

Chapter 7

January 13, 2137

Tempest was furious. “You can’t be serious. Those beasts are huge, and they spit. I will not have my people subjected to dangerous animals.”

Lieutenant Tempest Brown was a little woman but a force to be reckoned with. Just five foot six, with strikingly short cropped blonde hair, and a hint of a southern accent, this athletic little package would not be discounted.

Perri Gibbs was doing her best to assuage Lieutenant Brown's trepidation. “These are docile animals, tame and for the most part easy to handle. I assure you I’ll be responsible for their care. I’m a large animal vet and I specialize in camelids.”

“Camels, no one ever said anything about camels. Llamas are bad enough.”

Perri grinned, “Then I promise only llamas, no camels. Are we agreed?”

Brown capitulated, “Fine, but they’re your headache not mine.”

The lieutenant swept out of the room leaving Perri to collect the required documents for transporting animals. A black woman in her late 50’s, Dr Gibbs was quiet but not meek. She had a presence and an air of calm that made her well suited to care for animals, and, as it seems, cranky lieutenants.

Just as she had gathered her things, her husband Royal, the chief master sergeant, entered the room. “Well, how did it go? Did she approve?”

“She did.”

“How’d you manage that? She was dead set against you.”

“I promised not to bring camels, so she agreed to the llamas.”

“You’re kidding.”

“Don’t get me started.” Perri sat back down and took off her coat. “I’ve been thinking about things, and I’m just not sure.”

Royal was not surprised by his wife’s misgivings. “Is this about Kayla?”

“It is but it’s more than just our daughter now. She and Trent are ready to start a family. Royal, I want to hold my grandchildren. I want to see them off on their first day of school. I don’t want to miss any of it.”

Royal sat with his wife. “I couldn’t agree more, I didn’t know how to bring it up. You’ve been so involved with getting the animals approved. You know how much I missed of Kayla growing up when I was away on missions for months at a time. I want to be there for the grandkids, together with you.”

“Even with what we know? The world as we know it is literally going to end.”

“And begin again. We can be part of the re-genesis of a planet. Imagine that.”

Perri smiled at her husband. “I love when you talk like a man that has seen the earth from space and recognized it as a sentient being. I know why Gaia reached out to you. You’re a remarkable man Royal Gibbs, and I’m a brilliant woman for marrying you.”

“Okay brilliant woman, how are you going to tell Maddy her animal expert is not going?”

“That’s a problem.”

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Andrea Knight handed the clipboard back to Maddy. "So, you're working well with your mission team?"

Maddy hesitated, "Some of them."

Andrea knew exactly what was going on. "You've had the pleasure of dealing with Gen."

"No, I meant Lieutenant Tempest Brown."

"Same one. They call her Gen because she acts like a little general. That tiny blonde Texan is a feisty, surly, hot tempered ball of fun."

Maddy relaxed a bit knowing she wasn't the only one Tempest assailed. "She can explode without provocation. I never know what to expect from her unless Faxon is in the room. That girl has it bad for him and he has no idea."

Andrea agreed. "Men are oblivious, but pilots are the worst. Their focus is the stars and nothing else can compete. That girl has no chance. That'll just make her even more cantankerous."

"Great to know, I'll be spending several weeks with her."

Andrea corrected her. "You mean *we* will."

Maddy was shocked, "You're coming? Why?"

"The colonel wants to keep a close eye on things."

Maddison could read between the lines. "You mean he wants to make sure we're gone and won't come back."

"Well, that too."

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Faxon and Tam examined the diagrams spread over the conference room tables. Tam pointed to one of the documents. "You have to remember we've got seven families. One of them has four children --- they're going to need more room. Three weeks is a long time to be in such close quarters."

"Our people can configure the rooms so your families will have the space they need. We've been able to free up a large amount of area that was originally assigned for storage of rations, weapons and supplies for building shelters. Your manifest has only enough food stuffs for a few weeks. And no weapons have been requisitioned, no pulse rifles, no side arms, not even any perimeter sensors."

"We have the food we need, a significant amount of medical supplies, tents for shelter. As far as weapons go, we're, bringing more passive ones, as well as plenty of hand tools, and cooking utensils. We're well kitted out."

