



Outside In (An Inside Novel)

By Maria V. Snyder

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Me?

A leader?

Okay, I *did* prove that there's more to Inside than we knew.

That a whole world exists beyond this cube we live in. And finding that led to a major rebellion—between worker scrubs like me and the snobby uppers who rule our world. Make that *ruled*. Because of me, we're free. I thought that meant I was off the hook, and could go off on my own again—while still touching base with Riley, of course. He's the one upper I think I can trust. But then we learned that there's outside and then there is *Outside*.

And something from Outside wants In.

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Editorial Review

Review

About the Author

Maria V. Snyder is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the Study series, the Glass series, the Healer series, *Inside Out*, and *Outside In*. Born and raised in Philadelphia, she earned a Bachelors of Science degree in Meteorology from Penn State and a Master of Arts degree in fiction writing from Seton Hill University. Unable to part ways with Seton Hill, Maria is currently a teacher and mentor for the MFA program. Find her on the Web at MariaVSnyder.com.

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My fingers ached as my leg muscles trembled.

Beads of sweat snaked down the skin on my back, leaving an itchy trail. I clung to the almost sheer metal wall and breathed in deep. When my heart slowed to a more normal rhythm, I relaxed my right hand's grip and stretched for the next hand hold—a short piece of pipe. Then I repeated the motion with my left, climbing another meter higher.

Far below, spots of daylight illuminated the half completed construction on level ten. Distant voices floated on the stale dusty air. I had passed the last of the bluelights. Nothing but blackness remained above me.

I cocked my head, sweeping the flashlight's beam across the wall in search of another pipe to grab. Logan had designed a special helmet equipped with a light to keep my hands free.

"Trella?" Riley's voice startled me.

I lost my grip. Falling, I cursed my own stupidity for not switching my earring/receiver off.

"I know you can hear me," he said with an annoyed tone. "Where are you?"

Getting one hell of a rope burn, I grabbed my safety line and squeezed to slow my fall. After what felt like a thousand weeks, I reached the end of the rope and jerked hard, biting my tongue. I swung, tasting blood and lamenting the slip. That had been the highest point I or anyone else had attained. Ever.

Riley grunted in frustration. "Trella, you can go exploring later. You're late for the Committee meeting. They're waiting for you."

He wasn't the only one frustrated. For the last twelve weeks, I'd been promised time to go exploring the Expanse. All my previous forays had lasted about an hour before I'd been summoned to another important meeting. This time, I had been determined to ignore everyone, only to forget about the receiver.

I had hoped to reach the ceiling of the Expanse, but the effort needed to re-scale the wall would be too much for my tired muscles. Resigning myself to yet another delay, I stopped my swing by dragging my hand along the wall.

The construction workers wanted to build a ladder up the side of the Expanse, install daylights and find the ceiling. But the Committee insisted they first finish the six new levels for the citizens of Inside to spread out. I agreed, yet my curiosity would not be satisfied until I knew the height of the Expanse.

Pressing the top button on my shirt, I said to Riley, "Tell the Committee I'll be there in an hour. They can start without me. They don't need me there to quibble over every minor detail."

"You're right," Riley said. "They need you when they quibble over the insignificant details, the worthless details and the waste-of-everyone's time details."

While understandable, his sarcasm was too harsh for someone as even-tempered as Riley. "What happened?"

"I can't get a work crew to fix the faulty wiring in level five. It's a mess, but they're too busy with level six. We've lived in those four levels for the last one hundred and forty-seven thousand plus weeks, it won't kill us to wait a few more."

Overcrowding in the bottom two levels had been insufferable, but now that the uppers and lowers were united, there should be more room. Except the uppers wouldn't consider any plans for the scrubs to move into their levels. They insisted it would be a wasted effort since the new levels would be ready soon.

"I'll see what I can do," I said. I transferred my weight back onto the wall and unclipped the rope from my safety harness. Climbing down two meters to the roof of level ten, I glanced up. Next time, I would need a longer rope.

By then, level six would probably be finished. I walked over to the access stairs. It was so nice not to squeeze between levels. But before I reached them, the construction foreman called my name.

I waited for him to join me and smiled in recognition of the burly man. "Hi Hank, how's it going?"

"Lousy," Hank said. He had buzzed his gray hair to a stubble on his head. Holding a wipe board in one hand, he tapped the board with a marker. "I've a list of repairs for levels one to four, but no one will do them. And I'm losing construction people every hour."

"Losing how?"

