

## **FANTASY NOVEL EXCERPT: THE SPARK & THE STAR**

**From the diary of Adrik Iosifvich Solov**

*The fifth day of the fourth tennight of Summer, Year 3974*

Remembering is hard — like trying to read a letter after the ink has spilt. Drips and drabs and scattered meaning. But I try. I press my palms to my eyes until they're throbbing, and try.

The room stank of blood. I was a child then, but I knew the stench. I'd seen a pig slaughtered once and this wasn't much different. The squeals, the pops of flesh. The heat. It was no wonder the guard's hand slipped on my throat. As a man grown, I now recognize the war in the guard's eye. Duty or conscience? In the hesitation, I snuck away. The guard carried on.

He'll be an old man now. Retired to Old Kirov, grown fat with his jolly wife. He'll have watched his grandchildren play at his feet, licking salt beef from his fingers. Maybe he's taken time for the theatre and learned to appreciate the ballet. But I do not care.

I do not care about the grandchildren, or the fat wife, or the guilt. I don't even care about the mercy. When the time comes, the guard will die like Papa — wide-eyed and eager. Like Mama, a rope of red around her throat. Like Kiril and Kolya, their chests flailing. My sisters — the oldest, Tatya, on a spear; or the the baby, Amaliya, crushed beneath a boot.

When the time comes, the guard will die like his masters.

And I will remember every bit of it.

## Chapter 1: A secret in Norgay

### *493 days to the Suncycle*

The first time Danika journeyed home, the long grasses of the Steppe crunched dry and brittle beneath her boots. Now — even with Autumn on the horizon — they flowered.

Thistles of white and gold and palest purple fluttered like brightly winged birds. Danika knelt, blade in hand, and sliced the stem of the brightest bulb — *knautia arvensis*.

She twisted it between her fingertips, raised it high against the blood-orange glare of the blazing sunrise. A pop of perfect violet in a sea of craggy rock and endless grasslands. Thoth only knew how long it would be before she saw its like again.

Danika drew back the flap of her white fishscale coat. Six silk bags lined the interior of the lefthand side. The treasures hidden inside contained the fruits of her foraging — bottles of dew, clippings of antelope fur, bushcat feathers and flora of every variety she could scavenge from the moment she'd left Izumgray to the instant she'd arrived on the Steppe.

She tucked the purple bud into the third satchel from the top and stowed the knife in one of the six sheaths dangling from her waistbelt. The tools of an alchemist's trade were best kept close at hand — or so her instructors at Izumgray had taught her.

Her gaze drifted to the right lining of the coat, to the dozens of narrow pockets loaded down with thin glass vials. The vials would have dragged heavy on her coattails if not for the elixir she had imbued in the glass to make them weightless.

Each stoppered tube contained the product of eight years hard labor at Izumgray — Sivka's one and only institute for alchemy. Eight years sweating over fires, deciphering ancient script by

dim candlelight; eight years enduring the whispers and jeers of her fellow apprentices as the only Kotov to ever grace Izumgray's sacred halls. Eight years proving herself to teachers she could have outbrewed on her worst day. Danika suffered it all, and gladly, for the chance to prove herself, to learn her art. To be the best.

And when she had returned home to the Kotov Isles each summer — languishing in the salty shores of the Swansea, counting down the nights until the Aadan's Day harvest and her return to Sivka — she had endured the judgement of her own people as well.

Did she think herself too good to study alchemy in the old way, as every Kotov had done before her? Did she think the Sivkans could teach her better than the Kotov? Her siblings had elected to stay on the Isles, despite also possessing the Fire. Why did Danika think herself so special?

Babbin would say it was greed. Mama would call it stubborn pride. Nadya, ever the adoring older sister, would only believe the best in her. But the truth of it was that Danika's ambitions had always stretched beyond the Kotov Isles, and always would. Even if that very ambition that had led to her ruin.

A bracing gust rustled the grass and Danika pulled her coat closed against the chill. She spared one last glance back at the road that led to Izumgray, to a past that had dissolved from her future like water from a flame, and trod down the hillside to the bank where the Swansea met the grassy shore of the Steppe.

That innocuous meeting of sea and shore marked a barrier between two worlds, the place where Sivka's reign ended and the Kotov dominion began. It was the line between her old life

and the new. Her life before Izumgray and her life after. Only now, Danika did not know which was which. Instead, she held to the old Kotov anthem — a threat and promise in equal measure.

The tide will bring us in.

## FEATURE SCREENPLAY EXCERPT: SAFE PASSAGE

INT. AFRICAN VILLAGE, COUNSEL CHAMBERS - DAY

Anna and Clay stand before the VILLAGE COMMITTEE.

The Counsel Chambers is nothing more than a hut. Walls of dried mud, straw ceiling. Circular cut outs in the walls fill the room with intense beams of sunlight.

