

**WAKE OF THE  
WANDERER**

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PART I

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**THE ARTIFACT**



**T**he expert cannot see as the novice sees. The expert sees possibilities unfolding toward the horizon; her mind grasps only the threads that might be realized. The novice has not yet glimpsed these; they are behind the sea of mistakes that clouds his vision.

But the expert can no longer see those mistakes; she has learned to look past them. If the rules of the game change, and the mistakes come back into play, she will not notice.

This is why one cultivates beginner's mind: We all become experts at our own patterns of living, miss possibilities, lose flexibility. But this practice is—in most respects—about seeing past the filters we have learned over the course of our own lifetimes. Evolution made us experts at living on Earth and under its Sun; that expertise is wired into our genes. How will we see past the possibilities of our distant home? How will we see as beginners under other stars?

—Viktor Goto, *The Notes of Viktor Goto, Renouncer of Oneiri Station: Juvenilia*, compiled by Elitsa Han.

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CARLOS STOOD under the sun and focused on its warmth. He could feel the heat map on the surface of his skin adjusting. A simulative layer reacted to his attention, its procedural mechanisms working to keep up with his perception. The act of noticing was all it took to conjure in this place.

He walked the shore of the obsidian beach, clumps of black sand crunching beneath his feet. This was the site of the great battle: the place where Viktor, the first Renouncer, had been confronted by the *Other*. Carlos had been cast into this part of the Dream World by chance. He had come here to meet with Asumi; but, given this opportunity, he would delay linking up with her a bit longer.

Other Renouncers had walked in Viktor's steps before, finding traces of his resolve, or the memories of Owen or the other untethered he had stitched together along the sea. None had yet surfaced any sign of the creature Viktor had reported encountering, but when any Renouncer found themselves here, the strands of memory cast throughout the shore demanded attention. Carlos now felt that call.

That time was so long ago; the memories had been tossed by the sea, broken into smaller fragments, worn smooth—like the grains of sand that made up the beach. Carlos examined those pebbles of memory, opening himself. Sensory recall came first: the smell of rust, the feel of air blowing through him and chilling him, hairs standing up into gooseflesh. After he had a foundation in those scattered sensory experiences, he ventured out—constructing a map from raw perception to language and self-reflection—and began piecing those atoms together into conscious awareness. The awareness was anchored in its own long-gone present; it was like standing inside a ghost.

The sensory overlay warped; he was looking through the lens distortion of another's memory. The area had changed

little—only the waves were off. He could switch his view back and forth from his present to the other's past, though with a little difficulty. Like shifting back and forth between two interpretations of a visual illusion; he couldn't hold both in mind at once.

Wait—something in the sync was off. The tint of the sky above the waves... its color was wrong, the blue too deep. The clouds he expected were ridged and contoured; they looked like chunks of ice. The source of that image was neither in his present or the overlaid past—he only glimpsed the misalignment when he switched his perspective. A sense of warmth seeped through him in those moments, like the tingle of electric current, heating him with its *wrongness*.

That warmth—he had never felt anything like that before. If Asumi were... He was pulled suddenly at the thought of her. At first he mistook it for the usual signals wired into his body, back in the hospital where they were dreaming—the nudges. But it grabbed his conscious awareness and jammed itself into his inner monologue: *Yes, go get her; return here.*

He jumped, breaking from his walking meditation both mentally and physically, then tried to snap back to the thread that had just hijacked his thought. *No, don't lose it...*

He could feel the compulsion to find Asumi still pulsing through his mind, now rooted in his own thoughts; he had delayed and was overdue to meet with her. He scanned through his thinking, trying to unify the past and present he had grasped earlier, to find where the thread had pulled at him.

It had been like having another Renouncer present.

“Viktor?”

His voice rang out through the beach. No answer.

Whatever had spoken to him... had it withdrawn? Was it waiting for him to fulfill its request and bring Asumi? She would be waiting for him either way. He turned his attention towards the task of locating her, feeling the small tingles of sensation that passed from the waking world into his awareness here: turning, turning—northward.

He took a moment to see if he could find that pull again. Nothing. *North, then.* He ran, his legs lengthening with each stride.

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ASUMI MADE her way south along the stone cliffs that lined the coast. There was a clear break between the ridge line and the tufts of land that seemed to bob under the sea waves to her right. She sat a moment, dangling her legs in the air from the top of the cliff, and looked over the patterns of filmy moss that dotted the stone anywhere it was exposed to the sun.

