

GARY F. BENGIER

JOURNEY TO 2125

ONE CENTURY,
ONE FAMILY,
RISING TO CHALLENGES



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ONE FAMILY,
RISING TO CHALLENGES**

Gary F. Bengier

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*Of the many challenges ahead this century,
a few matter.*

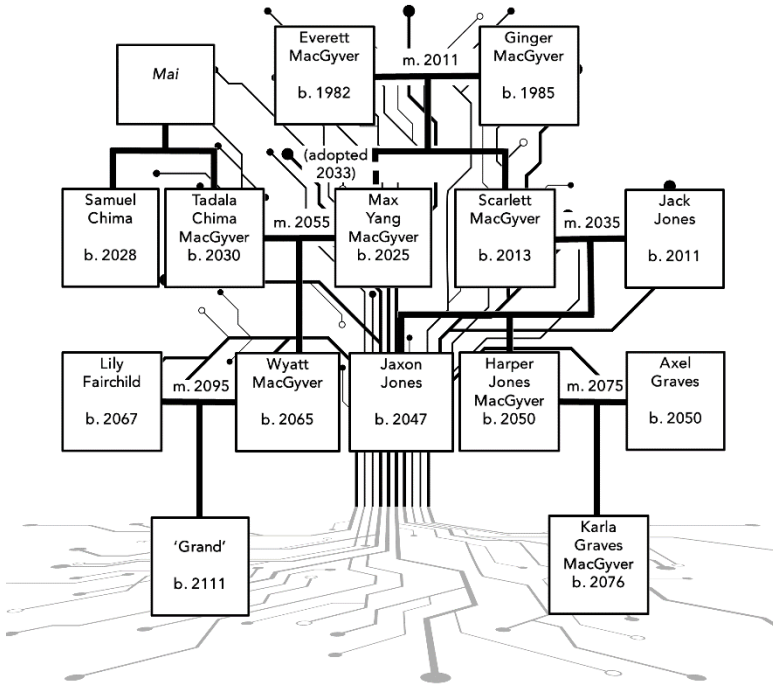
*Focus on and overcome those few,
and you, yours, and the world
will survive, and perhaps even thrive.*

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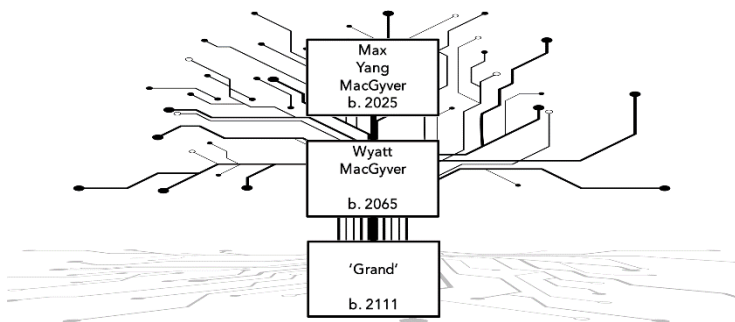
The ebook edition contains links to the [glossary](#) for the first appearance of many technologies (and complementary links to return to the previous spot in the novel). For the print version, please rely on the twentieth-century technique of flipping to the back pages.

MacGyver Family



1

MAX YANG MACGYVER—2033 (TAIWAN), PRESENT, 2125 (CALIFORNIA)



It begins with a splash, then rushing down the unknown river of life, each unique as Heraclitus said, around and through each oxbow and rapids, no doubt ending at an astonishing waterfall.

That visceral memory still wakes me after all these years—a recurring nightmare of bone-chilling cold water. Salt in my mouth and the burn in my eyes. The big man behind me pushes me up and I dog-paddle toward the white ship with the big red cross. People surround me in the water, crying, swimming. My life vest is too big, the straps loose, and the big man lifts me when a swell splashes over. I am tired, and my arms are heavy. I swallow seawater with each wave. Some people are sinking, and their heads disappear.

He hollers at me in Mandarin, his hard face close to mine. “Help me help you. Swim!”

We reach the ship, and he boosts me up to the thick, hanging rope net, and I grab hold and pull myself out of the

cold water. It's like the playground bars, and I climb to the top.

I sit shivering on the deck next to the big man as a nice woman in white dries me with a towel and wraps me with a blanket. He tousles my hair, then he looks at me, and tears come from his eyes. I can tell he is thinking of someone else. His muscled hand is not too rough, though I still flinch when he reaches out. I lose track of the big man, and when the ship fills with so many people from the water like me, I don't see him again until days later.

The nice woman points me to a doorway to descend into the ship, but I duck to the side and stay by the railing to watch everyone else come up the net. I'm short, and it is noisy and crowded, so I can hide by the rail. The tiny boat is now empty. It drifts away from the ship.

