her hunt from many paces away. She rushed to the nest in the center of the enclave, her teal head-crest raised in pure panic.

*No! They're not supposed to hatch yet!*

Wadjet was an experienced Nester that had collected, raised, and initiated many offspring over hundreds of Lekking seasons in the forest enclave. She had never had a hatchling arrive so early before—most stayed in their eggs longer than expected, and some never hatched at all.

Wadjet reached the hatchling just before she rolled out of the nest, perilously close to the riverbank that curved alongside the nest site in the center of the enclave. She lowered her body submissively and cooed in response, fanning her iridescent black primaries around the nest in a protective arc.

The hatchling squeaked, tottering and landing on her pubic bones, swinging her tiny fat tail behind her. She began to chase it, scooting in an awkward circle.

Wadjet studied her curiously. She had never seen an avian do that before, and not with such intensity. She noticed the pattern left in the nest from the motion, and sat up straight, gasping.

“Ra!” she yammered, her voice carrying into the depths of the forest.

It was then that the hatchling stopped her scooting. She tilted her head to one side, gazing up at her panicked foster mother. She listened intently.

“Ra! Ra come quickly...it’s a sign from the Oasis!”

The Nester male of the flock burst from the underbrush and the evergreen trees, his plumage raised in panic mode. Ra was Wadjet’s, lifelong mate. Ra represented the ideal of avian beauty, with sea-blue eyes and mousy brown plumes that turned to gold in the sunlight, in addition to bearing a flamboyant barred black and cream head crest. He hurried to his mate, who was still poised over the nest protectively.

Both avians gasped at the pattern the hatchling had made in the soil of the nest while chasing her tail. The hatchling paused her motions to gaze up at her anxious parents.

“Circles within circles!” Wadjet warbled.

“Lines within lines...” Ra mused, staring at the little fluffy brown and cream chick. She gurgled a hello, bobbing her head. She then continued scooting along in the dirt and pine needles without a care in the world.

“Do you think...she was chosen? Is that why she hatched so soon?!” Wadjet tried to no avail to keep the pain and sorrow from her voice. Ra lowered his head toward his mate submissively, trying to calm her.

“Her life path won’t be certain until she matures,” Ra shook his head, staring at the gurgling hatchling. “She did hatch much faster than the others...”

“I don’t know why,” Wadjet suppressed a wail of grief. “I had to hunt, I couldn’t guard the nest forever...”

Ra entwined his neck with his mate, cooing gently. “Do not blame yourself; the hatchling was ready.”

“What happens now?” Wadjet looked to Ra, her mate, her trusted confidant in all things. For the first time as a nest mother, she didn’t know what to do. She didn’t know how to raise such a tiny hatchling. How could she feed it? Would it survive?

Ra gazed at the hatchling, then at Wadjet, his pupils dilating in affection. “She will be a new challenge, I’m afraid. If she survives, she is stronger than we knew.”



The saber-toothed cat summoned by Clepsydra approached the lake bordering the forest enclave, where her feather had come to rest after a full moon cycle had passed. She had small round ears, a scruffy ruddy pelt blotched with dark brown rosettes, muscular limbs with

massive paws, and a short, bobbed tail. A pair of recurved fangs hung from her heavy jaws. She moved with a sure grace, even as she dejectedly flopped to the lakeside, studying her reflection somberly. She let loose a deep sigh.

*I'm not sure I can do this again. I've failed once before...why does Clepsydra trust me with this?*

The saber cat's eyes filled with tears, heartbroken over the loss of the latest Warriorfeather initiate. She looked away from the reflection she cast on the surface of the lake, weeping.

*Only traitors to Clepsydra choose your change of form, Moongaze,* came the unbidden memory. The saber-toothed cat was standing in front of another, her lips drawn back in a defensive snarl.

*You chose to betray her, not I,* Moongaze recalled her retort to the mysterious Shapechanger with Clepsydra's blood on his fangs.

*Then why did Woundtooth drag your pupil's carcass to the kill site?* he hissed in her ear, padding past her with cruel confidence.

As the saber cat wept silently, her reverie was interrupted by a squeaking sound at her feet.

*"Merp?"* questioned a tiny brown avian. Her eyes were emerald orbs in the darkness. The hatchling had managed to stumble out of the nest and found her way to the saber cat by tracking her pugmarks in the soft soil. She found this creature fascinating, despite her sorrow.