The Committee, a group of four, sit stiffly behind a long stone table. Things are not going well.

ANNA

I've got a boatload of refugees  
with no place to go. You can't  
tell me you don't sympathize with  
that.

The voice of the Committee, BARD, leans forward in his chair.

BARD

Our problem is not a lack of  
sympathy. It is a lack of space.  
We have trouble enough keeping up  
with the demands of our current  
population.

CLAY

And we've offered reparations to  
that effect. SAT is prepared to  
offer increased supply drop  
offs.

A WRINKLY WOMAN to Bard's left takes her turn.

WRINKLY WOMAN

It is not only the extra burden.  
You say these people were  
attacked by Scavengers? We have  
no need for that kind of  
trouble.

The rest of the Committee nods along.

CLAY

That's only a suspicion. There's  
no act--

David edges through the door-shaped hole. The Committee perks  
up. Relieved to see a familiar face.

BARD

David, welcome. How is Aria  
coming along?

Anna and Clay share a look. Displeased by the interruption. And  
David's presence undermining their authority.

DAVID

Well. Should be any day now.

WOMAN

Excellent.

CLAY

Dr. Bardot, we were just  
trying to explain what a  
welcome addition our refugees  
would be to this community.

DAVID

They aren't many. And they're  
fairly strong. You could  
always use a few more hands.

BARD

Frankly, David, we brought  
you here to deliver one more  
mouth to feed. Not fifteen.

Anna brings out the big guns.

ANNA

Unless, of course, there's no  
doctor to deliver the baby.

EXT. AFRICAN VILLAGE - LATER

Anna and David square off against one another. Clay watches,  
amused.

DAVID

Where do you get off  
bartering with my services?

ANNA

Your services, such as they  
are, are mine to barter with  
as long as you reside on my  
ship.

DAVID

That's funny. I don't  
remember getting my medical  
degree from the Anna Kensey  
School of Crack Flying.

ANNA

Yeah, well you did get it  
from the Kensey Medical  
Facility so maybe you should  
tread carefully with me.

DAVID

Apparently we should all  
tread carefully with you. If  
I'm bleeding from the gut and  
don't ask nicely, you might  
stop Clay from sewing me up.

ANNA

I'm just trying to get the  
most help to the most people.  
The people who need it. Isn't  
there something in your oath  
about that?

David turns to Clay. Assured the man will be on his side.

DAVID

Clay?

He assess the two of them for a long beat.

CLAY

I agree with Anna.

ANNA  
What?!

DAVID  
What?!

There's a moment where Clay looks like he might smile but contains it into his usually serious expression.

CLAY  
I think our first priority  
should be the refugees. And I  
think you two are done with  
these negotiations.

ANNA  
You can't keep me  
out of this!

DAVID  
It's my services your  
negotiating with!

CLAY  
I've already asked Nadie to  
come in. God knows we could  
use someone with social  
skills.

Clay returns to Counsel Chambers. Leaving Anna and David to fume.

EXT. AFRICAN VILLAGE - DUSK

Anna and David sit on either end of a long stone bench. Their backs slumped against the outer wall of the Counsel building. Sulking.

Anna chews on the inside of her lip. Wound tight. One foot bounces in frustration. David is irritatingly calm. Until she snaps.

ANNA  
It's not like I've got a gun to  
anybody's head. I'm just  
suggesting revoking your  
services. For whatever they're  
worth.

DAVID



In these circumstances, you may  
as well be. You're threatening  
the life of an unborn child.

ANNA

They shouldn't be having kids in  
the first place.

DAVID

Excuse me?

ANNA

SAT can't keep up with the  
population it's got.

DAVID

In case you haven't noticed,  
we're not on SAT.

He kicks at the dirt.

DAVID

See? That's called ground.

He points at the sky.

DAVID

That's called sky. As a pilot,  
I'd think you'd know that one.  
That big cloud over there? The  
one that won't produce water, but  
will produce acid... That's  
called Global Warming. We're not  
on SAT. And I can guarantee you  
that couple and their child has  
zero chance of ever getting  
there.

Anna's surprised at the strength of his argument.

DAVID

They're not even Skill One and  
they're certainly not rich.  
Population control might be  
necessary up there, but down

here... down here they need all  
the help they can get.

He stands, hands buried in his pockets. Anna opens her mouth to  
say something. Apologize, maybe--

DAVID

You'd see that if you weren't so  
worried about impressing Daddy.

And quickly shuts it. David storms off into the darkness.

She avoids watching him go. Until he's gone. Then fixes her gaze  
to the spot where he disappeared.

The Committee, Clay and Nadie pour out of the chamber.  
Anna gets up to greet them. They look tired but pleased.

NADIE

They've agreed to take in the  
refugees.