Before we all jumped off the boat to get to the ship, a jet had roared overhead. Everyone screamed, and many had prayed. But the ship was near, and people on its deck watched, and nothing bad happened.

Now the boat's sail flaps in the wind, and it bobs sideways as the ship's engines vibrate the deck, and our big ship turns away.

The fishing boat grows smaller behind us, and the jet returns. It flies low over the little boat. Fire shoots from the jet, there is a huge explosion, and the boat is gone. I watch the pile of drifting wood where it had been. The jet streaks away. My heart beats in my chest like a drum. The nice woman in the white dress is back, and she takes me inside the ship.

"How old were you when this happened?"

I am brought back to 2125. To my grandson. To my story. "I was eight when we were rescued by the Americans."

He sits at the table eating eggs and bacon. He has a full head of black hair, as much as I ever had, but his is curly. Do his cheekbones resemble mine? He has an oval face with an attractive chin like so many in our family. Sadly, I see few signs of his grandmother in him, except for a softness

around his mouth and fullness to his lips. His arms are tanned and muscular, more than I'd expect for a fourteen-year-old boy, like he spends time outdoors doing heavy labor.

"And the big man? Who was he?" His eyes are alive for the first time since he arrived near sunrise. Some of the trapped expression he wore then has disappeared. I'll tell him stories for a while and let him decide when to tell me his story.

"Someone who kismet placed on that fishing boat, and then swam for safety, like me. I know he was separated from his family because he was alone. I reminded him of someone close. I last saw him at the refugee center but never learned his name. Afterward, I never saw him again."

"He saved your life. If it weren't for him, I wouldn't be here." A shadow passes across his face. Good. My story has become personal to him.

"We make choices that affect other people, sometimes in profound ways. Sometimes they notice, but often they never know."

The [allbook](#) is on the end table. It feels solid. Books—such an old technology, and the antithesis of most of our tech, which now passes by voice and blinks through our [AIs](#). I call up an old 2D photo to help me remember.

"Momma Ginger must have snapped this one a few months later in Berkeley."

Grandson looks at it with interest. "You were a cute kid."

"Yes. It didn't hurt my chances." I had an angelic face, looking hopefully toward the camera in the photo, dark brown eyes framed by straight hair, pure unwrinkled skin. I sat on a playground swing. As if through a distant mirror, I see the boy separated from me by a century minus eight years.

"Is that an earliest mem'ry?"

"No. Of course, I remember my birth mother and father. I recall details of growing up in Keelung City outside Taipei. I was their only child. We'd go to the night market, with colorful stalls and people milling around and the smell of food.

Mama loved the crab soup. Baba—my dad—liked the stinky tofu.” Like a sprite floating in the air, the pungent aroma is in my nose.

“What were your parents like?”

“Baba was tall and a bit gruff. He was a research chemist and spent long hours at work. I have this memory, sitting in the kitchen, of him making me memorize the periodic table of elements, however unsuccessfully.”

Grandson snickers at this. Perhaps he relates as a young boy.

“Baba had a job with a global company and used English there, so we spoke both Mandarin and English at home. I’ve lost most of my Mandarin. Mama taught school, so she was home early every day. I remember her tucking me into bed.”

Her voice comes softly to me, singing the lullaby:

*Jīntiān wǒmen chéngzhǎng zài yángguāng xià,
Míngtiān wǒmen qù chuàngzào qī cǎi shìjiè.*

Today we grow under the sunlight,
Tomorrow we will create a colorful world.

There she is again, standing next to Baba, both dim ghosts, their faces not sharp like the allbook photo of me. I have no photos of them since I brought nothing with me, and everything was lost in the rubble.

Was the memory of Mama from that last morning when they sent me off to school? It could be, because she looks worried, as they were for weeks before the attack. Everyone held their breaths, waiting, but life went on as before. My class took a field trip to the museum downtown.

Recollection of the day comes back sharp, ahead of his questions, and my heart is beating hard again. We are walking back when the bombs start to fall. The noise hurts my ears. Everyone runs like a spooked herd of animals, and I am by myself and running. I see the ocean, and two fishermen pull people onto the boat at the pier.

He crunches on the bacon. His eyes are curious now. "How did you land in a boat alone?"

"The Chinese were bombing the town. I was afraid of the explosions and ran away from my school friends. I jumped on a fishing boat."

"That's terrifying." Grandson reaches for the photo again and studies it. "So young. Pa never told me this story. Besides getting wet and cold, it sounds like that experience didn't traumatize you too much. You were lucky to find the boat and lucky the American ship picked you up."

