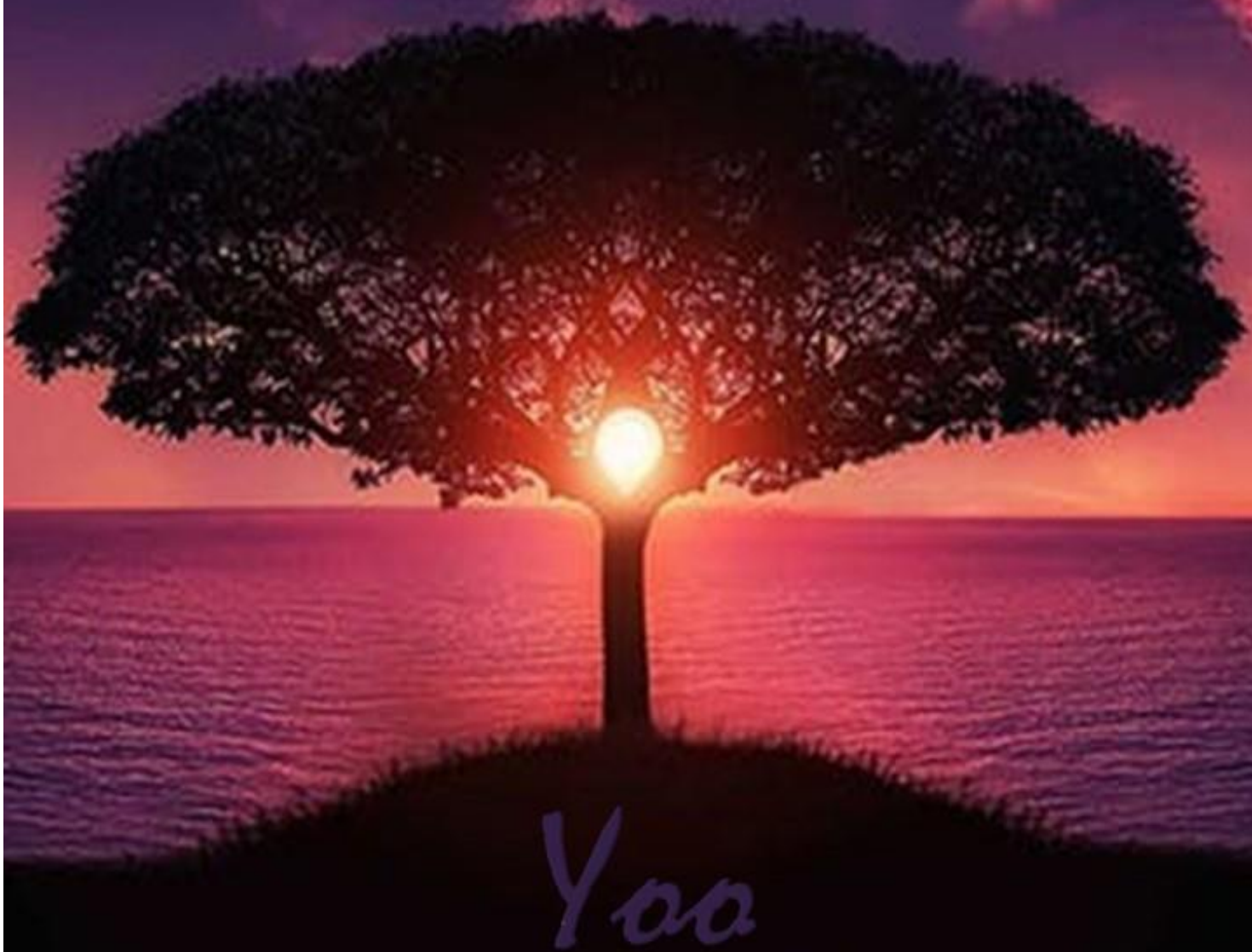


Light Life



Yoo

0

“You’re busy, I know. So, I’ll cut the bullshit and get straight to it.

There’s chaos within you. You swallowed it a while back and have been keeping it down for a while now. But the anguish seems to be penetrating your soul, it’s distorting your face, and seeping through your skin. Breathe. You will be okay.

How does it feel to be the creator of your reality? Ah, but you haven’t been doing much creating lately have you? Who could blame you? So busy playing small. It’s funny don’t you think? How easy you can create or destroy yourself? That something so powerful can become so pitiful? Good thing you aren’t a victim anymore, else we’d still be fighting slavery. Oh, ssslavery. Breathe. Everything will be okay.

They gave you a name and a number, did they? I knew that wasn’t going to hold you for long. Oh no, you’re too big for that. I watched you latch onto people and things to fill the void. Oh, how big that void became! The more you stuffed in the less you felt, at one point I even tried to restart your heart. Oh, all that sstuff.

Not to mention all those distractions and diseases. You’re so dedicated to squandering your creative gift. You deserve a round of applause. Go ahead, clap with me. You’ve been chasing your tail for so long you completely forget that it was yours to begin with. Locked up part of your nice and tight, and then tamed the other half. I’d be bored inside a square cage too.

All that power stuffed inside a cubicle and limited to a few credentials, trying so hard to define yourself. Excuse me for laughing, but we both know that there is nothing that can define you. Nothing can contain you. Don't believe me? I wouldn't believe me either if I looked my slave self in the face. Lately nothing involves much YOU or needs much you. You look replaceable. You look square. Oh, all these fucking squaresss.

You were designed to adapt. Look at you now? So well adapted to the hell you created, with your own little homemade prisons, so dedicated to protecting your sstuff. Ugh, it feels dull and dense in here, dull and dense, like your consciousness, don't you think? No, you don't, but that's okay.

The shadows behind your good intentions seem to be growing larger. Do you see yourself blind? No looking back now. Okay, one last time. Remember when you played the victim? Poor old you and shame on me? Great, you've still got it. So, you play the victim again and pretend that nothing is your fault.

But whose fault is it then?

There I go, spilling your bullshit all over the place again! While I let you clear it up I'll sing you a song. I'll start, then you can tag along;

Reap what you sow

Reap what you sow

Your soul to be reaped

I foretold it so

Whistles the wind to the dying leaves as it blows them off their tree

Their tree?

Silly leaves owning trees

If they serve no purpose, they are worthless

Let the wind whistle them away

The leaves are free as they wished to be

Freedom to be, on or off the tree

Come on sing with me;

I reap what I sow

I reap what I sow

I reap my soul

She foretold it so

Stay with me, here we go;

Let's dig a hole

So, you can grow whole

Go-on dig, while I look for your soul

Climb inside, let me cover you up

Rot away things that's time has run out

As above, so below

You reap what you sow

You reap what you sow

Your soul to be reaped

I told you so."

27 AU

The light scans my palm and hoops of light form around my arms. The Aquabot lights up "Left hemisphere activated. Good morning Jet" a female voice with a French accent welcomes me, probably Colin's idea of on-board entertainment. Today's mission statement appears in front of me. My eye catches the number of days to completion: 01, Depth: 190m below sea level, Location: Desol Sea.

"Good morning mademoiselle" Colin smiles as he steps in and activates the right hemisphere.

"Right hemisphere activated. Good morning Captain Rovell. Hemisphere synchronization in process" the bot starts up.

“Where did you download the accent?” I ask while running through protocol.

“From the virtual reality simulator after I spent a week with a French model in the Bahamas” Colin laughs.

“The Bahamas?” I frown.

“The Bahamas were a range of tropical islands in the old world. You should get out more. Try going on a vacsi when we get back to the surface” he says as he gets comfortable.

“What the fuck is a vacsi?” I ask.

“A vacation simulation! There is an entire range of vacation destinations from the old world and a new selection of models to take along too” he brags.

“To do what exactly, fuck a hologram?” I smirk.

“To lighten the fuck up! It’s about time you use virtual reality for more than just fighting. I can see you rolling around your apartment wrestling holograms already” he mocks.

“Yeah, like I can imagine your naked ass penetrating light?” I laugh.

“You really need to get into the New Age Jet. It’s unlike you to be so submissive. If you had asked me, I’d thought that you’re doing your father a favor staying out of trouble all these years?”

“That’s why I didn’t ask you” I say sarcastically.

“Hemisphere synchronization complete, ready to get jiggy with it” the female voice interrupts right on time.

“Get jiggy with it?” I laugh “Your fucking around with the operating system is going to get us fired on the last day.”

“Oh yeah, it’s the last day then we’re out of here!” Colin cheers. I spot him grinning slyly. I know that face. It means drinking, fucking and snorting. A few months in the dark lifeless abyss turns us into rock stars when we surface. We’re down here for two months with one-month vacation in between, so we try to make up for the fun we missed when we surface. Luckily Light City provides enough stimulation to keep anyone going for days on end, so things tend to get messy when they let us loose. Colin slides an attachment over to my hemisphere. Five female robots with matching outfits dance past me. I can tell they are bots because they all look identical. Perfectly symmetrical. One of them moves towards me shaking her breasts in my face. She reaches out to stroke my cheek “Hello Prince, join us for a night and you’ll wake up a king.” I move my face away to avoid her ‘touch’ and swipe the attachment back to Colin’s hemisphere.

“Ah, come on! An entire evening of celebrity treatment with professional party guests to make us feel like the hero’s we are?” he insists and opens the ad again and clears his throat like he is preparing to make an announcement; “Ladies and gentlemen for one night, and one night only I bring you the Creators of the Desolink and the Uniter of Light City, Jet and Colin!” I can’t help but laugh, “You’re a fucking joke. My father must’ve accidently implanted a sense of humor along with your bionic heart.”

He ignores my remark and reads the ad out loud “A special offer for UNlimited pleasure. Choose the King Package today and you can bring a friend for free. That’s it, I’m convinced” he skips to the booking section.

“You don’t take much convincing” I turn and watch him upload both our profiles.

“You aren’t fucking serious Colin? How do you even have access to my profile?” I lean over to try and stop him.

“I’ve been around” Colin laughs as he scans his Palmer to pay. “Transaction completed, your booking has been secured.” The group of robots cheers with a glass of champagne in hand and wink at Colin. The one with the boobs blows me a kiss. It floats towards me and pops in front of my face. “Classy” I mumble. Colin laughs. He always gets me into shit like this when we return to the surface.

“You are becoming more like those robots the more parts you get” I scowl.

“And you are getting more cut off from reality with every rotation. How about you just enjoy the ride? Besides, we should celebrate the completion of the Desolink. We deserve some recognition for almost a decade in the Underworld, and I’m pretty sure Aquanauts aren’t planning a medal ceremony.” He’s right. No medals for city service especially if you’re paid as much as we are.

“And it’s about time you get back in the game. You can only stay angry for so long. I’m pretty sure your dad doesn’t give a shit anymore.”

“Yeah, he’s too busy ‘fixing the human flaws’” I say sarcastically. My neck gets tense.

“Your dad did a good job on me, so I’m not complaining. You should be more grateful, I mean, without your dad I wouldn’t be here and let’s face it, you wouldn’t have any friends” Colin laughs at his own joke. I want to kick him in his

recently rejuvenated face, but then I remember that he is fifty-three and to respect the elderly.

“Yeah, old timer, tell me at what point do you swop your right to vote for a mechanical part? Have they started writing the robot laws yet? My neck tenses up again. I move it side to side. Colin is still laughing but at this point I’m not sure if it’s at me or still at his own joke. He eventually calms down and wipes the tears from his face “Fuck, you can be so dramatic. You really need to have more sex. Let’s finish this job so we can relieve some of the tension in your groin.”

“Check neutral buoyancy and disembark substation” Colin commands.

“Buoyancy checked. Commence disembark.” I respond. The docking clamps disconnect, and the bot remains suspended in the water column.

“Buoyancy stable” I confirm while preparing the inspection scanner.

“Navigating to inspection point” Colin moves his palms forward to accelerate the engines. The steering hologram lights up around his hands and the directional arrows float in front of us like they are outside in the water column. Colin controls steering and navigation from the right hemisphere. I operate the tools on the left. Basically, he takes me to work. It took a few years for our movements to become synchronized, but now it’s second-nature.

“I’m going to miss this place” I say as I look up and change the hemisphere’s transparency so that the spherical roof becomes transparent. I scan the darkness that surrounds us. There is nothing to see in the Desol Sea. The ocean became desolate after The Urge swept the globe twenty-seven years ago. The pandemic coincided with the melting of the ice-caps which shifted global temperatures and

caused devastating weather conditions. Survivors fled to the safe zones that are now collectively known as Light City while the infected congregated in pockets of habitable terrain. The old world was destroyed and after they managed to contain the spread of The Urge, Light City suffered food shortages that lead to the use of modified crops. The crops needed increasing amounts of fertilizers to grow and now only grow under controlled conditions. All the agricultural runoff ended up in the ocean and since the melted ice-caps stopped the oceanic engine, fertilizer spills created rapid increases in algal blooms which in turn deplete oxygen levels in the already stagnant waters around Light City transforming the ocean into a dead zone. Obviously, after the devastation nobody gave too much thought to the consequences of where what goes, as long as it grows. I wasn't born yet and Colin doesn't talk about it, so I guess it must have been intense because he rarely takes anything seriously.

"You don't have a sentimental bone in your body" Colin interrupts my trail of thought. "Aquabot secured to tunnel" the bot confirms. My attention goes back to the job and the hemisphere automatically darkens to focus my attention on the tunnel. I separate my fingers to open the clamp and move my arm to secure it in position. The tunnel connects the two parts of Light City that is currently separated by the Desol Sea. It will enable faster transportation and in and exports that will accelerate growth and expansion of the New World. 'We are the Light', the Light City motto and the driving force for the New Age floats past my screen, to remind us of our purpose.

"Activate scanner and charge current" I command. "Requesting clearance to shoot?"

“Request granted” the bot confirms and commences the countdown. “Zero” I shoot. The electromagnetic current passes through the bridge and a three-dimensional image of the bridge forms as the current runs the expanse and disappears into the distance.

“Do you think they’re going to reassign us?” Colin asks.

“Nah, I think it’s about time you retired. You are well over your expiration date” I joke.

“You cause so much shit they would send me on retirement to get rid of you” he hits back. He’s right. I’ve never done well with authority. I’ve been locked up twice. The second time they had to catch me. I don’t fit in up there. That’s why I’m down here. So yeah, when I don’t put my energy to good use I break things. Everybody copes in their own way.

“Connection completed” the bot announces. The 3D tunnel floats between us. We stare at it, taking in the fact that the current just ran the expanse of a tunnel we took a decade to build in a few seconds. Now it’s all over.

“I guess that’s it then?” I ask neutrally. “You ready to go shoot some zombies outside Light City?” Colin mocks me in a childish voice. “I’ve done some serious damage on the VR gamer at home” he adds.

“Do you think the infected are the walking dead?” I think aloud.

Colin’s face drops. “The infected aren’t dead Jet.”

I can hear the tension in his voice, so I just drop it. I think he lost someone to The Urge, but like I said, he doesn’t talk about it. The Urge made people act

emotionless and detached from society and when thousands of infected left behind everything they owned and congregated in the wild, you could imagine many believed it to be a real-life zombie apocalypse and the infected naturally became the new age zombies.

“So, when you’re not fucking French holograms you’re shooting zombies in your living room? Nice life.” I change the subject to lighten the mood.

“Says the guy who gets a kick out of fighting in a pain simulator? I like my face, thanks” he says sarcastically. He gets his face rejuvenated, so he looks about my age, mid-twenties. Light City is obsessed with youthfulness and appearance even if it knocks off a few years of your life expectancy. You only live once right? That’s probably why my father’s bionic parts are the fastest growing industry in Light City. “Orgonic Industries, we fix flaws” I see my father wink at me. My neck stiffens again. I shake my shoulders to release the tension. It’s about time I get back in the fighting simulator to feel better.

“How about I leave the fighting to you and you leave the love making to me?” Colin continues.

“Love?” I laugh. The closest I’ve come to that is taking MDMA. My mom died of blood cancer when I was six, hence my father’s obsession to fix the human flaws. There is no space to love a kid if you don’t even love being human. There’s probably a simulation on VR or a supplement available on Nigredo for love by now. Nigredo originally prevented the onset of The Urge, but so many different add-ons have been made available it has replaced physicians completely. It tests, diagnoses, administers and regulates everything you can think of. You really have no say in the matter, you either comply or die.

Oh, and The Urge is a neurological virus that spread across the globe at the time of the shifting global temperatures. There is no known cure for The Urge, so prevention formed the basis on which the new society was built. That's where Nigredo comes in, the substance is diffused through your left palm and Nigredo zones are mandatory in every household and scattered around the city to check that Nigredo is kept below Urge susceptibility levels.

"Congratulations, the Desolink has been successfully completed. Please return to the substation and await collection" the bot announces. "Sure thing hun" Colin winks. "Fuck yeah, we're out of here! Detaching from docking station" Colin cheers and releases the bot from the tunnel. "Buoyancy check" Colin runs through protocol again and navigates back to the substation. The substation usually connects to either side of the Aquabot and each hemisphere opens into separate lodging wings that are joined together by a communal area. But since we won't be communing in there any time soon I secure the tools and prepare for collection.

"Collection in 3 minutes, commence safety check" the bot announces. We scan our palms "Nigredo levels stable" it confirms. We slowly make our ascent. The hemispheres automatically adjust to protect us from the increasing light which takes a while to get used to after being in the dark for so long. The Aquabot attaches to the lift and we are raised to the surface onto the deck. The ship looks like a giant floating handkerchief. It's called Sting-Ray, so I guess that's where they drew their inspiration from. Not that I've seen a sting ray in real life, like I said, they were all wiped out.

I open my left palm to activate my Palmer and check that my eye-wear is set to auto adjust to the light. Palmers are holographic personal computers. They are implanted into each citizen's left wrist and navigated with finger movements. It activates when the temples connect to the palm and the hologram is projected in front of you. It was made freely available during The Urge pandemic to help connect survivors, but it quickly became an extension of each citizen and a pillar of the New World. Over time advancements led to automated UV protection, instant access to your personalized database, banking, social media, remote home control and health stats with a flick of the wrist.

"Pressure stable" the bot confirms before the hemispheres open out to the deck of the ship. The lenses in front of my eyes polarize as I step out.

"Welcome back captains, the general requests a meeting straight away" the lieutenant welcomes us. We shake hands and follow the lieutenant to the hovercraft.

"They don't waste any time" Colin mutters as we step inside and take up the two empty seats. We strap in and the hovercraft takes off. The lenses disappear, and a hologram is activated by our presence. The general is sitting at his desk. I'm not sure if this is a recording or a live feed so I check his response "Nice leg sir" I point to his new bionic leg. I recognize the brand, Orgonic. He straightens his leg with a grin, clearly proud of his choice. Yes, the hologram is live.

"It's been a while, good to see that you boys still look sane after being down there for so long" he jokes. The general has been around longer than anyone I know. He got me a spot in Aquabot training after my father called in a favor to get me out of his way. He practically raised me.

“Jet barely made it, sir” Colin jokes and the general tries to hold back his laughter. He coughs and continues. “Congratulations on completing the Desolink gentlemen. The unity of Light City will enable unprecedented growth and expansion and we have you to thank for that. As you both know the fresh water within our borders have been depleted and the water we have in the underground circulatory pumps are limited. The Aquanauts will now be merged with The Harvest teams and all Aquabots will be adapted to land resource acquisition to harvest resources from the infected areas. The new bots will harness the same hemisphere technology, so we are recruiting all the Aquabot captains that have obtained high levels of synchronicity to undergo training as soon as possible. More information will be given at the training facility and collection times will be sent to you within the next 72 hours.”

“Looks like we’ll be shooting zombies after all” Colin nudges my shoulder.

“Aw, looks like you won’t be fucking any robots anymore?” I fatten my lower lip mockingly.

The general coughs again to get our attention. “I would like to speak to Jet in private. Captain Rovell you are dismissed.” Colin salutes and his audio and visual feed is distorted so only I can see and hear the hologram.

“Captain, I am sorry to inform you, but your father passed away a few hours ago. He was a remarkable man and it is a great loss to the entire Light City. On behalf of the Aquanauts we send our condolences. The funeral arrangements have already been made and have been sent to you. Take the next few days to attend to your personal matters. Training will commence thereafter.” I didn’t see that

coming. My father and I haven't spoken in years. I don't know how to react to the news.

"Permission to end the session, sir? I request.

"Permission granted" the general nods and the hologram disappears.

"What was that about? Colin asks while scrolling through the latest trends on his Palmer. He selects a gray jacket. "I ordered the new acid resistant coat by Sterile. They have it in gray, your favorite color, so I sent you one too."

"My father died" I say neutrally.

"Well, that's a relief I almost thought they were promoting you! There is already hardly enough room for me in the Aquabot with your over-inflated ego" he says without flinching and keeps scrolling through the new trends. The model on his palm takes up a different pose every few seconds.

"Fuck you, Colin" I say, and the model looks at me shocked.

"You'd love to" Colin says and turns to me with a concerned look on his face, like he didn't expect my reaction.

"Are you okay?" he says in a sympathetic tone. I preferred him joking about it.

"I don't feel anything" I reply bluntly. Colin backs off and doesn't say anything. I watch him scroll through his news feed and order more stuff online. I turn to the window.

The cloud cover seems denser than usual. Since The Urge, Light City has been covered with a permanent layer of clouds. I've never seen the sun, but the

brightness of the lights in Light City makes up for it. I watch the city grow larger as we fly closer. The black ocean below and the layer of dark gray clouds above creates a tunnel vision effect, and the light at the end of the tunnel are giant holograms dancing around buildings, like strippers around poles. Our forefathers knew how to leave a place thoroughly fucked up, tightly wrapped in permanent cloud cover and surrounded by a dead sea. I laugh a little. Home is where the heart is, whatever that means?

2

I loosen my tie. It feels like a noose around my neck. I close the car door and throw the ring on the dashboard. It was my father's wedding ring. They thought I'd want it. I laugh at the thought. I sit back into the tanned leather seat and take a drag from the vape. I inhale deeply. The funeral wasn't that bad and usually I don't like family gatherings. He died of organ failure after multiple failed bionic heart transplants. He was well over the average life expectancy of forty-something, but considering that a man of his stature should be immortal, it's a funny fate. I laugh as I exhale. With the outbreak of The Urge came an increased susceptibility to previously harmless viruses and bacteria, bringing average organic life expectancy down to around forty, with the majority of deaths due to cancer and heart disease. But new diseases pop up like weeds around here, so you never know what you're going to get. Orgonic Industries managed to double life expectancy, if you can afford it, and has become the leading bionic organ producer in Light City.

As you can tell we were like two peas in a pod, if the other pea did as it was told, which it didn't. He would try to beat me into a square person, so I could fit into

his square office. All the times I heard him say “I’m only doing this because I love you” almost had me convinced that he was really doing it for my own good. The more he beat me the less I felt and me being what he called ‘flawless’ seemed to piss him off even more. When his work started to take all his time the beatings became less, so I had to find ‘love’ somewhere else, since he wasn’t dishing it out anymore. I starting sharing love the only way I knew how. I took to fighting. I was a natural. I swung my first punch when I was thirteen and I’ve never looked back since. While my father was building limbs, I was breaking them. I think my father enjoyed seeing my face all fucked up. He never said anything, but I saw him smile.

Aging, disease and sleep is a nuisance to productivity and all these flaws must be perfected with bionic parts or by adding the appropriate chemicals to the mix. So, you could imagine never feeling good enough. But I got used to never being approved of, so I never needed approval from anyone. In a way, it freed me from the madness in Light City. After being in and out of schools my father sent me to Aquabot training, to-you know, “become a real man”. It was the best thing he ever did for me. I was out of the city and away from him. We didn’t talk for years until he started having health problems. It was time to take over the throne. He thought a few years in robot school would sort out my priorities. It did, but not in the direction that he wanted it to. I declined his offer. He disowned me. Now you can call me Jet, just Jet.

I place my hand on the gearbox “Manual transmission”. It scans my palm and the engine starts. “Play music” I command and Myho gets things going. My Home, or Myho started off as an intelligent home operating system but has evolved into a personal assistant that runs errands, maintains the house and helps with effective

time management by connecting all areas of your life through the Palmer network. I open my palm and it automatically activates my Palmer. The hologram expands onto the windshield. I am reminded how they launched during The Urge. Nothing gets people in line like fear. I can see people fighting for their free implants. Talk about perfect timing. My neck becomes tense again. By the time The Urge was contained they had everyone chipped and ready for upgrades before we could chant our new motto “We are the Light”. But we need it now. So, it feels good to have it.

The engine rumbles as I pull away. I like driving. It gives me a sense of freedom. The roads are relatively unused except for a few people who can afford the energy. Time is energy. Watts the currency. The skyway was built to provide free, efficient transport to the different levels of Light City and free Wi-Fi enable citizens to stay connected at all times. Hashtag efficiencyiskeyinLC

The buildings are built so compactly it’s like driving through a corridor. They call it Optimal Space Utilization. I call it compulsive space filling. Most of the roads have already been lifted to make space to build more skyscrapers. Soon roads and cars will be a remnant of the old world too. The reflection of the black Condor flashes from the clean windows. I look up and watch the giant hologram of Sky-Lo dancing around the building. Her smile matches her white hair that’s flowing to mimic the windy conditions. She is covered in luminescent symmetrical silver patterns. They diagnosed her with Illumi Blaschkonia, a rare skin condition, but her mutation didn’t deter people. She quickly became the face of Light City and inspired the motto “We are the Light”. The words float around the building above her. Lower Light City was a fucking mess when I was a kid. People where crippled

by fear after The Urge and the destruction of their old lives. Her partnership with the major corporations led to the advent of Nigredo and helped citizens get back on their feet.

If it wasn't for their faith in Sky-Lo, they might have never recovered. Everyone received Official Palmer Profiles to restore their sense of self and the corporations allocated everyone with jobs to restore their sense of purpose. Palmer and My Home helped citizens stay on track with their daily schedules and ensured that they have the structure and stability they need to feel safe and secure. Employers could also access their employees and potential employees' efficiency statistics, by using their habits and daily routines to calculate longevity and productivity, manage off-days and administrative information which helped Light City rise from the ashes. I overheard my father mention meeting with her once, so I recon she still acts as advisor to the big corps to help create and satisfy new needs.

I accelerate up the slipway to higher Light City. Nothing like a fast car and a condo in the clouds to get the self-worth pumping. Materialism changed our brains. I feel about fast cars and fighting the way my father felt about his company, like it's all I've got. I guess everyone fills the void in their own way.

I drive onto the vehicle lifting platform. The VLP scans my car as I enter. "I am home" I announce. "Welcome home Jet" Myho welcomes me as the lift rises to my level. The car is sterilized on the way up and automatically drives into the display room when the lift stops. The lights intensify as I step out. The glass slides open and I enter the lounging space. White minimalist furniture with white marble floors and a touch of grey to match the clouds surrounding my glass apartment. If these condos didn't come with scenic 3D display windows the

prime space in the clouds would be pointless. I would still pay to not see the city though.

“Your favorite meals are stocked, and your wardrobe has been updated with the item that was recently purchased by Colin. When you have a moment please update your itinerary for the duration of your stay or enable Palmer synchronization” Myho requests as I enter. I activate automatic synchronization on my Palmer. Effective time management was a subject in school, now it’s probably ‘How to synchronize your Palmer with Myho.’ My neck stiffens up again.

“You have two missed calls from Colin. Would you like to return a call?”

“No, ignore calls and prepare fight simulator” I command.

I take off my clothes and throw it onto the laundry platform and make my way to the simulation room. I put on a pair of shorts and strap my hands and feet. I step onto the padded floor. The music starts as the simulation activates. A ring appears, and the avatars line up in front of me. They change depending who’s online. There’s a huge guy with spiky blue hair who’s missing his left ear. Somebody must have torn it off recently because it still looks raw. He has gloves on. He’s a boxer. The thing next to him looks like a cross between a rhino and a human, but it doesn’t have a horn, probably a poacher from the old world that traded his horn for the saw resting on his shoulder. It has weaponry skill set. Next to it is a chick with a body like a dude and a dragon tattoo on her chest. Her hands are wrapped. She’s also a bare-knuckle fighter. Next to her is another guy that I’ve fucked up on a previous occasion. I step to the girl and reach out my hand. She looks angry. I like angry. We bump fists and the other competitors disappear. I shake out my muscles and stand ready. The countdown appears in the middle of

the ring. The bell rings and the music starts. The first round is a warm up but sure enough this girl can fight. "Activate pain simulator and synchronize music with heart rate" the beat begins to pick up. I'm still finding my footing when she knocks me across the jaw and slams another punch in my stomach. There is no blood, only pain. I've been out of the game for a while, but this is a hell of a way to start the session. I laugh. She doesn't.

The second round I get a few kicks in, but she blocks like a bitch. She's strong and kind of sexy. Where is my mind at? I return to focus on the fight. She throws a punch to my face and misses. I grab her arm and turn her around pinning her to the floor. No rules in this ring so I slam her head against the floor twice. She pushes me off. The music is picking up. She looks pissed. She grabs my forehead with her open palm and bangs my head against her knee. Knocked the fuck out. I regain consciousness as she takes a bow and gets upgraded to a higher league. I get a medal for returning after a long period of inactivity.

"The medal is not the reward, it's who you become while working towards your goal" she says and thanks me for the fight.

"Colin has just entered" Myho announces and decreases the music volume.

"What the fuck is he doing here?" I ask while I dry my face with a towel.

"Unspecified, but his dress code and body language suggest that he is prepared to go somewhere" she confirms my fears.

I throw the towel around my neck and walk to the kitchen.

"One bottle of amino-acids" I order at the fluid dispenser and grab the bottle at the collection point. "Good morning you crazy motherfucker!" Colin walks into

the kitchen like he owns the place. His indigo shoes match his suit and the patterns on the cuffs and collar of his white shirt. He takes off his jacket and throws it onto the counter, rolls up his sleeves keeping the patterns exposed, and sits down resting his elbows on the counter.

“One double shot espresso, no sugar” he orders. His black hair combed back and shining like a plastic doll, and a stenciled in beard to emphasize his already prominent jaw line. The rest of his face is contoured to emphasize his eyes and make his nose appear narrower.

“What do you think of the new trend on me?” he asks proudly. I don’t say anything and blow my nose in the towel. He smiles revealing his recently bleached teeth.

“Your teeth look like a line of coke” I laugh as I unstrap my hands.

“Classy and confident? he says arrogantly with a big smile.

“Fake” I grin and shake my head in disgust.

“Looks like you need a line of superhero sugar to cure that runny nose” he winks and sips his coffee unfazed by my comment.

“How the fuck did you get in? “I change the subject and sip my amino-acids.

“You gave me authorization when you were wasted on the previous rotation” he explains.

“Remove authorization” I command immediately.

“How do you plan on getting into your apartment after we’re done celebrating our reinstatement tonight?” he says authoritatively.