She turned back to her task. She was here to meet Carlos. She sank into monitoring the sensations in her own body, searching for cues that might point her in his direction...

A sound echoed like war drums across the landscape, jarring her out of her meditation. She stood back up from where she'd been sitting on the cliff's edge, saw a figure sprinting toward her in the distance. She had no time to prepare or process; it was Carlos, and he was already here.

*Something—someone—was active on the south shore. I think it was Viktor.* He turned—not waiting for a reply—already running back. She followed him, running automatically, increasing the length and muscle contraction capacity of her legs, hanging just back and to his left. She ventured into

Carlos's awareness, found a strand of it regarding her, ensuring she was keeping up; otherwise, he had poured all his effort into leading her back to the black sand shore to the south and the recall behind *why*.

Asumi had never felt Carlos so shaken. They were on a routine excursion—a series of sleep cycles spent on the surface instead of Oneiri Station, where the Renouncers made their home. Each subjective night, they would don the wires and electrodes, link the IV and their ports, and fall asleep. They would wake up in the Dream World—here—where they would find one another. They had journeyed together this way many times before, and thus far—at least in her assessment—nothing out of the ordinary had occurred.

Carlos was starting to slow down. The cliffs before them became more uneven, then turned into a series of boulders, eventually giving way to stretches of black sand. The coast was lined with ripple marks, the glassy sand reflecting back the blues and reds of the sky. Carlos stopped a short way into the sand bank and Asumi paused just behind him, carefully monitoring how he was directing his attention.

She could place him precisely via proprioception, as easily as locating her own hand. She could feel the sensation of his foot on the rock, thinking through his sensorium at will. He regarded her with that same prudent curiosity in their connectedness, honoring certain boundaries, ignoring others. This was the mindset all Renouncers cultivated in their practice. In the Dream World, to find and work with others of the order was to encroach on the personal space of one another's minds. This was but one more thing to be renounced: the privacy that comes from being a mind to oneself, and any illusion about what goes on in other minds.

They were melded now. Carlos was cultivating a relent-

less focus. Asumi responded by stretching her awareness outward, monitoring all around them: a shimmering, periodic curiosity that illuminated their nearby surroundings. In this work they were like the satellite arrays the machines had set in various orbits through the Vaskania system: a network of lower resolution sensors locating anomalous or interesting phenomena, and a focused lens shifting its aim and uncovering their detail.

Carlos was backtracking his own steps—a difficult task in the Dream World. The landscapes of this place were imprecise, their impact on perception was rough and fluid—realized only through the act of traversal and observation, projected from some lossy, unknown medium. There were monuments and features of the landscapes that the simulation deemed important in its way, and once these were seen, you could then make direct progress in their direction. But their objective now was a shoreline, the specifics of the coastline and its infinite fractal dimension would vary on each encounter by a human observer. Their best hope would simply be to walk as much of its length as they could manage.

They were looking for the fragment that had spoken to Carlos earlier. Asumi could feel his recall play out again. He rummaged through it, cautiously appraising its veracity, then turned back to the thoughts he could scan from the beach, as sand and soil in a sieve.

This was *that* beach then—the place where Viktor had confronted the *Other*. Carlos would certainly not be the first to have felt a fragment of the first Renouncer's memory here. The work Viktor had done in reconstructing the minds of the untethered had only been matched by the effort of Elitsa Han and his successors. They had finished what they could of what he started, saving most of those

who remained untethered after his disappearance. Walking the dream world, you could still feel the echoes of that time pulsing through you.

But in his work, Viktor had encountered something else, something of which Elitsa and the others had found no trace. A creature—an alien, many believed. At least, most of the Renouncers were convinced that a genuine alien encounter was the source of Viktor's account. One observer, no witnesses, no remaining evidence—but they knew the efficacy of Viktor's techniques, the clarity they produced, even in this murky world which captured their dreaming selves.

Still, no one was infallible, and no others since had found any trace of anything alien. Maybe the alien—assuming it did in fact exist—left no residue in the Dream World. Or perhaps it had just been much better at cleaning up after its own thoughts.

