

Era of the Spectre

Rui Cruz

Lucid Dreaming

I must let you know that my present situation is unbearable. That I, the prophesised harbinger of chaos, can no longer raise my head and face the dawn with dignity! Each newborn day is but a fresh, monotonous leaf in that wretched tome that chose to chronicle my days. Every morning I wake up wearier, and eventually will find myself unable to rise, and will then wane as little time as I may have left in utter solitude. All the while, the bitter voices outside shall slowly rise proud and bright, for a dreadful cloud will have been purged from the skies above. Mirth and birdsong shall celebrate my demise.

I am hopeless, fatigued by much dark thought. Were all this that ails me fortuitous, or some fancy of heinous gods, I would waste not an instant in reflection. But my thorough understanding of the mechanics set to work in the making of my ghastly condition is incompatible with inner peace. I know—and too often grieve on that knowledge—that disaster came to me when the swirls of Time were artificially manipulated and forced to converge in a specific, carefully chosen spot. This process carries on still, effectively forcing an increasingly large span of time into a tiny slot in the fabric of reality. The years of my lifetime are an aberration, a surplus, an unwanted excrescence. I, as all in this world, am quite clearly outside the order of things, and my time does not exist. We were—I was—thrown out of Time, and the centuries for which I may yet live will bear no effect on my past life.

The truth, the one objective fact that apparently outwits those who surround me is frighteningly simple. This world we unfortunately share is but a dream. My dream. Better still, the dream of He who is what I was.

When dreaming, one usually sees oneself in the shape of a bizarre character, deformed by the particulars of one's subconscious and the distinctive traits of the dream in question. I know of what I speak, for I am frequently assailed by burlesque

Weird Chronicle

The following text was written under the influence of H.P. Lovecraft's 'The Book'.

The newspapers were brought to me early in the morning, as usual, and very soon, my bleary eyeballs were rolling over the headlines. All but one of the periodicals championed a series of grizzly murders with all the mannerisms of sadistic glee. The remaining tabloid's editor is either a tactful, scrupulous chap, or a complete idiot.

Nevertheless, the gruesome deeds are not wholly absent from its freshly inked leaves. Page eleven covers them in a medium-sized article, concentrating on the two domestic cases: a civil engineer who was axed to oblivion in his own yard and the brutal strangling of a young schoolgirl. The foreign tale surpasses these in sheer outlandishness. It is a melodramatic saga of betrayal and retaliation, that builds up to a horrendous finale: the despised murderess took her satirical lover's heart from out his thorax.

These are to me no more than trifle amusements, poorly outlined chronicles of human darkness. Though definitely cruel, they are just too far from the supreme negritude that lies beyond the earth, forever watching and waiting. It does not gaze down with cosmic indifference, which would be a true blessing, but rather with a soul-chilling propensity to champion wickedness, perversion, and every manifestation of general foulness.

Buried amidst the pages of just one of the newspapers—yes, oddly enough, that one whose marshals pay heed to the ageing principle of *decorum*—one small piece of writing caught my eye. It tells of the suicide of a custom's officer. Remarkably, no gore-drenched descriptions have been poured over that brief note. The man has hung himself in his bedroom, with the aid of the customary wooden stool, but neglecting the customary farewell note. The police are in the dark as to any plausible motive. And they will not get very far. Not that it matters much

The Last Day of Death

Under my bed, I would shrink from Death, perhaps certain that in such predictable refuge her peering scythe would fail to notice me. All through the dark hours, I would struggle to ban sleep, lest the bony hand came and woke me to eternal rest. I had no enemies, and lived inside pleasant reveries; I only feared the ghastly fate of everyone and everything, the ungainly peace that would greet us all in due time.

