

THE ECESIS SERIES

Pangaea Cracked

ECESIS: PANGAEA CRACKED

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For M.E.
They tried to bury us.
They didn't realise we were seeds.
Here I've planted all I love -
May it grow into a mighty tree.
(Mexican Proverb - Adapted)

ecesis: (n.) the successful establishment
of an organism in a new environment

"A writer is driven out far past where she should go,
Out where no one can save her."

~ Hemingway
(adapted)

Prologue

JASMA'S DREAM

CYBERCITY 6 | DREAMSPELL YEAR 12

*"If an idea does not at first seem absurd,
Then there is no hope for it."*

~ Albert Einstein

I stood alone on the mountain, overlooking the shore of the Sea of Jasma, staring into the vast black Vaniate, a darkness so deep it threatened to engulf me within its black hole folds, where I might disappear forever. A low sound rumbled in the distance, and I first thought it was thunder. The noise grew louder, seemed to be coming toward me, like a wave of thunder rolling toward the shore. The noise grew louder and louder and closer and closer until I half-wondered if the jets from the days of old would fly by. I looked all around me, but could not detect the source of the noise. Just then, above my head, something exploded and filled the night sky with colour.

A huge cheer erupted from the countless beings that had gathered on the shores of Jasma tonight.

The Rebel Revel had begun.

I shook off the profound feeling of loneliness, a long-lingering remnant from the very beginning and indeed, the whole reason for everything I'd ever created.

The feeling was replaced by a strong sense of pride. The Rebel Revel was my favourite celebration of the season, when all the ancient Earthians gathered together in our new world to remember our journey, to remember how close we had come to destroying Earth and the path that we had all taken together to fix our harmful, selfish behaviours. Every one of us here had joined forces and stood against those who called themselves leaders then claimed they had authority over us. We had stood up, and showed them they were wrong. The multitudes will always win. From that point, the tide had turned, and now, Earth was in deep rest, still healing from the damage

humankind had done to the air, the seas, the jungles, and all the other creatures that called Earth home.

Not wishing to join the throng, I'd found a place to perch above them on the mountain that cuddled the shore. I relaxed back against the smooth side of a rock and watched as nine plasma balls of varying rainbow colours popped above the horizon, glowing in the blackness. Tiny at first, the balls seemed to grow in size as they moved towards the shore, morphing, folding, rolling through the blackness, converging all together and morphing into a thousand different shapes, then separating back out in their original colours, then changing, moving through the entire visible spectrum of colour. It was hypnotic. Then, at once, all the balls exploded into an infinitude of smaller balls. They fell to the sea and floated atop the surface, like multi-coloured stars in the sky.

I had an extra appreciation for the lightshow, as I had ingested a large fruit from the Mutréa Tree earlier and was feeling its effects on my visual and mental perceptions. The lights seemed to be alive as they crawled through the sky toward me.

Then the sky went black again, for many moments, and just as I was wondering if they'd cut the show short, I saw a light on the horizon. The light began to grow and at first appeared to be more plasma balls, but as it grew closer, I could see this was moving very differently. It was pulsing, undulating and all at once... EXPLODED!... As hundreds of glowing forms spun through the air, seemingly bouncing off the water. The show held me spellbound from that point as the light reshaped itself a thousand times, finally morphing into hundreds of butterflies that then disappeared.

After the show, I had agreed to meet Myakai in the city to go to Blacklight Lounge, also known as the The Point or the Dive Bar Where All Worlds Meet.

From my vantage point in the sky, I could see the ultra neon lights that glowed on every Icicle, every Aerosphere, lighting the world up, beckoning Skyflyers to stop and see what irresistible adventure Cybercity 6 held in store for them.

At the very start of the third millennium a.d., according to the Gregorian calendar, technology on Earth had exploded. This new kind of technology was based on the contractive side of the universe and had changed the world forevermore. All the things we had dreamt of for

hundreds of years became possible...as well as things we had never dreamt.

A new way of living had been born.

Cybercity 6 floated atop Jasma's Sea on massive GEM plates – or grav-electro-magnetic plates - aligned with the planet's GEM field. Aerospheres could fly or float, even fully submerged, in any direction on a dime using GEM tech, otherwise known as *black whole* technology. This contractive technology was infinitely more powerful than the combustion technology which had preceded it, without any harmful bi-products. Spheres, for example, had far surpassed the flying cars we had envisioned. Spheres were interstellar ships, powered by mini black holes and able to traverse the universe far faster than the speed of light using the singularities at the centre of all circles as portals.

