

STARFISH

News had spread among the marine community that the Great Whale had called a crisis-conference. Sea temperatures were on the rise and just lately our collective survival was in real jeopardy. In the latter half of the 20th century, our schools were being hunted almost to extinction. It didn't matter if you were a Mackerel hiding in a river tributary or a Blue Whale in the Southern Ocean, indiscriminatingly, humans were taking us. The Great Whale, Herman, called us all to a position just off Lands End where safety would be assured and decisions could be made.

Electric Eels provided a lit path and Jellyfish created a camouflaged canopy just below the surface as we, Dolphins of grace and favour, sang our haunting lament that seemed to summon all watery creatures. And of course, those seasonal conference entertainers, the Starfish.

Even though there was a temptation among some delegates to behave in a predatory nature, for the duration of the conference the Great Whale was clear that no lifeform whose home was beneath the waves should commit a heinous act of cannibalism.

'We are united dear friends in our fight against the rising temperatures. It is agreed then, to combat those intent on destroying our very ecosystem and to ensure our oceans remain unpolluted, an elected delegation made up of a cross-section of our species will visit all seven seas and show mankind the way it should be. Humans had emerged from these very depths in which we govern not so long ago, and we should remind them of the bounty of the natural world that conquerors all,' said Herman. 'Let us not lose sight that we were the pioneers. We were the ones that mapped out the path to shore. And on that note, I now invite you all to join me in the coral garden for tonight's extravaganza, for conditions are perfect and transparency assured for the spectacle that is the Starfish Symphony.'

Us Dolphins had rehearsed and were in good voice, and as daylight faded and cirrus clouds gave way, so the twinkling lights of the Eels backdropped the Jellyfish curtained prism. Whales bellowed out their orchestrated funneled typhon and all assembled delegates eagerly awaited the Starfish arrival.

First in the Starfish parade marching over the reef were the well-travelled Echinaster – an orange coated sullen variety low in the hierarchy. Silently, the strange horned spotted Protoreaster, a middle earth opportunist, held hands with its cousin the pink Oral and came to rest on a sandy dune. Their extensive breeding comrades, the Hymenaster, showed off their cloaked finery; and finally, as we Dolphins created an adagio supported by a troop of sirens of the sea, the most beautiful of Starfish, the Blue Linckia, took their place and created their patterns.

It was autumn and under a crystal-clear sky, so the glorious stars performed in their constellations and glowed upon the ocean. The Blue Linckia aligned, mirroring the stellar formations. We were at one with the Cosmos.

(500 words)