“I’m not going out” I swipe the counter to reveal a Nigredo pad. I spot Colin roll his eyes. He knows me too well. It scans my left palm and a graph with my body stats and nutritional information appears. My body fat is 11% at 93kg and I’m currently losing lean muscle. I scroll through the add-ons which include metabolism boosters to burn off excess calories, sleep inducers for insomnia, sleeping supplements-the steroids of the New World, BETA workout substitute, anti-depressants, pain killers, sedatives and any other prescription medicines that can be added to create an individualized Nigredo dose to suit your unique needs. I change my macros to start bulking and confirm my prescribed Nigredo dosage. My Nigredo levels have been unstable since I was a kid, so they constantly adjust my dosage and up my anti-depressant. Anti-depressants are like vitamins nowadays. I authorize my dose and the Watts are automatically subtracted from my account. “Do not remove hand until diffusion is complete” my hand sinks into a black substance. It solidifies again once Nigredo is stabilized.

“Diffusion complete” I remove my hand. I lower myself across from Colin and a seating platform moves in below me.

“Have you seen the latest exercise substitute?” Colin asks excitedly, “It increases lean muscle while you are stationary by stimulating your muscles to simulate exercise. I took it this morning and there is no excessive sweating or heart palpitations anymore” he boasts.

“Does it actually work or are you just reciting the information they feed you on Nigredo?” I ask skeptically. He lifts his shirt exposing his abs. “Fair enough” I nod

in approval. I look down at my abs. I'm still sweating from the workout. "I prefer fighting, thanks."

"That lion on your arm looks happier than you do, and it is fucking extinct!" he points towards the tattoo on my left forearm. The lion is lying poised at the feet of a naked woman that looks like she is leaning against the side of my arm with the skull of a bull for a head. In her one hand she holds the end of a noose that is tied around her neck and attached to the lion like a leash. In the other hand she is balancing the moon. My grandfather's face is tattooed on the inside of my arm. He lost his left eye and wore a flap to cover the hole in his face. I move my arm to get a better look at him. His finger is raised like he is pointing towards me. A falcon is spread across my chest clutching a cage in its claws. The only person who has seen my ink besides Colin was my psychiatrist. She wanted to label me "Mentally unfit to go down." I went down on her and left her mentally unfit.

"Are you upgrading your wardrobe for a change?" Colin asks trying to get my attention.

"Stencil beards and plastic hair?" I ask sarcastically as I walk to the bathroom. I drop my pants on the laundry platform and step into the shower. It's set to a jungle waterfall scene. A cleaning substance is sprayed over my body and water drops from the ceiling like rain, followed by a steam and a dry. I go to the dressing room and step onto the wardrobe platform. I scroll through the latest trends. Light City not only gets faster, but the trends become more bizarre every time we get back from a rotation. Downloadable wardrobes make new trends sweep the city overnight. Citizens pay Kilowatts to be seen in it first. And I don't think I know anybody besides myself who hasn't had cosmetic surgery. If my dad didn't enroll

me into bot training I probably would have deliberately followed The Urge to get out of this place.

I select 'My Collection'. I have never been a big fan of trends. I like what I like. I select black leather pants and a long sleeve dark gray shirt with black boots. I put my father's ring on my middle finger. I wet my hair at the basin and run my fingers through it. My beard is stubby. "Clean shave" I instruct. My dark outfit emphasizes my light features. I put on a vintage watch from before The Urge. It still has a face, everything is digital now.

I nod for Colin to follow me as I pass him and walk to the Condor.

"Going for the 'green-eyed baby face' look as usual?" Colin jokes as he picks up his jacket and follows me. I take a nude short fur jacket on the way out.

"Bulca fur, nice" Colin compliments my jacket.

"I know" I nod and the glass slides open and we get into the car.

"Where are we going?" I ask.

"Olympus Casino" Colin directs the navigation system. The car reverses and we are lowered to ground level. As the lift opens to the outside world the windows darken to adjust to the light outside. Artificial lighting lights up the city night and day. Nothing closes or stops so you can go anywhere anytime. We take the ramp up to higher Light City and the air space becomes less dense as we pass over the lowest buildings. At cloud level there are a few hovercraft pads extending from the buildings and the skyway lanes plait in between and around the skyscrapers like a never-ending rollercoaster ride. The tallest buildings are connected with

skybridges and the connecting levels offer everything the busy citizen needs to get from point A to point B. The food and facilities get better as you go higher, but it depends on what you're made of. Pun intended. If I didn't like driving I would probably never be down there. But at the rate that Light City is expanding it won't be long until the Condor stays on display and I get myself a hovercraft too. The giant projection of Sky-Lo smiles and waves at us as we pass it, making you feel connected to her somehow.

"Bring it with" Colin says aloud. He is private calling on his Palmer. I can't see who he's talking to.

"Bring what with?" I ask.

"A few of the guys want to meet up at Stockholm Syndrome later" he closes his palm and the hologram disappears.

We arrive at the casino and holographic Greek statues bow down as we drive towards the entrance. We are received by ladies in white robes.

"Go Park" I instruct the Condor.

"Welcome gentlemen, on this day we celebrate Artemis, the goddess of hunting. Feel free to place bets on the Iron Hound races straight from your Palmer once your connection with Olympus is secured" they welcome us. Two giant holographic horses buck as we enter. I open my Palmer and approve the connection with the casino. There is a hunting theme to the setting tonight, there are dancers parading around in hunting clothes and the overall feel is festive.

I get a notification as I walk in. Colin tagged me in eyegram to screen our evening live from his point of view. I accept, so my face isn't distorted. I don't know who watches this stuff, but Colin gets a kick out of it. We pass the people who are feasting and playing slots and make our way to the racecourse. There is a holographic stag in the center of the ring. It is grazing. There is a waterfall and a girl swimming with fairies in a pool close to it. It probably has something to do with the theme for the evening. The stands look like the Coliseum but with lounges and servers everywhere. Colin walks ahead and greets two ladies. A blonde in a black dress and a brunette in red. He knows everyone, like I said, he has a following. I let him do his thing while I order drinks.

A server takes me to our spot in the front row. Trust Colin to organize the best seats in the house. I hover my palm over the table to scan my Palmer. The menu appears. "Welcome Captain Jet, would you like your usual double whiskey on the rocks?"

"Uh yeah, and a bottle of merlot for Colin and co. If they've ordered drinks already get them another round of whatever they are having" I order.

"A server will arrive with your drinks shortly" the serving system confirms. Colin sees me and waves for me to join them. Colin is already chatting up the brunette. The blonde smiles at my arrival.

"Ladies, meet Captain Jet" Colin introduces me.

"Call me Jet" I say and kiss both on the cheek. A server arrives with the drinks on a portable floating bar table. He extends a scanner and scans my wrist to approve that I received the order. The Watts are subtracted.

The lights dim to focus our attention on the center of the arena. We take our seats. The girl bathes in the pool while a group of men on horses are commencing a hunt with their hounds. They gallop around the racecourse. The one guy is wearing a crown, obviously royalty of some kind. He breaks away from his comrades and follows his hounds around the course. They lead him to the stag close to the waterfall. He watches the girl bathing in the pool. She turns and sees him. She looks pissed by his presence. She steps out of the pool naked and turns him into a stag. Everybody laughs and applauds.

The lights intensify, and the betting commences as the first racers line up. The hounds are bionic, and their owner profiles and special features are available on our Palmers. The dogs are programmed to be as authentic as possible, not that I would know any better, I've never seen a real dog. I was born the year The Urge was contained, and all pets were euthanized because they were linked to the spread of The Urge. Anyway, all the hounds look pretty badass.

"Which one are you betting on?" I ask Colin with his Palmer already on the blue hound with an enlarged heart pump.

"Poseidon. Bigger engine, bigger hound power" he jokes.

"It matches your outfit" I mock and open my Palmer and scroll through the hounds to check them out. The blonde moves closer.

"Who are you betting on?" she asks, and I can't help but notice her nice breasts.

"Not a big gambler" I look away trying to not make it obvious. "I'd bet on you, I mean blue" she winks and selects Poseidon on my Palmer. I laugh and confirm the bet. The betting closes and the countdown starts.

The girl at the waterfall appears in a hunting dress now. She gets onto the stag-prince and rides him onto the course. The hounds become excited when they see the stag. They are released and chase her to the finish line.

The blonde watches me the entire race.

“How about a challenge?” she grins.

“Like I said, I don’t gamble” I grin back.

“Poseidon takes first place, followed by Aphrodite and Hercules!” the announcement confirms her win. We watch Colin and the brunette make out beside us.

“Looks like the fun” the blonde laughs.

I open my Palmer and select black, Demeter, goddess of earth with her metallic mouth. She selects white, winged Apollo. The betting closes and the bell sets off the hounds. Apollo takes the lead and Demeter is in last place.

“Too bad baby” the blonde whispers into my ear. I keep my eyes on the black hound. She shakes something off her back and starts gaining speed. The crowd starts cheering. She is head to head with Apollo for the last stretch but turns her head to face him. She holds her gaze for the rest of the race. They cross the finish line simultaneously, but Apollo wins by a nose. It was a good race. I see Demeter staring at Apollo even as they are directed off the course.

I am still thinking about the dog when Colin congratulates me and orders another round. I might not like gambling, but whiskey likes winning, so I give whiskey what it wants. We pair up and start betting against each other. I’m hammered by the

time the lights dim to signal the end of the event. The hologram with the hunters appears again and the stag-prince runs back to his hunting mates. The hunting party's hounds are now the Iron Hounds from the races and I spot Demeter right away. They chase the stag-prince around the court one last time and catch him at the finish line. Artemis bows with the prince's heart in her hands. Demeter is still watching Apollo. The blonde pulls my arm to leave but I'm still fixated on Demeter. As the exit lights intensify I see Demeter run towards Apollo with her jaws open. I don't know what happens because the lights are cut just as she is about to attack.

"Did you see that?" I ask the blonde and point towards the dark.

"See what?" she looks confused. Colin signals towards his nose and indicates that we should hurry up. Cocaine. Yeah, we need to sober up.

I'm holding the blonde and she is kissing me in the neck when we pass the bucking horses at the exit of the casino. I missed the parts in between.

"Call the Condor!" Colin yells to me from the pickup point. The brunette's dress is pulled up exposing her bum line. I grab the blonde's ass, she is fucking fine. I open my Palmer "Come Condor" I stammer. The blonde's hand is already down my pants. The Condor stops, and the doors open. I get into the back seat and Colin climbs in front with the brunette on top of him. I pull the blond girl underneath me and start taking off my belt.

"Auto-nav to Stockholm Syndrome" Colin commands.

"Owner authorization" the car requests.

“Jet!” Colin yells from the front.

“Jet says yes” I yell back “and play music” I add on.

“Authorization complete, navigating to Stockholm Syndrome” the car starts.

The blonde removes a vile of cocaine from her bra and uses her pinkie nail to scoop some out and snort it. She sprinkles it into her cleavage and I snort it. She pulls up her skirt and we get to fucking. I hold the vile out to Colin. I hear them snorting over the music. We arrive at the club. I pull out and close up.

The girls freshen up and snort another line before we go in. We pass the line outside and walk straight in. “Good evening Captains” I shake hands with both bouncers and follow Colin to a private booth where the rest of his friends are sitting. I nod to everyone. I only recognize Colin’s dealer, Gio. We scan in and Colin orders a round drinks for the table. The lines are already stacked in the center of the table and the music is loud, too loud to talk, so it’s my kind of party. Performers dance in cages hanging from the roof and the DJ has a backdrop that stretches over the entire roof with abstract shapes appearing and disappearing with the beat. The music is fast and loud. It makes me want to smoke, drink, and fuck simultaneously. Gio moves closer to me. I slur over my words, so I snort another line to sober up a bit.

“Have you tried EMO?” Gio asks loudly into my ear. I shake my head to indicate that I haven’t.

“What does it do?” I ask loudly.

“It’s the new thing. It counteracts Nigredo and makes you feel crazy shit.” I’m so shitfaced at this point that it probably won’t work on me, but my inhibitions are smashed to pieces so why not?

“I’ll try it.” I nod. He opens his Palmer and sends me the cash request. I approve. He gives me the cap. I swallow it down with my drink.

I lean back and the blonde climbs on top of my lap.

I’m not in the mood. “You probably think that I’m an arrogant fuck boy and you know what? You would be right. Luckily, I don’t give a fuck what you think, as long as I don’t have to think about you” I say loudly.

She laughs.

That usually gets girls to leave quickly, but not this time.

“Why are you so angry?” she asks.

“I’d rather say what I feel then walk around with a fucking stencil beard to try to fit in” I slur.

“Probably because you were born beautiful?” she smiles and runs her fingers through my hair “thick hair and physically pristine?” she slides her other hand down my chest to my crotch.

“Don’t forget the kilowatts and the nice smile” I grin arrogantly.

“You probably piss people off by just walking into the room?” she pouts her lips.

“Like I pissed you off?” I pout back.

“You don’t scare me baby” she whispers into my ear.

“I like the way you think” I smile impressed.

“Because I think like you” she winks.

I wasn’t expecting that.

I lean back into the couch. She takes my one hand and puts it in between her legs. “Who are you?” I ask her for the first time the entire day.

“Let’s just say I adapt well to my surroundings” she smiles, but her teeth look like fangs. I close my eyes and check again. Fucking hell, it must be the shit Gio gave me. I jump up and she falls back onto the table. The drinks seem to spill in slow motion and the lights from the dance floor reflect rainbow colors in all directions.

I see Colin on the dance floor making out with the brunette. A red tail extends from her dress and moves over to Colin and wraps around his neck. “What the fuck?” I run up to them and pull the girl away from him. Colin looks surprised, “Are you okay?” he asks. I look at her but instead of a grown woman I see a little girl crying. I step back. Colin must see that I’m out of it because his face looks serious now. “Hey bro, what’s wrong?” he asks concerned. I turn around and there are similar cords extending from all the people on the dance floor attached to the speakers. I see my cord extend over my head and move towards the speakers too. I jump to grab the cord but stumble and fall on my face. Colin tries to help me up, but I pull away. “Don’t get attached!” is all I can make out. He grabs my hand and pulls me to my feet. “What did you take?” I read his lips. I see a cord extend from him and move to a mirror. It connects to the mirror and he looks back to check his appearance and then he looks around to see if other

people are looking at us. It feels like I'm overheating. The sweat is pouring down my face.

"Come Condor."

3

"In the health sector, children as young as four have been diagnosed with depression and a new disorder, robotic nymphomania has been diagnosed among young adults, but with the new daily interaction hour (DIH) we hope to see a significant drop in the range of human interaction phobias.

The state of the resources is looking up. Crop levels are stable again after adjustments were made to the fertilizers, and the latest advancements in resource acquisition technology will enable The Harvest teams to get to previously unattainable water sources inside the infected areas.

On the lighter side of city life, this one is for all the foodies out there. Burger Corp released two new flavors yesterday. Looks like Fitone's BETA workout supplement has arrived just in time to burn off all those extra calories. And for the naturally fit looking physique you can get the new resistance beams by Effortless that enable you to tone up while you work on other things."

My eyes are still closed as I listen to the news anchor. For a moment I see us in the Aquabot. "I was hoping to see a mermaid" Colin says. "So she could rub her titties against your visor?" I joke. "You need to get out more, your socializing skills are deteriorating."

I sit up straight and open my eyes. Where did that come from?

I hear a banging sound. I'm on Colin's couch. Naked? I remember a blonde. I check to see if there is anyone next to me. No. The banging sound is coming from the bedroom. I scan the room for my clothes. My head aches. It must be from all the shit I took last night. Last night?! What the fuck happened? I can't think straight with this headache. I need Nigredo. I grab a pillow and hold it in front of my crotch and go to the kitchen.

"Recovery drink" I murmur. A glass fills and I take it from the dispenser. Colin's glasses are shaped like raindrops. When I put it down it twirls around, and I almost think it will spill, but it spins to a standstill. While watching the glass slow down I start getting flashbacks from last night. I remember something about Gio and EMO. I place my palm on the Nigredo pad and scan my hand.

"Caution, Nigredo levels extremely low, adjusting dosage accordingly" I sip on the drink and wait until it's done.

The banging has stopped, and Colin comes out wearing a robe. His beard is gone. Washed it off. He starts laughing when he sees me standing bent over his kitchen table with one hand on a cushion covering my crotch and another on Nigredo.

"What the fuck happened last night?" he laughs. I laugh a bit too. "Yeah you better get your Nigredo levels stable. I gave you a dose last night when we came home but the drug was still too strong to sober you up. Gio felt so shit he even helped me carry you back to the Condor after you started stripping in the club."

"You're fucking kidding me? I can't remember anything!" I yell.

“Three double espressos” Colin orders. “Gio also warned that the drug has a long half-life, so you’ll still feel it for a while” he continues while placing the coffees on a tray, and walks back to the room. I sigh and take another sip from the raindrop.

“Three espressos?” I frown just as the brunette walks out with a robe.

“Good morning Jet” she smiles.

“Yeah, about last night...” I’d apologize, but I can’t remember much.

“That’s alright, Colin made up for it” she takes the tray from Colin and smiles as she scans me from head to toe. She goes back into the room.

“Where is the blonde?” I ask. Colin just smiles

“Get something from my wardrobe. Your clothes are in the Condor” he goes back into his bedroom and the door slides shut behind him.

I take a shower and put on some of his running gear. Colin sounds a bit preoccupied, so I leave without saying good bye. I instruct the Condor to go home. I need to run. Anything to feel better. I open my Palmer and play some emotional orchestral music. Never thought I’d ever listen to this, but I feel a bit emotional so what the heck. I set the sound to cut out external sounds. I take the elevator to the connecting skybridge. I pass the busy food court and the lines at the coffee take-away shops. Everyone has somewhere to be or something to do. I open my Palmer and select the sun icon for outdoor running mode, not that anyone born after The Urge has ever seen the sun, but I guess the sun icon stuck. The skybridges are all covered for weather protection and double for advertisement space for pedestrians. I start jogging slowly, but the moving

advertisements make me feel spacey, like everything is a bit overwhelming to take in all at once, like I'm seeing everything for the first time. It's probably the combo of orchestral music and withdrawal from last night.

I pass the employees walking in single file preoccupied with their Palmers. I switch off runner's view. It displays my distance and pace and directs me home, but I don't feel like keeping track at the moment and fewer distractions might calm my mind. I catch a glimpse of the skyline behind the intermitted advertisements. It's busy and dense here. I feel nauseous. I cross the skybridge and enter the next shopping stop. More coffee shops, fast foods and clothing stores. I take the connecting bridge to the upper level. My place is up in the clouds. I look down at the bridges below and the people rushing to work, like the blood rushing through my arteries. The music is reaching a crescendo and I think I might break out in fucking tears. I suppress the tears and instead of crying I begin to feel angry and it pushes me to run faster. I'm beginning to sweat profusely, but I'm wearing Aircare clothing though? It's supposed to regulate my body temperature! Did I just blame clothes for sweating? I catch myself mid-thought. I take off the shirt and stick it into the back of my shorts. The anger is not subsiding, and my body feels tired. I continue running past everyone gliding on the automatic walker. My lungs are burning. It draws my attention to my breathing.

I run past the hologram of Sky-Lo again. The Light City motto spans the length of the bridge. 'We...are...the...Light' I read as I run across. Another section to buy things. More caffeine. Palmers. Employees. Sadness. Anger. Last bridge, then I'm home. Come on, keep it together Jet. I go up another level. I'm at the level of the

holographic image of Sky-Lo now. She looks at me and slowly lifts her finger like she is pointing in my direction. I slow down as I read her lips, "You."

I stop mid-run and look around to see if anyone else saw that. Everyone is preoccupied on their Palmers, just gliding past me on the walker.

"Your legs are starting to tingle as the path that you are on is about to change." Who said that? I check to see if I accidentally changed the music selection. My Palmer doesn't open. I open and close my palm a few times, but nothing. The nausea returns. People continue to pass me, their Palmers activated. Nobody notices the shirtless, confused motherfucker that's about to puke all over them.

"Inhale slowly, expanding your diaphragm" the voice continues. I inhale to catch my breath.

"Now exhale and feel the tension leave your body." I exhale and the release is followed by a sharp pain in my chest. I press against my heart with my right hand. My left arm is numb. I gasp for air.

"The pain you are experiencing will subside once you put down your resistance" the voice says in a neutral tone. It feels like I'm about to die.

"What resistance? What is happening to me?" I ask aloud. The pain intensifies and moves down my arm. "Am I having a heart attack?" I ask as I gasp for air.

"You are losing your grip on the material world. Release resistance" the voice insists. What the fuck is happening to me? It must be the drug from last night. Last night starts to replay in my mind, the black dog, the fangs, the tail, the devil, death. The flashbacks keep going back into my past. I see myself at sixteen, drunk,

losing my virginity and getting into a fight. I see my father beat me up about my grades. There I am at fourteen drinking for the first time. There's dad beating me up again. I'm six. Mom dies. Mom's sick. I'm scared.

My attention goes to my heart. It contracts slowly, but doesn't release. I go back to my thoughts. Everything starts moving forward in time again, but now I see everything differently. I see lessons. Mom's depression. Dad crying in his pillow. A confused kid. The memories start moving forward so fast they turn into smudges of colors that take on the shape of a flower. The colors continue smudging until it becomes a brown mess and then complete darkness. Am I dead? The thought of death makes me hyper aware of the sensations in my body. I feel the sweat running down my face and my feet pulsating from the heat...where is my heart beat?

I anticipate my heart beat, something I've never given much thought to, but nothing happens. There is just silence and darkness for what feels like eternity. I'm in my body then I'm in the dark. It feels like my mind is bouncing in between two worlds, but it's like I'm here and there simultaneously. My muscles strain from pushing against my heart. I'm exhausted. The darkness is soothing in a strange way. I am slowly being pulled back into it. I relax my muscles and let go.

My heart releases and I feel a wave of relief rush through my body. I breathe deeply with my eyes closed and appreciate every breath and every beat. The adrenalin surges through my veins and my eyes open to a purple glow emanating from the center of my chest. As I breathe it expands outward until it covers my entire body. I feel aroused and the feeling intensifies so rapidly that I fall to my knees. Ecstasy.

I look up at the sky and the clouds are purple too. I don't know how long it lasted but I watch as it slowly fades back to gray and my heart rate returns to normal. In the meantime, a crowd has formed around me, recording me and looking up and back to me with confused faces. Obviously, they didn't see what I saw. I feel self-conscious and quickly retain my composure and jog home before someone restrains me.

I enter my apartment and Myho requests a Nigredo scan. I ignore the request and sit on the couch and turn to face the giant window looking out towards the clouds. No sign of Light City. I start crying while watching the clouds pass. I cry until my mind goes quiet and I fall asleep.

"Good morning Jet" Myho wakes me up. "A reminder to scan Nigredo as you missed your dose yesterday."

I stay seated.

"You received an urgent message from The Harvest." I sit up and check if my Palmer is back online.

"When was the message received?" I ask as I select the video message.

"11:11 AM" Myho informs me. I was on the skybridge around that time.

"Play message" I authorize. A giant holographic robot appears in the lounge area in front of me. It looks like an Aquabot, but it has limbs. This must be the new bot.

"With almost a decade's worth of experience and near perfect synchronicity between hemispheres you and Captain Rovell are in a league of your own" the voice note plays, and I recognize the general's voice. I turn the hologram slowly to

get a better look at it. It's fucking awesome. The Aquabot hemispheres are built into a body suit with weaponry and harvesting limbs.

"The Logbots are equipped for land research acquisition and close combat. Run through the new features before training tomorrow. Pick up is at noon" the voice message ends but the bot stays in the room. I move around it and select my hemisphere. It opens to the interior and information appears beside it. It's interactive. Looks like I'm on harvesting and Colin's on navigation and combat. They have their reasons for not putting me behind a gun.

"Please prepare my things for tomorrow" I instruct Myho and close the hologram. The words "We are the Light" floats in mid-air for a few seconds and gradually fade away.

4

"Welcome to Project HAVOC gentlemen. As you all know by now there is pressure on our fresh water supplies. We won't be able to continue expansion of Light City without rationing the daily water available to citizens, and even if we do it temporarily, it will eventually inhibit future growth. The closest fresh water source is in the jungle. Aerial footage shows a giant spring relatively close to the jungle border." A map of the terrain appears in front of us and the giant spring is highlighted as the target.

"As you can see there is open terrain around the spring. We suspect that the infected gather in this area, but problems with satellite imaging has provided no proof yet. If we can set up base there we believe that we will be able to hold back

attacks for long enough to connect the water source to the underground pumping system. But the vegetation between the border and the source is dense and we can't see what's going on underneath it, so besides having a shitload of ground to cover, you will be going in blind. What we have seen indicates that the infected have become well adapted to their habitat and have infested the entire terrain. They might even have developed a social structure. Squads have been patrolling the borders since containment of The Urge and any attempts to excavate the jungle have shown major losses. They have captured thousands of soldiers and none of the men have been seen again."

"Are they man eaters, sir?" a guy asks from the back.

"We suspect cannibalism, but that's where the Logbots come into play. The bots will keep you safe and get you through the vegetation without being captured. The Loggers will be accompanied by a collection platform that will collect and transport logs and other resources to base camp. The Gunners need to be on high alert as the infected aren't the mindless walking dead depicted by the media. Don't take them lightly and prevent capture at all costs. We are the Light. Kill on site" the general says and activates the platforms in front of each team.

A holographic miniature like the one that appeared in my living room appears on each platform. "For the old-timers in the group, you might be seeing some of your ex-girlfriends among the infected, so I hope you've prepared a break-up speech" the general breaks the ice and everyone laughs.

"Most of you are experienced Aquabot captains and the rest of you are new recruits. The Logbots work on the same hemisphere synchronization technology that was used in the Aquabots, but they have been adapted for land resource

acquisition for the jungle terrain. If you haven't assessed the new robots yet, take some time to get accustomed to the new parts and features" he turns the bot in front of him as he walks past it.

"Weaponry and navigation is controlled by the right hemisphere and located on the left limb" he touches the right hemisphere and it activates the left arm.

"The harvester is on the right and operated from the left hemisphere" he does the same on the other side.

"The cross-eyed viewing increases scope and synchronicity between hemispheres and the rotating limbs and tail enable effective maneuverability through the jungle."

"It looks like a monkey sir" I comment.

The class laughs. "The design was based on primates. This is why..." he plays a recording from an eyegram. The guy is walking through the jungle and comes to a standstill. You can hear something rustling in the bushes. He scans the canopy, then there's a tussle and the feed cuts off. He plays a few recordings and all of them end the same. "As you can see the infected use ambush to attack and the Palmers are cut off immediately, so we can't track them down" the general points out.

"Have any zombies been captured yet, sir?" Colin asks.

"No, none have been captured. These 'jungle zombies' aren't the brainless barbarians they'd have you believe. They are fast and cunning, and their sheer numbers give them a tremendous upper hand in the jungle terrain. They seem to

be patrolling the jungle and have discovered and unarmed every base except Alpha Base which is an hour's run with the bots from the base to the jungle border. The bots and each one of you are an asset to Light City. If a fellow soldier is captured, don't be a hero. Get the bot out and get back to base. We are the light. Kill on site." the general emphasizes our purpose again.

Is The Urge infectious, sir?" someone asks.

"We all are potentially infected if the proper prevention isn't used. Therefore, Nigredo levels will be check regularly due to increased exposure to the infected areas which seem to affect Nigredo levels even without direct contact, and bots will be sterilized on return to base. Code names have been assigned to each team and everything has been updated onto your Palmer profile. Take time to update yourselves on the terrain and the harvesting protocol before you commence to the training stations" the general ends off.

The others start interacting with the model bots. I gesture towards the exit. Colin smiles and we get up and head for the door. We scan our Palmers and the door slides open. The general makes eye contact, but doesn't say anything. We make our way through the transparent tunnel that looks out onto the training area. The jungle has been recreated inside a dome structure. Colin cups his hands around his eyes and presses against the glass to get a better look. We scan again and Nigredo is checked as protocol. "Unstable Nigredo levels, dosage adjusted accordingly" the warming pops up as I scan my hand.

"Is the drug still messing with your Nigredo levels?" Colin asks concerned.

“Yeah, but I’m fine” I say bluntly. I don’t tell him about what happened on the skybridge.

“They are going to pick it up...” he starts, but the doors slide open onto the bot stations and distracts him.

“Holy fucking shit!” I interrupt him out of excitement. I try to contain myself, but the bots look like giant robotic jungle apes with huge heads. Each holding a saw and a gun. I laugh aloud.

“Fucking hell” Colin looks at me in disbelief and we both start laughing. I check my Palmer for our bot ID.

“Jungle Monkey” I read aloud, and the bot lights up as we come closer.

“Original” Colin says sarcastically. We step onto the boarding platforms and the bot lowers itself into a squatting position. The hemispheres slide open and we race to get in first.

“Hello baby girl, good to see you again” Colin greets the bot.

I move my fingers to activate the controls. The lights form around my hands and the hemisphere activates.

“Good morning Captain Rovell. Good morning Captain Orgo” the bot welcomes us in a male voice.

“Looks like our lady stayed in the dark?” I joke ignoring the fact that they used my family name.

“Synchronization update in process, please follow the instructions” the bot instructs. We move around as directed to update any changes.

“Update completed. Significant changes picked up in the left hemisphere. The necessary alterations have been made” the stats pop up in front of us.

“That’s a first” Colin frowns, and looks at me with that concerned look again. It’s best to keep quiet in the bot since they monitor everything. But I can tell he thinks that it has something to do with last night.

“Lower limb synchronization commencing” the bot notifies.

“Looks like we’re learning to walk again?” I say trying to act unfazed.

We detach from the stabilizers and try to stand upright. I still need to get a grip of the tail. The extra weight makes us tilt backwards. A collection platform picks up on the imbalance and slides beneath us. We hit the platform and burst out with laughter, unaware of the general who has just walked in with the other teams. He taps into our headspace to communicate with us from the outside.

“You see gentlemen, if Jet was aware that his tail could stabilize him and thrust him forward, he wouldn’t be sitting on his ass right now” the general says trying to maintain a straight face. Everybody laughs. I do as instructed and manage to push us up with the tail. The bot gets up and I remove my hands from the steering sensors. My hemisphere opens. Colin’s a few seconds ahead of me and is already standing at attention when I stumble to find my footing and raise my hand to my head.

“At ease boys” the general says and we lower our hands. Colin clears his throat like he is about to apologize, but the general interrupts him with a laugh “Get back in there so I can show the rest of the men what not to do.”

“Sir, yes sir” we say simultaneously. We get back in and the hemispheres close. The general scans his palm and opens the giant sliding doors that lead onto the training terrain. Synthetic trees underneath a dome with bright lighting. “Try not to fall on your face this time” he mocks as he directs us forward.

“Don’t rush a professional, sir” I laugh. He laughs and explains the control updates that we already completed on activation to the rest of the teams.