CC6 was one of the original cities of Jasma, floating on six massive gem-plates with waterways in between, vaguely reminiscent of Earth's Old Venice. Towering circular skyscrapers, dubbed Icicles for their shape and translucence, soared high into the air, their ultraneon lights shining, an invitation to the Skyflyers.

As I watched from my perch, the spheres looked like fireflies flashing in the night sky. Then I found what I was looking for. In seconds, I vaporised and solidified - disassembled and reassembled my cells - inside the Sphere that had just floated into view.

"Lehalla Myakai," I greeted with a smile.

"Lehall AeveA," returned Mya, unsurprised, having felt me near.

We slowed our Sphere and descended, floating along the waterways, contemplating ports, a giant bubble in a giant bath. A massive Torpedal swam up below the sphere, delighting us. The closest Earth equivalent was a Blue Whale, but Torpedalos were at least twice the size. Playing with it, Mya sped up, leaving the waterways of the city and out into open water. With her mind, she fully submerged the Sphere then jumped out of the water, like dolphins do on Earth. I glowed with joy as she repeated the movement again and again until the Torpedal finally relented and did the same. Down he went, then burst out of the water in a magnificent display. He was truly a majestic sight; his sheer size was enough to stun us silent with awe. His energy lines glowed with all the colours our eyes could detect, and we lit up just watching him.

When he submerged once more, Mya stopped moving forward and instantly started moving backward, without re-orienting, towards the city. I smiled at her; it tickled me when she navigated backwards.

We found an empty dock and ported our forms to it. Mya shielded her Sphere so that no one could broach it, and we walked leisurely towards our destination.

The city of CC6 was populated mostly with Syms, Shimmers, Borgs, Bios and Luents like us. Borgs, similar to the first bionic man, had upgraded bits of themselves with AI tech. A titanium arm here, a Neural Link there. Shimmers were very tall, very beautiful androgynous light beings that, like us, had no fabricated machinations other than the one they were born into. Syms had an enhanced brain, usually human, fully fused to a cyborg body. They had used GEM tech to do some truly incredible things, and I loved looking at them. In a way, they had the best of both worlds, all the dreams and emotions of the human mind in a virtually indestructible frame.

But the simple fact of the matter is that a Borg body, amazing as it was, was still just an approximation of a Bio body. Even with the best GEM tech, Sym and Borg bodies still could not do what Bio bodies could do, were in fact hindered by their 'upgrades', despite popular opinion. Those who bought into mechanical upgrades were still learning what we already knew. The bio body was already the ultimate Borg, once the mind was mastered. But, they still looked insanely impressive. While Syms and Borgs embraced only technology, we had combined our understanding of the new scientific tech with the ancient ways of Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism. We had unleashed the potential of the mind, and it made us even better than any synth, but especially Borgs and Syms, which were in their infancy of AI.

We all had telescopic and microscopic sight, the ability to regenerate damaged body parts, complete control of every bodily function, and of course, immortality, if we so chose. However, Bios could morph. Bios could port. We could portal anywhere in existence, without an external vehicle. No Sphere necessary. Bios could regenerate instantly, without the aid of a robotic surgeon. Bios still had full physical sensations, which Borgs could only approximate.

Bios could dance. Borgs just didn't have the same fluidity we had. Their bodies couldn't vibrate with the music the way we could.

I would say that the only advantage Borgs had over Bios was that they no longer needed to defecate. Never would their bottoms touch a dirty toilet seat again. Then again, neither would mine.

Mya and I reached the door of Krysthala and took a moment to look up, appreciating the height and beauty of this gorgeous edifice. Then we looked at each and smiled, glowing indigo with excitement and pleasure.

Instead of porting or taking the Air Shuttle, we flew, straight up, just to feel the wind on our faces. When we reached the 'EnTrance' sign to the Blacklight Lounge, we vibrated higher until our matter disappeared. We moved inside, lowering our vibration until we materialised at the doorway to Apotheca. We walked up to the JucBar and smiled at the apothecary. We requested two Puraetas, and the apothecary reached for the mortar and pestle to prepare the nutrient-rich juice from Jasma's mutréa fruit, often called the Fruit of Infinity, famous for its psychedelic effects.

We were the only ones at the bar - the whole act of going to the bar and ordering a drink was a memory from our deep youth that we re-enacted tonight simply out of nostalgia. Everything else about the act had changed. No longer did we ingest poison liquids or pay money. Money itself no longer existed, as the corporate world with all its private banks, interest and inflation had imploded long ago as predicted by Digital Debt Theory, due to compounded interest on money loaned that was not backed by gold or anything else. Numbers on a screen. Just like wax, when it got hot, the whole thing melted.

