

HALLUCINIC DEJA

MAZE OF EXISTENCE



WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY
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MYSTIC DEJA: MAZE OF EXISTENCE

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“INSIDE THE MAZE THERE ARE NO LIMITS, NO BOUNDARIES, WHERE YOU
COULD GO ANYWHERE YOUR CREATIVE THOUGHTS COULD TAKE YOU.”

-TINA M. RANDOLPH

FOR MY PARENTS WILLIE AND JIMMIE MAE BUTLER
WHO WERE MY CONSTANT INSPIRATION
AND THANKS BE TO GOD FOR THE CREATION OF LIFE

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Mystic Deja

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ONE

THE OLDEST MAN

Lately my father, Dr. Octavius Chanel, has been showing signs of being a real mad scientist. He has been locked in his science laboratory for more than three weeks, coming out for his favorite snack of tuna fish and tortilla chips no more than twice daily. Yesterday evening, I saw him carrying in bulky containers of snakes, lizards, parrots, and other exotic animals—I guess to keep him company, since my mother and newborn brother died just days before New Year’s Eve. The doctor said she didn’t suffer much—screaming violently as she did—for 28 grueling hours.

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Just like Octavius, I've been mentally jaded, constantly reaching back, remembering things the way they used to be, before that sinister character I call the "*Heart Tickler*" descended upon them from another dimension. That soaring metallic "*creature feature*" with his mechanical outstretched arms and rotating fingers, spinning wildly back and forth, is the keeper of souls, the Grim Reaper's companion, lurking idly in hospital rooms, hovering aimlessly over sick beds. He uses just the right tools at just the right time to tinker with patients until something breaks, and shuts down all together.

Lying awake at night, I've tried to keep from having these nightmares that seemed to be ridiculously real. One eerie late hour, a wee, biddy baby burst into my dreams. His plump little figure froze in mid air as he hung by a string from the Tickler's hollow hand. With a tiny palm, he reached out to me, as he was plucked by his diaper and tossed into a swinging satchel. He cried no human tears, filling me with a newfound sense of confidence and peace. *How composed he looked!*

The glimpse into my own existence has always been intense. Sometimes, through random encounters of prophetic *déjà vu*, I can sense my ancestors. I've witnessed African tribesmen hunting leopards in the hot jungles while their women washed clothes under waterfalls, singing the melodious songs of heroism; I've seen Irish aristocrats smoking heavily scented cigars by the dim light of a crystal chandelier while contemplating political strategies and laughing away their fears; I've watched Cherokee Indians huddled together

by the warm, open fire, as the wintry sky beat down on their ten-foot teepees.

I have even felt the calm tranquility that my great, great grandmother Kanelia felt as she meditated at the summits of steep cliffs overlooking mountainous plains. Her age was seen in her long, gray tresses of hair, flowing like waves of silk. She held cosmic knowledge in those thoughtful, emerald eyes. I couldn't help noticing how deeply she smiled, as she opened her eyes to the soft blankets of white snow, drifting from the edge of valleys where buffalos roamed.

I've never met her or even seen her, for she died before I was born. But I know her, because part of her being, memories and all, are hidden somewhere deep within me.

As the morning sun chased away the past night's shadows, Joshua, my "Boo," and I were watching cartoons when he unexpectedly said, "You should see a therapist."

For a long moment I looked at him thoughtfully. "I guess you're *right*," I answered. The pressure of my dwindling family tree was now a burden that had me so mesmerized, I literally could not refuse.

Always meticulously neat, Joshua paid strict attention to detail. A tall, handsome guy of nineteen, he concentrated heavily on outdated and rare books, guitar music, and unique magician's stunts. "Miracles of a lesser god," he would say. Though Joshua thought highly of the great Harry Houdini, he preferred to perform street magic and some good, old-fash-

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ioned card tricks.

“I’m *glad* you agree,” he said, “I’ll go with you.” He pulled out his short pick and touched the strings of his Les Paul lightly.