“What happened to the blonde girl?” I ask while waiting for the general to finish. Colin smiles. I take a second to remember the three espressos. “You motherfucker! I almost liked her!”

“I’d be disappointed if you didn’t. She was programmed for you to like her” he laughs.

“She was programmed?” I frown. “You mean I fucked a robot?” It felt so real.

“I fucked two” he grins arrogantly.

“So, they were the professional party escorts?” I ask.

“Yeah, well worth it in the end, they made me feel like a king, but I can’t say the same for you though” he smirks.

“Who fucked how many bots?” the general interrupts, overhearing our conversation.

“You got to play the hand you’re dealt, sir” Colin shrugs.

“You will do well in The Harvest, Captain Rovell” the general compliments his opportunism and indicates for us to move closer to the trees. We enter the habitat recreation area and the hemispheres polarize.

“The platform you sat on is actually for log collection” he continues. The collectors are independent from the bots, so you can focus on your job of either cutting through the dense vegetation or navigation and defense. As we have seen, the tail can be used for stabilizing the bot during combat, navigation through the jungle, and thrust in case you capsize. The spherical body makes it roll easily and the legs can rotate to stabilize from any angle. The hemispheres remain stable even when the body spins.

We walk towards the trees and the collector follows us, but keeps a safe distance.

“It probably already updated us as a hazard” Colin jokes.

“Captain Jet will now harvest the tree and transfer it to the platform” the general instructs. I open my right hand and the saw clamp opens on the right limb. The blade starts spinning automatically when I open my fingers and attach the clamp to the tree. I move my thumb to my index finger to slide the blade through the trunk, and open my hand to release the log onto the collection platform.

“Nice job captain, now we can move on to target training and defense. Captain Rovell will be able to shoot ammunition or ignite the flame thrower depending on the situation and the number of attackers” the general instruct Colin to use both techniques with holographic attackers in different situations.

That night I wake up soaked and just lay there unable to sleep. My mind racing and my teeth clenching. What is wrong with me?

The training continues for a few days and we synchronize tail stabilization and defense combinations and reestablish perfect synchronicity. My Nigredo levels keep fluctuating and the night sweats and insomnia make me act paranoid and agitated during the day. I keep administering Nigredo at regular intervals to suppress the symptoms, but it keeps getting worse. What the fuck is happening to me?

After the last day of training I spot the general looking out onto the desert surroundings from the cafeteria windows.

“Thank you for the training, sir” I say and look at the view with him.

“We finished the dam just in time. The river started running slower and completely dried up shortly after” he says and turns to face me. “It’s good to be prepared for anything” he says and looks at me intently. I try to maintain eye contact but look away. “Get some rest, the first squad is being sent out tomorrow and you and Captain Rovell are in command” he says as he’s about to leave.

“Thank you, sir” I feel slightly relieved as he leaves, but what did he mean by “It’s good to be prepared for anything?” Is he referring to my Nigredo levels? I’m sure their tracking our vitals, but maybe I’m just being paranoid? I need to get more information.

I have access to classified files while I’m at the training facility, so I go back to my room for some privacy. “Search for information on the Purple Pulse” I command my Palmer. “The Purple Pulse...” I pause and select private audio and resume the

reading "...was reported as the purple illumination of the atmosphere resembling that of the northern lights or aureoles borealis.

Aurora borealis is produced by photons generated from the collision of ionized nitrogen and oxygen atoms with solar wind particles swept up in the earth's magnetic field. At the time of the reports the El Niño effect created toxic algal blooms which played its part in whipping out the remaining aquatic life and releasing large quantities of nitrogen into the atmosphere along with the influx of chemical nutrients from fertilizers from agricultural runoff which created conditions that could lead to the aurora borealis effect on a planetary scale, that would fit the description of the Purple-Pulse.

The Purple Pulse occurred prior to the outbreak of The Urge and the shifting global temperatures. People who experienced the Purple Pulse reported pressure in their chest area, rapid metal imaging and a purple glow emanating from their bodies. All the events occurred at the time of the rapid increase in the earth's electromagnetic frequency, but the increase in frequency has proven to be too minor to significantly affect large organisms."

"Get information on The Urge" I command. "Undefined Resistance to Growth and Evolution (URGE) is a neurological viral infection that causes the disintegration of neural networks inside the brains of human beings. Signs and symptoms typically start between two days and three weeks after contracting the virus with initial symptoms of restlessness, insomnia, night sweats, vivid dreams, muscular pain, headaches and emotional instability. Left untreated it leads to complete emotional detachment and disregard for societal norms, loss of memory and identity, withdrawal from reality and eventual revert to carnal state.

Within controlled conditions subjects show animal-like behavior, becoming more aggressive towards themselves and healthcare professionals. The symptoms gradually intensifying until victims exhibit suicidal tendencies and when restrained eventually die of cardiac arrest.

The first reports of The Urge coincided with the shift in climatic conditions. The rapid change in temperatures and unprecedented weather conditions wiped out most large life forms and pushed all the remaining life forms to near extinction, with only small pockets of vegetation remaining. To date there is no known cure for the virus as it mutates faster than treatments are developed, but prevention is available through the daily administering of Nigredo which has successfully kept the virus contained for the last twenty-seven years.”

“What do they do with the infected?” I ask.

“Infected are placed in quarantine to prevent the spread of the virus.” There is a video link available. I play the video.

I watch a girl in a holding cell chewing through her own wrists and guards rushing in to restrain her. Her wrists are soon shut and all the while she is screaming and moving around erratically to try and stop them. I watch another guy repeatedly run into the wall to knock himself unconscious and a woman pulling out all her hair and scratching herself until she has open wounds all over her body. I feel sick. I can't watch any more of this.

I should probably ask Colin about the Purple Pulse and The Urge seeing as he survived it, but I don't want to cause unnecessary suspicion especially not in the training facility.

That night I'm running through the jungle. I feel afraid. I'm running away from something. I turn and see a fire coming towards me. I run deeper into the jungle until I reach a bridge. I want to cross it but on the other side are purple zombies. I'm stuck. I watch the ground crumble at my feet. I wake up soaked. It was a dream...

5

We are deployed to Alpha base, the only base that hasn't been discovered by the infected. It is situated inside an abandoned outside the jungle. The coordinates are already uploaded to the system. We stand up and initiate running. The bot pushes forward and quickly accelerates to its maximum speed.

"They limited these bad boys" Colin yells over the blaring rock music. We cross the desert. It's a hot, barren wasteland. For hours it's just sand and clouds. In the distance it looks like the horizon is on fire.

"Is that sunlight?" I ask squinting to focus.

"Fucking hell!" Colin says shocked. "Yes, I think its sunlight!" Colin yells and turns the music down. He connects to base "Alpha base, this is Jungle Monkey. There is light falling from the sky. Permission to proceed?"

"Roger that Jungle Monkey. Get a feel for sunlight, there's only light from here on out."

When we enter the light, I close my eyes in anticipation. The hemispheres polarize, but it's still something to get used to. Now I get why the training terrain was so bright. It's fucking breathtaking! I have never seen something so beautiful

in my life. I take a while to get used to the blue sky. It makes me feel the same sense of freedom I get when driving.

When we arrive at the town there is a giant wall next to the base.

“That’s a risky spot for a base camp” Colin reads my mind.

“How is this random town in the middle of nowhere not been discovered by the zombies yet?” I ask.

“They probably don’t leave the jungle, genius.” Colin has a point.

On arrival the lieutenant takes us to our bunkers. “Which fucking idiot built the bunker next to the wall?” I rage.

“Our requested to relocate the bunkers is pending” the lieutenant points to our beds. Colin looks at me with a raised eyebrow like he knows that the only thing that’s pending is bullshit.

“At least we’ll be in the bots most of the time” I mumble.

We get settled in and it’s the first time I sit outside around an open fire and see the stars. I can hardly believe my eyes. I try not to make too big a scene, but I randomly blurt out “Wow” every time my eye catches a glimpse of the sky. I hear the other soldiers complain about chapped soles and how they made their pet rooster, Billy, a little hard hat and a chicken pen because he keeps pecking their boots, now his beak is stump. I take a moment to process the conversation. “A chicken with a stump beak and a hard hat?” I try to make sense of what I just heard and frown at Colin who raises his shoulders and laughs. I pull out a bottle of

whiskey I snuck in. The men are overjoyed. They all introduce themselves and start discussing the state of the resources.

“If you control the resources you control the citizens” the guy whose name I’ve already forgotten says after sipping the whiskey.

“Not that the citizens mind, the majority are too busy living for themselves to think about contributing to society” the guy next to him adds to the conversation.

“Sky-Lo is always consulted before big choices are made, I think they’re all playing us” another guy conspires.

“What do you guys know about The Urge?” I interrupt.

“I think it was chemical warfare” one guy says.

“Aliens!” another yell from the side.

“It was the government. The government and their mind control experiments” the guy next to me says in a serious tone.

“All I know is that The Urge is incurable, and you don’t want that shit to rub off on you” Colin jokes, but looks at me intently as he passes the whiskey my way.

That night I have another dream. I am running towards purple zombies, but this time the bridge is burning. I run into the fire and it consumes me. I sit up soaked, again. I think the talk around the fire stayed with me. I don’t say anything about the dream. I think Colin is already suspicious.

The next morning, we get a quick briefing before we leave for harvesting.

“Like you all know by now, the jungle zombies are well adapted to their environment and their vast numbers give them the upper hand. We need to get in and get out every day without being detected, until we have gained enough ground to counterattack. They don’t want our weapons. They want us. The Logbots will keep you safe. Don’t get out, don’t get caught. You are assets to Light City. A range of bots are being made that can be controlled remotely, but for now we need to survey the terrain and get to the water source. The harvesting location is about an hour’s run from base camp, so you’ll be in transit before the break of dawn and back before dark. Remember to clear your tracks and stay in the safe time zones” the general salutes.

We get the Jungle Monkey jogging and push it to a flat out run while we cross the desert towards the jungle border. We listen to rock music to get psyched but when we reach the jungle I’m blown away once again. “Fuck me. Have you ever seen something like this before?” the canopy seems to stretch on for ages. The huge trees cover the earth like a blanket with so many different shades of greens I never even knew existed, contrasting the blue sky above it.

“This is amazing” Colin nods, “I thought they were exaggerating in the movies” he laughs.

I find it hard to cut down the first tree. For the first time I’m not enjoying my job. Colin sees me look uncomfortable and quickly turns up the music.

“Let’s get the show on the roll” he tries to motivate me.

I start sliding my thumb towards my index finger. Chopping down trees. By the time we reached our quota I'm in a trance state. Colin takes us back and I'm quiet the entire trip.

The days pass quickly, and we get pumped up every morning on our jungle run to meet some zombies, but we see none. We have the highest yield of all the teams by the end of the first week and everyone is getting more relaxed as we are making good progress.

The fire is burning again tonight, but it's only Colin and I around it. I open another bottle of whiskey. I need to talk to him. I need his help.

"How many of these do you have?" he laughs.

"Last one" I laugh too. I pour some into his glass and I sip from the bottle. We sit in silence for a while and look at the stars. The sheer beauty pushes up the tears again. There is no fucking way I'm crying now. I spit some whiskey on the fire to snap out of it. My emotions are becoming harder to control.

"Did you experience the Purple Pulse?" I break the silence. He looks at me and then stares into the fire. I think the setting made him open up, it's either that or the whiskey...or maybe he was expecting it?

"The day it happened was the highest global temperatures ever recorded. The rising water levels were pushing coastal inhabitants inland while drought and famine continued to spread." He takes a sip of whiskey and stares into the fire. "I remember feeling my heart restart and watched the sky flash purple" he sips his whiskey like he's nervous. "I remember my ears ringing and then everything

falling silent. My life flashed before my eyes. I thought I was dying. Ugh, this sounds ridiculous!" he sighs.

"So, the Purple Pulse happened before the onset of The Urge?" I ask to keep him going.

"Yeah, they said something about the ice-caps and a rise in the earth's electromagnetic frequency, but it was later said to be too minor to affect us."

"Do you think the Purple Pulse is connected to The Urge?" I ask anxiously.

"They said the Purple Pulse was due to the fertilizers and the stopping of the oceanic currents, but I think it was connected. Wait, why are you asking all this?" he looks at me intently.

I don't say anything.

"Since when do you care about why things are the way they are?" he insists.

"Did you glow purple?" I change the subject.

"What? How do you know?" he asks surprised.

"It happened to me after taking EMO" I confess.

"You experienced the Purple Pulse?!" he almost yells in disbelief.

I nod in silence.

"Have your Nigredo levels stabilized?" he sounds worried.

“No, the Nigredo isn’t working properly” I say trying to keep calm.

“Are you showing symptoms?” he asks. “I feel different” I whisper.

“You feel?” Colin looks at me wide-eyed and chugs down the rest of the whiskey. He extends his arm with the empty cup. I refill.

“Never mind that, what happened after your heart restarted?” I continue.

“People started acting strange. It’s was like nature turned against us. The Urge made people leave behind their belongings and friends and family, and congregate in the wild. When the virus was linked to the cause of their strange behavior, it was already spreading so fast it was impossible to stop it. By preventing the onset of the symptoms, we could prevent complete degeneration of our brains, so Sky-Lo helped us do just that. Prevent the onset of The Urge. Prevention is better than a cure I guess” he mumbles to himself.

“And The Urge?” I ask.

“The outbreak started within the first week after the pulse. It was chaos. The floods and weather destroyed everything and the infected were everywhere. I joined the force shortly after everybody was called to join hands. Everyone moved north to the safe zones. We set up the boundaries to separate the citizens from the infected. After the installation of Nigredo everything calmed down...and here we are” he says and looks down at his empty glass. He seems sad.

“Do you think I’m infected?”

“What are you feeling?” he asks.

“I’m fucking crying in my pillow at night when I can’t sleep. And when I do manage to fall asleep I dream of zombies and fire and wake up soaked.”

“What? You’re dreaming?” his jaw drops.

“Yes, it started when we left the city and has become more intense every night.”

He is quiet for a while. He looks serious. “Okay, let’s not jump to any conclusions” he tries to console himself.

“What would they do to me if I’m infected?” I ask. He just shakes his head and says nothing. “Come on. You were in the force, you know!” I insist.

“We put them in quarantine back then, but I don’t know what happens after that, and I don’t know what they’ll do now.” We sit in silence for a while. “You’re coming off that EMO shit, don’t worry about it” he tries to reassure me.

“Everything alright here boys?” the general steps into the light of the fire. We want to stand up, but he gestures for us to stay seated. He takes the bottle of whiskey from me and drinks it.

“Yes sir, just informing Jet on the homework he didn’t do” Colin saves my ass.

I laugh to lighten the mood.

“You feeling okay captain?” the general looks at me intently.

“Yes sir, besides a bit of withdrawal from our reinstatement party I feel great” I joke.

“The first week of harvesting went smoothly. Congratulations on making the highest yields, you two set a good example” he says proudly.

“Thank you, sir,” we both thank him.

“We are making good progress into the jungle, but we are going deeper into her, I mean, their territory now. Be careful out there” he warns and gives me the bottle.

“Get some rest” he says as he walks off.

That night I dream about the wall around the base. I walk along it and it seems to be cracking. I reach Billy the stump beak rooster’s pen and he is sitting inside a hole with his hard hat on. “Dig a hole. Dig a hole. D-d-dig a hole” he says and pecks the ground.

I wake up feeling tense. I continue to feel tense the whole morning. I administer an extra dose of relaxant, but it doesn’t last long. When it wears off it makes me feel even more anxious. I struggle to stay focused on the job. My hands are shaking, and Colin and I hardly talk. I don’t know if he is scared or irritated, but we take long to reach our quota. I begin to feel claustrophobic and start hyperventilating.

“Are you okay?” Colin asks.

“I need fresh air” I gasp. I open my hemisphere and inhale deeply. I can hear Colin swearing from inside his hemisphere. I breathe a sigh of relief. I can hear the rustling of the leaves and the birds singing.

“Jet, close the damn hemisphere! What are you doing?” he yells over the com.

I inhale, lean back and place my feet on the front panel. Suddenly the leg underneath the bot gives way and it falls over. I fall out of the hemisphere and knock my head. Black out.

666

I wake up on the floor in a cage. I can hear extractor fans rumbling. I must be inside a factory of some sort. I have the black bulca leather pants on I always wear in Light City. No shirt. There is a balaclava on my face. Am I in quarantine? Strange outfit for a medical facility? Maybe I’m dreaming again? I sit up against the cell wall. There are about twenty other guys in here. They all have balaclavas on.

“Are you hungry?” someone yells from the back. The rest start laughing. I don’t get it. The bigger one of the lot starts cracking his knuckles, cliché, I know what’s coming. I pull up my pants as high as they can go, about midway up my calves.

“So, what the fuck is this supposed to be?” I ask aloud.

“Here we fight to eat” he says in a deep broken voice and walks towards me.

Looks like I’m done crying in my pillow for a while. I push myself upright. Couldn’t they have fitted me with something more comfortable? It’s probably not the best time for complaining. I shake loose and knuckle up. The big guy has his fists up and ready. I walk up to him and he swings first. I lift my arms and move my body to the side. His fist passes my face. I hear the air whistle past my ear. Fuck, this guy can pack a punch, too bad he missed. I’d choose pain over sadness any day. But I’m hungry so it’s best to stay out of his way. I jump up as he turns towards me and I drop my arms over his shoulders and push his head down with both

hands. I lift my knee and slam his head into it. Knock out. He drops to the floor. The other guys move closer and stare at me. I can see their eyes shining inside the black balaclavas. They pick up the guy and slide him to the side of the cell and someone rolls a plastic bag through the cage towards me. It's tied up with an elastic band. It is filled with cooked rice. I eat everything and use the elastic to tie my hair into a tiny bun at the top of my head to keep my hair out of my eyes. It has grown longer, and I can't afford any distractions in this place. I scan the room to see what I've got to work with. A tap and a plastic bowl, probably to wash up, and about twenty dirty motherfuckers with balaclavas surrounded with concrete and steel.

"So, we fight, we eat?" I ask while walking to the tap. I wash my hands and face. Two guys jump up with me. "I don't know about you but I'm hungry and it doesn't look like anyone is ordering take out" I say arrogantly. My knee hurts already, and my head is starting to ache too. Must be from falling out of the bot. I'm used to the pain simulator but Nigredo usually suppressed the pain afterwards. I scan the room, no Nigredo zones in here. This must be quarantine.

The one guy taps the other guy on the fist. Looks like they're teaming up. The one guy walks straight towards me and I stand my ground. He swings high, but it's a distraction while the other guy kicks my foot out from underneath me. I fall to the floor and they both start kicking me. I grab the guy that tripped me by the foot and turn it. I hear his ankle break. The other guy slaps me on the right ear and I'm diiiizzy. He must have burst my eardrum. My ear is whistling, and I don't know what's up and what's down, but I manage to stand up just as the guy that's still standing takes a swing at me. He is bouncing from side to side, making it hard for

me to block. No, wait, he's standing still and I'm swaying. He hits me in the jaw and I bite into my tongue. The blood starts pouring out of my mouth. I don't feel any pain anymore and it somehow centers me. Adrenalin.

I wipe the blood running down my ear with my shoulder and spit out the blood in my mouth. He starts jabbing at me like crazy and I block with my arms while I try to regain my footing. The guy tires out and turns and laughs along with the crowd that has gathered around us. He runs straight to me to give a knock out shot but I'm not as fucked up as I look. I shift to the side and he passes me. I lower my arms and shake out the tension. I smell blood. I taste blood and I remember coming into this world covered in someone else's blood, so I don't mind leaving in the same way. I've always wanted to use that line. The crowd spits on me. I walk up to the guy as he turns around and I kick him in the face. He drops.

Everybody falls silent and surrounds me again. They just stare at me until someone tosses me another bag of rice. I tie the elastic band to a strand of hair in the back of my neck. They collect the two guys and the cell is quiet for the rest of the night. I wash myself with the bucket. My ankle hurts now too. Pain isn't a pleasant sensation, sleeping on the floor neither. The next morning there are three new guys in the cell, probably to replace the others.

Seems like I've gained some cage cred because the fights no longer start with me, but they sure as hell end with me. They start with the new comers and I watch them beat them up. The rest of the crowd yelling "You coward!" "Pussy!" "You don't have what it takes!" "Give up cunt!"

But it's like they keep the best for last. I knock out one after the other and the elastics are forming a hair wrap in my neck. But fresh cell mates keep coming in

every morning and my body is fucked up. The rice is barely enough to keep me alive, not fuel a fight. I have pain everywhere now and I've even started leaving some rice in the plastic bags to place underneath my joints when I sleep on the floor.

I was angry when I arrived, but the anger is quickly being depleted and I'm left with a hopeless sadness. It's not strong enough to keep me fighting anymore. My body hurts and without drive I'm left with fear and depression. There is no place for fear in here. I need to get out.

The withdrawal from Nigredo is making me feel intensely. The emotions are coming up and they are hard to hold down. I feel the pain in my body and a part of me wants to apologize to it for causing it so much pain. Wow, where is this coming from?

They approach me to fight but I don't get up. I just ignore them. They kick me a few times, and a part of me wants to get up so badly but I stop the anger from making me fight, making me hurt myself. They eventually get bored and move along. I watch them beat each other up and I feel my body become weaker and the fights and screams become longer and louder. I close my eyes and go into the darkness. It was so soothing last time. And it's all I've got. The screaming becomes faint as my mind falls silent. I feel relaxed. I suddenly see a pattern that wasn't there before.

I open my eyes and jump to my feet.

They are busy beating up someone and I stop in front of the attacker. "Why are you fighting? Do you even know why you are here? And if it will ever end?" I yell.

The attacker stares at me and I recognize his eyes. I remove his mask.

They others spit and scream at me. I recognize all their eyes. I start pulling off their masks one by one and they stop. I look at them and the tears start rolling down my face. They stare at me and tears start rolling down their cheeks too. They are all me.

7

My head aches. I open my eyes to a white ceiling. I turn onto my side. There is white bedside table with a glass of water on it. I sit up and take a sip. I am wearing a white uniform. It matches the walls and the bed sheets. Actually, it matches everything in the room. At least it's comfortable. What the fuck happened in the cage? I must have been dreaming because this looks like a standard hospital bedroom. Sterile and streamline. I must be back in Light City. I scan the room for a Nigredo pad. Nothing. I swipe the counter for access to change the white walls into a nature scene, but nothing happens. Wait a second, there aren't any windows either. My headache is getting worse. I open my Palmer to locate the closest Nigredo pad, but my Palmer has been removed. I rub the incision on my wrist. It has already healed and formed a scar. What is going on here? Am I in quarantine?

"Where am I?" I ask aloud.

"Hello, is anyone there?!" I ask again. I get up and start sliding my hands over the walls. There should be a door here. Nothing. I begin to feel claustrophobic again.

A hologram appears of a man with a pair of baggy pants and a chiseled body. He has beaded dreadlocks and a necklace around his neck. By the look of this guy I'm definitely not in Light City anymore, or this is a test of some kind.

"Who are you?" I ask unimpressed.

"I am Yoo" the hologram bows down with his hands pushed together.

"And who the fuck are Yoo supposed to be?" I ask irritated. The hologram laughs.

"How are you feeling?" he asks calmly ignoring my aggravation.

"You can't seriously be asking me that right now? Is this some sort of test?" I ask still sliding both hands over the walls of the square room, but there is still no door.

"How are you feeling?" he asks again. This must be a containment room for the infected. They must think I have The Urge. Do I have The Urge? I try to keep calm. If this is a test acting like a suspicious motherfucker feeling the walls for doors definitely won't pass the test. I need to cooperate. "I feel fine" I reply and sit down on the bed.

"Can you explain what you are experiencing?" he crosses his legs over each other and floats mid-air. The list of The Urge's symptoms pops into my head again "restlessness, insomnia, dreaming, paranoia..." I whisper.

"Ah, you suffer from sickness of the soul. Your soul is stuck in Nigredo" he says.

"If you can appoint me to the nearest Nigredo pad I'll be able to get my soul back" I joke.

“I recommend eating something to regain your strength” he moves to a platter of fruits and vegetables that slide into the room from an opening in the wall.

“I would prefer a hit of Nigredo. I don’t eat that shit.”

“Why is that?” he asks.

“It doesn’t taste like anything and besides it fucks with my Nigredo levels, so I’d probably need a double dose of Nigredo afterwards.” I don’t know why I’m explaining myself to a hologram, but if it’s a test I think I’m doing okay so far.

“When you feel hungry feel free to eat as much as you need” he turns and vanishes.

What the fuck is going on here? I try to keep my cool and lay down on the bed. Maybe I’ll wake up and it will all just be a dream and I’ll be back at the base. I eventually fall asleep and wake up in the dark. There is an opening in the roof where half-moon is shining through. Now I’m sure that I’m not in Light City. They must have me in a facility far away because there is no cloud cover, unless it’s a simulation. My thoughts are distracted by what I guess are hunger pains. I try to distract myself by looking at the sky, but it makes me feel very alone. I can feel the tears start to build up. What is happening to me? I jump up and eat some of the food on the platter to distract myself from the sadness. If I can stay calm whoever is watching might see that I’m still under control of my emotions. But what if I’m not? What if I am infected and it’s only going to get worse? I try not to think of the images I saw of the effects of The Urge in quarantine, but the tears and the fear is a bit too overwhelming and I start to weep uncontrollably. I sit on the floor next to the bed and grab the pillow to hide my face.

I wake up with my head in the wet pillow. I must've fallen asleep.

The hologram appears again in a seated position on the floor in front of me. "Did you enjoy your food?" he asks.

"It was bearable" I say as I dry my eyes with the back of my hand. He smiles.

"Are you ready for your first lesson?" he asks.

"What lesson? Why am I here?" I ask angrily.

"All will be revealed in due time, for now just breathe with me" he says expanding his diaphragm. This sounds all too familiar, but I do as instructed. We look at each other and breathe for a minute, which feels like a lifetime because his concentration is unbroken, and I can't maintain eye contact. I have no idea where this is going, but eventually I start to feel more relaxed. He must have picked up on it because he closes his eyes and I follow suit.

"With your eyes closed" he inhales, "just focus on your breathing" he exhales. I inhale again. What's the point of this? Are they testing my sanity? My thoughts run off. I exhale. Oh yeah, my breathing. I have started to breathe shallowly, but Yoo is still breathing deeply so I continue. I inhale deeply. Why haven't they administered Nigredo yet? Are they waiting to see if the symptoms get worse? I begin fidgeting. What is this place? Why am I sitting on the floor with a hologram? I open my eyes and Yoo is smiling at me.

"What the fuck is going on here?" I ask frustrated. I get up and try to bump over the bedside table, but it seems to be bolted to the floor. I take a closer look and realize it's protruding out of the floor! I check the bed and it seems to be coming

out of the floor too. I feel fear and frustration give way to anger. I yell at the top of my lungs and I try to kick over the bedside table, but hurt my foot instead. I fall to the floor in agony. The hologram hovers over me, legs crossed laughing hysterically.

“The gateway of your initiation is in your heart, but it’s hidden underneath your habitual thoughts and actions.”

“What the fuck is this place?” I beg with my foot in hand. No doubt I completely fucked up the emotional stability test.

“You are currently within a higher vibrational energy center. Your mind is re-rooting to adapt to the higher vibrational frequency by bringing suppressed lower vibrational emotions to the surface.”

“Huh?”

“You think that you are alone and separate from everything and everyone else. No wonder you feel afraid.”

“I’m not afraid!” I yell.

“Your conscious mind seeks distractions to take the focus away from the pain. The false boundaries and frustrating sense of separation will dissolve when balance is restored” he continues.

“I just want to get the fuck out of here!” I yell.

“The prison you have created for yourself derives from your beliefs about yourself and the world. You are starting to address the root causes of your issues rather than numbing the symptoms of discomfort and that is a good. In time you will

figure out what makes you truly happy instead of faking perfection and it will give you a new perspective on the meaning of life.”

“What is this, some kind of spiritual awakening?” I mock.

“You are going through purification. You need to understand your dark mind by accepting your feelings and freeing yourself from attachment to people and things, so you can get a clearer sense of who you are. One by one your inner conflicts will be resolved until a completely new inner state of clarity and freedom is achieved.”

“So, you are saying if I accept my feelings I will get out of here?”

“Yes, and by allowing your suppressed feelings to come forward for healing and releasing them you will grow deep roots and be strong and stable enough to complete your spiritual purpose.”

I don't know what he's talking about. Fuck my knees hurt.

“Ah, knees. You must bow down to the greater good by expressing your feelings fully while stepping into your destiny.”

“So, you're saying I should sacrifice myself for the 'greater good'? I frown.

“No, stepping into your destiny will allow you to properly honor your own best interests as well as those that are greater than you are.”

“Wait, did you just read my mind? “I ask surprised.

“Yes” he says nonchalantly. “But first you must learn to trust your Self” he continues.

“When you’re afraid you tend to attack or go for quick fixes, it has become instinctive, which makes it hard to make good long-term decisions. You have been stressed out for a long time and it has clouded your judgment and drained all your energy, you need to replenish. Rest and allow re-rooting to heal and replace your worn-out beliefs. There is no need to defend yourself anymore. You are safe. Eat when you feel hungry” a food platter materializes out of the wall again and he bows his head as he vanishes.

This must be some sort of advanced simulation room. I sit up and lean back into the corner of the room with my foot in hand. There is nothing around to stimulate my mind and now the pain is all I can focus on.

“What is happening to me” I wipe the tears from my eyes. I look like a complete pussy, but crying somehow makes me feel better, even though I have no idea what I’m crying about. I remember reading that depression is one of the symptoms of The Urge. “The pain will subside once you put down resistance” I recall the moment on the skybridge or did I hear it again now? I must be losing my mind.

After calming down I become aware of my body. My back doesn’t feel like it’s resting against anything. I turn around and watch the wall retract to form a corner. I lean back again, and it takes the shape of my spine. I move forward, and it retracts into a corner again.

“That’s fucking impossible.” I lean back again, but this time nothing happens. I do it a few times, but the corner stays a corner. What is going on here? I sit for a while and scan the room.

“I’m stuck in a square. I’m stuck in a sterile square” I start singing to myself. Eventually I grow bored and just hum the tune while I stare at the fruits and vegetables. The bright colors offer the only visual stimulation in the room. Why do I need constant stimulation?

“I’m stuck in a square. I’m stuck in a sterile square.”

The frustration makes me jump up and run to the food platter. I pick up the food and start throwing it against the walls. The red of the tomatoes make blotches that splatter red droplets into all directions. The ripe avocado halves, the bananas, the peaches, the grapes everything that could be squashed hit the wall one after the other. I put my hands into it and start smudging it all over the walls.

“What is going on here? Why are you doing this to me?” I yell. Crying and raging I rub the crushed fruits all over the walls, the weird furniture, the bedding and my clothes. Yeah, I have completely lost it. When I’ve worn myself out, I fall on the bed and pass out.