The Apotheca nodded at us and we understood that the drinks would be delivered to our table. So we turned and looked around the club. A beautiful Shimmer was singing on stage. We walked closer, meandering through the secluded booths until we found one that suited us. We sat and the tabletop started to glow. A digital menu showed and we touched the table to let it know we had already ordered and what we had already requested. Once done, the tabletop lifted from the table and floated up to the ceiling, a glowing disk far above our heads, and then floated to the bar. It followed the exact same path when it returned shortly after with our drinks and slowly returned to its position on the table. The drinks were prevented from spilling by glowing lightwires that held them in place.

Embellished with fruit and flowers, they were truly an artistic creation. The mutréa was the most beautiful of all of Jupiter's fruits. Shaped by sacred geometry, it grew naturally in a kaleidoscope of vibrant, gorgeous colours that looked amazing in the ultraviolet glow of Blacklight Lounge. Mine was cerise and cyan while Myakai's glowed white with silver running through it.

At the first sip of the Puraeta, Myakai met my eyes and we both sent the same thought: psychedelicious.

The entertainment at Blacklight Lounge tonight aimed to please the Earthians that the Rebel Revel had drawn out. But I didn't come for the crowd performers. I came for the game.

We sipped our drink and watched three more singers, all Shimmers, resonating in the ancient ways. I could feel it when they sang; the whole room vibrated with it.

Suddenly, the room faded to black, till we couldn't see our hand in front of our face. I switched to infrared sight and looked at Myakai. Our glowing eyes met. When the blacklights blinked back on, the stage was empty and a murmur moved through the crowd as Shimmers emerged from every direction, weaving through us silently - the only noise was the whisper of the silk wrapped around their body that glowed brilliantly in the blacklight and trailed behind them. Their silk and scent caressed me as they glided by, tickling me, titillating my senses.

Then the room went black again.

One ultraviolet light above the stage switched on, illuminating a poly-limbed goddess writhing centre stage. All I could see was the glowing silk undulating - the effect was hypnotic. I watched as the singular goddess split, became two, then four, then eight, then sixteen. They moved in unison and I suddenly knew what they reminded me of. Bellydancers. I mentally lauded Krysthala for thinking of it; it had been a very long time since I had seen bellydancers perform. I watched them, entranced, until I felt a buzz and knew it was our turn. I looked at Myakai, and we both got up. We walked away from the stage toward the outer wall of the room where a Shimmer was waiting for us.

The Shimmer led us through a dark, labyrinthine passageway, the walls covered in blood red velvet that did not reflect any light. We followed our guide to a door which slid silently open, and we stepped outside into a garden, following the illuminated path, admiring the precision of the stonework and the millions of flowers that

had opened up to drink the Jasmanian rain. I recognised one that had adorned my Puraeta and knew the mutréa grew near. I searched, and then I saw them, the cheery cherry berries that bedecked the bud of the majestic mutréa. I plucked a berry and popped it into my mouth, holding it there until it heated up and exploded in a burst of tiny tantalising fireworks full of sweetness that had my lips puckering in pleasure. I could feel the gentle effects of the drink strengthened upon eating the berry. Immediately I felt it coursing through my veins, through my brain, and I shuddered. I basked in the warmth of the sunlight that shined inside me until I was so full of the love of the eternal that it radiated out of me. Everything around me came alive and started to writhe; all the colours brightened, and the edges of my vision glowed with a golden halo.

Myakai took my hand and when I looked at her, she smiled. I knew she felt it too. I smiled back with my whole soul.

The Shimmer led us to a domed structure and stopped. We sent her thanks and removed the zapas from our feet. The door slid open; instantly I could smell mutréa smoke as its leaves smouldered in the stone bowl. We stepped over the threshold into the resonance chamber, immediately disrobing, looking forward to one pleasure that the synths would never be able to experience. A massage. I hung my clothes up on a peg and eased into the water pod. The pod took my temperature and adjusted the water to just a bit above mine so I would be warm but not hot. Myakai and I fell into silence, letting our practiced minds go quiet. I received no mental pictures from Mya, just reddish waves of calm bliss, which peaked when my troughed and cancelled each other out. We were still. Almost imperceptibly, tiny streams of water shot out of the pod and started massaging my muscles. The streams slowly grew bigger and more powerful as they worked their way over my body to my bigger, more powerful muscles.

