

# ASPIRIT ANIMALS™

## THE EVERTREE

Marie Lu



SCHOLASTIC INC.



# ERDAS



“Hey.”

Rollan turned to see Conor emerge from the lower decks. The other boy stopped beside Kalani and squinted first at the ocean, then up to the Greencloak observing the sea from the crow’s nest. “What’s Essix calling about?”

Rollan shrugged. In the mist, he could hardly make out Essix at all. “No idea.”

“Think you can see through Essix’s eyes for us?” Kalani asked.

Rollan looked back out at the ocean and concentrated. He felt the familiar experience of the world rushing at him, and the curious sensation of being airborne, of soaring

over the dark water and through the mist. The air smelled sharply of salt and fog, and tiny droplets of water dotted his face.

Essix swooped down, then expanded her wings to their full length and caught the air currents. Rollan could feel the wind ruffling through her feathers. Everything looked a hundred times sharper than what he could see through human eyes.

At first, Rollan didn't notice anything unusual.

Then he saw the faint silhouette of a landmass looming behind the fog.

Essix shrieked again. Rollan rushed away from the sky and down toward the ship. He jolted back into his skin, right as he lifted his arm in the direction of the land and shouted, "Stetriol, straight ahead!"

A few seconds later, the lookout in the crow's nest called out the same thing. As others began emerging from belowdecks, Conor and Kalani stood next to Rollan and leaned out to see better. No doubt about it.

Jagged gray rocks rose from the horizon. Even from here, and even shrouded in mist, the vision sent a chill down Rollan's spine. He could *feel* something poisonous here, in the very air of the place. It didn't seem like so long ago when they had first passed Stetriol by.

*This time, we will actually set foot on forbidden land.*  
Was Meilin here?

As they drew closer, the land began to take on more detail, until Rollan could make out some sort of bay straight ahead. The wind began to pick up, and white foam crashed against jagged rocks lining the mouth of the bay. Some of the rocks glowed red with lava, still fresh and

hot from the mouths of underwater volcanoes. These were pieces of land just days old, with new lava still flowing over them. The red-hot liquid gave the rocks the look of a giant beast's bloody jaws.

"There's no way we can squeeze through that without wrecking ourselves," Conor said grimly.

"I'm not sure we have much of a choice," Rollan replied. Indeed, the Greencloaks were already busy lowering the ship's masts, preparing to enter the strait. A harsh gust of wind nearly lifted Rollan clear off his feet. Overhead, Essix had returned to circling the ship. Her cry echoed again.

"Why is she still calling?" Conor shouted.

The ship lurched to one side as they drew closer to the stormy bay. Now they were near enough to hear the waves smashing themselves furiously against the rocks. The whales pulled hard as the Greencloaks urged them on. Kalani winced, and Rollan knew she could feel their agony.

Kalani looked worried. "The whales are exhausted," she said, "but they're going to try to get us through. It won't be an easy passage." She removed her cloak and stepped up onto the ship's railing. "I'm going to guide them, and then cut them loose. Make sure to hang on!"

"Right!" Rollan called back.

Then she jumped overboard, falling in a graceful arc and splashing into the sea. A moment later, she emerged perched on the back of her dolphin, hanging on to its fin.

Rollan was about to call up to Essix when he felt the world rush around him again. This time, he saw through her eyes to the ocean behind them. There, in the wavering

V that their ship had just carved through the ocean, came the shadow of *another ship*.

A Conqueror ship was hot on their trail.