

Chapter 11

January 4, 2138

The screens all around the ship were showing a continuous loop of departure protocols interrupted only by the countdown to take off. With four hours remaining, the halls were filled with activity. The military personnel were making final preparations, and the passengers were moving about because they were too excited to settle.

Jimmi was busy gathering supplies for the lockdown required after takeoff. Food and drink would help her deal with her fear of the impending flight. Three weeks is a long time to be sealed in a man-made box, not something she, or for that matter any of the passengers, was looking forward to.

Maddy and Andrea were occupied answering questions. Some were actual concerns, others just the manifestation of nervousness. This was a trying time for everyone, it seemed, everyone but Greer. "I can't wait to get started, we're going to see Adelphi!"

Maddy was always happy to get a Greer hug, but she was concerned about the child's openness about her communication with a planet. "I'm excited too, Greer. Remember though, not everyone understands her."

"Sorry, I forgot."

"It's all right, no one heard. Where are your mom and dad?"

"Joha asked them to help get the llamas ready for takeoff. Maybe I should go and work with them."

"Good idea, why don't I walk with you?"

On their way Maddy noticed many of her people were moving toward the mess hall. She saw Idal, Zico, Nikau, Sophia and others entering. When she arrived at the llama pens, she found Bram and Fia moving hay bales around. "Why are Joha and Jedda not here?"

Bram seemed surprised at the question. “The Gaia speakers are gathering. They’ll be leaving and fear for their connection. They plan to speak to her as one. I thought you would be with them.”

“She doesn’t speak to me.”

“I assumed you would keep them safe so no one would barge in on them.”

“That is a good idea.”

Maddy wondered why no one had told her about this. She’d been very much in the loop these past couple of months. Jimmi and Tam included her in everything, why keep this from her?

Arriving at the mess hall she found Tam standing at the door. “Tam what's going on?”

“I assume you know, or you wouldn’t be here.”

“Bram told me, why didn’t you?”

“This is not only new to all of us but very frightening as well, quite unprecedented. What’ll happen to our connection when we leave? If it’s gone there’ll be a huge hole in our lives.”

“Why are you out here then?”

“As I told you, she only talks to me when I’m in the water, so I volunteered to keep watch.”

“Let me do that. Go on inside I’ll keep you guys safe.”

Tam gave Maddy a hug and went in.

Faxon was on the bridge ensuring all was on schedule. "Lieutenant Brown, have all stations reported?"

"Yes, sir. All except medical."

"Do we have a problem?"

"That depends, sir. Do you consider a runaway dog a problem? The captain has his family along. His four-year-old son and the dog decided to go exploring. The child was located but the dog is still at large. The captain and his wife are on her trail."

"Thank you, lieutenant, keep me posted on the search."

"Sir, yes, sir."

Corporal Thompson interrupted their exchange. "Sir, there is something strange in the mess hall."

Faxon approached the Corporals station. "What exactly do you mean by strange?"

Thompson directed the major to several blinking lights on his board. "Sir, there's some kind of power surge there but no equipment is being used. The power seems to be emanating from the room itself."

"Let's just run a diagnostic on your instruments first. You know, when you hear hoof beats, assume horses not zebras."

"Zebras, sir?"

"Yes corporal, they were horses that were black and white striped."

Thompson seemed confused. "Striped horses, sir?"

“Never mind, just run the diagnostic, I’ll check out the mess hall.”

Leaving the bridge, Faxon entered the chaos in the halls. The excitement was palpable, his included. This was his first foray into hauling living cargo. That meant having an audience viewing him handle the ship and crew. It made him extremely conscious of every move he made, not a comfortable position but a challenge he was willing to tackle.

Approaching the mess hall, he saw Maddy standing outside. He did enjoy running into her, one member of the ‘audience’ he was happy to perform for.

“Passenger Bear’s Heart, what has you loitering outside the mess hall?”

“Just waiting for my people to come out.”

“I’m sorry, is there a meeting going on?”

“Not so much a meeting, more like a religious ceremony. Yeah, that’s it. I’m here to make sure no one disturbs them. What brings you to the mess hall?”

“Just following up on an anomalous reading saying there’s a power surge here.”

“My people will be out any time. Then I’ll help you check it out.”

“Great, maybe we can have a cup of coffee and you can give me your preflight report and get that out of the way.”

Tam picked that moment to pop the exit open, giving Maddy a wink and holding the door so everyone could leave. All the smiles indicated the ‘ceremony’ went well. Fortunately, Faxon had his mind filled with takeoff protocols, making him oblivious to the interactions of his passengers.

As Maddy and Faxon entered the now empty room the screen flashed on, illuminating Corporal Thompson's face. "Sir, I completed the diagnostic, and the anomalous readings are gone."

"Well done, continue your systems checks."

Maddy was finally able to exhale fully and relax. She never imagined Gaia's power could manifest itself on the ship's instruments.

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Andrea's husband Sean was getting his things put away while she was attempting to contact Colonel Miller and give him her last report before departure. "Colonel, I have very little to report here. It's just the hubbub before we leave."

Tucker Bog stepped into view. "It's not the ship that we're worried about, but those staying here. What do you know about them? Has Bear's Heart been in touch with them? Is she still directing them? What's she telling them?"

Andrea didn't hide her frustration. "Sir, do you have any questions for me?"

"Ms. Knight, it seems Mr. Bog has lost his contacts within this mob, and we have no idea what they're up to other than they seem to be on the move. Right now several of them have come to see this ship take off. But they have cut their ties with their present locations. They're attempting to keep clear of passive monitoring devices. They're up to something and I want to know what it is."

"No one on board is involved with them so far as I know. Since it's a concern of yours, I'll delve deeper and let you know what I find. Is there anything else?"

"That Bear's Heart woman can't be trusted, don't let her fool you."

"Understood, sir."

Bog kept his image off the view screen. "Can I ask one question, Ms. Knight?"

"Go ahead."

"What do you know about a woman called Zyhna?"

"Colonel, do you want this information?"

"I do."

"I don't know much. She's in her late 70s Hopi, from Arizona, very traditional. Her grandson Emory serves as her right hand. That's about all."

Bog asked one last question through clenched teeth. "Does she wield power in this group?"

"I would have to say yes, but I've no proof of that."

The colonel reached forward to end the conversation. "That will be all."

Bog approached the desk, "Now may I proceed?"

"I'll release all the military surveillance software you requested. You'll have my full authority to do whatever you need to uncover what those people are up to. I expect reports every four hours."

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Emory was loading containers into the transport. "Why are we traveling separate from the others? We're already taking the most convoluted route possible. Wouldn't it be easier if we were all together?"

Zyhna climbed in and took her seat. “There are many eyes on all our people, but the worrisome ones are on me. Our course will occupy them and keep their focus from Gaia’s actions. Our people across the globe are in route to the sacred places Gaia has entrusted to them. They will be safe there. As you will be at Nuvatukaovi. No matter what happens you must go there.”

“Of course, we’ll get there. It may take weeks this way, but I understand it’ll be safer for us.”

“This is a dangerous time. But Gaia will protect you in the sacred place. You remember our travels there?”

“I do. It’s the one place I can feel her presence. It’s kind of like a current passing through the air and the ground, it’s everywhere.”

“She will always welcome you there. Know it is the place of safety and new beginnings.”