Once the water therapy completed, a small team of Bios joined us and began body brushing. The natural fibres from a local plant removed all dead skin and stimulated our lymphatic system to move any toxins to the lymph nodes. Beginning with our feet, they followed the energy lines to our heart, repeating until we were flushed all over, a sign that our blood was flowing freely, at which point we were expertly rolled to our front. Once fully exfoliated, I

felt four hands begin to massage with long, light effleurage strokes. They moved through the motions of petrissage, cross-fibre friction, tapotement and vibration, loosening the grip fascia held on my muscles. The massage ended with slow, deep strokes specifically designed to induce a slowed brainwave state. By the time their fingers feathered off of me, I barely noticed, so deeply entranced was I.

I floated on waves of bliss from both the mutréa and the physical therapy. Colours exploded in my mind even though my eyes were shut. I was ready.

One of the Bios added more mutréa herb to smoulder in the bowl and aid us in maintaining an extended psychic state. Gently, imperceptibly, as if they had done it a thousand times, they floated us across the room and sank us slowly into the water pod, where we would be secure and warm.

As they left the room, they pressed one more button to lock our sphere and activate the shield so no one could see us. Then they sent us off into space.

My consciousness set free from its physical confines, I roamed, searching for the vibration that felt like home ...my favourite story...that I could relive again and again and never tire of the experience. One thought whispered through me, as if the universe itself was telling me a secret.

"...in a sea of infinite possibility," it said, "...we can create whatever we want, without limit..."



AMAZON JUNGLE | GREGORIAN YEAR 1996

"Shifting timelines is as easy as shifting attention."

~ Doc Hollinger

I woke suddenly, as if plunged into icy cold water, and realised with relief that the hellish world I'd just been in was only a bad dream. In the darkness, I reached out towards my floating bedside shelf, feeling around for my smartphone. My seeking fingers found neither shelf nor phone. My brows snapped together in irritated consternation. I reached up to turn on my touch light but it too was missing.

"Alexa, light on," I commanded.

Alexa did not listen.

"Alexa. Light. On," I repeated, annunciating each syllable carefully. Sometimes, Alexa was worse than Grandfather.

Still no response. Maybe her batteries died. Equally confused and disgruntled that I actually had to manually turn on my own light, I got out of bed and went to the switch. It wasn't there. I felt around the walls until my fingers found a cylindrical button. I pushed it, hoping it was a light switch. Candlelight yellow flooded the room, and I looked around in disbelief.

Something was wrong. Very wrong. Gone was my mirrored wardrobe, my white marble desk, my ghost chair, my floating shelf and touch light. This was not my bed, this was not my bedroom. Yet, I knew this room.

I knew the sacred geometry that created the curve of the solardome overhead and I knew that the floor I stood upon was sunk five feet into the earth. I knew the large circular bed would convert into a couch, and I knew the cedar I smelled came from wood chips required for the compost toilet.

I knew because I had drawn the design plans, envisioning it literally countless times. I was in an MHab.

Meditation habitat. But how could that possibly be? They did not exist.

A thousand thoughts raced through my mind. I let my mind contemplate the possibilities, no matter how crazy, powerless to stop it.

I needed my phone. Somehow, it would have all the answers. When I couldn't find it, I knew. I was still dreaming. I had to be. I never dreamed of my phone. It never featured in any of my dreams. However, in real life, it was never far from me and usually touching some part of my body. So if I didn't have it, it must be a dream.

I had heard of lucid dreams. I had always wanted to have one and had tried the WILD approach for months. Maybe I had finally succeeded. I remembered a lot of people saying in the stories I'd read that once they realised they were dreaming, they woke up. The only way to avoid waking up, they said, was to spin. So I spun. And spun. And spun.

Unfortunately, they never said for how long, so I stopped just short of being sick. Dizzy now, I looked around. It must have worked because I was still in the familiar but unfamiliar room that didn't exist. I moved around, touching things. They felt so real. Brushed cotton bedsheets. Crushed velvet cushions. A silky black blanket. If my subconscious mind was producing this, it was doing a considerably better job than my conscious mind. Perfect, actually. The detail was far more exquisite than in my clearest visualisations. But things always seemed real while *inside* a dream, I thought. It wasn't till after waking that you realised that it didn't make sense. I suddenly felt surreal. Because nothing was making sense. I sat down on the floor and closed my eyes, focusing on my box breathing. In for four, hold for four, out for four, hold for four, in for six, hold for six, out for six, hold for six, in for eight, et cetera. After I'd regained my calm, I looked around again. Okay, so I was in a meditation habitat. Okay, so I was probably inside a dream. People survived much worse. I could handle this; I was a soldier.

