

Hope for a New World

Chapter 1

January 2, 2138

The bar was well lit and sparsely populated, the last quarter of a football game playing on the big screen. Maddison Bear's Heart, a fit slender Lakota woman, appeared engaged in the game but in truth her mind was millions of miles away.

"I thought I'd find you here," Came the sharp voice of a woman approaching the table.

Maddison jumped, "Jimmi, you scared me."

"Sorry, I thought you saw me." Ke'ala Kekoa, a short round Hawaiian woman of 63, pulled out a chair and sat down. She was, as usual, wearing a shirt emblazoned with Jimi Hendrix, explaining why everyone called her Jimmi.

Maddy leaned back and adjusted her chair. "Haven't been sleeping much, so my nerves are a bit frayed. Is Tam with you?"

"Nope, she's back in the room sound asleep. That woman has always been able to sleep any time, anywhere. She says it keeps her young. That's why we're such a great team. She has the youthful energy and I have the aged wisdom."

Maddison couldn't hold in a laugh at that statement. "Really, aged wisdom?"

"Okay, okay boastful arrogance," Jimmi confessed, showing her mischievous smile, the kind of smile that brings joy and terror to middle school teachers everywhere.

The years of friendship were obvious in their exchange. Maddy had come to rely on Jimmi's direct forthright countenance. She knew it was one of her shortcomings, and without Jimmi they would never be where they were today. But then, was that a good thing?

As Maddy slid the beer bottle round the table, Jimmi could see the trepidation growing in her young friend. "How are you feeling about things?"

Maddy's eyes never left the bottle. "I don't know---I'm directly responsible for the lives of 230 people and indirectly responsible for the future of the planet and every life here. How do you think I'm feeling?"

It was Jimmi's turn to laugh. "You're looking at things like a lawyer, worried about all the fine print, the whys and the wherefores. Look at it from the perspective of an astronomer. I have the luxury of seeing a much much bigger picture, and it *rocks*."

Maddy looked directly at her friend, "So you have no worries that in exactly 36 hours and 12 minutes we'll be on a ship headed into space because the planet told us to?"

"Well, when you put it like that, it sounds kind of crazy."

Maddy took the last swallow of her beer. "When did you know you were on this path?"

Jimmi settled herself in her seat, and ordered another round and some appetizers, "To answer that question we are going to need some sustenance. To be totally honest, I knew the day I was born. My family name means warrior and my first name means path. I never had a chance."

"Don't play with me, you wouldn't have it any other way and you know it."

"Indeed. I regret nothing of my life choices. We're working in concert with the most powerful forces in the universe to bring about a new age, a new beginning, and open the door to possibilities beyond our comprehension. I think my bucket list is pretty much done." I will, however, always remember the first day we met, when it started for both of us."

Maddy shuddered a bit, "That is emblazoned in my mind as well."

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Seven years earlier

February 16, 2133

Major Owen Miller strode to the podium, displaying the perfect posture of a career military man. “Welcome, you are all considered honored and valued stakeholders of the environmental community. I am here to present to you the findings from the report generated by the greatest scientific minds from around the world. They were brought together to investigate and explain the unique environmental events of the last few years.”

Tucker Bog jumped from his seat near the back of the auditorium. “Events? Are you serious? You’re calling them events? These are disasters!”

The crowd cheered and applauded.

Miller’s forceful voice is heard over the din, “Sir, please let me continue.”

Bog persists, “Why? We’ve heard it all before---we should just relax, you have it all in hand, and we should fall in line and behave. We’ve not come here to listen. We have something to say, and we *will* be heard.”

Applause and cheers fill the room. This time Miller's voice is drowned out. He attempts to wait out the raucous crowd, but they have better staying power. In the end he gives up. Then the chanting begins...

“Bog, Bog, Bog, Bog...”

Tucker reluctantly makes his way to the stage. His appearance is unassuming --- 40ish, dark curly hair, well-dressed but casual, slightly overweight, with an engaging smile and sparkling eyes. When he arrives at the podium, the chanting reaches a crescendo. He flashes his smile and holds his fist in the air as the applause and cheering begin again. Finally, he tries to quiet the group and get them back in their seats. Grabbing the mic, he paces the stage, abandoning the podium.

