

# Water Wars

My Grandpa always tells jokes about how when he was a kid, everyone wanted to live by the beach, now they'd give anything to walk on solid ground. It's a sensitive subject for everybody, especially my Mom. She lost so much that day. My Grandpa tries so hard to put some humor in it for her. It's been over 15 years since The Great Flood Plan was put into action, some people think it was the world's biggest mistake while other people commend the World's leaders for making the decisions they did. In February of 2022, the global temperature had risen so much the glacier melt off threatened to drown 97.908% of the world's solid ground by the following year. The world's leaders met for the first Planet Salvation Conference in March of the same year, by April they decided to build these giant concrete dams to delay the flooding of most of the world until 2025. They hoped that by then, we'd have developed the planet-saving technology we were promised by the most prestigious environmental scientists. In short, we didn't, and the Planet Salvation Conference met for the last time, and for the first time, even North Korea's leader was invited. Their final decision was to take down their dams and use their emergency plan to let the Earth flood. Following the destruction of the dams, all of the ground would be covered in 30 feet of water. The World's leaders, being not completely stupid, had made sure to develop backup technology to survive even if the Earth flooded. We live on rafts made of the ocean's trash, we use boats instead of cars, we eat water grown crops, and raise livestock on grass grown in dirt saved from the Pre-Flood World. Some people say it's a sign of the human race's ingenuity, but I think that's ridiculous. If humans possessed any ingenuity, I would be living on solid ground and eating a lot less rice, but I'm biased. My mom is an environmentalist and she tried everything to save the world before it flooded, but she was born several decades too late. For the most part, she's a bubbly, outgoing, and generous person but when we talk about The Flood you can see the hurt on her face. The Environmental Scientists did manage to fix the Ozone layer, but it'll be several decades before the world will return to its Pre-Flood state. Out of habit, I repeated these facts in my head over and over, rolling them through my mind. Every time I tried to make sense of the whole thing, the statements didn't quite align. It felt like there was a missing puzzle piece somewhere, but that was crazy, it happened, there's plenty of evidence.

"Hey, kid!" I stopped mid-step and lifted my face to see my nose was less than an inch away from a lamppost. The young kid, who I assume was the one who yelled, laughed. I waved and smiled sheepishly. He cut the engine on the lawnmower he was pushing and ran down the driveway to greet me. "What can I say except you're welcome!" he said in a singsong voice, referencing an old movie we both loved. "Haha, hilarious," I answered sarcastically and rolled my eyes. Drew and I have been good friends for about a year, mostly because we're both obsessed with scuba diving and, oddly enough, research. He crossed his arms and scowled, "Where have you been young lady?" We both laughed. Then his face got serious, almost concerned, "Really, where have you been? I haven't seen you since school let out." I almost laughed again, "Drew, that was a week ago! Needy much?" I giggled and he smirked sheepishly, "No, but it's too boring around here, it feels like it's been a month since anything exciting happened!" he said, exasperated. I put my hands up in surrender, "Tell you what, in about an hour I'll come pick you up and we'll go scuba diving. He smiled, "Great, see you in an hour." I waved and kept walking, a few seconds later I heard the roar of the lawnmower engine.

Drew and I live on the same “island” but we go to school on another island about a mile away from the dock. Most islands are about 1280 acres, plenty of room for a big neighborhood, a grocery store, and other things like that. You can get most things in walking distance, sometimes we use bikes if we need to get somewhere fast or far. Rich people have hydrogen cars but they’re kind of useless because there’s nowhere on an island you can’t walk to. The best comparison to the Pre-Flood world would be a small town, not quite rural, but not suburban. If you need something on another island, you can rent the city’s hydrogen powered boats (carbon emissions are illegal), kind of like public transit. Dad makes jokes about how public transit will never improve. Most of the boats work well, but sometimes you’ll get a faulty one and have to row yourself to wherever you were headed or call the “No Row Boat” Helpline and they’ll send out another boat to get you where you were going.