Well, had been. Military intelligence. Briefly. Seven months.

It counted.

Another thought hit me. Could I fly? I jumped, testing my dream abilities. I did not feel weightless. I felt exactly the same, and was instantly pulled back down to Earth by gravity. Okay, well, I'd try again later.

"Morning Mya."

I had always been skittish as a kitten, and would be in the dreamworld as well, it seemed.

With an embarrassing squeal, I jumped out of my skin, accidentally swallowed my own spit, which went down the wrong tube and made me choke, causing a coughing fit. When I had regained my breath, I stood.

Slowly, I turned towards the voice that had caused me to jump. I knew that voice anywhere. There was no other voice like it in my life. But my eyes wanted to confirm what my ears already knew.

"Mason."

The huge Russian that had joined our dig, and all my daytime and night-time fantasies, eighteen months ago. He was the sexiest man in the archaeology department. And the world, in my opinion. How many hours of my life had I spent secretly watching this man? How many surreptitious glances had I cast his way as he hiked through the Amazon jungle or dug up ancient civilisations, shirtless in the South American sun? Hundreds. Thousands.

"You dying?" He hiked his thumb towards the bathroom that he'd just come out of. "There's another towel in there if you need one."

"Mason," I said, weakly. His name was actually Afanasy but told us to call him Mason, for ease. Well, he told us to call him The Mason, but we blamed his bad English on being Russian. Mason Chambers. His Russian mother gave him the name Afanasy, and his American dad gave him his surname Chambers. I had no idea where Mason came from.

"Yea. I'm ready; you ready?"

"Ready?" I repeated dumbly.

"Yes. Ready. We said we would go while it is still dark."

"Go where?"

"Swimming."

I felt my eyes widen in shock. "Swimming?" I squeaked.

I had been seriously attracted to this man for eighteen whole months. To avoid another scandal of work romance gone wrong, I had completely ignored him for the entire duration. When he looked at me, he always smiled, but I never smiled back. I did not want to encourage him. As much as I wanted him, I couldn't. For so many reasons.

He was a work colleague. I had already learned a brutal lesson about that. Business and pleasure were like

bicarb and vinegar. Mix them and they will explode all over you.

I had promised myself I would never again give someone the power to destroy me, and I knew, if I let myself love him, he would have the power to destroy me, so intense were my feelings.

And I did not trust feelings.

Feelings changed.

I did not trust lust. The flame of lust burned hot only until someone ran out of oxygen.

I did not trust 'falling in love.' Those feelings always went away. Always. This was not just my personal experience; this was backed by science. I knew, because I had researched it whilst in the throes of tortuous pain I had suffered during one break-up. I had needed to understand why I was curled up in the corner like an addict who'd been cut off. More, I needed to know how to make it end.

I learned the best way to get over an ex is to go out with someone new, and get those happy chemicals flowing again. And thus began the never-ending cycle. One man after the other, chasing the high. They should call it 'flying in love' and 'falling in pain.'

This cycle did not end until, as Einstein advised, I attached my happiness to a goal instead of person.

My goal? The Atrium.

I wanted to create a sustainable solution for the homeless. I threw myself into learning everything I could about self-sustainability. For ten years, I stayed alone, studying tiny homes, Dirksen domes, earthships, sacred geometry, aircrete, composting, water purification, battery banks, everything I needed to know to build habitats for the homeless. I knew I would never again to fall 'in love'. Not the same thing as loving. I loved. I gave my love to all of the world instead of just one person. Instead of spending my life trying to please one man, I gave my love and my positivity to every single person in my life. My mantra: always leave them feeling better than when they came. This applied to everyone I came into contact with. My family, my colleagues, my postman.

I'd had the wrong dream, and it had died hard, drowned in a river of tears. I scraped it out of my belly with razors, and it left me feeling empty. Vacuous. But that created room for new things. You can't fill a cup that's already full. You have to empty it.

I filled the variate with a new dream. Instead of dreaming of the perfect man to give me the perfect life, I

dreamt of creating a positive change in the world that would last long after I was dead.

Over time, I cherished being alone. Life was so simple. So peaceful. I valued this much more than the unreliable high and the inevitable pain of romantic love. I preferred the stability of peace to the roller coaster of emotions that relationships caused. I didn't need the high and I didn't want the low. I just wanted to laugh, smile and be happy and after a while, I was.

