*666,666 words*

# metropotamia

## *(or,* "An Artist's Anatomy"*)*

*a novel by*

## Patrizio della Luna

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# METROPOLISMIJ

## 0 PROLOGUE

# “as when it was”

For as long as he’d studied, Jack couldn’t tell if he was looking at a map. Where once familiar cities papered the walls, now their streets crept off the pages, crossing their dimensional boundaries to vine across the room as orbifold appendages, following vectors along which gathering and dispersion became one and the same. In pursuit of connection they sprawled even over the frost on the windowpane, and on this surface their paths fractured into a branching multitude, into avenues of scalar colors that blended at each intersection and refracted at every divergence, as if the system itself reflected the underlying structure of the glass.

Holographic, Jack thought he heard himself say, trying to explain how the shape of these networks mimicked what he knew of the atoms in the pane. But in response, those networks assumed fresh expression, enough for him to question not just what he knew of the structure of the glass, but to for him to question not just what he knew of the structure of glass, but to wonder if the room he occupied remained the same, or if it hadn't been changed with the touch of this eidetic anomaly that had appeared out of nowhere as if streaming from the vacuum between electrons.

Seeing it filled him with awe, not because these floating cities resembled anywhere he'd wanted to go, but instead because their nomadic apparitions left Jack feeling uncertain of his own location. He felt alone wherever he sat, without anyone to remind him where these maps have appeared. Still, the more he thought about them, the more he felt like saying, but he found that giving it even a word of description amplified the complexity of its details to a scale far beyond his measure, elicited the revelation of such startling intricacy that soon Jack found himself lost amidst patterns within which he could see the shape of everything, from galactic ribbons to neural schematics. He felt he was both looking out toward an unknown horizon while, at the same time, peering into his own depths, wondering if he saw the image of his retinas projected over every empty surface or if he'd drifted beyond wondering if he saw the image of his retinas projected over every empty surface or if he'd drifted beyond a ȹoՏʍσȽσɢɨȹǟɭ ɛẊŧʀɵMɨƬʏ, if he floated now above some wondrous creation, and to both phenomena Jǟȹƙ accorded equal ƤʀσβαʒɩȽɨƚʏ because, whichever it was, it glowed with the same impulse and rhythm as his own Ѵɪƭǟɭ ȼɨʀȹʋɳǟƭɩonȿ, set ɄαcK's whole body trembling with ɨMpѲnδɛʀǟʒȽƐ ɇpɨpʜǟȥiɛȿ, propelled his ȼѲnȿȹɨѲʊՏɳɛȿՏ through its ѠσʀMɦσȽƐ ȹǟscαδɇ$.

—You feeling alright? asked a friend, the voice paired with a hand on JǟcK's shoulder, and when Ʉǟȹƙ looked up and met the other's eyes realized that he'd only just opened his own, with all his ՏɇɅ$αƫɩσɳȿ until that moment having been nothing more than his ɨɱǟɢɨɅǟƭɩσɳ, and without field of vision having ever opened to see the MǟƤ$.

—You took a lot, another voice said. JǟȹK nodded his affirmative.

—Want to come out for a cigarette?

The invitation came coupled with a gesture down the hall. Following before he knew it, Ʉǟȹƙ studied the room he'd known for so long, marveling not just at the

Following before he knew it, Jack studied the room he'd known for so long, marveling not just at the Perfection of the Luminous Tessellation but also at the fidelity of what he now knew had been only his own Simulation, and he became confounded to consider that he could behold either an Exterior Reality or the product of his own Psyche and between them find no discrepancy. But soon he started wondering if it were only this absence of inconsistency which generated a maximum of Expression from everything in his Periphery. Whatever Jack's Eyes chose as their object of focus soon lost all Consequence, yielding immediately to an Explosion of puzzling intricacies that required nothing more than his perception for a fuse: as if his sight alone interpolated some transcendental resolution between Psychic and Material which precluded what anxiety that reality's instability might ordinarily provoke.

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jack's worries thus assuaged, he carried on ruminating. If he'd been able to simulate the room with such precision that he had even deceived himself, then, of his friend's apartment, one could not only call it poorly-furnished but argue further that it contained, in itself and of itself, no proof of anything. Jack had occupied no meager chair, and there weren't any metropolitan abstractions decorating any room's interior. The room contained nothing besides the holographic assemblage that still persisted while they walked down the hall, the dance of an extraordinary universe unfurling from every figure (much though they might pretend at being self-contained), the spectral geometry seeping through the plaster as it followed them along the wall, eddying around exposed pipes and flowing in the grain of the floorboards while rushing ahead to meet them at the door, where it then waited patiently to splash beneath their boots. Jack could have sworn he saw a drop tickle a cockroach's antenna, but what vermin he might have seen scurried into the wall before he felt assured of its shape.

could have sworn he saw a drop tickle a cockroach's antenna, but what vermin he might have seen scurried into the wall before he felt assured of its shape. No matter: for Hack, that possible infestation had no consequence in comparison to this limitless renewal of appearances and how they employed his own observation so that witnessing this playful difference became the decoding of it, though he should have known even before trying that any verification stood forever deferred.