When I finally made it home, I cracked open the door and breathed in the wonderful smell of laundry detergent. “Mom?” I called out, still not stepping inside because I was pretty sure she was in the backyard working in the garden. “Out here, baby,” I heard her yell from the backyard, just as I predicted. The islands are basically boxes made of recycled trash and filled with dirt, with buildings and roads and such built on it, which means Mom can still garden. Dad told me before the Flood, gardening was fairly common, for some reason it became a lot less popular and I don’t know anyone else who gardens besides Mom. I don’t know why you wouldn’t garden, the food is so much better, and most food Mom grows is a scarcity for everybody else. All the other food is grown on special farm islands, the food is then delivered to grocery stores. A certain amount of food is delivered to each grocery store depending on how many people live around it, there’s an entire branch of local government dedicated to it. Dad goes on and on about how awful the government issued food is, but no one thinks he’s funny. Most crops that can’t be grown in water are always in a shortage, mostly because there’s not enough dirt. Grandpa finds it hilarious that dirt isn’t cheap anymore. Our water was another problem the world had to face after The Flood. Our water is two parts filtered salt water and one part leftover hydrogen energy byproduct.

I ran through the house and thrust open the sliding back door, “Hey, Mom! Drew and I are going diving in an hour, is that ok?” She seemed to calculate for a moment, “Yeah, honey that’s fine, just be careful.” I nodded and smiled, then shut the door. I embraced the delightful coolness of the air conditioner. Even though the ozone layer was fixed, we were still dealing with the heat as everything reset. I ran up the stairs two at a time, swung the door to my bedroom open and opened my closet, all in under thirty seconds. Although I had an hour before I needed to meet Drew, I still had a ton of preparation to do. I grabbed my wetsuit and changed into it, then I dragged the giant oxygen tanks out of the hall closet. I hefted those and a set of flippers down the stairs. Then, I began my slow, hot journey back to Drew’s.

I was essentially boiling in my wetsuit when I ran up and knocked on Drew’s door. A second later he swung the door open, practically grinning too big for his face. “Aww man, this is going to be great!” he gushed. I laughed at him, “Fangirling?” He shrugged, unapologetic, “Want me to drag one of those?” “Well, duh!” I said rolling my eyes sarcastically, “No, I just wanted to drag two giant oxygen tanks in 101-degree weather in a black wetsuit.” He laughed while he grabbed the tanks, “You’re too much.” The walk from Drew’s house to the dock wasn’t long at all and we loaded our stuff onto a decent looking boat. “So, did you have a spot in mind?” I asked Drew. There were plenty of good

diving spots around, my personal favorite was a secluded spot far away from any islands. There have been several reports of a sunken military satellite around the area and there are also lots of beautiful fish and interesting water plants. "Well, I thought we'd go to that sunken satellite area you like so much?" I smiled, "You read my mind!" We started our motor and headed over there.

We were about halfway to my favorite little spot when the motor started making weird sputtering noises, I rolled my eyes. "You're kidding me right?" Even though we were only halfway to our destination we were still miles away from any islands, which meant there was no hope of rowing. Which also meant we were going to have to call the No Row Helpline, implying we were going to have to wait a solid thirty minutes to get someone out here, and no diving. All of my thoughts seemed to run through Drew's mind at the same time. "No no no no no..." he said defeated. I put my head in my hands as I listened to the last noises of the motor giving out. I looked up at Drew, he gazed back at me looking so sad I was worried he might cry. In a desperate attempt to remedy the situation I said, "What if we just dove here?" Drew looked confused for a second, "Huh?" "What's stopping us from diving here? Nothing says we can't, it might not be as pretty but it's better than just waiting here for some boat from the Helpline to come get us, or trying to row back." He seemed to roll the idea through his mind for a minute before smiling, "I think that's what they call a stroke of genius."

