

Eugorian Night Sky

by Chefprefers

Sitting amongst the pigeons is an honour, but feeding the pigeons is a failure.

Chapter One: Pasian Sea

The bright orange morning sun burst through the apartment's sliding windows, miraged by the Pasian green sea. On the opposite, the living room wall projects a copper shadow throughout the room, denoting the arrival of the Eugorian day. Preparing the morning dinner, Jesse looks out towards the villa balcony, admiring her husband's serenity outside on the patio; he appears to be mesmerised by the ocean's movement. The strong onshore breeze causes a flower petal to dance along the patio railing. Her partner's silver-lined hair moves in sync with the gusts. She wonders whether he is happy. Their polar holiday in the Northern region is nearly over; she had hoped to find a healthier life. Searching for jobs here in this tourist settlement?

The settlement offers seashore apartments overlooking the Pasian Sea. The dwellings are situated along the tourist resort's coastline. The town of Guze lies inland, within the isthmus between the two main polar seas, Pasia and Jasper. The connecting mountainous temperate forest to the south forms a source of precipitation that descends yearly. This natural enclosure creates a tropical ecosystem.

Jesse and her husband, Daniel, spent their evening exploring the coastal inlets. They hiked along the rugged oceanfront, strolled in the red sand and trudged through the swampy mangroves. They experienced the massive swell of waves hitting the pebbly sand, causing an endless roar. The tide was more extensive than usual due to the presence of a large moon in the sky. Finally, the twilight was a sign for them to turn in and shelter for their long-awaited daytime sleep.

Jesse organised an assortment of dry meats and cheese and joined Daniel on the terrace. She places the platter down and reaches for his arm. She feels the erect, white, smooth hair on his albino skin. Hidden within the depths are dark moles, giving him a polka-dot appearance. A common trait amongst their people is the name 'The Polkans'. Generally, irregularly displaced moles appear on the body, except on the face. The Polkan's complexions display smooth, ivory skin, red, vertically slitted eyes, and a snowy white mane. The nocturnal race exhibits special senses, allowing excellent night vision and sonar capabilities. Jesse smiles as she leisurely sits down for their morning meal and gazes across the Sea towards the glorious sunrise—the only part of the day when they can enjoy the sun's warmth.

Being from the equatorial region, their nocturnal form involves resting during the day and being conscious at night. The Eugorian moon axially tilts slightly towards the ocean planet, causing a variation of twilight in this region. The sun's rays and the Ocean planet's reflection cause different light patterns throughout the Eugorian 42-hour cycle.

It was their last night here. Jesse regrets the long travel back to their home cave at the equator. Their journey consists of ferries across the Sea, boondoggle transport through the mountains and rugged sand trollies over the desert. The 52-hour journey spans several Eugorian cycles, which most Eugorians would find too lengthy a passage of time.

Jesse's archaeologist talents and Daniel's mining skills are rare in these parts. Their efforts to find employment at Guze came at a cost. Since the region is primarily a tourist destination, numerous job opportunities are available in marketing, entertainment, cooking, and hospitality. If they wanted to stay, their line of labour would need to change.

Jesse squeezes his arm. 'We need to,' she paused, searching for his attention. 'Catch the ferry before nightfall.' She ends her conversation with a smile. Daniel nods and smiles in acknowledgement. He turns his attention to the Sea. She keeps looking at his profile and notices his smile turns to concern, a feature he shows when he is sad. They both were sorrowful since their holiday was ending, and the dreaded journey back to the equator began the next day. They turned in for the day after the sun peaked above the horizon.

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The bed shook, stirring Jesse. She opened her eyes and perused the room. With the twilight peeking through the shades, she could see objects moving within the room, and then the trembling stopped. The hanging on the wall was crooked. She realised that perhaps it was an Eugorian quake. She lay for a while, wondering whether it would return, knowing that the quakes are common in this region. Finally, she relaxed and closed her eyes.

She felt movement again. She opens her eyes to see Daniel above her. She notices her troubled husband and asks, 'Are we late?' Daniel shakes his head, his long white hair swings across his brow, lifts his hand to swat the curls and struggles to say, '*The illusion has failed me. I'm blind.*' Jesse is confused but always bemused by Daniel's quotes—the language of his background. The room is quiet; usually, the ocean fills the apartment with a low rumble, but not this evening. Daniel leads her to the balcony, and she immediately notices his concern. She couldn't believe it. Jesse turns to her partner with searching eyes, then looks back towards the ocean. She wonders if it is a low tide because she can't see the water. All she could see was the bottom of the Sea.

Chapter Two: The Steeples

Jesse looks down at her feet, which are entrenched in the muddy sea floor. She spots a wiggling silver Ghoti not far away, the gills flapping as though they were trying to find the lifesaving water. Once the ocean waves landed, rocks and sand lay bare. A known hidden source is exposed. The sea floor reveals a descending slope into the canyon. The other side is too far away to see in this faint light. The sun is just below the horizon, casting a twilight that shadows the ravine below. The side of the canyon is smarmy, making it difficult to maintain traction, so it feels as though they could slide into the abyss at any moment. Nevertheless, the structures are not too far away.

She is an archaeologist, and this is her calling. She analyses the grey rock faces as she walks down the descent. Jesse quivers at the sight of discarded rubbish covering the slopes and the movement of the hagfish flipping in the mud. She knows little about the *Anguilla* species and does not understand this ocean. However, she's aware that the divine Eels produce delicious eggs, which they had recently indulged in the night before.

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It all started when they stood on the balcony in disbelief. They look down towards the open forecourt and watch the disbelief on the Polkans' faces as they surmise the ocean floor. Jesse is surprised by the audience at the beach resort. Most often, the expensive resort is deserted. Jesse would have dined in the restaurant below with very few patrons. Now, they are trying to make sense of the chaos.

They noticed the bemused beachgoers when they went down to the shore. Jesse saw a mob of thrill seekers venturing into the descending canyon. Aerial Copters were flying over the shoreline, diverting people away from the Sea. Perhaps the regional officials were concerned about losing control of the situation. Copters with loudspeakers shifted the Polkans away from danger.

Suddenly, they hear a chirping sound from above, and the mob turns inland, rushing past them. Jesse looks up and sees a giant flying bird swooping down. The bird's hazel eyes dart at its subject, spreading the talons to grab an unsuspecting Polkan and then trying to fly away. The bird laboriously flaps its wings and cannot rise due to the unexpected weight. Then, without success, they drop the being to the ground. Jesse peruses the sky and spots a flock of Theropods. She could hear their eerie calling, like a crying baby. 'Ark Ark Siss!' These substantial, colourful, dangerous birds are known to carry a dolphin in their claws. It is unusual for the Theropods to hunt Polkans. 'So perhaps, the birds are bewildered and are confused by this dramatic event,' she thought.

Evading the oncoming mob through the evening twilight was difficult. Jesse feels Daniel grab her and pull her towards him. He wraps his arms around her, providing protection. The rushing hordes of seekers dodge them like pigeons lifting from a scare. Daniel and Jesse's arms are raised, protecting their position as they wait for the crowd to disperse. The flying Copters turn towards the birds to shun them away, like a kelpie coercing the stray sheep. Daniel rises from the sand and dusts off the grains of purity. Daniel turns to Jesse. '*It's better to be a coward for a minute than a dead man in a coffin,*' he quotes, eyeing the sky. Daniel looks down at Jesse. He reassures her that the danger is over. 'He states again, '*Hunger makes a wolf come out of the forest; we need to allude them.*'

Fearing they would be the Theropod's dinner, they rush back to the accommodation. They reconvene on the balcony overlooking the chaos. Jesse speaks as they stand over the railing, 'It is obvious that the sunken sea ferry isn't leaving today. Perhaps it's a rare low tide, and the water will make its way back later.' Daniel smiles and says, '*The plant that slowly grows bears the best fruit.*' Jesse scans the sea floor and is intrigued by the soggy features. She could see a large object on the sea floor due to the lack of light. It looks to be some distance offshore. The dim twilight provides enough visibility to assume it is a sunken artificial object. She is curious and turns to Daniel, 'What is that?' Pointing in the direction of the entity. 'The perception is large.' The sea floor descended deep into a canyon, and the object appeared as though it was positioned on a ledge, ready to tip further into the ravine. 'A building, it appears,' Daniel quotes. '*A mirage plays with the soul of a mind.*' Daniel identifies another structure and points to the left. '*Another illusion.*'

Ever since Jesse's upbringing near the equator's cave systems, she has been intrigued by the rock formations underneath the harsh landscape. Her father is a miner with a talent for identifying

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archaeological features; he educated her on the different types of rocks and crystals that the boring machines uncovered. The digging machinery would drill through layer after layer of colourful crystals to reveal the radioactive isotopes. Although mining was used to provide energy throughout the planet, other valuable resources were also extracted, providing a rich source for the fashion industry. Crystal and Quartz were abundant; the irregular shapes would be preserved and delivered throughout the moon.

