

Chapter 10

December 14, 2137

“We’re getting close here. We have to sort this stuff out today.” Maddy was checking out the coding chips on the cargo containers with Zon’s help. The location of their supplies will be crucial for the flight and arrival. As the mission progresses, Adelphi will be communicating more information on how the landing will proceed. It will be imperative to find what they need easily.

“It’ll be fine. I know it was all recorded. Sergeant Prasana is thorough. Nothing gets in this room unless it’s checked and logged and checked again. That’s why I chose her for this mission.”

“Tell me, did you choose Lieutenant Tempest Brown as well? And what was the deciding factor in that selection? You thought I might need to be berated on a daily basis?”

“Idal is a master in dealing with Lieutenant Brown, and she’s happy to work with him.” Zon enjoyed giving Maddy the occasional dig.

“I don’t care what you say, it was not all my fault. Just ask Tam, Jimmi, Jedda and Andrea. Speaking of Andrea, I’m having coffee with her. So I’ll let you sort this out. Any problems I’m sure Idal can handle them.”

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Maddy found Andrea tucked in the far corner of the coffee shop. She stopped at the counter to place her order before joining. “Thanks for inviting me, nice to get away from the ship for a bit.”

“I’m glad you agreed to meet me. There’s something I need to discuss with you. I wanted some privacy.”

Maddy was taken aback by Andreas’s demeanor. Usually profoundly self-assured, today she seemed almost submissive. “Are you okay. You don’t seem yourself.”

“I’m not, I’m confused, and I need your help.”

“What’s going on?”

“Actually, that’s my question. What’s going on with your people? They seem to be able to communicate with each other without speaking. Idal was working in the cargo hold saying he needed Zico, who appeared minutes later with no call. And what’s with Sophia and Izumi? I heard Joha had a fall, and was injured, but after those two were with him he was fine. There’s something more here that I just can’t wrap my head around.”

Maddy was not prepared for this. “How long have you been feeling this way?”

“It started when you were recovering from your injury. Your people took everything over and they kind of ignored me. They spoke freely around me, a lot that I didn’t understand. I know there’s something intense and powerful happening here. That’s wrong --- I don’t just *know* it, I *feel* it.”

“Have you told any of this to the colonel?”

“That’s the worst part. It’s my job to keep him informed, but I know that I absolutely can’t tell him. What’s that all about?”

Maddy hesitated, “I think that’s a question beyond my pay grade. Would you mind if I got Tam and Jimmi over here to help answer that?”

“You mean those two walking in the door right now?”

Maddy smiled, “I guess telling you that you’re just imagining things isn’t going to work. Why don’t I get some beverages and food, and we can try to answer your questions.”

“Tam, Jimmi, you know Andrea, and I assume you know why we’re here.”

Tam accompanied Maddy while Jimmi sat herself next to Andrea. “I understand you have some questions. But first you have to answer some of mine if that’s all right?”

"I can't promise anything, all this is making me very uncomfortable."

Jimmi was intensely serious. "Understood, I'm with you there. I've never had this discussion with someone like you."

"What do you mean like me?"

"Someone working for the corporate military in a position that encourages if not requires the ability to spin the truth to suit the situation."

"Not the most becoming job description, but accurate."

"I need to know if you're brave enough to be separated from your job. Can you see beyond it? Or does the work supersede all else. For instance, is your relationship with the military and the colonel more important than your relationship with this mission and Maddison or us?"

Andrea was silent for a long time. Tam and Maddy returned with some food and drink. Jimmi let the two know what questions she had posed. They talked amongst themselves, allowing Andrea the time she needed to consider the implications her answers would carry.

Andrea was reticent. "So, you're telling me I have to give up everything that makes me, me to find out what is going on on that ship?"

Tam answered that question. "In truth, you're not giving up anything that makes you, you. Your job is not who you are at all. That's obvious to everyone. That's why they've been open when you're around. Not so much ignoring you as accepting you. You know this is bigger than you, otherwise you would have just told the colonel and been done with it. Tell me, was there something unusual the first time you met Maddy?"

"What do you mean?"

"I think you know what I mean."

“Okay, I was at that first meeting to evaluate Maddison’s honesty and gauge her truthfulness in agreeing to abandon all protests in exchange for the ship and mission. My involvement was only to be that one encounter. But when I met her, I knew. I don’t know why or how, but I knew I had to be involved in this mission. It was me that pushed the colonel to employ me as his liaison.”

Tam moved in closer to Andrea. “And?”

“And what?”

“And?”

Andrea paused and took a deep breath, “And, there's this voice in my head...”

Maddy nearly spilled her tea. “Seriously, seriously, you have got to be kidding me.”

Both Tam and Jimmi laughed.

Andrea was startled. “What did I say?”

Jimmi was still giggling, easing the tension for Andrea. “It’s not you, it’s Maddy. She’s a bit jealous.”

“Jealous of what, a crazy woman that hears voices telling her to do things?”

‘Yes, she would love to be that crazy woman, but Gaia chooses who she chooses.’

“Who’s Gaia?”

Tam became intent. “Isn’t she the one that’s speaking to you?”

“No, she calls herself Adelphi.”

“Well, I didn’t expect that. What has she told you?”

“It comes in bits and pieces, but when I put it together I know I have to keep the military in the dark about the voice. I know I have to go. I think I’m supposed to bring my husband and stay with you. That last part is unclear. There’s something coming, but I can’t really decipher it yet.”

Jimmi leaned back in her chair, “Maddy, you need to get ready for another passenger and, Andrea, we have a lot to talk about. It’ll be difficult for you to hear but I trust you can handle the information as well as the need to keep it safe.”