Asumi was now fully linked with Carlos, opening herself to his memory and perception, immersing herself both in his earlier and present experience of the place. He could feel the sense of *otherness*, the trace, separating it from himself. And now she could too. There were familiar sensations: grains of sand between the toes, the roaring of waves diminishing to a background hum after repetition, a sudden breeze blasting salty air in time with the waves breaking on the shore. These were human sensations. Inside that, though, something else. The red sun warmed them, but digging deep into the residue, they felt a different kind of warmth spreading through them, heating them.

They were standing at the shore, had felt some basic human comfort there between the warmth of the sun and the rhythm of the waves. But now they felt dissatisfied, dried out. A longing for other comforts emerged; it took offense at

the directness of the red sun, objected to the effort the musculoskeletal system exerted as it stood upright against gravity. It wanted to retreat from these hardships to which the human body was habituated. That longing again, as if being pulled under the water, being immersed in the current and jetting away at high speeds was the most natural, comforting thing in the world. Like wrapping up in a warm blanket. A pure, care-free release of active-doing.

*Here.* That was it. The word formed in their minds—the first Renouncer. A *Viktor*-ness was there, its resemblance to the memories from his era was unmistakable. Carlos had felt this character to that thought earlier, had matched it to sensations of Viktor he had encountered before. He had not hallucinated that pull—it beckoned; it had a purpose, small fragment that it was.

*Follow this.* Carlos and Asumi probed each other to confirm that the other was willing, but that brief hesitation was a formality. This was what they were here for. They followed.

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VIKTOR'S FRAGMENT had urged them south along the edge of the shore. They had followed its nudges as though they were hunces they both shared. As they turned or moved around, a subtle satisfaction or dissatisfaction would rise within them; this thread of Viktor had been woven into them as if it were an additional neural input wired to the stomach's sense of fullness. If they focused their attention on the sensations, more concrete words or images would come to them, but it took time, as if that thread were manually tapping out a binary signal over a wire.

They were at the shore's outer edge, on an outcrop of

rock, looking down over the sea. Tall waves crashed against the stone below.

Go. Viktor again. Asumi explored it, felt its earnestness. They were both skeptical; she could feel Carlos raising his guard.

*Into the sea?* They would be swept away. Asumi opened her perception more, feeling her way behind the urging. New images began to appear in their minds: a pocket of stone, a sandy shore, a tunnel and—beyond that—darkness. Sounds echoed, coming from an ingress. It was below the rock they were standing on.

Go. Asumi and Carlos pooled their thoughts. It could be a trap of some sort. That alien, mysteriously absent since Viktor's encounter—could it have captured and reshaped him? Using him, or some thought or intention it had learned to mimic, as a lure? What if they became untethered—their bodies left mindless, as those in Viktor and Elitsa's era had been?

It seemed the only real risk to consider. There were dangers in the Dream World; these would lead to discomfort, pain, terror—many forms of hardship were possible. In the end, though, the dreamer would wake up. They would recover in the waking world and eventually return here when they dreamt again.

But maybe it was a fallacy, Carlos considered, to frame this in terms of their existing expectations. This active, disembodied thread of Viktor was something new. The risks to which they would be exposed could also be new. The situation was entirely out of their ordinary context. If it were the *Other*, the threat might be much more insidious. It could infect their minds, reshaping them into its unwitting agents, sleeping inside them, waiting for just the right cue.

Asumi was feeling out the details they had to work with

—exploring the disposition, (such that she could discern) in that fragmented urge from Viktor—considering what possibilities were open. She could feel no hostility.

*I think we can merge more.* Her unconscious was at work already; she and Carlos were wrapping around one another, manifesting fins and tendrils that extended from their now-shared body. They were becoming an inhuman composite, a melding of two that might hope to navigate in the water. *If we can find a spot where the current is just right...*

*Yes, yes. I can lead.* It was—had to be—Viktor. What could be contained in that fragment? It had been obvious earlier it was more than a memory; there was some process of his that was still active, but how much of *him* could be encoded there? It had a direction and a purpose but very little else. Like finding someone's appetites and plugging it into your brain's signal processing with the rest of your body's inputs. How much could you trust the appetites of someone good-natured—was any of that good nature in the appetites, or only in the now-absent parts that restrained them?

*We know the way.* There was something else hidden inside Viktor and that urging. The earlier sensation replayed (a memory?)—falling into the ocean as though it were a warm blanket. *Trust.*

It was a lot to ask. But they were Renouncers. This is what they had committed to doing, who they had committed to becoming. To follow in the footsteps of the first Renouncer, to understand the Dream World, to keep the other humans of the Vaskania system safe in it if they could.