*"Go away,"* the saber cat growled. She turned away from the hatchling, rubbing the tears down her muzzle along the backside of her paw.

Despite being told to leave, the hatchling avian still stood there. She peeped, *"Merp!"* as if in protest.

The saber cat sighed in frustration. *"Go. Away!"* she snarled, turning to face the intruding avian. The hatchling shrank back in fear but did not move from her spot. She quivered, her downy plumage making her resemble a breathing dandelion head.

The saber cat paused, her breathing heavy, anger subsiding into deep sadness again. *I just yelled at an innocent...she had nothing to do with my anger, yet I directed it at her...*

The hatchling whimpered a feeble cry. Her peeps and whimpers made the saber cat even sadder.

She gazed up at Moongaze with wet, huge, green eyes, her pupils enormous. *"Peep, peep!"* she pleaded as if to say, *"Don't eat me!"*

Concern filled her eyes as Moongaze slumped down and wept loudly. "Oh, you little peeping thing...how can you possibly understand?!" it wailed to the little brown avian who was rooted to the spot. "I failed; don't you see? I am a terrible mentor!"

"Peep?" the avian wondered, tilting her head to one side.

The saber cat wept for several minutes, and even though the torrent of tears puddled around the avian's tiny, clawed toes, the avian refused to move. Something about the giant cat made her feel at peace.

"Why haven't you run off yet?" she wondered. The avian blinked, sniffed, and blinked again, confusion and delight in her eyes. "I should scare the living spirit out of you, yet here you are...what is it, little one?"

"Peep," the avian answered. *I am not afraid. I wish to stay with you.*

"You should be in your nest, asleep, with your siblings. Don't you want that? A nice, cozy nest?"

"Peep," the avian shook her head slowly. She then rushed over to the saber cat's big, outstretched paw, poked her way beneath the velvety paw pads, and snuggled under it.

"Peep!" she answered, and closed her big green eyes, content.

"Oh, little one," the saber cat felt a big smile creeping into her muzzle. Hope burgeoned inside her, and a funny feeling twisted her guts. "You are too young, yet, little one. I cannot mentor you until you are initiated, a sister among the flock. What am I saying—you don't understand a word I am saying, do you?"

"Merp?" the avian opened one eye. *Somehow, I do understand...!*

"Maybe you do, silly fluffball," the saber cat smiled. "My name is Moongaze. I will guide you...I will not fail you. You will find me when the time is right." Moongaze suddenly lifted her paw, and the chick opened her eyes.

"Peep?" she asked, concerned. Moongaze lowered her muzzle to the fledgling's gently, in quiet farewell, as Wadjet stepped forward, her teal plumes iridescent in the moonlight.

"It is time to go, littlest one," Wadjet warmly addressed the errant hatchling.

"Wadjet!" Moongaze muttered. Wadjet ushered the hatchling into her primaries.

"She will be a Warriorfeather when the time comes," Wadjet agreed. "She has made it clear."

The hatchling started to protest as Wadjet led her away, back to the nest. A wind blew down from the trees, rippling the lake and sending shivers into the saber cat's pelt. The saber cat watched the little hatchling's bright eyeshine fade into the darkness, and then she closed her eyes wearily, knowing her journey had just begun.



The littlest hatchling with the emerald eyes kept her distance from her larger younger siblings. Her first attempts at getting along with her nestmates almost left her dead...or so she felt, as she didn't receive a single scratch from their talons or teeth. Their loud voices and odd gestures frightened her. Even though she was the first to hatch, she was the last to fledge, the last to leave the nest. She preferred to stay in the nest while her siblings rushed about the forest, teasing one another, and chirruping amongst themselves about their odd older sister.

At fledging, the young avian shed much of her down of youth, her adult plumage poking in here and there. Her feathers were growing in a mahogany shade, her underside an off-white stained with ruddy blotches. Her wing feathers were off-white with alternating bands of black. Her tailfeathers had yet to form, her tail still covered in the down she was born with, indicating her age.

Her first hunting excursions were unsuccessful, but one night she managed to kill a tiny huffing mammal with her enlarged toe-claws. Thrilled, she brought the kill back to the nest, eating with wild abandon while her sleeping siblings paid her no mind.