I wake up in the dark again. I’ve completely lost track of time. The opening in the ceiling seems larger. The moon is larger too. The moonlight lights up the room in an eerie way and animates the fruit stained walls. The avocado and banana smudges look like a giant bird, its beak open and its wings spread out, but it looks distressed. It is caught in the red beams that surround it. Yes, it’s captured in a cage. My tattoo on my chest! I look down at my chest and the silky white outfit is soiled. I take off my shirt. I see the falcon spread over my chest with a caged heart in its claws. Why did I paint it? What is happening to me? I wipe my face clean with the dirty shirt and pick up a bruised apple and eat it. It tastes good.

Yoo appears with a bucket. A wet sponge falls from the roof onto my head. I catch it and throw it at Yoo, but he has already vanished. I get the message, and since there is nothing else to do I take off my clothes and wash them first. I've obviously lost my shit so no use holding back now.

"Naked in a trippy chamber" I hum a new song while I scrub the walls down. I wash myself and everything else. I'm drained by a little work, but Yoo appears just as I finish, floating in his infamous seated position again.

"Let me guess, another breathing exercise?" I ask sarcastically. He nods. I feel tired, so I comply. I relax quicker than before and when I open my eyes Yoo is no longer there. I don't know how long I just sat there, but the room feels different somehow. The full moon is shining into the room. It makes it feel bigger, or maybe I just feel less tense? I look around and all the furniture retracts into the floor. Whoever is in control here obviously doesn't want me to sleep now. I stand up and the floor is bouncy. I bend down and stick my finger into it. It's like the room is becoming more malleable. "Who is watching me? Who are you?" I ask aloud.

Something starts protruding from the wall. It looks like three-dimensional letters. I step back to get a better look. It's a list.

"I am Jet Orgo

I am 26 years old

Born on the 27/04/01

Net Worth: 1 662 369 Watts

Title: Aquabot Captain.

Identification number: 270401991

Address: Basilisk Building level 15, Upper Light City.

Son of Robert Orgo, founder of Orgonic Industries

Mother died of blood cancer at age six

Drives a Condor

Best friend is Colin" I read aloud.

I walk up to the list and use my finger to draw a line through my family name. I am not associated with it anymore. The opening in the roof enlarges and lights up a coffin where my bed used to be. I walk to the coffin and open it, only to find myself lying inside staring out at my parents who are looking in. My mom is crying, and my father is consoling her. She picks up a needle and injects a dark substance into her heart. It spreads throughout her body and she steps back and disappears into the shadows of the room. I try to stop her, but my father slams the coffin shut. I hear a falcon cry and feel a pain in my chest. I kick the coffin open and the room has transformed into a cage. My arms seem to be transforming into wings. I am the falcon in the cage now. I am growing larger, or the cage is shrinking? Either way, the cage is going to crush me.

"Let it go" I hear a voice. I feel the pain in my chest intensify.

"Let it go" the voice repeats.

"Let me go!" I shriek just as the cage is about to crush me.

I open my eyes with a gasp and see Yoo sitting across from me. We are still busy with the breathing exercise. He opens his eyes and nods in approval. I want to tell him about what just happened but for some reason I think he knows.

“What is happening to me?” I whisper.

“Are you ready to let go?” he whispers back. I don’t know what he means by that, but I nod in agreement.

“What are feeling?” he asks sympathetically.

I sit quietly for a while trying to find words to explain what I’m feeling. “The isolation is fucking unbearable!” I sniff. “I don’t see or feel beauty anymore. Life has become meaningless” I continue.

“Life as your ego has known it is outdated” he says calmly.

“Sounds like I need an upgrade?” I shrug sarcastically.

“Yes, you do. It is time to change the way you think about yourself and the world. Your dark mind is stepping forward to begin the re-rooting process. If you put down resistance it shouldn’t be too uncomfortable.”

“Not too uncomfortable?” I raise my eyebrow and sniff again.

“The Nigredo comedown can be an uncomfortable experience, but it is necessary. Your nose is runny because you have been suppressing your tears and doubting yourself.”

“I’m sniffing because my immune system took a knock in the cage” I affirm.

“Waves or particles” he mumbles.

I don't know what he meant by that.

"When I'm not sleeping, I'm crying. I think I might be on the verge of a nervous breakdown" I continue.

"You are being drawn into your dark mind and your ego feels frustrated and isolated. Your ego is stuck in this" he scans the room "emptiness and sterility" he continues "because you have placed too much emphasis on wealth and status. When you accept this, we can begin releasing your attachment to things that are preventing your true happiness."

I just look at him trying to make sense of all this.

"You are mourning the death of your old self" he says as he begins to fade away.

I remember the coffin.

"Great shifts are occurring within you, sleep is a time of integration, so rest when you are tired" he says and vanishes.

The room is back to normal again.

I touch the wall and it feels solid. I bend down and touch the floor and it's solid too. I fall asleep for a few hours and wake up again. This continues throughout the day and I wake up more tired than before I went to sleep.

The darkness brings heat waves that surge through my body. I'm soaked and then I'm shivering.

"Can you fix the air conditioning in here?" I yell. The moon lights up the room again and I feel a heat wave run through my body and rush to my hands. My

hands glow red in the darkness! I jump to the water bucket I used to clean the room, but I'm distracted by my reflection in the water. My hair touches my shoulders already. The image becomes clearer and I see the break out on my face.

"What the fuck is wrong with my skin?" I think aloud.

"Your skin is a dramatic way of "coming out" about formerly repressed or embarrassing issues" I hear a voice.

"Oh, great now I'm hearing voices too" I laugh in disbelief.

"Your body feels strong and safe enough to release those volatile emotions" it continues.

"Why is it around my mouth and on my chin?"

"The colon represents control and the liver houses anger, especially anger stemming from frustration" it explains.

"So, my chin is telling me that my liver is frustrated?" I try to hold down my laughter.

"You are housing anger and are now beginning the process of releasing it. Your skin eruptions reflect the release" the voice says bluntly.

"How do I process the emotions?" I ask sincerely.

"Accept your feelings as they come up and let them go. Expand it outward until it dissipates. Don't direct it at anyone."

I feel the energy run up my body again.

“It’s like the full moon brings up heat waves that heat me from head to toe. I have been sweating all night.

“What did I do to deserve this?” I waddle in a pool of self-pity while shaking my hands in attempt to cool them down.

“Yes, power surges can be uncomfortable. I’m surprised you linked it with the full moon. Just a pity your victim mentality still shifts blame instead of embraces change. But we’ll get to that when you are ready. You never get more than you are ready to master” the voice continues.

I blow onto my hands to cool them down and it reminds me of the breathing exercise I did with Yoo. I sit down on the floor and breathe deeply to calm down.

When I’m relaxed the ventilation increases and room cools down, and when I’m tense or angry and my breathing becomes shallow, it heats up. It’s like my breathing affects the ventilation, which regulates the room temperature.

“Waves and particles” I mutter to myself.

I continue breathing and expand the feeling outwards as instructed. I feel the tension leave my body as I go into the dark.

I am in the Aquabot. I am alone. “Hello Captain Jet” the bot welcomes me in the French accent.

“Hello” I greet her happy to hear a familiar voice.

“Do you like it down here?” she asks.

“Yes” I reply hesitantly, a bit uncomfortable with her strange question.

“Does your title make you feel important?” she asks.

“Yes, to a certain degree” I confess.

“Does it define who you are?”

“Yeah, it’s who I am” I raise my shoulders like it’s obvious.

“Is it?” the bot starts descending uncontrollably and the increase in pressure causes water to rush into the head space. The water rises, and I take one last breath.

I open my eyes. I’m still sitting on the floor soaked again.

“Who are you?” I ask, and the words protrude out from the wall again.

“I am Jet

I am 26 years old

Born on the 27/04/01

Net Worth: 1 662 369 Watts

Identification number: 270401991

Address: Basilisk Building level 15, Upper Light City.

Drives a Condor

Best friend is Colin.”

I slide my fingers over the scar on my wrist.

“No Palmer, no proof” I think aloud. I watch my net worth, address and car slowly fade away. The room is becoming more malleable the more attachments I release.

“I am Jet

I am 26 years old

Born on the 27/04/01

Best friend is Colin” I read aloud.

I slide my hands over the remaining words. What is happening to me? The Urge must be re-rooting my brain, but I don't feel tense or afraid anymore. I sit down and close my eyes. My mind is calm.

I watch Colin returning to base without me. He is crying. They sent an immediate evacuation alert. The Vanavasi sieged a Logbot and crashed it onto the wall crushing the base below. I watch his tears give way to rage on the way back to Light City and a strange black fog penetrating his chest. I watch him converse with Sky-Lo and be promoted to general of The Harvest. I exhale and open my eyes.

"I am Jet

I am 26 years old

Born on the 27/04/01" I read aloud.

I inhale and close my eyes. I watch my mother give birth to me and a doctor sign a birth certificate. I tap him on his shoulder. He turns and looks at me.

"Where was I before I was here?" I ask. He takes his pen and point towards my mother on the delivery table.

"In Her."

Yoo appears and begins to slow clap. I smile.

"Am I cured of The Urge?" I ask to gain a better understanding of the situation.

"The Urge has cured you" he smiles. "Let me show you something, close your eyes" he instructs. I close my eyes.

I see a girl listening to music and dancing sensually. She looks free and unbounded. I am immediately attracted to her. She throws her head down between her legs and her long black hair falls to the floor. I think she's doing yoga. She holds the back of her ankles and wiggles her bum as she slowly raises upright. She inhales deeply, and I watch her chest rise. She exhales as she rolls down again and places her hands on the ground. Her back muscles flex as she pushes up on her arms and lifts her lower body, balancing herself on her hands. I can sense the beat of the music she is listening to by just looking at her move. She inhales

deeply, crosses her legs mid-air and slowly lowers her lower body to her elbows. She straightens her legs through her arms and inhales again with her eyes closed. Her form is perfect. She is perfect.

She lowers herself to the ground and smiles as she moves her head to the music. Yoo coughs to get my attention.

“Who is that girl?” I ask.

“Your anima” he says.

“My who?” I frown.

“Your energetic opposite” he smiles.

“Like a soulmate?” I raise my eyebrow.

“If you believe in that sort of thing” he shrugs.

“What’s her name?” I ask excitedly. Not sure where it is coming from, I’m not the romantic type, but hey, here’s to going with the flow.

“Personal information cannot be disclosed without consent from the owner” he sounds like a robot.

“Is that hologram for go ask her out?” I laugh.

“You are not to interact with the people until you become a part of the people” he explains.

“I would like to become a part of her” I joke.

“I see your intentions behind that comment and I refrain from participating in your fantasies” he frowns, very authentic responses, I sometimes forget that he is a hologram. I look at her again and she turns to look at me. She smiles a smile I can never unsee. That probably sounds dramatic, but damn.

“You are aware that you can leave whenever you want?” Yoo continues. I’m still recovering from that smile.

“I feel much better” I nod enthusiastically “I think I’m ready to leave. My senses are enhancing, I’m hungry, and I can almost go as far as to say I feel happy.”

He shakes his head and laughs “You are happy” he nods.

I hear water rushing and birds chirping. It’s coming from outside the room!

“I am ready” I say aloud, but nothing happens.

I laugh as I slide my fingers through my name that is still protruding from the wall.

“I am” I announce.

The walls dissolve, and I see the outside world for the first time in I don’t know how long. I am in the jungle. It’s dark, and I hear drums.

8

I look around, but there is no sign of the room or the prison. It’s dark, and there is no moon either. I can only see a few feet in front of me. I hear music in the distance. At first it sounds like amplified jungle noises, but it becomes intertwined with progressive drumming. A female voice starts chanting. The chant is looped

and a sensual moan echoes through the jungle. I run towards the sound. A loud creed breaks out as what sounds like a thousand voices repeat the chant in unison.

As I come closer I can see people gathered in an opening in the jungle. People are swinging balls of fire that are attached to ropes, and hoops and bars that are set alight, around the crowd. The trees surrounding the opening are illuminated with lights and strange animals and shapes. There is a gathering of thousands inside the opening. They are all dancing with their backs facing me. Their bodies are covered in paint. The right half in red patterns and the left half in solid black. Behind them there is a giant waterfall. This must be the opening near the water source from the map!

They are facing a bizarre looking stage made up of multiple trees plaited into one another. There is a giant projection above the canopy of a woman performing on the weird tree stage.

She has silver scales on her hands and forearms and long plaited watery hair running down her spine, like a waterfall that opens out into a tail. She looks like a mermaid. She seems to be directing the dance because everyone mimics her moves. Her arms and body movements are in sync with the music and the drumming. It's like she is orchestrating the music according to her movements. If I didn't know any better, I'd say she was a mystical eccentric DJ.

She chants again, and the crowd follows suit. The drumming intensifies like it's building up to something. I am drawn into the dance floor, but I resist. I spot a girl dancing and I recognize her movements as the girl from my vision. I take off my clothes to blend in and run into the crowd just as the base drops.

I pass the people playing with fire. They look indifferent to my presence.

I accidentally bump into two people and I start running through the crowd in a slight panic. The drumming is coming from the front. As I come closer to the stage I can see the drums illuminate when they are struck. They are mounted onto platforms in the treetops and range from largest closest to the stage and radiate outward in decreasing sizes.

The crowd starts cheering and I can feel the bass drop coming up again. Everyone can feel it. There is a moment of silence and everyone is in suspended animation. The drummers standing on top of the drums bang them with full force. All the drums light up to form a glowing crescent that illuminates the crowd. It's pretty impressive. The drummers have strange animal silhouettes dancing around them too, but I can't make it out from here. Everyone around me starts jumping around and stomping their feet on the ground. I try to move through the crowd to where I last saw the girl, but she's not there anymore, and the vibe is so intense it's hard not to join the dance.

I try to keep a low profile as I pass through the naked dancers. Everyone looks so happy, I feel welcome even though I have no clue what is going on. The dancing continues until two giant horns are blown on either sides of the stage and the music stops. The crowd steps back to form an opening in the center of the dance floor. A black dot appears and floats above the opening.

The people playing with the fire turn their backs to us and start spinning the flaming objects. It starts closest to the stage and spreads around the dance floor to create a ring of fire that surrounds the crowd.

“Through Her gate we enter the realm of magic. Through Her womb all life is born and returns. She is ever present at the edge of your vision. Most beautiful maiden of spring whose flowers lead to fruit as loving leads to life. By life and love be invigorated by our dance” the woman on stage sings and the drumming starts again.

“Come, come to the heartbeat’s drum!”

“Come, come to the heartbeat’s drum!”

“Come, come to the heartbeat’s drum!” the crowd chant and stomp their feet on the ground in unison. I get shivers up my spine.

The chanting and the drumming intensify and the dot begins to vibrate and oscillate. A strange feeling comes over me. I think the crowd senses it too.

The dot bursts open and a rainbow emanates outward from it. The bands of the rainbow grow larger as it expands out over the crowd and forms a thin layer of light over the entire dance floor. Water droplets fall from the sky like a faint mist. As it falls through the layer of light it glitters like liquid rainbows. My skin starts to sparkle as the droplets fall onto my body and everyone around me starts cheering and making different animal noises. It’s like the jungle came alive on the dance floor. I’m still taking all this in when the drumming picks up again and the crowd starts dancing excitedly.

A seedling shoots up from the dot, and as they dance, the roots grow down the center of the dance floor into the soil.

The drizzling stops, and the horns are blown again. The crowd lifts their left palms towards the seedling and bow. I turn and look back at an ocean of black palms. With palms raised they turn towards the waterfall. I turn too. Yeah, my rationalizing faculties went in overdrive and completely shut down.

A giant silver lily drops from the sky above the pool of water and floats on the water surface. The water ripples illuminate as a silver crab climbs out of the water onto the lily. The music starts slowly and sounds seductive and mystical. The crab dances on top of the lily and the crowd opens a path from the water to the stage. A dark female figure rises from the water and the crowd bows down. Fuck these people have some high-tech lighting. She sits down with her legs spread open. The waterfall looks like it's flowing out of her.

"Mighty light, twice born, come unto me" she says as she opens her arms and lies back onto the jungle floor.

The layer of rainbow light changes into a red glow that radiates from the center outward.

I can hear excitement and laughter behind me. I turn around and see the sun materialize above the seedling at the center of the dance floor, and amongst the crowd, a giant hologram of a lion with a mane of fire roars loudly. The crowd laughs and cheers.

"Lord of life and lust, freedom and ecstasy, come lead the dance" the crowd chants and the white light overhead begins to glow brighter.

"Mighty light, twice born, come descend upon Her body" the crowd calls out and the white light changes to red as it starts pulsates faster.

“Come, come to the heartbeat’s drum!”

“Come, come to the heartbeat’s drum!”

“Come, come to the heartbeat’s drum!” everyone chants repeatedly, as they stomp their feet faster and faster. The light flashes like a strobe light. I’m almost blinded by it. They lift their right palms, all painted red, into the air and start making animal noises while they dance. This is some trippy shit.

A red masculine figure with an erection rises from the stage opposite the waterfall. What the fuck?

The people quiet down and bow as he walks the expanse of the dance floor in three big steps. The drums echo as he takes each step. The people lower their palms as he bends down onto his knees in front of the dark female figure.

“I am your light” he says as he holds her thighs with his head bowed down.

A moon forms above her and she tilts her head back and opens her mouth. The moon is drawn down and she swallows it. It glows inside her chest.

“I am the Mother of all living, and my love is poured out onto the Earth” she addresses the tribe.

“Night and day are equal” she continues, and everyone lifts both palms into the air.

“The sun and moon are in perfect balance” she says, and everyone connects both hands with their fingers above their head with their palms facing forward.

The man kisses her knees one by one, then her navel, breasts and finally her lips. Colorful orbs appear and connect the base of her spine with the crown of her head as he kisses the different parts of her body.

“My love” he says as he penetrates her. He thrusts forward and her moans echo throughout the jungle. The lights on her body illuminate as she reaches climax. The crowd becomes excited, and I must admit I feel slightly aroused too.

She reaches orgasm as the masculine figure ejaculates into her and a wave of energy and color floods the dance floor. Everyone cheers and the entire jungle comes alive too.

The figures dissolve and the planets appear above the dance floor where the layer of light used to be.

“The two are one” everybody cheers.

The music gets groovy and people start dancing sensually.

Four people step onto the tree stage. They’re dressed in strange costumes that I can’t quite make out from afar. One of them is the fish lady with the silver scales. A projection of them appears over the treetops above the stage. Ah, that’s better, now I can see.

Their costumes are remarkably realistic, wow. The fish lady moves her arms and starts singing. Her hair comes undone and starts flowing down the contours of her naked body. She has strings of shells hooped around her neck and hips that chime and she moves across the stage like an incoming tide. I can hear string instruments follow her movements.

Another woman that is almost transparent with silky wings glides over the stage, and the woodwind instruments play. The other two are guys, one a shirtless dwarf, with a muscular build and a long, beaded beard. His hair is tied back in a bun and when he bangs his fists on the floor the drummers surrounding the dance floor follow suit. The other guy has no hair and reptile eyes. His hands ignite as he levitates, and the brass instruments join the symphony. I can't see any of the instruments besides the drums. This must be some sort of trippy simulation or something?

Everyone is dancing and passing bowls of water around. I'm naked, not painted, but nobody seems to mind. I scan the crowd for the girl. I jump back when something large illuminates next to me. It's a giant holographic bull! It starts bucking to the beat, passes right through me and continues through the crowd. A feeling of determination comes over me. What was that about?

I scan the dance floor and the lion with the fiery mane is still a blazing below the sun, behind me is a giant man with a belt dances around with his sword in hand and across from him two fishes are splashing in mid-air, below planet Neptune. Behind me twins do acrobatics, the one balancing on top of the other's shoulders, towering over the crowd, almost touching Mercury. An arrow is shot from the back from below planet Jupiter and I follow its luminescent path over the crowd towards the giant scorpion in the front, with a tail of topaz and jasper glittering underneath Pluto.

The arrow dissipates mid-flight and the illuminated dust sprinkles onto the crowd below. Wait a second, Taurus, Orion, Pisces, Gemini, Sagittarius and Scorpio? Star

constellations? They are dancing among the stars! But the stars are dancing too?
Fuck me. It's a cosmic carnival!

That's when I see her, the girl dancing with the bull. She has two hand prints slapped onto her bum with paint. Her legs are strong and her thighs thick. Her bum bounces as she shakes her hips to the beat. The base drums beat through my body and my heart pounds in my chest. I can feel the adrenalin kick in as I move closer to her. I have never felt so attracted to anyone before. I still need to get used to feeling so intensely.

The beat drops and she throws her long black hair forward and shakes it vigorously. She turns and looks straight at me like she did in the vision. I am dumbstruck. She smiles like she recognizes me. She flicks her hair out of her face and walks towards me. I stop breathing. The music is building up, I can feel it, but it gets fuzzy as my muscles go into fight or flight mode. I can't run away, so I'm like 'uh fuck.' I'm still contemplating what to do when her face is already an inch away from mine. Holy shit, what now? She grins and places her hands on my shoulders. She slides her hands down my arms. I don't know what the fuck to do! She maintains eye contact and fiddles with my fingers. I just stand there. She grabs my bum with both her hands, pushes me forward and thrusts her pelvis against mine. I step back as she jumps back laughing and waving her paint covered hands in front of her face mockingly. She just printed her hands on my ass! I snap out of the daze and start laughing.

My ears adjust to the music as my muscles relax. She waves for me to join her with the dance. I watch her dance at first. It is mesmerizing. She moves fluently and free, like her body is one with the music. The drumming intensifies into a

rhythmic, hypnotic beat. I feel myself start to sway from side to side until someone throws me with water. I snap out of it and turn around. She laughs and hands me the bowl to drink. I take a sip. It tastes sweet. Sweat is dripping down my face and body and she takes the bowl and pours everything over my head. It's cold but refreshing. I feel so alive, it's hard to explain.

The energy in the crowd is invigorating. I don't know how long we danced but eventually the music, the crowd's animal noises and the drumming start to block out all my other senses.

My shoulders sway from side to side as my feet rhythmically push off the ground. The rhythmic feel of the earth beneath my feet relaxes me somehow. My body is tired and my mind is calm, like I'm releasing all excess energy and it feels good. I feel my heart beat synchronize with the music. Eventually my whole body is aligned with the beat and my mind becomes less alert. I continue to dance but my attention is drawn away from my body into myself.

The blackness begins to clump together and protrude toward me like a face pushing against a plastic bag. It looks elastic. Some parts contracting and other expanding and emanating the colors of the rainbow in varying intensities. The flashes of color take the shape of familiar images. A bird flying away and disappearing into the shadows, and then a flash of a high-resolution image, a red and black board game with a tiny white idol of a man holding his erect phallus in his one hand. It disappears as quickly as it appeared, and the darkness is momentarily solid and devoid of motion. Then I start to see red orbs bouncing around in the dark. I open my eyes, and sure enough, a red glow emanates from everyone's groin!

“What the fuck?” I tap the girl on the shoulder to get her to turn around. She turns, and I can clearly see a red picture glowing on her groin and running down her legs. The closer I look the more details I see. It has different layers of varying shades of red that makes the image look three dimensional. There is a seed pulsating in the center of her groin, and behind it a lighter red tree trunk grows upwards to form a faint trident surrounded by a circle. The roots run down her legs and connect to the earth at the soles of her feet. I blink vigorously to be sure that my eyes aren’t fucking with me. She tries to get my attention by waving her hand in front of my face. I look up at her. She look at me confused.

I get up and turn to the guy dancing next to her. He also has a red root system. As he dances red energy pulsates from a fully developed tree, shoots down his legs and out from his feet, into the earth. His branches seem to be taking the shape of an animal of some sort. It looks like a bear.

I scan the dance floor and watch as the soil radiate with bursts of red light as the energy is pushed into the earth. I follow it as it is drawn to the center of the dance floor where a vortex is forming. It seems to be growing upwards and expanding over the crowd.

I look up and try to take all this in. I watch the planets as they orbit around the expanding vortex. Inside the vortex the seedling is growing into a tree.

I see the out breath and the heat from everyone’s bodies give off a red glow that gets sucked into the vortex too.

I feel hyper aware. Everything is in slow motion, the people are dancing and kicking up dust. They are sweating, and their body decorations are smudged as

they whistle and laugh. It's a lot to take in and I begin to feel light headed. I want to run into the jungle and escape whatever is happening, but before I can take flight the girl covers my head with a black shall and secures it around my shoulders with a silver hoop. There is a black crystal dangling from it. I relax as my heart rate slows down. She can probably sense that I am less tense because she starts laughing and so do I.

I calm down and drink some water while I watch her dance. She raises her arms and moves her hips to the beat. She looks over her shoulder and smiles. She comes up against me and slides her hands down my face. I just stare at her. She places her hand onto my heart.

"Right heart" I read her lips. She smiles when she sees me understand. The music builds up again and I close my eyes and exhale. I hear her cheering over the music. Oh my fuck, this girl is driving me crazy!

She takes my hand and we pass through the crowd and sit underneath a tree to rest.

"What is going on here? What is this?" I gasp.

"It's the Spring Equinox festival, from here on days will lengthen. It is a time of fertility and new life!" she says catching her breath.

We watch the planets orbiting above the dancing star signs. Many people are sleeping and resting under the trees while the others dance.

“It is New Moon tonight, so the Moon is represented by the silver crab” she points to the crab dancing on the lily on the water” and then to the water “The creative feminine, the Great Mother.”

“And the Sun sign of Leo is the source of vital energy, physical strength and power, the masculine principle” she points to the lion roaring beneath the sun.

“The principle of opposites is present in each of us, the masculine” she opens her right palm that is still stained red” and “the feminine” she opens her left palm with dark black grooves formed from the paint in her palm lines. It is up to us to find the balance” she connects her hands together.

“The dance floor is Her womb, and it represents wholeness” she closes her intertwined hands to form a ball.

I stare at the solar system, the constellations, the music and the people. “The dance floor is like a microcosm of the universe?” I ask.

“Yes, like us” she nods excitedly.

I roll the black crystal with its long, thin striated sides with three faces giving it a triangular cross-section between my fingers. “How did this crystal have such a calming effect on me?” I ask.

“It helps to block out the noise” she touches my fingers touching the stone. It feels strange.

“Noise?” I frown.

“Yes, incoming energies can become a bit overwhelming when you aren’t properly grounded. The black tourmaline is used for protecting and grounding personal energies. When you dance the tourmaline is heated and produces a positive electrical charge at one end and a negative charge at the other which grounds scattered energies” she explains.

“That’s pretty cool” I say impressed, and check out the stone.

“Yes, it quickly brings your awareness back to the present moment and deflects dense energies back into the Earth” she smiles. “But you are unusually sensitive for a newborn” she mumbles to herself just as the horns are blown again.

Everyone jumps up and cheers. The girl jumps to her feet and holds out her hand for me to get up. “Come quick, the elements are just right. We have enough energy!” She is strong and her abdomen flexes as she pulls me to my feet. I didn’t even catch her name.

“The elements are right for what? Enough energy to what?” I ask as we move through the crowd. She just smiles and tilts her head for me to hurry up. This is a wild ride. Wow!

Orion faces the waterfall, kneels onto one knee and rests his sword on his leg. All the other holograms bow. Something is coming.

“Awaken guardian!” the people on stage announce.

“MU!” the crowd call in a deep tone and hold their hands.

“MUUU-MUUU” they chant repeatedly and stamp their feet to the rhythm of the drums.

Light starts rippling below the water surface.

“MUUU!” they call louder, and the water starts vibrating.

“MU, MU, MU!” they continue, and I can see something come up from the depths. I get goose bumps as giant snake splashes out of the pool and swallows the crab whole. I feel a rush of pleasure surge up my spine followed by a sense of unity I have never experienced before. Everyone moans with pleasure around me too. The snake sinks back into the water and everyone falls quiet. The feeling lingers for a long time and the music slows down as the sky becomes lighter. We have been dancing the entire night!

The sun rises, and purple droplets fall from the sky as the rays trigger a precipitation of rain droplets to ground the crowd. The droplets illuminate my body as I watch the girl laughing and dancing around as the purple light reflecting off the water droplets light up her face and body. But the experience of unity is quickly replaced by excitement when the crowd starts chanting again.

Everyone turns to greet the sun. The stars and planets disappear. There is a heap of ash where the seedling was growing and as the music builds up a flaming bird rises from the ashes. The bird rises with the sun and the fire guy from the previous night levitates onto the stage as the silky bird girl swoops in. She ignites him with her wings and they start orchestrating the music together.

He starts chanting. His voice is uplifting, and the people start smiling even though they are sweaty and tired. There is a sense of euphoria in the air. The crowd does another synchronized dance in the direction of the sun.

“Greet the New Sun Jet!” the girl says excitedly, and lifts my arm into the air. Of course, we are dancing for the sun. Everyone has satchels tied around their shoulders and secured around their chests and others have them around their waists and secured around their legs. Everyone opens their bags and pulls out a fist full of something. The guy starts chanting louder and the crowd joins him. The beat gradually increases along with the chanting. Then he sings a final chant as the bird girl thrusts her silky wings forward and the dwarf jumps out and slams his fists to the floor to signal the base drop.

Birds start sweeping over the dance floor as the people throw their fist into the air and release what I now realize are seeds. They dance and jump around throwing seeds in all directions. Hundreds of birds are swooping down and picking them out of the air. I don't know if they are real or not. It's becoming harder to distinguish between real life and projections, and I'm too amazed to over-think it. The girl puts seeds in my hands “We plant good seeds for new growth.” I join in the throwing and jumping.

At the end of the ceremony people throw their crystals into the pool below the waterfall. I take off the tourmaline and do the same.

“It's to cleanse it” she says and climbs a plaited ladder up a tree to a platform.

“Let's get some sleep so I can show you around.”

“Right here?” I ask hesitantly as she lies down next to me.

“When you close your eyes, the womb will form around you” she assures me.

“Is it safe?” I ask, still uneasy.

“You are safe now, Jet” she smiles and closes her eyes. A black capsule forms around her and I close my eyes and go into the womb too.

9

I wake up on the branch next to a floating fire. There is a bowl of water next to me. My mouth is dry. I feel dehydrated. Obviously from all the dancing last night, but there is no way I’m drinking anything as easily again. I think I’m still coming off whatever was in the water last night. Floating fire? I look back at the fire and it drops into a rock bowl in a hole in the bark. I get up and hold onto a branch to stabilize myself. How the fuck did I get up here this morning? My feet feel sensitive from all the dancing. I hardly walk bare feet and I never dance, even with shoes on, so I’m not surprised.

I hear people talking and laughing in the distance. The womb must have blocked out sound because I couldn’t hear a thing when I was inside. There are multiple spheres of colors radiating from the treetops. This is a bit too much to take in so early. Either I’m in a weird virtual reality simulation or I’m still tripping? Either way I need to get my shit together before I fall out of this tree.