First, I had suffered withdrawals from all those beautiful chemicals, and it was painful. But the pain did end. Once and for all. I suffered it once, and I had not suffered since. I did it the hard way, and it was what gave me the ability to resist Mason.

I knew exactly what would happen if I allowed myself to be led by my feelings.... assuming the attraction was reciprocated, of course. The beginning would be the same heavenly perfection that every couple felt at the start of the relationship, which was the effect of a particularly powerful chemical cocktail the body produced. This bliss always ended within the first year after having sex, at which point lovers would either start to produce oxytocin, the same chemical that bound mother and child, or they would start the separation process. The chemicals released in the first year were very different from the chemicals released in the second, and couples who made it to the oxy-bonding stage acted very different to how they acted when they met.

Because most people believed that what they felt was real, they became dejected when it changed, believing it had something to do with them, rather than the chemicals. They thought their relationship had really gone to shit, but that wasn't true. It just changed chemicals.

After what I had gone through in my last relationship, I knew there was no high, no matter how perfect, that was worth the pain. Suffer while the entire department watched? No way. Everyone asking if I'm ok, constantly showing their concern that the big sexy Russian had lost interest and failed to oxy-bond with me? No thanks.

Yet, here we were, apparently sharing a room and swimming together.

He perused my face. "You ok?"

"Mm. Hmm." I said slowly, by syllable. "Yep."

I sat on the bed. What was going on?

Okay, this was definitely a dream. I needed my phone. I needed to know what day it was. Year it was. I needed to

feel connected to the outside world. Because my subconscious was fucking me up.

I stood up. "Mason, have you seen my phone?"

"What phone?"

"My smartphone. Black flipcase? Seen it?"

He shook his head as if he had never heard any of those words before in his life.

"Hey, ah, are we sharing this room?"

"What?" He pulled a face. "Why are you acting so crazy right now? Seriously, are you feeling ok?"

I was beginning to feel very, very not okay. I sank back onto the bed.

"Have you ever pressed the wrong button in an elevator and gotten off on the wrong floor, without realising it, until you noticed that the carpet was a different colour and the chairs were arranged differently and faces are all different and they're looking at you like, 'You're not supposed to be here.' And you feel totally, completely disoriented....until somehow, the reality of the situation hits you, and you realise....'Oh, I'm on the wrong floor.' And then all the world makes sense again....?"

Mason tilted his chin to the side and looked up, pursing his lips. His thinking face. The same face he pulled anytime someone asked him where a specific city was in the world.

"That is how I feel right now...like everything has shifted... just two inches to the left."

So when would all the world makes sense again?

"Mya, this is weird, even for you. You're starting to worry me."

I stared at the huge Russian before me, struck again by the fact that we were in this room, my meditation habitat, together. When he shifted and touched his face self-consciously, I realised I had been staring for too long, I forced my eyes to the floor, bowing my head.

"I'm sorry," I said, a little pathetically.

He misunderstood, thinking I was sorry to worry him. He crossed the distance between us in two strides and pulled me into his arms, against his big comfortable chest, and despite the unresolved questions and worry in my mind, I found myself smiling inanely while my eyes drifted closed in sweet contentment.

I mean, things could have been worse. This dream, or whatever it was, had its perks. In the waking world, I had longed for Mason with an intensity that had surprised me. I had thought myself past such lust. I allowed myself the

fantasies, but I would never, ever act on them. I had already caused enough scandal; for the foreseeable future, I would be pristine. At least, in the waking world.

But I was no longer in that world, it seemed, but another, where Mason and Mya were together. It was obvious my mind had created this world inside my dream as a coping mechanism, to deal with my raging desire. And so, I would savour this more than my annual 'Pinot Noir, chocolate and cherry liqueurs breakfast' for my birthday. I didn't really mind if I ever woke up.

I tipped my head back to look up into the beautiful, strong arch-angelic face of my Russian Afanasy.

"Better?" he asked, smiling gently at me, dimple showing.

"Yes." Waking Mya had never touched Mason, but to Dream Mya, it seemed the most natural thing in the world.

"Good. Let's go swimming."

"What? Now?"

"Yes," he said decidedly. "No going back to bed. We said we would wake up early, and go swimming before everybody else. Now let's go!"

"Well I need to change."

He sighed. "Then why have you just been standing there? Go change."

I looked around the room. There were two suitcases. I assumed the smaller one was mine and went to it. I unzipped it, hoping there would be a swimsuit inside.