Ra and Wadjet conversed quietly with one another, watching the fledgling from a distance.

"The littlest one has improved...she's hunting on her own now," Ra remarked.

"Initiation will begin soon..." Wadjet trailed off, ending on a deep sigh. "Circles within circles...and lines within lines...we know her fate..." Wadjet preened herself instinctively, calming herself as she felt the familiar panic set in. Why did this fledgling make her feel so helpless?

"I'm afraid for her, too," Ra admitted softly to his mate. "Let us hope she succeeds as a Warriorfeather. That is all we can do. She can hunt on her own...it's only a matter of time before she is initiated...before the Lek...before she settles into a nest full of her hatchlings. That is the bright future, which is what we must focus on for her..."

Wadjet nodded weakly. The littlest fledgling somehow usurped so much of her energy. She wondered why she was chosen for the task of raising the tiny creature. Wadjet wondered if her

patience would last long enough to ensure the fledgling would leave the nest and become a full adult.

The cold wind rustled past the littlest fledgling's feathers, making her instinctively puff up and draw her body into a tighter curl as she slept. Her siblings did the same, some opening their eyes from time to time, glowing like the stars, only to wink out.

As she slept, a soft feminine voice called to her...repeatedly singing the phrase ***Circles within circles...lines within lines...***



The fledgling woke with a start. The sun was much higher in the sky than she had anticipated. *I slept in!* She panicked, her heart thundering in her chest.

Wadjet loomed over her, clicking her jaws in disapproval. "Fledgling, why aren't you practicing your Lekking exercises with the others?"

The little brown fledgling ducked down into the nest, curling her tail over her legs, and pulling her neck toward her chest. She looked away from the cold hard stare of her furious parent. "Wadjet, I am sorry, I..."

Wadjet's crest rose in irritation at the fledgling's submissive display. "Get to the clearing with the others. Now." The hiss was low pitched, an intimidating sound the fledgling dreaded hearing. The fledgling hurried to the Lek site.

The Lek site in the forest enclave was a clearing carved by hundreds of avian talons into a ring of soil, surrounded by polished and rounded rocks. From above, the Lek site appeared to be in the form of an ammonite shell.

The littlest fledgling took her place on the outermost edge of the Lek site...the last of the group, as usual.

As the would-be Nester males puffed out their feathers and hissed at one another, jaws agape and wings outstretched, the littlest fledgling began to lose interest. She had seen this practice run so many times. *Why should I care when I've been ousted too many times to count?*

The fledgling noticed something odd in the corner of her eye. She gazed at a branch on a nearby tree bordering the edge of the Lek site. On the branch sat an avian bedecked in green plumage, with a beak rather than a typical snout, and it was a deep orange, like the setting sun.



Its eyes were brown, and, to the fledgling's surprise, its tail ended not as her own, but in a short fan with a pair of long ribbon-like feathers trailing at the end.

The fledgling was startled when Wadjet bounded over, snapping her jaws testily at her. Wadjet pinned her neck to the dust under her merciless talons. *I must show her that avian society will reject this distracted behavior...*

"Fledgling, you are better than this! Why do you disobey?"

"Wadjet, I can't help it! I can't!" the fledgling squealed. She felt like crying.

"You need to understand the Lek ritual, to make a flock of your own. Don't you want a flock of your own?"

"Y-y-yes, Wadjet..." came the lie, muffled by gasps. The fledgling was more frightened than ever.

"Good." Wadjet bounded away from the fledgling. She stared at the others, snapping her jaws at a few to keep them in their places. "Again! New contenders!"

The sun finally sank into the horizon. The avian with the bright green plumage and elongate tailfeathers took flight. *Something is off about that fledgling, and I need to find out what, he had decided.*

The fledgling hobbled back to the safety of her nest...when she was stopped by Wadjet, who was sitting in it alongside Ra. He had protested Wadjet's cruelty, but she would have none of it. *She must learn the rules of the flocks, how to survive in the enclave on her own, and she is learning the hard way.*

"You will have to make a new nest for the night."

The fledgling held back tears as she stumbled in the darkness, grabbing too many branches in her jaws and spilling them on the dirt. She kept grabbing them, trying to make a circle. More than once, the cycad fronds scraped her legs, making them bleed. More than once, she fell into the dirt, her plumes coated with it. Finally, her makeshift nest complete, she curled up into it.