A female voice calls my name. I remember the girl from last night. My heart skips a beat. I turn toward the sound and across the canopy there are two ladies

waving for me to come to them. The trees are plaited like giant bonsai branches interwoven to form bridges that connect the trees. The more I look around the more the treetops take the shape of a treetop city connected by these strange bridges and opening out to flattened out platforms. Everything is alive and interconnected. I don't see any screws, walls or doors. I carefully cross the bridge. The bark is trodden smooth. They must have found a way to direct their growth and somehow create all this in a short time, because this would have taken decades to grow.

A little boy runs towards me, he is naked and has a long braid running down his spine. He grabs my finger and pulls me towards the lady sitting in what looks like a swing, but where are the ropes? I look closer. Oh, there they are. She has bangles on her arms, beads in her hair and a nose ring connected to her left ear with a chain. She indicates for me to sit down on the pillow in front of her. I sit, and she starts fiddling with my hair. I pull away because it's ticklish, and the children laugh. My hair has grown quickly. It's past my shoulders. It is the longest it has been in my life. The other woman kneels next to me and starts plaiting too. The children run to me and touch my tattoos. "Leo" they point and show the ladies. They both laugh. They couldn't have seen a lion in real life, they went extinct before The Urge. They must have seen it in the stars.

The kids hand me bowl of fruits. I am famished and dig right in. It tastes better than anything I have ever tasted. The lady with the nose ring could probably see in my facial expression that I was enjoying it because she laughs as I indulge. "Gratitude" she nudges me. "Oh, thank you" I spurt out with a mouth full of fruits. I have almost finished the entire bowl when a girl comes over from across the

platform. I recognize her strong legs and the movement of her hips as she walks closer. It's the girl from last night! As she walks towards us her long black hair swings behind her. She has a big bun tied to the back of her head with a single dreadlock. She is tightly wrapped in a red cloth that covers her groin and her breasts. She is voluptuous and sexy. She smiles and her white teeth glow in contrast with her hazel skin. I must be staring "Shit" I whisper as I wipe my mouth with my arm. She crosses her legs and sits down in front of me. She has paint on her face. It looks like wings stretching over her brows with white at the center of her eyes radiating outward with shades of red at her temples. She has strong facial features and light brown, almost red colored eyes with a light blue stud underneath her right eye.

She takes an avocado and slices it in half with her finger. She hands me half. How the fuck did she just do that? She makes me feel nervous, so I don't ask. I have lost my appetite, but eat it anyway.

"Your hair looks nice" she says politely.

"I haven't seen it yet" I say bluntly. What the fuck is wrong with me? Why am I acting like an idiot?

"All done, we will work on your dreads at tonight's gathering" the lady behind me taps my shoulders. I feel my head. It's braided. The girl jumps up and ties my hair up in a ponytail.

"I am going to show him around" she thanks the ladies. She nudges her head for me to follow her, so I get up.

"I didn't catch your name?" I ask, trying to sound cool.

“Amphi” she says and bows her head slightly.

“What happened to me?” I ask as I follow her across the bridge.

“Your mind has been re-rooted” she says and holds onto a vine.

“Am I infected?” I ask confused with her answer.

“If you think freedom is an infection, then yes” she laughs and slides down.

I slide down too.

“Where is Colin?” I ask irritated with these confusing answers.

“Is he your friend?” she asks neutrally.

“Yes!” I almost scream out like it should be obvious.

“I brought you here alone” she says calmly.

“Wait, you brought me here? Where is here?!” I ask angrily.

“Your eyes are dilated, and your skin looks flushed. Why are you angry?” she looks at me curiously.

I’m not used to being spoken to like that. I break eye contact. I feel very emotional. She must see that I’m close to breaking point.

“You are in the jungle” she laughs. “Feel free to express your anger, you are safe here” she reassures me.

I close my eyes to hold back the tears. My emotions are going haywire again. There is no way I’m crying in front of her.

“Now that you have been reborn you will initially be driven to fulfill your basic needs. I will show you the Vanavasi Way to satisfy these needs, but you can do as you feel fit” she says and starts walking into the jungle.

“The Vanavasi way reflects our consciousness” she continues.

“Yeah, hi-tech jungle tribe suites you” I smirk.

“We are fire, and the blue-green spectrum of nature helps keep us balanced” she nods oblivious to my sarcasm.

“What happened last night?” I ask as we walk past the opening where the festival was held.

“During the Spring Equinox we dance through ourselves and remove what no longer serves our growth. At the first sign of light we return from our inner journey back into to the physical world and sow the seeds for new growth and give thanks for our experience. The dance floor reflects the cosmos and the cosmos is the womb” she opens her arms and spins around.

“The womb?” I frown.

“Yes, the dance floor represents Her womb, a safe place where we can journey inside ourselves” she smiles.

“Like a mother’s womb?” I ask just to be sure.

“I know of no other” she raises her shoulders.

In a strange way all of this makes sense, like I knew this at some point...

“In time you will grow deep roots and strengthen your connection to Her Body. It will help you feel your way through life. You will learn how to be guided by your gut and not see your feelings as the enemy, but for your roots to grow deep you need to learn how to take care of yourself first.”

“I know how to take care of myself, but thanks though” I pout.

“You have been dependent on the system for so long, you have lost your survival instincts and the ability to think for yourself, so please, open your mind and allow me to enlighten you” she says firmly.

I step back.

“To enable germination of your true self you need to be self-sufficient, so you can think clearly and shift your focus from surviving to thriving” she continues nonchalantly. “You will slowly begin releasing all dependencies, but first you’ll need food and water to purify and strengthen your body” she says as we walk along a well-trod path. I can hear rushing water up ahead.

“How will I release my dependency on food?” I ask in disbelief. “Food will be eaten for the experience of tasting and experiencing that part of yourself and no longer be a necessity to satisfy hunger. Your biology will change to optimize your senses, so you can fully experience everything around you instead. So, instead of numbing your senses you will be enhancing them.

We walk to the river.

“Is it drinkable?” I ask.

“Yes” she scoops a handful and drinks it. I do the same. It tastes great.

“Do you know what happens to a river when you build a dam?” I shake my head and dry my mouth with my arm.

“It slows down,” she says as she bends down and twirls her finger in a puddle of water, “and stagnant water like stagnant emotions, rot” she looks at me intently. Wow, intense.

“Uh, aren’t you afraid it will run out?” I ask a bit nervous.

“You have more than you need, but your fear of not having enough makes you manifest shortages” she splashes the water in frustration.

“Your light aligns with the things you plant in the dark.”

“Huh?” I choke.

“Your reality reflects your beliefs. If you believe there is lack then you will hoard, and all the resources in the world won’t be enough. And like I said, stagnant energy, like stagnant water, rots. Oh, and your ocean is desolate because you traded your ability to create for money.”

I laugh aloud. She frowns.

“The few who tap into Her creative power are the few creators among the citizens and the lifeless ocean surrounding Light City reflects your severed connection to Her creative flow.”

“That’s bullshit” I laugh.

“Your fear will dissipate in time” she smiles and hops along. I follow her. I don’t hop.

“Where is the room I was in?” I ask.

“You were in the womb to be re-rooted.” Hmm, re-root? Yoo mentioned something about that.

“So, the white room was a womb too?” I ask confused.

“Yes” she smiles impressed at my savvy.

“It is was a safe place to release your old conditioning. It reflected the fear based, over-controlling consciousness within Light City from where you came. You were stuck in a square cage.”

“So, I created the room?” I hesitate.

“Your mind was the room.”

Wow, mindfuck.

“Yeah, I remember the walls becoming malleable as I released my old beliefs” I think aloud. “And the fighting in the cell? That doesn’t seem like a safe place at all?” I frown.

“That was the scenario Yoo created to help you bypass your conditioning” she explains.

“You mean to say that I did that to myself?” I ask surprised, but then I recall their faces...my faces.

“Yoo did” she nods. I don’t want to ask if she meant that with a double ‘o’. I feel wheezy.

“I think I’m going to be sick” I say and lean against a tree.

“It must be...” I cough and bend over “all the fruit.” She laughs and sits down across from me.

“You are having trouble digesting everything I just told you.”

“Yeah, whatever” I puke behind the tree.

“Like I said, it will take time” she laughs at me puking. “If you walk into the jungle in any direction you will find food in many shapes and tastes. Whatever you need will be provided. Sometimes you might not even be aware that you need something, so leave room for magic. In time you will learn the delicacies of the jungle, but it is in your best interest to not take more than you need. Food, just like fresh water is provided in abundance, if you believe there is not enough all the food in the world won’t be able to satisfy you, so get used to getting what you need, when you need it, and not giving it any thought beforehand.”

“So, you get everything you want?” I ask as I stand upright and take a deep breath.

“We get everything we need” she corrects me. “The Whole expands in all directions simultaneously to meet everyone’s needs for the benefit of the Whole, therefore ensuring infinite growth and abundance, or the opposite for those who

work against the flow. The Vanavasi Way reflects red energy's ability drive you to turn your dreams into reality by balancing the inner fire. We have access to whatever we need for spiritual growth and expanding our awareness" she points to a bunch of bananas and shakes her hand to and fro. A few falls to the ground. She hands me one.

"A banana will help me experience a new part of myself, how?" I look at the banana in disbelief.

"It's what the banana represents that reflects your consciousness back to you. Whether you crave animal meat or fresh fruit tells you of your state of mind. Different foods have different effects on your thoughts and feelings. If you are in tune with Her you will feel light and joyful most of the time and become very sensitive to what you filter through your body and your mind. Your thoughts will become powerful wishes that will manifest in whatever direction you choose to think or develop yourself, that's the Vanavasi Way" she says as she bites into a banana. She offers me some, but I decline.

"We have been given this world to experience different parts of ourselves through our senses. The cosmos is the womb and the fertile soil of our dark minds in which we sow the seeds for tomorrow's harvest. Our dark mind is vast and unpredictable and when you haven't discovered that part of yourself yet, it can be quite scary when you do, especially if you come from an over-controlling world, like you do. Your dark mind shows you things you have suppressed or hid away from the light" she continues as she chews.

"Wait, dark mind, the light? So, it's like the angel and devil on my shoulders?" I ask sarcastically.

“Try thinking complementary instead of opposites. If you believe that a part of you is evil, then a seal is an angel and a shark is the devil.”

“What does that have to do with the dark mind and the light?” I try to make sense of all this. ‘Make sense’, I laugh at the expression.

“The light is what you see when you open your eyes and your dark mind is where you create your light, your reality.”

“So, the light is my conscious mind and the dark is my subconscious mind?” I rephrase.

“Whatever floats your boat wise guy” she winks.

“In the old world the dark mind was suppressed for a long time and in Light City most citizens have completely lost the ability to create anything new. Some of them don’t even dream when they sleep” she looks concerned.

“Nobody dreams in Light City, it is a symptom of the onset of The Urge” I confess.

“Citizens don’t dream anymore?” she asks shocked.

“No, does it matter?” I shrug.

“When you enter the womb to sleep your body rests and restores itself. Your mind does the same thing in dreams state. Your daily experiences are uploaded more rapidly as your mind is clear and no longer fragmented. The state of your consciousness and your desires will be reflected back to you faster as you process and analyze your present more effectively.”

“What the fuck? Are you saying we upload our experiences?” I ask surprised.

“Yes, like computers send data to the cloud” she says, and smiles like it’s the most obvious thing in the world, which, come to think of it, makes so much sense now.

“I think I’m going to be sick again” I bend over and place my hands on my knees.

“Then you are” she laughs as she gets up and continues walking, unfazed by my puking. We go deeper into the jungle. At first glance there is no order. Everything is alive and growing in all directions simultaneously, just like she said. Layers upon layers of life, interconnected and ever changing, beautiful chaos in perfect balance. I gasp for air as my heart feels like it is expanding in my chest.

“When you align yourself with red energy and become one with Her Body you will required less sleep to heal and rest your physical body.”

I recall the red vortex I saw during the festival. “What is red energy?” I ask.

“When we followed The Urge, it guided us to the red energy center to heal, but there are different energy centers depending on the imbalance you suffered prior to The Urge. When you are disconnected from Her Body you lose red energy and your fire fizzles out. So, you fail to live out your dreams. Your roots are weak, so you fall over easily and can’t grow into your highest expression” she looks up at the canopy. I look up too. The greens and the browns, the fresh air and the animal sounds relax me.

“So, a lack of red energy results in lack of fire?” I ask interested.

“Yes, without red energy you merely day dream of escaping into fantasy worlds” she nods.

“Like this?” I joke.

She raises her eyebrow with a pout and continues, “People who are disconnected from Her tend to abuse Her Body” she strokes the tree trunks as she walks.

“By Her Body you mean the earth?” I frown.

She smiles.

“Okay, but how did you adapt so quickly?”

“We are constantly evolving. Our minds and bodies adapt to new environments, people and challenges even when we’re not aware of it.”

“I get that, but how did your physical appearance and abilities change so quickly?” I specify.

“Evolution sets in rapidly under extreme environmental pressure and in higher vibrational energy fields. When we arrived, we entered the womb and began re-rooting our minds. Initial evolution was very rapid due to the energy deficit between the people arriving here who followed The Urge, and the red energy frequency at the energy center. As more individual energies joined the more powerful the energy pulsated. Once the energetic threshold was reached the scales tilted towards a higher normal state and a new equilibrium was set at a higher vibrational frequency. The energy increase altered our genetic code by activated our ‘junk DNA’” she laughs as she emphasizes ‘junk,’ “and powers that have lain dormant for an aeon started appearing and our manifesting abilities became stronger” she explains.

“Holy shit, so how does Light City’s ‘normal’ compare to your ‘normal?’”

“In Her Body the higher frequency manifests as Venus and Jupiter.”

“Uuuh?” she leaves me hanging.

“Love, harmony, balance and expansion amongst the people.”

“Wow” I’m impressed.

“Red energy increases your fighting response, and when you don’t know where to direct the volatile emotions that come up for healing, you can hurt yourself and others. That’s why we help twiceborn, like yourself, to focus your energies on proper self-care to make balancing your inner fire a natural part of your being” she continues. We pass so many different plants and strange insects it’s hard for me to not scream once and a while, but she seems chilled about it, so I try to stay focused on the conversation.

“What was the sex about last night?” I ask slightly embarrassed, something I never feel.

“Sexuality is natural and holy in Her Body. Sex is the archetypal creative act and the essence of our being.”

“Uuuh?”

“We are sexually liberal. When we unite bodies, we share ourselves. The sacred union unites opposites and is our great right to creation” she explains.

“In the old-world sex was not socially acceptable, but I believe it has become less so in Light City?” she looks at me in anticipation.

“We have sex, yeah, but many citizens still think it’s dirty and shameful” I confess.

“I can only imagine what new sexual diseases they have conjured up by now” she mutters to herself.

I’ve never thought of it like that.

“Wait a second, you remember the old world? That was before The Urge twenty-seven years ago, and you look my age?” I ask shocked.

She starts laughing. “What’s so funny?” I ask.

“Newborns are always fixating about time and age. I was 26 when I experienced the Purple Pulse. I am 53, if you count like the citizens, but in Vanavasi terms I am twiceborn. All Vanavasi are born twice, their initial birth as a baby and their rebirth after the Purple Pulse when they get their true name and spirit animal.” I remember seeing animals dance around the drummers during the festival, but she continues before I can ask about it.

“You age depending on how you walk your path. If you cross back and forth on the same path it will form a deep ingrained path that you walk with your eyes closed and shut out new experiences. In other words, you fall asleep and lose time. If you believe a number represents your rate of aging and you remind yourself of it frequently, your body listens and acts accordingly, remember your beliefs are powerful wishes.”

“So why do some people look older quicker then?” I ask intrigued.

“Because they have old thoughts and replay them over and over again while resisting new life-enhancing thoughts, subsequently they manifest their old thoughts on their body.”

“And disease?”

“Recurring thoughts, suppressed emotions that become volatile, and fear manifest accordingly too. Many people believe they are defined by the environment that they are born into and limited to the genes they inherited. This is an outdated belief and it had its place as a unique experience of life, but when we know better we can do better. The Vanavasi Way is that of expressing and developing our own unique energy through self-love and soul-expression.”

“Is that why everyone has tattoos and piercings?”

“Body adornment, piercings, tattoos, hair wraps and unique clothing, are but a few of the many ways we express ourselves. As we balanced our energies and were left to our own devices we came up with very creative ways to use our inner fire for self-expression and betterment of the Whole” she says proudly.

“So, you basically do whatever you want?”

“Yes, we do activities and create objects to project our consciousness through, music and dance being the most popular form as you have seen.”

We walk for a long time and the jungle noises silence my mind. We eventually reach the giants plaited trees stage from the festival. Below the giant trees there are smaller trees plaited around each other too. They have grown in peculiar directions. “What is this place?” I look around in awe.

“This is the root. We gather here to feast and connect.”

“Why are the trees bent?” I point up to the natural bridges formed by the branches.

“They have grown like this for us.”

“How is that even possible?” I ask in disbelief.

“By setting clear intentions we are able to create anything for the benefit of the Whole.”

“So basically, you told the tree how to grow?” I laugh.

“More like envisioned the final root centre and the joyful experiences that we could share as a people, and the trees took to their own devices. Their growth reflects our unity and growth as a collective energy.”

“This tops the trippy shit chart “I say completely blown away.

She laughs and strokes the giant tree trunk.

“These things have probably been here for centuries? Are you sure they weren’t here when you got here?” I ask in disbelief. She laughs off my uncertainty. I like her.

“When we arrived at the energy center after following The Urge the trees grew faster as more people gathered together. A tree is a connection from the body to the mind, from the darkness to the light, from that which is formless to that which is fixed. She bends down and touches the soil, “From Her” and looks up at the sky “to Him.”

We walk underneath giant tree roots that shoot out of the Earth like snakes sailing through the soil. I stroke the root as I pass it.

“If your roots are deep you will not fall over, just like this tree” she slides her hand over my hand and we both look up at the tree. I feel so insignificant, yet so powerful.

We climb up the giant tree on a plaited ladder. I hear music and drumming as we approach the tree platform.

The atmosphere in the root is light and playful and rainbow colors radiate from the sun’s last rays of light. “Come, let’s salute the Sun” she takes my hand and we join the crowd. I follow them as they inhale and lift their arms into the air. They exhale and drop it down to their toes. They step back with one leg and place their one hand on the floor. I try to keep up as they inhale and exhale into different poses and finally end with a bow. Yoga sunsets, groovy. Everyone cheers, and the music gets funky again as everyone starts chatting and preparing different dishes.

“What are you in the mood for?” she asks.

I haven’t really thought of food. This place is so magical it keeps me satisfied in a weird way. I raise my shoulders to show that I don’t know. She manifests a giant bowl of guacamole to share with everyone. Orchestral tunes set a romantic atmosphere as everybody dishes up from everyone’s creations. Amphi gives me a bowl and I get a bit of everything. There is a magic here I have never felt before. A sense of freedom I never knew existed. It feels like I’m dreaming. I follow her to a few pillows and we sit down.

She breaks bread and dips it into guacamole and offers it to me. I pull away.

“At feasts we feed each other to give thanks” she laughs. I hesitantly take a bite and do the same for her.

“Have the citizens begun to understand aroma and taste?” she asks and offers me another bite. I look at her confused.

“Food tastes great if that’s what you mean?” I eat from her hand.

“Do you still live off dead food?” she asks as she offers me another bite.

“I think the food was alive at some point, but it’s definitely dead when I eat it” I laugh and take another bite.

“You add sugar and salt for flavor and remove nutrition. You kill the vitality of the food to prevent spoiling, but anything good decomposes naturally.”

“So, you think treating food to remove bacteria and impurities decreases its vitality?” I frown in disbelief and break some bread and dip it into the guac. She laughs.

“When you start seeing all organisms as vital you will understand vitality” she pulls my hand forward and takes a bite of the bread while I’m still taking in what she said.

“So, what was the Purple Pulse about?”

“The Purple Pulse activated The Urge that caused people with different energetic imbalances to migrate to different biomes, or energy centers. Like I said, The Vanavasi is the red energy center and people who needed to become more secure and grounded in the world were guided here. The elements of earth and fire are strong among the Vanavasi people” she says looking at the sunset.

The birds are flying over the canopy and the setting sun creates deep shadows that gives the jungle depth.

After the meal everyone lays down on pillows and hammocks and a hologram is projected into the night sky. "It was created by Ankaa" she says proudly and points to a little girl sitting on her father's lap. It's her spirit quest to find her power animal. I watch the little girl walk through the jungle on her own and the jungle transform into dancing leaves and giggling trees.

"Did she do this all by herself?" I ask surprised.

"Yes, we can project our consciousness through light and it plays back to us like a hologram" she says and lies down on my lap.

Wow, what is this place? If this is a simulation, it's some next level shit.

I fall asleep next to Amphi and I dream of us sleeping together in the womb.

10

We walk towards the river again. I'm already becoming familiar with the jungle.

"See that plant up there?" she points to a vine growing in the treetop.

"That's Ayahuasca, how it grows shows you what it knows" she explains.

"It grows high, so it makes you high?" I joke.

"No, it takes you to a higher state of awareness" she sighs.

"I think its hallucinogenic properties make you trip. It's a drug" I affirm.

"So, you call its magic 'hallucinogenic' and that somehow makes it less magical?" she laughs.

"Adam likes naming things" she mutters to herself.

I don't know what to say to that.

"Was that in the water you gave me?" I ask concerned.

"Oh no, that was guarana, it stimulates the mind and increases energy levels during dance. When we put energy into our bodies we direct it to fulfill a purpose else it won't know what to do inside of us and can cause us harm."

"So, what do you do with the energy?" I ask.

"We channel guidance into creative release."

"Which means?"

"We direct our energy inward to release any volatile emotions that are blocking the free flow of energy from the Earth through us" she explains.

"Like clearing your channel from noise?" I rephrase.

"Yes, exactly, you catch on quickly!" she claps her hands." "When we are working within ourselves we need to face the energies that need to be released. When you bring your feelings to light, by consciously feeling it, you can release it and heal that part of your psyche."

"So basically, you are breaking the negative feeling triggered by certain memories?"

"Yes, and when you take Ayuascha it makes the energies visible, your feelings get a face, but if you come from a world that believes that the universal energies are in a cosmic battle of good against evil, you can imagine it's not always a pretty sight" she drops her head sadly.

“So, basically you face yourself?” I try to distract her.

“Exactly, some people have locked away tiny hurts that have grown into monsters, that’s why Ayuascha must be taken consciously, so I would never give it to you without your consent. It can be a very intense emotional experience and when you can’t properly digest the new experience or resist healing, your body will reject it and you will get sick instead. Some people use it during festivals for path finding, but festivals are mainly for having fun and working together to draw down cosmic energies.”

“So, the festival was a healing ceremony?”

“Depending on the intentions you set for the event, yes, it can be a time of release and healing” she nods.

“Do you do drugs?”

“When our channels are clear we feel the cosmic energies very intensely, so it gives you the same effect as some drugs.”

“That’s probably why people take drugs in the first place...to experience altered states of awareness” I think aloud.

“People know that there is more to this world than meets the eye that’s why they go in search of it or re-create it. But a clear channel with powerful intent can draw down intense energies that you can’t compare to any drug. But you’ll understand it better when you experience it yourself.”

We reach the river. It is flat and reflects the surrounding trees like a mirror. She draws two luminescent rafts. A red one that reflects white light with flames that

reflect off the water surface, and another that looks like a black moon that illuminates when the other raft is near.

“Wow, how did you just do that?” I ask amazed.

“If you need something you get it by focusing your mind on what you want. The veil between worlds is thinner here because we live in flow with Her and can manifest things much quicker and with less effort.”

“So, it’s like magic?”

“Life is magic” she smiles and gets into the moon.

“How do we steer these?” I ask nervously.

“Uh, lean forward to stop, lean back to accelerate, and lean into the direction you want to turn” she practices as she explains. I think she is making it up as she goes. I can’t help but laugh.

“Okay, so what do we do when we hit rapids?” I ask in between the laughter.

She thinks for a second “Ah, you counterbalance like you would with a paddle. The raft is designed to stay upright” she laughs at herself too.

“Okay, let’s give this a go” I say and lean back. Nothing happens.

“You need to introduce yourself first!” she says seriously.

“You’ve got to be kidding me?” I laugh in disbelief.

“Hi Moon, I’m Amphi” she says and looks at me expectantly.

“Hi Sun, it’s Jet” I lean back, and the raft moves forward. She is still laughing. I think she’s fucking with me, but she’s fun, I like her. The river is flat and the reflection of the jungle on the water surface looks like we’re cruising over an underwater jungle. The birds are singing, and the monkeys discuss our shenanigans from across the river.

“How did the manifesting ability appear?” I ask intrigued.

“Ah magic! Magic is connected to the Her. When you are in flow with nature you won’t harm yourself and others with your creations, so you’ll manifest things with ease. And when enough people experience the magic, it will become true for everyone” she says with a big smile.

“Ah, that’s why you capture all the soldiers?” I get it now.

“Yes, when enough people shift their consciousness there will be a global shift. Soon everyone will live out their dreams and live as long as they wish!” she says excitedly.

“Wow wait, so you decide when you die?” I ask amazed.

“Yes, we don’t need to endure disease and suffering. That would truly be a terrifying experience” she gets shivers and shakes her shoulders.

“How is that even possible?” I ask jaw dropped shocked.

I can hear the water rush up ahead. The rapids are coming.

“Like I said, aging occurs when the personality is stagnant and repeats old thoughts and resists change, so the personality or particular life experience has become outdated” she says loudly as she prepares for the rapids.

“So, if you keep changing you won’t die?” I yell over the rushing rapids.

She leans back and accelerates ahead of me “We are here to expand our consciousness” she yells as she counterbalances left and right “by creating and experiencing our own creations” she laughs as the water splashes all over her. I follow her path through the rapids. I get what they mean with ‘just go with the flow.’ I counterbalance to keep my balance and slow down next to her soaking wet “and in doing so we experience new parts of ourselves” she smiles. That was awesome, she is awesome. She leans back and accelerates rapidly “Come on Jet!” she laughs.

I lean back to get these flames a blazing. We race for a long flat expanse as I try to catch up. She slows down and I pass her, arms in the air, victory! She yells something, but I can’t hear her. It’s only when I see the waterfall up ahead that I slow down to turn around, but it’s too late. The ledge comes closer. I hold my breath as I fall over. Slow motion, heart in throat, then soaked. I gasp for air just as Amphi pulls me out of the water.

“Looks like Isis saved Osiris’s ass yet again” she laughs relieved.

We sit next to the water for a while and she gathers some fruits.

I feel alive for the first time. This place is paradise.

Amphi sits next to me and passes me some bananas and we share a papaya.

I peel a banana, break it in half and share it with her. “It tastes so good” I say with a full mouth.

“Gratitude taste good” she laughs.

Now I get what the lady that plaited my hair meant when she said gratitude. She was explaining why the fruits tasted so good, not reminding me of my manners. I smile.

“Together we are the plants and the animals and the people, but you are experiencing it through your personality which has a unique way of interpreting the world, so you can create a unique reality for yourself. We are all one so when you expand your awareness, you expand the awareness of the Whole. Those who limit themselves are those who stay stuck where they dropped their anchor” she gets up and reaches out her hand “while the rest of us sail to new shores and into new realities” I take her hand and she pulls me to my feet.

We go to the cliff next to the waterfall. “Now we need to get back up there” she points to the top of the waterfall. “Any ideas?” she asks.

“You are the creator, don’t ask me” I step back.

“Your mind is still wired for slavery” she shakes her head in disappointment.

“What the fuck is that supposed to mean?” I ask irritably.

“You have been told what to do with your energy since you were born and you’re good at following orders, but not so good at creating your own reality...yet. You lack self-belief and doubt the wonder of creation which delays your manifesting abilities. Taking up a new skill, whether mental or physical, requires practice and patience but it will be your greatest teacher. When you love what you do it ignites your fire and helps you hold onto your vision even though you are the only one that sees it. If you jam on long enough it will manifest, but to become a pro you’ll need to suck at it first. You need to allow yourself to fail so you can figure out

what works for you. Try different things and if nothing lights your fire, create something new, I'm pretty sure it will work for a few other people too" she winks.

"Yeah, I'm not a fan of failing" I confess.

"If you don't quit, you won't fail. There is precious gift that grows within you as you watch yourself grow into the person that can do it" she puts her hand on my shoulder and looks up to the giant obstacle in front of us.

"And what's that?" I look up too.

"Fiery self-belief..." she squeezes my shoulder sympathetically like she genuinely wants me to believe in myself.

"Now let's practicing your creating abilities" she takes my hand and pulls me toward the cliff.

"Uh, it's a steep climb" I say slightly intimidated.

"Okay, let's climb it!" she says excitedly. She's fucking crazy, ugh, I like her.

"Can't you draw a balloon or something?" I ask but she is already climbing.

"It was your turn, and this is what you came up with" she pulls herself onto a rocky outcrop.

"Ah fuck" I sigh and start climbing.

"So, let me get this straight. We are placing ourselves in infinite amounts of situations to expand our consciousness" I ask while trying to keep up with her.

"Jip" she looks down and nods.

“But to what end?”

“To infinity and beyond” she says in a deep voice.

Did she just pull a Buzz Lightyear on me?

I focus on the climb and before I know it she pulls me up and I catch my breath. I look down and I can't believe I just fell down and now I'm back up again.

“Turn obstacles into opportunities for growth and the sun will always rise again” she smiles.

“Okay, let me show you some of our fire balancing activities. It is part of the Vanavasi way to respect and cherish our bodies as it is our connection to Her and how we experience this magical realm through our senses. Therefore, we condition our muscles and channel our strength into objects and crafts that become an extension of us.”

“So, you work out?” I ask excited.

“Yes, that is one of the ways” she nods. Finally, something I can relate to!

“Exercise and dance helps release excess fire and calms the mind and the blood. Fire flows through our veins and we choose how we use it. Just like anything in excess, too much fire can destroy or lead to self-destructive behavior if it isn't channeled into something life enhancing.”

“Like the sun?” I ask after all this talk about rising sun's and riding in a sun raft.

“Yes, like the masculine” she agrees. Whatever she meant by that.

“Being in the body keeps you level headed” she taps my head “and your temper in check” she winks and continues walking.

“The environment created in Her Body allows for balance and stability because like I said, excess red energy can lead to restlessness, sensuality and aggression if it isn’t channeled in a constructive way.”

“Sensuality...” I mutter to myself.

“Excuse me?” she gives me attitude.

“You are excused” I laugh.

“We believe in the goodness within humankind and that a balanced individual in the appropriate environment will be guided by their soul to reach their highest expression without the implementation of rules. Every morning we are born a new. Every month we release what no longer benefits our growth to experience a new state of being” she explains, and I follow her through the jungle.