The rest of the story comes brutally to mind. The part when the big man saved me, shoving me off the boat and into the water. It's the same then as now, that in times of acute distress most worry first about survival; humanity and our fellow men are a distant abstraction. A very few big men and women don't forget everyone else.

The man puts an adult-sized life vest on me. There are not enough vests to go around. I paddle beside him, the life vest hanging loose.

"Too big for him anyway," yells the other man in the water as he tries to steal my vest.

My head goes under, my mouth full of salt water. I can't breathe. I'm drowning. Then my head is up, and there's air again. The big man hits the other man on the head and wrestles with him, both shouting. The smaller man fights desperately, pulling me under water when he pulls on the vest. More salt water.

The big man holds him down until he stops struggling. "It was never yours. It belongs to the kid," he says then to no one.

The smaller man's limp hand disappears under a wave. The big man tightens the vest straps on me and begins towing me away from the boat. Everyone else swimming pretends not to see anything.

"Yes, lucky."

"Pa told me I was part Chinese and part other things, read from my DNA. He and Ma never mentioned details."

“The details are missing because your mother leads a simple life without modern science. Your Pa followed her.”

My grandson pursues his and my roots. “What was your original family name?”

“My name was Max Yang. Max, because Western first names were already popular then. But I left Yang behind. At age eight, I became Max MacGyver. With no regrets.” It’s been my name for so long, and I’m proud of it. It’s who I made myself.

I look him in the eye now over my eggs and smile. “It’s good to see you. My only Grand. Do you mind if I call you that? It’s grand to have a grandson.”

His dark brown eyes stare back. “I’m not so sure what could be grand ‘bout me. But you can call me that. Though I’m proud to be called a MacGyver. Pa said to never be ashamed of your name.”

“That’s a fact.” However, he doesn’t know how some people resented that association. He’ll learn about that history in due time.

“Shall I call you Grandpa?”

“Let’s go with Grandfather. Then we’ll both be grand.” I prefer to leave that ‘Pa’ in the Piney Woods, or in whatever century that it belongs. I like the grand and proper. So one should live one’s life.

The robot comes from the kitchen with a tray of drinks. Robert’s oval head swivels toward Grand, the eyebrows raised in inquiry mode. “Coffee, tea, cappuccino, or salakororange juice, young sir?”

Grand seems confused, and I help him out. “Salakororange juice is from a bioengineered fruit, popular these days.”

“Salakororange juice, please. And a glass of water.”

Grand finishes breakfast before anything to drink arrives. He likely hasn’t eaten since before stepping on the train. Robert sets down Grand’s two drinks and then serves me my usual cappuccino. I begin to eat the eggs and toast on my plate. Robert moves to stand at attention near the wall. Grand tastes the juice. His eyes light up with surprise, and he sips again.

How sheltered is his life there, deep in the woods in East Texas? And why does he choose to leave now? “Did you come here to wish me a happy birthday? That was last month.”

“I heard that you turned one hundred, but no, that ain’t the reason. But happy birthday, Grandfather.”

I learned to fish a long time ago in Yosemite, and now I dangle a line to find what he is hungry for, and to put together what he knows. “So, why the sudden mysterious message? I didn’t know that you had my contact ID.”

“I’m pretty good at figurin’ out ‘lectronic stuff. I got it from Pa’s contacts.”

The robot’s lenses move back and forth between us. Robert is recording all this.

Grand cradles the juice glass and bites his lip. Was he going to tell me anything? I eat the eggs and wait.

“It was disheartenin’ living there. I had some ideas about how to make life a bit easier, but they wouldn’t listen. Not much patience with any new idea. I didn’t like everyone telling me what to do. Everyone was repeatin’ the same things that the Commune leadership said.”

“So you got fed up, and decided to leave?”

Grand’s face hardens. The trapped expression returns. “I couldn’t take it anymore.”

“Understandable. Well, glad to have you here.”

It has been too many years since Grand and his father, Wyatt, last visited. How did I allow that to happen in the family? The hurricane that pummeled the Commune kept them busy with cleanup. That was followed a year later by the fire, and further rebuilding. They weren’t encouraging visitors.

But the real reason was because Lily, Grand’s mother, wanted to forget the real world, to keep him a child, to shield him from the truth. Still, I should have pushed more to see him, and his appearance today makes for both joy and regret. “It seems you had no trouble traveling here.”

“I stole a com unit to message you first. Thanks for sending the money, pass, and train ticket. I put ‘em in the com

unit. A big robot stopped me at the Commune's south gate, but it let me by when I showed the pass. I got to the train station on foot, a good hike. I figured out how to hop on the right train. It was a long trip. And the robot here met me with the [autocar](#) at the station."