Jesse's company, Quartizon, works with mining companies to filter out the special extras from the cultivation. Jesse's job is to analyse the direction of the drilling to preserve the material. Spending most of her time in the dark and moist tunnels, she is accustomed to the slimy seabed floors she is now looking at. However, the structures are appealing, and she felt an intense internal curiosity.

'Maybe there is a way for us to stay a little longer,' she wonders. She turns to Daniel. Should we wait for the sun to fall below the horizon to avoid the Theropods before we explore?' Daniel turns to her and replies. '*My endeavour leads,*' he pauses and smiles. '*The way.*' Jesse smiles back and notes that the previous sorrow on his face is gone.

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Jesse and Daniel continue in a single file to descend into the steep ravine. The height of the building is at the level where they stood. A pool of water obstructs their narrow path. Swimming across is the only way. Daniel turns back to her and nods towards the pool. Jesse takes that as a 'We are going swimming.' Jesse holds her small backpack above her head as she enters the pond. The base is soggy, and an occasional object disturbs her footing. There is movement in the water, and she feels the tingling in her lower limbs from the multitude of marine life beneath. Jesse senses the species and shivers, so she takes bigger steps to follow her partner. She is up to her torso when something grabs her foot and pulls her into the water. Daniel hears the splashing and turns to find Jesse has submerged.

Daniel freezes, scans the surface water, and starts to creep back, his protruding hands now visible in the disturbed water. He yells for Jesse, and then a hand emerges from the water. He dives over, grabs Jesse's hand, and pulls. Daniel feels a tug, like he has just caught a fish, and then heaves harder; Jesse's head surfaces, and he takes a breath. She cries a non-cognitive screech. The snag gives way, and Jesse springs forward, and the anti-force causes them to submerge. They surface again, Daniel still holding on to her, quickly manoeuvre them towards the edge; luckily, the pool is not too long. They scurry out and lie on the rocks above. Inhaling to catch her breath, Jesse explains, but she is incomprehensible. Daniel put his hand on her polka-dotted bare arm to calm her. Whatever grabbed her was still in the water. Perhaps the danger has passed. 'Something had wrapped around my leg, and then let go,' Jesse utters after recovering. They moved away from the pool and sat on a slimy rock for a period. Daniel questions whether they should continue. '*Dangers exist; the unknown is near.*'

Daniel looks up toward their destination. He sees a grey stone building with a large steeple structure poking out of the roof, with a large Plus (+) symbol on the front. It is not a plus sign but a plus sign with extra length. On the front of the building is a gnarly wooden door. An entrance pathway snakes its way to the left down the ravine, as though the building is situated on a hilltop, allowing anyone to climb. Jesse looks down at her leg and notices a red mark where the water thing grabbed her. It looked as though a long snake wrapped its body around her leg. The red rash was quite prominent against her albinism. She stands up and puts weight on it. It feels okay, she says to Daniel. Let's continue, and Jesse will lead the way down to the structures. They approach the stone steps to the solid wooden door; Jesse reaches up to turn the round handle.

Chapter Three: The Time and the Book

The large door gives way with a strenuous push. There appears to be something stopping it from opening wider, as though a springy object were keeping it closed. She peeks through the open gap and notices an underwater plant branch wedged on the floor. She searches through her pack and finds a knife to help pry the plant's limb off. As the blade slices through the plant's stem, she hears it burst like a balloon popped. She turns her head away, hoping to avoid the stench from within. Once she extracts the limb, the door opens wider. She enters, and Daniel follows.

Jesse feels dizzy and stumbles through the archway. Daniel catches her as she falls and helps her to a nearby bench. She sits down and closes her eyes to remain stationary. Daniel shakes her to stay conscious, and eventually, she stirs. Daniel watches her open her eyes, and then she leans over and barfs. Daniel pats her back as she extracts her inner. Jesse sits up again and starts to become aware of her surroundings. Her sickness has passed, and now she is aware. Daniel assumes that her illness came from the gases inside the plant. *'We must be careful now; this is an unfamiliar environment.'* He stresses.

Jesse looks up and scans the large rectangular hall. On the hall's sides were windows of ornamented glass in the shape of a plus sign (+). Wooden benches are arranged into two rows with an aisle in the middle. The bench was pointed toward the stage. The raised stage has a podium and a pedestal. Bench-style seating on the sides. Behind the podium is a substantial eight-position candlestick, and a large, arched window is positioned above. Jesse has seen entertainment venues of a similar style before, but she feels this is something different. It's as though she's sitting in her old classroom again. She notices woodcarvings on the bench arms—carvings of four-legged creatures she has never seen before.

Daniel walks past her and down the aisle to the stage. They both look around in awe at what they are witnessing. Daniel reaches the stage and walks around the pedestal adjacent to a lectern. The top of the pedestal has a round plate with a gnomon and a post casting a shadow from the faint light. Daniel looks up and notes the light coming from the round window. The window appears as a magnifying lens that amplifies the sunlight. Somehow, the window shape directs the sun's rays to this point. *'Fascinating, it has become,'* he mentions. Jesse comes over and notices some engravings on the plate. The post cast a faint shadow on the edgings where numbers represent the time of day. With 42 hours in an Eugorian day, the shadow casts over the numbers. She looks up towards the window and is reminded that it is nighttime. Since they were in the polar region, it was twilight all day at this time of year. The faint shadow she sees is from the twilight. It may only show the time when the sun is visible. *'It's like a time model,'* she discovers. *'Wow,'* Daniel acknowledges.

Daniel steps over to the podium and spots an open book on top of it. He peeks over to find the words in the book, which are smudged and hard to read. Being underwater for an extended period would have caused the ink to disperse. He reaches up and closes the book to reveal the title; the lettering is unrecognisable, although he can make out three words. He opens the book again to the first soggy page and finds the letters to be coherent, perhaps because the paper's compression to each other preserves the structure of the ink. He recognises the letters, and the words are in his language. He looks at Jesse, breaks the silence and says, *'The language, the discovery, the divine revelation.'* Jesse quizzes, *'Well! What does it say?'* Daniel reads the words slowly as though trying to read such small print. *'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.'* Daniel looks up at Jesse and asks, *'Who is this supreme being?'*

Jesse slowly shakes her head and says, *'I don't know how strange this place is; it's like somebody created a sanctuary.'* Daniel continues to read in silence while Jesse pokes around the room. There is sediment on the floor, which causes her to walk carefully so she won't slip. Jesse finally sits on the front bench, looking at the ornamented window. She eyes the glass panes, trying to determine the figures. In the centre is a human with long hair, arms spread, and hands laid outward. The two panes display beggars looking up at the central figure. The sediment from the water causes the windows to appear dull and unappealing. However, the twilight from outside projects through the painted panes causes an exciting spectacle. Daniel looks up from the hardcover and says, *'The first chapter says that God created the Earth in seven days.'* He glances up towards the ornamented windows and asks, *'Has the Earth been created?'*

Chapter Four: The Tunnel

Jesse looks at the time and says, 'We should continue.' Daniel closes the book, and they both head for the door. When they reach the exit, Jesse notices the front steps leading down the pathway. They follow the path, which meanders to the next structure. The sun is below the horizon, which triggers their nocturnal vision to take over. Along the pathway are rusty railings with plus signs (+) embedded within the design. The barriers must have assisted the participants in ascending to the hall. The water on the path is starting to dry up.

It has been five days since the Sea disappeared. Whatever happened to the water, nobody knows, but it does not seem to be returning anytime soon. There are signs that the seawater vanished down a drain hole based on the amount of water flowing to the lower parts of the canyon. Jesse concluded that it must have been a massive hole since the water had disappeared overnight. The hordes of people who had been present from the first day had disappeared after the Theropod episode. Therefore, when Jesse and Daniel began exploring, they were the only ones on the beach. The Aero Copters were nowhere to be seen. They figured they wouldn't be the only ones to explore. So, they headed out secretly. They carried a backpack with enough to hold utilities for the day. Travelling further would require some planning and equipment, which they didn't have.

The pathway is heading towards the next edifice. Jesse could see the structural features. Its overhanging, doom-shaped roof covers the large open square. The shelter has a doorless entrance. Daniel and Jesse rest before they enter. Jesse peruses the dark room and spots the railing in the middle. As they approach, she notes that the barrier is guarding a stairwell. The steps lead down into the darkness. She looks up to see windows on the upper walls. Every window features an iron lace design engraved with the Plus (+) symbol in the centre. She looks down at the railing lace, which has the same pattern. She turns to Daniel, 'This must be the entrance to something below. How interesting!' Daniel looks at the time, notices they have plenty of time before they should return, and says, 'Shall we?' The blackness isn't a concern since they have the vision. It was as though their eyes had become redundant, and they could rely on their sonar senses to guide them through the darkness. It is like speaking another language, switching from one thought process to another.