ANNA

What changed their mind?

CLAY

They decided there was strength  
in numbers.

Anna flinches.

A: Main

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Pictured in her new studio at Bridgewater Woolen Mill, artist and 9/11 survivor Schandra Singh points to people wearing traditional Muslim dress and praying in her "9/11 Painting." The work was done on a canvas recovered from Singh's Ground Zero apartment. Tara Wray Photo

## 9/11 survivor and artist Schandra Singh finds peace in Bridgewater

By Tess Hunter  
Managing Editor

Schandra Singh left her parents' Vermont ski house on the night of September 10th, 2001. She was applying for a Fulbright Grant and had a series of meetings in New York the next day. "A friend of mine had sent me a piece of art in the mail," says Singh. "I finally had an apartment to myself in New York, I had this good job. I was going to apply for this grant. I remember I put this piece of art on the wall, and I thought 'Okay, it's time to really begin. And then I woke up.'"

Literally. She woke early on September 11th, glanced out the window at Tower Two of the World Trade Center, less than two blocks away from her apartment/art studio, and thought to herself, "It's going to be a beautiful day," and went back to bed. When she awoke



Detail of the civilians who perished in Singh's "9/11 Painting." Photo Provided

fleeing for her life as Tower Two crumbled behind her. All that was saved from her apartment was her own life, and a canvas. Singh took that canvas back to her parents' house near Killington. There she began what she calls an almost obsessive pursuit — painting the faces of every single victim of 9/11 within the framework of the towers. "I go up to this mountain here in Vermont and I

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# In light of changing tide, Sea Shepherd's Watson resigns

*Woodstock office to close*

By Tess Hunter  
Managing Editor

Sea Shepherd founder Captain Paul Watson announced his resignation from the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (USA) effective July 27. Sea Shepherd is an international non-profit organization dedicated to the protection of the oceans and marine wildlife. Sea Shepherd (USA) CEO and Board Chairman Pritam Singh resides in South Woodstock.

Reached outside Watson's Sea Shepherd offices on Central Street in Woodstock on Friday afternoon, Watson confirmed his decision to leave the U.S. contingent of Sea Shepherd, but noted that he would continue to work with

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Sea Shepherd Global. As such, Watson said he had given up his lease on the Central Street office. Watson cited disagreements with the board and executives as his biggest reason for leaving the organization he founded in 1981. Meanwhile, Singh said in an interview with the Standard that he suspected the resignation stemmed from "a misunderstanding," adding, "He thinks we're not as enthusiastic about doing the kinds of things that he did in the past. He's right. We're not. We are enthusiastic about working with governments. He felt that we weren't being as aggressive as we should. I understand that. That's his feeling. But that's not what we're doing. We think there are more effective ways to do that."

Sea Shepherd is perhaps best known for its extreme activism. Boasting a fleet of ships, Sea Shepherd crews, often captained by Watson, led militant-like campaigns against illegal fishermen and whalers in international waters. These campaigns were depicted in the 2008 Animal Planet channel television series "Whale Wars," which ran for six seasons. Sea Shepherd is also associated with the 2013 film "Blackfish" in which abuses towards whales and dolphins by aquaria, and SeaWorld in particular, were put on display. Watson also appeared in the 2009 Academy Award winning film for Best Documentary, "The Cove," which laid bare the industry of dolphin slaughter for profit in a small cove in Taiji, Japan. The slaughter, which claimed thousands of dolphin lives annually at the time of the film's debut, continues to take place in a somewhat curtailed form today. Watson's latest foray into filmmaking came in 2019 when he starred in the aptly named documentary "Watson," which examined his 40 years of activism with both Greenpeace and Sea Shepherd.

"It is with great relief that as of July 27, 2022, I have ceased my employment and cut all ties with the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (USA)," said Watson in a statement he released that same day. Watson resided on Singh's South Woodstock property for several years, according to Singh, eventually moving on to a new residence in Okemo, while still maintaining his Woodstock office. In his resignation letter, Watson also said that his decision to leave came from a fundamental disagreement about the direction and methodology of Sea Shepherd. "Over the last few years, I have been slowly marginalized from the organization that I created in the USA. I was removed from the Board of Directors, my advice ignored, my close associates terminated and directors that supported me were removed. I was reduced to being a paid figurehead, denied the freedom to organize campaigns and the freedom to express the strong opinions that I have held for decades, opinions and campaigns that have shaped what Sea Shepherd has become and continues to be outside the borders of the United States."