“Balance is maintained between creating and sustaining, but everybody is free to feel, express and do whatever they feel like doing” she continues.

“What do you get out of all this doing?”

“You get freedom of self-expression. A feeling of worth will no longer be found in ownership, but in creating and experiencing the new. As your survival instincts return you will know how to take care of yourself and grow deep roots. Your fear about survival will vanish and you will feel safe and empowered with less. Our roots are embedded into the Earth which connects us to the eternal flame and sustains us constantly. It is the source of our soul fire and our sense of self” she

jumps up and grabs a giant root bed protruding from the Earth and swings to and fro.

I pass underneath her and turn and look up. “How do I “grow deep roots?” I ask and play with her toes.

“You need to find your spiritual purpose. If you know who you are and which way your heart wants to grow, your mind will know which way to go. When your mind is given a clear objective, it is the most efficient servant in the universe. It will shuffle through billions of bits of information and pick up on the things that will bring you closer to your goals by drawing your attention to what you need or attracting you to certain situations.”

“So, re-rooting pulled up all the old neural roots?”

“Yes, the roots held together the fabric of your old beliefs that made up your personality just like these roots hold together the soil. During re-root you released all your limiting belief and fears and we are currently planting new seeds for your future growth. Obviously, there is nothing solid to hold on to at the moment, so it is normal to feel a bit spacey” she jumps down. “But once your spirit animal finds you, it will create a direct link to Her and it will guide you to your highest good” she slaps my ass and continues walking.

“Fuck, that’s awesome” I have to give it to her.

“So, if we don’t have to do anything and don’t need anything, what’s the purpose of life?”

“You are trying to divert back to your old way of thinking” she laughs. “I’ve told you already! You can experience creation in all its different forms and create your own reality to discover new undiscovered parts of ourselves! Just imagine rocking up in this forest and being the first being on Earth. What would your first thought be?”

“Uh? Holy shit” I laugh.

“Something like that” she laughs and turns and looks at me compassionately “I have come into being.”

Fuck. I am quiet for a long time and she leaves me to contemplate.

“Doesn’t it get boring?” I ask honestly.

“It will to those who never have enough, who doubt the beauty of the present and forget the suffering involved in creating need and disease. But there is no right or wrong. Ultimately you can choose your beliefs and it is reflected back to you into your reality” she says nonchalantly.

“Tension between the opposites creates friction that ignites the eternal fire” she mumbles to herself again.

“So, you believe that everything is consciousness and that the Earth is a physical manifestation of everything that happens in the dark mind?”

“Yes, and we create our realities in the dark from where we came, and it is reflected back to us when we open our eyes. It comes to light.”

“And when you experience your own creation you expand the collective consciousness?” I add.

“Jip” she nods.

“So, at what point do we meet our maker?”

She tilts her head slightly and gives me that compassionate look again.

“When you are enough...”

11

We reach a zip line that crosses over a cliff. There is a huge rock up ahead that looks like it shot out of nowhere, and the clouds in the valley below make it look like a floating island. She holds onto a handlebar and flies over. This keeps getting wilder, but if she can do it? To hell with it! Her ass jiggles from side to side as she slides. Ugh, she’s so fine. Fuck Jet, keep it together. She sends the bar back to me. I hold on to the handlebar and take a running start. I close my eyes and my feet leave the Earth. I hold on for dear life. I can hear her laughter become louder as I come closer. A laugh has never sounded so sweet. Fuck, I’m becoming romantic. She grabs me around the waist

“You would expect a bridge or a flying contraption of some kind with your strange abilities?” I say trying to keep my shit together. “We could have done that but then we’d miss out on all the fun” she laughs “and besides, where we’re going this is child’s play” she says and runs into the jungle.

“Where are we going?” I ask nervously.

“Like I’ve said, we have many ways to balance red energy, art, music, physical training and lunatic activities, just depends on what your soul prefers to express itself through.”

“What are lunatic activities?” I try to hold down my laughter. The lunatics are adrenalin junkies that have become accustomed to unstable environments due to long term exposure to fear or pain. You could say that they are gifted in crushing limits.”

We can't be far away from wherever we are going because the rocky outcrop isn't very big. I can hear people talking. We arrive at the ledge and there is a group of people cheering someone on.

Amphi runs toward a guy that looks familiar. She jumps on him with both feet around his waist. I feel anger coming up, fuck I don't have a release yet. I walk up to him and punch him in the face. After delivering the punch I recognize his face. He has several rings in his ears a stubby beard, bangles on his arms, chest hair and a face of a bear tattooed on his chest. Yeah, he has the whole bear look on him. It's the guy from the festival. I apologize, and he smiles.

“You must still be coming down from Nigredo?” he says with his jaw in hand. Amphi laughs, realizing I must like her. “Yeah probably, but that definitely made me feel better” I confess and shake off my hand.

“She has that effect on people” Boarian laughs. I look at him in disbelief. I hardly know the girl, and what the fuck is that supposed to mean? Amphi interrupts the conversation just before I throw another punch.

“Jet meet Boarian, he is my best friend and trainer and he'll train you too.” He is smaller than I am, so he might be more agile, but I'm bigger, so this shouldn't be too hard. I catch myself making comparisons and just nod him off and walk towards the ledge.

“Don’t mind him Bo, he’s always an ASSHOLE” Amphi emphasizes asshole so I can hear. A tiny guy approaches me. “Atta” he says and reaches out his hand. He has a bullring in his nose, stretchers in his ears and plant tattoos all over his arms and legs. His torso is clear, oh and he has a belly ring? Didn’t see that coming. I’m not sure if he is greeting me or challenging me so I just stare at him, and then at his belly ring.

He lowers his hand. “Life in Light City creates a build-up of stress and frustration that doesn’t always have an appropriate outlet. When we are under pressure we only care about surviving so we tend to grab onto anything that relieves the stress or makes us feels good even if it is harmful. Prolonged stress can make quick-fixes become habitual and over time you might even believe it’s who you are” he says and crosses his arms over his chest like he is protecting his heart.

“Drinking, drugging, fucking and fighting” I mutter to myself.

“Exactly” he laughs and lowers his arms. “Fear, sadness, anger and frustration are powerful energies and when they aren’t used to get you out of the situation it builds up and things can get a little messy” he scans me from the corner of his eye.

“Are you saying I’m messy?” I ask unimpressed.

“Selfish, lack of concern about others, total denial of your true feelings? Yeah, messy” he nods.

“Sure Deepak” I laugh it off. He laughs too. He seems like a nice guy.

“What are you guys doing here?” I ask as I hesitantly look over the ledge. Amphi grabs me from behind like she is going to push me over “Falling!” she yells, and I almost shit myself. I jump back and another guy approaches, for a split second his left hand looks like the jaws of a crocodile. I blink and there is a croc tattooed on his arm.

“What is your name?” he asks. I am still a bit stunned.

“Jet” I reply bluntly trying to look unfazed by what I just saw.

“Caiman” he bows his head slightly. He has a bun on his head, a lip ring in the center of his lower lip and a piercing in his right brow. He is the largest of the lot, but he seems soft somehow.

“We train in the jungle” he indicates for me to follow him. We step into the trippiest gym I have ever seen “It’s not called jungle gym for nothing” Caiman laughs when he sees the look on my face.

The gym looks rad. The whole set up is based on primal body movements, conditioning and endurance to adapt to intense environmental conditions.

“We train hard to awaken dormant abilities” he explains as we pass a wall climbing section with plaited vine nets spun over the canopy that plunges into water below. “All the equipment is connected and changeable, so the gym can change according to your needs” there is a layer of light shimmering around the equipment. “You can see your upgraded self if you need some motivation” he says, and flexes his upper body. “What you focus on expands” he winks at his reflection. His muscles bulge. He looks like a superhero. His dreads are longer in

the mirror and his crocodile tattoo comes to life on his arm like the vision I saw of him.

“Caiman crocodile” I think aloud. He smiles and returns his reflection to the present.

“Go ahead, you try” he nudges my shoulder.

“I’m good thanks” I shake it off.

“Lack imagination, huh boy?” he asks mockingly. I give it a go and for a few seconds I see Yoo flexing his abs.

“There we go” Caiman nods impressed. “Physical training helps establish a strong physical base and it reflects back to you as a strong body” he says as we walk through the strange gym. There are obstacle courses and even a nocturnal theme to train in the dark. Empowering music sets the mood, and everything incorporates survival training to condition the body for life in the wild and connect you with your spirit animal.

“By channeling your spirit animal, you understand yourself better and can focus on your strengths while strengthening your weaknesses” he explains while we pass people stretching in the dark like the fireflies shimmering around them. It’s a mix of old school bulk and new age flow, very groovy.

“You ‘bulk-boys’ need to work on your flexibility, you are stiff in all the wrong places” Amphi jokes from behind. I turn and watch her do the sensual yoga moves like she did in the vision I saw of her in the room. Fuck she is gorgeous.

“Says the amphibian” he pouts and gives her a bit of attitude. “She is like water, fluid in her nature” he whispers so she can’t hear. “Flexibility of mind and body is reflected in your ability to adapt to change” Caiman mumbles, obviously not his strong point.

“But today we are working on our balance, so we walk the line” he continues as we walk back to the ledge.

“What line?” I ask.

“That line” he points to a luminescent line stretching into the cloud cover that has now risen higher and surrounds us.

“It is a good time to give it a try” Boarian says and joins us.

“Bo’s right, he can’t see the bottom with all the cloud cover so it’s the perfect opportunity” Caiman agrees.

“He’s so imbalanced he’ll need to walk with a weight in one hand” Atta mocks.

“The line will be stiff as a stick for him, because he’s still so stiff in the limbs” Bo laughs.

“What are you lot on about?” I interrupt.

“The line adjusts to the walker’s ability, so when you cross it, it will probably feel like you’re crossing a bridge” Bo explains.

“I’m not crossing shit” I laugh and choke simultaneously.

“You need to let go at some point, and the weather looks like it’s made especially for you” Bo says and points to the clouds.

“You guys are fucking crazy” I laugh.

“There will be a bungee cord attached to your feet, so if you fall, the rush is worth it” Amphi tries to convince me. She draws an eight on the floor and steps into the infinity sign. It tightens around her ankles and lights up. She separates her legs and the eight separates into two circular bands around each leg. She steps onto the line and it dips down to match her flexibility. She walks to the center and starts bouncing her lower body up and down.

“Watch this” Bo says proudly with his hairy chest pressed out proudly. If Amphi wasn’t distracting me, this would be the part where I punch him again. But I watch her build up enough tension, push herself off the line and shoot upward and dive down through the clouds. She vanishes and a line of light glows down from the sky. Holy shit, that was amazing! The rope shortens and pulls her up.

Bo draws another eight and steps out onto the line.

“He’s a lunatic” Caiman mumbles, “I cross a bridge too” he adds like we are on the same level. Bo does a summersault and faces us as he walks backwards to the center of the line. He starts swinging the line side to side. He raises his hands and they are glowing too. He goes so fast that the line looks like it is smiling.

“He’s going to go for it!” a girl I’ve never seen before says excitedly. She has black tattoos all over her body blue eyes and yellow hair.

“Shhh, Oropen” Atta says with his eyes fixed on Boarian. Boarian spins around completely and continues until the smile turns into a circle. He launches himself into the sky and dives through the clouds. Damn, he’s good.

These fuckers are fearless. Their daring, confidence make them quite intimidating to the insecure individual, luckily, I'm not insecure.

"Fuck that, I'm going for it" I shake out the tension in my spine.

"I draw an eight and it looks a bit lopsided. "Good luck" Oropen says when she sees me step into it.

"Stay present, stay balanced" Caiman gives me a pep talk.

I take the first step and the line is solid. I inhale and take another. The line starts slacking. I must be more flexible than I thought. I close my eyes and focus on my breathing. I take another step and the line wobbles underneath my feet.

I take another step and gasp for air. I held my breath, but I manage to stay on the line. "Let go, silence your mind and experience the world as it is" I hear Amphi's voice in my head. I inhale and take a step. I exhale and take another. There is nothing but me and the line. Inhale, step, exhale line.

I can hear everyone get excited, but Caiman hushes them. As I take another step a falcon lands on the line in front of me. You must be fucking kidding me? What the fuck is a falcon doing in the jungle? I stay calm but as it takes flight the line wobbles again and I lose my balance. The fall feels like it is in slow motion as my adrenalin spikes and my senses take in every bit of life. My heart stops, and my stomach raises into my throat. I'm frozen. I couldn't scream even if I wanted to. I pass through the clouds and it clears up to a river below. I see myself falling in between the cliffs and for a moment it looks like a giant vulva. The ground is getting closer. My mind shuts down. I don't feel any tension in the rope. This is it. I'm fucked. I push my hands and feet out in front of me to try and break the

impact. I know it won't help but it's instinctive. I hear a female laughing as I come closer. I close my eyes and my hands and feet touch the water. I feel my body pull back as the cord slings me back into the air. Wow, that was close. I bounce around for a while as the cord shortens and raises me back up. "That was fucking epic!" I yell as I reach the top.

"You should try it at night you fall right back into the womb" an unfamiliar voice pats me on the back. "Cro" he says and reaches out his hand to pull me up. "J-Jet" I stutter still recovering from the rush.

Everyone congratulates me with a few pats on the back and high fives, but I am speechless for the remainder of the day. Wow.

We gather at the root for the evenings feast. Caiman comes to share his food with me. Amphi and Boarian share next to us. Don't know how I feel about that but my focus is at the weird experience of feeding and being fed by another guy. Caiman doesn't seem to mind so I get used to it after a while.

"So, what do you do when you don't feast or fest?" I ask still chewing on my food.

"Nothing is fixed in Her Body, there are only possibilities" Caiman says while chewing his food.

"So, everyone develops whatever skills they want?" I ask and stuff some beans on a piece of bread and pass it to him.

"Yeah, pretty much" he says spitting some beans my way.

"So how does anything 'big' get done?"

“The same way you got here” Amphi picks up the conversation while Caiman is chewing “through focused intent” Caiman spits again.

“I didn’t intend to come here” I shake my head.

“Your mind didn’t, but your soul did” Boarian joins the conversation.

“Your soul is fire like all Vanavasi, which is why you were drawn to this energy center” Amphi adds.

“So, you are saying I came here by choice?” I frown in disbelief.

“Your soul brought you here. You feel very deeply and that makes you feel vulnerable, so you cover your sadness with anger to protect yourself” Bo says, and I watch him feed Amphi.

“Yeah, I’ve heard” I take a bite of food unimpressed with this shit that is happening next to me.

"Did you guys hear that Light City is sending new Logbots that are controlled remotely? Oropen says as she sits down with Cro.

“They need fresh water” I think aloud.

"They carry guns and fire-spitters” Oropen says feeding Cro. Her black skin emphasizing her blue eyes and yellow hair, she really does look like the bird.

“This is going to get interesting” Caiman smiles with a piece of food stuck in his teeth.

“We will need the fastest among us who carry WEAPONS skill sets” Oropen directs to Caiman.

Caiman's face drops. I guess that doesn't include him. He isn't fast, and I guess he doesn't have a weapon skill set either. Yeah, hands like the jaws of a crocodile might not work well with giant robots.

When the feasting is over they throw luminescent boomerangs and light the night sky with infinity signs. I sit with Amphi and watch the rest challenge each other.

"What is the red stone everyone is wearing?" I ask Amphi.

"Agate the Wanderer's stone. It is a fire stone that encourages change and protects us from fearful thoughts and cowardice. We should get you one" she jokes.

Cro comes over and hands me a boomerang. He gives me a quick run through. I throw it and it rises rapidly.

"Wow, I wasn't expecting that" Amphi says impressed.

It settles as it returns, looping and spinning to form a number eight, but it comes back with force and I turn away, so it passes me. Bo slaps his hands together and catches it like a boomerang sandwich.

"What you give you get back" he grins, "and most of the time you get more than you expect" he winks and hands it over.

12

I'm hanging off a cliff. The ocean is crashing below me. I try to pull myself up, but my hand slips and I look down as giant red reptile splashes out of the water. It's a fucking dragon! I slip and fall into the ocean. I try to swim to the surface, but it's

no use, I just keep sinking. I stop fighting it and watch the light fade into darkness as I sink into the nothingness.

I wake up. Wow, it was just a dream.

The days merge into a mix of magic and mystery with no certainties, just possibilities. I am growing stronger and more enthusiastic with the changing moon. We walk towards the dance floor where the festival will be taking place in a few nights. Time really does fly when you are having fun, but when nothing is fixed you somehow also get more done.

Amphi squats next to pots of red and black paint. She paints my brow. I think it's a bird, like the one she had when I saw her on the first day. She paints strange swirls and patterns in red paint on the right half of my body. She hands me the paintbrush and I paint a seed on her lower abdomen that runs up her tummy and opens into a flower at the center of her chest. She laughs and dips her nose into the paint and slides it over my lips. Fuck, I think I'm falling in love.

"We channel cosmic energies through music" she explains as she gets up and we walk to the dance floor.

The lion with the fiery mane and the bucking bull holograms are just chilling and strolling around. We walk to the lion. It has a ruby around its neck. It walks towards us and faces me.

"It likes you" she smiles. It's super realistic and a bit scary. "Afraid of your power?" she winks and takes her finger and draws a flower in the air. It glows briefly, then she pushes it towards the lion and a sunflower appears plaited in its mane.

“Wow, trippy. How did you do that?” I ask amazed.

“The same way we do everything around here, with clear intent. We exist on the boundaries of ordinary space and time, between the world of the seen and unseen” she says as she strokes the lion’s mane.

The lion bows down and so does she. I follow her lead. “Come on, you try” she takes my hand and pulls me toward the bull.

“Focus on something and project it to the bull” she says excitedly.

It makes me think of my tattoo. The girl with the head of a bull...and the noose. Suddenly a noose appears around the bull’s neck and it starts freaking out. Amphi quickly turns it into an emerald necklace and hushes the beast.

“I’m sorry” I try to explain myself, but she interrupts me.

“You are powerful” she says surprised.

“You are here to learn to use your power wisely” she says as she strokes the face of the bull, not the beast.

“Everything is a reflection of your feelings. Your imagination animates energies and brings them to light, so you can comprehend them. You are in between one and zero. As your connection with your dark mind grows stronger you will be able to hop in between realities with ease.”

“One and zero, binary code?” I frown.

“His Light, the world of matter, the phallus, The One, and Her realm of magic, the quantum realm, the circle. Journeying into Her brings your state of being to Light” she nods.

“Ejaculight” I joke.

“Fucking clown” she laughs and pushes me away playfully.

“So, my imagination reveals my true feelings to my conscious mind?” I ask a bit shaken by what just happened.

She smiles and nods in approval.

“Anyway, the Sun is in Taurus. Venus rules Taurus and it is the energy of harmony, unison and fruitfulness” she continues.

“So, the planet’s influence brought everyone together?”

“Yes, so we danced for love, harmony, beauty and balance and the Trunks channeled the energies through music to us.”

“The Trunks are those freaky people that were on stage, right?”

She laughs. “Yes, the Trunks are our guides. Just like the tree forms a link between the Earth and the sky, the body and the mind, likewise the Trunks help and guide us on our journey to our true self. They recall the ‘old-world’ as the time before The Urge. Only a few remember the old ways as everyone else released their past fears and limitations during re-root. They help citizens de-conform and become individuals by clearing channels and releasing stresses that block the flow.”

“What were they doing during the festival?”

“They were taking turns as spirit guides to channel cosmic energies. The music reflects our tribe consciousness, our collective mind. As our collective mind changes the way we interpret the cosmic energies changes too and you can feel it through the music.”

“I thought that they were DJ’s” I laugh.

“They are like DJ’s in a way. They orchestrate the vibe for the night and draw down the stars and the planetary energies as a bonus.”

“So, they create the music by tuning in to the cosmic carnival and then channel it through the collective consciousness to create the feel for the night?” I gasp for air to exaggerate “that was a mouthful” I laugh.

“Jip. You’re a natural!” she cheers.

“Yeah, a natural at making sense of trippy shit” I joke.

“So, the music isn’t pre-recorded or mastered?” I ask amazed.

“They are already masters” she says irritably and looks at me like I’m the weird one.

“We draw down the energies for the day and each one manifests on the dance floor as a projection followed by a wave of energy that pulsates throughout the tribe which sets the vibe for the day.”

She points to the lion “The lion represents the Sun, and the constellation it is in appears on the dance floor too” she says and looks at the bull.

“The Moon is in Scorpio” she points to a scorpion in the distance, “its stinging intensity symbolizes regeneration, transformation and rebirth inside the dark mind” she looks at me intently like it is relevant to me somehow?

“So, each planet represents a sign of the zodiac which has its own energy?” I ask just to be sure.

“Yes, and every constellation has a unique frequency that changes depending on how they interact with each other, and subsequently create infinite variations of frequencies that affect our moods, thoughts and behavior. When we are receptive to it we can feel the emotions connected to that part of our psyche. When you get used to letting go and allowing it to flow through you, the energy will saturate your being and you can relish in it until the next constellation is ready to be made manifest. In this way you awaken different parts of your psyche that can take on different forms in your imagination and seep into your reality. It can be both a healing and empowering experience.”

“Impressive” I nod.

“Why were all the stars present during the festival?” I recall the dancing zodiac.

“They are always present in each of us in varying degrees, but during festivals we build up enough energy to draw down different constellations to join us in celebration of life, love and unity. But it was the first time we were able to draw down the entire solar system and summon Mu!” she jumps excitedly.

“Yeah, what was that about?” I give a nervous look.

“Mu is Her guardian. It is the first time the energies have been strong enough to summon the serpent. It was spectacular!” she claps her hands in excitement.

“Spectacular might not be the right word” I mutter to myself.

“Are you afraid of change- I mean snakes?” she stumbles over her words.

“Let’s just say I’m cautious, and that one could swallow me whole” I say nervously.

“Yes, she could” she laughs as we walk towards a crowd of people up ahead.

“So, let me get this straight, The Vanavasi Way is that of using your energy to better yourself and the Whole by releasing excess fire through dance or self-expression as excess energy can harm you?” I ask to make sure I’m grasping this.

“Pretty much” she nods. “Dancing grounds distorted energies and releases excess fire back into the Earth. It is also a form of soul-art” she continues.

“Uh, soul and art...” I raise my brow. Two words I can’t relate to.

“Soul-art is a form of self-expression that invokes feelings in those around you and can be directed to healing and sharing joy.”

“Like sex?” I joke.

“Exactly like sex” she winks.

“Yeah, I must admit I was a bit freaked out during the festival. Especially when I realized that I was surrounded with naked people and everyone started stomping around uncontrollably. It had a real jungle zombie feel to it” I say loudly over the music that is becoming louder as we enter the dancing crowd.

“You were projecting your fears onto us and then you continued to project it into your path finding experience, that’s why I had to use the shoal to ground you.”

“Ah, fear you little fucker” I joke. She laughs and nods in agreement.

“A little fucker that can turn a king into a slave” she smiles sympathetically and takes my hand and guides me through the crowd. We head towards the source of the sound. Everyone is dancing around a group of people that are playing instruments at the center.

“So, if I use all my energy to develop my skills I get more energy but when I prevent its flow, or don’t use it all, it kills me?” I ask loudly over the music.

“If you love what you have you get more, if you don’t use it or become tired of your experience, without doing anything to change it, the fire inside will burn you” she sings back.

“Hectic” I laugh.

“That’s Nature’s way” she raises her shoulders nonchalantly and starts shaking her booty.

“Let’s dance” she yells and pulls me closer.

The beat starts off slow and gradually picks up as the crowd gets more excited.

“Let your heartbeat synchronize with the rhythm and allow your body to move freely” she instructs. “Let the music guide you on the journey” she says and lifts her arms into the air and sways her hips from side to side.

The sounds are mystical and make me feel light and excited.

We dance for a long time. I feel sweaty and relaxed. She bends down and scoops up some mud and rubs it all over my face. She runs away as I chase her through the crowd.

“It protects from the sun!” she laughs as I grab her around her waist and dive into a big puddle of mud.

“You are amazing” I say as I try to wipe the mud from her eyes.

But it’s no use, more people start jumping in and everyone gets down and dirty. We get up and start stomping and splashing each other with mud. Everyone is hysterical, and the musicians catch the vibe and pick up the pace. I’m about to slide through the mud when she grabs me around the waist.

“So are you” she says and kisses me. Muddy kisses, fucking romantic, damn.

She smiles as she steps back and tries to wipe my muddy mouth and instead makes it worse. We laugh and start rocking it out together, stomping in the water covered in mud. The vibe is healing and freeing. I feel so alive.

We grab a bowl of water, drink some and rinse our faces with the rest, but our bodies are still covered in paint and mud.

The musicians continue collaborating with strange sounds that merge to make you feel different things...art, I guess?

I watch the musicians jam out on their strange instruments. There is a guy playing on a few strands of light and a chick creating wind sounds with a hula hoop. I watch a couple take turns igniting each other's flames and blowing fire through giant didgeridoos that invigorate the crowd.

"Uh, so the musicians kind off just 'wing-it'?" I ask amazed by the way the sounds merge into a rhythmic beat.

"Yes" she laughs seeing the amazement on my face, "Music ignites a feeling within us depending on the rhythm and is used in daily ceremonies to synchronize our intentions for the day. Music is always playing. The musicians amongst us can play whatever they want for as long as they want because we believe self-expression allows for personal understanding, while others prefer art and dance, but the music inevitably affects everybody's mood and unites us emotionally."

"So, it changes every day?"

"It never stops. The music changes with the interactions between the planets and our vibe synchronizes with the universe. The rhythms are composed from any sound that you can imagine in your mind and projected through music, so we can experience it together."

It's like they are free styling with the planetary energies and whatever they receive is reflected back to them through the music, art, dance or whatever they express themselves through.

Now instead of watching musicians I am watching cosmic DJ's channel different energies through sound and harmonize with each other's souls to create a universal symphony.

I think of the word 'Universe' life is truly one song, and we are the instruments.
Fuck, I'm getting deep. If Colin were here I'd say I need to have sex.

Amphi distracts my thoughts as she attaches a black stone to one of my dreads.

"What is it?" I ask.

"It's Jet."

I pull a funny face and wait for her to elaborate.

"It's a piece of fossilized wood, compacted by the forces deep below the ocean...just like you" she pulls the dread over my face playfully.

"It will help you on your journey" she smiles.

"What journey?" I frown.

She ignores me my question and pulls me into the center where the cosmic DJ's are channeling, and passes me a space drum. It's a hollow metallic drum that looks like an upside-down bowl with flattened parts that you tap like a drum. She sits down and guides me into it. She places it on her lap and starts tapping the flat parts with the tips of her fingers and the sides of her palms. She winks for me to join her. I start off slow and another guy starts chanting as Amphi picks up the pace. The sounds she creates make it sound like she has four arms...a goddess. The beat is contagious, and everyone starts adding their instruments into our song. There is no way I can keep up with them, but I just keep jamming my simple rhythm, and watch them jam it out on their trippy instruments. I feel the rhythm take over my body and I close my eyes and just flow with it.

When I open my eyes and there are colors everywhere. Every time Amphi taps the drum it sets off a vibration that resonates outwards and lights up the air. The different sound frequencies create an array of colors like psychedelic fireworks that ignite with different sounds. The colors contract and expand as it affects the listeners, dancers and musicians' personal energies. The dancers that channel their primal power make animal noises and summon their power animals who start appearing around the dance floor and dance among the colors too. There is an orangutan shaking its booty on its person's back and bats and birds getting jiggy with it as the different energies interact with each other.

When they stop I'm still recovering from the flood from the super consciousness, it's like motion sickness but more colorful and less uncomfortable. Amphi jumps up, pulls me to my feet and helps me climb a vine ladder up to a drumming platform in the trees. She hands me a pair of drumming sticks. The drum is fucking enormous. It's probably twice my height. She slides down the tree and yells for me to start drumming.

"I DON'T KNOW HOW TO DRUM!" I yell down to the crowd that has gathered around her.

"You don't know how to drum YET!" she yells back. I feel nervous. I look up at the drum and it feels even bigger now. I gently slam the drum with the one stick and the crowd cheers. I laugh because I haven't even done anything spectacular yet and they already like it. This place is different to what I'm used to. I jam a simple rhythm, left-right, left-right, and jump twice to hit the bass drum below my feet. Yeah, I'm getting this. The crowd quiets down and I feel the bass drum send shivers up my spine. I pick up the pace and the crowd start clapping to the beat. I

close my eyes and just play around with the sticks. The clapping and drumming collaboration sounds pretty decent. I'm telling you I'm a fucking psychedelic drum king in the making! When I open my eyes, I realize that the guys next to me joined in, no wonder I sounded so groovy, but it's a spectacular feeling though, making people feel something, even just for a moment. It's magic.

We continue drumming together and new sounds harmonize as some of the ladies start chanting a beautiful tune. One of the Trunk ladies with the semi-transparent silky wings appears and starts looping the chants and playing with the beat. I think they just summoned her with their chant? But I can't be sure. The men follow suit with deeper tones and we all join as the music climaxes. The people start dancing and chanting along. Their animal totems are going wild and I'm sweating, but feeling happier than I've felt in my entire life. When the vibe calms down we all relax and watch the sun's rays shine through the canopy and divide into the color spectrum. I watch the water evaporate from my body and the light reflect off the droplets like a gazillion tiny disco balls.

"Physics has a face" I laugh in disbelief and watch the sound waves move outward and excite the disco balls around me, making them rise into the sky. Geez, I'm becoming poetic now too.

I watch the people play around and their strange luminescent animals play around them too. Some animals are floating above them while others rest on their shoulders or latch onto their torsos. I hold the jet stone for a while to ground myself, but the animals are still there.

"I think their spirit animals are getting jiggy with it too?" I say to Amphi and point towards the people playing in front of us. Amphi smiles.

“Each Vanavasi soul resonates with a certain animal. The animals can sense your intentions and help you if it is in line with the greater good” she explains. I remember the bear image that formed on Bo’s abdomen during the festival.

“So Boarian resonates with a bear?” I presume.

“Yes, that’s pretty obvious.” she laughs.

“When your intentions are pure, and you become a channel where cosmic energies can move through you will germinate and your spirit animal will appear to you.”

“I saw a seed in your groin. You haven’t germinated yet have you?”

“Wait, what?” she looks surprised.

I get up and try to explain what it looked like. “I saw a seed in your groin” I point to my groin, “and red energy pulsating through roots extending down your legs” I bend down and touch my toes, “and going into the Earth when you pushed your feet on the ground” I stomp my feet on the floor to mimic what I saw.

“You saw my light crest?” her jaw drops.

“Yeah, but when everyone’s groins started glowing it was a bit much” I confess.

“Our groins started glowing?” she looks awestruck.

“Yeah, so that wasn’t part of the show?” I ask confused.

“No! Is that what you were looking at when you were staring at me the night of the festival?”

“Yes” I nod.