“But do we have to go *now*?” I interrupted. “I don’t feel like doing anything today.”

“That is precisely why I think you need help,” was his reply. “You haven’t felt like doing *anything* for days.”

“Why should I?” I asked.

“Trust me, Deja. You need to get back to your normal self. This new you just isn’t any fun.”

Sensing my hesitation, Joshua stated, “Oh come on, what’s the *worst* that could happen?”

“Well, all right,” I replied coolly, standing up to shake the stiffness out of my limbs. “Let’s leave now. Might as well get some fresh air.” Those keenly perceptive, troubled eyes seemed filled with a ray of hope, as he drove me to the mental health clinic.

For 20 minutes I sat staring distantly out the window, mentally recollecting fondly how my mom and dad used to stroll hand-in-hand through our splendorous garden, while I ran about busily gathering fresh flowers, enjoying the vibrancy of the sunlit sky. I could hear the pleasant sounds of chirping beetles making such a soothing song, that I soon drifted off to sleep.

My dream took a familiar shape, and brought my mind

from the past to the present, finally resting again in the car's interior—Joshua's form and the whirling trees that passed blurrily by on opposite sides of the freeway. Joshua sat perfectly poised and not too relaxed, as he cautiously kept his mind on the long road that stretched forth as far as the eye could see.

"Joshua, what's *that?*" I exclaimed, trying desperately to get him to slow down, but not getting his attention at all. I noticed *he was* looking at the street.

"STOP!" I yelled, grabbing the dashboard and steadying myself for the imminent crash, but the car kept rolling forward, as if nothing *unusual* was hovering in the middle of the highway.

I saw him plain as day. He was *old*. He was perhaps the oldest man I had ever seen. Old like Methuselah, who lived for *nine hundred years*. His wrinkled skin was full of tiny sparkles, of vibrant gleaming stars, as if he were wearing a jar of body glitter. He was almost completely covered by exceedingly long, blue-white, shaggy hair, which seemed to shine and twinkle.

For a brief moment, time seemed to slow down, just long enough for him to plunge his scrawny body's head through the windshield.

Then the most startling thing happened—*he reached right down and grabbed my hand!*

"This way," he exclaimed, and the next thing I knew, I was diving into a pool of murky water.

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I found myself swimming fast toward the ocean's floor. Then, as I turned to miss bumping into a beady-eyed trilobite wiggling pass my right foot, I realized something extraordinary: *I was still breathing regularly.* As we approached the sandy bottom I noticed a thick bed of fat, lazy jellyfish.



“Follow me,” the old man floated in front of me, pointing his finger toward the surface. He led me to a large rock, stationed in the middle of what seemed like nowhere. I pulled myself up on it and gazed out at the scene. Up above, the sky was a dark purple color, almost pitch black, but somewhere in-between the sky and the sea, a powerful, bright, amazing light descended, warming my dripping-wet skin.

The old man smiled at me. It felt like he could *see through me*, as if my thoughts were *funny*. “Call me Zim Logi,” he grinned with a wide mouth showing no teeth. “I have something to show you.” I noticed he was wearing a bulky,

cerulean robe that seemed much longer than his little legs should be.

“Well, what is it?” I asked.

“*Wait* and you’ll *see*. It will come quickly,” he replied, still with a grin. Gazing at the sky, he beamed. “Look, here it comes. Remember what you see.”

The mauve haze climbed down out of the sky, swirling past me, faster than I could blink my eyes. Each cloud that hurled by turned a different shade, until I began to make out images in them, vague pictures. It was such a captivating sight that I wasn’t sure, but one of the images resembled *Octavius*. He was standing at the edge of a steep precipice, gazing into a voluminous hole layered beneath a thick, misty fog.

Gasping, I yelled, “NO, DADDY, DON’T!” but it was too late. He didn’t seem to hear me anyway, as he dived head first, plunging into the mysterious pit.

