

CITY AT MY FEET

FREE PREVIEW

Thomas More



Mannahatta Press

CITY AT MY FEET
Mannahatta Series, Book 1

by Thomas More

FREE PREVIEW VERSION

MANNAHATTA PRESS, New York
“History Rewritten”™

© 2023 by Thomas More. All Rights Reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electric or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without prior written permission from the publisher, except for the inclusion of brief excerpts as part of a book review or as otherwise as permitted by U.S. copyright law.

This book is a work of fiction. The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental and not intended by the author.

eBook ISBN: 978-1-942947-23-3
Print book ISBN: 978-1-942947-24-0

thomasmorewriter.com

PART I: MANHATTAN

CHAPTER 1

SAKIMA TAMANEND PAUSED in the middle of her bedroom, silently saying goodbye to her childhood. She sighed deeply as she scanned the room, as if she were studying a museum recreation of her life. It was time for her to leave now, to prove herself, to be on her own. Despite everyone telling her that being herself was the wrong thing to be. That there was no such thing as a woman warrior. That she would fail and embarrass her family. Why live, if you can't be who you were meant to be? She was seventeen and had already waited too long to do this.

She gazed across the room at the stack of poetry books on her nightstand. One held a collection of verses from other nearby nations. A favorite of hers happened to be a Mohawk poem, "Ziyakè." The sentiment reminded her of her first love, Pat, for reasons she didn't fully understand. Her Mohawk was a bit rusty as she'd stopped reading or talking in that language a few years ago, long after she'd finished that class.

Sakima walked over and pulled the book out from the middle of the stack. She sat on her bed and flipped to the well-worn page and read the verse aloud quietly to herself as best she could. She wasn't that great of a Mohawk speaker.

*Karonhi:io,
kaniehtiio,
kahnawake raksà:'a
ziyakè*

She smiled, wishing she had paid more attention at school in languages class. Then she remembered what every word meant, and the poem rushed back from the past to the present.

*Beautiful sky above,
beautiful snow below,
by the rapids a young man clutches
an eagle feather.*

Sakima's eyes grew wide. She had gotten every word. Sakima dropped the slim book of verse on her dresser and stood up. She had no time to contemplate further. She needed to leave—and soon.

First, though, she had to get organized. Sakima paced around her room. *Now, what shall I take on this mission? What will I need?* She noticed two of her older quivers of arrows, no longer in use. She'd stacked them together in the corner of her room near her window. The small and faded pale red quiver held a dozen arrows. The other quiver stood taller, wider, and was a deep brown in color.

This quiver held all the arrows Sakima had over time examined and rejected, one by one. These were the arrows that, no matter how carefully she calibrated them, would never fall within the narrow spectrum of strength and straightness required to hit a target. Her adjustments to the arrow's built-in electronics and CPU for distance settings, flight trajectory, and power-on-impact never fixed what was wrong with these arrows.

What good is an arrow—regardless of how hard it hits or how far it can travel—if it can't fly true, if you can't be certain it will hit the target you aimed at? Sakima thought. *No good at all.* She smiled broadly as she grabbed the full quiver and leaned it against her bed. When she returned from this journey—if she returned—she would try again. Maybe she'd missed a step when she attempted to recalibrate the broken arrows in the past.

But if she was unable to do so, she'd take them up to her favorite place in the world: the peak by Nagatamen Mùxul Allanque, the Trusted Starship. Shoot them off the top of that high point—the highest in miles—just for fun. Watch them fly and dance along their ridiculous anything-but-straight trajectory. It would be a fitting way to deploy those defective arrows. To send them flying through the forest to strike wherever they might.

Next, she examined her bows—she had three in total. The first was small and rose-pink. Her father had given it to her when she was a little girl of eight, back when he hoped Sakima's interest in archery was merely a phase. She outgrew that bow quickly, as it only shot short arrows with blunt tips. It was designed to be aimed at flimsy paper targets made especially for children. Safety Archery Kit, it said on the box. “For real warriors.”

Sakima's mother had presented her next bow, a gorgeous gleaming gold color, on her twelfth birthday. Like her father, her mother also assumed Sakima's desire to be a warrior was only a preadolescent thing and that she would soon outgrow it. Yet, her mother enjoyed how much Sakima loved her archery games and practice sessions. She couldn't help indulging her daughter with that gift. For the last time—or so her mother hoped—Sakima would put away her youthful, harmful dreams.

The third bow, Sakima's pride and joy, was the one she'd used earlier in the day—the one she always had with her. The bow was gray and black, with touches of burnished copper throughout. It looked fierce and serious. It stood tall and strong, almost muscular somehow, and capable of the best tricks. Sakima had once shot two arrows at the same time from it, but only once. Sadly, she could never recreate that incredible feat of hitting two targets side by side, at the same time, with a single pull of her bowstring. Endless practice had so far not reproduced that incredible result.

THOMAS MORE

Sakima grabbed her bow-cloth and perched on her bed with the bow. She lovingly polished the wood and metal with a cloth, cleaning off old dirt, rain spots, and bits of grass. She dabbed a second, smaller rag in the wax and ran it along the string a few times until it shone. Then she returned to buffing her cherished bow, quickly bringing a new glow to it, as if it were lit from the inside. As her final task, she applied leather polish on the bio-leather strip of the bow's grip and massaged it in so that the handle would remain soft and supple.

Sakima said, "Tuner, please," and a small computer the size, width, and shape of a maple leaf in autumn floated off her wall to hover about chest high in front of her. She touched the front panel with a well-practiced finger pattern. Purple-pink ripples echoed out from where she had tapped the screen. The waves increased in size but decreased in intensity as they reached the edges of the face of the computer's touchscreen.

In reaction, the top and bottom tips of the bow responded by glowing and pulsing, first only slightly, then with a purple glow so dark it was almost black. As the ripples on the gadget bounced from Sakima's fingertip to the edge of the device, over and over, the bow tuned itself to perfection. Finally, the tips glowed a cyan-turquoise hue. Sakima finished bringing both the bow and the string to perfect condition, with no overstretch in the string and no weak points in the bow.

As the maple leaf technology floated slowly back to its perch on the wall, Sakima placed the bow on her shoulder and slid it around to her back. She did the same with the quiver, setting it carefully behind her other shoulder.

As a soft summer rain plinked against her open window and pattered on the sill, Sakima strolled over to her knife collection. A display case on the wall over her headboard held five knives, each with its own unique capabilities. She lifted the clear cover, and it stayed raised up in position.

The first knife in the row was tiny—about two inches long and pink. This had also been a present from her father, this time when she was only six years old. The blunt blade couldn't cut anything, but at the time, the younger Sakima had thought it was the finest gift ever.

The knife next to it was blue and had two closed blades; the larger blade opened on one end and the smaller one across from it on the other. This knife could cut, but not well, and the "big" blade measured only four inches long.

The third of the blades lay in a sheath, and unlike the previous two knives, didn't open or close but was always available. This weapon was the first of this type Sakima had ever owned, and it was given to her by her favorite uncle, Uncle Pahòke. It was five and a half inches long and fine for cutting small things like thin branches while also pretty good for throwing—but not great.

The fourth was a tiny bit larger and had been Sakima's first to contain built-in electronics, which she found amazing at the time. She could set the target or the distance, and it would fly true from her hand and never, ever miss. This kind of accuracy made the young Sakima feel like a fearsome warrior with true abilities. This was also a gift from her father, and she loved showing off with it. It had a boomerang setting that let her toss it through the air, the weapon returning to her palm safely each time, slowing down before softly touching her hand.

The fifth blade was already in the sheath at her waist: “Chessi,” her favorite. Her parents presented this one to her as well, also on her birthday. It was a posthumous gift from her brother Hitami, whom the family called “Tommy.” He’d wanted it to be hers and because of this it meant so much to her. Sakima patted the handle of the knife gently, like petting a tiny cat. As her eyes misted over, she worked carefully, so as not to trigger the nano-defense system which would target the nearest threat. Once in Sakima’s grip, the knife was programmed to find the best insertion point for inflicting various levels of damage, up to and including death.

She’d take Chessi with her, naturally, as well as the one her father gave her, with its targeting and return-to-hand features. She retrieved that one from the display case. Then she turned and walked over to her bookshelf and removed the matching sheath off one shelf, then slid the blade into it. She attached it to the belt on her waist, directly across from Chessi.

The drizzle outside increased, changing from intermittent drops to a steady downpour. Lightning carved through the sky, reminding Sakima of the laser scapulas in the school lab when she used to examine small bio-animals last year. She heard her mother opening the front door and calling Tangetta inside.

Almost ready.

Sakima approached her nightstand, where she kept a small tree branch embedded in hardened clay which she’d made when she was twelve. Hanging from it were two necklaces. The first, a cherished gift from her now-gone boyfriend, Pat. It had a lovely fake gem set against burnished wood. The necklace was made from a thin leather strip. She still loved that choker, but for many reasons, she would not take it with her.

The other necklace had belonged to her mother. She slipped that strand off the short, narrow branch it was draped on. She smiled as she watched it flow through her fingers until it dangled below her outstretched hand. This one was made of braided silver. A shiny disk displaying the Lenape symbol for kishuxa, the moon, hung at the end of the chain. Her mother told Sakima she should always reach for the moon and never give up.

Don’t worry about that, Mother, Sakima thought. Your daughter will do just fine as a warrior—the one thing you don’t want me to be. But I know you love me.

Sakima was about to slip the necklace around her head and onto her neck, but with a swift motion, she raised the moon to her lips, kissed it, and dropped it back again onto the branch.

Don’t want to lose you, she thought with a sigh. Well, there’s only one more thing to do. Say goodbye to Mother, and Tangetta and I will be on my way.

She hurried through her bedroom door as it slid silently open for her.

CHAPTER 2

S AKIMA STROLLED INTO THE warm kitchen filled with the delightful smells of stew and bread. The pristine walls of the room were bright white. Gleaming metal appliances filled most spaces. She found her mother by the stove busy preparing dinner. Sakima picked up a shiny apple, casually examined the fruit, then crunched into it before speaking.

“What’s up, Mother?” she said between chews.

Sakima’s mother, Wùnitā, chuckled, focused on the contents of the pots and pans simmering on the stove in front of her. “Cooking, cleaning, shopping, taking care of my family. You know, the dream life. What’s up with you?”

“I have decided I am going on a quest.”

“What’s that, honey?” Wùnitā said, bending slightly to adjust the flame under the largest pot.

“A quest. You know: an adventure. It’s well over time that I set out alone to test myself. A Vision Quest!”

Her mother slowly turned around, and to Sakima’s surprise, she looked at her with tears in her eyes.

“Mom, what’s the matter?”

Wùnitā hesitated for a second. “Nothing, nothing, sweetheart. Onions,” she said and sniffed. She wiped at her eyes with the back of her hand and then smiled bravely at her daughter. “So, what is this quest? Or should I ask, which boy are you questing with?”

“Mom, seriously! It’s nothing like that.”

“Okay, okay. So . . .” Wùnitā paused to take a deep breath. “What *are* you up to, then?” she said. She exhaled, a look of exasperation on her face—like she’d been here too many times before.

“Well, Mother. I can’t tell you. I can’t reveal anything yet.”

Her mother sighed again.

“But I *will* tell you everything, when I return.”

If I ever do. That’s the thing with vision quests, they can take you to far away, enchanted places with dangers unknown. I’m a great warrior and I know I’ll survive. Nothing is written in stone, it is only written on the wind.

Sakima picked up a snack bag of mixed nuts, grabbed another apple, then stuffed them into her side pack.

Her mother dried her hands on a small towel. Dropping the damp cloth on the counter between her and Sakima, she said, “Tell me what’s really going on.”

“All I am at liberty to reveal,” Sakima said in a conspiratorial whisper, “is that I’m traveling to Tèkëne Forest, deep into it. The farthest I’ve ever gone!” Pivoting to the fridge, Sakima grabbed a water bottle and attached it to the loop on her belt before turning to face her mother again. “But like I said, I will be back in a short time, most likely.”

“Is this, um . . .” Her mother frowned, pulling her lips tight until they nearly disappeared. “Is this your ‘warrior’ fantasy again, honey? I thought we settled that. Didn’t we? You are seventeen now, my daughter. Isn’t it time you gave up all this ‘girl warrior’ kèpchat—this foolishness?” She twisted her mouth as if she had just smelled something terribly offensive.

“You never listen to me!” Sakima yelled. “You don’t understand me!” She pivoted away, jostling the statue of Kishelë, the Great Spirit of the Lenape and the Creator of All Things. The foot-high terra-cotta and shell edifice wobbled, pitching off its shelf. Sakima caught it, feeling the tiny chips of clam and oyster shells stick into her palms. As clumsy as she first felt, she had to smile at how quickly she reacted to catch the idol as it plummeted.

These shells in the statue had been pressed into the clay when it was still wet many years ago. The pieces completely covered the statue and gave it dull but pretty shine. It was her mother’s favorite object in the entire house, but Sakima glared at the thing in its shrine with a level of anger that surprised her. She wished the stupid thing wasn’t just an idol but really Kishelë—she was sure the Great Spirit would understand her and why she had to do this. To go to the forest and test her skills. It was time, she thought, to prove herself at last, or retire the idea of being a warrior forever. The forest was full of predators and she needed to show that she could survive in there. Show herself, if not anyone else. Because no one else seemed to care.

“No, Sakima, it is *you* who refuses to listen to reason!” Her mother said, snapping Sakima out of her reverie, rushing over to snatch her precious idol out of her daughter’s hands and reposition it carefully in its wall alcove.

She marched back to the stove to attend to dinner again without saying another word. The family favorite, salàpòn—fry bread—sizzled in the pan while soup of lab-grown venison, corn, beans, tomatoes, and spices bubbled next to it in a towering mpoalonium-powered kettle.

The yummy aroma was so strong that Sakima grew furious at the soup, with the sweet memories it fostered of laughter and love and family. It called her to remain home, stay safe, and not go off to discover her destiny, to learn whether she was good enough, strong enough. With no wars on Mannahatta for decades now, testing herself against the odds in the forest was the only way to truly know.

Wùnita stirred the stew, making a *tch-tch* sound at herself for having let dinner nearly burn. She stood there facing away from Sakima, stirring the bubbling stew and adjusting the heat.

“But you must admit, Mom, our traditional ways, as important as they are, only help keep men in power and women ‘in their place.’ It’s been that way since time began.” She took a deep breath and pulled her shoulders back. “I want to be a warrior, Mother. It’s been not only my dream, but the very

THOMAS MORE

core of my being, I know it! To be a warrior just like Tomi! I was born for this, it's as simple as that. I feel it in my bones, in my soul, and in my heart. My whole life. I can't turn away from that calling. I can't be anyone but who I am. Why can't you believe in me?"

"Of course I believe in you, Sakima!"

"Well, it doesn't always seem like you do. Anyway, I do have to get going—"

"No! You are not going anywhere. Do you hear me?" Sakima's mother slammed the wooden spoon onto the counter, her back tense. "Are you being thick-headed or are you just being cruel?" Wùnitá said, raising her voice. She spun around to glare at Sakima. Her face was crimson and dappled with tears. "Your brother was murdered! And you know why? Because he lived the life of the warrior!"

Stunned, Sakima took a cautious half-step back. She spoke softly, as if to counter her mother's loudness. "Mom, that was a battle with a renegade group of Mohawks, a surprise; a cowardly ambush."

She cleared her throat and swallowed with some difficulty before continuing. "They shot Tommy in the back with three arrows. Slaughtered the scouting party that accompanied him too. They never got a chance to fight." Sakima sniffed noisily, her eyes full of tears to match her mother's. "Father told me all about it . . ." she whispered.

Her mother bit her lower lip but said nothing.