*As in all understanding,* Carlos began and Asumi finished, *nothing ventured, nothing gained.*

ASUMI-CARLOS HAD TRUSTED that additional instinct at the beckoning of what they hoped really was Viktor. Their reshaped body contained smaller holes through which the flow of water could be directed into and around them with precision. Tentacles and spikes could navigate, anchor to the rock and use it to make a slow but sturdy progress along the underside of the stone outcropping of the shoreline. They were not sure if their configuration was something they had envisioned on their own, or if they had been fed the ideas by Viktor, or by the other set of sensations he had brought into them.

Now in the water, they let that trust continue to guide them. They were going faster than they could have managed on their own—the way getting pulled out to sea by one of Earth's riptides must have felt. But the movement was purposeful; they probed the side of the rock above that made up the shore line, found their way down into a crevice. They were navigating the currents instinctively—it had to be the other memories smuggled in through Viktor's fragment—hopping between currents and the directions in which they flowed before Carlos or Asumi could notice any difference in the water.

As their movement was being guided by another, they shifted their attention to monitoring their joint perception. Asumi could feel sensations in their body reacting to minute differences in pressure and temperature. Carlos followed, focused more on these—tried to resolve some visual correspondence to these sensations—but couldn't. He could reason through it, though. Those differences in pressure must correspond to depth contours, the temperatures a proxy to the underlying dynamics which gave rise to the

currents. It was like having a transit map, given the ease of navigation through the other's urging—this creature's (it must be or have been, to have this natural fluidity in movement). It took them out from the shore some distance, changed current and direction, then pulled them back in again, but at a wide angle, eventually moving back underneath the rocks of the shore.

Asumi breathed in. It was as simple as remembering you could breathe at any time, ignoring the cues the world fed you in dreaming. Carlos was looking directly ahead of them, waiting, struggling to hold back the impulse to extend a tendril and anchor to this or that rock and brace for impact before being pulled away. The contents of his vision moved too fast for any conscious interaction, but there was hope that if any sudden danger emerged, and that other thing guiding them did not stop in time—or did not have their best interests in mind—then something of his or Asumi's unconscious would have time to react before the scenery accompanying the danger resolved in their visual awareness.

The rock was hard basalt throughout and would hurt—rather, it would be a limited simulation of painful—on impact. Any real danger in this situation would be what they were being pulled to, and what was behind the pulling. They caught and redirected their caution almost at the same moment, cueing off the processes of reasoning in each other's minds and reaching similar conclusions at once.

They had submerged completely underneath the rock, navigating an underground channel. The trajectory they were following in the water had arced upward, toward the surface again. Their speed reduced and they came to a stopping point, though still at high enough speed that the tendril—their tendril, Asumi reminded them—extended

instinctively in front of them, bracing. It formed a spring or coil, absorbing the shock of impact, then redirected, bouncing them out of the water onto a small rock ledge.

The blur of the water and their high speed navigation had settled back into a scene more suitable for human eyes and brains, though there was almost no light. Asumi was dilating their pupils, tweaking the range of frequency response they could tune into—at least what the Dream World made available—as Carlos peered around, beginning after several moments to detect edges in the rock features around them. Dark gray on black, that was all they had, but he traced out the mouth of a cave, formed the shape in their minds. *Here?*

*Here—through. Careful.* That thread of Viktor again. And there was something else it had tried to convey with that warning: *careful*. Carlos was concentrating on it, but could only resolve a texture. Segments, ridges, a leg, a sharp protuberance. He stopped then, had an inkling; Asumi was following his thoughts. Carving, tunneling, an appendage for that purpose. This cave was a burrow of some type. The thread had only been able to convey a few aspects of the creature's makeup, but it must have been one of the arthropod creatures they and other dreaming humans sometimes encountered and occasionally fought with or were ambushed by, at or around the surface or just underground. They entered.

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A FEW STEPS into the tunnel, and all light departed. There was very little sound; after they had flown with the other creature's impulse through the channels and ended up underground, the silence had stunned them. It was easy to

forget how windy the surface of the Dream World was, especially near the shorelines. You got accustomed to it; your unconscious tuned it out. But when thrown into genuine silence from there, that silence seemed to suck sounds out from inside you and surface them. Their footsteps let out crunches at the slightest contact with the ground of the tunnel; the breaths of their intertwined form were uneven, another deep resonance to the tone, air working at a low frequency just at the border of audible. There were a few distant echoes from drops of water elsewhere in the tunnel system, but the uneven structure and narrow chambers made it difficult to determine where it might be coming from.