"Very enterprising."

At the word "stole," Robert's lenses flick back and forth again, and a metal eyebrow rises toward me. "Sir, perhaps the boy's parents should be informed of his whereabouts?"

"The young man is fourteen. I can decide when to tell them. There're no reasons under the law to report anything, correct?" I don't disguise a glare. Robert has been more presumptuous since the latest software update. But the robot nods yes and stands against the wall.

Grand leans closer at the bot's question, making his rumpled clothes and dirty face obvious. He traveled all night, no doubt with only catnaps on the train.

"Grand, I'm sure you'd like to shower and change into clean clothes. Then we can talk more. I'll sit here and enjoy my cappuccino." He smiles gratefully, and Robert leads him to the guest suite and bathroom.

The robot returns.

"Robert, did the new clothing we ordered for Grand arrive? It looks like we guessed his size about right."

"Sir, the drone will deliver them in seven minutes. I will go outside now to await the landing."

"Thank you, Robert." I look out the window and sip. Robert walks into view outside, and soon a delivery drone is visible against the blue sky, its black shape gliding like a raven. It approaches and settles on the lawn.

The ocean sparkles in the distance, too far away to hear. It will be a good day for a stroll. While we walk, I need to figure out what he wants to do next. But first, I must learn what he already knows. Given all that has happened these last years, maybe they've kept him more in the dark than I imagined possible.

Now that he is here, the task feels paralyzing. Once I discover how much of the family story he's missing, I'll have to

disclose some parts. I've long contemplated this conversation, both wishing for and dreading it.

My hand quivers around my cup. There's a bitterness in my throat, not from my drink but rising from my very soul—an angst from holding these secrets inside. What should I share? What dark secrets should be left buried for his own good?

We'll start the story from the beginning. I'll call it a hundred-year story. The story of the MacGyver family.

'GRAND'—PRESENT, 2125 (CALIFORNIA)

The shower feels warm against my skin, but I get a chill thinking about Grandfather's story, swimming for his life. He was younger than me. I'm having a hard time being away from home for only the second time, but I reckon hard times is relative. No one threatened to kill me yet, though that big robot at the Commune didn't look friendly. Ma said never to trust 'em.

Another chill goes through me, recollectin' the robot that appeared out of the gloom like some animal ready to attack. I couldn't run because its head was shining a bright light in my eyes. I raised my hand, even though it was shakin' so bad, showed it the pass flashing on the com, and held my breath.

"Young sir," said the voice, all deep and rumbly, "you may go," and it moved out of my way. And then I *did* run, before it changed its mind.

The bathroom door opens, and the robot Robert barges in. "Your new clothing, young sir."

I feel naked, 'cause I am naked, and 'cause there's almost no one in the Piney Woods to spy on you skinny-dipping in the river except the drones. It doesn't bat an eye at me and just leaves the stack of folded clothes. Seems this Robert is programmed the same way as that one at the Commune, which was too dumb to think that the com unit was stolen.

The towel feels good. Fluffy material is not the only soft thing in this new place. Natural stone covers the bathroom, smooth and shiny. I peek into the bedroom. It's beautiful too. Huge with a big bed, soft light streaming through the windows, and the ocean in the distance. Grandfather has a nice house, all to his self.

The Commune houses are tiny, and we make the furniture ourselves in the wood shop. Rocky would stand there and tell me to be careful with the saw whenever I made anything. He always hung by my side like a cautious little brother.

I got to be leader, and he followed behind, out into the forest until he got scared and said we had to stop. We'd hide in the tall grass above the lake and wait for deer to come by to drink. He'd make a noise, and they'd run off, and he'd look at me sheepish and sorry. I taught him later not to make any sound so we could watch all the animals living there. Rocky found allbook articles about how to track animals, and we practiced and learned about all of 'em.

Rocky came to the door every day, asking for me. Ma was not too sweet on him, but Pa defended him. One time Ma and Pa got into it right in front of me. I shrank into the kitchen chair and heard every word.

Pa said I needed friends, and there weren't many kids there. He said Rocky was essential for my education because home schooling only goes so far.

"But he's learning that accent. Another insidious oppression for me."

Pa said, like it's an explanation, "It's the local dialect in the Piney Woods." Then Ma clenched her hands and stormed off, while Pa rolled his eyes at me and shrugged his shoulders. I feel sorry for Pa at times like that when Ma gets distraught and into her head.

Hardly anyone visits the Commune; just drones unloading supplies on the landing pad. I was happy enough going off into the forest every day without the adults saying much. I'd tote my allbook and we'd go to the creek, and I'd read to Rocky and we'd talk about the stories. I like tellin' tales.