After we hooked up our oxygen and put on our flippers and goggles, we gave each other the thumbs up and jumped in. The cold water was a welcome relief from the hot sun and warm wood of the boat. I opened my eyes realizing I'd reflexively closed them, the first thing I saw was a Yellow Tang. I live around Southern Colorado, comparative to the Pre-Flood World. At least that's where my island's anchored, before the world flooded it would've been unheard of to find a Yellow Tang in Colorado, but the water is saltwater. All the freshwater fish live in specially filtered spaces. After following a school of Gobiidae and watching a couple of Kokanee Salmon swim past, who must've recently been moved out of a nearby estuary, I gestured to an extremely long water plant, hoping to catch Drew's eye. Most of the seaweed and other "water weeds", as I always called them, had grown to be at least ten feet tall, but Drew and I were only a couple of feet underwater. Meaning, this one must be at least twenty or twenty-five feet tall, it was the longest plant I'd ever seen. When I finally gave up on my gestures, I grabbed his arm, forcing him to look. His eyes got wide. He frantically pointed down, which I understood as he wanted to follow it. We'd never been to the bottom before. When diving, I'd always found the wildlife the most interesting and the farther down you go the less there is. I considered for a minute then decided it would be cool to see the roots of the plant, so I nodded at him, and we both dove down.

The water got noticeably colder the further down we went, sending shivers down my spine. The plant spiraled down, deeper and deeper. My ears started to feel the pressure change. We must've been only about twenty feet down when my hands slammed into something. I stared back at where my hands had hit, there was nothing there. I looked over at Drew confused, he looked back at me and tapped the place where his hands must've hit. His finger jabbed into something, but I couldn't see anything, it was like a force field. I pushed my feet back underneath me and stood on it but only for a second before my whole body slid down. It felt like I had been standing on the floor and someone pulled it out from underneath me. I was free-falling, but only for a second before I landed on hard ground.

I sucked in a shocked breath. It took me a moment to realize my oxygen tube had fallen out of my mouth and I was breathing in normal, dry air. I wasn't underwater at all anymore. I looked around, shocked. It was dark like the last couple minutes of twilight before the sun fully sank. I looked up and there was Drew, it looked like he was struggling to get through the invisible barrier I'd fallen through. I watched him bang into it time after time, I waved my hands and shouted, frantically trying to get his attention. Then I realized he couldn't see me. He gave up trying to push his way through and stood on it as I had. He fell right through, plummeting to the ground. He landed hard, a couple of feet away from me, I quickly stood up and rushed over to him. He was unconscious. I panicked a little, slapping him and shaking him. I pulled the oxygen tube out of his mouth, fully ready to do CPR on him when he opened his eyes and sucked in a gasping breath as I had. "Are you okay?" I asked him, nearly in tears. He looked around like he was unable to comprehend what happened.

"No, this can't be right," were the first words to leave his mouth, "We should be surrounded by water and drowning without our oxygen." As I glanced around I started to piece together the puzzle in my mind. "What if..." then I stopped mid-sentence trying to sort out the trainwreck of thoughts going through my head, "What if it never actually flooded." I heard the words tumble out of my mouth and even I was surprised at them, what was I trying to say? Drew looked as confused as I felt, "How? How does that make any sense, everyone lied?" The more I tried to make sense of it, the muddier it got, "What if the World's leaders did lie and they made that weird force field thingy to protect the Pre-Flood World?" Then I suddenly realized that if my theory was correct, I was standing on solid ground, for the first time in my life! Drew snorted, "Yeah, all that AND Earth's flat AND the moon landing was staged, you sound crazy. It's probably some experimental island thing, except instead of floating it's submerged, allowing more ground space. The force field thing is what keeps it dry." I had to admit, Drew's theory was much more realistic and actually made sense. I nodded submissively, "You're probably right." Drew shrugged, "I don't know, maybe I shouldn't be so fast to discredit you, maybe I'm thinking too in the box." I smirked, "Yeah, maybe, why don't we look around?"

It was probably the driest place I'd ever been, it didn't feel like we were underwater. As we walked along I started to notice something on the horizon, so far all we'd seen was wild prairie grass and other weeds, plus the water above our heads in place of sky. I started to see what looked like buildings on the horizon, they got closer and closer as we walked. Soon, we were walking on a highway, I turned to Drew suspiciously. "If it was an experimental island, then why would they make a road? And I think I see buildings over there," I said gesturing to the objects I'd seen earlier, "And while we're at it, why would they put dirt and grass on it, and go through all the trouble to make the grass and weeds native to the Colorado area?" Drew furrowed his brow, "What's that sign say?" I could barely make out the letters, "I think it says, Lamar."