"Well," Sakima said, taking a deep breath. "That is *not* going to happen to me. No one will sneak up on me. I will never hesitate to fire at a threat! To me, to Tangetta, to Father. To you, Mother."

Her passion surprised her, and she hoped her mother didn't notice that her hands shook. Her mother, though, had already returned to her cooking, her posture stiff.

"Don't be so childish, Sakima. You know nothing of those days, of what happened; you were not yet born when your brother left us. So, you have no right to speak of it." Then she wept hard, her hands on the counter and her shoulders shaking.

"Mother," Sakima whispered, her eyes wide.

"If you were to be a female warrior . . . I can't even say those two words together. Xkweyòk ilaok: female warriors!" Wùnitá wiped away at fresh tears that had suddenly appeared in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. "There is not even a Lenape expression for that, my daughter, don't you see? If you pursue this path, you will no longer be in control of your fate. I'm certain that you will be killed and at a young age. Just like Hítomi, my sweet, innocent Tommy."

Sakima stared silently at her mother, her face melting into sadness, her lips slowly parting. "If you think that way, Mother, then you do not believe in me."

Sakima turned abruptly and stormed out of the warm and fragrant kitchen, again crashing into the effigy of the God of All Things. This time, however, it crashed to the floor before she could attempt to catch it, her reflexes overtaken by her emotions. The sacred idol crashed to the floor and shattered into a hundred fragments.

"Sakima!" her mother yelled in disbelief, covering her mouth in horror.

Sakima stomped to the foyer where shoes and jackets were neatly arranged. She glanced at the Lenape symbol for tulpe, the turtle, painted in pale silver on the wall about three feet wide and tall. It welcomed

and blessed all as they entered or departed the Tamanend home. Sakima leaned against it, fuming as she slipped on her leather boots.

“Would you mind not touching the art?” her mother scolded, arriving at the front hall, her face bright red from both anger and the heat of the stove. “It’s delicate, you know,” she said so softly Sakima barely heard her. “It scratches so easily.”

Sakima exhaled slowly, trying to collect herself, to rise above her anger and hurt feelings. “Mom, I—”

“The traditional ways keep our clan, our tribe—our family—together, do you understand? Without them, we’d have nothing to guide us.” Wùnita sighed, releasing the sharp edges of her anger. She approached her daughter and affectionately played with Sakima’s quiver, adjusting it on her daughter’s shoulder a bit better.

“You’ve knocked your quiver all lopsided,” she said as she straightened the arrows in Sakima’s quiver. “There!” Reaching behind Sakima, Wùnita stealthily added a brightly colored arrow from the umbrella stand into Sakima’s quiver. “For good luck,” she said with a mischievous smile.

“I appreciate that, Mother,” Sakima said, smiling herself and calming down a bit too, matching her mother’s new tone. It amused Sakima how her mother attempted to pull a fast one. By how her mother put so much faith into that ridiculous “lucky” arrow. To Sakima, it was the dumbest-looking thing she’d ever seen.

Whenever her mother managed to insert the arrow into her quiver over the years, Sakima had always found a way to take it back out. Despite her mother’s intentions, the odd arrow spent far more time sitting in the umbrella stand by the door than it did in Sakima’s quiver.

“Mother, I must go,” she said, kissing Wùnita on her cheek.

“I know,” her mother said, with a look of love and fear on her face, her lips trembling. She reached out and pulled Sakima close, squeezing her briefly before letting her go. “Be safe, my little one. More than that, be smart.” She returned a kiss to her daughter’s cheek.

Sakima ran straight outside, the front door “whooshing” shut behind her. She rushed off as fast as she could across the glen to get to the streets and neighborhoods that would take her to the opening of Tèkène Forest.

“Goodbye, my child!” She heard her mother’s voice call out to her across the long and wide field behind her. “Be careful. Watch and listen for the mech-predators in the forest.”

Sakima dared not turn to look at her mother by the door because she knew she’d lose her resolve and run back to her, cry onto her breast, and never leave her childhood home.

The sound of her mother’s voice rippled through the air like a hot summer breeze carrying the threat of rain. Sakima well knew the sound of her mother’s voice when it was happy and when it was filled with love. The sound Sakima heard now had little love or joy in it—but lots of fear.

It had been almost three years, and Sakima wanted to forget it forever—the day she failed. Unable to let her arrows fly, she failed to save him. Now the rage was back as hot and dark as it had been when she and her mother fought in the kitchen. *Mother does not know what she is talking about, she thought. She had no right to remind me of it. Maluwe—damn it!*

CHAPTER 3

TANGETTA LAY IN HER bed after a delicious dinner—although she mostly just ate the fry bread. Her mother had read to her a story in a sad voice, which wasn't sad at all, and had cut reading time short to announce that it was now bedtime. However, Tangetta wasn't sleepy. She had already explained that fact to her mother and her mother said it didn't matter at all. Seven-year-olds needed lots of sleep.

That might be true of every other night, Tangetta thought, but it is not at all true for tonight.

Tonight felt different, with how Sakima and Mommy had fought and how Sakima was behaving. The broken statue that made Mommy cry. They did not know I was listening, standing at the front door, peaking in through the screen.

Tangetta pulled off her covers, which wasn't easy because her mother had tucked her in “as snug as a bug.” It was more like she'd been strapped into place, and the straps were screwed into the bedframe. After rolling and kicking and flipping from side to side for a bit, Tangetta freed herself. She sat up and pushed away the rest of her sheets and blankets that still covered her middle and her legs.

She squirmed around until she was up on her knees on her bed, and leaning forward, she placed her elbows up on the windowsill. The bed was just the right height to do this. She rested her head on her arms and let the breeze caress her face. She heard a big-eyed kukhus somewhere nearby going “hoo, hoo!” and a tème's lonesome cry on some distant hill. It was so distant, Tangetta barely detected the lonely song of that young wolf. She heard it, though, because she had amazing hearing. Sakima told her that once. So had Daddy.

Tangetta watched the trees swaying gently and scanned the skies, hoping to spot comets or spaceships, but the sun was still out since it was late summer. The sun would set soon, and then she'd see the space objects—she was sure of it. She continued to think about her sister.

What is Sakima doing? Tangetta wondered. What secret adventure has she gone away to find? Will she ever come home again?

Tangetta wished she could be just like Sakima, with arrows and knives and a brave heart. *I want to be like Sakima! Then she and I could go on adventures together.* An enormous smile grew on Tangetta's face, and her eyes nearly sparkled in her darkened bedroom. *I wish I could walk beside her, have a bow of my own, and be a “worrier” too, as well as fight and jump and punch and shoot.* Tangetta gazed up toward the night sky again. Closing her eyes, she made a wish to the Spirits.

Then she recalled her conversation with her big sister earlier that day . . .



Tangetta sat on the lowest step of their porch, playing a game of pretend with her homemade figurines. She preferred these over many of the modern manufactured dolls that she owned. Scattered around her were her pickup sticks and cup-and-pin toys of varying sizes and colors.

Sakima grinned at her little sister through the front screen door. Tangetta always wore that ridiculous mechBear cub suit even though it was now two years old and was tight, frayed, and worn. The outfit, pajamas really had fake fur all around and the hood had plastic bear ears sticking out on each side. She noticed the dirt on the knees and elbows and that Tangetta's real left ear peaked out from the hood where the bear ear was. "What are you up to, Tangetta?"

Tangetta twisted around to look at Sakima. "I've got a city, Sakima," Tangetta said, unsurprised by her sister's sudden appearance. "See?"

Sakima stepped forward, and the screen door dissolved. It used a virtual mesh that was more effective at keeping out insects than its real-world counterpart. Sakima removed her bow and placed it on the ground, then squatted next to Tangetta.

"Oh, you have a city, do you?" Sakima's smile grew bigger. She stroked the top of Tangetta's head. "Tell me about it."

"You see," Tangetta said getting up and rushing to the set up she'd created on their front lawn. She smacked her lips for a second and then licked her top lip, which was chapped, preparing herself for the serious dissertation she would deliver. "These are the buildings, for example." She reached over and pointed to various stacks of clamshells and oyster shells.

"And these are us!" She walked a couple of paces to gesture at some shiny, smooth stones, positioned in a circle in the center of the stacks of seashells. "You, Mommy, Daddy, and Nimmy."

Tangetta walked along a bit further. "And that's Mimi and Uncle Machto and the new baby, Mimëntëta." She waved at three small stones about two feet from the center of the "city." Then she returned to the steps and sat back down.

"Is that all?" Sakima said. "I see more things. For example, those big rocks. Which buildings are they?"

Tangetta tilted her head and nearly folded herself in half from her waist down where she sat. "Those," she told her sister with a very serious tone, her lips squeezed tightly together, "are the monsters." She jabbed her small finger toward the three large rocks with sharp edges. Moss, like a beard, grew on top and down one side of the biggest rock.

Sakima remained still, her eyes wide, surprised by her sister's revelation. Then she spoke. "Monsters? What are you talking about, Tangerine? There are no such things as monsters." Sakima hoped that she sounded convincing. She tried to laugh, but something like a cough came out instead.

"Don't say it like that!" Tangetta shouted, standing up and staring at Sakima. "Of course there are monsters, Sakima, everybody knows that!"

THOMAS MORE

“Okay, okay. Calm down.” Sakima smiled as she put her arm around her sister. “I just don’t want you to worry about those types of things, is all.”

“I’ve seen them, Sakima. I have! At night, out my window.”

Must be nightmares, Sakima thought. “Okay, look. If there are any monsters in the world, they cannot hurt you. You know why?”

“Why?”

“Because I won’t let them.”

Tangetta appeared to contemplate that notion for a moment, squinting up thoughtfully at the dark clouds collecting in the sky. “But Sakima, they do stare at me in my bedroom. I close my eyes and pull the sheets over my head so they can’t see me. When I look again, they’re still there. Only closer.” Tangetta took in a sharp breath.

Sakima felt chills on the back of her neck. It sounded so real. “Okay, fine. But don’t be scared. They will never get you.” She gave Tangetta a slight squeeze. It surprised her how tense her sister’s body was, like hugging a stone statue instead of a girl.

Tangetta wiped her nose with her tiny index finger. Sakima couldn’t tell if her sister’s drippy nose was just because she was a little kid—and little kids always have drippy noses—or because Tangetta had been crying.

“Easy, there, Tangerine. Take a deep breath.” The two sisters pulled apart gently to look at each other. “You will be fine, I promise. You know I will protect you—forever!” Sakima patted the quiver of arrows on her back, then stood up. She picked up her bow from where she’d placed it to sit with her sister. Sakima mimed shooting it, holding it up near her face, and then pulling the string again and again.

“Zoom, zoom, zoom. The monsters are dead! One after another. Look, a great big ugly one! What a stupid face it has! It thinks it has a very scary face, but I think it is just dumb—tèpahtu—and I laugh at it.” Sakima fired imaginary arrows at the tip of a pine tree across their yard, high above from where they were talking. “Zoom, zoom, *zoom!* This freak needs many arrows before it will fall! And many more to kill it. There, it’s dead now. No tèpahtu monster can defeat your mighty Sakima!”

Tangetta laughed out loud and hopped up to hug Sakima, her thin arms wrapped around Sakima’s waist. “Thank you, Sakima, thank you! I knew you could defeat them!”

After Tangetta released her tiny hug, Sakima said, “Well, I have to go now. Need to gather some items from my room and then be on my way.”

“I will go with you then!”

“No, I have big girl things to do, which I must do alone. A new quest.”

“Are you going monster hunting?”

Sakima’s eyes widened in surprise. “Hah. Tangetta! Why would you even ask that? No, that’s not what I am planning to do,” Sakima said. Then she winked at her sister.

“What if you run into a scary monster and it wants to kill you and eat you all up?” Tangetta made growling noises, exposing rows of tiny, white teeth.

“I will shoot it down with my arrows; that is what I shall do! And slice it up into pieces with my trusty knife, Chessi! Then I will eat it—turning the tables on it. What do you think about that idea?”

Tangetta’s face had turned pale as a ghost, her eyes filling with small tears. Sakima knew that she’d gone too far with her monster-killing tale. “No, no, Tangetta. I misspoke. I mean, I would use my knife to pin its tail to the ground. Then I would come get you and show you that the monster was no more.”

“Okay, Sakima, I would like that. Then I could take your knife out and stab, stab, stab!”

Sakima’s mouth fell open, and she gaped at her sister. Had she, Sakima, just created a monster?

“And he would say, ouchy, ouchy!” Tangetta said, laughing hard, her eyes squeezed tight with joy.

Wow, there’s a lot this miniature human doesn’t understand, she thought. “Gotta run, kid,” Sakima said.

“Can you teach me arrows?” Tangetta asked her, surprising Sakima again.

“Well, I don’t know. Why?”

“So I can be brave like you and fight the monsters.”

“Look, Tangetta,” Sakima leaned over and put her hand on Tangetta’s tiny shoulder, “you should let Mom teach you what you need to know. I can only teach you things you will never use, that will get you into trouble.”

“No, Sakima, I can do it! I’m good at it, like you! You don’t get into trouble.”

Sakima chuckled. “I do, though; I do all the time. Okay, now I really have to go.”

“Okay, Sakima. When you come back from your quest you teach me arrows, okay? Promise?”

“Wow, Tangerine, you stay on point, don’t you?” Sakima laughed gently. “I will think about it. How does that sound?”

“What’s ‘think about it’ mean?”

“I will weigh on the one hand . . . ” Sakima said, sticking her left hand straight out in front of her, palm up, “your desire to learn about warrior skills and the affairs of men. Knowledge that will make your life miserable and your mother and father very sad indeed. On the other. . . ” she said, doing the same with her right hand as she had with her left, “whether I should train you in all that I know. What if you were to become better than me? I could not allow that!” Sakima smiled.

“I will never be better than you, I promise! Okay, Sakima? I’ll stop myself from getting any better right before I’m almost as good as you. Okay? So, please?” She batted her eyelashes, holding her hands in a prayer-like supplication.

“I showed you my two hands, Tangetta. That means I’ll consider it. I’m not promising anything. You get me?”

“Fine, fine, I get you, Sakima. You still have to tell me what hand becomes the winner. Okay?”

“Deal,” Sakima said, stretching out a fist toward Tangetta. She bumped Sakima’s strong fist with her little one, as hard as she could.

“Got to run. For real this time,” Sakima said in her softest voice. “You be good for Mom until I get back. Deal on that?”

“Deal!” Tangetta said, reaching her fist up toward Sakima, this time initiating the bump.

THOMAS MORE

Sakima paused and then tapped the small fist, laughing quietly to herself. “You are quite something, aren’t you?” she said, shaking her head.

“So are you,” Tangetta said, giggling and flopping herself down onto the grass to return to her “city.”

Sakima felt a couple of rain drops and raised her palm to test the air. “Looks like rain’s coming.”



Tangetta hopped off the bed and found her wrist light and slid it on. She wandered around her room, examining her stuff and humming, putting some things down, keeping others.

Tonight’s going to be the best night ever, she thought. *Tonight, I become a warrior!*

She stood very still in the middle of her room as she’d seen Sakima do while practicing in the yard. She raised her tiny fist to her chest, and with as much pomp and drama as she could summon, hit the area just above her heart with a mighty thud and then arced her pudgy arm to her side. Exactly how Sakima and Father do it.

Tangetta took in a big gulp of air and signaled her bedroom door to open. Then she snuck downstairs, moved silently to the back door, and slipped quietly out of the house into the backyard.

Best. Night. Ever!

CHAPTER 4

S AKIMA TROTTED AT A moderate clip from the middle of Tùkwsitàk village where her home was located and headed toward Tèkène Forest. Taking what she hoped would be a shortcut, she passed through a neighborhood she knew all too well: the outer edges of the Tùkwsitàk village. Her sister, Amimi, lived there with that disgrace to the Wolf Clan, Machto Pequonitto, and their new baby, Mimëntëta.