Thankfully, there was. I pulled it out and stood, facing Mason. I did not care if Mason and Mya were together in this dream, there was no way I was changing in from of him. I went to the bathroom and stripped off my pajamas, and slid the swimsuit on. I came out of the bathroom, and he was sitting on the edge of the bed, in just swimshorts, waiting for me. He was so delicious.

"Ready now?" he said.

I nodded.

"Good."

He opened the bedroom door and swept his arm gallantly, inviting me to go first.

I went through the door, and paused, unsure which direction to head. Was the floorplan identical to my original design?

He shut the door but didn't lock it, I noted, then started walking down the dark corridor. I followed quickly behind. The earthen floor made our steps soundless and we were just two shadows in the night,

moving silently through this labyrinthine passageway. I felt surreal. To know this place, and yet not know it. It was surreal.

I reached out for Mason in the darkness, and he took my hand, my tether to reality, such as it was. He was strong and it made me feel stronger.

The corridor went on for fifty metres then opened up to a huge glass-domed jungle oasis. Palm trees loomed high into the air and a waterfall cascaded over the edge of a rocky ledge and fell into a pool below, which cascaded into a pool beneath it and so on, and all fed a large circular pool in the middle. Moonlight poured in through the glass dome above us, illuminating the thousands of plants and flowers and trees, even the fish in the ponds. I could hear the gentle croaking of frogs, the whisper of crickets, the ambient sounds dimmed by the rushing of water. It was so magical, so ethereal....even better than it had been in my wildest imaginings. Everywhere I looked was so beautiful. The large pool of water in the middle was surrounded by a lazy river which kept the water moving, never stagnant, and the large pool fed a huge wood-fired copper hot tub that sat on a platform near the windows surrounded by plants and trees. I could see algae growing everywhere, a natural antibacterial, and I smiled. I knew there would be no chlorine or any other chemicals in that pool. Nothing harmful. Everything here could be eaten, technically. Moss covered the stones as if it had been there for hundreds of years.

Mason looked at me, his smile huge.

I smiled back with my whole soul.

"Can you believe it?" he said.

I shook my head. No I couldn't believe it. It was utterly surreal. I was standing inside The Atrium. With Mason.

"Can you believe we work here now?"

Wait.

"What?" I said.

"It's amazing."

"Mase...we *work* here now?"

"Live here, work here," he shrugged. "You know what I mean."

Before thinking, I spoke, "But I designed this place to be Habitats for the Homeless. Not a workplace."

For the first time, he looked at me as if he didn't know me. I never, ever wanted him to look at me like that again.

"Mya, you agreed to test it, to perfect the design before starting the global build. Don't you remember?"

Obviously, I had no idea what he was talking about. I dropped my gaze. What could I say? "I'm sorry, Mason. I feel a bit weird. I don't feel myself, exactly."

He softened instantly. "I'm sorry. Are you finding it stressful?"

"No. Not stressful. I just..." what could I say?

"Forget it. I'm sorry. Let's swim. You will feel better soon."

We walked down a short sandy path and the water gently lapped at our toes. We kept walking and the water got deeper and deeper until I had to go on tiptoe to keep my mouth comfortably above the water. Indigo lights lit the pool water. The water was cool, not cold, and pure enough to drink. Goosebumps broke out all over my body as the water caressed my skin.

Mason smiled at me and walked backward, going deeper, pulling me by my hand until my toes could no longer reach the floor and I swam. I flicked my feet gently underwater, propelling me forward. We glided lazily through the water, relishing the feeling.

This dream...

I wanted never to wake.

How do you make a dream last forever?

I spun in the water. Spun and spun like a bullet through the water, till I was dizzy. I reached out for Mason, and he grabbed my hand and pulled me towards him. His fingers slipped over my skin, and he pressed me up against him. His body was warm and hard, and I clung to him.

It had been a very long time since I had felt this sense of peace. Since I been this calm and content. I was swimming in the pure waters beneath the solar dome of The Atrium with the man I had dreamed of for years.

Maybe I wasn't dreaming, after all.

Maybe I was dead. Maybe this was heaven.

I shivered.

"Are you cold?" he asked. "Do you want to go in the hot tub?"

No. I wasn't remotely cold. The shiver was something else entirely. But I definitely did want to go in the hot tub. Those glowing blue lights beckoned me like a magical enchantment, with the promise of a secret world inside.

I nodded and we glided lazily to the edge of the pool.

"I love the way you move through water. No noise, barely a ripple. Like a swan."