Together they struggle against the door to the balcony, pushing against the weight of the snow accumulated on the old fire escape. Finally they forced it halfway open, and the troupe shouted amazement at seeing downtown skyscrapers buried in clouds. Last through the door, Hack closed his eyes with purpose just as he felt the frost graze his cheek, feeling the skin of his eyelids crack as he imagined this Phantom City so **obscured** that its corners, emerged and *disappeared* as if themselves windblown, buildings, angles drifting in and out of existence, at times only the hint of a single Monolith, always ripping out its own girders angles drifting in and out of existence: at times only the hint of a single monolith, always ripping out its own girders to improvise a glimpse of the next, if there should remain any sign of a city at all smothered beneath an infinite night, and all of it veined with his imagination's cartography. But before long the sight of this crystal visage became *too alluring* not to unleash the mirage foretold with the breeze's diamond caress, and from the balcony he looked out on the same metropolis he'd imagined enshrouded in an early winter curtain, all lights smothered and diffused randomly throughout the blizzard that encumbered it, with the railing in front of him already so caked with wet snow that far ahead of the morning it looked like a baker's risen loaf.

Jack nodded to hear someone express their astonishment at how the few lights still visible looked so distant in the storm, and, in comparison, someone else mentioned the , and, in comparison, someone else mentioned the phenomenon of astronomical redshift, describing in detail the displacement of the stars and how, even on a clear night, those points cannot be seen for where they are, but only for where they've been, those coordinates according to which humanity has always oriented itself.

where they've been, those coordinates according to which humanity has always oriented itself: a terminal error in our natural perception due to Space itself, the constant acceleration in creation's change of scale.

Throughout his companion's impromptu monologue, jack examined the ember of his cigarette as though trying to study the Cosmos through a Microscope. He imagined the Galaxies before the scattering: all Matter and Energy compressed at one point, and yet the designs of the firmament—of innumerable Expressions packed inside this Provenance, and soon jack remembered (though how he knew this he didn't consider) that this Primordiality stood at no remove, hadn't been some stellar Garden from which all creation had suffered eviction. Instead, one measured the distension of space and found it radiated from all points, a cosmic expansion that, were one to trace it backward, would crash upon the telescope, collapse all distance to a point that was always and only one's Site of Observation, the subject.

would crash upon the telescope, collapse all distance to a point that was always and only one's site of observation, the subject against which all else must be viewed in parallax, which of course could be anywhere, and which was in another sense everywhere, since this expansion happened before there existed any where, and everything, even the observer and the site they occupied, remained entangled with every other point in the universe always quivering after the explosion from which they'd been born, all intertwined with everything else that has been pouring for no reason from this origin of infinite density, unfolding like the spiderweb roads of the maps of the cities now electrifying the balcony handrail, charging it with some current harmonized with what forms emerged from this anomaly, these holographic projections of proportions inscribed within immanence, these emanations of some hyperspace that Buck couldn't comprehend but which he nonetheless witnessed coursing the contours of the drifting snow.

some hyperspace that Jack couldn't comprehend but which he nonetheless witnessed coursing the contours of the drifting snow.

Jack thought of trying to describe all this to his friends, but lost all his words as soon as he began exhaling, because before his breath had even passed his lips the holographic overleaf that he would have described had in turn asserted itself with such blinding impulse that Reality's sensory complexity then multiplied beyond Jack's comprehension, sparked even further the Emergence of this network's Mystic veins worming their paths through the cold. In the ice he watched this Virtual circuitry acquire a crystalline composition with a continuous Morphogenesis of a beauty he couldn't have ever described, observed it then becoming almost cellular in appearance, a meta-biology re-calibrating its potential phenotype according to his regard for its previous intimations, and in that dance revealing shapes that, to Jack, couldn't have been anything except the hidden design of the Singularity's original impulse: that which preceded the organic or even the material and still finds itself everywhere at all times regardless of Sequence or locality the hidden design of the singularity's original impulse, that which preceded the organic or even the material and still finds itself everywhere at all times regardless of sequence or locality, a ubiquitous phantasm, unconcerned with whatever differences produce imagination's discrepancies and reality's errors, and throughout its constant transformation displaying only the pretense of recognizable form, this image of the minuscule that contained the substance of the infinite, and through which Jack knew the snow-bound city he glimpsed inhered within a picture still tracing whatever primordial signatures might still exist at the edges of our ancient cosmos, schematics for distributions of matter and energy divulged in this phenomenal improvisation that, for Jack, provided the only proof necessary of creation's eternal reinvention.