*We can't stay blind here*, Carlos thought—Asumi agreed. She searched herself, Carlos, themselves, the configuration of their bodies, looking for some way to emanate light, or otherwise bring in more. She could magnify their sound input as a whole, separate some of the sources, then heighten those drops and—now, subtle shifts in the rock or dirt, maybe—dampening their footsteps, dampening any sound that matched the movement of their body.

The thread of Viktor was urging them again, and the creature—something in that other urging *knew* about other options—was already reshaping parts of their shared body, from the inside. Carlos was turning over and dissecting a feeling emanating from it, a pleasurable pulse. In the pulse there was a sensation, nerves: a swell that would rise up from their inner body, almost sexual in both of their immediate human framing. But—putting that aside—there was a different physical character underneath it. The pulse was outward, energetic, electrical, emissive; it could give off light.

*I think this sensation corresponds with some sort of bioluminescence*, Asumi felt Carlos share her appraisal, giving his

agreement; but also, she felt the urge from Viktor and those stowaway sensations he had brought along with him, beckoning: push further. She pushed, a small thrill tickling her and Carlos, and tiny granules of light began to speckle the surface of their shared skin. Reaching into that *tickle* sensation was like pushing more current through a light: the glow would increase, but too much and the wiring couldn't take it. It might short, or give off sparks. The sensation was unsettling; she couldn't hold it for long without feeling a compulsion to fidget, a compulsion that if not indulged escalated to a desire to flail, jump around, dance.

She pulled back from it, felt Carlos thrown unsteady from each pulse as well. There was a balance to work out here. He began moving them forward, taking steps; she wielded their pores of light as best she could, emitting dimmer pulses at an irregular pace, careful not to overload their biological circuitry with those overwhelming sensations. Already in the intimacy of shared thinking, there was another undercurrent to those pulses they were both all too aware of, but they had exercised the discipline necessary for sharing thoughts before—they were both conscious of where they were placing their attention, moving forward, emitting light, making their way.

This small hint of light gave them a few meters of visibility. The irregular character of the tunnel appeared before them as if through an endoscopy camera, as if they were descending into the throat of an enormous creature with stone and dirt innards. At each junction, they felt that inner urge guiding them, pushing them this way or that.

*How is it navigating, I wonder?* Carlos thought.

Asumi considered. *Hard to say when we don't know what we're being led to.* What was it?

Their partial companions were silent in this. Not as if in

hiding—at least neither Asumi or Carlos thought so at the moment—but as if there were no information to impart, nothing to say. These pieces of one human, and one—creature, Asumi was resolved to regard it as such, at least for now. If you just jammed a chunk of neurons from something else into your own mind, you couldn't exactly carry on a conversation with that chunk. Whatever beings had joined with them were limited in the thinking capacity they possessed; they contained just enough to lead them where they were going. With those constraints, she decided, it must be more like following a beacon than possessing a map.

They followed the tunnel system further. The tunnels were almost uniform in width, though sections here and there grew more bulbous or narrowed. The ground sloped upward or downward constantly; they realized this only from shifts in the angles at which their feet hit the ground. The tunnels were not straight but followed curves that sometimes seemed to double back on themselves, though at different levels, as if they were strings cast on the ground in a tangle. All they could do was hope those urges from Viktor or the other creature were leading them correctly.

Asumi heard something then; Carlos had already stopped, reacting to the same sound.

*Get ready*—the Viktor fragment.

*Ready for what?* But there was no other reply. The sound grew louder: a scurry, keratin or chitin on rock. They braced, Carlos reflexively extending a longsword from their shifting form. He readied it, but struck the ceiling of the tunnel in doing so; they didn't have the room in this cramped space to use it effectively. The sound continued, became louder. He and Asumi both shaped an arm each into a scythe that turned back in on itself; the shorter, curved shape would

slash more effectively in the narrowness of the tunnel if they were attacked and needed to defend themselves.