“We know they don’t value or honor us. We know they brought us here to placate us so we stop telling the rest of the world we’re in grave danger. But we will not be stopped!”

The cheering explodes.

Tucker's eyes light up and his smile endears him to the crowd more. He spends the next hour rallying, empowering, encouraging, endorsing, and authorizing the crowd to unite in their demands for action. After one final explosion of applause, he calls Maddison Bear’s Heart up to the podium.

“This woman is the one that brought me into this fight. She is the one that I look to for guidance and support. She has all the facts and figures. I leave you in her capable hands.”

Maddy’s shocked expression was fortunately well hidden by her long black hair. She fumbled as she tried to gather her notes together, moving awkwardly to the stage. As Tucker offered her the mic, she begged him to present the information himself.

Bog turned to the audience, “Maddy is a bit shy, she’s going to need some encouragement.” A soft ripple of applause flowed through the auditorium again, as he placed the mic back on the podium.

Maddy arranged her notes, leaned into the microphone and began. “Everyone here has read the report the major was going to present today. We all know it’s not only a waste of paper but of precious time, and if things go unchecked, we have little time left. The culmination of well over a century of denial and corporate greed has devastated all life here. In recent years, this planet has experienced desert floods, rainforest droughts, everglades fires, Midwest quakes, and even a new volcano. The peoples of the world must act now, today. With the intelligence, energy and power in this room we can do anything --- we must engage with each other, we are stronger together.

“I have broken down this report into sections specific to each country, identifying the issues you will face politically, militarily, legally and, most challenging of all the corporations that will do everything to block you. It is important to think of this as a rescue rather than a battle. Any protest that even appears aggressive will hurt our cause and as we have seen in the past, will draw blood.

“Please engage with your country men and women, create strategies, share what has worked in the past and be prepared for more resistance than we have ever faced.”

Another bit of applause and the group started murmuring and milling about. Maddy spread out her documents, trying to avoid engaging with anyone so she could make a quiet escape, but that was not to be.

As she made her way to the exit, two women moved to block her path. “Where is Gaia in all this? You never mention her once. She’s everything, she knows how to stop all this, and you just ignore her. You know her and you ignore her.” The older of the two women, short and round with beautiful bronze skin and salt and pepper hair, was nearly baring her teeth as she questioned Maddy.

Maddison dropped back and actually cringed at the accusations, causing the younger of the two to step between the ‘mad dog’ and her prey, trying to ease the conflict, “Relax, we don’t bite, we just want to talk. Jimmi, back off, this approach will get us nowhere. Let’s start again. My name is Tamara Akana, and she is Ke’ala Kekoa. We’re from Oahu and want to buy you a cup of coffee and have a chat.”

Ke’ala turned away and exhaled exasperatedly. Tamara just smiled at Maddy. “Don’t worry I’ll protect you and, if necessary, will give her a kick under the table to keep her in line.”

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The mood was more than a little tense in the coffee shop. Maddy sat at the table and fiddled with her mocha as the two older women waited in line for their order. There was a hushed argument between the two. Those watching would have to give the victory over to Tamara. When they finally made their way to the table Ke’ala seemed a bit more subdued, or maybe she was just on a short leash.

Tamara was a slight woman, 49, short, cropped hair, toned, and with well-tanned dark taut skin. She wore a calming smile and sported a soothing voice. “We came here to see you.”

“You mean to the coffee shop?”

Ke’ala broke free of her leash, “No, no, no, we came all the way from our beautiful island to Minnesota where there is snow on the ground to meet you.”

Maddy was shocked, “What are you saying?”

“You’re the key to all this, you silly child. And you’ve thrown in with the devil himself.”

Tamara let her frustration loose, “Damn it all Jimmi, either you calm down or you can wait in the car. This girl has done nothing but care about saving Gaia, and you know it. Now take a long draw off that hot chocolate and settle back in your chair while I do the talking.”