The sun shone bright now that the clouds had parted and the rain had finally stopped. Sakima passed the row of monuments to Lapowinsa, the glorious Chief of the Lenape from ancient times, and then past Moskim's statue, the Rabbit Hero of myth. She smiled at the funny character as she walked past some other famous faces, both human and animal.

The air felt cooler, carrying the scent of wild gardenia, which she loved. Her grandmother's garden had overflowed with them—the off-yellow ones and various shades of white and cream. Her grandmother had sometimes filled her living room nearly floor to ceiling with those blossoms in what seemed like hundreds of vases. As she jogged along breathing deeply, the flowery bouquet became overtaken by another, stronger scent. Sakima crinkled her nose in disgust: manure. The stench wafted over from the cornfields across the open meadows of grass and flowers.

Artificial excrement from the digestive tracks of sisileyòk, mechBison. In the past, this included metal shavings from operational gears and levers in the mechBison migrating to the digestive tracks of the beasts. This resulted in the minerals from the shavings leeching into the root system of the xàskwim stalks, then into the ripened corn later harvested that the people ate.

But a team of scientists and graduate students had fixed the problem of the metal shavings ending up in mechBison spoor, making all harvests clean and safe again. That was a noble victory, and Sakima fondly remembered the ceremony of thanks and the big celebration after. Her smile faded. The party had taken place a year after her Pat had died, and now she felt that sadness all over again, fresh in her heart where he still lived.

To distract from the sad memories falling darkly around her, Sakima forced herself to study the various homes and businesses she passed. While doing so, she saw a familiar sight: a house with a tall spire rising high into the sky, just like the one at her family's home. This one sat atop the house owned by

THOMAS MORE

the Winkalits, where her aunt and uncle lived. As her parents had done with her house, the Winkalits had implemented a design known as “Modern longhouse.”

SimGrass, along with chestnut and elm simBark, made up the thatched roof. Saplings of simTree materials formed the skeleton of the rooftop atrium, as well as the porches along the side of the longhouse on the upper stories. The tops of these saplings had been carefully bent and interwoven to create a dome-like shape. Grass and bark shingles created a natural-and-sim cover from the rain and hot sun. Sakima smiled, thinking about her aunt and uncle—an old-school couple, well-meaning and full of love for Sakima and her family.

Picking up her pace, Sakima darted through fields of corn and long grasses and wildflowers and soon found herself on the very outskirts of her village. Lost in thought, she entered Tèkè Forest. Crows mocked her from tree branches deep in the wood as she ran her hand across a natural hedge of boxwood, flicking the raindrops out in a semicircle back into the denser brush behind. A distant rumble of thunder made her look up to the sky, although the short storm had long since passed.

She kicked a rock down the footpath and it landed in the nearest small puddle without joy in its bounce. A squirrel chattered nastily at Sakima from above, just out of her reach. As she gazed up at the creature, ready to give it her best stare-down, the fuzzy thing leapt from the branch it was on to another, showering Sakima with an unwanted extra dose of rain.

“Maluwe!” she said in her native tongue. “Damn it!” Sakima spat to take the dirty taste of the old tree out of her mouth. She licked her lips. The rain itself, however, tasted so good. As she wiped her forearm across her face, she heard a sound, the crack of a branch, and sensed eyes were upon her.

She stopped and spun around, ready for battle. But the trail behind her was empty. She stared into the dark brush on both sides of the path, squinting to make out the shape of perhaps xinkwtème: the wolf. Or even kwèn’shùkwëny, the mountain lion. Her vision always strong, she focused on the shadows hidden within shadows, but she discerned nothing frightening. She had traveled far from home now, beyond the outskirts of her village. Not unsafe—but not that safe either.

She turned around again and peered on ahead where the pathway led deeper into the forest. A red cardinal swept low across her field of vision and then drifted up into the trees. Sakima took that as a positive sign and chuckled at her seemingly unfounded nervousness. She continued hiking, daydreaming about her brother, Nimàt—only younger by a couple of years—and the fun they’d had playing tag, chasing each other through the tall grasses and the wide bushes by their house when they were kids. Then, a vigorous slap on her shoulder brought Sakima quickly into focus on the now.

“No!” she gasped. She swung around, confused.

“Hey there, Sakima!”

Sakima’s face hardened from fear to stone-cold hatred. She bared her teeth reflexively. “*You.*”

CHAPTER 5

“**T**HE ONE AND ONLY.”

A tall, overly muscular man stood before her, hands on his hips. Clearly, he had experimented liberally with bioMech muscle formulas, including the black-market wchètahsën, or “stone muscles.” Wchètahsën produced “kèpcheonkèlèt rage,” which could make someone act deranged at times, driven by anger and ego. The person who stood before her needed no chemical or bioTech enhancement to act crazy, because already was.

She stared at her brother-in-tribe, Machto, who’d married her older sister a year earlier, after he’d gotten her pregnant. The marriage had not been his idea, but rather the decision of their two clans collectively, who also enforced it. An old-fashioned “tànkamikàn” or “spear” wedding.

“What are you up to, sweet ‘suhk eemuh’?” Machto sneered, trouncing her name into two words. He took a step forward, licking his upper lip. Sakima detected with repulsion the fox gland oil on his skin that Machto used to “attract the ladies,” as he often declared. She hated that stink; it reminded her of death. The poor little fox. Òkwës should not be hunted like game; they were fellow hunters to be respected. No mechFoxes could yet produce this oil, so it always symbolized to her the passing of an endangered natural fox.

“What are you doing out here, Machto?” Sakima said. Despite trying to suppress her contempt, her lip curled with disgust.

“I followed you, my ‘sister’,” he said, winking. He forced a smile, but it tilted south to become more like a drunken leer.

What is wrong with this idiot? Sakima thought. “You *followed* me? What are you talking about?”

“Yeah, sure. I saw you heading for Tèkëne. I sought you out for your own protection. You do know there are wolves and bears and wild piggy mech-kwëshkwës out here? You should know that, as the big hunter-warrior *man* that you are, right?” His leer grew bigger as he leaned in to seize Sakima’s bicep. “Ooooh! That’s solid. A true man’s ‘muscle.’ Well, I got one too.” He grabbed his crotch with his other hand and winked lecherously.

Sakima slapped at his hand on her arm. “Get lost, you weird creep.” She wrinkled her nose. “Leave me the hell alone.”

THOMAS MORE

“Ah, is that any way to treat your savior? I came here, at great personal risk, to make sure *you* stayed safe and sound.” He winked again like he had a twitch.

“*Phwit!* Bullshit,” Sakima growled.

“Again with the insults! Well, you have no gratitude, girl. That’s right, no gratitude at all.” He reached out, this time with both hands, to grab her by her shoulders. He made sure he brushed her breasts as he reached for her shoulders.

Sakima didn’t feel it, though, because she wore a leather and steel vest for protection whenever she planned to head into the woodland. She wore it for another reason too: because the vest had once belonged to her brother, Tommy. It had taken her weeks to repair it and rework it to fit her much smaller frame. The garment had ceremonial markings of Lenape symbols. It required another two months for Sakima to weave in filaments of the sacred energy—mpoalonium—given to her people by the Star Walkers. She had woven in two strands, one down each side of the vest, running in parallel wavelike shapes.

Sakima pulled away from Machto’s grip. “Let me go, you asshole!” she said, her voice rising in anger.

“Nope, you like it when I touch you. Am I right? Of course, I’m right!” He licked his lips suggestively.

“Screw you, Machto!” Sakima shouted. She turned and hurried on further into Tèkène, her forest, her sanctuary, her escape. Before she had taken ten steps, she felt Machto’s arms slime around her and form a tight bear hug. She tried to scream, but Machto had already reached up and covered her mouth before she could even try. Sakima, eyes wide open, dropped down and sent her fists hammering fiercely between his legs at his groin.

He wasn’t a bad fighter, though. Sakima was forced to recognize this as he sidestepped the worst part of her strike. He tugged her closer and she smelled the wēshkiyēm on his breath because, of course, he’d been drinking in the middle of the day. Then, to her horror he licked her neck with hideous and exaggerated slowness. Sakima kicked and squirmed to free herself. Finally, she bit down on his hand as hard as she could, but he quickly yanked it from her teeth, laughing.

“You’re a feisty one! Damn right!”

But it was all the time Sakima needed. “My sister know you’re here?” she cried out, with such anger that she sprayed spit into the air. Machto stalled. Then he let her go, giving her a hard shove as he did so.

“Shut the fuck up,” he snarled.

“She’d love to learn about what you tried here. You sànkweyòk, you weasel!”

Sakima straightened her vest and pulled her quiver around to her back again. She bent over to pick up her bow where it had fallen when Machto violently grabbed her.

“You are nothing, SUCKima. I could kill you here, you know that? Easy. Your sister would never hear of what happened. You’d be dead, and nobody would care. Not one single person would give a shit about some little man-girl warrior. Not even your parents.”

“Try it,” Sakima hissed, teeth clenched, her eyes nearly slits, her jaw pushed out. She clenched the handle of her knife, Chessi, at her waist, where she’d been unable to reach it earlier. “I’d *really* like you

to try it.” She said this last in a hoarse whisper, her lips pulled tight. Sakima instinctively bent her knees and leaned forward slightly like the brave cat, kwèn’shùkwēnay, ready to pounce. All muscles tense—if only she had fangs and claws.

Machto hesitated, his hand now on the handle of his knife too. After a long pause, he let go and gave a loud laugh, his hands raised in supplication. “No, I don’t need to kill a nothing, a complete nobody. I’d rather have you live your stupid life in shame: the Man Queen. The Lady King. You are neither a woman nor a man. You are an unnatural thing that the Spirits hate to look upon.” His eyes grew dark, his sneer a grimace of loathing. The large vein in his neck throbbed. “You are too dumb to realize that this world you wish to escape from is *man’s* world. Men do the hunting, fighting, and killing. Men take whatever woman they choose and make them do anything they want. You’re something like a girl, but I’m not totally sure, with your girl-muscles and your angry face. Ha, ha!”

Sakima couldn’t control her anger any longer. She stepped up to him and spat in his face. Then she spun around and sprinted as fast as she could into the forest.

“You bitch!” he yelled after her.

It is always “bitch,” Sakima mused. That was what they always said.

“I’ll deal with you later; you can bet on it,” Machto hollered after her, but she was already out of earshot.

CHAPTER 6

SAKIMA SPED ON THROUGH the brush, tears stinging her eyes. How she hated those tears, being seen as weak and helpless—the nshawësi xkwe—“weak woman.”

She pushed on through the thicket, oblivious to the pain from the small, thin branches whipping at her legs and stomach. Blind to the bugs that dinged off her face, then scuttled into her mouth. She spat them out, wiped them off, and kept running. After a few minutes of reckless running, she slowed to a stop and peered back over her shoulder.

The path was empty. Machto was gone—as if he’d never been there.

She stared for a long time, she wasn’t sure how long, and then a white òpinkwinakwsu with its long snout and pink tail crossed onto the path halfway and stopped. Then the opossum must have thought better of it. It turned around and reentered the safe shadows of the undergrowth.

From far away, Sakima thought she heard her mother calling her name. Or maybe it was the wind playing tricks. Turning swiftly on her heel, still gripping the handle of her knife, she darted deep into the darkness and safety of her sanctuary forest.

Her mind wandered away from Machto’s attack. He was dangerous but a fool. I will deal with him one day, and he will no longer be a blight on the Tamanend family name, she thought. She grew satisfied that the moment would come when he would have to answer for all he’d done. Sakima couldn’t think about that right now or about the inevitable conversation with her sister, Mimi, that she would need to have when she returned from her quest.

Sakima knew she had to get to the mountaintop, her refuge, the place where she could think and be at peace: Òhchu Peak. There the visitors’ monument rose high into the sky, Nagatamen Mùxul Allaque, the Trusted Starship. It should be easy to spot, glistening like a giant gem in the sunshine. So, she would go to the peak and rest there, maybe have a snack and drink some water. Sakima figured once she reached the very top, she’d determine the correct navigation to continue her quest.

She had the general direction of travel in mind—north and then west, toward what would soon be the setting sun. From the summit, she counted on making a more precise orientation. It would take fifteen minutes to slog through the rough terrain and dense forest of Tèkëne to get to Òchu Peak.

The air had cooled down quite a few degrees thanks to the day's thundershowers. She caught the sweet scent of honeysuckle now that she'd entered the forest and traveled deeper into Tèkène. The sharp, refreshing scent of pine and cedar came next, and Sakima took it all in.

She kept the croaking of the frogs to her left. With the wetlands on that side, she knew Òhchu was on the other. She had her eyes peeled for predators, even though it was too early for most of them to hunt yet. She patted the knives on her waistband, feeling the reassuring weight of her quiver as it bounced rhythmically on and off her back as she ran.

She moved through the brush slowly, lost in thought about Machto's motivations and plans, her family, her few friends, and Tangetta. Before Sakima knew it, the path leading up to Òhchu Peak appeared, and she began her slow climb. Facing upwards as she went, she soon caught the glint of the Nagatamen Mùxul Allanque up ahead. It was often referred to by its acronym, NMA, pronounced "nemma," which was a play on the Lenape word meaning "the thing to see." Sakima reckoned she'd be at nemma straight away.

She climbed through more sparse forest now, hillier than the area by her family's longhouse. She continued the challenging job of scaling up the side of the steep slope. At the summit, the woods thinned out to almost nothing, just large boulders, some bunches of grasses here and there, and a handful of stubby bushes.

Sakima stopped to stare at the structure that had changed everything: "nemma." The gigantic disk-shaped object was about fifty shaèk (or about 50 yards or 150 feet), across from bow to stern, or in this case, from top to bottom. About a third of the craft—sixteen shaèk—remained hidden in the dirt. Nemma had chopped the nearby hills almost in half when it screamed through the skies of Mannahatta out of nowhere, centuries earlier. The buried disk wedged vertically where it had crashed, an immense axe blade driven into the ground.

Even with a good chunk of it hidden underground, the ship was still an impressive thirty shaèk high, just over seven stories, nearly three of which were permanently embedded in the dirt. Small bushes covered the bottom of the disk where the structure had planted itself in the Earth. This flora grew to about three feet high and about as thick across. Beyond that point, moss clung to the metallic craft mostly on the north side. Where the moss had not yet grown, she could still make out strange markings. These were not like early Lenape symbols that Sakima knew so well, yet they were similar. As if the people who had constructed the flying disk had spoken a comparable language to, and perhaps had a somewhat related culture as, the Lenape. How that could be, she had no idea.

She wondered what it was like to fly such a spacecraft, where it had come from, and how it found its way through the Many Worlds, to her people. The Lenape had never built a ship like that; no one had ever been interested in such flight, what with the portal, the Skontay Chìpilësu, enabling people to travel to strange new worlds. But local flying machines—the hovercraft found everywhere on Mannahatta—were more than sufficient.

Still, the military forces had developed a virtual space flight training system that simulated all the tech that Lenape scientists had been able to develop. Because of her position in society, she had also had

THOMAS MORE

some training on the controls. More like a space camp than true training, she nonetheless studied it all intensely, because it felt important to her to learn all those virtual dials and screens and controls, both hands-on and voice activated.

Sakima had taken to her spaceship controls simulator like a namè (fish) to water. She spent hours in there, often having to be kicked out by her father when she was little, so the actual warriors could get some practice. She loved the feeling of flying through space. She had achieved the highest scores so far for shooting accuracy, flying and navigational abilities, and hours logged. Though it could never be, she fantasized about controlling a real spaceship through the Many Worlds and all the galaxies in reach.