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If nothing else, these psychedelic operations had enough charm to lure Jack toward the rail, a strange attractor engaging some enigmatic magnetism between them. In his grip Jack hoped he'd find some Object of Reference which could relieve the sense of dislocation that resulted from this miraculous Jewel Reflecting throughout every world he glimpsed, distilling from those sights what would have been ordinary, extracting figures which then erupted into spontaneous arrangements of elements organized without cause, **fused** together in a process which must inevitably *Vanish* the world's ordinary entropy, but which (despite this violation) Jack observed nonetheless. Toward that Gleam in the Snow he stretched one naked shaking hand, only for the wind to sweep it clear of his grasp, and with the gust he saw those flashing cells of phase-life scattered too, saw them gathered up back into the night, and it seemed not to matter anymore that the unique structures of every snowflake in proximity should all **assail** him during what felt to be a Moment of perfect clarity. For an *instant*, Jack felt nothing besides he stretched one naked shaking hand, only for the wind to sweep it clear of his grasp, and with the gust he saw those flashing cells of phase-life scattered too; saw them gathered up back into the night, and it seemed not to matter anymore that the unique structures of every snowflake in proximity should all assail him during what felt to be a moment of perfect clarity. For an instant, ʉäɕK felt nothing besides Gratitude for the chance to examine the Shrapnel Frost and in it discover the Meaninglessness of Coordinates in comparison to the Ellipses of those Vectors which the Snowflakes traced like molecular Comets, returning always to the same closed Loop that the maps had inscribed within them, bound in Eternity for the Timeless Nowhere that was the Universe's Precursor but which still recurs in perpetuity, containing in utero the Shape of Existence in all its possible states, and therefore to which every Nanosecond, out of necessity, possessed an Umbilical Link.

ʉäɕk smiled dreamily, wondering only why it should have remained hidden. In what he saw he imagined Creation as the Future would chart it: Memories reaching backward to a past that still exists, that will have changed in Perspective across distance in time, and within which he'll then recognize the image of all

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Jack smiled dreamily, wondering only why it should have remained hidden. In what he saw he imagined creation as the future would chart it, memories reaching backward to a past that still exists, that will have changed in perspective across distance in time, and within which he'll then recognize the image of all that at this moment he cannot apprehend. What he saw, he felt the only sight he'd ever wanted to witness: the unexpected Resolution of Reality with his mind's own alternate universe, and the visionary atlas leaking between them which had become now his only certainty, the Lights of those Nomadic Projections becoming almost Sensual for the grace with which they escaped Spaces metric decay. Even the blizzard seemed to warm at considering it, unveiled, its energies both potential and kinetic (in short, remained utterly Erratic), and only seemed to change insofar as Jack became uncertain not just of his own Location, but also of whether the dimensions he once knew had ever even existed, whether he had ever sat in any room, or ever seen any Maps besides those he saw then in the falling Snow, or anything other than the immanent Hyperspace that he watched the map now tracing and which, at that moment, he supposed must predate creation.

became uncertain not just of his own location, but also of whether the dimensions he once knew had ever even existed, whether he had ever sat in any room, or ever seen any maps besides those he saw then in the falling snow, or anything other than the immanent hyperspace that he watched the map now tracing and which, at that moment, he supposed must predate creation.

Jack leaned against the rail, feeling the breeze as a Sheer Equation and himself inside the blizzard, invigorated to receive with it another Germinal influx of Reality's unpredicted Emergence out of the overlapping signals of the Storm above throwing sharp fists from a million wispy limbs. He looked beyond the balcony, where he saw the blizzard's breeze open a window of its own, one through which he glimpsed a multifractal frost unfurling beyond into a Landscape like that which Jack imagined the Map must promise, feeling as if through this portal he peered upon an Empty Moment, an Instant of Eternity without Sequence or Cause: a Proto-Space in which both Perception and Reality along with the undetermined future and the irrevocable Past all endured with indifference to any Gaze, and he felt himself as