The stars twinkled in their inky sea overhead. The littlest fledgling sighed, wondering if every day of her life was going to be this terrible.

"I wish I wasn't here anymore," she wept softly to herself.

All she heard in reply was the subtle creak of a tree branch, followed by barely audible wingbeats in the darkness.



The sunlight lightened the sky little by little, the stars fading away. The fledgling had not slept well. She decided it would be best for her body and mind to wander.

She found a path through the forest, a thin trail of dirt that led her to a babbling stream. She drank, dipping her muzzle into the cold water and tilting her head up, letting the water flow down her throat. She did this several times before continuing.

She enjoyed the silence of the forest in the early morning. Few creatures had woken up; the nocturnal mammals were safe in their burrows, and the diurnal avians were still asleep. She wandered past several boulders and felt the tickle of ferns at her feet. The cycads and redwoods filtered sunlight through their canopies, lending a green glow to the hushed world around her.

The fledgling found a place where the path had widened, leading her into a secluded clearing. To her left the stream she had followed flowed into a waterfall, then into a small lake. Several fish weaved beneath the water, stirring up the sediment and algae. To her right the forest continued, becoming darker as the trees grew closer together. It was here, between both paths, that the fledgling sought refuge from the slights she endured.

She hopped up onto a large flat boulder, then sat. The sunlight warmed the rock and her body as the sun climbed into the sky above the enclave. She spread her wings, allowing her body to absorb as much warmth as possible. She sighed, content. For a few moments, she could be at peace.

Something crashed through the branches of the cycads close by, smashing onto the ground by her sunning rock. Startled, her eyes snapped open, and she leaped backward, swinging her wings out for balance.

Irritated, the fledgling narrowed her eyes at the intruding object—a ginkgo seed. It had split open, its stench filling the clearing. A rush of wings buffeted her head. She hissed at the newcomer, then recognized it at once.

The bright green avian with a beak landed awkwardly, his tail feathers dragging on the forest floor. He gulped down the ginkgo seed meat, tilting his head to examine both it and the irritated fledgling. He finished his meal, tossing the rest of the seed with a flick of his head, his

bright orange beak stained with green and yellow ginkgo fruit flesh. He then hopped over to the stream, put his beak underwater, and spat out the water with a huff.

In the meantime, the fledgling had returned to her sunning spot, trying to relax. The newcomer had distracted her, and this upset her—how could she relax now? He hopped all around her, tilting his head, watching as she tried to focus on the warmth of the sun again.

The fledgling watched as the bright green avian ran to the highest point of her sunning rock. He then launched himself off, spreading his wings. The sunlight shone through his red primaries and green contours, giving him an otherworldly glow. He flapped his wings once, then glided on the warm air, following the thermals above the clearing.

The fledgling gazed up, craning her neck as high as it would go. The bright green avian was flying in large circles, ascending well above the canopy of the forest. The black four-winged could not fly as well as this twin-tailed avian, and she was envious of the graceful movements he had. She wished that she could soar above the ground, escaping her situation, laughing at last at those who had for so long laughed at her.

The fledgling froze. A mist seemed to enshroud her mind, and she couldn't move.

It was as if she was watching herself from a distance, unable to do anything to stop the vision from happening.

The fledgling shrieked in terror as the sunning rock below her body collapsed into ever-falling dust, which began to drift and swirl toward the darkened forest before her. She instinctively stretched out her wings and tail fan for balance. She chattered in horror while fixated on the forest. Her heart racing, the fledgling stared as a massive being emerged from it and wandered toward her, begging her prone body to wake up.

The dust coalesced into bright points—stars. The stars in turn swirled about, giving substance to the phantom beast. The stars shimmered as the phantom beast's striped coat, and in her left eye was an amethyst encrusted ammonite. Her pelt was the ever-changing night sky, its hues shifting from pale blue to indigo to deep black.

***Hello fledgling***, the beast began, its booming voice echoing in her mind. The fledgling could only stay frozen in place, adrift among the stars.

*Who...who are you?!* the fledgling's thoughts reached the phantom.

The beast looked down on the fledgling. She saw some stars continuously twirling as a helix along the phantom's back, their points fading and strengthening with each twist of the strands.  
***I am Clepsydra. I have trained all Warriorfeathers, including you.***