My chest feels tight, and I'm sorry I didn't say goodbye to Rocky when I left, but it's best because he couldn't have come with me. It's hard leaving your best friend.

I always thought that when you got older, everything would make sense. But it's the opposite. Ma is more jumpy, looking at me with her face anxious, like she's afraid to lose

me. Pa used to give advice, knowing all sorts of things about the forest and life, but lately he mostly worries about Ma. Now without Rocky too, I'm alone in the world, without their voices to tell me anything.

The jeans fit nice and comfortable. There's a new blue shirt that fits too. I comb my hair. I'm dressed and now can find Grandfather.

He can tell me about the family, and I can figure out why Ma and Pa decided to join the Commune. That's what I got to find out. Then, I can decide what to do next.

Grandfather is sitting and drinking his special coffee. I've never had one, and it might be an interestin' experience. "I'll try one of those too."

Grandfather nods to the robot, who returns to the kitchen to fetch me one. "You don't mind spending the day with me?"

"No. That'd be fine. I haven't thought too far ahead."

"We can walk around the property a bit later. I need to keep the body moving. Or else."

Grandfather's words shake me, but he has a wry grin sayin' it, so he's joking. I see him in full, how ancient he is. He's tall, but he stoops over, his gray hair combed neatly across his brow. There wasn't gray hair like his around the Commune. Ma and Pa use some sort of medicine to keep their hair regular, but Grandfather doesn't seem to care. He's gruff to the robot, but he looks at me with big kind eyes surrounded by deep wrinkles, making them look farther away like he's seen a lot.

The bot returns with my cappuccino. I take a little sip. It's more bitter than I expected, but it might perk me up. "What happened next, after being rescued?"

"I know now that it was a hospital ship. Those were the only American ships that came close to Taiwan during the invasion, and they carried away many thousands of refugees."

“Is that why the Chinese jet didn’t attack?”

“Yes. It would have been a war crime for that Chinese plane to attack the fishing boat filled with civilians or the hospital ship. I was lucky to find both.”

“That’s how you came to America.”

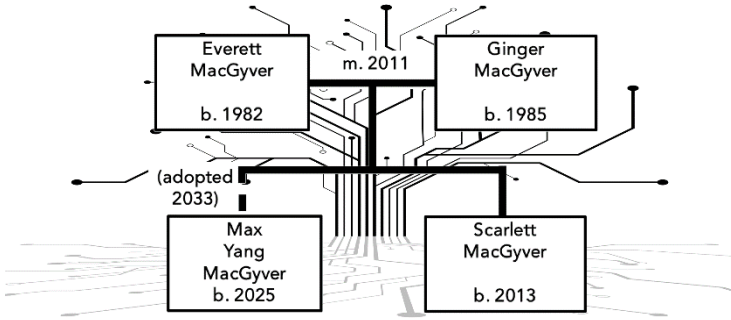
He nodded. “A refugee arriving in California. I don’t remember much about the crossing except that the boat was crowded, and it was rolling during some high seas. I got sick. I think we went to Okinawa, and then they put me on an airplane to California, to a refugee center in Berkeley. That is where I met Momma Ginger. Ginger MacGyver.”

The drink rolls creamy on my tongue. “So, this is how you and all of us became MacGyvers. No one’s ever told me before.”

An expression comes over Grandfather’s face, like he’s been aching to tell someone these last years. “Since you have the day, relax, and I’ll tell you the story of our family.”

3

GINGER MACGYVER—2033 (CALIFORNIA)



Ginger walked down the hill toward Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley. She always strode with purpose, though her head was miles away, envisioning the refugees crowding the sanctuary offices. It would be a full day's work to register information from the throngs of people, followed by a frantic search for sufficient housing. The immediate effect of the war in Taiwan was this first wave of displaced souls washing the US shores. Northern California was a favored destination, and her employer, Unity Bridge Services, was just one of the nonprofit organizations managing triage processes amid the latest humanitarian crisis.

Cars moved on the street. The ubiquitous self-driving vehicles glided empty and ghostlike, their rooftop sensors swirling, mimicking some signs of life. She reached the corner to cross and paused when a fire truck's lights flashed nearby until it turned the other direction. The siren's piercing wail dropped an octave and broke the silence of the street. The pedestrian walk sign changed to the familiar walking man. Another fire vehicle followed the first.

A small boy wobbled a little when he left the curb to pedal his bike into the crosswalk from the opposite side. The strobing light on the handlebars caught her eye.

They met mid-street when the self-driving car waiting second in line jerked into the left lane and accelerated. She saw it sideways, bearing down. Adrenaline pumped through her veins.

