

## Elsewhere Calling

“So, how do I get to the other hemisphere?” Jake asked.

“That’s easy. If you roll between zero and four, that’s a minus sign, and between five and nine that’s positive.” Rann said, explaining the rules.

Jake rolled a three. “That’s in the southern hemisphere,” Rann stated, having figured out how to do this only hours earlier. Rann found the dice in a game store where 40K models were sold. He was interested in 40K, but nothing caught his eye today. He perused the other merchandise and came upon a whole shelf of dice in different size containers. Wooden boxes with normal, square dice. Plastic containers of gamers dice – with four, eight, 10 and 20 sides.

While looking at the 10-sided dice, Rann experienced ... something. The soft voice he heard urged him to pick the red and black die, and the blue and green die. Both were beautiful. Their shimmering colors coalesced into silky swirls, then frozen into 10-sided objects not much bigger than a key on a computer keyboard. When Rann picked them up, he felt like he’d just finished a big meal, or a good book. The dice felt satisfying and warm, and they had a good weight. He felt complete holding them. Except...

Except he also felt a desire to roll them. It was a subtle feeling, like a cat brushing by his leg, but it was unusual and it was deeper than that – it had details, about how to roll, where to roll, what to do with the numbers and then what would happen, and it was confusing and fast and he could not understand any of it, so he dropped the dice back into their bin.

All of the satisfaction left him.

After purchasing the dice, he headed home and began to pick out the details he was receiving about this game he was learning.

“So now what?” Jake asked.

“Roll again, that will be the first digit.” Rann knew that with every roll he would feel that same, wonderful feeling he had in the game store. He was curious if Jake would feel it too.

Jake rolled a zero. “Ok, that’s fine. Latitudes go from minus 90 to plus 90 on the globe. A zero means we’re between minus nine and zero degrees latitude. Roll again,” Rann instructed. He studied Jake to see if he looked any different. Rann wondered if he himself had looked different in the game store when this happened? He wanted to know if these feelings were visible to others.

Jake rolled a six. “Got it, we’re going to minus six degrees latitude, but we need more numbers,” Rann explained.

“Wait, why minus?” Jake asked, forgetting the first rule Rann mentioned.

“Because you rolled three first; sign rolls are always first, then the digits next. Once we have enough digits for the latitude, then we’ll start on the longitude. Those values go from minus 180 to plus 180 degrees. There are more rolls needed for those.”

Jake was confused. He’d started the day by getting his supplies ready for 8th grade, which was starting next week. When Rann messaged asking him to come over, he felt a little annoyed at the interruption. After Rann explained what he was doing, Jake’s interest was piqued and he decided to go. Rann met him in his driveway and they rode their bikes over to the riverbank they liked to hang out at. The late summer air was thick and the placid, slow-moving river attracted roving clouds of gnats.

“How do you know when you have enough digits for the latitude?” Jake asked, hoping to clear up the rules. Instead of answering his question, Rann asked, “Are you feeling anything weird?”

Jake thought for a second, then said, “I feel weird that I’m working with map coordinates during the last week of summer. What exactly are we doing?”

That answered it for Rann. For whatever reason, only he was experiencing this strange feeling. He could still feel it when Jake rolled, but it was muffled. Rann grabbed the dice from Jake and rolled one of them again.

A zero.

“It’s just a weird feeling I get when I’m holding these dice, and even more when I roll them.” Rann continued to roll.

A four.

“It feels good, like eating mac & cheese, or running through a sprinkler on a hot day.”

An eight.

“I can still feel it when you roll, but not as much.”

A nine.

“When I have enough digits, it feels like a twinge, not really painful, but like something isn’t right.”

A nine. “Ah, oof! There it is, that is SO weird. Here’s what I got: -6.04899.”

Jake looked at him, without saying anything. Earlier, during Rann’s explanation, Jake thought this was a new game Rann had bought. What he didn’t expect was this woo-woo stuff, and that Rann was apparently making up the rules as they went along. Intrigued enough to keep playing, Jake asked, “So, longitude then?”

“Exactly,” Rann replied. Rann rolled a seven; a plus sign for the longitude. “I need three rolls for the longitude before the decimal place,” Rann said.

A zero.

A five.

An eight.

This is where Rann had heard the buzzing before, would it happen again? These were the last digits specifying the longitude. They already had the latitude, so when he felt the twinge, the buzzing noise would be really loud and then there’d be that scary POP! He decided to ask Jake for help.

“Okay, I’m going to roll the last few digits, but I need you to do something for me.”

“Sure, what?” Jake was getting excited that there was finally something else to do. He was glad he hadn’t stayed home to continue his pre-reading for English.

“This happened last time, and, well, I don’t know what happened to me here. I need you to keep an eye on me, and just tell me what happens here.”