Sakima dropped to the ground and fell against the starship, panting. She pulled her quiver and bow off and laid them down beside her. After she'd eaten one apple and a handful of nuts and then took a few long sips of water, she realized that, despite her best intentions, she couldn't travel any more tonight. So much for great plans. Tomorrow would be different—she'd continue to new places, new discoveries.

She laid down, using her quiver as a rough pillow for her head, her hands clasped over her stomach, ankles crossed. As she watched the stars, her eyelids slowly fell, and she drifted into dreams.

CHAPTER 7

AS THE EARLY MORNING sun just barely crept over the horizon and the bluejays and crows chirped loudly, Sakima awoke, stood up, and gathered her belongings. Stretching with her arms high overhead, she peered down into the forest. *Where to now?*

With the sun still low in the sky, she discerned only vague outlines of the tallest trees. Slowly, the details of the distant landscape emerged: the individual trees, the largest of the boulders, all intertwined in morning mist. She wanted to squint to see more details, but she knew that would make things worse.

Sakima turned to face north. Her knowledge of the stars told her which way to stand. Alànkok Luweyunk—the North Star—slowly disappeared as the dark sky grew blue. She witnessed a streak, a comet, flying from one side of the sky to the other. Sakima smiled, amazed to see such a sight when it wasn't the middle of the evening. She nodded in respect at nature and the universe when the sudden snapping of a branch somewhere on the hill down below her startled her back into now. This forest isn't empty, she thought. It's filled with a variety of creatures that could kill me.

Sakima relaxed as she realized that the twigs snapping sounded small, and whatever was walking on them must be little too. Like the furry masked thief, nahënëm, or the dam-building worker, tēmakwe. Neither would be this deep in the forest. *Something else.* She reached down and touched her knife, reminding herself again that she was not alone. *Time to move.*

She proceeded down the mountain and reentered the forest. As she walked, she sometimes heard faint footsteps behind her, but nothing too disconcerting. It was likely the pupukwësh, the quail, or tschikenum, the turkey. Sakima kept her eyes and ears wide open, and her grip on her knife tight. She'd throw it if necessary, but she'd rather not. Better a stab than a toss, because it was harder for an animal to dodge, as opposed to an object flying through the air.

A loud crack of a large branch being snapped under foot hit her ears like a punch. Something big was in there with her—and close. She heard a low, deep growl. This creature was not the one who made small branches snap. This was something very big, and it sounded displeased.

CHAPTER 8

S AKIMA SLIPPED HER KNIFE back in its place at her waist and immediately raised her bow and fitted an arrow onto the string with a single, swift motion. She flexed her arm and chest muscles as she pulled the bio-engineered gut-string taut. Standing still, every muscle tense, she did not make a sound. She heard the shuffling of large paws through leaves, and then out of the shadows the creature appeared.

Then she studied this threat. It was a mechBear, the mechmàxkwi, and it lumbered noisily into view on the path ahead. Less than twenty feet separated her from the beast in the thicket. Sakima's finely tuned senses picked up the animal's lab-made odor—sulfur and the slight hint of burnt rubber—and its radiating warmth. She concentrated on the cracking twigs and crunching leaves as the mechBeast stomped from one side of the path to the other into the dark overgrowth of Tèkène Forest. The angle was wrong, and so was the distance. So she did not let the arrow fly—not yet.

She predicted the mechBear would re-appear on the path as it wandered in search for food. This time she would be ready. After, the mighty animal would give up its chemfur and biomeat and simbones to help one of the True People, a Lenape. This would be its greatest sacrifice. Sakima intended to accept this gift with gratitude and grace.

Sakima focused on the scent of warm fur, the barely noticeable snap of the smallest twig. Her hunting skills gave her the ability to zero in on certain sounds and movements. What she needed, more than that, was time. She swept the bow and her body around to face the rear from where the beast had suddenly emerged behind her, surprising her once again. This time she was prepared. An arrow was already strung in the bow. Another dangled from her shooting hand, ready to load in right after she let the first one fly.

She froze. The string taut, holding all the energy in the world, quivered with the promise of relief. Nothing happened. Beads of sweat dotted Sakima's face, above her lips and on her forehead. Her arms trembled from the exertion of keeping the bow and string apart, using all her strength.

Unable to let the arrow go, she slowly released the tension on the string and then turned and sprinted. She jumped over small boulders and around thick oak trees and straight through bushes. Many of them had pointy branch-ends where traveling animals had snapped them off. Then, she remembered.

Her knees went weak at the thought of being with him, kissing him. *How would that happen? He was too beautiful for words. He never spoke to her or said "Hi."*

Who cares? she thought. I'm better off on my own. I don't need a boyfriend trying to kiss me when I'm working on my archery skills.

But Apatschin, her Pat, had come into her life—real and wonderful. Kissing him above the banks of the Mahicantuck River had been so much more glorious than she'd imagined, as they held each other and watched the sparkling river flow over the edge of their world, into the dark mystery of space.

Sakima stopped to catch her breath, tears stinging her eyes at a different, horrible memory. First, a splash of blood. Next, a stream of it. Flesh being torn, a body being slashed open. A scream.

Sakima shook her head to rid herself of the memory. There was no blood and no screaming in the now. She lifted her bow up to her face again. *Thank the Spirits that the mechmàxkwi hasn't seen me yet.* She'd had the luck to be downwind from the creature, so it couldn't pick up her scent. At least not at that distance.

Blood everywhere. Skin torn open. The screaming!

Tears filled Sakima's eyes as she fought against her memories and her guilt. Back in the present, she nocked an arrow into her string again. She blinked to clear her vision, to focus on the mechAnimal in front of her.

She swallowed to stop the choking wave of grief building up in her throat. This was no time to cry. She needed to be as brave as she'd ever been.

She steadied her arrow and concentrated, closing one eye to aim. The arrowhead, shining blue with targeting energy, gave an almost imperceptible whine from the tip as it prepared to go. A similar but lower-sounding hum came from the feathers, which also now glowed a bright cyan. These components tested the air quality, humidity, and wind as they calculated the distance and the perfect trajectory, as Sakima waited to release the arrow toward the target.

The mechmàxkwi turned and spotted her. The bear's eyes blazed red, the metal wheels embedded in its back became a dull crimson as they powered up and spun around, preparing for attack.

Sakima heard the screams in her ears as clearly as she had that terrible day, almost three years ago.

"Sakima! Help me!"

That awful noise of Pat's voice, a usually sweet sound, was now in tandem with horrible shrieking. It came out as a kind of whooping, from where the rip in his throat was. A hollowing death-wind roar.

"Shoot!" He tried to scream the words. Sakima understood him, even though his voice was overpowered by the screech that his open, bleeding throat emitted, as well as the growling of the mechmàxkwi. She couldn't let the arrow fly and potentially kill the boy she loved. So she shut her tear-filled eyes while the sounds of screaming grew dim.

Today, Sakima's arrow launched from her bow with a loud snap of the bowstring. It traveled with such velocity that when it hit the bear's shoulder it drilled through the muscle and straight out the other side. Blood pumped from the mechBear in spasms, but the animal did not slow down or veer from its target.

The mechBeast was motivated not only by the hunt but by rage and pain. It blindly flew toward her, growling. Then the bear slammed into the large, coarse trunk of a sycamore tree, skidding to a painful stop.

THOMAS MORE

Sakima jumped out from behind the trunk and shot a second arrow into the bear's back, then nocked again and loosed yet another. Is this the right time? Sakima thought. The moment when I should use the special pink and gold arrow? The bear roared with pain and rage, twisting around again to face its adversary.

Sakima dashed away as fast as she could. She knew the beast was hurt and should have fallen. Then it was up, seemingly unaffected, and tight on her trail. It would catch up to her in seconds. No time for an arrow of any kind.

Sakima pulled the ten-inch blade from the leather belt attached to her waist. She dodged left and then right, then twisted to face her pursuer. The bear's paw was bigger than a large rock and more deadly as it swept down at her. Sakima stayed out of reach. She felt the slight breeze as the paw swiped past her, nearly slicing her face in half.

She jumped behind the wide trunk of a pine tree as the mechBear, weakening now, attempted to follow. But Sakima's radius around the tree was tighter, quicker. The mechmàxkwi skidded in the underbrush, slipping and falling on one knee. Sakima rushed until she was behind the creature now. She gripped her knife in both hands. Screaming a battle cry, she plunged the blade deep into the animal's hide, aiming for the heart far beneath the muscle and fat. She jammed it in as far as her strength would allow. Then she pulled it out and tore off running.

A tree branch hung just above her head a few yards farther on. She arrived at the spot below it and leaped high, grabbed the branch, and swung herself up. She climbed swiftly, despite the small, spiny branches cutting into her skin and blocking her way. When she finally reached the top of the tree, she allowed herself to stop, breathe, and study the forest below her.

The mechBear was not following her—not at the base of the tree, not in its branches. Sakima adjusted her position so she could look deeper into the forest. There she saw it, not far from her. It lay on its side, nearly dead, its chest moving up and down in shuddering, shallow breaths. In its enormous paw was Sakima's quiver, its claws deeply embedded in it. She hadn't felt it being ripped off her back as the adrenaline had carried her toward and into the tree's welcoming arms.

She waited to be sure the mechBear would not get up again and then lowered herself to the ground. Then, with cautious steps, she made her way to the bear. She hesitated. The creature's breathing was loud and labored. Blood oozed out of multiple wounds. As she stood above the beast, Sakima realized that the creature was not an adult or a child. The fact that it was not full-sized had contributed to why it was dying on the forest floor instead of her.

Sakima said a quiet prayer thanking the Wematëgunis, the Wood Spirits. Kneeling, she slit the bear's throat.

CHAPTER 9

THE MECHBEAR WAS DEAD, its warm, damp smell slowly changing as she waited. Sakima took a deep, long breath in the quiet. Closing her eyes for a moment, she silently acknowledged the spirits of the universe for their generosity and protection. Sakima thanked the bear for giving up its life, feeling honored to be there with the creature in its final moments.

She opened her eyes with sudden alarm and gazed around her. There were scavengers everywhere, as were predators, in the ominous shadows of the forest, some just feet away. She could not allow herself to become lost in thought and prayer for too long—another creature could attack while she was vulnerable.

But Sakima knew—or wanted to believe—that she was a warrior, too skilled a tracker and hunter to be snuck up on like that. Sakima removed her second knife from its sheath on her belt and held it in front of her like a holy object. This blade was her prize, her pet. She sharpened it daily on a stone with two drops of mech-oil. First one side, then the other, and then the other. The blade could cut the rain from the air.

She adored her knife, “Chessi,” short for “chesimus,” meaning “brother.” This was how she thought of her blade: as her tough, trustworthy little brother, ready to strike at her enemies and defend her. Like a miniaturized Tommy, her actual older brother.

Hitami, whom she and all her family called “Tommy,” had been a true warrior before a treacherous squad of Mohawks betrayed and slaughtered him. Tommy was a glorious hero, and Sakima loved him with her entire heart and hated that he had passed on to the other land. She’d never known him; she was still inside her mother’s belly up to the very day of his murder. Her mother informed Sakima that Hitami had set aside this knife especially for her. He said that it should be presented to his brand new baby sister on her twelfth birthday. He wasn’t around to hand it to her himself. Her mother had given Sakima this special knife with a befitting ceremony at age twelve. Still, Tommy was gone, and she would never know him—not in this life.

Gone just like her Apatschin was gone forever. Sakima had prayed to the Tree Spirits, the Water Spirits, and the Spirits of the Wind. Not a one of them would bring him back or answer her prayers to see Pat’s smiling, handsome face, to know that he was all right in the Land of the Dead.

THOMAS MORE

She wiped a tear from her cheek and rubbed the wetness between her fingertips, lost in thought. She wanted to believe that she was stronger than this. Sakima took a deep breath that ended in a sigh. She desired to be strong, to fight, and to protect. Yet here she was, in tears.

What is so different in this, in my pursuit, in my dreams? How come the one thing that makes me happy makes everyone on this island miserable? Why must I be hated and scolded and ridiculed for being myself?

The loud cawing of a murder of crows flying overhead sucked Sakima out of her reverie and back into the now. She was surprised at first to see a knife in her hands and the dead mechBear below her, stretched ungracefully in the dirt and dry leaves on the ground. She stared at Chessi, contemplating her love for the small, sharp weapon.

The handle was carved from a mechBuck's horn and had been smoothed down from hours of being rubbed with oils, being held, and caressed. And from being, hurled through the air into a tree trunk until she could slice the leg off an ant and leave the rest of the insect unharmed. Embedded in the handle were shiny bits of oyster shells that were luminous in their shimmering beauty.

Sakima lifted the animal's back leg and took her time deciding where to cut first. She felt around near the groin, then up the stomach and back along the spine. She knew how to do this, and she'd done it before, but never with an animal bigger than a squirrel. Squirrels were easy; you could stab anywhere, then peel off the skin and fur. Squirrels had less fat and muscle than a rat.

Rats needed the extra muscle for the labor they did. Rat work consisted mostly of breaking into places where they didn't belong. Sakima thought of the silo where a single family of rats had destroyed a field's worth of corn. They broke in by biting, gnawing, poking, grabbing, pushing, and "rat punching." Sakima had seen a large brown rat do this once, battering its head against a barricade of solid stone. It then tore it apart after weakening the stone with its big teeth.

"Sakima!"

For the third time in less than an hour, Sakima's heart jumped, and because she was in an awkward crouching position, she almost fell backward. "Oh!" she said, cursing her inattentive ears. As she stood toward the familiar voice, she sheathed her beloved Chessi and shut her eyes.

CHAPTER 10

“S AKIMA. WE HAVE BEEN looking everywhere for you,” her father said. He crashed out of the underbrush with the grace of a malfunctioning mechBoar. “Your mother is very worried!”

Nimàt, Sakima’s younger brother by one year, followed next. He tripped on a tree root and flailed his arms to keep from falling. Sakima rolled her eyes without thinking and looked away from her brother, who was on the forest floor doing pushups. Right now, he was trying to cover the fact that he clumsily fell by pretending he intended to hit the ground and do a quick ten. It fooled no one, least of all Sakima. But nobody ever called Nimàt on it.

Sakima turned her face to her father and addressed him. Not with the full respect that he deserved, with his station as the Sachem—the Gegeyjumhet—and as both an Elder and her father.

“Why?” she asked. “What is bothering her this time?”

“Watch how you talk to me.” Her father stopped walking toward her and stood in the clearing, glaring at her. “And most certainly check how you speak about your Mother.”

“I’m sorry, Father, I—“

“Your Mother told me that you had gone running off to the forest.”

“I didn’t run—“

“She saw you heading for Tèkène, *alone*. She immediately summoned me and Nimmy to come find you and get you home safely. I had assumed you’d run into the woods to be alone and play out your warrior fantasies. I wanted to get to you before you got too deep into . . . “ His voice trailed off. It was only at this moment, remarkably, that he noticed the mechBear on the ground, all its lights gone dark.

“What’s *that* doing there?”

“Don’t worry, Father. It is terminated. Although I have to say it nearly clawed me to death before I was able to elude it and shut it down.”

“Well, I can see it is a terminated mech. What I mean is, how is it that the dead mechmàxkwi lies there in a patch of sun, flies buzzing around its wounds?”

“I killed it,” Sakima said, standing proud and smiling.

Takachsin stared at her disbelievingly.

“I destroyed its CPU and internal networking system. That is why the bioflies are there, released automatically upon termination. Proof!”

THOMAS MORE

“*You?* That’s the biggest bear I have ever seen,” her father said. He pondered the situation for a second. “Well, at least this close up.”

“*You? No way!*” echoed her brother, getting up from the ground and clapping dirt and pine needles off his palms. “Then again, maybe so. A big bear, taken down by a big pain in the ass!” He laughed out loud.

“Son,” Takachsin said, giving Nimàt the side-eye. “Give it a rest.”