Ginger grabbed the boy, wrenched him backward off the bike, and, with two giant steps, jumped toward the curb. Though he was lightweight, pain shot through her shoulder, and it hurt even more when they tumbled together. The car's brakes screeched in her ears. It had halted halfway into the pedestrian way, just where she and the boy had been. Had the self-driving car become confused by the bike's light? She stood and picked the boy up from the pavement.

The boy seemed to be annoyed with *her*. She didn't think he'd even noticed how close the car had come to running them over. The car smoothly returned to the right lane and drove away when the light changed.

His eyes widened. "It would've hit us."

The vehicle disappeared down the street, leaving the scene of its near-crime.

"Be careful. You can't always trust those self-driving vehicles." Or the programmers who write the code and the inscrutable AIs at the heart of so many systems.

She patted the boy on his head and watched him pedal away. Her mind went to Scarlett—off to college in New Hampshire now two years ago, so not actually little anymore—but she sent a prayer for her safety. She rubbed her shoulder and felt hyper-vigilant for the rest of her walk to the office.

The refugee center was jam-packed, even worse than she'd feared. People lined the walls. The elderly sat on the few chairs, some people stood, and many squatted on the floor. Meager belongings were piled near each family. The inadequate number of staff collected information and attempted to identify housing and services. Two colleagues who spoke Taiwanese and Mandarin worked the counter.

Other staff members spread out around the room. Ginger took a desk and chair in an empty corner, motioned for refugees to line up, then got to work. First was a woman holding a baby. When the woman said, “*lí-hó,*” Ginger tapped the AI [HASP](#) on her lapel, so it would translate the Taiwanese into English. Her colleague Debbie, looking flustered, nodded in appreciation from across the room as each line of refugees already seemed more manageable. The near-accident invaded her thoughts a few times, but she put it from her mind. She had her reputation to uphold as the calm one in the office.

Ginger processed her line and then turned to those who sat along the walls. She moved from one huddled refugee to another, responding to their concerns and hoping to erase the apprehension on every face. Her AI HASP switched effortlessly between English, Mandarin, and Taiwanese without delay between each spoken sentence and the audio translation. There was almost no advantage to learning a language, she thought. The translation software broke verbal barriers, and she forgot that her AI HASP was even being used.

She came to a big, stocky man sitting on the floor with a beautiful small boy beside him. “What is your name? Please tell me your story. I’m here to help you find what you need.”

Her HASP translated the man’s answer, helpfully storing the surname because she immediately forgot it. “I am here alone. I know no one here in America. I have nowhere to go.”

She raised her eyebrows. “And the boy?”

“He’s a stranger. I helped him leave the boat that we escaped on before the Chinese sank it.”

She knelt next to the boy. He had dark hair, almost black, an angelic face, and looked about eight. His brown eyes revealed a warm soul. Her heart missed a beat, thinking again of her Scarlett. “Can you tell me if any of your family came with you?”

He didn’t need the translation software. His English had a slight accent but was clear. “My Mama and Baba didn’t come. I was with my school class when the planes came. I

don't know what happened to them all." A tear slid down his cheek.

"Could you use a hug?" He wrapped his arms around her at the invitation, and Ginger gave him a squeeze in return before gently wiping his face with her finger. "Don't you worry. We'll take care of you. We'll try the best we can to find your parents."

The big man nodded and said "thank you" in English, but he said nothing to signal the boy should stay with him. She checked them into the system separately.

The day proceeded in a blur. Half the refugees they'd seen were placed in acceptable housing. The rest were taken to a nearby school gymnasium, where they organized a makeshift soup kitchen and found sleeping bags for the exhausted, frightened people. They settled into marked spaces on the floor.

Ginger sought out the small boy in the gym before she left and tucked him into his sleeping bag. "Everything will be okay. I'll see you tomorrow."

He looked tired but not fearful. He was resilient—a good sign for his recovery from something so traumatic.

The staff slumped into chairs in the rear lounge as the sun settled on the hills outside the office window.

Debbie sat across from her, exhaustion lining her face. "What a day. And there'll be more of the same tomorrow."

"War sucks." Ginger reclined in the comfy chair for a few minutes, massaging her shoulder. "How lucky we are to have homes; to have family." She sighed deeply as she pulled herself to standing, overcome with a quiet sense of security as she made her way home to her husband.

Everett sat at the kitchen table. His big hands dwarfed the enormous sandwich he wolfed down. His arms and broad shoulders hinted at some Scottish ancestor who might have tossed the caber. His hair was windblown above strong

eyebrows and a thin, well-trimmed beard. Her handsome engineer.