I laughed. "Ok Mase."

We walked over to the hot tub, a giant copper pot. Just as we relaxed back against the side, a loud crack of lightning echoed around us.

I looked at Mason questioningly.

He pointed. I looked and saw lightning streaking its fractal fingers across the entire horizon.

We watched the lightning show through the glass solardome.

Could this dream get any better?

Mason sank lower into the tub, until I could see only his eyes above the water. He came towards me and I was reminded instantly of a shark, or some equally scary predator, and I felt a little shot of adrenaline rush through me. Fear. Then his hand reached out and grabbed me under the water, and I squealed and backed away from him. He grabbed me with both hands, and I was trapped against the wall of the hot tub.

"Come here." I grabbed his face and pulled it up out of the water. "Its crazy how scary you are when I can't see your dimple." I kept hold of his head so he didn't go back under the water, and realised he had the most satisfying head. It reminded me of holding a Rottweilers head, all huge and square. I pulled it closer and my eyes dropped to his lips. I wanted to taste them. I promptly dropped him and backed up a few inches. Why was I hesitating? None of this was real. Actions in dreams don't have consequences like they do in the waking world.

He smiled, and his dimple popped out. "Why do you like this thing so much?" He touched it, feeling the small indent in his face.

I shrugged. "I'm a sucker for dimples."

"But why?"

"No idea," I shook my head. "It's inexplicable."

He just looked at me.

"Unexplainable," I explained.

He laughed. "Just because I'm Russian doesn't mean I don't know big words."

"Just because I'm Russian,'" I mimicked, teasing him. I loved his accent so much.

"Stop it. You insult me." His dimple popped out.

To me, this man was irresistible. "I'm sorry Mase," I said in mock sorrow, kissing his cheeks and forehead to make him feel better. "I would never insult you."

"Mmmm. I like it when you are sorry."

I stared at him too long again, torn by my earthly desire for him and my heavenly desire for inner peace.

He watched my internal war, but I could not tell what he was thinking.

Then he said, "We better go. Everyone will be up soon."

I nodded and allowed him to help me out of the copper pot.

"Shall we go get some food?"

"I can definitely eat."

"What would you like?"

"Tea and tofu."

He nodded. "For you, tea and tofu. For me, anything else."

As we approached the cantina, I could see all the lights were off.

"They're closed, we'll have to come back later." I started to turn, but Mason caught my hand.

He gave me that look again, the look that wondered if I had lost my mind. "You know it doesn't work like that. The Itamae prepares breakfast the night before for the early risers and leaves it in the cool barrel for us."

I had at least ten questions I didn't dare ask him for fear of triggering that look on his face again. The look that said, Who is this person? The look that made me feel like a complete stranger.

I didn't say a word, just trailed just behind him so I could watch what he did. He went to a round barrel and pressed a lever. A three-tiered stainless steel shelf rose out of the barrel, its bottom sealing the top of the barrel so no cold air escaped. He rotated the tiers, looking at the items on the shelves. I noticed with impressed surprise all the food was vegetarian or vegan.

I selected a cucumber roll and an avocado roll, which did not need to be heated. I watched as Mason selected several plates that appeared to have holes in them and took them over to weird mini glass dome, not unlike the supermassive version we were currently living/working in. He opened the dome and slide the plates inside, then pulled a lever and steam filled the dome, steaming the dumplings and wontons in minutes.

Thrilled, I decided this was the best kitchen I'd ever seen and I said so.

Again he looked at me. "Did you hit your head or something?"

Oh no. "Why?"

“Jesus.” He turned to face me. “You created this. Everything....*everything*... here has come from your head.”

Was he talking to me as a figment of my imagination? Was my dream telling me that I created everything inside my dream? Was he my subconscious trying to send me a message?

We took our plates to a table and sat down. The tables looked like they were made from a matte metal material and the design was so intricate I wanted to ask Mason if we’d 3D printed them, but I didn’t want to see that look again.

After breakfast, we crept back to the room to dress. It was still dark and it felt wild to be creeping around in the night with Mason, while all the world still slept. It was a delicious feeling.

The entire ground floor of The Atrium could be accessed by anyone with a G pass, basically anyone who worked here. The ground floor had everything a person could need. Food, sofabeds, internet, power, latrines, gym, swimming pool, creative spaces, hidden nooks, access to hot water and cold water for showering, cooking, washing their clothes. Everything.

The Atrium sought to satisfy the first four of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs so that the fifth could actually be achieved....