"Lamar? Like an old western movie, main character Lamar?" I shrugged "I guess." We walked along the road for about a mile when the buildings I'd seen earlier were so close I could read the signs. "Drew, this is a town," I said as the thought rushed through my head like a wave crashing on a beach. "What if you aren't staged moon landing, flat Earther crazy when you said the world wasn't drowned? What if you were right?" I held up a finger, stopping him mid-thought, I looked towards my arm, opening my holographic wrist com. "Search Lamar, Colorado," I said and the space around my wrist was immediately flooded with images of buildings and landscapes closely matching the ones I

was surrounded by. "Look!" I exclaimed as we the photos flashed before our eyes and I read the first paragraph of Wikipedia, "Lamar was the biggest town in Prowers County, located in Southeastern Colorado, Pre-Flood world." Drew dismissively shook his head in denial. Butterflies filled my stomach with the idea of being on solid ground, we were in the Pre-Flood world.

"But, how are we the only ones who've figured this out, anyone can dive 30 feet!" Drew exclaimed. He was in shock and I could almost see his mind-stretching, trying to find a logical answer. "Maybe they just called it Lamar and it's something else entirely?" "Then why does it look the same?" He let out a defeated sigh, "So if you're right, then why? Who would flood the world and blame it on environmental changes caused by us?" I closed my eyes and concentrated but I couldn't think of anything, suddenly I just wanted to leave. I felt sick to my stomach and I just wanted to go home, "Let's go, I want to go home." Drew looked confused but he nodded. "How?"

"Umm," I paused for a moment, willing another stroke of brilliance. The water was at least ten or twelve feet above our heads, "What if we climb up the side of a building and see if we can reach the water? I think the trick to crossing through is slow movement. The barrier is a non-newtonian fluid so as long as you use slow movements and don't put a lot of pressure on it than it should be as easy as moving through water." He nodded listlessly, staring off at something, "How do you plan on getting on the roof of that building?" I shrugged, "That's the hard part, got any ideas?" "Well..." he started and then pointed to the spot he'd been staring at, "There's always that ladder on the side of that thrift store leading directly to the roof." I put my palm on my forehead, too easy, how'd I miss that? We quickly proceeded to climb the ladder and stand on the flat roof. My theory worked perfectly, we both slowly eased ourselves through the boundary and suddenly we were underwater again. I breathed a sigh of relief through my oxygen tube. I pointed to my wrist com, showing Drew the GPS I had turned on to hopefully get us back to the boat. I always point-plotted a spot on the map before we dove anywhere, in case of emergencies.

After a quick swim, we were back at the surface a couple of feet away from our boat. I groaned, we forgot to call the No Row Helpline before we dove. "We still have at least a half-hour wait for another boat to come to get us," I moaned, wanting more than ever to be home. Drew held up a finger, "One second," he said, sliding the wrist com off my hand, I guessed he left his at home. He called the number and answered their questions, including our exact latitude and longitude. "They said they'd be out as soon as possible," he said after hanging up. I nodded, that's that they always say.

It was late by the time I finally got home. I was so exhausted my mind had almost completely blocked out all thoughts about Lamar and it's mysteries. As soon as my head hit the pillow I was asleep, I didn't think anything could wake me up. But, I was wrong, something did wake me up. A loud banging sound made me jump out of bed, I couldn't figure out where it was coming from. As I disorientingly looked around my room, I heard my mom swing the front door open. Did that mean someone was knocking on the door? What time was it? I cracked open a curtain, it was still dark outside. I crept down the stairs to see who was at the door. It took a second for my eyes to adjust to the moonbeams streaming through the open door, but the overbearing presence of a woman was intimidating enough to stop the air from filling my lungs and keep my heart from beating. The figure was at least six feet tall, dressed in a sharp, tailored business suit, the tag on her lapel said Relma R.

