

Finding Badger

The Evolution of Doing Nothing

Holly LaMora



Canoga Park, California, U.S.A.

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Published by Jeanne D'Arce Press, Canoga Park, CA

Publishers Cataloging-In-Publication

LaMora, Holly.

Finding badger : the evolution of doing nothing / Holly LaMora. -- 1st U.S. ed. -- Canoga Park, Calif. : Jeanne D'Arce Press, c2011.

p. ; cm.

ISBN: 978-0-9831067-0-8

1. Social change--Fiction. 2. Environmental degradation--Fiction.
3. Choice (Psychology)--Fiction. 4. Social choice--Fiction.
5. Reincarnation--Fiction. 6. Science fiction. I. Title.

PS3612.A54743 F56 2011

813.6--dc22

1103

First U.S. Edition 2011

This book is dedicated to all the animals in my life, who have so joyously brightened my world, including Abigail, Bob, Augie, and Willy and Murdoch. May all beings in all worlds be so loved and cherished.

Author's Note

Dear Reader,

I originally conceived the idea for Finding Badger in a self-hypnosis class. From there, the book metamorphosed into the novel before you. It wasn't until well into the process that I realized, with insight from my mentors, that this book is metaphorical. At the end of the story, I have placed short explanations of some of the symbolism, for those who may be interested.

May this book open your eyes to your dreams, your heart and the possibilities in all of us.

Holly LaMora
January 5, 2011

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my parents, Loren and Lynne LaMora, for all their love and support. Thanks to Heather LaMora, Gus Bilderback, and all my friends for their encouragement, during the many years it took to bring about this story. Thanks to my first round readers, especially Cindi Garcia, Donna Robbins, and Judie Dunn. Their feedback was essential in crafting this novel. Thanks to my editor, DanaRae Pomeroy, for her invaluable insights, suggestions and corrections. Thanks to Jossette Browning and Jim Browning for generously sharing their afternoon and their expertise with me at the stables. Thanks also to Spencer, Sugar, Sammie and Callie Garcia and Terra, Willow, Munch and Stubby Kappmeyer for the many delightful antics that have been shared with me by their human caretakers.

Special thanks to Helen Kappmeyer, for patiently listening to my daily struggles in getting this novel from the ethereal regions onto the printed page.

Chapter 1

Hayes

A few streetlights burned at intervals along the dark, dingy street, but they didn't help much. Everything was shrouded in dust and mist. I looked around cautiously, checking for traps and large, aggressive rats.

"I'm telling you, Murphy, I got set up for this job. Do you think this is as light as it gets?" I asked my partner.

"I think so. The atmosphere looked thick enough to walk on, from the docking station. I don't want to know what kind of damage we're doing to our lungs, by breathing in this junk." He warily eyed doorways and alleys. "I didn't think it would be this bad."

My eyes were adjusting to the darkness but, if it never got any lighter, things could get dangerous quickly. It was as hard to discern the subtle differences between the shades of gray and black, as it was to tell the ash, dust and debris from the buildings they had once comprised. Everything blended together, as though a charcoal artist had smudged the edges of reality.

Nobody knew why the war had started. My mother attributed it to the typical historical squabble, among differing groups of people, over land or resources. I never understood that. It all belongs to the Universe or our Creator anyway. We're only stewards for the short time of this one life. Then we're reborn somewhere else and again think some piece of a planet belongs to us, to bicker over and defend from "trespassers." How silly is that? To stake your life on rocks, soil or sand you can't take anywhere, when there's a whole Galaxy out there, waiting to be explored? We're all just sojourners, wherever we land.

At one time, over twenty million people and several million animals had inhabited Epsilon. Now she was known as Planet X, because she'd been crossed off the list of habitable planets. No visitors or émigrés allowed.

It would have been kind to have relocated the children who remained, but too many people were afraid that whatever indoctrination had led to their parents destroying themselves was like a virus and could be transplanted to the other human-inhabited planets, which would

then fall, one after the other, until we had nowhere else to go. As a result, several million kids had emerged from the underground shelters to a ravaged world. The younger and weaker ones stayed in the cities, where they could get the subsistence food the Intergalactic Legislature supplied. The older ones roamed the rural areas, where no peace officers tried to keep them under control. When the food they could find dwindled, some migrated into the cities and preyed on the smaller animals, including the human ones.

The war had been over for five years and the legislature was still battling over what to do with the survivors, pariahs in a galaxy, terrified of even the slightest hint of sickness, whether it was caused by microbe or misguided thinking. No government or planet was willing to assimilate so many young ones from a place that had been so foolish as to use their resources to build up weapons and use those weapons to destroy all the ecosystems the colonizers had worked so hard to build, not to mention the paranoid foresight to have created bomb shelters for their children.

We were in one of the few small, semi-secure cities, which were still inhabited. It was one of several urban areas, in various stages of decay, surrounded by miles of broken terrain, tenuously held by older teenagers, who were nomadic barbarians. The peace officers on Planet X weren't peace officers, like Murphy and me. We spent most of our time helping those who had problems with their intergalactic interests. Planet X's peace officers were more enforcers, who tried to keep the marauders out and the unsupervised kids in the cities from rioting and looting and whatever else kids in a destroyed world did, for fun and survival.