Carlos reshaped their vocal cords, blasting out a series of roars with the tone of a massive horn woven in. They had both used sounds like this to scare off creatures on approach, but it was only effective sometimes. There was a pause in the *click-click-clack* that was approaching. No—in *some* of it. That pause had struck off a shuffling of rhythms; clanks that had been masked by striking in unison now unfolded, there were more than...

A sound just behind them—Asumi pivoted both her arm and the tendrils of face-flesh with her eyes toward it, rock and dirt spraying from the wall of the tunnel as two appendages extended from it and toward her, several claws with a filiform sieve webbing the space between them. Its head was almost like a cricket's...

She had no other time to take in its form—it lunged out and struck as she arced her blade up to meet the claws, hacking off a few as the creature's other arm swung in below. The flesh of her fused form hardening in response, a few strands torn out by the slash of the digging claw.

She passed a cycle of her perception through Carlos. The others reached him, multiple creatures were swarming, but only a few would fit stacked in the tunnel. He was weaving through a continuous dance; he had extended another arm, wielding the two scythe blades like an explorer in the simulations cutting through a dense forest with machetes.

He let out another roar. Other creatures filed behind the one attacking her through the new section of tunnel they had formed in their ambush. She and Carlos felt their skin hardening; flesh had been pulled off here and there, some regrown, the rest vaporizing into the Dream World's impre-

cise tracking. They continued their frenzied carving, keeping the creatures at bay, but the sheer mass of the creatures stacked into each other pushed at them from both sides.

Then an electrical blast. The other creature inside them, inside the Viktor fragment, wired in there with them—it had pushed into its own pulsing capability, the same one Asumi had incorporated into their form earlier to light their way, and now emitted an enormous surge. For Carlos and Asumi it was like a seizure, sneezing, spasming, orgasming all in the same instant, a blink that overloaded conscious awareness and short-circuited perception. Then they were laughing, a ridiculous laughter, a redirection of the energy that had built up inside them. The creatures closest to them looked unconscious or dead, a burnt smell lingering in the tunnel; the others were scurrying away in both directions.

*I think we're clear*, Asumi managed to pull the thought together a few moments later, still short of breath. Whatever mapping to or analog of their nervous systems was here in the Dream World, it was recovering, though with a touch of absurdity. They both knew they should feel a settling of the adrenaline, new pains or injuries surfacing in their awareness once its masking effect was gone. But instead, a giddiness accompanying an energetic residue—a sizzle—and beyond that, an out of place cathartic relief.

*Thank you*, Carlos pushed gratitude through their shared attention, hoping it would reach the creature deep inside them. *Don't do that again.*

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THE LAST SEGMENT of tunnel they walked through opened into a lava tube. The divide in the rock was clean: in one

area the rough, jagged rock near them could have been dug out over many years by the creatures they had just fought. Then, a neat line marked the boundary, and the next section of stone extended like a railway tunnel through a mountain, but smoother than any machine or human labor could have produced.

Carlos felt like a raider entering a sealed tomb. His and Asumi's pupils were still dilated, pulling in all the light that they could. The earlier light emissions they had pulsed out were no longer necessary; here and there in the lava tube were faint glows from small puddles. Water might have surged up through here with the ebb and flow of the ocean, the faint glow possibly bioluminescent microbes or small creatures? The scene before them—whatever the source of the light might be—was like an upside down corridor, the glow of lights emanating from the floor rather than the ceiling.

They spotted a stronger blue light ahead of them. It was like a distant city shining through a fog. *Here*—the urge from Viktor's fragment and its passenger—the eagerness growing, resounding as an echo would if they were inclined to shout here.

They walked closer and the light resolved into fractal, crack-like patterns. The densest light emanated from an alcove where the cracks intersected—a higher concentration of microbes? At its center was a shadow, as if someone had carved a hole through the light.

As they neared, its form became more clear. It was a perfect hexagon, embedded in the wall—smooth, solid, and entirely black. The light that shone around it did not reflect off the glassy smoothness of its surface. Instead, the hexagon was an anomalous sink, sucking in all the

surrounding light: an irregularity in the very fabric of the Dream World, some defect in its underlying reality.

Asumi and Carlos were both waiting for the other to finish processing what they were seeing. This was unlike anything they'd ever come across.

*Touch.* The voice again. They had come this far; it would be a strange time to stop trusting. They extended their arms out in unison, still joined and wrapped together. Their hands made contact with the cool surface of the hexagon. Without warning, it gave way and they were sucked through, falling into a sea of memory.