Wheatridge, with the words Social and Environmental Protection Services scrawled below. I distantly heard my mom's voice ask questions like, "What could she have got into? She's hardly left the house since summer started." Then, I heard the woman talk, her voice was hardly more than a whisper, but her words filled the room. "Your daughter hasn't committed any crime, we'll be taking her as a key witness in a very important and confidential court case, we'll need her cooperation for the next 4-8 hours. Should you refuse to let us *borrow* her for a few hours, you'll be creating more trouble for yourself. For starters, we'll sue, you can be sure of that." "B-but..." my mom sputtered, looking near tears. I stood up and walked to the door, still in my pajamas, "It's okay mom, I'll be back in a few hours. If anything happens to me then they can be sure *we'll* sue," I glared at the woman to sell my last point. My mom broke down crying and pulled me into a hug. "It's okay mom, I'll be okay," I said shakily, swallowing my tears. "If she's back a minute late..." she started threateningly. "She won't be." the woman reassured, this time with a softer tone. My mom kissed the top of my head and I followed the woman back to her car. It was still dark and I was still in my pajamas, getting in a stranger's car, was this a bad idea? Yes, but this "confidential court case" must have something to do with Lamar, it was too convenient for a government-run agency to come looking for me now.

The car door slammed and the woman put it in drive, "Phew," she whispered, "I didn't think she'd let you go." This time her voice was different, smaller somehow, kinder. "Who are you?" I asked, confused. Her intimidation melted, "I am Relma R. Wheatridge, founder of the Social and Environmental Protection Services. We have reason to believe you know something you shouldn't, and we're taking you, protecting you, before an *actual* government agent finds you and erases that information from your memory." "So, you're not from the government?" She laughed, "Heavens no!" I sighed, it probably was a "confidential court case" and had nothing to do with Lamar. "So, what did I witness?"

"If I read your wrist com's history correctly, you went thirty feet below the surface on a scuba diving excursion, right?" Way to answer a question with a question I thought, rolling my eyes internally. "Yes," I said simply, unwilling to give any unnecessary information. "In 2025 the world flooded because of global warming and climate change. The huge icebergs in the oceans melted and covered all land in thirty feet of water, we were prepared and adapted to life on our islands. That was the end of it for most people, those people never even paused to wonder if something was awry. But before that, in 2022 most people were under the belief that unless they stopped it the world would flood by the next year, that estimate was correct and the world would have flooded without intervention. But, there was intervention, the first Planet Salvation Conference was held, and they chose to use the giant concrete walls to delay the flooding till years later. The people were under the belief that 2025 was like an environmental deadline and the concrete walls would fail and we'd have to adapt to a new way of life, but the walls actually wouldn't have failed till 2031. Six years after of what was believed. The final Planet Salvation Conference was held and for an unknown reason, the World's Leaders chose to take down the walls and let the world flood, leaving everyone else under the impression there was no other option. While it was happening it seemed to make sense, but when I revisited the incident, the facts didn't align and something was suspicious. For years I've been searching for two things, the reason they chose to let the world flood, and evidence of their crime. Tonight, I have both. I know the reason they let the flood happen thanks to Dr. Ballerini," and then she gestured to a small man sitting in the backseat. I nearly had a heart attack! Where did he come from? Had he been there the whole time? How was he so *quiet*? Miss Wheatridge apparently noticed

my surprise. "Yes, he's very quiet," she said with a wave of her hand like it was nothing and continued, "He worked as one of the leading environmental scientists during the final Pre-Flood years, he developed the technology you encountered yesterday. The barrier between the ocean and the Pre-Flood world. When he showed this as a backup technology, in case the world flooded, the World's Leaders went crazy at the capabilities of the science. They each dropped huge amounts of money in investments in the technology and decided to flood the world so it would have to be used, making them each millions. They flooded the world out of greed, and you are my proof! Others whose stumbled upon the Pre-Flood world or had seen any evidence of what they did was immediately taken to a government facility and had their memories erased, another piece of technology they didn't share with the public. It doesn't damage the brain it just severs the connections that create certain memories, keeping their secret completely safe. The only reason you and Drew did not receive this same fate was because you called the No Row Helpline. Speaking of Drew, he's fine, his being picked up by an associate of mine in a similar fashion. Anyway, for some reason when you called the system glitched and hid your phone from any monitoring, keeping the government from finding the data that was stored about your dive. You are about to become a key witness in the most important court case of all time, and be home in time for your mother's curfew."