

Prologue



THE SAND WAS HOT, EVEN IN the shadow of Ship Rock Mountain, a tubular edifice that spiraled upward into the blazing blue sky. No wind, no rain cooled the air and the heat burned all vegetation since time immortal. Yet, the voices danced on air as if in some native ballet partnered with the waves of heat on the vast horizon. The tongue and tone of the voices were foreign, not of this world. Strangely, the air carried stillness, a pause that obeyed the sounds.

Far in the distance, a bright light shone like a flash that grew in hue and brilliancy like a trapped aurora borealis. As it came closer to the mountain, it grew in intensity and beauty. Moving without disturbing the air or touching the hot ground, shortly the light was all-encompassing, blocking the sun and devouring the heat in its changing, calming turquoise glow. Pure light cooled, and comfort began to take on a shape. Out of the

light, a woman stood, her face beautiful, her long, thick black hair like hot, wet asphalt blowing in some surreal wind, her arms extended, beckoning as if to embrace. She had eyes the color of a doe's pelt and a smile so engaging that it was purely memorizing.

The voice was a siren's song on the gentle turquoise air, warm and enchanting. *"It is time, my love. Look to your own heart. Feel it beat for another. Gather close those who have strayed. All will return to you and another will come. Farewell, my love, for I will come to you no more."*

Jake Hawkins' eyes opened and his arms reached out to the dream that vanished. He uttered one word with an agonizingly sweet pain. "Skai."