"You seem to have remarkably high expectations for this new world. More trust and hope than should be assigned to the unknown. As far as the flight, have you gotten all the special diet information from your people?"

"I'm working on it. You have to remember I am dealing with excitement, fear and a fairly large dose of distrust. The military has never been a friend to my people."

"I understand, I don't take anything they say at face value."

"You mean you don't trust your own people?"

"I'm in the military because I get to fly the newest and best ships. I don't buy into all their dominate the world stuff. I never supported their initiative against your group. That always seemed wrong to me."

"Maddy was right about you."

“What’s that?”

“She said there was something not right about you in the military. I’d have to agree with her. You seem more, for lack of a better word, nice. And I mean that in a good way.”

“I was going to say take that back, but I guess I can live with it. Now back to your lists. Do I understand correctly you are taking llamas, butterflies and only one type of seed, wild rice?”

“You're not mistaken.”

“Seriously, butterflies?”

“There are several species very at risk, and they will likely not survive the end of....”

“The end of what?”

“The end of our protection, you know the protests and demonstrations.”

“Okay and the llamas?”

“They can pack, they provide fiber for clothing, and they’re exceptional at drawing nutrition from very little.”

Faxon seemed persuaded. “Reasonable, strange but reasonable.”

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Bog handed Colonel Miller the pen, opening the contracts. “All it needs is your signature, colonel, and our business is done.”

“Mr. Bog I have a feeling I’ll be seeing you again. You seem to have an insatiable hunger for wealth and power. And there is little you are not willing to do to obtain it.”

“I merely see potential where others don’t.”

“You mean like the receding tides having created a beachfront, and you are staking claim to the new land.”

“Someone has to own it, why not me?”

“If your eco warrior friends were still protesting, they would say it’s public land. And, I imagine, would not be happy about you building there.”

“My philosophy has always been, remove obstacles and you can take whatever you want. I put in the work, now the rewards are mine.”

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Emory led the group through to a room set up with maps, graphs and charts. Zyhna was in deep discussion with several men and women looking at a map of the world’s oceans. “She will be with you shortly.” He touched his grandmother’s shoulder alerting her to the new arrivals.

Emory returned to his work recording the information generated by the scientists and those with a connection to Gaia. As the fourth world advances to its conclusion, those staying behind must be kept up to date on what to expect and be prepared to move as Gaia directs. This has finally become real.

Zyhna was aware of her grandson’s growing uneasiness. It was quite acceptable to listen to an old woman preaching some ancient prophecies, but seeing it come to fruition is a little more daunting. She would have to make time to speak to him. But all these people had vital information that must be documented and disseminated as efficiently as possible. Gaia was communicating with her people, but there are many in need of this data. Emory would have to be patient.

She approached the new arrivals and found them some place to work. "Please let me know if there is anything you need. Feel free to introduce yourselves to the others and share your thoughts. We are trying to discern the outcomes of the actions. More is coming, much more. We must keep up to speed with each change so we may understand the next."

The large screen in the room came to life. Jimmi's smiling face greeted Zyhna. "Aloha, I see you have some new arrivals."

Zyhna addressed her friend. "Good to see you. Yes we have new ones coming every day. They have so much information to share it is hard to keep up. What have you for me?"

"The moon continues to distance itself from us as do Venus and Mars. This has diminished tides significantly. The revolution of the Sun has slowed. I don't know what significance that has, but it's unprecedented. The sun flares are remarkable, but there's no way to connect that to the rotation. The research is active, but no one is ready to shout gloom and doom. What can you tell me?"

"Your Tam has likely seen the changes in the, let me get this right, the Antarctic Circumpolar Current as well as the five major gyres. This affects the water temps, and the surface currents, therefore the air currents are moving in unique ways. The thought is they are precursors to major shifts in weather."

"If Gaia is going to restore herself there's no telling how that'll happen. It seems you're doing a good job of theorizing."

"We are doing our best." Zyhna was glad to connect with a familiar face, up to this point her life was one of nothing beyond family, friends and Gaia. All these visitors were beginning to feel more like intruders causing a tension that was growing. "Thanks for calling. I would love to have some time to talk with you and Tam. You can tell me how the plans are coming for your voyage."

"We'll make the time for you. Goodbye, my friend."