**Collective Memory**

Megan Nicholson

Tamar stood with his back to the windows that lined the conservatory’s south wall, running a finger over the broad, smooth surface of a banana leaf. No matter how often the filters were cleaned, the vents that cycled the air into the compound left a thin sheath of dust on every surface, and the leaves were no exception. He had done the job himself a handful of times since he was of age to start his rotations. The filters were located in The Pits, along with the water purification system, geothermal heating and cooling system, and electric generators that connected to the solar panels that lined the roof of the compound like a stegosaurus. Pit duty was exhausting but inescapable, no more or less essential than any other work that had to be done to maintain the compound and the life sustained within its walls.

The radiators hissed, injecting a faintly metallic smelling steam into the conservatory to maintain adequate humidity levels. Tamar wiped the remainder of the dust off the face of each of the tree’s leaves with the soft skin of his palm, careful not to rip its tattered edges further. He could remember planting the tree as a boy, he and his father bending down and parting the moist, black earth with their hands as he listened to his father describe how the mellow fruit would practically melt on his tongue.

“When can we eat one papa?” he had asked.

His father chuckled, “You and the tree both have a lot of growing to do before then,” he reminded Tamar.

Ready to do his part to speed up the process, Tamar had pressed the seed deep into the dirt, his small finger leaving a little dip in the soil. They had watched the spot in silence for a moment, as the humid conservatory air pressed in around them, filling their lungs and making them sweat.

Now the banana tree was the size of Tamar, shooting up tall and strong. Tamar went to the conservatory daily after his morning shift in the kitchens. He preferred the peaceful stillness of the conservatory to the clatter and whir of the rest of the compound. Here he could enjoy the beauty of nature: green, ripe and pungent.

The gravel that lined the conservatory floor crunched and shifted under his bare feet as he turned to face the windows. He looked out into the distant winter sun that was at its midday climax, a low-slung golden orb that seemed menacingly aloof, its rays merely glancing Earth’s way as an afterthought. He thought of the stories he had been told when he was younger about the rains and grasses, forests and rivers; a whole world that looked like the conservatory. But Tamar had stopped believing the stories long ago. He, for one, could never imagine Earth looking like anything more than the swirls of dust he saw beyond the conservatory windows.