"I don't think the vision for what we have been doing



At left, Captain Paul Watson founded Sea Shepherd Conservation Society in 1981 and has been working for more than 40 years as an activist dedicated to the protection of the oceans and marine life. He recently resigned from Sea Shepherd, citing differences with the board and disagreement with the direction of the organization. His offices on Central Street in Woodstock are now closed as a result. At right, Pritam Singh is an American businessman, environmentalist, and philanthropist. He serves as Sea Shepherd Conservation Society's CEO and chairman of the board. Singh resides in South Woodstock. Photos Provided

has changed at all," said Singh, speaking via phone from Washington D.C. as he waited to meet with the U.S. State and Fish and Wildlife departments to discuss Sea Shepherd's continuing work in Mexico. "We will continue doing the work that we're doing, which is really important work. Everybody changes their opinion, what they want and who they want to work with... We wish Paul the best. He's fabulous and good luck to him."

Singh noted that Sea Shepherd (USA) walked back its more extreme activist measures many years ago, adding, "But it is this way, I can say unequivocally the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (USA) has not undertaken any of those kinds of actions for 10 years. And we have no intention of doing that. We work with governments, we work with empowering governments to enforce their own laws... That's our future."

Singh explained that he believes Sea Shepherd (USA) can be much more effective getting out of murky international waters and instead target the protected marine areas of Mexico, Costa Rica, Columbia, Panama and Ecuador. "International waters are basically outlaw oceans, right? Because there is no sovereignty out there," he said, adding that the sovereign waters where they're working now "is an area bigger than California and is the most biologically diverse area in the world. As the most biologically diverse area of the oceans, it needs protection. [The governments]

have declared them protected areas, but they have no vessels. And so our job is to provide vessels to assist the local police, coast guard, and fisheries departments in controlling illegal fishing. And you can only do that if you're in cooperation with their governments and their laws."

Singh says that Sea Shepherd has established particularly strong partnerships with Mexico, referring to one specific operation called "Operation Milagro." "Milagro is a Spanish word for 'miracle,'" said Singh. "There's a species, the most endangered marine mammal in the world, called a Vaquita. And we are the ones protecting the Vaquita, in partnership with the Mexican Navy. Those programs are programs that rely on cooperation and being there forever, because these problems don't go away. When you have a species that's down to 10 or 12 individuals, you have to keep protecting them, because they could easily be gone in a year or two or three. So that depends on having a very different kind of approach, which is an approach of respect, cooperation, etc. As opposed to going out in the ocean where you're literally dealing with outlaws."

Singh did admit that outlaw fishermen continue to operate in international waters, but says, "The biggest opportunity to protect the oceans isn't to go out and confront the illegal fishermen on the open waters. It's to have areas that are tens of thousands of square miles of waters that are the most protected and important places in the world and have them have effective protection." As for the whales? Singh says that most of the whaling is being done in protected waters such as the Faroe Islands, Norway, and Japan. "You can't go into their waters," he says. "You'll immediately be arrested. But also, we found out and realized that yes, that's happening. But thousands of whales and thousands of dolphins a year are being killed in illegal nets, are being killed in sovereign waters, all over the world. And if we can work in the sovereign waters and help them, that's a more effective way, in my opinion."

Watson, undoubtedly disagrees. "The current Board seeks to turn our vessels away from confronting illegal poachers that prey on endangered species and instead seeks to turn our fleet into non-controversial research vessels. Research has always been a part of Sea Shepherd efforts, but it has not and should not be our priority. What we have provided is a unique function: a fearless leadership to intervene against poachers on the high seas, to document and to stop illegal acts that would otherwise go unnoticed and unchallenged. Sea Shepherd has always, and must always go where others fear to go, to say the things that must be said and to tackle the obstacles fearlessly and with great resolve."

The new direction that the present Board of Sea Shepherd USA has decided upon is not a path that I can in good conscience support nor participate in. I have not changed my objectives or resolve, and I refuse to change and adopt an approach that diminishes the incredible movement that we have created over the last four and a half decades, a movement that continues to grow outside the borders of the United States." Watson said in his resignation letter, noting that he would remain a director of Sea Shepherd Global and would continue to "support our campaigns around the world utilizing our unique philosophy of aggressive non-violence and cooperation with governments and NGOs. We are Sea Shepherd. We are direct action motivated by imagination, persistence, and courage. My future lies with the people from around the world who have made and continue to make Sea Shepherd the most influential, passionate, and effective marine conservation movement on this planet."

For his part, Singh isn't worried about Sea Shepherd's future. "Sea Shepherd is doing spectacularly and growing. We opened up more offices in the Americas. We're now up to nine offices in the Americas and nine affiliates," he said, adding, "We have just bought a new ship, which is a great vessel for patrolling illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing." Singh also said that South Woodstock and the surrounding area still has a role to play in the organization, noting that the Sea Shepherd summit was held at his house in 2014. "We've been committed to Woodstock for 40 years. We're going to be here and I'm going to be involved in Sea Shepherd for many years to come."

For more information about Sea Shepherd and its mission, visit [seashepherd.org](http://seashepherd.org).