How others dealt with it, I could not understand. Who needs peace, if it is in havoc we all rejoice? Men of remarkable intelligence have been known to quiver and cry in their deathbeds, all the while mumbling gibberish so appalling it could never be induced by their lethal diseases. If they, masters of lore immeasurable, were so in terror, then surely I was not scared enough; for I would mostly forget about Death's presence, and in so doing assure myself that there was a tomorrow for me, and perhaps another day after that, too. Only at night, did the merciless clock-strokes reach my ears, and remind me of the reaper lurking in wait.

But much changed since those days of fear. I grew wiser, and at length came to accept the notion—nay, the necessity—of there being an end to everything. It eased my sleep. And so it came as a surprise that the same mankind whose levity of mind I had feared to emulate would now attempt to destroy its most ancient enemy. Over the years, the new heights of sheer happiness that Man gradually stole from the Gods shaped him anew, a creature more wide-eyed and ambitious than before. And the most wide-eyed and ambitious of men, the last monarch left in a realm of anarchy, contrived the arch-weapon for use in the final battle: a serum that would make of Death our final disease, and eradicate her as such.

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I should have been the most grateful for it, yet I felt not pride in seeing Man, or one man, adopt my former viewpoint

The Guiding-light of the Southern Sea

The once proud sail hung tattered, the very image of a shrouded spectre. As is wont, the wind had ceased to blow too soon after the storm, and the forlorn ship was presently set in motion by no force other than that persistent current which had driven it southwest for ten days.

It was a sturdy vessel, the Ulbaryn. The King would not have had it otherwise. For long had he kept the Southern Sea under an inquisitive eye, and the substantial wealth amassed that year secured the long-awaited journey into that legendary realm. Thirty-seven galleys had left the shipyard, and nineteen of these sank during the storm, seven weeks after their departure. It was a dreadful sight. Like puppets from a string, the ships fell prey to the whims of the gargantuan swell; two of them were at one point thrust against one another, a most unfitting end for the hundreds whose bodies were crushed and skewered by the large wooden planks of their sea-homes now unmade.

So the nineteen ships sank, after many a toil from their occupants, prime examples of the dauntless people of Ulun. Of the remaining vessels, seven strayed far not long after that first calamity. As they had not issued a word of warning to the second command-ship—the first, Syhan, known as ‘The Vagrant’, had by now plummeted to the depths—it was generally agreed upon by the surviving elements that a mutiny had taken place in their midst, its origin lying perhaps in a fit of temporary collective madness, disease or hunger. As it was, they were gone forever, perhaps to better fortune.

The journey's planned extent had long been exceeded, and the company moved southward without a glimpse of dry soil. The violent storm had disoriented the wisest among navigators, whose worm-eaten black scrolls sprinkled with silvery dots had little in common with the patterns in the sky above.

“I believe we have edged westwards and off our original course,” said one of them.

The Angels no Longer Weep

All traces of austerity had forsaken the Plains of the Immemorial, wherein calamity rose thrice. They were now populated by the fairest, most ingeniously contrived life forms, who hopped and danced quite free, knowing no coyness in action, speech, or even bearing. For most of the world, there was no such place—the very impossibility of that scandalous perfection outraged the wildest of poets, in themselves a race waned enough as to no longer stir the unkempt urges of their fellow men.

To believe that the stray children of the elves had survived the three quietuses was to have faith; and, in all practicalities, that was an abandoned art, the more so as pride intensified and kindled every heart with its foul coal. The wise principles of abnegation and self-disgust had ceased to find acceptance among us, and true spiritual ambition attracted only the spite of lesser beings who would become lesser and lesser, only to be out-lesened by their scruffy children, unless something pure came to touch their blood.

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The Plains were for the most part wreathed in soft ferns and nourished by the manifold streamlets that flowed into the Hazy River. The latter was a somewhat narrow course, as its sloped banks were never more than forty feet apart, and in places approached each other so that the less knowledgeable observer might have mistaken them for a natural dam of some sort.