“Yeah, këlulë! Screw you, man.” Sakima’s mouth was downturned, her eyebrows drawn together. But her love for her brother was in her eyes. “Had this mechBear been after *you*, Nimmy, you’d be as dead as it is now.”

Her father laughed. “I don’t question that,” he said. “Son, you have certain skills, but staying out of trouble is not one of them.”

“I’d have killed it. Sakima just got lucky. She said herself the thing nearly killed her, nearly clawed her to death. I’d have shut it down before any danger. She got lucky.”

“Not luck. *Skill*,” Sakima countered. “I only told you how close he got to show you how amazing my escape and my ultimate victory was. You would have cried like a baby, Nimàt.”

“Enough,” Takachsin said before Sakima’s brother could lift his jaw from where it had fallen. “We need to get this beast home. It is getting late, and we have to prepare to keep the mechWolves and mechCoyotes and the repliVultures from making your victory theirs.”

Sakima drew in her lips tight and frowned. *Here we go again*. She put her hands on her hips and breathed out hard through her nose.

“Hear me out, my daughter,” her father said. “I know you think you are a warrior. I know you practice shooting tech arrows and throwing your optiKnife—Kishelë knows why! But there is no such thing as a woman who fights. A woman against a man? That can’t be considered.”

Her father, Takachsin Tamanend, known affectionately within the tribe as “TeeTee,” stood with his arms akimbo and his chest pushed out. It was a posture of his that Sakima was quite familiar with. He rarely used it at home, and not with her—only occasionally with her mother. It was his “stance” when addressing the members of Sakima’s clan because TeeTee was their leader, their Sachem. Her father slowly shook his darkly tanned head back and forth.

“It is unfair to both the man and the woman,” Takachsin went on. “Because the man holds back and does not use his full killing powers. The woman will die a quick, embarrassing death. By dying, she brings shame to the male warrior . . . my Kishelë, listen to me, would you? It would bring shame to his people, his village, and his clan.”

When he had finished talking, he hung his head, as if mimicking the ridicule such an incident would inflict on him and his family. Behind him, his son, Nimàt, was distracted by a butterfly dancing past in an unpredictable flight path. Nimàt turned to watch it and before long he had wandered off into the woods to follow it.

“I killed it,” Sakima said in a sharp whisper, “so it would not kill me!” Tears filled her eyes, making her dark brown irises shine more than normal. She fought them back.

Her father squinted at her as if waking from a dream and slowly realizing what was happening. “I am glad you are not alive, Sakima. What I was trying to say . . . and I am not a man whose words flow freely when talking to his daughters . . . is that I wish you were not here, um, with the bear. I would prefer if you were home making fry bread with your mother. If you must have your strolls through the forest, I wish a real warrior, a great man like Machto, your brother-in-law, was here to have saved you!”

With that, Sakima let out an exasperated yelp and flung her hands to her sides.

“What?” her father said. “What did I say wrong?”

“You should know Machto as I do!” Sakima spat on the ground. “Please, leave me. I’m fine. Let me strip this bear. You can help carry the reusable components and bioMeats back home.”

“No, Sakima! I forbid it. I forbid this language you use. I will not allow you to keep talking in this way like you’re a man! You are a shiki skixkwe, a beautiful young woman. You ought to be gardening, harvesting, making food to eat. Not slaughtering mechBeasts. Not skinning and butchering and cleaning them. That is man’s work. Sakima. Listen to me: you must stop this. You have got to give up this tēpahtu, this stupid idea!”

Sakima stomped away, nearly growling. She shoved past her brother who had just returned, cradling the butterfly in the cage he made with his two cupped hands. When she bumped hard into him, his hands separated and the insect escaped, flitting into the upper boughs.

“Ah, Sakima. Look what you did!”

She didn’t answer him, she just kept moving, from a stomping exit march to a jog and finally to a full run. Through the bushes and trees, branches slapping her legs and arms and face. She didn’t care. She wanted to get as far away from them—from every man—as she possibly could.

She kept along the trail mostly, which she and her people used but which had been originally created by the bears and the deer. Sometimes she used shortcuts through the trees and bushes off the path.

Sakima’s thoughts drifted to her father. Why can’t he see me? she thought. He has known me forever, and he says he loves me, but he does not act like it. He treats me like a child, and I’m almost twenty. Well, in two and a half years, anyway. Sakima ran on, her steps slowing a bit after a while.

And Mother. I am tired of her always picking at me, of her never understanding me. I should run away from home. Yes, that is what I’ll do. I mean, I am a little old for the actual “running away” part, but I can go, pack up my stuff, and get out of here. Go to the other side of the world. Maybe some other clan will accept me. Maybe even the hated Mohawks? I do not care anymore.

Sakima took a deep breath to calm her nerves. She stood in a small clearing now. She heard birds singing in the trees while a pleasant breeze caressed her back. There was saltwater in the air. It was one of her favorite things: the sea. Clams and oysters and eating by the crashing waves. She missed that. Her family hadn’t been to see kitahikàn shohpe, the seaside, in years. Father was always too busy running the clan. Mother helped him with that, while also tending to the crops and taking care of the children. It had not been an easy time.

Sakima peered up at the bright blue sky. From up there somewhere had come the Star Walkers, the Alànēmëskat. They were referred to in the Lenape legends as the People Who Fell to Earth, arriving

THOMAS MORE

from the multiverse with their marvelous technologies, magical elements, and deep scientific knowledge. They changed everything on Mannahatta for the better, forever.

My ancestors of long ago lived in humble houses built from branches, Sakima thought and smiled. Wikëwams and longhouses. Our best technology consisted of stone arrowheads.

But the Alànëmëskat and Lenape cultures interconnected in their equal love of the Spirit World. The True People and the Star Walkers communicated with each other through Vision Quests. Thus, the two cultures shared visions of the future even, though they did not yet have a shared language.

CHAPTER 11

S AKIMA SQUATTED TO PICK up a stick and drew a crude outline of a tulpe in the dirt: a circle for the shell, as seen from above, and an oval for the head. Two small ovals represented each of the front legs, two larger ones for the back limbs. Then a narrow triangle for the tail. The turtle shape always calmed her. The solid shell meant home and safety; its slow pace meant confidence and deep reflection. Her family and her village were a part of the Tulpe Clan. She would rather have been of the Xinkwtēme Clan. While she had definite turtle-like qualities—bravery, loyalty, and stubbornness—Sakima knew she was more like the wolf: strong, fast, and deadly. A warrior.

Sakima stood up and breathed in again, deeply. She smelled the sweet scent of the jasmine flower and smiled. She opened her eyes and realized that she had no idea where on Mannahatta she was. With a slight tickle of panic, Sakima decided it didn't matter. She had her knife, her bow, and her arrows. This would be an adventure. She chose a tight, overgrown trail ahead and jogged toward it, confident she could handle anything.

Then, she was out of the forest, from shadows into light, standing on a spot she did not recognize. Sakima had crossed from the rough Tēkēne trail onto manicured grass on the flattest piece of ground she'd ever seen. No hills—not even a bump or two. The perfume of gardenia and rose blossoms filled the air. Everything appeared staged, perfect, and located “just so.” The grassy area where she now found herself stretched out further than many cornfields put side by side. The flat green carpet of it swept forward to end at a trail that was not sand or dirt but something black and smooth as glass. An enormous sign with white letters against a burgundy background squatted about fifteen feet away on the lawn. A garden of short-stalked flowers, including marigolds, surrounded the post. The writing on the sign formed these words in Lenape:

LĒPWEICHIK ÈLIKHATINK LENAPE

The Lenape Technology and Research Campus. Beneath this large lettering was a row of smaller letters that stated:

MANNAHATTA

THOMAS MORE

Sakima recognized this place with a smile. So, this was the “back way” in, then. Through the forest to a probably off-limits alternative for entering the campus. In other words, a security problem.

Her father worked here. He used to bring her with him sometimes when she was little, but she hadn't returned since over a decade ago. She remembered he had hoped she'd take an interest in research, experiments—or whatever it was they did here.

Why spend your life sitting indoors on a chair under fake lighting? Where's the excitement in that? Still, her father told her there were discoveries to be made—more thrilling than any battle a person could ever be in.

Many more buildings populated this site now than back when Sakima visited as a young girl. At the time, there had been only one building with two more in the early stages of construction. Today she counted eight. Probably even more hidden from her viewpoint. The campus was now at least three times the size that it had been when she was a child. Sakima allowed herself to be impressed with both the place and how it had grown. With her father for being a part of it.

But fond memories would be of no use to Sakima right now. She needed to figure out exactly where she was geographically. She returned to studying the trail. It wound its way to a massive structure that jutted up into the sky like a small mountain. Neat and symmetrical, built from glass and metal. Sakima peered over at the structure. It was like nothing else on Mannahatta or any of the buildings in her village. It was taller and wider and more serious.

Yes, that is it. This is one serious building.

It both imitated and honored the classic longhouse design of the ancestors, but recreated in steel, glass, and oak. Carved Lenape words on the front of the edifice, above the immense doors, stated:

WĪKĒWAM SHAWKEN OBROA

Sakima knew the first word, but she didn't recognize the last two words. They seemed like an attempt at spelling out foreign words in Lenape. The initial word was in Lenape. WĪkĒwam meant “house” or “building.” The sign said, “UNKNOWN-UNKNOWN” BUILDING, as far as she knew.

Sakima shrugged her shoulders, one eyebrow lifted. Whatever. I'm pretty sure it doesn't matter.

She continued to survey the area, taking in the symmetric and geometric hedges and the groomed trees all about. A few benches lined a secondary path that appeared to Sakima to follow the perimeter of the grass field all the way around. No trail she could distinguish led into or out of the forest, other than the overgrown and long-since-abandoned pathway she'd stumbled onto.

No, this is interesting. She'd heard stories about the history of the visitors from beyond the Lenape world. Strangers who had seemed friendly at first, like the Shĕwanahkòk—the pale people—had been. Things changed the more these people saw how beautiful, lush, and full of game and other treasures the lands of the Lenape held. She remembered one of the times her father had talked to her about the days when the change came.

Her father told her that, in the time of the peacekeeping, before the arrival of the Alànëmëskat—the Star Walkers, the People Who Fell From the Sky—were already in danger.

Idiocy and greed had become the two great pillars of almost all societies on Earth, he had said. People obtained what they wanted, no matter the cost to people, animals, vegetation, and to Mother Earth—Kahèsëna Hàki. No one cared about how they destroyed the planet for riches.

Soon, there'd be nowhere to build their fancy houses, her father had informed her. There'd be no place to shop, and no fine dining, should the world cease to exist in an unending state of destruction. Stupid did not care about consequences. Stupid just wanted to be rich and to party and have expensive things and show it all off.

When the Alànëmëskat, the Star Walkers, came, the Shëwanahkòk, the white people, disappeared. They took their guns, their greed, and their stupidity. Why? She recalled the look on his face, his eyebrows rising up with the question and then crashing down with the answer: Because they wanted our land, they wanted to take it from us one way or another.

When the Star Walkers, the People Who Fell From the Sky, brought their xinkwi tàmahikàn—their gigantic machines—they stopped all the madness. This ended the destruction of Kahèsëna Hàki, Mother Earth. Peace was restored for all the True People, the Lenape.

Sakima couldn't help but smile as she remembered her father's story. Was it true or just a myth? It almost didn't matter.

CHAPTER 12

S AKIMA'S FOCUS RETURNED TO what she saw from where she stood: the front of the building and part of one side. She had wisely ducked in among the shadows. She crouched behind a bush with its public-facing side trimmed to perfection, but its back, where Sakima now hid, grew as wild as the woods. Sakima kept still in the shaded area. She waited, gazed around her, and then with a start, she realized she wasn't alone. Someone else was cloaked in shadows about fifty yards away, up against the wall that faced the forest. *Machto*.

He crouched by the lone window on the lower back of the wall. Machto had an animal with him at his side, but the shrubs and vines between where she hid and where he crouched partially blocked Sakima's view. Anyone who might come strolling up the path would likely not notice the pair of them. Machto then took his knife out and worked it slowly along the bottom of the window sill and then up one side.

She wanted to move closer to the action. She spied a great place to hide much closer to where he worked: another big cluster of bushes and shadows. The problem was that she would be exposed if she were to run across the flat grass to reach it. So Sakima backed into the forest to try to approach Machto from that direction, under the cover of the forest. Sakima planned to reposition herself about six shaèk, or roughly twenty feet, from Machto. About half the distance that now separated them.

She glanced back at Machto, who had gotten down on a knee, pushing his knife like a wedge into the gap where the seal gripped the window. By the way he struggled, he seemed to be leveraging most of his upper body strength. Sakima couldn't see for sure, but if that *was* his knife, and it wasn't bending or breaking under the pressure, it could only mean one thing.

The blade was made of the same material as her knife, Chessi: mpoalonium, the gift of the Star Walkers. Next to him, still just beyond her sight line, the animal—a wolf pup? —sat motionless.

Sakima dove quietly back into the embrace of the woods. She didn't see a trail leading anywhere near her target destination, so she'd have to push through the thicket. It didn't appear to be too dense; it was mostly soft growth like the fiddleheads and fern below the low branches. A few blueberry bushes and other plants filled some gaps, vying for sunlight. If she could force her way through all of that, she'd arrive in time.

As she progressed into the brush, she noticed a small opening close to the ground. It led to a trail that would give her better mobility. The bandit-masked, bushy-tailed nahënëm with its tiny black mittens

probably created the path. Sakima crouched down on her hands and knees and moved through it. It soon became too low and narrow for her to continue in this way. She lowered herself flat and snaked along.

After a short while, an exhausted Sakima stopped for a minute to lay on her stomach on the coolness of the forest floor. She blinked a drop of sweat off her eyelashes. The subtle perfume of blueberry blossoms drifted in the air. A bright yellow and orange caterpillar at her eye level seemed to stare right in her face.

“Hello, sister,” Sakima whispered, smiling. “How are you today?”

The creature raised itself up on its many hind legs and continued to stare at Sakima. Then, assured that this young Lenape woman represented no danger, it lowered its body again and crawled along the small branch, then deeper into the bush.

Sakima inched forward herself, plucking a pill bug from the dirt on the path. She lowered her head until her left cheek nearly brushed the ground. She made slow, steady progress until finally, she took a quick peep out of the brush.

She pulled herself immediately back under cover. *You fool. Use your ears, not your eyes.*

Sakima had miscalculated, misdirecting herself. She hadn’t ended up a safe distance from Machto, which had been her plan. Instead, she found herself in the brush almost directly opposite him and beside a spot where someone had cut the fencing and bent it out of the way.

The sound of suction breaking with a *pop* caught Sakima’s attention.

“There! We’re in!” Machto whispered to himself, loud enough for Sakima to hear.

She dared to peek out between the rough branches of her hiding place. The yellow forsythia leaves grew thick there, providing her with excellent cover. She watched as Machto pulled the window from its casing and lowered it to the ground, laying it flat on the grass.

Then he lifted the little animal—maybe a pet wolf pup?—and lowered it through the window opening and onto the floor where she could no longer see it. There was something familiar about that pup, but Sakima couldn’t quite put her finger on it, and she was still too far away to see real details. Machto then lifted himself into the opening, legs straddling the gap, one foot outside and the other in.

Sakima sneezed. *Oh, maluwe. Darn it! All this dusty dirt by my face.* She shut her eyelids and made herself as still as she could, listening for footsteps coming her way. Thankfully, none did.

She opened her eyes. Machto remained straddling the window opening, staring in Sakima’s direction. She determined he was peering too far above her, though—thank Kishelë. Machto gazed for a while about the center of the bush, three feet above Sakima. Then his gaze drifted higher.

He’s looking for someone who’s standing or crouching here. Not some fool flat on the ground in a gap barely big enough for nature’s small thief, nahënëm.