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Emory arrived at his grandmother's house to find her sitting in her kitchen staring out the back door. It appeared she had been there for some time. She didn’t acknowledge his arrival or for that matter seem aware of his presence. He had seen this many times. All he could do was make some food and tea and wait. When she was done speaking to Gaia, she would be hungry.

He sometimes envied her ability to communicate directly with the earth. From a young age he was aware there was something more, something special about the natural world. Zyhna saw that in him and nurtured it. He was captivated by his grandmother's affinity almost a kinship with all living things. She introduced him to what life really was. She would hold a stone in her hand and let him feel its life force. She helped him become the best man he could be.

Zyhna’s eyes began to focus on the room again, and she was able to see Emory. “You sweet boy, you made some food. Sit and eat with me. There is much to discuss. Gaia has put her pieces in place --- the beasts of the land, the sky and the sea have begun to move. The currents are preparing for the new land. We must start all our journeys. They will wait only Adelphi’s sign.”

“Who are they?”

“The sun, the moon and Gaia.”

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Tempest Brown was presenting her report to Major Navarro. "We've nearly finished receiving personal effects from our people and the passengers. All items have been checked and cleared and sent to the appropriate area. I'm scheduling boarding for all nonmilitary personnel

to occur over the next two weeks. Idal has been cooperating with all the regs, and getting the passengers to toe the line on protocols."

"Well done, lieutenant. Are there any outstanding issues I need to take care of?"

"Sir, I wanted to thank you for handling the Bear's Heart woman. I apologize for my behavior in dealing with her. She's quite infuriating, but I didn't comport myself appropriately."

"I will agree you could have managed that situation better. Your rank suggests you have the skills to deal with people, but I have concerns with you on this mission. Our cargo is going to be a challenge for a minimum of three weeks. These people are leaving everything they know behind. The stresses for them will be great and in effect limit their ability to be their best selves. We're going to have to give them some leeway."

"Sir, are you saying we don't enforce the rules?"

"Not at all, but there are ways to get the result you want without an all-out frontal assault. What I'm saying is, these are not military personnel. You have to treat them differently."

"Sir, my expectations of everyone aboard will be the same --- do as you're told so we can complete the mission safely and effectively."

"And what I'm saying is that my expectation of my crew is that they make sure we not only arrive safely but that we do so with the cargo protected, secure and, in this case, happy."

"Sir, yes, sir."

“Now I want you to go over the procedures when we arrive at the planet. We are to land and off-load all cargo, passengers, equipment and supplies. Then we’re to return to orbit, verify weather patterns and any threats from either flora or fauna, and initiate a thorough survey of the planet to leave with those on the surface.

“Barring any issues, we will maintain watch for 14 days before our return home. Have you secured the instruments we’ll be using?”

“Yes sir, they’re directly behind the items we will be off-loading. The personnel operating the equipment verified functionality and signed off. He’s a private and has little experience with these instruments, but he met the requirements for this mission.”

“I think we both know this mission was put together with more haste than care. It’s going to be our job to keep on top of things. A small problem can become serious quickly. I am relying on you Lieutenant Brown to be my right hand. I want to bring my people and ship home safe.”

“Sir, yes, sir, you can depend on me.”

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Anna let Maddy in. “Thanks for meeting with me Ms. Bear’s Heart.”

“Major Navarro said you had something for me.”

“For all your people. Have you seen the comms units we use?”

“No.”

Anna pulled on a chain around her neck revealing two tags. “Like this.”

“You call those dog tags?”

“Not any more. We call them CID’s (kid’s). One is a comms unit, the other is an identification tag. Every soldier has them. The major and I thought your people should have the comms as well.

“They are quite amazing. long range and, if you don’t abuse them, they can last indefinitely. These have been set to contact you easily. Getting through to military is a little more difficult. You understand why.”

“You don’t want the ‘cargo’ to bother you. How do you recharge them?”

“Just by wearing them. They draw very little energy and can hold a single charge for months. But just by keeping them close to your skin they can pull energy off you.”

“That’s incredible.”

“I know, right? I am aware the military is not your favorite thing, but they do have the coolest toys.”

“Sergeant Prasana, if I’ve learned anything in these last months, it’s that I don’t have a problem with the military, just the people that use it to further their own greed.”

“I couldn’t agree more. The major was right about you.”

“How’s that?”

“He said you were a good person.”

“Funny, he said the same about you.”

“Wonderful judge of character that man.”

“I understand your daughter is aboard. Has she met Greer? They’re about the same age.”

“Unfortunately, they’re not.”

“Aren’t they both 14 or 15?”

“My daughter is the 15 where you think the world is stupid and unfair and your mother is the meanest thing in existence. Greer is still at the 14 where you find joy in playing games and your folks are the best.”

“I understand. You should know that whenever you’re down, a Greer hug makes the world a little brighter.”

“Thanks Ms. Bear’s Heart, I’ll remember that.”

“Call me Maddy.”

“I will, if you call me Anna.”

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Bog reached out his hand to greet the colonel. “To what do I owe the pleasure of your visit?”

The colonel was agitated. “Are you keeping track of these people?”

“I know those boarding the ship are all together, and the rest have stopped all the protesting and are quiet. Is there something I’m missing?”

“You just told me what they aren’t doing. It is essential I know what my enemy is up to. That’s what I pay you for.”

“Colonel, I assure you they’re no longer a problem.”

“I need to make this very clear. I don’t pay you for your assurances. I pay you to keep that rabble under control. Do your job or I’ll have to pull back the leases on that land where you are building all your new hotels. It may just be put up for auction, and you’ll have to vacate the premises. How many are you working on right now? If my research is right there are over 110. Do we understand each other?”

“I’ll have what you need by tomorrow.”

The colonel turned and left. Bog shouted into the outer office. “Killian Hart, get in touch with that Indian boy and find out what they’re up to!”