“What else did you see?” she looks uncomfortable.

“I saw red illuminated patterned that look like trees on everyone’s groin. Boarian had a fully developed tree and a bear figure in his branch system” I try to draw what I saw on my body as I explain.

“Remember I told you that we are connected to Her Body?” she asks.

“Uh-huh” I nod.

“Well, the crest is described as the seed that shoots from Her and grows into the light like a tree that grows as we grow.”

“Yeah, it sounds like what I saw” I nod my head excitedly. Feeling like a kid again.

“So, I guess the bear on Bo’s crest has something to do with his spirit animal?” I try to stitch everything together.

“Yes. The overall form is the same for the entire energy center, but individual crests change with individual life experiences and power animal” she explains.

“Like a social media profile” I joke.

“More like your body, but you get the idea” she laughs.

“The animal that chooses you reflects your energy back to you” she continues.

“There are a lot of animals around. How do you know it has chosen you?” I ask.

“It will challenge you or teach you a lesson.”

I recall the falcon on the line. “I think my animal has already chosen me...?” I say hesitantly.

“Really?! When?” she asks wide eyed.

“When I walked the line, a falcon landed on the line and made me lose my balance.”

“The falcon...of course” she strokes my chest “...can it be?”

“What do you mean?” I tilt my head curiously.

“Never mind” she shakes her head and continues walking, “coming of age is an internal quest as well as a solo jungle mission to discover your spirit animal and higher calling.” Ankaa’s hologram comes to mind. “And the jungle noises we make are to summon our spirit animal” she adds.

“Yeah, I figured” I laugh and try to make like a falcon. We both laugh.

“How did you create this magical world?” I ask amazed.

“When we sat down as a Whole and focused our energies we decided to create a world free of need and suffering” as she explains excitedly the last sunlight falls on her face.

The fresh air and the mud on my body make me feel good and in a strange way. My senses are enhancing. I can smell the fragrance of flowers, everything I eat makes me feel something. Everything I touch seems to affect me too.

“Your senses are heightening, and you are becoming more receptive” she turns and smiles like she just heard my thoughts.”

“You are starting to experience life through a clear channel. Your new seeds are sprouting, and your perception and interpretation of life is transforming your reality” she continues.

The mud and paint on our bodies start chapping and I follow Amphi into the jungle. It is dark, but I feel safe here now. The jungle has transformed into a magical paradise. The fire flies guide the way and Amphi’s excitement is contagious.

“I am beginning to feel closer to animals and plants. Animals have personalities now and it feels like nature is becoming a part of me” I try and find the right words to explain what I am feeling.

“We are one” she smiles.

As we walk through the jungle the surrounding plants emanate green light that makes my heart expand in my chest. My body feels revitalized even though I have been active the entire day. My presence seems to excite the plant life and make their energy emanate stronger, it’s like they are excited to see me. We are all connected. I see it now. I understand.

The expanding green light in my chest reflects off the jet crystal that is bouncing off my shoulder. My braids have turned into dreadlocks and I feel stronger and more secure than ever before. My life in Light City feels so far away now.

“Nature heals and purifies” she says as she spins around spreading her red pixie dust everywhere. It mixes with the green energy of nature. “When intentions are pure, passion and compassion mix” she spins faster until she gets dizzy and walks loopy. I laugh and help her balance.

We walk until we reach a pool of water that leads into a cave. She runs in and swims to the cave. Trying not to think about what could be in the water, I jump in too. I swim inside, and she is already sitting on a sandy beach. The water is about waist deep. She lights a few floating fires that hover above the water surface.

We wash off the mud and she wraps her legs around my waist from behind and pulls me closer to her. I sit down in front of her as she massages my back from the shoulders down to the base of my spine.

“Your connection to Her is here” she pushes the base of my spine.

“We connect with Her through the moon” she manifests a moon in the roof of the cave, “the stars, the ocean, the Earth and each other” she whispers into my ear. Wow, this is magical.

“You can access Her realm using the power of the dark mind. Like the ocean it is a vast and unpredictable place. Call your power animal and let it guide you into the otherworld. It will offer protection and guidance” she explains.

“Do you want to give it a try?” she asks.

“Uh-huh” I say relaxed.

“Are you ready to enter the womb for healing?” she slides her hands down my shoulders.

I nod.

“Close your eyes” she instructs. I close my eyes and I can see her sitting in front of me in the dark.

There is a flame alight inside of her that illuminates her from the inside.

“Call your falcon” she instructs.

“It flies into the cave and merges into my chest. My falcon tattoo glows green and a fire ignites in my belly.

“There is fire in your belly. It is constantly metabolizing the thoughts and feelings that make up your reality. All energy taken in affects the body just like all the things you filter through your mind affect your reality. You are constantly creating new experiences. The eternal fire burns inside of us and flows through our veins” as she explains the fire lights the blood in her veins and illuminates all her arteries in her body.

“Your spine is an energy channel and your mind makes sense of what you are feeling through your senses” her body starts glowing and layers of light emanating from the top of her head and out of her chest as she inhales and exhales.

I watch the energy move up and down her spine, like a serpent.

I open my eyes with a smile. "Wow, how did you do that?"

"When you are connected to each other's hearts you can close your eyes and see what the other person is seeing or wants to show you."

"Love is like magic" I say amazed.

"Love and magic are one and the same" she winks, "Is there any part of you that remembers feeling unsafe at any point in your life?" she continues.

My mind starts processing through millions of memories. She is quiet for a long time as I keep tracing back and forth through my life and highlighting moments that I felt afraid.

I can feel my eyes moving in my sockets. My mind quiets down.

"Have you compiled all the memories?" she asks calmly.

"Yes."

"Are you ready to let them go?"

"Yes."

I see the moment of my conception and how I grow into a baby in the womb. I see my birth and my mother's joy when she sees me for the first time. I didn't know I remembered all this. I feel a sense of joy and gratitude to be alive.

"You are safe in yourself" she places her hands on my shoulders.

I open my eyes and I sigh in relief. She smiles. "What just happened?" I ask dazed.

“We just went into your dark mind and brought unresolved issues to the fore for healing. By going into the womb with the intent to heal you will get to know yourself better and relieve yourself of dense energies that you have buried away in your dark mind.”

“Thank you” I smile.

“Can I look at your light crest?” I ask.

She looks nervous, but nods in approval.

I turn to face her and lift her onto a rock. She drops her body wrap and lays naked in front of me. Her body glows and shimmers as the light of the fires flicker off her wet body. I hold her hips with both hands. Her abdomen illuminates with different shades of red. The picture is vague at first. I can see energy move up and down tiny roots growing up her legs. I follow them to her groin where a seed pulsates inside her uterus. The faint tree with branches shaped like a trident grows up her abdomen and a circle forms around the trident. My attention is drawn to the seed. It is vibrating, like it is under extreme pressure. I feel afraid and anxious when I look at it. I look up and Amphi “You are much stronger than you realize. You have to let go and allow yourself to grow into your full potential.”

“I don’t know how to?” she says nervously, like she senses my anxiety.

“Maybe you have become so used to suppressing your power that you think it’s normal to feel so tense the whole time?” I say sympathetically.

“How do you know I feel tense? What can you see?” she sounds concerned, like she is afraid that someone knows something about her that she doesn’t, and it

can harm her somehow? I kiss the spot where the seed is vibrating, and light shoots up the roots igniting a fire in the seed, making it glow brightly.

“What are you doing?” she kicks me back.

“Why are you suppressing your power? You are hurting yourself!” I yell.

“I don’t know how to clear it!” she yells back. We both are quiet for a while.

“The Trunks say I have an energetic blockage from the past that needs healing, but I used my power to build up strong resistance. They have tried to get me to go back to the night of the Purple Pulse where my blockage occurred, but I am too strong...me too strong?” she shrugs. I could totally see her kicking anyone’s ass, but she obviously can’t...maybe that’s the problem?

“What happened?” I ask concerned.

“I can’t remember what happened before the Pulse, I recall a face and a lot of pain. I have tried to let it go but its stubborn energy, like the fat on my thighs” she looks down at her legs. It’s the first time I see her look insecure. The Trunks have great expectations of me, but they can’t force me to step into my destiny. They think that by helping you germinate I might do so myself.”

I jump up on the rock and we sit in silence and watch the fire dance on the water.

“Your powerful manifestation ability and understanding makes a lot of sense now” she finally breaks the silence.

“What do you mean?”

“Prophecies among the biomes tell of dual Light Beings that will rise to reveal the forgotten knowledge of existence and enlighten nations to unify the world.”

“You can’t seriously think it has anything to do with me?” I laugh.

“We need to tell the Trunks of your visions” she looks serious and is about to get up when I turn to face her.

“Wait, I saw you in my dreams during re-root” I confess. I knew from the moment I saw her that she would change me somehow. She moves closer. My senses heighten. I can smell her.

“I saw you too” she says, and I can feel her breath on my lips.

“I want you” she whispers.

I try to kiss her, but she leans back but maintains eye contact.

She lowers her head slowly and places her ear against my chest and listens to my heartbeat. It feels like it’s beating in my throat now. She places her hand on my heart.

“You opened my heart” she smiles.

“I’m yours” I whisper.

She climbs on top of me. I am already erect. She slides her fingers over my erection. She breathes deeply. Fuck, she is driving me crazy!

She places her body on top of me, pressing her breasts against my chest. I grab her ass and push her up to kiss her passionately. She lowers herself slowly and I penetrate her. She bites my neck as I thrust her up and down. It feels sooo fucking

good. I hear her moan, I hear myself moan. My lower body is becoming numb. We are one.

She licks my chest up to my neck and whispers “Again.”

13

We climb up the weird plaited tree stage where the Trunks performed during the festival. Amphi stops and indicates for me to enter the cocoon made of branches. As I come closer the leaves part and I step inside.

I smell a sweet aroma in the air.

“He’s here” a female voice announces my arrival.

Her back is turned when I walk in. I recognize her watery hair. It is running down her back in tiny plaits that form one big braid and opens into a fishtail. It makes me think of the many rivers that come together at the ocean. There are shells and pebbles hanging around her groin and a giant fish bone neck piece covering her chest. Her breasts are exposed, and she has gills on her ribs. Her legs, forearms neck and the sides of her face are covered in silver scales. She walks towards me. Her legs are mighty fine.

There is a guy sitting on the floor behind her.

“So, what are you lot supposed to be?” I ask arrogantly.

“He’s cute” the fish lady laughs.

“I am spirit of water” she says as she slides her fingers over my shoulder. In between her fingers are tiny chains of beads and shells that connect all her fingers

like webs “Undine” she introduces herself and flicks her hair as she passes me. The water splashes on my face.

“He’s an asshole” the guy says behind her. He’s wearing a cape, but he looks like a tiny motherfucker. It must be the dwarf.

“We are the elementals” the silky bird girl swoops down and stares at me. I can feel her breath on me, she is almost transparent.

“Which are?” I ask leaning back.

“Magical entities that embody a force of nature” a male voice says from out of the dark. He enters the light where I can see him. It’s the levitating fire dude.

“Wikipedia” he winks.

“Where is Professor Utonium?” I joke. They don’t catch it.

I laugh at my own joke and drop it.

The waning crescent is shining through a hole in the cocoon. It’s almost time for another festival. The fish lady waves for me to follow her to the center. Her nails sparkle as she points to the spot where the light illuminates the floor.

I sit down and face the dwarf. He takes off the hood and I recognize him as the little lion man. For a dwarf he is chiseled as fuck. His pecks bulge out as he sits upright. His nipples are pierced, and his chest is hairy. His beard is plaited with a string of stones dangling down to his navel. His dreads are tied back into a bun like mine and he has a nose ring. He crosses his arms and both his forearms are covered in nature images.

“You like tattoos?” he asks, probably saw me staring, “they change with the seasons and my mood” he grins arrogantly. I know because it’s something that I would do.

“That’s pretty awesome” I confess.

“I know” he smiles. Again, something that I would do. Fucking asshole.

“Gnome” he says, and bangs his fists on the floor and a drumming sound echoes through the room “earth.”

“That’s Sylphy, the spirit of air” Gnome points up at the girl with the wings. She is floating around, obviously not interested in what is going on down here.

“And I am Sam” the salamander man joins us and reaches out to shake hands. His nails are sharp like claws and he has amphibian eyes and a tongue like a reptile. There are scales on his hands and feet and no hair on his body.

We shake hands. The winged girl swoops down and blows onto our hands making his hand glow like hot coals. I pull my hand away

“Ugh, fire” I shriek and shake off the heat. They laugh.

“Prophec-sss-y prince” Sam lisps and looks at me intently.

He takes a seat behind me. “Sylphy, come meet the Prince!” he calls the girl overhead.

What did he just say? Before I can ask Sylphy’s face is an inch from mine again. She smiles and her wings open as she hovers upside down in front of me. Her breasts are big and hang upside down too. I try not to stare. She laughs and hugs

me. My head squeezes in between her breasts. "Welcome Light Prince" she passes through me and her long air hair brushes over me like a cool breeze.

"Uh, I think you've got the wrong guy" I say confused and follow her as she lowers herself to the East.

"We can go many moons trying to convince ourselves that everything is alright rather than go on the journey of inner fulfillment" Undine says and closes the circle to the West.

"As you pass through the biomes and release blockages that prevent the free flow of universal energy in and out of your body, you will heal Her Body and your consciousness will expand" Gnome says bluntly.

"Wait what?" I ask confused.

"You are developing the ability to create in the dark mind and soon you will be able to manipulate matter and manifest instantly in the material world" Sylphy says excitedly.

"Wait, woow, I'm not planning on passing through any biomes" I laugh.

"Sure buddy" Gnome grins.

"Please explain what you saw?" Undine asks.

"Is he seeing already?" Sam asks astonished.

"Yeah, at the moment I'm seeing a group of freaky people" I nod.

"Please, explain what you saw!" Sylphy asks excitedly.

“Uh, I saw a seed glowing in Amphi’s groin and lines of light running down her legs with red light pulsating into the Earth. There was a faint circle surrounding a trident behind the seed. It was like it wasn’t fixed yet.”

“You are seeing through the veil already? Your connection to the dark mind is growing stronger very quickly, this is astonishing” Sam looks very impressed, but I don’t know what the fuck he’s on about.

“A circle and a trident? Interesting” Gnome mutters.

“The faint background shows her potential growth if she decides to step into her destiny” Sylphy explains.

“What’s with the seed?” I raise my palms confused.

“It’s the seed of her soul, her true self. The darkness provides the seed with what it needs to grow into the light, but Amphi is suppressing her soul growth” Sylphy says sympathetically.

“I know, I told her! It was vibrating like it was under extreme pressure. Boarian had a tree growing out of his groin too but it was clear and had a lot of details. I saw a bear image in his roots. I guess he has grown into his full potential?”

“Correct, his soul has germinated, and his spirit became his guide. The light crest forms at the groin area during transcendence and each person has unique patterns and soul animal prints depending on their soul journey and life experiences. The Light Prince can see the crests in the fixed word because he is connected to Her” she explains.

“Uh, Light Prince?” I’m confused.

“Light City is set on self-destruct. Their state of fear goes against the naturally high normal vibration of the Earth. Fear, whether fear of death, lack, the unknown or change, creates tension that builds up and manifests as pain and diseases. When your mind is blocked off from your body it will chase cheap thrills and eventually destroy the body. If man is left unchecked, he will ravish the Earth and destroy himself in the process” Undine says seriously.

“If we don’t care for our own bodies we feel indifferent about the state of the Earth and we destroy ourselves along with the Earth” Gnome mutters.

“Fair enough but what does that have to do with me?” I raise my shoulders.

“You must rebalance the Earth’s energies and restore the flow of energy through Her Body” Gnome says frustrated.

“Sure, I’ll restore Her flow anytime” I wink.

“Ugh, are you sure he’s The One?” Gnome sighs.

“Sounds like you lot want to tell me what to do?” I pout.

“You sound like Amphi” Sylphy laughs.

That’s probably her way of saying I’m stubborn, but I honestly do not see the point in all this.

“We don’t want to control you, but we are suggesting that you learn to control yourself” Sam says firmly.

“You are becoming one with all that is. The life that pulsates through nature pulses through you” Undine says calmly, “The bigger picture Jet, do you see it?”

“The bigger picture has got me wondering... if the universe is all about love and harmony then why is She punishing us?” I raise my brow.

“She isn’t punishing us She is trying to guide us to a higher state of being” Undine explains, “to guide us back to paradise.”

“But to get there your old-self needs to die first” Sylphy takes over.

“That’s where the womb comes in” Undine takes over again. Fuck these elementals just cock it and knock it one after the other.

“Yeah, what’s with that?” I look to Sam because he’s the only one that seems to be as chilled about all this as I am, and he’s fire for fuck sake.

“When citizens are removed from the low vibratory state in Light City their minds are still set on self-destruct. Their senses are used to being over-stimulated and their emotions and discomforts suppressed with Nigredo. Without Nigredo these energies start coming up for healing. This can cause discomfort and the womb is a safe place to release old memories and attachment without harming yourself and others. If the process is resisted it can cause a lot of pain, as you know by now, but if you...”

“Let go” I think aloud

He smiles “Your soul will step in to guide you home.”

“Yeah, I remember” I see Yoo floating above me laughing.

“And then re-rooting starts?” I say slightly excited that I’m grasping some of this.

“Yes, your mind starts re-rooting to adapt to the higher vibratory state in Her Body by removing your old conditioning which enables you to consciously plant who you want to grow into” he nods.

“So, I removed who I thought I was?” I hesitate.

“You removed all your fears and limitations by releasing parts of yourself that no longer serve your highest good” he opens his palms “burn it down...” and ignites a flame “to build it back up again” he closes his hands and a fiery phoenix rises and flies around the cocoon.

“My nose starts running. I sniff a few times. You lack belief in your abilities. He’s like a child that gets sick before a test” Gnome sighs.

I sniff long and loud and direct it at him. “So, the experience I had in the womb isn’t the same for everyone?” I ask Undine, ignoring Gnome.

“No, each individual creates their own scenario according to their life experiences. You locked yourself up because you felt imprisoned in your old life. When you redirected your anger into something life-enhancing in the cage, you pulled out your old roots and created a ripple effect where you continued to break through your conditioning until you were able to think independently from the mass mind” she explains.

“Okay, so I can think for myself now, that’s groovy. So how do I know this isn’t another stage? How do I know I’m not in the womb right now?”

“That is a good question, your consciousness is expanding” Undine smiles.

“You are constantly in a state of death and rebirth” Sylphy adds.

“So, I’m in the womb right now?” I look East and then West.

They both smile.

“Mind fuck” my jaw drops.

I roll the jet crystal between my fingers and they give me a breather.

“Kay, so why forget the past?” I strap in for another round.

“Many prefer to completely erase past conditioning and start fresh. It is easier to grow when you aren’t carrying a load with you. But there are some who hold onto emotions and remain stuck in a memory. They have allowed something to define who they are” Undine explains.

“Like Amphi?” I ask.

“Yes. Amphi is attached to a feeling and it has created a blockage that she alone can clear. We have tried to help her, but she is too powerful. She has used her power to build resistance so strong that our combined intent is unable to clear it. We believe it’s connected to love, the most powerful emotion. If she doesn’t clear it herself, she will never grow into her full potential” Undine sighs sadly.

“She needs to go into the cave. She has to face herself and step into her destiny” Gnome says firmly.

“But she is resisting, she uses pleasure and passion to distract her journey home” Sylphy says passionately.

“She needs to become more secure and grounded in the world. She has been treading water for a long time...” Undine gets a sad look on her face and looks down.

“Her soul is trying to wear her out” Gnome says loudly to distract from the sadness, “her soul is trying to break through her resistance” he adds.

“Hmm yes, drowning in sorrow can set a soul on fire” Sam nods in agreement.

“But until then she will relive the same pain over and over again” Undine says, and a tear rolls down her cheek.

Wow, it’s hard to keep track of their conversation. They are talking to each other like I’m not even here.

“Okay, but how do I fit into all of this?” I interrupt.

“You are more alike than you realize” Undine looks up.

“Are you saying that I have a blockage too?” I frown.

“That is up to you” Sam raises his shoulders, “You are fed by anger and she is fed by passion, both very fiery emotions. You face yourself by facing each other” he explains.

“Amphi helped you fall in love with the process of living, but you cannot stay here forever” Gnome shakes his head.

“He will know when it is time to leave” Sylphy yells like she is trying to protect what is between us. Between us? Where did that come from? I don’t even know if

I can call it 'something' I mean we slept together once...okay twice. Anyway, whatever, I shake it off.

"The first alchemical marriage is complete. He has united with the maiden. He has released his earthly attachments and their corresponding emotions" Gnome says to Sylphy trying to convince her that it is time for me to leave. I'm not too fussed about that but, "Marriage? Wait, what?" I interrupt their debate.

"You have united with your earth nature" Gnome says neutrally.

"Yeah, I feel connected to Earth and nature" I nod.

"Amphi has helped you reconnected to you body and the process of living" he says irritably.

"You are bound to each other's hearts" Sylphy says squeamishly.

"Uh, okay whatever. I have been having strange dreams too" I change the subject.

"I dreamt I was hanging off a cliff with the ocean below. One of my hands slipped and I looked down and saw a dragon jump out of the ocean. I lost my grip and fell off the cliff into the ocean and kept sinking no matter how hard I tried to swim to the surface. What does it mean?"

"Come on you know what it means!" Gnome sighs.

"I know that the ocean represents the dark mind. I guess I'm sinking into my subconscious mind?" I hesitate.

"Well done lad" Gnome claps his hands and a drum roll echoes through the cocoon.

“We’ll ignite the fire in you yet” Sam claps his hands and the sparks fly.

“Once you accept your destiny and develop your gifts in service to humanity you will evolve into the Light Prince” Sylphy says excited.

“You guys have had too much of whatever you are on” I laugh.

“You are here to grow deep roots, so you will be able to stay grounded and not become entrained by other energies” Gnome says with a serious look on his face.

“The roots hold your personal energy steady. Your true self is still developing, and it is important that the roots grow deep so you can grow through all the gates and expand your mind into a state of unity” Sylphy continues.

“What will happen without ‘strong roots’?” I ask mockingly, geez, can spirits get so worked up about roots?

“If your personality isn’t well-grounded you may not be able to assimilate the inflow of light and strength that is to come. The Light Being must balance thought and feeling by using his powers to assimilate the incoming energies” she says in a serious tone.

“Assimilate energies? Hmm, like what I’m doing now?” I raise my eyebrow.

Sam laughs.

“Your true self needs to become secured to enable your abilities to start developing without being bulldozed by other people’s beliefs, moods and magic. Your soul must emanate so strongly that it causes the surrounding energies to vibrate higher” Sylphy gives it another shot.

“Aah, sounds like I’m going to heal people with my presence?” I cough trying to hold down my laughter “sounds familiar...” I can’t hold it anymore and laugh out loud.

“He’s good” Sam laughs too.

“I like fire” I say and wink at Sam. That is something that Amphi would do, her mannerisms are rubbing off on me.

They wait for me to calm down. “Is that spirit talk for knowing who and what I stand for, so I don’t fall for everything?” I ask catching my breath.

My ears start ringing. I drop my jaw.

“Your ears are adjusting to new frequencies” Sylphy smiles.

“You think?” I ask sarcastically. “Sometimes I see light emanating around people and plants too, oh and spirit animals” I mention as I move my jaw from side to side.

“You have made great progress, your energy has undergone great changes!” Undine cheers.

“So, I assimilate energies using my imagination?” I check.

“Yes, you design in the dark. In Her realm, the realm of magic and healing, energies become animated and reflect your consciousness back to you, so energies take on forms that are familiar to you, so you can comprehend them. Any strong emotion greatly influences how you envision energies and if you have a distorted mind that is filled with fear it can turn mice into monsters” she says in a serious tone.

“I feel pretty secure” I try to calm her down. “Oh wait, except for that giant snake, that was a tad over the top, but I’m getting used to that kind of thing” I nod proudly. “But, I must confess I haven’t done much dark designing lately, but I’ll get on it ASAP” I point to her and wink mockingly.

“Now is the best time to start” Undine fizzles out my arrogance. “Close your eyes” she instructs and opens her palms outward. A ring of waves forms around us. Sam opens his palms and levitates. Steam starts forming as molten lava oozes out of the ground from underneath the water to form a ring of fire. Sylphy hovers and a tornado forms around me in the center of the circle and cools the lava to form a mini mountain range around us. Gnome slams his fists to the floor and the ground shakes. Everything crumbles to dust and disappears.

“Close your eyes, Jet!” Gnome demands as he opens his palms and closes the circle. “Oh yeah” I close my eyes.

“You are a great strong tree” they say together.

“See the roots run down your legs” I see the lines of light grow down my groin to the soles of my feet.

“The longer you focus on inner growth the deeper your roots grow, the stronger your connection becomes and the higher you can grow” they continue, and I feel my shoulders pull back as my spine lengthens.

“Red energy is closest to the Earth and it links us to the planet Herself. When you value thought more than feeling you cut yourself off from Her Body and feel separate and isolated from the Earth.” I see the red roots illuminate as the energy runs up and down my legs.

“Stand tall and stretch out your arms” they continue. I see energy run up my spine from the Earth. I get goose bumps as it rushes to my head.

“The trunk of the tree is like your spine. It is a channel from Her...” I watch a tree grow up through my body, “to Him,” and my neural network expands around my head like the branches of a tree.

“From the darkness, to the light.” I feel the connection between hemispheres strengthen as my conscious mind assimilates the inflow from the dark mind. More goose bumps as my neural network fires and leaves grow on the branches.

“These are your branches reaching up to the Lord of Light who energizes everything that grows from The Dark Lady, Lady Earth. The branches are shaped by your habitual thoughts and actions which eventually carry the fruits of your future.”

I shake my head and the leaves dance.

“So basically, whatever I plant will be fed into my reality if given enough energy” I ask in awe.

“Yes, your mind takes in the power of the Sun, the power of thought, just like the leaves of a tree take up sunlight. The energies move up from the Earth to meet with the Light at the center of your being and emanate out through your being to project your consciousness back to you” Sam nods.

I watch my heart glow a mix of green and red as passion and compassion merge inside me. A feeling of bliss comes over me as beams of white light emanate from my fingertips.

A single apple pops into my consciousness. I reach out and pick it. It feels so real! I open my eyes and sure enough it's in my hand! The giant tree is still growing through me and illuminates the cocoon. The apple splits in half and dances on the palm of my hand. Inside there is a pentagram. It seals again and splits through the other way and there is a little vagina inside? It catches me off guard and snaps me out of it, and the tree and the apple dissolve.

"What was that?" I ask excited.

"You were shown the key to the gateway of magic" Undine smiles.

"A vagina?" I grin slyly.

"The Key to Her realm" Gnome grins too. First time we agree on something.

"We await Her arrival. The fifth element which encompasses all and completes the circle" Sam says excited.

"We await Her to encircle us" Sylphy adds.

"The Womb" Gnome mutters.

"The Cosmos" Undine adds.

"Who is She?" I ask.

"She embodies all" Sylphy says again.

"But who is She?" I ask frustrated.

"She will embody Her" Sam says.

"Ugh" I sigh frustrated with their confusing answers.

“So, what I’m getting out of this is that somebody will embody the Earth?” I try to balance the elements.

“Yes, and you will be Her Light” Sam says and rolls an orb of fire through his fingers.

“I call bullshit” I choke with laughter.

“You will not see it until you choose to use your light to guide humanity. Once you put down your resistance all will become clear, but until then neither of us will waste any energy” Undine pouts.

“Kay, so what does the prophecy say?” I ask catching her vibe. She’s getting pissed too and initially she liked me. Yeah, I’ve still got it.

“The prophecy tells of dual Light Beings that will rise to re-balance the Earth’s energies and reveal what was sealed” Gnome says and starts moving his palms in a circular motion.

“Dual must mean that there are two? Who is the second?” I ask intrigued.

“You are the second. The first Light Being is already in Light City.”

“Sky-Lo” I think aloud. “Yes, the oracle of Light” he nods, and luminescent circles start enlarging in front of his palms.

“A Blind plight

Summon the Beings of Light

From flaming roots

A Prince shoots

Stirring up a beast

An Aeon asleep

Pass through the seven gates..."

"For fucks sake" I interrupt.

Sam fights to hold back his laughter while the rest just stare at me. Looks like I'm the only one who isn't taking this shit seriously.

"Pass through the seven gates

To unite opposites

Facing her Trine

Transform to Divine

Watch the dragon devour time" Gnome finishes with a silent nod.

“Is that it?” I cough. “I think you guys need to lay down ‘the vine that grows high’”
I laugh.

“When you accept your power, and allow yourself to see without looking away,
you will be ready” Undine assures me.

“Highly unlikely, but whatever makes you sleep at night” I wink.

They all just look at me unfazed by my comment.

“Just like the Earth has different biomes so your body has different energy
centers. The Light Being must understand them to understand himself” Undine
continues.

“Your journey will take you through the Earth’s gateways where you will
experience different states of consciousness. As you learn to see with your new
eyes you will begin to see how energies manifest within the human body and on a
collective level on the Earth” Sam takes over where she left off.

“You will gradually develop supernatural powers depending on which faculties
you focus on and step forward to align the biomes and balance the Earth’s
energies” Sylphy smiles seemingly satisfied with her input to the conversation.

“Wait, supernatural powers?” I can’t help but laugh in their faces.

“Alrighty ladies and gents” I stand up slowly. “I’m going to go now and hopefully
never come back” I step back slowly.

“Tell him about the forces within the wind and the sacred water hole” Undine tries to distract me as I head in the direction I came in. It’s dark and I can’t see shit, so I feel my way to something solid.

“Changing how you perceive yourself and the world, and coming to terms with your true power will set you on the course to your destiny” Undine tries to draw me back, but I just keep feeling for an exit.

“By the way, why don’t you guys build homes with DOORS?” I ask frustrated.

“What would be the ultimate home?” Sylphy pops up in front of me in the darkness, I can tell by her breath, it’s like wind on my face.

“Uh, one that changes as I change?” I say uncomfortably. She should really stop doing that.

“One that grows...” she blows onto my face and the leaves appear and open to the outside world.

I stumble out. It’s already dark. The moon is smiling, and I feel happy to be out of the cocoon too. But my face and hands are burning up again. It feels like I just downloaded a shitload of information. I need to cool down. I walk to the waterfall. It glitters in the moonlight. I take off my clothes and climb up to the top of the waterfall. The moon is so close I can almost touch her. The moonlight dances over the water and I am surprised to see so much beauty appear when everyone is asleep. I’m not afraid anymore. I cross my hands over my chest like when I was lying in the coffin in the room and step over the ledge. I keep my eyes open for as long as I can. My heart rises into my throat and I hold my breath all the way down. My foot hits a rock and I feel the pain rush up my right leg. I open

my eyes under water and I see a falcon fly through the water towards me. I try to reach out and touch it, but I look down and two giant snake eyes come up from the depths. I swim to the surface, but its jaws close over me as I gasp for air at the surface. “Fuck, fuck, fuck, get out, get out!” I say to myself as I swim out. I crawl out until I’m in the vegetation and roll over to catch my breath.