Ke’ala looked like a scolded child, but she did as she was told and seemed to deflate a bit as she settled back in her chair.

Tamara sipped her tea and leaned in as she spoke to Maddy. “We have been following your work for the last few years. You’ve been a driving force behind so many of the groups working to stop the destruction and save, us all really. Your work in the courts is well documented, and you’ve broken barriers between so many factions that were getting in each other’s way. But none of that is why we came to see you. We were sent here to save you, so you could save us.”

“That’s a little disconcerting. I’m just doing my job, I’m an environmental lawyer.”

Ke’ala leaned forward, and before Tam could scold her again, she picked up her hot chocolate and took a long pull off the mug, swallowed slowly and gave her partner a look to ease her worry. “You, dear girl, are part of Gaia’s plan and it’s about much more than your job. She sent us here to help you, to take care of you and get you away from that evil, son of a...”

Tam jumped in, “Jimmi!”

Ke’ala moved to the edge of her chair and addressed her partner, “We don’t have the luxury of nice and sweet. She said it herself, we’re out of time. We stayed away too long. We need to get down to business and find out how little she understands.”

Maddy pushed back from the table with such force both women grabbed for their beverages. “I’ve had enough of this attacking, cajoling and then belittling. It’s not something I need to endure right now. Thanks for coming to the conference, and I hope you can find some worthwhile information to take home with you, but we’re done here.”

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When Tucker Bog finished shaking hands and schmoozing the conference attendees, he made his way outside for a cigarette. As he lit up, an elite transport rolled to a stop in front of him. The window lowered, and he approached the vehicle, knowing exactly who the passenger was. "Major Miller, I have to compliment you, it couldn't have played out better. I can almost guarantee you and your sponsors that I can put an end to these protests and get these pesky lawsuits out of your way. Of course I will be expecting you to come through with all of the contracts I requested."

Miller never showed himself in the open window, "You deliver, and we will too."

As the car pulled away Bog saw Maddy stomping her way back to the convention center. He met her at the door, "What has you so hot under the collar?"

Maddy looked at him, her fists tightened, "Exactly what I knew would happen, Gaia. I can't keep denying her --- it's like taking your greatest asset and burying it in the sand. She's how we're going to win this fight."

Tucker shot her that wonderfully weaponized smile of his trying to disarm her. "We've been through this. If we want the military and corporate world to take us seriously, you don't go around saying the earth talks to you. You'll be blown off as a loon, a crazy fringe nutter. We have to play this on their terms. What happened to get you so off track?"

Maddy's jaws clenched, "That's just it, I'm thinking more and more it got me on track. I know you live in the corporate world. You have been so generous with the cause and we've worked so well together these last months, but I have to be true to who I am. I need some time to think this through."

Bog didn't skip a beat, "Of course, I would never want you to be less than who you are. I'll support whatever you decide --- and you know this fight is my fight too. Take some time, whatever you need."

Maddy felt relieved at his response, "There are some people here I need to meet with so I can get my bearings again. I'll be in touch with you or your office when I have a better idea how I need to proceed."

Wrapping his arm around her shoulder, Tucker led Maddy back to the auditorium. “We can make sure things are set up for tomorrow and I can walk you over to the hotel. If you want, we can stop for a drink.”

Maddy declined, “It’s been a long day, I just want to get some sleep.”

But she knew she had a stop to make first.

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Maddy’s heart quickened as she knocked on the hotel room door, silently hoping it would be Tamara that answered. Fortune was not on her side.

“Come to apologize?” Ke’ala’s words dripped with antipathy.

Maddy steeled herself for the encounter, “Not exactly, I’m willing to sit down and hear you out, but I expect you to be respectful. I don’t want to hear any ‘little girl’ ‘child’ or any other derogatory monikers. Is that doable?”

Ke’ala’s facial expression never wavered, “Tomorrow, breakfast downstairs, 6:00,” and the door closed. Not disrespectful, but not exactly respectful either. Maddy was satisfied that at least an attempt was made to meet her criteria. Now to try to find sleep.