



This excerpt from *Mayan Interface* describes an encounter between Lydia—a translator of Mayan glyphs and shaman-in-training—and a creature of ancient myth. Charon, a skeletal death figure, is Lydia’s *uay*, an alter-ego who appears in shamanic states.

*Relax.*

*Without thinking.*

*Without expectations.*

She remembered that the Tarot Death card was nestled in her blouse pocket.

“You might be of use at a time like this, eh, Charon?” she murmured, taking the card in her hand. Lydia closed her eyes and concentrated on the image of the skeleton that was also her own *uay*. She felt her mind settle into a paradoxical feeling of reverie and alertness. It was a state she often thought of as “wide focus,” encompassing both intense concentration and a free flow of thought. People called it right-brained thinking, but Lydia didn’t like to pin it down to just half of her brain. It always felt to her as if her whole mind was engaged, every one of her neurons active. It was as if her nerve endings reached beyond her physical brain into the boundless area of her concentration.

It was the state in which she could become deeply involved in a drawing or some aspect of her work, letting go of the rest of the world and infinitely enlarging the space and time she experienced at the moment. It was when unexpected ideas and images were most likely to drop into her mind. It was the space of daydreams and of the greatest creativity. And it was also the state of shamanic awareness.

Lydia opened her eyes. The temple had darkened and the macaw was glowing. She held out the hand in which she was holding the card. She couldn’t see the card, but her hand was there – gray and slightly unformed, just as it looked last night.

She slipped the card into her pocket, then raised her hand again. It began to move without her conscious volition, shadowy fingers following the intricate pattern on the virtual wall. Again, she heard that ringing, crystalline sound. She watched with serene, hushed interest as the diamond pattern of the mural seemed to peel away from the temple walls and spiral around her. The details of the temple melted into a different space that took on the quality of an Escher drawing – an area not constrained to the height, width, and depth of the room.

*Extra-dimensional.*

She felt herself fill with a deep joy.

During her brief visit here before, her impressions of the space had been vague, scattered, dreamlike. But in the fullness of her wide focus, everything seemed astoundingly vivid. Through the gray lattice, Lydia could now see a midnight-blue sky speckled with blazing, sparkling stars. The patterned sky seemed to curve closely over her, forming a corridor that writhed slowly in a snarling, snake-like motion. It was like entering a living tunnel, a sinuous space that constantly shifted its barely-seen perimeters. And was it Lydia's imagination, or did the very surface beneath her feel softer, less stable, in subtle but constant motion?

No questions of delusion or trickery made Lydia hesitate now. Whoever or whatever had created this reality, it was too wonderful to run away from. She took a step forward into the tunnel. When the darkness again gathered into a seemingly living and sentient form, she walked directly toward it.

Lydia realized she was holding her breath. She let out a long sigh, as quietly as possible. The dark form didn't seem to be coming any closer, but it was changing. Colors emerged – red, with touches of black and yellow. Lydia saw two bright flashes, like circles of reflected light.

Then the fog-like veil between her and the creature parted, and Lydia saw the face clearly. It had a nearly straight beak filled with blue, jeweled teeth. Its eyes, surrounded by golden disks, were strangely human. The image was absolutely familiar to her.

The creature was raising its wings ...

The macaw leaped forward into the air, sailing toward her with a wild cry that seemed neither human nor bird. Time and motion seemed to freeze as Lydia took in a succession of details: light refracting off the jagged edge of a razor-beak that clacked with a sound like castanets; fury glittering from a gold-ringed human eye; hard, metallic-looking feathers reaching outward, sweeping downward.

She knew who this creature was.

"Itzam-Yeh!" she shouted, raising her hands above her head in a gesture of triumphant greeting. Her own shout contained a note of wild exultation that sounded unlike her – as if she had become somebody else.

*Charon!*

She had shouted with Charon's voice!

The macaw veered upward, flying over her head, talons slicing just inches past her face. His wingspan must have been at least twelve feet across. The flapping of those wings created a deep, percussive pounding in Lydia's head that almost shook her off her feet. The air churned around her in swirls and eddies in response to the thundering wings, and the diamond-patterned walls drew back to accommodate his flight.

The macaw circled above her, scooping and ducking, rising and diving – sometimes a dozen or so yards away, other times so close that Lydia almost expected to feel a harsh brush of feathers across her face – but always with a gold-ringed human eye locked upon her.

With an abrupt outcry, Itzam-Yeh broke out of his low orbit and sprang upward, ascending and diminishing in the distance, becoming a red speck against the rapidly-expanding net across the sky. The farther the macaw flew, the deeper Lydia's sense of kinship became. She felt like a child again – or as if a lost, forgotten child had been reborn inside of her.

Then the pounding of wings seemed to grow louder again. In fact, Lydia felt as if that pounding was coming from deep inside her. Had her very heartbeat synchronized itself with the beating of those great wings?

It took her a moment to realize that it wasn't her heartbeat that she felt, but her breath. It came and went in rapid, throbbing pants and gasps, erupting from her solar plexus, her entire diaphragm rippling violently like a bed sheet hanging from a clothesline in the wind.

*Laughter!*

She was laughing aloud!

It was a powerful, penetrating laughter that went far beyond joy or even hilarity. It was the kind of laughter that could only come from the fulfillment of some deep, long-held, long-denied wish – the kind of laughter that might arise from being reunited with a long-lost friend one had given up for dead. It was also a singularly insolent, mocking laugh – not like her own laughter at all.

*Charon's laughter!*

She began to grow dizzy and giddy – positively drunk with her laughter.

*What's happening to me?*