Organic green slime covers the steps. They would need to be careful descending. Even though the entrance to the tunnel is large, the stairs narrow to a single file. The tunnel is gloomy, although they would be able to detect any obstacles. They descend for about 15 minutes before landing at a site that features a shrine. The familiar Plus (+) shrine has many small unlit candles and trinkets. They continue down the stairs until they come to another platform. They could make out a single trackway to the left.

In the Equator region, trains transport natural resources from one remote location to another. However, this trackway appears to be for passenger trains. The height of the platform to the tracks gives it away. The platform tile walls display markings. Jesse approaches the wall and reads the text. '+ The End of the World. +'. Plus, signs (+) are visible throughout the terminal. Jesse turns to Daniel and surmises, 'It's like this whole journey is a pilgrimage, and this is the destination. But where are they coming from?' Daniel slowly shakes his head. They both look around the station for hints of travel. Jesse comes across a horizontal line map posted on the wall. The horizontal line has four points indicating train stops, and she notices that the 'End of the World' is the final stop. There are three other stops: Santiago, Pedrouzo, and Sarria. She sees Daniel peeping over her shoulder and says, 'Well! We know where to go' Daniel smiles. He mentions, '*The tracks are clear*' They both move towards the end of the platform, and when they reach the tracks, they see a handcar. Daniel looks up at Jesse and grins. '*Well! What do you think?*' He added before she responded. '*We'll head back. Perhaps we can come back tomorrow, and this time, be prepared for a longer journey.*' She agrees.

Chapter Five: The Journey

It had been five days since they returned. Once they returned to the accommodation, they devised a plan to go on a longer journey. First, they visited the local library to find any information about their discoveries. The steeple-looking building was known as a church, and the underground train was called a 'Subway'. They had come across a book that explained the Plus sign, otherwise known as a crucifix or a cross. The crucifix symbolises religious believers, and our ancestors followed many religions. Not to be confused with the other meaning of crucifixion. Crucifixion is a method for handing out an execution or a slow death.

Living in the equatorial region, the environment is harsh and unstable, and the idea of the common folk believing in the supernatural is unheard of. Jesse summarises that religion wasn't accepted in the past, so they were unaware of its existence. However, they discovered some religious establishments in the Pasian area. They explored the town of Guze and came across a similar building with a steeple protruding from the roof. A sign on the front door stated that it was the Guze Christian church. The building was old and appeared to be abandoned. They walked around the back of the building and noticed gravestones. All Polkans are incinerated once they die and spread on significant regional monuments. These gravestones are positioned as though the Polkans are lying on the ground. Coffin-like stone covers were distributed amongst the yards. The headstones would have names engraved in honour of the dead. Jesse and Daniel perked over a grave and asked, 'Is there a dead body under there?' Jesse asked. Daniel screwed his lips in discussion and responded, '*So cruel.*'

They continued to walk around Guze, searching for gear from their preparations, and obtained supplies such as a tent, sleeping blankets, cooking utensils, and clothing. They weren't sure if they needed a tent because they were underground, but Daniel mentioned that they could find themselves above ground at some point. When they returned to their accommodation, they decided to check out the following evening, not knowing when they would return. It could be a while.

As they both lay on the bed waiting for sleep, Jesse ponders, 'If this were the end of the world, then where did they come from?'

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Water will be a problem, both external and internal. Once they descend into the tunnels, they may encounter rotten water. They need a filter for drinking water that needs to be clean and contain calcium. Calcium helps maintain strong bone structures and keeps the skin and eyes healthy. It also improves their night vision. So, tablets and a filter are needed.

When they arrived at the Subway station, they were both exhausted. They decided to bring a handcart carrying the gear. Lifting the cart over obstacles and down the stairs was taxing. The cart also provides a place to rest. Jesse could hear fainting sounds coming from the tunnel as they rested. She remembered the flapping eels above and assumed they were more similar to them. A source of food was still available and easy pickings. Although after a few weeks, the fish started to rot, and the area began to smell. Jesse had noticed other animals that had come from the land to raid the seabeds. They had to be careful. Daniel obtained a pistol for protection and for the occasional fresh meal, as well as fishing gear.

Daniel indicated it was time to go and hopped down to the tracks from the platform. Jesse follows and lowers the cart via a rope. Daniel manoeuvres it onto the handcar. Jesse hops down, and they both get into the vehicle. The handcar takes two people to operate. One on each end, pushing and lifting the lever. The track appears to be descending, so it should be easy. Initially, the lever was jammed, possibly due to its prolonged water immersion. However, it helps when Daniel releases the stopper. When the cart starts to move, Jesse expresses a sign of relief. They will take it slow. They came across artefacts draped across the tracks, and Daniel would hop down and remove the obstacles. The loud noise of the car wheels causes the tunnel to echo the sound. Pools of water at the base of the tunnel ripple in response to the noise. The squeaking and squealing cause Jesse to cover her ears. Especially since the Polkans have sensitive hearing, another one of her qualities is put to the test.

The car slowly moves down into the tunnel, and Daniel notices, far in the tunnel, another obstacle, but this one seems to move, and it is more significant than anything they have come across - an animal, perhaps. When they arrive at the spot where he first saw the creature, it is no longer there. Maybe the animal was moving away from them. Suddenly, Jesse sees the strange creature and yells, 'What's that?' Daniel applies the brakes, and they remain silent. A low growl echoes through the

tunnel. Something aggressive is looming in the darkness. Their vision could only be seen from a certain distance. Daniel reaches for his pistol and inches the car forward. They hear water splashing, and the echo appears to be moving away. Then, the splashing stops. Daniel continues to move the vehicle forward, hoping to scare the beast away. He looks down at the base of the tunnel and sees a giant paw print. By the size of the pattern, he determines it is a gator, a walking snake. Gators' mouths are enormous and have large teeth. They could snap a tree trunk in half. Jesse could make out the tail; the tail was more prominent than anything she had seen before. It's much more significant than a gator.

Daniel stops the car. The oversized gator starts to turn around to face them. Daniel cranks the handcar in the opposite direction to give them space. Due to the change in direction, the cart screeches even more. The echoing noise disturbs the beast, and it launches at the car; its mouth opens wide, and it takes hold of the front of the handcar. It shakes the vehicle by wiggling its rear tail. Jesse holds onto her dear life. The tunnel walls were within touching distance, but there was nowhere to hide or run except the way they came. The car continues to move in reverse, with the creature propelling it forward using its hind legs and tail. Both Daniel and Jesse hold on, trapped. Finally, the beast stops, opens its grip and lets go. Jesse could see its eyes and balls poking above its head. Its slitted eyes look in their direction and then behind. The creature moves under the car as though it needs to reach the other end. Jesse holds her breath, not wanting to make a sound, then looks at Daniel in horror. They hear the creature emerge from underneath and keep moving up the tracks away from them. Jesse senses the animal disappear into the distance.

Relieved, Daniel releases the brake, which moves the car further from the creature. They keep engaging the lever to make the distance, and the comforting squealing provides relief. The tunnel base began to fill with water as they descended. The water is now at the car platform's level, so they come to a gentle stop. They cannot leverage it anymore. Jesse wondered how far it was to the next stop, 'Santiago,' she remembered from the wall map. The distance they had travelled was hard to judge, but they had been moving for over two hours. Jesse turns to Daniel and says, 'Have we reached the point of no return?' The edginess in her question concerns Daniel. '*Perhaps they had,*' Daniel thought, and he tried to be reassuring. '*Perhaps so, mind over matter,*' Jesse knew Daniel and understood they could be trapped. They sat quietly, and Jesse noticed a slight breeze from the water's end. It was comforting since the odour in the tunnel was suffocating. The narrowing of the tunnel caused the air to shift. Jesse exclaims, 'Can you feel that?'

Daniel replies, '*The feeling is mutual?*' Jesse rolls her eyes, annoyed at Daniel for answering the question with a riddle. 'The air' Daniel remains quiet and utters, '*Yes, I can*', with a reassuring voice. '*Perhaps the tunnel doesn't get full of water, and there is a way through,*' he surmised, '*I'll swim into the tunnel and see how far the water goes. Then, hopefully, the depression will open.*' However, Jesse doesn't want to stay in the car alone and insists she go along. Daniel didn't want to argue, so he agreed.