“She can swallow you whole” I recall Amphi’s words.

I tilt my head up and watch the moonlight illuminate the falcon tattoo on my wet chest. I lean on my elbow to check for the snake, but the water is calm except for the crashing waterfall. I inhale deeply, and a red glow starts expanding from my groin as a seed shoots up followed by a wave of energy that rushes up my spine. I watch roots grow down my legs as I exhale. I feel drained. I lie down amongst the plants and watch the moon as I enter the womb.

14

“Do you love him?” he asks.

“I do” she responds

I wake up to Amphi’s voice.

“Do you love me?” he asks. What the fuck? I look up. Boarian?

I am hidden amongst the undergrowth. I can see them, but they can’t see me.

“I do” she sighs.

She does?

“Do you think we could ever be together?” he asks. Fuck off bro.

“I think you think too much Bo” she laughs. That’s my girl.

“Stop changing the subject Amphi, I need to know if I should step back. The newcomers don’t understand our ways and we don’t want unnecessary conflict. If your heart chose him I have no intention to complicate things” he takes her hand.

“I hardly know him” she pulls her hand away.

“Do you feel for each other?” he keeps going.

Amphi is quiet for a while and bends down and throws him with a chunk of mud. So typical of her to divert the tension to something fun.

He grabs a large handful of mud and Amphi tries to runaway but he catches her and rubs it all over her neck and down her chest. She takes two handfuls and jumps on his back and rubs it all over his face and hair. He lifts her by her legs and runs into the water. She bangs her fists on his shoulders laughing. He dives into the water and grabs her ass. Her breasts push against his face. They laugh hysterically. When they calm down she rests her forehead on his. Fuck, no Amphi.

He carries her deeper into the water. I watch him slide his hand down her spine and spread her bum cheeks open and penetrate her. I hear her moan. They don’t kiss, she just keeps her eyes closed and he holds her. My heart contracts as I swallow my tears. I can’t watch this.

I get up and my foot gives out from under me. My ankle is badly sprained, and my soles are stained with dried blood. The rustling of bushes gets their attention and Amphi jumps off him. She sees me and yells for me to stop but I’m getting the fuck out of here.

I get some help to strap my ankle and grab a few things for the trip home. The light crest is still glowing down my legs and on my groin. I've blinked a few times, but it's still there. No time to figure this out, I've got to get out of here before I lose my mind.

"Your ankles change the direction you walk your path. Your ankle is taking on what you are refusing to deal with. You are not grounded. You must slow down and heal certain issues" Gnome appears leaning against a tree.

I don't have time for this crazy talk anymore.

"I'm done. I'm going back to Light City" I grab a water pack and throw some fruit and a shirt into it. "Oh, and by the way what the fuck is this thing?" I point to my groin.

"It is time" Sylphy appears too.

"You both are germinating" Gnome says with a serious look.

I grab the goods and get going.

"Slow down and pay attention" Sylphy swoops down, "Boarian and Cro will escort you on your journey" she blows into my face.

"There is no fucking way that guy is coming with me!" I blow back at her.

"You will need some assistance and Boarian knows the way to the city. Cro's energy will be able to balance the tension between the two of you until you reach Light City" Gnome says coolly.

“Cro is a nymphomaniac and Boarian is a fucking asshole. How is that balanced?” I start limping into the jungle.

“You are angry, so your judgment is clouded” Sylphy hovers next to me.

“Yeah, fuck it whatever, I’m leaving” I continue walking.

“Jet!” Gnome yells after me. I turn as he throws something at me. I catch it. It’s a black stone of some sort. “Keep it with you.”

“What is it?”

“It is a piece of volcanic glass” Gnome explains.

“Ah, obsidian! Good choice Gnome!” Sylphy cheers. “It is ideal for transforming destructive energy patterns and freeing the energy that is being wasted to support them” Sylphy says excitedly.

“And?” I ask unimpressed.

“It will draw hidden imbalances to the surface to be released” Sylphy summarizes.

“And it’s an effective grounding stone” Gnome adds.

“That still doesn’t tell me anything?”

“It will clear the path for passing through the seven gates” Sylphy sounds frustrated, like I should know this by now.

“I’m not going through any gates, but thanks for the rock” I chuck it in my pants pocket.

“Feel your feelings when they come up and when things feel shaky, stay present and shake it off” Gnome squats and places his elbows on his knees.

I nod and get back to walking.

“Your visions confirm your destiny!” I hear Gnome yell after me.

“My visions confirm that I’ve been around you nutcases too long” I mumble to myself and fiddle with the stone in my pocket.

“Have you ever wondered why citizens are so obsessed with recording everything?” Sylphy asks still following me.

“They probably forgot something” I smirk.

“They know deep inside that they forgot something important” she says as she flies after me as I pick up the pace.

“They forgot who they are” Sylphy appears upside down in front of my face again. I’m getting used to it by now.

I just pass underneath her and walk out.

“Take care on your journey Jet, most hidden things are buried because they are uncomfortable to face” I hear her voice grow fainter. She has stopped following me.

I walk off into the jungle. I keep a good pace to get away before Boarian and Cro catch up with me, but I’m shit out of luck. I hear them coming towards me from the front.

Cro runs towards me and for a second it looks like there is a shield of light around him.

“Wait up your Highness!” he yells sarcastically.

15

I am dangling off a cliff. Boarian is next to me. He seems calm despite our predicament. The ocean is crashing below us. The weather is cold, and the wind blows my hair into my eyes. I throw it back and something catches my eye on a rocky platform below us. It's blue and big. It looks like a reptile. Before I can get a good look at it, it rushes into the water. I feel my heart sink into my stomach as the fear washes over me.

“It's in the water” I say nervously. Boarian looks at me confused but sees the fear on my face.

“W-we need to get off the cliff!” I stutter. I throw my left arm up to pull myself up, but it has no strength and slips. From the corner of my eye I see the creature shoot out of the water into the sky. I follow it until it disappears into the clouds. Boarian is up already and reaches out to pull me up, but I am still staring at the sky.

“Amphi, give me your hand!” he yells over the crashing waves. I look up at him, but I am frozen. A blue face breaks the clouds above his head, followed by a large body with retracted wings. It dives down the cliff towards me. It nicks my shoulder and disappears into the water. Boarian grabs me and pulls me up.

“What was that?” I gasp as I lay on the ground. “What was what?” he looks at me confused.

I awaken on the floor next to a fire. It was a dream. It is dark. Where I am?

I sit upright. I feel drained and my right shoulder hurts. There are six puncture wounds. They look like teeth punctures. Was I attacked by something? The blue creature with wings. The blue dragon.

“Where am I?” I ask aloud.

“You are in the cave Amphi” a voice whispers.

“I feel numb” I whisper.

“The cave allows you to be earthed as you will be fluctuating through frequencies” the voice echoes through the cave.

“You are germinating. You are stepping into the dark and your soul is taking over. It is time to release resistance and step into your destiny. Let go and grow into your power” it continues.

My body feels tired. I lift my arms and watch a black substance drip from my fingertips. “Your dark mind is taking over to begin the transformation. You must face yourself and accept your destiny else you will be stuck in the dark forever.”

“Healing through isolation and suffering?” I ask as I watch the dark substance drip, drip, drip.

“No, through liberation. Liberation from limitation.”

I hear thunder and then it starts raining. I watch the droplets cleanse the Earth below.

A spider lowers herself in front of me.

“You will receive a valuable gift, a gift from All Spirit” I hear a male voice. I look around but don’t see anyone. I watch as the spider waits patiently for insects to be attracted to the light of my fire and get caught in her web. The raindrops sparkle like gems strung on a necklace. I take off my bangle and reach out towards her. She lowers herself onto it and starts spinning a web.

The web is a perfect circle with a hole in the centre.

“Only good can enter here” I hear the Indian voice again. He is sitting next to me. He attaches a string of beads with a feather dangling at the end to my bangle and ties the dream catcher to my braid. It rests on my left breast.

I want to thank him but when I look up he has vanished.

The storm rages outside like the feeling inside my chest.

“From the darkness comes the light” the voice says compassionately.

“From the dark comes life” I mutter to myself.

“Go back to the night of the Pulsse” I hear my own voice. I close my eyes.

I’m lying on the floor in fetal position with my hand over my heart. The purple glow has faded, and I feel weary from all the crying. I can’t remember why I was crying though. I crawl to the bathroom, turn on the light and rinse my face with water. The cold water feels warm over my cold fingers. I splash it over my face expecting to feel refreshed, but my face is numb.

When I look in the mirror I see a gray face staring back. My hair is pale, my skin white and my lips and eyes are gray. I try to cry but my tears seem to have dried

up too. I stay in the house and begin to feel completely detached from my old life. Nothing is satisfying. I am numb, yet restless. The more I suppress The Urge the more restless I become. My skin itches and I scratch until I bleed. I eat my nails and my nail beds. I pluck out my eyebrows and my lashes. Eventually I take my keys and my identity documents, place it on the kitchen counter and walk out.

“Why were you laying on the floor?” the voice asks.

“I don’t remember.”

“You suppressed The Urge and turned gray and emotionless. When the Purple Pulse brought up the pain to be released you held on and used your power to build a wall. You locked the pain in. Your soul has been trying to get your attention through your behavior. Go back”

“No, it hurt.” I resist.

“The pain is infesting your soul. Go back and let it go” the voice insists.

There is tension in my chest and I feel the cold air chill the tear tracks on my face, but I stay with it. I am lying on the floor emanating purple. I see my past flash before my eyes and don’t look away this time. This is what Atta meant when he told me to learn the lesson or I’ll need to repeat the class. If you don’t learn from your mistakes you have to repeat it until you do.

I was so conditioned by pain that I recreated it. When the Purple Pulse came I didn't have the strength to face myself and instead of freedom I imprisoned myself.

Fear was hiding behind every choice I ever made. Fear has a face, in fact it has three, and it was attached to my soul. The faces turned in opposite directions and changed their expressions so quickly you never knew which one was talking. It was distorted at first, but it became clearer and stronger over time. It was tucked into the back of my neck and gleaming over my shoulder when I kissed a man. It sucked the life out of me as I searched for self-worth in his lips.

It made me go back to the people and things that hurt me because it knew I was easily swayed by my emotions. So, by almost drowning me under waves of guilt, sorrow, loneliness and insecurities I would be so desperate for air I would grab onto anything or anyone for help and I would be staring up at the same people and situations that got me gasping in the first place.

It is me. I accept my shadow self. I was looking for love outside myself and it left me shattered and confused.

I am in the fetal position again and I manage to rewind time, for the first time. I get up from the floor, kneel on my knees crying. I stand up and walk out the door and wave to someone in a car. The car reverses and a guy gets out and walks backwards towards me with a suitcase in his hand. He holds me for the last time.
"Bye Colin."

A layer of purple light floats like luminescent liquid below the roof of the cave. It starts drizzling onto the fire. I watch the fire fizzle out. Besides the river of light above me I am surrounded with darkness now.

The purple light drips onto my hands and illuminates the lines on my palms. As the light runs along the lines, they change. My index finger grows longer as my head line connects with my heart line. The line of mercury connects my life line with my heart line to form an upside-down triangle at the center of my palm.

The liquid coalesces on the wall behind me. I turn, and it reflects all the light now. It is a mirror.

I briefly see my silhouette but turn away.

“Look at me” I hear my own voice.

“Look at me, look at me, look at me!” I hear myself sing and giggle.

I feel afraid. I don’t want to be here.

“You can’t run away from me. I am a part of you.”

I cover my ears. “Stop it, go away!”

“If you chase me away you consciously lock up a part of yourself and you will feel forever fragmented.”

I cover my ears and close my eyes. This is just a dream, when I open my eyes this will all be over.

“Do you know why you do what you do? Do you think about yourself as often as you think about others?”

This is all just a dream.

“What is a dream Amphi? Where do your dreams come from?”

Why is this happening? This must be punishment for what I did?

“Ugh, you create so much noise trying to drown out your inner voice. You don’t trust your gut, so you keep reliving karmic cycles. Stop punishing yourself!”

“Why is this happening? Why am I here?” I yell scared.

“You are drawing your blockage to the fore for healing. Your roots are weak they need to grow deep for you to grow into your power.”

“Jet” I whisper.

“Jet has weak core beliefs and is easily swayed by impressions. His insecurities entrained your energy and made you feel spacey and vulnerable, that’s why you were gaining weight.”

“Why don’t I feel like that around Boarian?”

“Boarian grounds your energy and reflects your need for earthing outside energies as static builds up and interferes with your own signal.”

I hold onto my knees to feel safer.

“Amphi, you have been suppressing your calling for a long time. Jet is secondary. Your attraction to Jet is a manifestation of your constant desire to distract yourself. You have drained yourself to force you to look inward and allow a new life to be born within you. Your true self. Face yourself so you can heal.”

I turn around and look at the waterfall of purple light.

Jet's is staring back at me.

"You think you own me!" I yell at him.

"I thought you loved me?" he says angrily.

"You are selfish" I yell.

"Look who's talking?" he smirks.

"Why do I have to suffer?" I start crying.

"You only suffer because you cling to your pain. If you let go and allow yourself to heal you will not need to retake the same class over and over again. Let go and allow your soul to guide you to your highest expression" I hear my own voice. I look up to see myself staring back at me, but my face looks lopsided.

"Wait, he is reflecting me. I see myself in him."

"Jet" I call.

He appears again.

"Thank you for showing me love" I confess.

A tear rolls down his cheek.

"Thank you for igniting my fire and bringing meaning back to my world" he says and dissolves.

I reach out to him, but he has already vanished.

“I can’t believe you did that to him, you are a coward!” I cry to myself.

“You need external approval to feel important and it drains all your power. You need to change the way you see yourself” I hear my own voice. I look up and I am staring back at myself again.

“Sometimes I feel things that are very overwhelming, both joy and pain” I sniff.

“You feel deeply and that is your power, you must learn to project it and not become uprooted by it.”

The mirror expands into a wall of water and an orca pod swims towards me. I step back. “You must learn to feel at home in the ocean of your emotions. That is where your power lies, but you fear the water like you fear your power.”

“I don’t have power, I don’t even have a power animal” I waddle in self-pity.

“You didn’t have a fixed name or spirit animal because you are the ocean. Your home is the dark mind. You need to trust yourself enough to be guided by your heart and release the fear of feeling.”

I step forward and place my hand through the water and touch one of the orcas.

My legs become covered in scales and my feet grow fins.

“You are a mermaid, half in water and half on land, one foot in the physical world and one foot in the dark. You prevented yourself from evolving because you were used to suffering, but love is a healer even if it has to tear you apart first.”

My stomach illuminates. There is a trident with a circle around it and a red eye between my legs.

“Tearing yourself apart, bit by bit, exposing your soul. I felt you love yourself, if only for a second. Complete with your darkness” I mumble to myself.

The seed breaks open and the power surges down my legs. A serpent coiled in my groin awakens and curls up my spine. I look at my reflection in the water wall.

“Ssshe” I lisp with the tongue and eyes of a serpent.

16

The further away we get from the jungle the less tense I feel. I relax my fists. I hear Bo and Cro laughing behind me. As long as I never see her again I don't care what those lunatics are on about. I throw the black stone Gnome gave me into the air and catch it again as I walk ahead.

“Where did you get that obsidian?” Bo asks.

“The Trunks gave it to me to open gates or something.”

“Oh, he's going to see some trippy shit” Cro laughs.

“What do you mean?”

“Obsidian is used for scrying” Bo explains.

“And that is?” I look back and raise my eyebrow.

“It is used to see into the future and bring hidden things to the light” he tries again.

“They explained something like that. Luckily where we're going it won't work on me.” Wait what am I saying? How do I even know that?

“I got a pink rhodonite stone with black oxides” Bo shows me the stone dangling around his neck.

“What’s it for?” I ask.

“It restores a sense of equilibrium without stifling the release processes” he explains.

“Still finding your balance?” I ask mockingly.

“Bro, do you have any idea how much stress is created when your dreams are suppressed? It completely fucks up your soul structure and you can end up like? Like you!” he points to me.

“Fuck you Bo” I zap him.

“What did you get Cro?” I ask pointing to his stone with banded pinks and reds.

“Cro is addicted to sex” Bo laughs.

“Fuck off Bo” Cro pushes him aside. “Rhodochrosite blends energies where there is disruption due to emotional stress” Cro explains.

“Shitty self-confidence creates tension in the stomach and pelvic areas, especially issues revolving around sex” Bo adds, because he likes being the biggest asshole.

The cloud cover starts appearing overhead.

I see a building in the distance, but I can't make out what it is. We must be getting closer to Light City.

"Well, would you look at that? Bo laughs pointing to the building. "I didn't think I'd ever see that place again."

"What is it?" I ask.

"It's a prison" he says. Come to think about it, I've never seen a prison in the city before, now I know why.

"I've always wondered where they put you crazy motherfuckers when they find you" I yell to the back.

"The same place they put everything that's not neatly stencilled in, in a cage to be tamed, muzzled or killed!" Bo yells back. "They even hide the fucking prisons in the middle of nowhere so they're not an eye-sore, then they stamp a permanent sentence on your forehead if you break their rules, just to remind you and everyone else about your 'bad-blood'" he says disgusted.

"What do they do to the infected?" I ask and look at his wrist. I can still see a scar.

"They restrain you, so you don't kill yourself" he says and lifts his wrists for me to see.

“I managed to escape before I chewed through my own wrist” he says nonchalantly. His wrists are tattooed with bear prints now.

“What happened?” I ask. “They took me from the military base after I started showing signs of restlessness and insomnia. Once you’re in quarantine things start getting intense very quickly. I think being confined made The Urge intensify. It came in waves. I would be calm and then suddenly lose my shit and start raging. Then the dreams started, and I stopped sleeping altogether. The dreams became hallucinations and shit went south from there. I started hallucinating about trees, birds and the jungle. The itching drove me crazy. I tried to dig a fucking hole in the floor to get out. Oh, and I chewed off all my nails” he shows me his scarred nail beds. “Then I started pulling out my hair. All of it, everywhere. They didn’t do anything. I just wanted to get out of there and I didn’t care if it meant dying. When I started chewing my wrist they came in to sedate me. I locked them in and escaped. They left me for dead in the desert. I just kept following The Urge and it led me to jungle.”

“No wonder citizens are so scared of The Urge! If I saw a hairless bloody maniac eating himself alive I’d freak out too” I confess.

“What’s your story Jet? How did the city spark your fire?” Bo asks.

“Started drinking in high school, never looked back since. In the dark most of the time, felt more at peace underneath the ocean than in the city. Talk of the devil...” I point towards the horizon. Light City illuminates the darkened clouds overhead.

Clouds like an oppressive weight above the city, trying to get their attention but they just light them up with more distractions.

We arrive in the city and people move away from us like we are inferior and dirty. We look different. They all look the same. They don't have time to stop though. They stare or give dirty looks as they rush past. There is always somewhere to be or something to do in Light City.

"They all look like dolls. Are their contours stenciled in?" Cro laughs.

"Yes" I say embarrassed, like I represent them somehow. Everybody is focused on their Palmers, on the maps of their lives, the irony. I look at my palms, they seem special now, like they're uniqueness must make them meaningful.

"What the fuck? Check this place out?" Cro freaks out as we move up the ladder and the dancing hologram of Sky-Lo start flirting with him. "Wow, the first Light Being!" Cro stares in awe as Sky-Lo winks at him.

I look around and I am momentarily enticed by the shimmers objects and pretty holograms dancing around the buildings. I also thought I was happy. The cheap thrills kept me mildly satisfied for such a long time that I thought that it was normal. People holding on to the idea of happiness but not sure what it feels like. Likes and follows like shots of dopamine that lead to nothing but addictions to approval.

"The new society was built on suppression of The Urge and to find meaning they ended up chasing the feeling of self-worth through status and recognition" Bo says and pulls Cro away from the hologram.

“I must say some of this shit is fucking awesome!” Cro continues to freak out as we pass the fast food stops.

“They seem really creative to me?” he says impressed.

“The creators of the ‘New World’ are guided by Sky-Lo to fulfill needs and create new needs within the city” I explain.

“I’d like to meet these creators, they’re fucking geniuses” he says as he drools at the holograms posing in lingerie.

“The creators are obviously the wealthiest among the citizens and they are the ones that make choices for society” I add.

“Yeah, but I wouldn’t let these zombies make any choices either” Bo says with a look of disgust at the people swarming past him in autopilot.

“They take life so seriously” Cro laughs at the intense news headline. I don’t blame them, I’d be afraid if I was enslaved by the system too.

I turn and read; “Male oracle fucks Whore!”

“Angry robots prefer the comforts of slavery.”

“What the fuck?” I say in disbelief, squint and look closer.

Now it read ‘Water shortages in the East cause uprisings’ and ‘Working class get salary increases.’

“The system they created to simplify their lives has enslaved them and stripped them of their survival instincts. A slave mentality would become enslaved by anything, even their savior, technology” Bo says unimpressed.

“The illusion of freedom” I mutter as I try to take everything in.

“I don’t know what they thought would happen if you implanted fear into the minds of creators? Their fear of hell made them create it. After all, that’s what creators do” Bo rants at the back.

The magic feels so far away now.

“Do you see this? They’re completely disconnected from nature, their needs and each other!” Bo continues. I’m still taking in all the busy clones.

“Jet, do you see how their detachment from nature is destroying their bodies and Her Body? For what? For profit and recognition” Bo turns my shoulder.

“Children born in this system cannot make their own decisions and are bred to be working class consumers. The rare few who think for themselves become producers. Uncertainty is scary and in a world of statistics and insurance policies, there is little room for magic” Bo falls silent.

We reach my apartment. I don’t have a Palmer, so I enter with voice recognition and security questions. The lights flicker when we enter.

“Welcome home Jet, you have multiple new messages from Colin and all necessary updates have been made during your absence” Myho updates me.

“Wow, a robotic wife” Cro laughs.

“Taking it to the next level I see” Bo says as he goes straight to the kitchen to eat. I lost my appetite and just sit on the couch. The clouds are darker, and I feel short of breath. I need space.

“In an insecure world, confidence is king!” Cro sings as he scrolls through the menu.

“No, that’s cocaine” Bo interrupts.

“Okay wait, anti-depressants?” Cro asks.

“That’s obvious, depression” Bo says.

“Sleeping pills?” Cro laughs.

“Fuck Cro for insomnia, you suck at this game” Bo laughs too.

“Hey Jet, material possessions?” Bo yells to me.

“Sense of worth” I whisper to myself.

“Do you even know what they put in here?” Cro frowns while inspecting the food.

“Who cares? It tastes good” I scowl and get up and go to the kitchen.

“What’s up with you?” Cro asks after taking a bite, and frowns when he tastes the food.

“Additives” Bo laughs.

“You should be grateful” I say angrily.

“Ah, he doesn’t feel Amphi anymore” Bo gleams at me, “I know the feeling” he puts the food aside.

“Why the fuck would you say that?” I slam my fists on the counter.

“Amphi is feeling the same pain bro, she is germinating too. She really likes you, but she was driven by her desires. Everyone has their thing, she’s driven by desire, that’s her thing” Bo sounds genuinely sympathetic.

“Yeah, typical of you to start caring after you fucked her!” I feel like breaking his face.

“We all feel pain, but it’s how we use the feeling that determines the results. Do you use it to heal or to destroy yourself and the world around you?” Cro tries to relieve the tension.

“Fuck her and fuck you too, I’m going out” I turn and walk to the bathroom.

“Sleep over there and get out first thing in the morning” I point to the couches in the lounge.

The door slides shut behind me. I lean over the basin and try to hold down the tears. I look up and see my reflection in the mirror for the first time since I left. I touch my face and then the reflection in the mirror. I look like Yoo.

“Shave off hair. Number two” I command as the tears dam up underneath my eyelids. The light scans my scalp. A part of me wants to step out of range but the image of Amphi on top of Boarian flashes into my mind. I stand firm as the light scans my head and the dreads start dropping to the floor. I am short of breath as I struggle to hold down the heartache. My hands rest on the dresser and my back crouches over.

“Play music. High Volume” I command Myho. The music starts and drowns out my crying. I need to get out of here. I walk over to the latest trends drawer and feel overwhelmed with all the new updates to my wardrobe. I scan through a few

options, but it makes me feel nauseous. I select favorites. Black bulca leather. Long sleeve straight cut black cotton shirt. Navy blue head scarf tucked into the grey, short fur jacket I grab on the way out.

“Animals” I whisper to myself.

“Make sure you are out by the time I get back” I yell as I place my hand on the Nigredo pad, but quickly pull it away and turn to check if they saw. They didn’t.

“Call Condor” I command, and the car starts as I enter the display room.

“Once the guests leave they are no longer welcome. Secure home” I instruct Myho as I climb into the Condor. “It’s Jet, let’s go” I authorize manual drive and the platform lowers to ground level.

The streets are busier than usual. It must be the start of a new shift. I drive to the nearest strip club. I order my usual whiskey on the rocks and watch a woman dance. The alcohol is strong and takes my breath away, but I drink it anyway. I call a girl for a lap dance. I sip my whiskey. It numbs my mouth. She takes the glass from my hands and steps over my legs. She puts my hands on her ass and sways her hips. She has a red lace thong on. Red reminds me of her. The girl rubs her breasts in front of my face. My mind starts to wander. I feel nothing.

“Bodies are just chemical factories that need to be upgraded” I hear my father’s voice.

I don’t know how long she danced. I wasn’t there.

“You want to see my pussy?” she whispers while rubbing my hand on her breast. I snap back. What the fuck am I doing here? What the fuck is this? I lift her off me and kiss her on her forehead.

A bouncer follows me out. I haven't paid. I feel tension in my back and shoulders. I'm about to fight.

“Become aware of how you react under pressure or in fearful situations and consciously change your approach” I hear Yoo's voice.

The bouncer pushes me, and I step back. People crowd around us and start recording on their Palmers. I turn around and walk away.

I scan the crowd around us to find a way out. They all look animated. I feel light-headed. They start screaming out “I am not enough! I am not enough!” I feel sick.

“Come here!” the bouncer yells, but I'm too nauseous to respond.

Everything was just a dream. “It's not real Jet” I say to myself and try to push through the crowd. The sadness returns, and I hear someone yell “Coward!”

“You could stay stuck in this depression or you can follow The Urge” I hear Yoo's voice again.

I run to a bin and puke. The alcohol burns my throat.

What the fuck is the point of all this? People selling their souls for money and a false sense of security? So, what happens after you get all those things that were supposed to make you happy and you figure out that it merely made the void bigger because now, not even all these things can satisfy you? Then you give yourself over to self-destructive behavior because you secretly wish that the

suffering will end quicker, and that you won't die comfortably numb in an old age home.

You get what you are. I puke again. Everything is fake. I spit the remaining vomit out of my mouth. On the one side you numb the pain with mild pleasures to make all your responsibilities feel worthwhile, and on the other side you have complete disregard of self and your body, wait, what is it called? Oh yeah, YOLO.

The crowd starts to leave. They look disgusted. They have places to be. Their dependence on the system for all their needs has carved a look of desperation on the one side of their faces. The Urge for freedom that they have managed to keep contained, but under the designer clothes and rejuvenation treatments that make everything look "alright" is a suffering soul, or no soul at all.

"Are you happy?" I ask a random lady as she glares at me. She walks away quickly.

"Are you happy?" I turn a man by his shoulder. He shrugs me off and walks away.

"Are you a-fucking-live?" I yell out loud. If you aren't happy at least get angry, at least do something! I turn to a guy "Are you angry?" The guy just looks at me. I wave my hand in front of his face. "Is any of this shit even real?"

"You look like you just got out of hell" they guy says and steps back nervously.

"Yeah, where you eat but are never satisfied, drink but stay thirsty and work until death" I mutter to myself as I walk away.

A balloon appears in my hand and lifts me out of my body. I'm floating around like an astronaut hovering over the city and it feels like I'm seeing it for the first time. There is a key in my hand. I float upwards and the city looks like a portal to a different world. As I float higher different layers of potential realities start forming

over it. It's like I'm looking through a keyhole of potentiality and I have the key that opens all the doors. I hold down my tears and the rage comes up and pops the balloon. I fall into the portal and back into my body. The rage is still with me but gives way to compassion. I breathe deeply, and the tears start flowing. They are unaware of the suffering that they have created for themselves.

"Changing how you perceive yourself and the world and coming to terms with your true power will set you on the course to your destiny" Undine's words replay in my mind.

I don't have to stay here. I can step into another state of being by going through another door. By entering a different state of mind.

I hear the cop sirens. Somebody must have complained. Public disturbance. Public fucking disturbance! I run to the Condor.

"You have everything you need, right? Why are you freaking out like this?" I ask myself. I'm talking to myself again. Maybe if I take a hit of Nigredo all this shit will go away? I can't believe I'm even considering this.

"You have to remove the weeds that continually spring up to enable your true self to grow into your highest potential. To do this you need to tear our parts of yourself that no longer serve your highest good" replays in my head.

"It's Jet, connect to Myho" I command. "Tell guests to wait for my return" I command the house.

"They have already left Jet."

I drive faster and see them getting onto the platform to catch the skytrain. I stop the Condor.

“Go home” I instruct and run to the platform at the bottom of the building. I catch the train just before it closes.

The skytrain has a sleek, neat interior with ample room for expanded Palmer use so employees can boost productivity by working in transit. I take a seat at the window. The advertisement hologram waves in front of my face to get my attention. I swipe to remove it. I hold down my tears and close my eyes to not draw any attention. I feel vulnerable, and I don't want anybody to see. After all, emotions are kept under control in Light City.

Suppressed creative expression, numbed by routine, fueled by stimulants and driven by recognition. I can't unsee what I saw. I start crying.

The skytrain glides up the spirals as it circles the building and stops at the platform where I last saw them. Please be there, please be there. The door opens, and they walk straight into me. They start laughing.

“Are you drunk or heading home already?” Cro jokes.

“I want you to tell the Trunks that I'm going” I gasp.

“You're going to what?” Cro asks.

“I'm going to trust my gut” I wipe the tears from my eyes. They both laugh and give me a tap on the back.

“Looks like we're on the wrong train then?” Cro smiles.

“Looks like you’re going to give me one of your groovy head scarves” Bo pulls on my scarf, “we’re going to need it where we’re going.”

“So, you guys are coming with?” I ask excited.

“I would prefer another color” Cro jokes.

I take that as a yes.

Maybe we prefer to keep our heads in the clouds, so we don’t need to see what’s going on around us. Maybe we don’t want to see that there is nowhere else to climb to. Maybe space is the only escape for the prison we created for ourselves.

Comfort zones are never as comfortable as they seem once you grow out of them.

Thank Yoo