My mind was spinning. I wanted to let go of my fears and jump in after him. I was startled to see Zim Logi smiling triumphantly. Looking into his reassuring eyes, I gradually began to understand. “You *must* remember,” he was saying.

Nodding my head, I said, “I won’t forget.”

A sense of weightlessness filled my body as I followed, experiencing a ghostly numbness that shook me from my sleep.

The next moment I sat up bewildered as Joshua pulled into the clinic’s parking lot. “Girl, *you sleep hard*,” he teased.

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The clinic was located on the outskirts of Atlanta, Georgia. It was a tranquil and private spot, where a person could rest from the stress of the city. Joshua and I walked down a long, white corridor to a small room with a sign that read Dr. Pauline Shanavy. Once we were seated on a cherry leather sofa, a tall, slim, dark-haired woman walked into the room and sat down in front of us.

Dr. Shanavy was dressed in an indigo pantsuit with a paisley silk scarf and diamond flower pendant that I'm sure cost a fortune. Her eyes seemed dull like a raggedy old doll.

"So tell me what's *troubling* you," she asked, staring inquisitively behind pricey, gold-plated glasses. I glanced at Joshua uneasily.

"*Go on*, tell her how you feel," Joshua interjected. He put his hand on mine for support.

Immediately my right leg started to quiver—a nervous habit. "Well, it started with my mother's death," I began, "First of all, my Daddy has been up all night doing these *strange* experiments. I can hear him making noise in his laboratory. And I have a bad feeling that something awful is about to happen."

"What makes you think this?" she asked. "Where is the *fear* coming from?"

"I'm not quite sure."

I gazed annoyed out the open window at the violet-green swallows whose chirps seemed to get louder as the time went by. "Probably because I keep having nightmares about my

mother and baby brother's death. My dreams seem so real. I don't know whether I am asleep, awake, or somewhere in between. And my dad, I don't know what to do about him. Both of us are going through our own grief issues right now. It's like talking to a brick wall. I don't even try to communicate with him anymore."

Dr. Shanavy sat quietly for a moment, vigorously taking notes. Her serious, pale face showed no emotion. After she had finished writing, she took off her glasses. "What do you *mean*, you don't *know* whether you are *asleep* or *awake*?" she asked. "Can you explain?"

"Ok, well this is what's wrong," I scratched my now-aching head. As I turned to her I said, "My dreams are too real—almost three-dimensional. Most visions give me the feeling I'm experiencing somebody else's thoughts; like I'm living through them—similar to *déjà vu*. It can be pleasant at times, but lately, it hasn't been."

Joshua started to speak, paused briefly, then looked at me surprised, as if I had said I was seeing ghosts.

"How often does this occur?" the doctor went on, unmoved.

"Two or three times a week."

Dr. Shanavy sat in deep thought. She was already figuring how to put it to me gently that I would need constant supervision and lots of sedatives.

After what seemed like forever, she spoke. "You are experiencing what is called *post-traumatic stress syndrome*," she

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explained. “It’s quite common among people who have been traumatized. It’s expected with the great loss you’ve recently suffered. I’ll write a prescription to help you sleep and I suggest you get plenty of rest. Call me if you think you might want to harm yourself, but other than that you’ll be just fine. Oh, look, time’s up.”

She smiled and led us to the door, handing me a slip of white paper.

Joshua and I reached the car and headed for home. Although the day was still young, I had suddenly felt fatigued and wanted to sleep for the next 24 hours. All in all, my afternoon had been most disappointing. I felt as if I hadn’t gotten anything accomplished. Dad was still going to stay locked up in his laboratory, and I was definitely considering being in my room for the rest of the year. This was surely becoming somewhat of a routine for the both of us.

After I got home, I made my way to my room, turned off the light, jumped on the canopy bed and dozed off.