The water feels slimy and warm. There appears to be underwater reed growth, and the stems tickle her legs. Finally, the water came to about waist height, enough to hike. Daniel is in front, trying to wade through the water. It appears to get more profound, and the water has come to her bosom. She feels a stronger, fresher breeze as the passage narrows due to the rising water. Jesse senses the outdoor air and yells ahead to Daniel. 'Can you smell that?' Daniel replies, '*Yes, the dewyness is evident.*'. After a few steps, Jesse notices that the water is receding from her body, and then, after a few more paces, it reaches her ankles. Daniel stops and turns to Jesse. *The shine of the walls promotes organic growth. Seaweed from afar,* and she feels it in the water. Jesse looks up ahead and notices a shadow. It is not direct light but a reflection of the tunnel wall. Daniel spots Jesse's stare and looks behind him, saying, '*Ventilation shaft.*' When they arrive at the source of light, a ladder heads up through a shaft with light shining down.

Jesse looks up and sees a small peephole of brightness, approximately 20 rungs up the ladder. It is an exit. Daniel grips the ladder handle and starts to climb. When Daniel reaches the exit, there is a round lid with a handle. The cover is overgrown with seaweed. He goes through the slimy weeds and pushes on the cover. The top doesn't budge. He looks around for a handle and comes across a lever, which he turns. The lever moves and stops with a click. Daniel pushes the lid with one hand on the ladder rung and the other on the handle. The exit door gives way, and brightness fills the cavity. He

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remains stationary for a minute to allow his eyes to adjust to the twilight of the outdoors. Then, he pokes his head out of the chamber and notices that he is at the base of the Seabed. The terrain has levelled out, and he peruses the area to understand the surroundings. Still standing on the steep steps, he feels something grab his foot, and when he looks down, he sees Jesse. He moves up out of the hole to let Jesse have a look.

They both stand next to the ventilation shaft, looking up to determine the direction of the trackway. Daniel spots a similar type of building in the distance. It may be another subway station. Jesse looks behind and wonders how far they'd come. She couldn't see the 'End of the World' building. They have descended too far. Daniel surmises that they should walk from here to the station and take a look around. She looks back towards the shaft and agrees. She didn't want to return to the tunnel. Nevertheless, they knew they would have to return at some stage.

The Seabed was soft underfoot. Jesse determines that the ground has accumulated a lot of sediment over the years. The area has been above the water and thriving with terrestrial life. Although the existence of marine life distinguishes her, the Sea has covered the ravine for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years.

Daniel and Jesse start walking towards the subway station. Jesse stops occasionally, kneels and puts her hand in the mud. She is hoping to find a layer of soot that she can recognise. It was like being in a sandpit, scooping out the sand and then letting it fall between her fingers. Her archaeological skills helped her determine the soil layer, age, and minerals, which defined the type of life that existed. She reaches into the sediment and turns it over. Looking at the different colours and textures, she recognises the layers caused by the significant environmental events. Daniel asks, '*Seek?*' She responds, 'I see that Sandstorms have been here; for example, the swirling dust would drop onto the water's surface with the specific ground colour, and the sediment would descend to the seafloor. She knows that Hurricanes would cause the water to stir, moving the localised debris to settle. She dug deeper, hoping to find when the terrestrial stage would end. Before the Sea arrived, the ground would be much denser and more rigid to explore with her hand. She speculates that the water covered the area over 10,000 years ago.'

Chapter Six, The Roadway Passage

Occasionally, they would come across a pool of water, which they would steer clear of. The twilight air was refreshing but cold. Daniel and Jesse haven't had a chance to dry off yet, so they walk closely together to keep warm.

As they walk along the pathway to the subway station. It starts to take shape. Jesse could see the path meandering in the distance. The terrain features a rolling landscape with water-filled depressions. It's been over two weeks since the disappearance of the Sea, and she could see signs of recent corrosion. The seafloor is a sandy desert of sod. The sea life at this depth has failed to thrive. Strange boulder spires appear everywhere. Over to the right, Jesse sees a pool of water the size of a lake. The rolling terrain makes it challenging to keep her footing. Every step causes the soil to indent, making walking hard, like stepping up a dune.

As the subway station comes into view, it becomes more visible. Jesse sees several structures further along. She points to the strange-looking forms and asks Daniel, 'Have you seen that before?' Daniel, walking with his head down, too focused on his footing, looks up and says, '*Wow! The dish-like structure points to the sky.*' Jesse counts four large bowl-looking platforms with a rectangular building at the base. Daniel remembers they used radio waves during his training to communicate on the surface. These are radio wave antennas. They have been on the move for hours and need a rest. Then, they spot a boulder cluster nearby and settle on a rock. The breeze from the North is gentle, and the sun is peeking over the horizon; she determines it is earlier in the day. They have been on the go all night and into the next day. Their skin is susceptible to the sunlight, so they cover themselves with a solar blanket Jesse had in her pouch.

Jesse and Daniel were huddled together. The sun blanket provides enough warmth for Jesse to stop shivering. She lay there looking out towards the terrain, mesmerised by the sunlight reflecting off the rippling pools of water. Dead fish and dried-up debris litter the sea floor. She determines they are deep enough in the ravine to see a change in the marine life. She has read that the Sea exhibits multiple zones—the sunlight zone between the surface and a depth of 200 meters. The marine life is abundant with larger fish that need the surface to survive, and the floor is besieged with colourful coral and seashells—the Twilight Zone, below 200 meters to 1 kilometre, where 95% of the marine population inhabits. The Midnight Zone, located below 1 km, is the darkest part of the Sea where marine life produces its light. When they first enter the waterless Sea, she notices lots of coral and seaweed; now, the sea floor is bare and sandy. Jesse determines that they are now below 200 meters.

'Ark! Ark! Siss! Ark! Ark! Siss!' The sound stirs Jesse from her slumber. She lies motionless, curious about what that noise is. Should she be alarmed? Or was it just a dream? She lies on the hardness of the surface. She feels the softness of her partner's closeness next to her. There is a dual feeling of cold and rigidity beneath her and warmth and safety beside her. Ark! Ark! Siss! She opens her eyes. Reminded of her whereabouts, it is not safe. Jess turns her head around to see a large Theropod standing over her. Its large head looks up towards the sky. She admires the feathered creature for a moment, its large beak and rippled dried skin wrapped around its talons. She couldn't see its eyes since they were pointed upward. She remains still and looks at Daniel, who is awake and alarmed—the feeling of being caught with your pants down and nothing she can do about it. Just as the giant bird begins to move its head toward them, another sound is heard from a distance. 'Ark! Ark! Siss!' Jess could see the head move upwards and towards the other call. Then, the raptor's wings suddenly lowered, covering them and lifting off towards the mating call. A louder 'Ark! Ark! Siss!' is heard from the departed bird of prey. Jesse hears a loud exhale beside her and rises to face her lifelong friend. 'We need to be careful!' she bellows. Her anger had taken shape from her tiredness. Daniel nods his head in response. He stands up and points to the subway shelter. '*Hurry!*' He pauses and finishes, '*Before it returns.*'

Running down over the seafloor was strenuous and slippery. Parts of the base are like quicksand, and every step wants to swallow you up. Daniel and Jesse must separate, ensuring they wouldn't fall into the same instability. Finally, they arrive with relief. They settle down on a bench underneath the dome to rest. The subway shelter is similar to the first one, featuring a domed-shaped cover over a staircase leading into the subway. The windows and railings feature cross-type figures. There were benches in a uniform layout, enough to hold at least 20 Polkans. Again, Jesse scans the room and is amazed by the artistry of the railings and features. Situated between the roof and the

walls are windows. She notices the windows have a single letter or number on each pane. She reads it as 'est 2753'. Jesse is familiar with dated structures throughout her life, but a number as low as 2753 is unusual. It's like this structure has been preserved for a very long time. The current Eugorian year is 1003422.

The Years

Realising the age of the structure is over a million years old, it was hard to comprehend. Even the metals themselves would have corroded or decayed due to exposure to seawater. Jesse assumes that the structures were covered with a chromium-type dye, which allowed the metals to be preserved. Perhaps when they built the structures, they knew the harshness of the Eugorian atmosphere would corrode the metals. However, they would not have known that seawater would rise above this point.

Daniel looks over, sees Jesse transfixed on the windows above, and looks in the same direction. Jesse could not hear the raptor's call, assuming they were out of danger, and said, 'Do you know what date it is?' Daniel replies, 'It's two three-five twenty-two.'¹ Jesse asks, 'What do you make of that number? As she points towards the letter on the window. Daniel looks up and says, 'E S T 2 7 5 3. Does that mean the building was established in the year 2753? Wow! That is, he paused, a long time ago.' Since Daniel was brought up in the Equator region, his schooling was limited to localised education. Daniel had heard stories of the polar region and the planet's geology. However, most of his education was focused on living in the harsh equatorial region. 'This area is so amazing; it's like', he pauses. 'All these artefacts have been kept preserved, somehow.' Jesse peruses the area and nods in agreement. 'Shall we continue through the tunnel or stay at the surface and check out the structures over there?' As she pointed over towards the bowl-type structures. She hoped to remain on the surface for a while, not wanting to reencounter the unknown creature. However, she knew that they would have to return at some stage to retrieve their gear. Daniel looks up to the sky and notices the sun is higher, indicating it is midday. The dome structure provides enough shade from the burning sun. 'Perhaps we can camp here for a while before moving on.' Jesse looks around the shelter and relaxes on a bench.