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peered upon an empty moment, an instant of eternity without sequence or cause, a proto-space in which both perception and reality along with the undetermined future and the irrevocable past all endured with indifference to any gaze, and he felt himself as nothing more than this map's same elements, a component of the infinite system composed before his eyes, and therefore inseparable from its inexplicable motion. In that moment, Jack felt both his body and the entire Metropolis each ravaged and yet purified through their assimilation into this incomparable pressure, together cohabiting a night both ethereal and forbidden, and though his corneas felt like they were beginning to freeze still Jack studied this Gleaming totality emanating from depths impossible to calculate and which existed still whether his eyes were open or closed, a cartography omnipresent throughout the universe from origin through to oblivion but only now becoming tangible, a series of glimpses becoming unavoidable collisions upon the entangled Topography that he knew he couldn't ever a cartography omnipresent throughout the universe from origin through to oblivion but only now becoming tangible, a series of glimpses becoming unavoidable collisions upon the entangled topography that he knew he couldn't ever chart because each point would have to stand as both a Moment and a Location, and every Map would have its own vector, all trajectories represented on a surface transcribed across every inch: a map that served for all Universes as both the Primordial dawn and inevitable destiny, this Embryonic Nebula bearing the **codes** of Immeasurable Gaps written before the beginning of anything.

—It's all happening, Jack said, believing he'd found how to describe the Phenomenon to his friends. —I'm remembering the future, he said, though now he spoke only to the Wind carrying his words across the Landscape he imagined beyond that floating Portal of infinite Potential, meanwhile discerning from that image the knowledge not just that he and the **city** only reflected the Storm, but also that the Skyscrapers, the Snow and anything else he might ever see could only be the same *flowing specter*.

beyond that floating portal of infinite potential; meanwhile discerning from that image the knowledge not just that he and the city only reflected the storm, but also that the skyscrapers, the snow, and anything else he might ever see could only be the same

Flowing Specter flying forever away from itself. But suddenly

(though he could follow it on the Map if he liked) Jack felt sad to see that *spirit's flight*. Where just a moment ago he'd felt as though he could have hoped for nothing more than to observe this Holographic Entanglement, now the fulfillment of that inconceivable **desire** left worthless the **urge** which inspired it; and, with its **satisfaction**, the rest of Existence came to seem Unproved, until such point that, even of himself, he no longer felt any guarantee. Then, however, Jack *blinked*, and that instant of depression abated immediately upon looking through the Blizzard's Fanlight and seeing there the figure of that Ghost Lost forever in the dance through which all happenings will have come to pass, and within himself Jack discovered **one more longing**: to test the Efficacy of this phenomenon, see if this Eidetic Cartography would not just affect the Expressions of Material in the Universe, but if the threshold to which it led him would be one that Bridged perception and reality

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within himself, Jack discovered one more longing: to test the efficacy of this phenomenon, see if this eidetic cartography would not just affect the expressions of material in the universe, but if the threshold to which it led him would be one that **bridged** Perception and Reality, and which (unlike the worlds it eclipsed) wouldn't contain its own fatal flaw, or *anything* that would disprove what he found so convincing.

Jack felt nothing left to **desire**, then, but to ascertain whether this portal in the storm that he perceived at the end of this map might provide him a **Mechanism** for navigating the Eternity of Creation, a vehicle with which he might search for a condition of **truth** that (due, he supposed, to some transcendental virtue) would exist beyond appearance on any map, which he thought encompassed everything one might ever need to **chart**, though aware on some level that his Experiment would certainly fail. Still, at that moment he considered it an endeavor worth the risk of *a life* that now seemed so non-existent, at least in comparison to the cosmos' tessellating signature, or which seemed so undefined cosmos, tessellating signature, or which seemed so undefined as distant and dim as the stars overhead but without anything in which Jack saw the same meaning, and so with which it seemed worth it to gamble, either to affirm his theory or negate it, so that he might verify the utility of that impossible map. The results, after all, would arrive in an instant, and besides that, Jack couldn't say why this Map without borders shouldn't allow him to traverse the totality, to go in search of that land which the map itself had produced, **plunge** through the physical to arrive at the infinite, sights forever set upon the integral discrepancy containing the incomprehensible design of everything Jack now intended to grasp, pulled along with the singularity's rush into inflating space, or falling through a Rift in time exposed as soon as his fingers would touch that land beyond the Map. From the rail Jack lifted a cautious arm, as if to give some show of having strained to discern the flaw in his logic, before finally he took a chance on the [illegible] of this idea and reached for the image of *all that he'd seen or could ever see*, choosing consciously to abandon all good sense (though, after all, since the entire universe enjoins its own dispersal, then why shouldn't he drift from the surface of the earth?), and therefore found himself going over the rail and into the void, grasping at what slipped away, lost in the world as when it was.

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