That night, I awakened to the annoying sound of the telephone. Immediately, I sprang out of bed, spinning around, frantically trying to figure where I’d left the receiver. I didn’t end up finding it until I sat back down a moment to think.

“Hello,” I said groggily.

“*Deja*, meet me downstairs in the lab. It’s *important*,” my father whispered, exasperation in his voice.

“Okay, Daddy, I’ll be down in a second,” I replied, glanc-

ing at the clock on the nightstand. I wondered what could possibly be so important at 4:00 am.

My father's science lab was downstairs in the west wing of our huge estate. The laboratory was built in the early 1800's by my great-grandfather, who was also a scientist. Its walls were made of mahogany wood, its rooms spacious and well-organized. There were several quarters including an open, round space developed into a wildlife habitat, which resembled a zoo exhibit. It had a telescope too, one that stood out in size and probably weighted over a ton.

The one unique aspect of the lab was the simulated space room. Its imitation of the stars, planets, and micro-galaxies, were quite realistic and made you feel as if you were seeing the whole universe all at once. In the center of it all stood a suede, back-massaging chair, more comfortable than a couch, just right for lying down and pretending to be somewhere you're most certainly not.

The hallway was chilly and eerily dark. I passed my mother's oil portrait and for a moment, I gazed upon her face, remembering how she reminded me so much of myself. I remained there for a while, in a dream-like state, until I heard a loud burst, like breaking glass.

I was again wholly alarmed when I heard a screeching noise and then a bump, and a thud, as if something had hit the wall. I ran as fast as I could to the stairs and jumped several steps at a time to get to the bottom, being careful not to trip and fall. The west wing was deserted and rightfully so,

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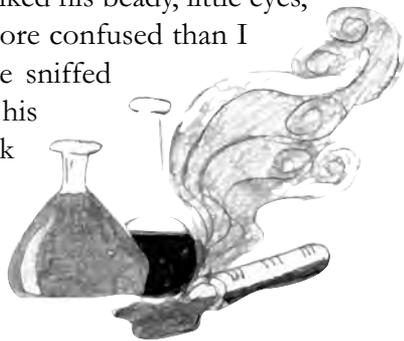
since Octavius had dismissed the staff the week before. Rounding the corner, I gradually perceived the lab door slightly ajar and a bizarre twinkling glow coming from within.

“Daddy,” I called as I pushed open the heavy door. All of a sudden, a strong electric current knocked me on the floor. Beakers and tubes flew against the wall. I shielded my face from the glass exploding all around.

When the commotion finally stopped, I rose quickly to look around. I was watching gooey liquid drip from a broken vial when I realized something furry was moving under a brown cardboard box, scratching and pawing, trying to tip it over. I approached the box cautiously. It was beneath a long table so I had to bend down and crawl slightly under the table to get close enough to see what had me distracted.

I had hardly flipped it over when I heard another noise behind me. I recognized the sound immediately to be static electricity. Ignoring the pulsations, I placed my hand under the carton and pulled out a half-sized koala. The koala and I looked at each other. He blinked his beady, little eyes, puzzled. He seemed even more confused than I was. With his large nose, he sniffed the wasted chemicals, and his ears became frizzy and stuck straight out.

“How *did you* get in here?” I asked not expecting a reply. Despite his



unexpected appearance, I wasn't surprised. He had probably gotten out of the recently constructed habitat. He was the latest and most expensive of the group.

I got up, koala in arm, and began searching for answers to what may have caused the disturbance.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Originally from Grambling, Louisiana, Tina M. Randolph graduated from the Art Institute of Houston with an Associates Degree in Visual Communications. After graduation she worked as a computer graphic artist, editorial assistant, and later art director for several small magazines. She then went back to college and earned another Associates in Computer Information Systems.

For the past four years she has worked as a web designer and developer, specializing in multimedia and streaming video. She now spends most of her time reading, writing, and studying 3D animation and special effects. Randolph lives in Houston, Texas with her dog Dandie.