As if it weren't enough that war had devastated the planet and left the vast majority of the children orphans, rats moved in and took over. Big, mean, vicious rats. The sometime companion animal Earth had unintentionally exported to her colonies had overrun Planet X. With no predators and virtually everything human-built laid to waste, their numbers grew exponentially. We weren't looking forward to running into them.

However, the most serious problem was the chronic food shortage. The rats fed on the people and the people fed on the rats and all of them were barely surviving. Earth had hemorrhaged up people into the stars and those who landed on Planet X had gone back to the Stone Age. I briefly pondered being forced to eat another being. The mere thought turned my stomach. I couldn't imagine being that hungry, but then I hadn't been on Planet X long.

"Your contact was a badger, Hayes?" Murphy asked.

I could barely glimpse the boyish mischievousness always present in his blue eyes. He'd been dispatched to assist me, when our supervisor found out I was headed to Planet X, and had joined me on Beta, while I was begging ship captains for a ride into the nether regions of the Galaxy. I'd been happy to see him. We partnered occasionally and I enjoyed his company.

"Yeah... what do you suppose it was like, riding a horse?"

"Riding a horse?"

"The badger said I'd been a bank robber in the Old West of the United States, in a former life. The person we're trying to find is being detained by my daughter, from my bank robber life. She's still angry with me for abandoning her four and a half centuries ago. I don't have enough problems in the present. Fate has decided I need to deal with complications from my past, too. My very distant past."

Reincarnation was something I took as a given, since both my parents were firm believers and, after hanging around with me for years, Murphy accepted the possibility. I still felt a slight shock, when discovering a friend or acquaintance thought he or she would only have this one life. It seemed sad, somehow. To only have the opportunity to play in this realm once, with one

toss of the dice to decide whether your circumstances were good or bad. Wasn't it more equitable to be a king one time and a peasant the next? To be male sometimes and female others? How else were you ever supposed to really understand why others did and believed differently than you did and were sure enough of their beliefs to die or even kill for them?

Murphy cleared his throat. We'd been taking turns doing that or coughing every few minutes. It was hard to breathe and the smell of rot and decay nauseated me.

"Did you get a dose of water from the Sea of Toxicity or something?" He teased.

I shuddered. He was referring to the largest body of water on Planet X. After she was set up and inhabited, her environment started deteriorating; nobody knew why. Eventually, her oceans were used as a dumping ground for toxic waste, biohazards and chemical refuse, all the stuff no one elsewhere wanted to handle.

"Don't worry," Murphy said, "Maybe there's a nice facility to watch over people who've been exposed."

"I heard they let them wander around, confused, until they starve to death."

He grimaced. "From the looks of this place, you're probably right. Another of the many atrocities committed in the name of humanity, I guess."

"Have you ever heard anything good about this planet?"

"Not since the war." He looked around and frowned. "I can't believe we still let other beings starve. This is how I pictured Earth looked, during The Second Dark Ages."

I tackled my mind, before it initiated a bout of self-flagellation. My family's contribution to ruining the Mother Planet had been worse than most. Ruination was a corrupted form of Ruining Nation, the country known as the United States of America at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Some of my family's Earth origins were from there, a secret we kept to ourselves. There was still a lot of animosity about it in various parts of the Galaxy. Nobody was happy we'd been thrown off Earth, but that was the result, when the climate changes, the oceans rising, the population upheavals and the government collapses so overwhelmed the existing systems that the United Nations' Peacekeeping Group, realigned to maintain global martial law, kept the survivors out of their neighbors' mass graves by forcibly removing people en masse to TLG and then on to Alpha and Beta. Then the scientists and farmers were able to get to work, adapting to the changed conditions on Earth and developing new methods and crops, to keep the remaining beings alive, no matter where in the Galaxy they lived. The Second Dark Ages wasn't confined to Europe, like the first one. It was world-wide. We lost so much: knowledge, science, healing techniques, history, literature, species after species and so many, many people.

"What's the badger want Rory for anyway?"

"I don't know. I had the idea Rory was being summoned and knows why, but the badger said Rory wouldn't leave Chancy Ryan. I figured we'd find Rory, explain things to Ryan and then be on our way. No problem. Who would stay here, if he or she didn't have to?"

I stopped and studied what used to be a street sign. It wasn't showing on the small crudely drawn map that I kept running my fingers over. The map was made of real paper, something galactic citizens rarely had the opportunity to hold, and I wanted to absorb it with all my senses, then maybe it would absorb me and I could leave the misery of Planet X behind.

The sky began to lighten a bit, as we continued walking along the dark, dank, depressing streets. It helped we were heading in the general direction of an area glowing in the distance. I glanced at the map for a second, to be sure we were still heading the way we were supposed to go. When I looked up, I saw the kid skulking in the doorway.

Murphy pointed his finger at him. "Don't try anything," he warned.

The kid scowled at Murphy, then faded away.

“I thought peace officers were sworn to be pleasant to the natives?” I said, after we were well past where the kid had been.

“Don’t be ridiculous. In this atmosphere I can barely tolerate you, and I don’t think you’re going to stab me in the back.”

I didn’t bother to answer. What a morbidly miserable place! I promised myself, if I survived Planet X, I’d never speak to another badger again, no matter how badly he or she needed help.