“Sorry. I couldn’t wait any longer.”

She barely made out the words he said around his mouthful of ham and cheese. Half of a loaf of bread past its prime—he’d made it three days ago—lay on the counter.

He baked bread to unwind, and Ginger liked to watch as his hands worked the dough. That breadmaking diversion was one of their few escapes from the unease that permeated every conversation. The shots fired on one side of the globe circled round, and no one knew who they might find or what might happen next.

He stood and pulled her into his embrace with a kiss. She flinched when he squeezed her, and he pulled back. “What’s wrong?”

“Sore shoulder. A self-driving car nearly hit me in the crosswalk. And it almost hit a little boy next to me. I hurt my shoulder jumping out of the way.” She didn’t mention grabbing the boy.

“I’m glad you’re not just giving me the cold shoulder,” he said with a wink. “Are you hurt?”

“I’m fine.”

“Did you report the car? That rarely happens, but it’s important that they fix glitches in the AI’s training data.”

“No. I don’t have time to fix annoying machines.”

“But remember that plane crash a month ago, blamed on the autopilot? Some companies are pushing technology too fast. It’s irritating and sometimes deadly. We should do the right thing.”

“You’re always worrying about *everyone*.”

His gaze revealed that he’d caught the emphasis on the last word. Ginger had known him so long, she could visualize the gears turning in his head.

Everett’s expression changed to concern. “There was a real risk of being run over? You were so flippant. I missed that.” He gave her a deep but gentle hug, avoiding her shoulder.

“I’m fine, and stopped thinking about it right away because of work. We had a building overflowing with refugees. We don’t have enough rooms to house them. So many of the cases are heartbreaking. Especially the children.” She thought about the boy with the angelic face and hoped he would be able to find rest, even in the gym, among strangers.

“Everyone loses in this war.” He finished the last bite of his sandwich. “And why now? To humor an old man on his birthday.”

“And for what gain? They didn’t even save the chip factories.” She brushed back her auburn hair with both hands. While Everett focused on military strategy, she preferred economics and politics. Every major electronics company had ordered all the chip-making photomasks stored in Taiwan to be destroyed. The rest of the chip manufacturing equipment was probably damaged in revenge for the invasion. Western companies no doubt had copies of the masks in the US but would need months to restart factories. Global electronics production had collapsed, stock markets had nosedived, and took with it their retirement investments. It was an odd time to worry about their savings, and Ginger pushed the thought away with some guilt.

Everett worked the espresso machine. “I would have waited for you for dinner, but I’ll be on a plane tonight for Tokyo. The company decided we need a core team closer to Taiwan to do what we can. It’s imperative that we shut down the test reactor without any leaks. We can’t risk a release of radioactivity or any bad press about fission power plants.”

She used the rest of the bread to make herself a sandwich and sat across the table eating as he drank his espresso.

“You’re sure you’ll be safe in Japan?” She waited for his logical response, which often dispelled her worries.

He scratched his beard. “I presume so. As safe as here. China was strategic when they launched the Taiwan invasion. The announcement that they wouldn’t attack the US or anyone else beyond Taiwan, and were only recovering their rightful rebel territory, put the ball into our court.”

Ginger thought back to her political science minor classes. “The US will look like the aggressor if we jump in.”

“Exactly. It’s a gutsy bet that the US won’t start a nuclear war. China has the conventional military force to fight at their doorstep. The naval blockade, except for the passage of humanitarian aid, dares the US to try to resupply the Taiwanese military.”

“That move reminds me of Kennedy’s naval blockade during the Cuban missile crisis.”

He sipped the espresso, leaning in the chair. “But there is some treaty. How far are we obligated to help Taiwan?”

She had looked this up when the war began. “The Taiwan Relations Act says we’ll provide Taiwan ‘with arms of a defensive character’ and that we’ll ‘maintain the capacity to resist force’ from mainland China. It doesn’t say we’d ever send troops.”

He finished his coffee. “A good thing, too. The US mainland is six thousand miles away, and there’s not enough equipment stockpiled in the western Pacific to stop them. If our ships approached, we’d be sitting ducks for their missiles and drone swarms. We don’t have a strategic response, except for a direct attack on China.”

She tapped her fingers nervously on the table. “Could it still come to nuclear war? Could it hit here?”

“If someone miscalculates. It’s a fear gnawing at my gut. But neither side wants that.”

“And short of nuclear war, you think China will win?” She cared less about the military strategy, though she knew Everett was deeply interested in the subject.