Sakima watched him shrug. Then he disappeared through the opening.

Once Sakima was certain Machto wasn’t suddenly going to leap back out, she extracted herself from the bushes. She raced the short distance across the lawn, careful not to be seen. She waited for a second and listened. She heard no sounds of activity or talking or any such thing. With one last look around her, she climbed up, through the window and into the building.

THOMAS MORE

The strong and off-putting scents of different intensities of various cleaning solutions assaulted Sakima's nostrils. The disinfectant smell grew stronger as she reached the end of the short hallway she had landed in. Around the corner stood a mop bucket surrounded by orange cones. She looked up and down the hall before crossing it, continuing on her way. That's when she smelled the ammonia, NH₃. It wafted up from under the door of a room labeled LAB-12. Sakima had no idea what took place in LAB-12, but whatever it was, it needed a lot of ammonia to clean it up. Or perhaps the NH₃ was a byproduct of the experiments happening inside.

She hurried along the hall, trying to make as little noise as possible, then turned the corner into a wide-open space. It was gigantic space, bright white, with bluish lights around the entire circumference about six feet from the floor. The arena, whatever this might be, stretched farther up and across than any modern longhouse Sakima had ever seen. The ceiling was glowing, adding additional diffused ambient light.

In front of her was some kind of model, a full two stories high. Sakima estimated this cathedral space at about three times that height. The disk-shaped structure had lights of all around the outer edges. A few additional lights ran across the bottom. The disk itself tilted slightly and had windows at what Sakima took to be the forward face of the thing. From where she stood, she detected miniature seats and what might be control panels inside the craft. If that's what it was. It appeared to be a ship that traveled vertically, cutting through the air like a knife.

CHAPTER 13

THE LENAPE SCIENTISTS IN the room were the best in their field, the brightest minds in the entire tribe. Each of them had at least a master's degree and a Ph.D. One had two of each, and the oldest of the group had three Ph.Ds. They sat in the meeting room, while the talking whiteboard, the Nimbus Think & Draw 2000, guided them through their thought processes.

"Brainstorm session active: Problem 1171b-3," the whiteboard announced. "Please submit an alternative explanation for recent system breach."

"Well," said one scientist, "these cages are old. The technology hasn't been updated for half a millennium."

"But that's an argument *in favor* of them not deteriorating," a second expert said. "Their tech has worked perfectly for every one of those 500 years." She glanced at her watch nervously. According to her calculations, the breach shouldn't have occurred, but it had. She took a deep breath. If someone had broken into our systems, Kishelē forbid, then that would mean the end of everything. All that they had built and protected—the advanced technologies for conquering disease and exploring the Many Worlds—would be torn apart. "It's not a system malfunction, gentlemen," she said over the noise of the debate among the other scientists. "We have been hacked."

"That is patently absurd, Adrianna," a third scientist said.

"It's Dr. Cherryh," she said.

"Dr. Cordwainer, what do you think?" the man continued. He turned to face the other man while ignoring Dr. Cherryh's objection to his using her first name. "Hacking? Ridiculous."

"I agree. This is an impenetrable facility," said Dr. Cordwainer, smirking. "No one can get in who doesn't work here. Everyone has had a full security check. We update quarterly with new checks, searching for any compromised individuals. The network is completely isolated and impossible to hack. You'd have to be a brilliant programmer and a talented actor to carry it off. With an impeccable and unimpeachable background. Who would that person be? What Lenape would desire the destruction of his world? Absurd. These things, these monsters of our ancient legends, have no remorse. What drives them is an insatiable desire to kill. It's all they know."

"Regardless of the reasoning," Dr. Cherryh continued. "We need to face it, as impossible an option as it might appear to be. The only interpretation is that our systems have somehow been infiltrated."

“Nonsense!” The fourth scientist rose to his feet and slammed his fist on the table.

“No demonstrations of emotions, please,” the whiteboard stated firmly. “No physical threats or threatening gestures. Rule 19a, page 147 in the Meetings Handbook, version 12.4.9.”

“I apologize,” the scientist said, remaining standing. Then he gestured at Dr. Cherryh like a parent reprimanding a child. “But to suggest that a system which has functioned superbly in defending against all attackers and malicious code might have failed—after all these years, centuries—it’s insane!” He paused long enough to allow his brilliance to sink in. “Our benefactors were not stupid people, Adrianna. They designed the software, the hardware, and the security mechanisms to perform flawlessly because they are perfect.” He then sat back down with a triumphant sneer on his face.

Fervid whispering initiated among the team of scientists.

“Do we agree that we reject the validity of the premise that we were hacked?” the Think & Draw 2000 voiced. The machine drew a large X through the notes it had taken on system infiltration.

“Yes.”

“Absolutely.”

“Without question. Done. Over.”

“Këlulël! Dammit! Wait a minute.” This time Dr. Cherryh stood up. “I’m only asking you to keep an open mind. You’re scientists, right? So, let’s apply scientific methods here and not dismiss a theory before thorough analysis. Instead, we should try to disprove it.” She strode to the door. “Will you all join me in a walk to the incarceration area, Area 21?” She opened the door. “Let’s conduct a few more tests. You say there is no malicious code in our programs? Well, let me play devil’s advocate then. Regardless of how well-crafted the intrusion is, it’s not a matter of if we’ll find it, but when.”

General grumbling commenced. After a moment of this, the scientists reluctantly left their seats.

“Fine, fine,” Dr. Cordwainer said. “For the last time, however. We’ve spent enough thought and energy on this wild goose chase.”

“Wild geese are easily caught and killed,” Dr. Cherryh said. “I’ve never grokked that expression, frankly.”

The T&D 2000 announced, “System infiltration re-added to the discussion list for tomorrow morning’s meeting. I have sent materials to your notebooks. Please sign after you’ve reviewed it. Have a productive day!”

All notes and diagrams evaporated from the screen as the four scientists, led by Dr. Cherryh, marched out of the room and down the hall.

Sakima heard the footsteps. Machto? No. Because she could make out the melody of a woman talking and the quick, distinct tapping of her heels on the floor.

Sakima plastered herself against the wall. The surface was cold, but not uncomfortably so, and extremely smooth. She listened as the voices grew louder—one woman and at least two men. Panicking a bit, she surveyed the surrounding area. There were a few doors down the corridor to her right, lining the outer edge of the cathedral-like room. She rushed to the first and stopped in front of it, but it would not open, nor did the glowing panel to the left of it respond to her waving hand or her touch.

The voices were dangerously close now, and Sakima stood exposed. She scurried to the next door, and this time heard the *whoosh* she had hoped for as it glided open to accept her. She dashed inside the room, the door barely finishing whooshing closed again as the sounds of talking and footsteps arrived. She crouched down in a dark corner. Thank Kishelë she hadn't activated any lights or devices. She held her breath and waited.

The small group passed directly past the office where Sakima hid, without apparently taking any notice, and continued on their journey. Sakima stared at someone's lunchbox left on the table before her and a pencil on the floor as she waited for them to pass. Then a booming voice addressed her:

"Would you like to brainstorm? The Nimbus Think & Draw 2000 is ready whenever you are!"

"Who's there?" Sakima shouted, jumping to her feet, prepared for battle. Against what, she didn't know. She scanned the area hoping to figure out who was suddenly talking to her.

"Here, let me get you started!"

It was the whiteboard up front. An overly cheerful, somewhat feminine, and *loud* whiteboard.

"I'll draw a Venn diagram and you fill it in, okay?"

Sakima noticed the whiteboard on the wall in front of her glowed with a slight purple tint. On it, a large feather-shaped cursor skidded across the center of the board to draw a set of ovals in the shape of a Venn diagram. The labels on each of the circles pulsed, like the heartbeat of an animal. Waiting for Sakima to tell the Ntite Pikchëlhe—the Think & Draw 2000—what she wanted for each label.

Sakima's mouth turned sideways, and she let out a long breath of air to calm herself. *Just a talking wall. No menace, except for how loud the stupid thing is.*

"Maybe next time," Sakima said.

She inhaled and listened at the door to determine if anyone had heard the commotion—someone who might pose an actual threat to her. Once she was sure the people had gone down the hall and weren't coming back, she exhaled and reached for the door. The shiny metal exit quietly slid open. She hurried through and toward the immense arena ahead of her.

CHAPTER 14

S AKIMA STOOD IN AWE of the vast atrium space and all that was alien to her. While she knew her mission was to track down Machto and figure out what rotten thing he was up to, she couldn't help herself. She *had* to investigate these mysteries.

Sakima strode down five wide steps, taking her deeper into the room where she surveyed the place. Ten large windows covered opposite sides of the circular area. Sakima strolled up to the first one. It was a diorama of a strange being about Sakima's size. Next to this being stood two shorter ones, which she presumed were children. *What else could they be?*

The taller being, the "adult," looked Lenape, only with far fewer clothes on. Sakima studied the being's pinkish-purple skin, striated with cyan veins running up and down its body. The skin had a slight glow to it as well, in a much subtler shade of blue.

The being—and that's how Sakima considered it because she felt she couldn't call it a true person, not like a Lenape—stood about five feet tall. Sakima couldn't discern their gender because their clothes were nondescript.

A gray cloak covered the creature from shoulder to below the knees—or what Sakima assumed were knees. The material tightly followed the contours of the being's body, without clinging to it.

There were circles cut out of the cloth along the front of the frock. The initial circle was at chest level and about three inches across. The next was below it at about where a human stomach would be. These circles revealed hairless shimmering purplish sections of "skin."

Sakima stepped closer. The mouth of the alien being was closed, so she couldn't learn about its teeth or tongue or even if it had such things. Its nose was little more than a flap-covered hole. Its eyes, large and bulbous, had no eyelids. Sakima moved in closer still, to verify that her initial observations were correct. They were.

She noticed, due to her proximity to the being, that it had transparent inserts in its ear holes. These implants fit nicely into the ears while also covering them. They were roughly an inch larger than the openings, in a disk shape.

In its hand the being held transparent, flat, dish-shaped device. It gripped it by the base, which acted as a kind of handle. It used all of its nine fingers of that hand alone, including both thumbs, Sakima noted. The top of the device was a clear disk about seven inches across. She saw no buttons or switches or

triggers of any sort. Sakima understood somehow, without having to analyze it further, that this thing was a weapon.

Sakima next turned her gaze to the two children—as they seemed to be. They lay on the ground, seemingly asleep. Their eyes were missing, though. Upon further study, Sakima realized the eyes were still there, only the creatures' foreheads covered them. The foreheads appeared to have lowered over the eyes using a hinge mechanism, similar to the human jaw. They covered the children's eyes like lowering the lid of a chest to close it.

Sakima tilted her head slightly to study the scene more. She glanced away from the children to the full diorama. Trees that were comparable to those on Mannahatta filled the set—birch, elm, oak, pine, and spruce. The background was lit by a silvery light simulating the nocturnal glow of the moon. A small moon had been etched onto the back surface painted a deep blue and black with few stars. Below the sky, simulating distance, stood small trees. The forest reminded Sakima of the one she had so recently been sprinting through: Tèkène.

She shrugged and moved on to the next item of interest. As she wandered throughout the vast atrium area, she noted various items sitting on tables, a single piece per table.

The first that she came upon was a white cone. It sat in the middle of a glistening white table. Sakima examined it briefly before reaching up to touch it, at which point the white cone vibrated. She jumped back, and the cone went still. She raised her hand to it again, and again it shook. Sakima kept her hand raised to see what might happen. The vibration increased, faster and faster. Then the cone rose from the tabletop.

When it had risen to about twelve feet high, it made a slight clicking noise. Next, a laser beam from the apex of the cone cut a perfect circle around the enormous room. It swept in an up-and-down pattern as it headed in Sakima's direction.

Startled, Sakima lowered her arm and sprinted toward the hallway. Immediately after she had dropped her arm, the cone ceased firing its laser. It floated gently back down to the table, landing as silent as a spirit.

Oh. So that's how it works.

She peered about, listening hard, checking whether someone had picked up the noise and was perhaps coming to investigate. There was no commotion anywhere else, other than what she herself had caused.

Sakima glanced at the walls where the lasers had hit. She could see a continuous cut less than a sixteenth of an inch deep, if that, but that was all. *What are these walls made of, anyway?*

The laser had etched so exact a pattern into the wall it appeared as if the walls had been manufactured with the design already on it. There were no burn marks, no smoke, no residue. Only a nice, neat pattern.

Impressive. I can see how a thing like that might come in handy. If I could learn to control it, at any rate. I wonder if there is a hand motion to increase speed or intensity? Or perhaps make it shoot more than one laser beam at a time. Or maybe in many directions?

THOMAS MORE

Sakima proceeded to the next table. It was clear, and upon it sat a transparent pink disk. The disk had several holes cut into it. Sakima looked. *Where have I seen that pattern before?* Then she remembered: on the shirt of the bigger being in the diorama. The one she'd assumed was the mother or father of the smaller sleeping ones at its feet. It had an almost identical arrangement on its cloak. These matched the circles, large to small, that ran along the face of the disk.

Sakima held her hand up to the disk. Nothing. She waved. No response.

"Rise!" she said. It didn't rise. "Okay, fine, whatever." She snapped her fingers in a dismissive gesture.

She continued to the next table and its curiosity. As she did, she had a distinct feeling that someone was watching her. She swung around, hand grasping her knife handle. About an inch from her eyes, the clear disk with the three-hole pattern hovered in the air as if it were staring at her.

"What in the world? Oh . . ." Sakima grasped that the signal to start this weapon must have been her finger snap.

"Well, I'll be!" Sakima said under her breath. She snapped her fingers again, and the device silently floated back onto its pedestal.

Seems dangerous if these devices respond to anybody at all who waves their hand or randomly makes snapping noises. She wondered if it responded to just anyone. Or if there was something special about her. She hoped it reacted only to her. Not any old jerk. Especially not Machto.

Speaking of which, she needed to get back to hunting him down. He didn't break into here to have a nice walk around this museum.

Sakima's eye caught a mysterious object on the last display table. The other tables were round, column-like things. This was a black rectangle. The item on it wasn't white or transparent or bluish, as all the others were. It was burnished gold and brown. It was tube-shaped too, narrower on one end, and not a disk. It was almost like a *tëpinxkèpi*—an archer's cuff.

CHAPTER 15

S AKIMA LIFTED HER HAND up and waved it around in front of the device. It just sat there, exactly as she expected it to. Moving closer, she saw that there were three jewels embedded into the cuff. There was a green jewel closest to where the wrist would be when worn. The next up was blue, and the third was red.

Sakima reached over and picked it up. Nothing happened. No laser beams, no problems. She smiled and slipped it onto her left arm, delighted that the cuff fit her perfectly. She lifted it up closer to her face. On further inspection, she realized the jewels were not in a normal setting, as she had expected. Instead, each stone was in its own unique setting.

The emerald-like jewel sat in an opening the shape of a tulpe as seen from above. She could just make out the little head, feet, and tiny tail. The gem itself made up the shell. She understood why the green stone was in the tulpe-shaped setting. It made sense to her.

The middle stone, the blue one, was in a set in what seemed to be the paw print of the xinkwtëme. The blue of a wolf's eyes. *Pretty.*

The red, garnet-like jewel rested in the center of the three-toed foot of the wild tshikenum. It was only then that Sakima comprehended the meaning of the shapes. They corresponded to each of the clans of the Lenape people: Turtle, Wolf, Turkey.

Then all three gems took on a beautiful, light blue shimmer. She could no longer discern the individual hues. Only this new, mysterious glow. Sakima laughed.

Good thing I'm not standing too close to that laser cone, she thought. Who knows what strange action a shaky hand might make that device do? But then she grew serious again. How could all these foreign technologies have anything to do with her people, her heritage? Why would this unusual contraption have Lenape symbols on it?