When Jesse opened her eyes, the sun was below the horizon, and she heard rain pelting down onto the roof and a chilly wind gusting through the entrance. Storms are more common in the polar sector than in the equatorial deserts. The noise in the shelter is deafening. She notices that Daniel is missing. She walks over to the entrance and looks out towards the bowl-type structures. The faint light is enough for Jesse to spot a figure within the compound. Her night vision is excellent at close range, but she needs light to see in the distance, and the rain doesn't help. She yells out, hoping to attract his attention, but he is too far away. The strip of land between them slopes down into a gulley. Movement on the sea floor interrupts her attention. The downpour is creating pools, and she notices the surface is flapping as though fish were dormant and now alive.

Why is he over there? Jesse expresses. She feels she must go to him. The terrain forms a gulley between them. With the hail turning to sleet, a river flows down the gulley. She must cross the fast-flowing rapids so she remains at the entrance.

She notices a glitter beneath her and kneels to put her hand in the soil. She scoops the sod and examines the contents. The glitter is a reflection of the twilight of a shiny substance. She spreads the sod to find a sprinkle of gold nuggets. The nuggets were about the size of peas. Her archaeologist skills kick in as she's intrigued by the existence of this mineral. Gold is believed to come from intergalactic stars. Heavy metals can only be formed through rapid neutron capture, such as in the explosion of a star. She has only seen this mineral in a premade form, such as jewellery. She peruses the surface and is enthralled by the abundance of glitter.

The hail ceases, giving Jesse passage across the gully. She carefully walks down the ravine, steps over the formed river, and climbs the other side. As she ascends the gulley, she notices the shards of ice falling from the plume. From her study of rocks, she knew the importance of the

¹ There are 410 days in a Eugorian year. Therefore, the Eugorian Days of Year (EDY) are recorded as the numbered day of the year 235, and the years are recorded as EY (Eugorian Years). For example, in 'EDY EY' 235 22, the EY is 1003422, but only the last two digits are mentioned; therefore, the date is pronounced as 'Two Three Five Twenty-Two'.

erupting plumes. The release of water vapour into the sky was critical to the Eugorian atmosphere, oxygenating the air to energise the circle of life.

As she reaches the structures, she shouts out for Daniel. She received no response and walked around the buildings to find an entrance. She notices a door and pushes to enter. Keeping the door open, she inches into the dim room. As she enters, she hears footsteps in another room. She moves across to another internal door and peeks through. The room is filled with benches and wall-hanging monitors, similar to a mining operation centre. She spots Daniel sifting through a cabinet. She barks, 'What are you doing?' Daniel jumps at the outburst and turns, 'Oh, Hi', then pauses. 'The gang of mystery is defeating the gang of knowledge' He turns and pulls a container out of a bench cabinet. His calming self, far from what she was feeling, bewilders Jesse. She wants to chastise him for running off, but is subdued by her curiosity to know what is in the container. Daniel puts the box on the bench and lifts the lid to reveal the contents. Jesse walks over to peek inside. She reaches in and pulls out a small memory stick. The label reads 'SIMP 2125' She reaches in again and pulls out another reading 'Europa 13100' Daniel points out that there is a poster on the wall explaining the bowl-type structure. He guides her to the wall, and they examine the print. Jesse reads that the structures are antennas that provide a communication link to Tellus, the ocean planet. She wonders whether life still exists on the sister planet. The ocean planet was known to have life, but when the Earth warmed up, the globe became immersed in water. The thumb drive data may reveal why this has happened. She walks back to the container, sifts through it, and finds a drive labelled 'Earth 120065'.

Cause and effect

Jesse was aware that a small memory stick is a type of intelligent storage card. The issue is to find a device that can play the content. Daniel mentions they must return to the mainland to obtain such a mechanism. Noting that this is important, they make the trip back through the tunnel to reveal their discovery.

In Guze, they came across the device in a computer shop. The store attendant, bewildered, searched through the back of the shop to obtain a device. The attendant asked, 'Where did you get this from?' Jesse responded, 'It was passed down from my grandparents,' not wanting to reveal the whereabouts.

Jesse and Daniel rent a bubble for a few days to rest and recoup. Sitting on the lounge, they play the first card, 'SIMP 2125'. The playing device has a cable that can be plugged into a monitor at the apartment. The story begins with a message on the screen: 'From the archives of the Origins.' A strange being, similar to Polkans, but with black and round pupils and beige skin colour, appears on the screen, explaining the video content and its importance. Strangely enough, they spoke the same language.

The video reveals the existence of a rogue planet 'SIMP2125' entering the solar system and disturbing Jupiter's moons. In the year 2125, the 50-km-diameter rock deviated from its course, and its trajectory was altered by the sun. The rock veers off to a planetary orbit. However, its path was interrupted by Jupiter's gravitational pull. The outcome was that the rogue planet interfered with the orbits of Jupiter's moons. Ganymede, Europa, and Io were ejected from their orbits. They then became rogue planets. 'Europa' was captured by the gravitational pull of the planet Earth. Europa then becomes one of the two moons that orbit the planet. The SIMP2125 was then projected out of the solar system as quickly as it came.

After the video stops, Daniel turns to Jesse and asks, 'Is this known. Jesse shakes her head. I was more fascinated by the presenter, who had characteristics similar to ours. It's as though we come from the same creator. Daniel was amazed by the existence of the Rogue planet entering the solar system, which had occurred over one million years ago.

Since the video mentions Europa, Daniel decides to put the Europa 13100 card. This time, the video provides a different presenter, who appears to be present at a different time. Again, the video describes the existence of Europa, a Jupiter moon captured in 13100 by the Planet Earth. Europa was an Icy moon with a layer of ice on its surface, followed by an ocean, and the Sea was kept liquid by the inner core. With diagrams and videos, the presenter then describes how, over hundreds of thousands of years, the Europa surface has changed from an ice-capped moon to a planet with life flourishing. Due to the sun's heat and Earth's weak gravity, the ice surface started to melt, creating a

habitable atmosphere. Oceans in the lower layer began to appear on the surface, incorporating multiple atmospheric layers for an ecosystem to thrive. Although it has abundant water, the planet is surrounded by oceans. The video went all scratchy and then stopped. Daniel noted that the player had somehow powered off, as though there was a problem with the player itself rather than the thumb drive. Jesse was in a trance, thinking about the existence of Europa and wondering whether the ocean planet above was Europa instead of, as it's now known, Tellus. Although the size and the orbit conditions suggest that it isn't, there were too many unanswered questions, so they needed to work out how to play the next thumb drive, Earth 120065.

They returned to the computer shop, and the shop attendant reported that the parts for this device were obsolete and that they couldn't repair the player. Jesse and Daniel return to their bubble and contemplate. Then Daniel perked up and said, I wonder whether there's a device at the antenna structure in which they could extract the components. Jesse wasn't too keen to go back through the tunnel again. Even though this was interesting information, is it worth all the trouble to view the contents? She was eager to explore more objects and suggested to Daniel that they return along the surface to find the structures.

It has been over 30 days since the ocean disappeared. The sea basin is starting to dry up, and Jesse found it easier to trek down the ravine. She noticed many more people around the basin; the Polkins were adventuring further into the gorge. Daniel reached up to help her slide down the boulder. A disturbed pebble rolls past his foot. He stated, 'When one rock falls, others follow.' The descent was like rock climbing; the antenna dishes weren't visible from the shore; they could see the train outlet somewhere down the steep gorge. Jesse was amazed at how deep they had gone. It wasn't evident in the tunnel. The midnight ocean planet reflected the sun in the sky, providing ample visibility during the night. They were making good time before the sunrise. The dreadful odour from the fish carcasses was filling her lungs, and every so often, she would kneel and heave the innards.

When they arrived at the antenna compound, they entered through another entrance. They could see disturbance as though the site had been looted. As they entered the same room where they found the memory sticks, the hanging monitors had been smashed, and the chairs were out of place. The cabinet where they found the video items had been tipped over and ransacked. It was apparent that whatever they tried to find was destroyed or taken. Jesse turned to Daniel. 'What are we going to do now?' Daniel slowly shook his head, knowing that their time was running out. 'The ice is melting,' he expressed. 'Shall we continue to see if there are more places to explore?' Jesse asked. Jesse dreaded entering the tunnel, where they saw the giant reptile. Although she knew their best avenue was exploring the tunnel. Daniel moved to the exit as a sign of agreement. They left the compound and walked back to the train outlet. The sun was due to rise, so they made their way down the subway stairs.