“China has been preparing this invasion for a decade. The Taiwanese have already lost any chance of reversing the landings with conventional weapons.” She prepared for what she knew would be a well-thought out analysis. “China’s opening cyberattack took down communications, command, and control. Then their hypersonic missiles destroyed Taiwan’s air force in the first few days. China’s army lost a hundred thousand with the amphibious landings but still got ashore. Now, they’ve secured beachheads and are

overrunning the island. Taiwanese resistance is already weakening.”

“And the rumor that Marines are fighting?” There was no escaping from the news feeds reporting both facts and speculation.

He furrowed his brow. “No doubt our littoral Marine forces that were pre-positioned in Guam landed in Taiwan and are there fighting. China is not discussing that for strategic political reasons, and neither is the administration. That’s part of why I think both sides are still rational, avoiding nuclear war. There simply are not enough American conventional forces to swing the outcome now.”

Ginger finished her sandwich and wiped the crumbs from the table. “I know we hoped they feared the downside—global economic isolation—shown by the Russian experience in Ukraine.”

Everett nodded in agreement. “But the aging leadership saw their chance slipping away.”

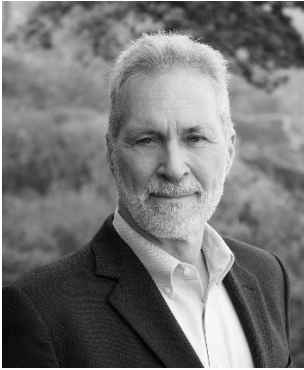
“Why reunification with Taiwan became so important to them is a psychological mystery. But we see crazy things happen all over the world.” Ginger sat close to him and held his hand, the touch reminding her that she’d be alone for a few days for the first time since this surreal war began. “How much longer do you expect it will last?”

“I’d give it a month or three. The weapons today are terrifyingly lethal, and China can now resupply easily. The Taiwanese will fight, but they’ll still be rooted out of their underground bunkers and mountain hideaways. There might be a million people who die from this war. But I don’t see it ending another way. China will control the island.”

She squeezed his hand. “Be very careful. It isn’t logical, but I worry about you being closer to the fighting.”

Everett glanced at his watch. “I need to pack and go. It’ll be a tough week. For you too. I’ll call whenever I have a break.” He stood, lovingly wrapped her in his arms, and kissed her. Then, he was gone to pack and she heard clothes being shoveled into a suitcase. He kissed her again before he headed for the airport.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Gary F. Bengier is a writer, philosopher, and technologist.

After a career in Silicon Valley, Gary pursued passion projects, studying astrophysics and philosophy. He's spent the last two decades thinking about how to live a balanced, meaningful life in a rapidly evolving technological world. This self-reflective journey infuses his novels, *Journey to 2125: One Century, One Family*, *Rising to Challenges* and *Unfettered Journey*, with insights about our future and the challenges we will face in finding purpose.

Before turning to writing speculative fiction, Gary worked in a variety of Silicon Valley tech companies. He was eBay's Chief Financial Officer and led the company's initial and secondary public offerings. Gary has an MBA from Harvard Business School and an MA in philosophy from San Francisco State University. He has two children with Cynthia, his wife of forty-seven years. When not traveling the world, he raises bees and makes a nice Cabernet at the family's Napa vineyard. He and his family live in San Francisco.

Journey to 2125 is the prequel to another book in this two-book series. Learn more about the other book, [*Unfettered Journey*](#).

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The story of a family facing our future

It's 2125 when a long-separated grandson suddenly arrives on his doorstep looking for answers. Max MacGyver retells their family story and secrets, revealing a century of challenges that they've faced. Journey to 2125 is one family's touching story, across generations, of adventure, rivalry, loss, survival, and resilience.

This is the story of a family facing our future. A small boy escapes war in Asia. A young woman flees catastrophe driven by climate change in Africa. Some family members build technology companies, while others deal with the trauma of jobs lost to automation. A young couple fight for privacy and democracy. Lives are positively transformed by biomedical science and threatened by it.

At its heart, Journey to 2125 is the story, told over a single day, of a young boy and his grandfather. Why did his parents decide to move to the Commune? What family secrets will his grandfather share?

Parts political drama, family saga, and hard-science speculative fiction, Journey to 2125 is the story of how humankind might collectively weather the tragedy and chaos that we can expect from accelerating change. What will it feel like to live during these next one hundred years? Take this journey with Max MacGyver and his grandson, as they reveal their family history, and the road ahead for you and yours.

"One family's consequential journey through the trials and triumphs of the coming century, including climate change, medicine, AI, and the new world order as robots displace human labor, all while experiencing the multi-generational tug of family dynamics, and what it means to be a human. A must read for those who seek to understand how technology and humanity will shape the coming century."

Raissa D'Souza

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