Sakima drew a deep breath and studied this strange cuff perched on her arm. She hesitated, tilting her head slightly and squinting her eyes. Wait. A. Minute. The two things appeared to be identical—like they belonged together. *Perhaps it's my destiny to wear this curious new cuff.*

Sakima didn't know what to make of it all. She brought the new, alien cuff up toward her face again, to appreciate the glowing gems. She noticed they had just the slightest bit of interior glow. She'd never seen expensive jewels up close like this. She'd read that the best gems have that inner shine.

THOMAS MORE

She reached out to caress the green jade of the turtle. When she did so, the internal glow of the stone became very much external, as if it emitted a bright light. The light didn't travel anywhere; it stayed within the gem as if electricity ran through it. Sakima was not afraid, and she instinctively pressed down on the gemstone.

Then, a three-dimensional, transparent wireframe image appeared of the room she was in. She touched the gem again, intending to shut the map off. Instead, it increased in coverage. She could now see a schematic drawing of the entire first floor.

"Èchei!" She gazed through the map projection all around the room. Her eyes widened, and an enormous smile emerged on her face. "Wow . . . èchei!" Sakima said, exhaling.

She explored the area, using her new 3D, see-through map system. Before she could get very far, she heard the voices of those scientists once again. Sakima ducked behind a display cabinet in the middle of the gigantic room.

Seconds later, the group walked past the opening of the grand cathedral space. The woman did most of the talking. Sakima watched as the committee in their white coats passed. They spent some time before a massive steel door, chatting. Then it opened with a low grinding noise.

Must be incredibly heavy. No whoosh at all, just that scraping sound.

The group passed through, and the huge door ground shut again. After a safe pause, Sakima approached. The door was a thick, solid structure, with only a small square window at about eye height. The window was thick too, so dense that it slightly distorted the view of the inside area. It didn't seem like a window that you could break with a hammer.

Sakima bobbed side to side, hoping to force the door to let her in, but nothing happened. She held her hand up to the control mechanism on the left of the door. She tried her palm, her fingers, her thumb, and then she just waved frantically. Still nothing. She bent over and placed her face as close to the instrument as she could. She opened her eye as wide open as she could make it. No success.

Giving up, Sakima meandered around the immense space. As she did so, she saw that the yellow sphere in the 3D map moved with her. *That's me!*

She wandered absent-mindedly back to the massive metal door the scientists had just gone through. Then, four bright blue orbs appeared on the virtual map the cuff projected. It had to be the scientists on the opposite side of the gigantic door.

Sakima noticed a cluster of four in the center of the space. Then two more off in one corner. As she drew closer to the doors, she suddenly saw a large, dark gray blob off to one side. Not an orb, but very much blobbish. Almost as if it didn't have a defined border.

Sakima had no idea what that meant. Was it a plant, perhaps? Plants are life-forms and would not show up as human. But a gray splotch? It seemed more like an amorphous energy source.

As she came closer, a second gray blotch showed up on the map that hovered above her cuff. Then a third, then a fourth. She realized they were all lined up on the left wall of that research or lab space or whatever it was.

Sakima observed that the outsized gray spots stood equidistant from each other, as if they existed in separate, restricted spaces.

She turned slightly as she neared. Now four more blobs appeared on the right side of the 3D map. These matched the size of the first set, distributed across the opposite side. Two parallel rows of big blobs separated by. . . what?

The large globules floated around—not staying in one place, but not moving beyond a limited distance, as if they were being stopped by walls.

Why are these globs so big compared to the human ones? Represented on the map at about ten times the diameter of the little blue human dots. They moved back and forth like pendulums, but not in sync with one another. It indicated restlessness to Sakima.

Then, one of the globules traveled outside of what Sakima had assumed to be its prescribed perimeter. This dark gray globule advanced swiftly for the blue orbs, which appeared to rush to the front of the room, according to Sakima's 3D map. Sakima heard a commotion near her, then loud banging and the sound of the huge door being activated.

The scientists, she thought. They're right here. That was where they were running: to the massive door. She pondered that for a second or two. I must not have the map hovering correctly.

Then the horrible screaming began. Sakima stumbled back a couple of steps. She wanted to cover her ears, but she stood frozen in fear. Then she saw the blood oozing out from under the enormous door, then through the metal capillaries in the floor that were part of the door's opening-and-closing mechanisms.

The screaming grew louder and more horrifying. Sakima could almost feel their pain. She was momentarily shocked into inaction by the wave of grief she felt. Then she pulled herself together. This was what she had trained for. *I have to get in there and do something.*

"I don't care who you are, you maluwey, you damn gray blob. I'm coming after you!" Sakima shouted. Her jaw set, her right hand gripping the handle of her knife, she worked the door again. She tried her fingerprint, then her retina print. The sounds of suffering became increasingly unbearable. Still, the door refused to open.

Then it struck Sakima: her new arm cuff. *Could it . . . ?*

She tested the wolf button. No luck. Then the red turkey. No results. Sakima knew just what she needed to do, as if some mysterious supernatural force silently dictated it to her: Tulpe the turtle, strong like the door and Xinkwtëme the wolf, for taking action.

Sakima pressed both the turtle and wolf jewels at the same time. She heard a faint beep from the other side of the door, and then it opened. The system acted sluggishly, and the door only cleared a few feet wide where it then came to a stuttering stop. It bounced an inch or so as if something jammed in the tracks kept it from opening completely.

The bodies that had fallen against it. That's the problem. She pushed against the door with all her strength to assist it, and after significant effort on her part, the door opened entirely. When it did, it spilled mutilated bodies onto the slick floor before her.

THOMAS MORE

Sakima screamed, her hand flashing up to hide her mouth, eyes wide. She turned away from the sight and leaned over, breathing deeply.

Come on, Sakima. Warriors don't squeal when things turn weird or confusing or disgusting. Get it together, girl.

She pulled her favorite knife, Chessi, out of its sheath. She prepared to go after whatever monster or man had done this. She found nothing.

No adversary. No gray blobs.

Only four dead scientists lying on the floor in a large, sticky pool of darkening blood.

CHAPTER 16

S AKIMA SIDESTEPPED THE GHASTLY CORPSES without gazing at them any longer. Bypassing them was not difficult to do because the opening stretched as wide as ten ordinary doorways. She made her way cautiously into the space and then stopped cold.

First, she knew her initial impression of the place had been exactly right. The room she'd entered looked to be a research area. It was as massive as the museum-like space she had just left. What she hadn't expected to see were the giant enclosures that she assumed were some type of cages. Or perhaps even prison cells, based on their structure.

These spaces evenly lined both sides of the interior. Each cage was constructed of some sort of "living" glass panels, or whatever these immense boxes were. The glass made Sakima think of a living thing because it had veins. *Veins of . . . what? A solution of some kind? A liquid that glows?*

Sakima didn't know the answer to that. The effect was as if the panel rippled. It glowed with that pinkish-purplish tone. A hue she was beginning to understand as the color scheme of this whole place. She wished she could gaze straight through these panels and discover what was hidden behind them.

Sakima remembered her cuff and pushed only the tulpe button. The map popped up again and hovered over the cuff as before. The blue orbs near her no longer showed up. She realized that other black blobs lay beyond each murky panel, just on the other side, information from the cuff's 3D map told her so. Either these mysterious blobs were silent or asleep, or those glass-face enclosures were soundproof. Because Sakima neither heard nor saw anything.

Why can't I see any additional blue blobs—especially the ones representing the humans by the door ten feet behind me?

Oh. It senses only living things.

Sakima had that revelation, but she couldn't concentrate for long because the black spot materialized once again. That huge blob she'd witnessed while separated from it by the enormous door. Now another section had appeared on the hovering map as Sakima moved along.

That's where the blobby thing has gone to. Sakima jogged to the far end of the area, her senses on high alert. She came to a sudden stop.

The cage or cell where she now stood was empty, and shattered glass was everywhere. Sakima studied the outline of the enclosure. It was roughly twelve feet by twenty by twenty—or using shaëks, four by

THOMAS MORE

five by five. Liquid filled the bottom of the space held in place by a short wall maybe three feet high. The floor all around her, she now noticed, was damp. Some kind of solution had passed over it recently and drained out somewhere.

Sakima peered up at the signage she had just noticed for the first time. The big sign read:

DANGEROUS CREATURES

Beneath that, in smaller letters:

NOT LEGENDS, BUT REAL

Beneath that, in even smaller letters:

DO NOT FEED

A smaller brass placard, just to the right of the demolished cage, contained a single word:

YAKWAHE

They're real. The terrible monster she'd heard of only in stories. She shuddered at the possibility of the humongous, hairless man-eater of nightmares being real. She tried to absorb this shocking new information, but she couldn't take the time to ponder it because she had urgent things to attend to.

A loud, monstrous shriek filled the room like a siren going off. Sakima fell hard against a murky, opaque window and covered her ears. She tried not to yell from the pain the horrible sound caused her. She squeezed her eyes tight. When she opened them, she couldn't repress her reflex to scream any longer.

Staring at her were the blood-shot, bright green eyes of—what? Each orb was twice the size of Sakima's head. They stared at her with menace, looking right into her soul. Whatever face held these eyes, she could not say, as the milky of the window had only cleared where the creature's eyes seemed to hover.

My Kishelë! What barbaric experiments do they do to innocent creatures in here? Turning them into these abominations.

Sakima grew angry at the injustices she perceived the scientists to have inflicted in this room. She noticed, however, that the monster's piercing scream had created a tiny crack in the cage's glass wall. As she examined the break, the panel suddenly vibrated furiously. The brute was trying to use the initial crack and make it bigger, attempting to escape its high-tech prison.

With horror, she realized, *It's trying to get to me.*

Sakima knew enough about cracks in glass to know they only become larger. This one did just that, the original break now tracing a deeper, longer fissure. It cracked along from the thing's head down to the middle of the plate, like a break in thin ice.

Sakima stumbled backward, bumping into the tables crammed with lab equipment behind her. She couldn't make herself look away to see what other damage she might have made. She swallowed rapidly and clapped her hand over her mouth as the glass warped and the ungodly thing bellowed.

Then something remarkable happened. The rippling, multicolored veins in the glass, or whatever they were, increased their vibrations and grew thicker—like white blood cells on the attack. New smaller veins swarmed around the fissure, and right before her eyes, the crack healed. In a minute, the panel was back in perfect condition, despite the fiend banging its head into it, again and again. Sakima stood up straight. That was how they kept mythological monsters trapped! The glassy cages they were in were laced with nanobots and nanoparticles.

Many things on Mannahatta were produced with nanotechnology embedded. These were different—they were defensive and built to protect against the escape of the imprisoned behemoths.

Only one thing mattered: the constant flow of electricity through the walls of these cages to keep the nanoparticles active. So, Sakima realized, that's what Machto did. He shut down the power to a cage. Setting the monster free to inflict horrible murder upon the world.

Since the Split almost five hundred years ago, the Lenape had created nanobots, mechBiology, and hovercraft technology. All of these were the direct result of the inherent abilities of mpoalonium, or "Mp." Mp was a magical, "supernatural" substance—or at least that's how it seemed. The prefix "mpoa" meant "power from the Spirits."

The visitors from space, the Alànëmëskat, had presented the element to the Lenape during the Big Event in the Sky. The Xinkwi lè Mushhakunk. An incident that took place during the Lenape Year of 10,609 which corresponded to the Land Below Year of 1609 A.D.

Sakima, with her jaw set and her fists in tight balls, forced herself to race back through the giant room. She tried to ignore the other monstrosities now, who beat their heads against the walls of their prison cells as she ran past them. The thumping damaged the glass with fine hairline cracks. The nanobots responded immediately, sounding like swarming bees as they performed their repairs. The surreal landscape made even more horrific by the mound of lifeless bodies at the opening of the space, toward which she sprinted full speed.

CHAPTER 17

OUTSIDE, SAKIMA SLOWLY CAME to a stop, breathing heavily. She had panicked and she knew it. This was not how warriors behaved, and it was completely unacceptable. Embarrassed, she moved stealthily across the trimmed grass back behind the large holly hedges and tried to pull herself together. As she collected herself, she peered through the gaps in the leaves and branches and spied a tall man in formal attire, striding purposefully out of the building she'd just fled from.

Sakima couldn't quite discern who it was. Then when he passed almost directly in front of her and dangerously close, she recognized him. It was Elder Manunsko. He glanced back and forth in a nervous manner. Then he abruptly turned before quickly disappearing into the shadows.

Interesting. What that was all about? And why was Elder Manunsko acting so strange? She shrugged and returned her attention back to the entrance doors but saw no one else leaving or entering. It was strangely quiet, as if everyone had taken the day off.

Sakima raised herself to her full height and left her hiding place. She headed cautiously toward the building's entrance. As she approached, she noticed something odd: the walls of the big building seemed to be coated in reflective technology. She could see the sky behind her and the clouds moving slowly in the sky. A hawk swooped smoothly from a high branch to a lower one in another maple tree across the path.

She strode up to the wide front doors, which still reflected the entire landscape behind her. Oddly, not her own likeness. It was as if the technology deleted humans, or perhaps all living creatures, from the reflected image. Sakima felt like a ghost, a spirit drifting across space and time, unseen by human eyes. A visitor from the Land of the Dead. Then the background vanished, and only her reflection could be seen on the building's wall surface. Once again, a flash, and she was gone, and so were the trees. Only the sky and clouds reflected there—nothing else. Sakima had a sudden epiphany as she realized the implications. Machto, in breaking in to the site, must have short-circuited the building's cloaking technologies. It was working, but not exactly as designed.

She shrugged it off and concentrated on the problem at hand: the monster or monsters roaming free in the building in front of her. A few feet from the entrance, Sakima strategized how to get in, or more likely, how to break in. Right then, her cuff beeped. Then, as if an invisible doorman were present

to guide her into the building, the doors slid wide open for her. Sakima stalled for a second or two, suspecting that it was a trap.

Realizing her cuff had been nice enough to open the door for her, she glanced down at it and smiled. Then she stepped into the building as the doors behind her remained open. Once she'd passed through the second set of doors, these stayed ajar too. Sakima didn't have time to concern herself with the peculiarities of the electronic doors as she found herself once again in familiar territory (although she wished it wasn't, wished she'd never been here). Less than five shafts in front of her: the museum again, or whatever it was. Where she had inadvertently activated those strange weapons. She proceeded to that area but then paused, reminiscing on all that had occurred there mere minutes ago.

Sakima continued toward the laboratory. She noted as she approached that the gruesome pile of dead bodies had already been removed and that the enormous doors were in the open position. She assumed that a robotic cleaning system had kicked in. *So much for forensics and crime scene investigation*, she thought. Senses alerted, Sakima crouched a bit before sneaking further into the massive laboratory/monster prison.

Farther on, she passed that empty pen, its glass front wall still lowered down. Sakima pondered how someone, or some automated system, had moved the bodies elsewhere, yet this cage hadn't yet been re-locked. *Perhaps it got damaged*, she thought, *and couldn't be reset without repairing the mechanisms or the software, which might require human intervention, or at least a combined human-nanobot repair effort.*

Sakima heard a sudden scream—muffled and in the distance. It startled her so much that she dropped her knife to the ground where it clanged noisily and slid a foot away from her. While maintaining her gaze straight ahead, she squatted, felt around for her Chessi, and picked it up. She stood upright, her focus never leaving the area of the lab where the screaming had come from.

Clenching Chessi, Sakima took a cautious step forward and then another until she was at the back of the "prison" section, next to the enclosure where that horrible creature's gigantic eyeballs had glowered at her with inconceivable hatred. Sakima picked up the faint cry again, almost like the call of a frightened baby bird.