"They take a break and never come back." My alarm must have shown on my face, because Hank rushed to assure me. "It's not like that. They're angry the uppers aren't doing any of the work. My crews are being difficult, showing up late, leaving early or not coming at all."

A passive resistance. Wonderful. "Why won't anyone fix the repairs?"

"Same reason. The uppers aren't doing their share."

I suppressed a sigh. The Pop Cops had threatened the uppers with exile in the lower levels in order to scare them into cooperating. They had thought life below would be nothing but hard physical labor. Since they had

run all the systems in Inside, their jobs involved sitting in front of a computer, and telling the scrubs what to do. Changing their perception of the scrubs was still ongoing, and I believed would be one of the hardest tasks. But not impossible.

"Okay, Hank. I'll tell the Committee."

He looked doubtful. "That Committee can only agree on one thing."

"What's that?"

"To disagree."

I laughed, but Hank didn't. "Oh, come on. It's not that bad. We don't have Pop Cops anymore."

"Maybe we should."

Hank's words followed me as I descended to level three. He had to be joking. No one...well, no scrub—and Hank had been one for maintenance—would ever wish for the return of the Pop Cops. I dismissed his comment as being melodramatic and hurried to my room.

Since it had only been twelve weeks since the rebellion, I still slept in the extra room in the infirmary in Sector B3. It had been designated for the Doctor's intern, but, so far, no one could handle the job. I wouldn't mind—a place of my own was a luxury I've never had—except I shared the suite's washroom and kitchen with Doctor Lamont. Also known as Kiana Garrard. Or as I liked to call her, the Traitor.

Unfortunately, I remained in the minority. The Committee had reviewed her actions during the rebellion. They decided she had been duped by Lieutenant Commander Karla Trava and her betrayal had minor consequences. Of course, the two infirmaries full of wounded from the revolt had nothing to do with their ruling. And the limited number of doctors hadn't been a consideration, either. Yeah, right and I was Queen of Inside.

The Traitor tended to a few patients in the main room of the infirmary. Which consisted of two rows of beds lined up along each side. Curtains hung from U-shaped tracks in the ceiling for privacy and a narrow path cut through the middle. A high counter full of medical supplies covered half the back wall. Next to the counter was another door that led to the Traitor's office, the exam room and the surgery. Beyond them was the apartment.

Without looking at her, I hurried past the beds, aiming for the far door.

"Trella," she called.

I paused, but kept my back to her.

"I have a surgery scheduled for hour sixty. I'll need your assistance."

"What happened to Catie?"

"She passed out when one of the construction crew came in with a bloody gash on his forehead that exposed the bone."

Closing my eyes, I suppressed the accusation that she purposely tried to gross out the people I found to help her. Yet another item for my long to-do list—find the Traitor an intern. "I'm busy. You'll have to find someone else to help." I glanced at the clock. Hour fifty-five.

"I can't train them in five hours, Trella. You have experience and an iron stomach. Plus..."

I waited.

In a softer voice she said, "Plus you're good. You have a natural talent that shouldn't be wasted. You must have inherited that from me."

Whirling around, I confronted her. "Now you decide Karla wasn't lying. Does thinking I'm your daughter help you with the guilt over betraying us? Am I supposed to feel special that you risked all we had worked for and *died* for because of motherly love?"

She stepped back in surprise, clutching a tray to her chest as if it were a shield. Her long hair—the same color as mine—had been braided into a single plait that hung to her waist.

I hadn't meant to be so nasty, but since the rebellion, she had never once acknowledged the possibility of our relationship, insisting it had been another one of Karla's twisted tricks. I agreed. Riley, though, had speculated that if she believed I was her offspring, then the enormity of what she had done would have overwhelmed her. He had tried to explain it, to help me see it from her point of view.

But a traitor was a traitor in my mind. No need to waste time justifying her actions. I had enough to do.

Despite my personal feelings, we did need her doctoring skills. "What about Doctor Sanchia?"

"Busy with his own patients and the scrub...the caretakers in the lower levels." She hesitated.

A ripple of unease lapped against my stomach. "They refused?"

She met my gaze. "Not in so many words. They just won't answer my requests, and when I go down there, they ignore me or give me the runaround until I give up and leave."

Dark circles, new wrinkles and streaks of white hair aged her. She appeared older—closer to fifty centiweeks than forty.

"How critical is the surgery at hour sixty? Can it be delayed?" I asked.