Such equivocation might indeed have occurred if the less knowledgeable could have ever reached the Plains of the Immemorial. As it was, all its inhabitants had profound understanding of the terrain and its features, either by virtue of having been born under its moons or—in the case of Cygna alone—by having with such keenness studied the descriptions of the land that she could traverse its fifteen miles with eyes closed, hands tied and muffled ears and nose. Not that she had ever done so; she inebriated with free body and mind with the vapours that

The Silent Lake

From out the great mist-bound lake a thousand islets stare at me, as I lay in the deepest sleep. I have entered the realm of That which speaks not, yet Whose voice I often hear in soft ensnaring tones as if uttered from my bedside. In this nether region, Its shadow spreads free, like the arrogant wings of some monstrous beast of yore.

I cannot tell whether I sleep or not. It is no longer possible for me to tell wakefulness from slumber, as both are wasted in the frenzy of this turbulent nightmare.

Each islet bears a single dead tree, not stripped but crowned with brown decaying leaves. Air would never breathe upon their stems, were it not for the tranquil passage of the cold mist, whirling slowly around the countless earthy spots that skewer the water.

It is foolish to try and find one's way in the lake, even though each tree is unique in appearance and likewise in spirit. I believe the islets to be ever in motion, an imperceptible crawl inducing the most dreadful dizziness, giddying me as I peer within the silent shadows, and numbing my sense of orientation to a useless stupor.

The lake's edges I could never see if they do exist. I call this stretch of stagnant water a lake considering only its apparent shape. I do it also, perhaps, out of my fear that It may live in what is actually a river, and some day find its slithering way into some dark recess of the living world.

Silence is Master. The water slides mournfully, without the slightest rumour. I have seen some dead birds and beasts, and they always look back at me with such snideness as is typical in those from whom even time was stolen. As with the trees, their countenance lays bare the misery they are lost in, yet they still show a quaint strain of vigour, seemingly at odds with their overlong stay in the lake. The greatest of powers holds them all there, still and standing in the haze, mouths wide open, inhaling

Demise

After so much time, I am still haunted by that chill I felt when her hand slowly fondled my hair.

I did not know her then, though she had watched me for years, looking after the quietness of my sleep and the placid hedonism of my dreams. Her nature at that time may be likened to that of a guardian angel. But how bizarre that sounds, how unfitting it is to white-wing a damned being. She is a ghost, a lost soul, cursed, bold enough to gnaw at the fetters that held her in the world of spirits and reach for me with velvet touch and satin voice.

In that strangely quiet, warm night, Adelie unwittingly revealed her presence, so worried was she with my condition. Of late, grief had taken quarters in my mind, putting Morpheus to fear and tormenting me for the best part of most nights. Very awake was I when she came with that oddest of touches, a vague caress that startled me to my feet. I frantically groped the surrounding darkness, looking for some unseen disturber, yet found no one in my room. It was very late, and I lay partially uncovered, sweating profusely. I swore later to any who cared to listen that I had felt, other than the caress itself, the intruding presence of some entity in my room, and its rapid vanishing after my arousal. Needless to say, that night was waned in strict vigil.

The memory of this incident sought permanent lodging in my mind, unlike those of my other night-follies. It baffled me for quite some time, and eventually crystallised as a significant event, yet one at whose cause I could not guess. As for its effects, of one I had already begun to reap fruit. Since early childhood I had been of a very nervous disposition, prone to irrational fears that ashamed me deeply. The notion of something in my midst, something intangible but friendly, soothed me as no physician or calming herb might have done. I have already mentioned the extreme sadness I felt at the time. This too wilted considerably, as a torrent of optimism less

His Was the Foreboding

August 12th witnessed the arrival of renowned painter Fredric Roberts in Townsangel, a small city on the West Coast of the United States of America.

The British artist has come to present his work in a long series of exhibits, covering most western states. In tandem with the Government's new and much lauded policies on artistic literacy, Fredric was persuaded to include in his tour a number of small cities, little accustomed to such events. The folk of Townsangel happen to find themselves among the chosen.