She knew that a close-fought battle with her wielding the knife could very well be too little too late. So she returned her cherished blade back to her belt and yanked the bow from her shoulder instead. She would need the protection of distance. She pulled two arrows from her quiver, then snapped the first onto the bowstring, pulling the string back to half-tension. The other she held in her shooting hand, dangling there but ready to reload and shoot.

She crept further down the hall, moving with care. She could see up ahead that she had a blind corner to turn through. Not good. Anything could be there. She might stare into the eyes of death, the red-rimmed glower of some hideous monster, the mesmerizing glare of an evil spirit eager to rip her apart.

Sakima inched on, her back to the wall, her bow taut and fixed to shoot. She drew a deep breath and held it for a moment, listening to the silence while preparing for the worst. Please Sakima, she told herself, be ready, and be strong. Don't look away. She swept around the corner, moving fast and with

THOMAS MORE

deadly purpose, prepared to release her arrow without hesitation. Instead, she froze. What forced her to stop also made her skin crawl.

The face of a demon. Through the gauzy haze caused by the destruction of the equipment, its eyes emerged. Then its nose, its mouth, and finally the creature's entire sickening face. Because neither fur nor skin covered that hideous surface. The muscle, gristle, and here and there, the bare bone of its skull fully visible. In a few patchy spots, she could see where the skin still clung, and sometimes, there was thick, black fur stuck to that skin.

Staring in disbelief, she watched the glowing eyes withdraw again into the mist. They rose to ten feet high, then twenty. Then, incredibly, it was almost thirty feet above her in this cavernous room that must have been four stories high. Even then, she got the feeling that the beast was still not fully upright, hunched over in the dark space. Then the nauseating face reemerged from foggy obscurity, and Sakima suddenly realized exactly what she was seeing: a thing of nightmares. It was a devil straight out of Lenape myth.

It was the mythological creature—or at least until this second, so she thought—the man-eating giant, the hairless bear that tore men limb from limb and ate their hearts. Lenape eaten by this demon would never see their family again—in this life or any life. This horror she'd only learned about in legends—stories meant to teach the young how to behave right, to stay on the good side of things. The Lenape “bogeyman.”

It was Yakwahe: the furless bear monster, standing there on its hind legs as if ready to consume her soul.

Sakima stumbled backward, crashing into the shiny metal tables lining the hallway. She couldn't look away, unable to catch her breath.

“Hi, Sakima!” a tiny voice called out. It was Tangetta, waving cheerfully to her big sister. Tangetta skipped happily toward Sakima.

Tangetta! How? No!

Sakima could hardly speak her sister's name. “Tan . . . Tangetta . . . ” she gulped, concentrated, and suppressed her horror. “Come here to me, nice and slow, okay, Tangerine?”

At that moment, there was a deafening shriek, so loud that Sakima grimaced at the pain it caused her ears. She did not look away. She did not close her eyes.

A gigantic shape passed from right to left, arcing between herself and Tangetta. Sakima heard, even above the horrible noises everywhere, her sister's tiny squeal, calling to her as the massive paw swept her away:

“Sakima!”

Then, nothing. No noise, no monster. No Tangetta.

She'd been taken by that thing that had escaped the inescapable. The cage the engineers no doubt designed to work flawlessly forever. Thanks to Machto, the pen had been compromised, allowing the abomination to escape—the horror that now held Tangetta's life in its gigantic, furless paw.

Sakima gritted her teeth and took a deep breath. She then pulled the bow taught again, to the farthest position her strength would allow. *I will not be a witness to this tragedy. I won't let it happen.*

She set off, sprinting in the direction where the creature had run away, from which they may never return.

CHAPTER 18

SAKIMA SPUNTED AROUND THE CORNER into a short hallway and then into yet another enormous space, with tall clear windows lining every wall, climbing to over twenty feet high, halfway to the ceiling. The ceiling was glass too. It felt almost as if she'd stepped outside again. Sakima instinctively recognized the area in which she found herself. This was where they developed new species. Each room held a different set of material and equipment, another potential new bioMech creature, part of a unique, lab-made species.

She recalled what she'd learned about the lab in school. She remembered that the process for each animal began the same. First, they would create an alloy skeletal system. Lab-made muscle and sinew were then grown over the metal frame using living organisms and nanobots. Next came the mechanical biosystems for digestion, blood flow, and so on.

Part metal and part living biology, these manufactured machines appeared to the average Lenape as nearly identical to their original source models—the deer, bear, and coyote. However, the mechBeasts possessed visual clues that were easy for the trained eye to pick up on, such as an unusual glint to the eye or a strange but subtle glow right beneath the fur. This allowed you to quickly identify these features as not fully biological animals. At close range, a metallic whirring and clicking would also provide a strong hint.

MechBeasts leveraged a highly sophisticated AI-OS (artificially intelligent operating systems) to maintain all standard functions. AI also controlled reflexes and reactions and responses to stimuli using the five familiar senses of sight, smell, hearing, touch, and taste. Heart and nervous systems were automatic and mpoalonium-powered; they could potentially last forever.

However, and against all odds and initial designs, these machines became able to reproduce. It took decades before the BEPs—birth end products or babies—would survive. Those that did live failed after only a few weeks, as they had significant defects. But that was a hundred years ago.

Now, BEPs were as perfect as any in nature. BioMech machines made new bioMech babies. Even the predators created offspring.

BioMech creatures such as mechLions and mechBears had additional bio-mechanical features such as laser tracking eyes and super strength. The only way to kill these predators or any of the other

artificial life-forms, was with specially designed weapons. These included some of the arrows that Sakima carried—purpose-built weapons that could initiate a permanent OS shut down.

The meat of these laboratory-created animals was completely edible. That was a large part of the reason they had been built. Their fur was as usable as that of any natural animal. All hardware, plastic, specialized materials, and liquids were all reusable. Thus, a brand new mechBeast could be built from the remains of a fallen bioMachine. High school students studied these “animals” in mechBiology class. Sakima gritted her teeth as she remembered dissecting the small animals as she stopped in front of yet another massive door, this one nearly as enormous as that at the front of this research area. *Same access procedure, I bet.*

She understood just what to do and pressed the tulpe and xinkwtëme jewels simultaneously. Behind the thick wall, mechanical gears ground together as pulleys and weights groaned. The large door scraped open with a noise like pushing a massive block of granite across cement. Ten seconds later, Sakima strode into another enormous room. This area was entirely different.

Banks of terminals and controls lined both sides of the sparkling clean space. There was a surprising amount of noise from them, buzzing and beeping. Not loud, but constant. She moved forward and stopped again. She stood in awe of a gigantic device deep at the back of the room. She stepped toward it as if in a trance, as if she were being guided to approach it.

Sakima stopped a few shaëks away from edifice, dwarfed by it. The structure of it was shaped in a half-dome, with the apex more than thirty feet from the floor. Although it was obviously high tech and composed of the latest materials, it also had components created from carved wood. All around the face of the arch, Lenape symbols shimmered on both the metal and wooden parts. They gleamed with such subtly, Sakima could barely make them out. If she took only two or three steps back, the pictographs would seem to disappear altogether.

Sakima had never seen artistry and technology merged in this way before. It was beautiful and reminded Sakima of a holy place of communion with the Spirit World.

Like the sweat lodges she'd secretly observed, women were never allowed in these special places; they were for men only. Sakima had been in quite a few such locations without getting caught. She'd even completed a Vision Quest of her own, with no help from the tribe. She'd discovered so much but could not tell anyone what she'd learned. She'd say nothing about the Spirit Animal that visited her: xinkwtëme, the wolf.

Sweat lodges had a similar hybrid of natural and manmade substances. They were comparable in application to the oak, maple, titanium, and mpoalonium integrated here in this gigantic archway. The arch before her towered much bigger, more impressive, and more stunning than anything Sakima had ever witnessed. Sakima studied the markings on the surface of the archway, above what looked like an altar. It certainly resembled a sacred place. She recognized these symbols well, and their meanings. They were warnings, and they were meant to be taken seriously. Across the top of the arch was etched:

SKONTAY CHÏPILËSU

THOMAS MORE

Its meaning could be interpreted as either “the dangerous doorway” or the “exciting passageway.” In common terms, it meant “the portal.”

Had the monster that killed those poor scientists been anywhere in this room, Sakima would be dead because she hadn’t paid attention to anything but this ornate, enormous archway. She stood transfixed by the sight of the gateway, now that she understood what it was. She’d heard of this portal, but she had never believed that such a contraption could exist. Yet here it stood in front of her.

Steam and mist poured out from the black space in the middle of the portal. That phenomenon made little sense to Sakima, but then she didn’t understand the workings of the device. They rarely taught or even discussed interdimensional travel in school, aside from a brief history of the gate. The lesson to remember forever was that no one should use the portal because it was dangerous, with no guarantee of returning from wherever it might take you.

Yet here Sakima stood facing the mysterious portal, pondering if a man and monster had recently activated it, that they might have forced her kid sister to travel through it with them. *How could Machto lure the mythological monster into the Skontay Chìpilësu, the portal?* she wondered. *Why did he beam himself down with it, across the multiverse, if that was, in fact, what he did? How could he possibly believe that he could control it? What the hell did he think he was doing? The tèpahtu—stupid jerk.*

Sakima shook her head, both in disbelief at Machto’s stupidity, but also to snap herself out of her trance. It was time for action.

A bug in the system listed Machto’s destination as the Land Below, a mythical place in a parallel universe. The people there were called “primitive” because of their dependence on fossil fuels and disrespect for Kahèsëna Hàki, Mother Earth.

Where had Machto gone? Would she ever locate him and bring him back? More importantly, would she ever be able to find and rescue Tangetta?

CHAPTER 19

THE DIALS, DIAGRAMS, AND monitors in front of her overflowed with information, but it told her nothing. Some were labeled using Lenape symbols, some with technological words she could barely pronounce, and others with numbers. Sakima stood there, ready to go, bracing herself, with no idea how to begin.

Then, when she snapped out of her reverie, she glanced to her right. There she noticed that a series of electronic readouts were furiously blinking on a variety of pënael'ntàmahikàn screens. The wall was filled with flat LCDs. She strode over to the wall, her head turned slightly away, as if she feared the entire thing was dangerous. It might very well be, given how things had gone so far this day.

She read the displays: more warnings, but also something else. A screen that said:

DESTINATION STATUS:
SET

And another that displayed:

TRANSPORTATION STATUS:
ACTIVATED

On a third screen, she read:

DESTINATION TARGET:
MËNATINK OHËLËMI

Mënatink Ohëlämi—*the Land Below*. The mythical land her ancestors referred to as “Manhattan” in some of her textbooks. Somehow, the two versions of Mannahatta had split apart with the arrival of the People Who Fell to Earth, the Alànwènik. This event caused the Dutch, the English, and other European settlers to abandon the lands of the Lenape. At least that was how the legend was told and passed down to each new generation.

THOMAS MORE

But this was only a myth and nothing but, and Sakima knew it. There was no such place as the “Land Below.” How could there be? But it was fun to grow up hearing tales of this imaginary place and how different it was from her land.

Anyway. There is only one real Mannahatta in the entire universe. Mine.

Then, the transport screen flashed briefly and then new messages displayed:

ENTITIES IN TRANSIT:

LIFEFORM: ONE ADULT. HUMAN

LIFEFORM: ONE CHILD. HUMAN

LIFEFORM: ONE UNKNOWN

Sakima took a step backward in horror. Lenape Law forbid the use of these transports without authorization, a decree enforceable by death, or so she had been taught. Sakima’s eyebrows rose. Yes, Machto had done the unthinkable.

Worse, he’d transported a fearsome monster with him to a place whose inhabitants, whoever they were and wherever they lived, would now certainly die. Thanks to Machto, that monstrosity was speeding toward the unsuspecting and unprepared people in some alternate world, invaded by a dreadful aberration that had escaped its cage—or more likely, been freed by Machto.

She noticed just then that her cuff gave off a slight turquoise glow. She reached over and pressed the tulpe button again. The turtle icon seemed to have something to do with travel: slow and with a house on its back, but still...

However, this time, not even a map appeared. Nothing at all to assist her. The other gems, the fierce noble xinkwtëme and the wild bird, tschikenum, struck Sakima as not having much to do with any of it. The black matter, the enchanted matter, the wormholes, the multiverse. The Many Worlds.

With a shrug, she pressed the wolf button next. Nothing happened. At least not that she could tell. No sound, no light displays, and no vibration from the cuff. Yet something was happening on the panels in front of her.

Lights blazed on at various places on the wall. Connections beeped. Gears revolved. Small monitors woke up to reveal strange graphs showing interwoven spinning ellipses connected by lines of triangulation.

Waveforms slithered across a larger monitor above her head. Sakima gazed about her. It struck her that the Skontay Chipilësu took more than one person to operate it. Probably a team of what? She counted the workstations surrounding the portal—at least a dozen.

She scanned the room as a multitude of electronic devices and instruments came to life. As she stared in awe, the portal gate rotated. Two halves—metal and wood—spinning opposite to each other. Slowly at first, and silently, but then gradually faster and louder, to such a degree that Sakima had to cover her ears. Then, as the circling portal arches had a hypnotic effect on her, she shut her eyes too.

Sakima closed her eyes and breathed deep. This was it. Her moment to prove herself. She could leave here and go back, assemble the warriors, and then they could deal with it, and she would remain here, safe. Or she could go herself, kill this vicious thing, and bring Machto back to Mannahatta. Dead or alive.

I have a mission now. One of life and death. I will not fail!

Sakima opened her eyes and stepped forward with intense determination. Now she understood why she had been brought here and what she needed to do: go through the portal and save Tangetta and the people of the Land Below. In doing so, she could make a name for herself at last.

Sakima didn't enter any codes, pull any levers, or trip any switches. She did not step through the portal gate. She did not walk up steps or pass a certain line on the ground. She just stood there as the Skontay Chipilësu operated at full velocity again, courtesy of the wolf button on her cuff that seemed instinctively to understand how to activate all systems.

With her eyes closed and ears covered, Sakima noticed the room quiver and then shake violently, as if she were caught in an indoor earthquake. The noise was deafening, and for one quick moment, Sakima feared she might pass out.

Then, it ceased. The screeching, metallic sounds of mighty winds, the topsy-turvy sensation of the floor. All peaceful again. As soon as it had begun, it returned to stillness.

Had the portal malfunctioned? Did her cuff only take a guess and didn't know with any certainty what it was doing?

Sakima sighed, sadder than she'd felt in a very long time. Her little sister was gone and almost certainly dead. The monster, Yakwahe, and the human monster, Machto, vanished to a world that was on the verge of destruction. She had the feeling that the entire universe collapsed on top of her, as if it were all falling apart everywhere.

Sakima was too disappointed and exhausted to be upset, to succumb to anything close to tears right now. Instead, she took a deep breath and tried to center herself. *I'll just try again. I'll get to Tangetta, somehow. I must do this.* She realized she still had her eyes squeezed tight, her palms suction-cupped against her ears.

She cautiously drew her hands away, only to hear some very unusual voices. None of them were speaking Lenape, or Munsee, or any Algonquin tongue. Instead, the cadence of a hurried, alien language caught her ear. She heard a word repeated here and there as she listened: "Yanqui." And another: "Metz." And still another: "Nix." Then she heard a sound that was unfamiliar to her, a strange tone, neither flute nor drum. Similar, though, to the honking of geese. Curious, Sakima opened her eyes and immediately snapped them shut again.

KEEP READING!

Thank you for reading this free preview of *City At My Feet, Mannahatta Series, Book 1*, by Thomas
More!

To find out what Sakima saw, what became of Yakwahe and Machto, and if Sakima's sister is
still alive in this page-turning heroic adventure...

... pre-order your ebook copy for just \$1.99, today, and finish reading on January 6th, 2023
when the book is released.

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0BHPM3J3R>