The Cave

The stairway to the subway platform was similar to the previous station. Jesse noted that the subway was created during the same era. The intricate railing designs and the imprints on the walls were silhouettes of the antennas above. This marks the location of the station. She knew the train had come from somewhere enormous; the infrastructure alone was a testament to its importance. When they reached the platform, a train was waiting for them. Frozen in time with the doors still open, undersea growth had filled every nook and cranny. The growth was whitish-coloured and broad, and the leaf plant life was due to a lack of light. If you wanted to, you could move the train doors. Curiosity enticed them to enter; the floors and seats were overcrowded with living matter. Jesse treads lightly to avoid slipping. Dan reached out and held her hand. The train had multiple carriages, and people could walk between the cars.

Jesse noted a bunched-up plant on a bench; her echo-sounding organs determined a framed profile of a Polkan. 'It couldn't be,' she said out loud. Adjacent to her, Dan approached the frame and tried to pull the plant aside. Within the casing, bones could be detected. Jesse reached over and could feel the slime. She pulled her hand out as though she had touched fire. Jesse felt ill from the odour through her sensing nostrils, more so since there was no light. Their night vision can only be used when there is some light, but when it's completely dark, they tend to echo their location.

EUGORIAN NIGHT SKY

Polkan's senses rely mainly on night vision, touch, smell, and sonar echolocation in the darkness. Sonar is emitted from their sinuses. This high-frequency pitch is generated by exhaling through the nostrils on demand. The reflected sound is detected and triangulated using both ears to determine the position of objects in very dark conditions.

After a few breaths, Jesse gathered herself and felt around the frame. She was pulling away the leafy substance, determining that it was a large person sitting on a bench. Her hands moved towards her lap, and she felt a solid object. It's a band around a wrist. She pulled at it to examine its structure. As it broke away from the grabby organic stems, it didn't completely break loose. Then she felt the chain links attached to the band. WOW! She expressed. 'This poor soul has died in captivity.' Her senses took in the area, and she solidified her perception of the train. That this car was a holding cell for prisoners, she turned to sense other bunches of plant life nearby. Her nostrils were stinging with odour, and he stated.

'I've seen enough; the potent smell is too much.' She let go of the band and walked out of the way. They came into the next car. Dan followed and stumbled toward the side train door. He slid the doors open and felt the coolness of the tunnel fill the cabin. The musty rush of air was better than the decay within. Dan stepped down and turned to help Jesse. She jumped off and landed awkwardly on her side; she reached down and felt the coarse stones at the base of the tracks. Jesse grabbed a stone and felt its smoothness. She pulls it to her nose to sense its make. She licked it to taste the tinge, similar to a silicate substance; its weight had confirmed what she had predicted. The tunnel was full of Mica.

Mica was mined in the equatorial region and used for various products. Its main uses were as building materials, paints, and cosmetics, although it could also be used to boost the immune system. Somehow, this position comforted her; memories of her father floated into her mind. He took her to a tunnel many years ago. The light reflection of many colours sparkled around the cavern. Beautiful images pulsate throughout the cave. His father lit a candle to excite the translucent. Pinks, blues and violet reflections cause a soothing effect. She looked up at Dan and asked. 'Do we have a candle in that bag?'

Dan smiled, swung the pack off his shoulders, and reached into the back pocket. He pulled out a long, waxed wick and then again for a lighter. He flicked the lighter, which illuminated the cave and the candle. They looked out towards the tunnel, noting the intensity of the brightness as though it were daylight. They both had to close and refocus their eyes to adjust to the darkness. Once she opened her eyes, she could see the same pattern of beauty flicking down the tunnel. Her heart felt warm even though it was remarkable at this time. The train, the organic matter, and the prisoners lay dormant for thousands of years in the cocoon of liquid. The water had drained even to this depth; where had all the water gone? She wondered. They were about to find out.

Jesse stood up; the Mica stone base was unsteady underfoot but manageable. Dan reached over to grab her hand. Putting the pack around his shoulders and holding the candle in his hand, they walked alongside the train until it ended. Jesse's eyes hurt from the brightness, and she asked Dan to put out the light. Memories of her father stayed with her as they crept down the subway.

Dan led the way down the channel in total darkness. He detected a shift in the tunnel walls, and a sense of open air was nearby. He reached out to feel a siding along the side of the tracks. Jesse felt the same present, although somehow she felt they had come to the end of the line. Dan jumped up the siding and helped Jesse up to the landing. The landing was more significant than the previous stations. They walked along the pathway towards another tunnel, expecting to come across an ascending staircase, but it never appeared. Instead, the walkway went to a barrier, and stairs leading down were visible, along with the sound of rushing water in the distance. Their senses felt that the open area was enough for Dan to reach for the lighter again. They had to see what it was, which felt huge; their sonar couldn't detect the expanse of the area.

Jesse could feel the railing blocking their path and sensed the openness. Dan flicked the lighter and lit the candle. Dan held the candle out and was amazed at what he saw. The musty area provided the clue; they now know where the Sea has gone. The flickering light could reach the pool below; the enclosure sounds were not swallowed up by echoing reflections but by endless silence. This area was so big that they could not detect the size of the underground cave. The water had somehow found its way down here, and the pool was so enormous that it was more significant than the Sea. The stairs

disappeared into the water below as though the area was flooded. 'Behemoth are my thoughts!' Dan surmised. 'We know where the water has gone now?' Jesse added.

They descended the stairs to the water's edge, hoping to gain a better understanding of the enormous cave. As they drew closer, they noticed the pool was full of objects that appeared to be garbage floating on the surface. The pool was rippling, perhaps from the rushing of the water, which could be heard in the distance. Multiple sizes of substances were flowing past towards the left, either submerged or bobbing up and down. The water movement indicated that there was another drop in elevation somewhere. Jess felt a shiver, causing the hairs on her forearm to stand up. They must return and investigate another access unless they find a way around or through the pool. Jesse felt they had descended a long way from the subway entrance, and returning would be exhausting. Dan, reading her expression from the flickering candle, said. 'Perhaps we could ride the waves,' Dan pointed at an extensive object that appeared stable enough to float on. Dan conveyed. 'Hey, look, we could use that object to keep it afloat,' Jesse noted, pointing out that the object had a raft-type platform and was just far enough away that one needed to retrieve it.

Dan spontaneously jumped into the water and began swimming towards the floating craft, still holding the candle above the surface. He didn't anticipate the strength of the current and noticed that he was moving away from the bank and the floating craft. Dan grabbed the nearest substance to stay afloat. Jesse yelled out, 'What are you doing? ...Hold on!' Jesse watched as Dan floated away, holding the lit candle and showing his path. Jesse, yelling out for him to hold on, watched as he drifted away and then submerged into the pool in a swirl of movement. Jesse screamed Danny! Danny! As soon as he went under, the light in the cave disappeared.

Jess knew he had submerged in the liquid once the light had extinguished. Daniel was a good swimmer, so she was surprised that he sank so quickly. A force of nature was somehow involved. Her sonar ability went silent. The rustling of water was constant, as though she were listening to a small cataract. Her realisation that Daniel was gone expressed sobs and screams within the cavern. Abruptly, he was there; now he wasn't; her lifelong friend wasn't by her side. How could she go on? What is she to do now? The stairwell was edged by water on both sides, and her only way out was back up the stairs or through the pool. She sat on the step, trembling, not knowing what to do next. She wanted to jump into the water after him, knowing she would end up in the same fate. She had to do something, she surmised, that he must have floated down a waterfall or just got caught on something below. Either way, she needed to know. Polkan's ability to hold their breath for up to 30 minutes was normal. She waited and hoped. Staying quiet and hopefully hearing any odd sounds. However, the cave wasn't silent. The rushing of water and the objects in the pool caused abnormal noises.

After some time, she needed to start searching; going into the water wasn't the way. She used her echo sounding to feel the area. She detected a large device in the water not far from her. The objects in the water were moving in a pattern, like a giant whirlpool, and they continued to circle. An object, which was far away, was now closer; it had floated towards the bank. She noted that it was big enough to use as a raft, that the object was approaching more quickly, as though the current was swirling stronger at the water's edge, and that if she wanted to capture it, she needed to dive at it at the right moment. She needed to stay afloat if she had any chance. It was there, and then she went for it. On her thrust, she grabbed it and noticed the current was strong, pushing the vehicle to the left. She climbed above the water. It had a flat surface but was unstable unless her balance was correct. She held on to the edges of the craft for stability. She was now at the point of no return. The stairs were her only way out, but she was going nowhere without Dan. She held on, hoping to go through the same fate he had. She called out to him, knowing the sound caused an echo in the cave. Noises were amplified so every sound could be heard. She remained quiet, only hearing the noise of water falling somewhere in the darkness, and then noticed that the craft had come to a halt.