Fredric is much of a newcomer, and has already stirred controversy by virtually dividing European criticism. Many scholars are somewhat enticed by his impeccable technique, but the unoriginal themes and styles he favours reek, for the remaining specialists, of pretentiousness and borderline childish obstinacy.

The exhibit is to take place on Saturday 15th, in a large gymnasium adjacent to the local high school. Fredric will stay in a hotel called Sunny Heaven, near the beach, a focal point for tourists—the pleasant climate and a shoreline reminiscent of California's finest strands draw in a considerable amount of journeyers every summer.

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The summary information above could be garnered from all major newspapers, and such unexpected publicity further widened the mad flux of fans, scholars, and inquiring souls that invaded Townsangel. The locals, and especially the shopkeepers, were very pleased, busying themselves with the renewal of stocks, as they expected an increase in daily sales figures.

Fredric's work meant little to most inhabitants, especially those of greater age and lesser imagination. However, a little agitation could do no harm and, come to think of it, it had been long since the city had witnessed such a fuss.

The Gifted

In her worst days, my sister would take to deep meditation. As lifelessness surfaced, her spirit trod long, without weariness, over a land she described as her paradise. Rare though they grew over time and the progressive seriousness of her ailment, periods of sobriety served merely for her to describe in detail those journeys, drawing and writing or, should her mind be too frail still, asking me to draw and write at her behest. Apart from us both, only a few close relatives and her last physician have seen those documents we produced. And no matter with how much care they might have perused them, the plenitude of this place of afterlife will haughtily rebuff them until they effectively arrive here. What surrounds us now is not easy to dissect and reproduce, even resorting to the highest skills in the highest arts, when available. Yet I will work hard at it, as I always have.

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To see it for the first time is to learn how to breathe again. The eyes, open afresh after a spell of death undefined in length, endure a process of adjustment to the persistent brightness of the place, which radiates from the air itself—not a sun or lighting device of any kind. Thereafter, every glimpse registered is beautifully wild. Greenery as far over remarkable escarpments, paving down the way towards canyons of majestic breadth and depth; rivers of huge girth and others smaller yet apparently unending, as if running in a circle; and a disproportionate amount of caves—so many that we have come to believe this land, or whatever sort of place this is, to be honeycombed to near-oblivion on the inside.

These are the main features, and in and amidst them we all live, or rather “journey on”. Apart from Anja and me, of course, this region delimited by a circle of about ten miles in diameter, its centre being on the point where we stand now, is inhabited by some twenty lonely beings, at most. This we have been able to gather from our expeditions of the past eight months.

The Damned

The boy could not remember what had taken place before he entered the library, which was located across the hallway from his room. He knew, of course, how unnatural his presence seemed therein, at some point in the small hours. He looked around, saw faint contours of furniture etched shyly in the darkness by the radiance of bright moon and her thousand companion stars, little and noble, bright and reassuring traces of cosmic purity. It had rained copiously the night prior, and many consecutive nights before. That much the boy grasped as hard fact, amidst the wild speculations of fantasy induced by situation and setting alike.

Maybe I came for something to read, he thought. It seemed plausible, and his little arm did stretch for a moment towards the shelves to his right, yet he was somehow unable to grasp the meaning of those book titles. This impairment was not to be expected, since foreign tomes were scarcely present in his father's collection. He forced himself to read slowly, one word at a time, but his callow mind would only register individual letters.

Incapable of focusing, he rubbed his eyes for an instant. These memory lapses were unusual, as was the excessive sleepiness he felt. And there was still his unexplainable presence there, a matter he would certainly not let go of, tired as he felt.

Methodically, he tried to retrace his steps since supper, yet could not even remember what he had eaten. His vision of such commonplace activities was dimmed. It was, then, more than a simple gap in his remembrance of some events. At present, his only reality was the library.

And then it dawned on him that the much-desired key to that particular chamber was yet beyond the allowances of his childhood. How had he entered the library, then? Whenever allowed to visit this veritable shrine, he had relied on his father to open the door for him. Not knowing how or why he was there