"It's Emek's appendix. If I don't remove it soon, it will burst and kill him."

"All right, I'll help you. For *Emek's* sake." I headed to my room. My thoughts returned to the Committee. They would need to investigate why the lower care workers were ignoring requests for help.

My palms stung as I washed up. I had forgotten about the rope burns. Grabbing a tube of antiseptic, I rubbed it on the abrasions. Abrasions? I needed to find another place to sleep before I started spouting medical lingo like a pro.

Riley's father had offered to move from their apartment, but it was too soon for us to go that next step. Since

the rebellion, Riley and I had little to no time to get to know each other better. I touched my silver sheep pendant—a gift from Riley. Perhaps I could live in our storeroom and spend more alone time with Riley. Only a few members of the Force of Sheep knew of its existence. Which made staying there even more appealing.

The Committee met in the large conference room next to Inside's main Control Room, both within Quadrant G4. I had argued for the new levels to be built in a different configuration than the existing levels without success.

With so many changes happening so fast, the Committee thought a new design would just confuse everyone. So level five resembled levels one through four—a three by three grid, like a Tic Tac Toe board. The four corners were labeled Quadrants and the middle sections were Sectors. Starting from the top row on the left, the first Quadrant was A, then Sector B and Quadrant C. The middle was Sectors D, E and F and the last row had Quadrant G, Sector H and Quadrant I. Just add the level number and any idiot could find a location.

I arrived at the meeting two hours late. Slipping into an empty seat beside Jacy, I glanced around the long oval table. The Committee had been comprised of one representative from each of the nine upper families and one leader from each scrub area like hydroponics and waste-water. Eighteen in all. Since an even number could cause problems when members voted, a nineteenth spokesperson had been added.

Despite repeated requests that I become the nineteenth member, I refused, preferring to be a part of the Committee as a consultant only. Less responsibility. Riley had been asked next, but he'd quipped that the Committee didn't need both him and his father and he'd claimed that he would be more useful as support personnel.

They finally elected Jacy.

After my initial surprise at his appointment, and, when I thought it through, it made sense. He had taken over the organization and leadership of the rebellion when I had been captured by the Pop Cops. Plus he was well connected through his network of people in the lower levels.

I leaned close to him. "What did I miss?"

"They're trying to decide which group can move into level five."

"Group?" That was new.

"Once all six new levels are completed, the Committee thinks the nine families can share five levels and the scrubs, broken into groups by areas, can live in the other five."

"That won't work."

"I know and you know, but try and explain it to those eighteen." He swept his hand out. "They're still thinking in terms of uppers and lowers."

Which reminded me. "Are you aware of the labor strike?"

Jacy stared at me with a guarded expression. "Yep."

"How do we get the workers back?"

"By having the uppers get their hands dirty for once."

And Jacy just proved he also thought in terms of uppers and lowers. If I was being honest, I did as well. That was the problem. But I couldn't figure out a solution.

Why should I? I'd done my part and found Gateway, led the rebellion and discovered the Expanse. The multiple scars on my arms, legs and torso from Pop Cop Commander Vinco's knife proved I had sacrificed for the citizens of Inside.

I had also lost my closest friend, Cogon. He had acted more like a brother, and I missed him so much my insides felt rusted and brittle. Cog would have loved organizing the construction crews. He'd have insisted on perfection before moving on to another level.

Slouching in my chair, I let the Committee's voices roll over me. They didn't need me. The Committee would take us to the next stage.

After listening to the sixth scrub area representative list the reasons they should be the first to move into level five, I willed the clock to move faster. These meetings were a waste of my time. I could be spending these hours with Riley. The session went on and on. Assisting the Traitor with surgery grew more appealing with each minute. I lasted until hour fifty-nine.

"I'm outta here. I'm helping the...Doctor Lamont," I whispered to Jacy.

"Will you be back before the vote?" he asked.

"Why? Nothing I say changes their minds." Frustration and weariness welled, but I swallowed them down.

"You've given up, Trell. That's not like you."

"Sitting in endless meetings for twelve weeks isn't like me either. I'm a big picture girl." I tried a smile, but Jacy kept his frown. I made a sudden liberating decision. "Tell the Committee I'm resigning as a consultant and going back to what I do best."

Shock, anger and censure warred on Jacy's face. His lips moved for a moment before he spoke. "And what do you do best?"

Users Review

From reader reviews:

David Williams:

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Novel) is kind of reserve which is giving the reader unforeseen experience.

Tracy Gardiner:

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