The raft was jammed against something below, preventing it from freely moving with the current. Hoping that the raft would float around in a circle and the subway stairs would reappear. Jesse sensed that the submerged object had a protruding tubed frame. The cave walls were far away now, and her intuition was that she was in the middle of the cave. Her sounding echoes were faint. She was stuck and had nowhere to go. Her sonar detected another object a little distance away, one of similar construction. She vibrated another sonar to detect five other objects with similar edgings. All

with tube-like features poking out of the water. She noted the raft was stuck on a landing, submerged and against the tube. The echo sounding was useless in water, although she used her nocturnal sight to see the submerged surface. The evidence of light must be close since she could detect the underwater landing. She slipped off the raft and stepped into the water, her shoe settling on a steady surface. She thought of using her footing to push off again, but she was intrigued. She looked out at the body of water and noticed that the water projected an underwater glow. The water came up to her ankles, and to regain her balance, she bent down to feel the tube frame. She sensed a type of metal; she guided her hand along the tube and came across a latch mechanism. It felt like a door handle; 'Perhaps it could open the tube,' she thought. She turned the latch and then heard a loud click. Luckily, the water surface was below the latch, so water didn't fill the void. The top of the tube pulled away and came freely. It appeared to have struts to hold up the panel, which allowed her to scope the internals. She looked over to the other tubes and determined the positional pattern of the tubes. Then, she realised what she was standing on.

The Illuminating objects were starting to take shape. The formation determined that the tubes were independent of each other and arranged as though they were parked vehicles. These were larger than any land vehicle; the tubes served as cockpits for a jet aircraft. Seats and a central joystick gave way to its existence. She could feel the strong current as she stood on the wing. She stepped into the cockpit and took her seat in the pilot's chair. She felt around for clues. She had seen these types of aircraft before. However, she had never seen them up close. Jesse froze when she felt a moving entity near her feet. A long snake-type animal slithered past the dashboard and exited the cockpit into the pool. She wondered what else could be in this cabin. She remembered that aircraft carried memory devices, which recorded their movements. She felt around the dashboard, pushing buttons and flicking levers, and then she heard a click as though something had been ejected. She found a mechanism that could be dislodged, about the size of her finger. She could see it was a memory stick, about the same device they had obtained at the antenna compound. She slipped it into her pocket and stepped out of the cockpit and back onto the wing again. She needed to keep searching for Daniel. She could cast off by stepping onto the raft with one foot and pushing off with the other.

Jesse started to tremble again, not from the coolness in the cave but from the anticipation of what was going to happen next. The darkness and not having her long-time partner beside her brought disturbing thoughts. At any moment, her demise was imminent; she felt the stronger current moving the craft toward the glow in the water. The sound of the water crashing into the pool was growing louder, as though she were floating towards a waterfall. She could feel the mist on her face. Her echos detected falling water, and the craft started to bubble up and down as though it would submerge at any minute. She first felt the noise of the fallen water hit the craft and then was sucked under the cascades. Jesse held her breath as she was plunged into a light-filled tube. The water flowed downward and then levelled out; she was caught in this vacuum of liquid, expecting to be ejected at any minute to the other side. She saw light above and noted that she was surfacing, and just as she was sucked into the pool, she was spewed out onto the surface again. She breathed in the musty air and opened her eyes to see blinding light. Catching her breath, she heard a familiar voice, a call from the unknown; the resonating tones of Daniel had filled her ears. She blurted out, 'Daniel?' She received a reply, 'Yes, I'm here on the shore, not far away. Swim towards my voice. Excited and relieved, Jesse started to swim, and then she felt the bottom and walked up the embankment to dry ground. Her eyes were still shut from the intensity of the glare. Her scent sent out a signal, and she noted that Daniel was nearby. Then she felt his presence and embraced him.

Jesse's eyes began to adjust to the brightness; she couldn't feel the warmth of direct sunlight, but she was able to detect the light coming from above. She pulled back from Daniel and looked into his eyes; the swollenness revealed his sadness. Although they were wide open and alert, his slitted pupils showed a sense of relief and true happiness. Their separation hadn't been long, but they were now united again. 'You've squeezed through the hourglass? Daniel's attempt to make a joke.

Jesse smiled back, although she felt the rage within her. 'You did it again! She snapped, turned away in discussion and then stumbled towards the high ground. Her focus extended to the distance. She was aware that she was in a dark, underground space. There were multiple bright spots on the

ceiling, like huge light bulbs emitting from a dome-type cavern. Jesse surveyed, looking for the extent, and she couldn't feel it. There were large pinnacles forming the shape of the terrain. It was, although they were on an island in the middle of the ocean, and the spires were positioned on this island and out in the water. She turned to see the cave wall behind her, which appeared to be the separation from the aircraft cave to this cave. Her echo sensing was unclear; this cave was too large to detect. The cavern appeared to be hundreds of leagues long. As her eyes adjusted, she noted that the spires were not natural but rather formed structures, like bubble towers, with multiple apartments and balconies. It seemed that the water above had flooded this cave, and there was more to be discovered beneath it. Daniel caught up with her and joked, 'Inspiring!' Jesse turned to him and smiled. Her anger dissipated in the face of their discovery's amazement. 'What is this place?' she asked. Daniel responded, 'Some ancient underground city.'

Urban Underground

Jesse was familiar with the planetary cave system, as the equatorial region was full of them. Polkans travelled to the polar region, where the benign weather was suitable for surface living. Being outside in the fresh air, where oxygen levels are higher, is considered healthy, although there are some disadvantages. The sunlight could burn their skin, and the toxins of the surface growth could be dangerous. The oceans had obscured the existence of caves in the polar regions, and it was believed that living on the surface was the only viable option. Although their ancestors had known of the caves, it is only today that they have been revealed. Jesse and Daniel were now witnessing this discovery.

The cavern was clearer for Jesse since her sensing had now adapted. She looked above and noticed the light coming from the multiple cracks in the cave ceiling. Some cracks were emitting light, and others were draining water from above. Following her discovery, Daniel stated, 'The natural forces will always win.' Jesse followed the crack and noted that the flaw had extended out of sight. It could be the reason why the Sea had disappeared. The Eugorian quake we felt on the first day created an opening for the water to drop into this cavern. Jesse speculated. Daniel responded, 'There are layers of layers.' Jess smiled.

'Yes, I suspect this cave is larger than we have ever seen. Polkans may have lived here for thousands of years in this cave.' Daniel surmised and responded enthusiastically, 'Hey, the world is waiting...' His red eyes darted at the bubble towers, suggesting, 'Let's take a look!' Jesse looked down at the ground and noted an ascending pathway approaching the buildings. She felt cold in her wet clothes, but she knew that they had to keep moving to keep warm. Daniel led her up the formed road; the pathway was wide and smooth enough to let large vehicles pass over the rough terrain. The roadway showed signs of having been recently washed, as though the descending water from above had flowed through here. Sprinkles of water were still in the air, creating a cloud of mist; Jesse scanned the tower and counted 11 balcony floors. The cave ceiling was far beyond the rooftop, indicating the cavern's size. Waterfall noise could be heard in the distance, raising the ambient above a Polkan's usual tone. Daniel called out, 'The sky lounge has a better view' as he looked up to the closest tower.

The road forked towards the entry, and the front archway appeared to be open. Jesse and Daniel approached the entrance and saw a massive statue in the foyer. A large, fat man is sitting cross-legged with his palms together. The stone figure appeared to be at the centre of a fountain. The symbols on the side of the pool were of mythological creatures. These creatures were nothing she had ever seen before. A cross between the body of a bear mixed with the smiling face of a Polkan. Around the other side was a circular staircase winding up to the next level. To the left, there was another archway; they both headed towards it. The floor was littered with debris, and Jesse was constantly on the alert for little creatures lurking. At any moment, a surprise was awaiting.

The archway opens into a theatre similar to the Plus-type building they encountered many weeks ago. A stage was positioned at the back of the gallery. The backdrop of the stage displayed square interlaced symbols. The décor of the room was slightly different from the Plus building; there were no chairs, only kneeling platforms. Statue pedestals and paintings were aligned along the right side wall. Windows to the outside were on the left wall, providing enough light to see the fixtures. Jesse turns to Daniel, 'What is this place? It's like another auditorium.' Jesse walked over to the left

side of the stage and noted an artefact with three vertical barrows held in place by a top and bottom axial. She reached over and touched the barrow, noting that it had moved slightly. She then pushed the barrow, which made it spin in place. The spinning of the relic produced a ringing bell sound. She then spun all three, each causing a different ringing tone. She spun it harder, causing a louder ringing echoing within the gallery. She watched them as they slowly came to a stop. Daniel clutched her hand and led her around the galley. Each artefact had similar features: little men sitting cross-legged, large chalices with steeple tops, small relics inside gas lanterns and tiny square houses. Inscriptions were displayed on the front of the pedestal, although the symbols were unrecognisable. When they reached the back of the gallery, Daniel asked, 'Shall we continue?'