“What do you mean by ‘here’? Are you leaving?” Jake was used to theatrics from Rann.

Rann felt the need to keep rolling. He rolled several more times, and with each roll he felt the intensifying pull to roll again, and again.

*Four.*

*One.*

*Three.*

*ONE.*

*EIGHT.*

Rann shouted to Jake as he rolled the last time, waiting for the twinge, for his side to hitch. “Watch me Jake! Watch me...!”

*ZERO!*

*LATITUDE: -6.04899, LONGITUDE: 58.413180*

The Captain of the *Marlu 4* called to halt the engines of the fishing vessel he commanded. With a length of only 26 meters, it didn't take long for the weather-worn ship to stop. As her wake pushed the stern up, then dropped her down again, he could see the problem. A crewman rushed to the long-line, draped through guide-posts attached to the bulwark, and gauged how to release the humpback's tail from the tangled mess it was in.

They had been out for 62 hours and the crew was in as rough a shape as the ship was; they were in no way prepared to deal with a 60,000-pound problem. In fact, they could be in serious trouble themselves. If the whale decided to start thrashing, she would bring the ship and her crew down, and a tangled long-line would be the least of their worries.

Jake saw Rann's eyes close as the last die rolled zero. Rann slumped against the riverbank, unconscious. Jake rolled him over onto his back, and made sure he was breathing. He muttered to himself, “He wasn't kidding. Rann, are you awake? Rann!”

Rann felt his dorsal fins move, but his tail would not move freely. It was difficult to rise and to take a breath; he felt scared. The more he tried to free himself, the more he needed air—and the harder it was to breathe.

Rann and the whale were one. Her cries had called to Rann and made him a part of her. She was grateful someone had answered her call and she wanted to explain, but she couldn't. Not right now. Rann was so confused, he had no clue what to do.

She remained calm as Rann became more familiar with the situation and began to assess the problem. She could hear the people on the ship yelling, working frantically to figure something out. They didn't scare her, but she wasn't sure they could help.

As she drifted slowly up and down with the ebb of the blue ocean water, her tail tied to the ship's fishing line, Rann found that he could change his perspective. He could turn around and look at her (or was it their?) tail, and the tangles of the long-line fishing gear from the *Marlu 4*. The tangle was from a single line thankfully, not much thicker than a standard rope, but it encircled her tail several times just below the fluke.

“If only I could get her to roll over a few times, with her tail out of the air, that would do it,” Rann thought to himself. Suddenly, he heard another voice, a thought in his own head – “Which direction?”

Unsure if he had just imagined this voice or if someone else was speaking to him, he responded, “Did you hear me?”

Another thought arrived, “Yes, how should I turn to release my tail?”

Realizing this was the whale, Rann silently replied, “Well, I can guide you. Just a moment.”

Despite not really believing what was happening, Rann found the use of his arms. No longer stuck in position with her dorsal fins, he moved his arms around her and started to roll her, as if she were a giant barrel. He couldn't move her of course, but she could feel where his hands were and in which direction he was moving them.

At first she did not lift her tail out of the water, so he made a pushing motion from below and she responded. Being nearly vertical now, she rotated slowly, holding her breath as she did so, until she felt Rann push the opposite way. She felt the long-line slip down her side, and she was free.

There were astonished cheers from the ship's crew, as they wondered aloud how a whale had become so smart.

Rann once again merged with the whale and she thanked him for answering her call. He felt her appreciation flow over him like a cool breeze on a warm day, surrounding his entire body.

“Rann!” Jake continued yelling at his friend, becoming increasingly worried. Rann slipped from the whale and opened his eyes, staring at another frantic mammal. “I thought you were a goner,” Jake said, helping Rann to sit up.

“How long was I gone?”

“Long enough for me to start freaking out,” Jake replied. “You rolled a zero and then fell over. I tried shaking your shoulders, but you were out.”

Rann tried to recall the incident, but it was fading fast. It seemed so real while he was there. He *was* the whale and their thoughts *were* shared. He was the whale helping herself from...from what? He remembered people, and a ship, and spinning something large. He told Jake most of what he could remember. The rest was lost, like a tendril of smoke on a breezy day.

“How in the heck? Did you just have a dream? Why did you pass out so fast?” Jake had more questions, but not as many as Rann had.

The school year started, and along with the many challenges that come with eighth grade, Rann and Jake had even more to talk about. Rann knew this was something special. Not special like a birthday, but something *really* special. He had started to remember more from each journey, learning how to work with these experiences. As strange as this game was, there were still things that he couldn't tell Jake. How would he even explain it?

Rann kept his dice in a beautiful, dark wooden box he found at the Goodwill. The box was shaped like a book on its side, with intricate carvings that were made in a place he was sure he'd travel to one day. Occasionally he'd feel the dice calling and more often than not, he'd reach into the box, and answer.