When they reached the foyer again, Daniel noticed that the noise from outside had subsided compared to the noise inside, so he suggested they rest there for a while before going up the stairs. He sensed that it must be daytime with the light coming from above. They sat on a bench opposite the fat man and settled in for a while. Jesse reached over, embraced Daniel, and held onto him as she drifted off to sleep.

Flap! Flap!...Flap!...Flap! Jesse opened her eyes to this strange noise. She could still feel Daniel next to her and shook him. He stirred with a moan; she felt tired, as though she was heavily sedated, trying to wake, and her body was forcing her to sleep again. Flap! Flap!...Flap! She turns towards the sound and senses a fish flapping in a water pool within the foyer. Her stomach churned; she couldn't remember the last time they ate. Yesterday, the day before, her brain was in a fog. Daniel leaned up from his slumber and said, 'Time for ingestion. Jesse reached into her pack and grabbed a pack of dried meat sticks. She wonders whether the content is dry. She opened the packet and was relieved that they were undisturbed. She handed Daniel a stick, and he gladly took it, finishing it with one gulp. She gave him another one. He chewed this one, and she also put a stick into her mouth. They both looked over and could barely see, although their other, more sensitive senses detected the flapping fish. 'The time is night,' added Daniel. They would need to use their night vision.

After their snack, Jesse felt refreshed. She stood up, a little weary, and walked over and sat down on the waist-height stonewall surrounding the fat man fountain. The pool was filled with dirty brown water, although she detected a few reflecting substances in the murky water. 'What are those little things in the pool?' she turned to Daniel. Daniel came over, reached into the pool, and pulled out a tiny flat disc. The disc had a gold tinge and had engraving on both sides. He couldn't quite read the impression, so he responded, 'My senses are straining, but I believe it's a polar coin. ' Jesse added, 'I've got a light in my pack.' She reached into her daypack and pulled out a small torch. She turned it on and was relieved that it illuminated. Daniel took the torch and shined it on the coin.

The coin had a profile of a Polkan's head, and the text printed around the edge read, 'Delldimple III Europa 843417. 'he turned over the coin, and it had a symbol of the same interlinked square shapes they noted on the back of the stage in the auditorium. Daniel reached into the pool again and found another disc. The disc was the same colour and size and had the same edging. Then, they handed the disc to Jesse. She took the torch so she could analyse the engraving. The engraved coin had the same name, apart from the number, and was slightly different in its edgings, reading 'Delldimple III Europa 843423'. It appears that this coin was made within the same period, 5 years later. We are gaining a sense of the age of this place, dating back over 15,000 years.

Jesse smiled and thought back to her childhood days exploring the caves. The Equator Cave system was extensive, and many of its routable caves were inhabitable. Climbing up rock faces and sliding down rock holes was the norm. Here, they were attempting to discover new caves in a different location, as if they were seeking to uncover their origins. 'WHERE DID THEY COME FROM?' A question that lingered in the back of Jesse's mind. Were these the homes of our ancestors? Does the species resemble them? What did they look like? The obese man had a fat face, big eyes and a rounded belly. Is this what they looked like? How ugly?

Daniel pocketed the coin and signalled Jesse to go to the next floor. A spiral staircase led up to the levels above. As they ascended, Jesse noticed imprints on the wallpaper that resembled the silhouette of an obese man. Jesse reached out and slid her hand across the surface as though she were reading Braille. The paper disintegrated with her touch, and a trail of her fingers made a mark. She was oddly amused by this, which made an everlasting impression as she climbed the stairs.

At the first landing, they stepped into a hallway with doors on each side as though they were in a dormitory where the occupants shared the facilities. Daniel pushed open the first door, which fell off its hinges. He wondered how brittle the building was, given that its construction had been sealed in a tomb for thousands of years. They shouldn't go to the levels above. They entered an apartment-style room with an opening to the outside as though it were a balcony window. The translucent glass had been smashed recently, possibly due to the influx of water entering the cave from the ocean's drainage.

Jesse was starting to determine the recent timing of events. Oddly, they discovered that the Sea had vanished on the first day. She remembers the bedroom shaking the previous night, possibly due to an earthquake. The quake could have opened up cracks and holes at the base of the Sea, which drained the water into the cave system. She was determined that the cave had been hidden for thousands of years and that the surface was once covered in ice, now melted; she remembered the sparkling ground near the antenna compound, where she had picked up a substance that was rigid and sharp, and she thought that this could have been formed during an ice age. Perhaps the surface was too cold for the occupants, so they settled in the cave. A bigger cave system must be below to swallow up the Sea so fast. This cave could be the top layer of many caves beneath; she turned to Daniel and expressed her thoughts.

Daniel stared back at her, one of his slitted eyes widening as though finding out that he was hearing something new. 'Astounding!' he said. His lips parted a little, suggesting that more exploring was to be done.

The single-room apartment had furnishings similar to those of the bubble apartment they stayed in in Guze: a single bed, a bedside bookshelf, a circular table, and two lattice chairs. The wall opposite the window featured an L-shaped kitchenette, and a bathroom filled the void. The water above must rise to this level because most objects are damp. She established that this cave hadn't previously been submerged under water and that the items had been left untouched for thousands of years. Fortunately, from their determination, the stagnant cave air must have preserved the materials. A layer of regosol covered the bed, perhaps from the aging dust that had recently become damp. She reached down and wiped the mud away, revealing the linen. The brittle cloth pulled away as she scraped the surface. She looked down at her feet, noticed the shattered fragments from the broken window, and was convinced that the water didn't rise above the bed. Daniel was searching through the kitchenette cupboards for clues about items of interest.

Jesse noticed some grey, weathered books lying on the bookshelf near the bed. She crouched down, easing herself onto the edge of the bed. Jesse sank further than she wanted to and slowed to avoid falling through the bedding. She felt the dampness of the material through her trousers. She reached over and picked up a red leather-bound hardcover. Edge in italic on the front cover was the words '*High School Dictionary*' and down the side marked the author 'Thorndike Barnhart'. She opened up the front binder and noted on the inside, 'FARMINGHAM SCHOOL DEPARTMENT JUN 13 1955 Copy 11.'

Jesse was intrigued by the print format of what she thought could be the date, 'Jun 13 1955'. It's a format she wasn't familiar with, although this may explain the origin of these occupants. She began to search through the brittle pages delicately and noticed it was a dictionary. This could add clues about this existence. The dictionary illustrated some words, and she stopped at a page showing a Polkan with a horse's body. The Polkans had hair on their faces, with their torsos blending into the bodies of four-legged animals. The word associated with it was 'Centaur', describing it as a monster. She had never seen a species like this and wondered whether they existed here. However, other illustrations showed Polkans with a head, two arms, a torso and two legs. On the same page was an old-looking Polkan with an instrument, captioned 'Man with a Cello.' The word 'Man' captured her attention; was this what this race was called? There were many drawings of the race, such as 'Man looking through binoculars' and man portraits with hats. The same race is known as 'Women' who wear bodices and play instruments. She compared the female figures to females. There were different-looking animals and maps of locations. She had a feeling that they would refer to this book for answers. She turned to Daniel, lifted the book above her shoulders and announced, 'This is it!'

Daniel came over to look at what she had. She handed it to him, and he flicked through the contents, amazed. He landed on a page that illustrated a similar structure to the first building they had

come across. Its caption read, 'Cathedral in the Gothic style.' Daniel mentions, 'This is the one.' He smiled and handed it back to her. She put the dictionary into the pack. She peeked into the bathroom and noted a cupboard on the wall. She reached for the handle and opened it. There were small white bottles on the shelf. She picked one up and tried to read the contents. The small writing was illegible, so Jesse only assumed that it was medicine. She shook it and could hear rattling, so she tried to open it. The lid kept spinning, and it wouldn't twist off. She shook it again and wondered what the contents were; something for later, she thought and put the bottle in her pack. Daniel peeked into the room and asked, 'Ready to go?' She turned and stepped on a floorboard, which felt like it would give way. She manoeuvres around it and carefully leaves the apartment. Daniel leads the way down the staircase back towards the fountain, and they exit the building.

[The Caves Revealed](#)

There was a range of bubble towers to visit, and the subterranean lakes retreated slightly each time. Some towers were partially submerged in the water, and others were situated on an island in the middle of the water.