

Coth-Normador: An Odyssey in Vision

A Cosmic Short by Andrei Babanin

Foreword: Some of the visions mentioned in this tale are ones that I indeed have witnessed. I too, like the protagonist, was born with synaesthesia, allowing me to view the world in all the sumptuous colours and sheer emotional brilliance it provides. The events the character here goes through are fictitious, but I hope this story can serve as a kind of insight into the minds of writers and artists like myself in a positive way.

- Andrei Babanin, 19th of March, 2021.

I frequently ponder on the fragile line that separates the wizened man in science, and the one in consciousness. To comprehend that which is perhaps forbidden, which is both granted yet locked away within the very scalp of every man and woman to roam the planet in search of spiritual or material gratification, is to put one's own sanity into the momentous hands of fate to decide an unfurling. I truly share that not all are gifted in viewing things perhaps not meant to be seen, in feeling and hearing sights and sounds of deep monotonous vocalisations and towering massifs that reach the heavens amidst ethereal whisps of clouds and floating bodachs. I can only say that I am perhaps the few who have gained an insight and scraped the silver surface of that petrified yet evanescent tarn and saw the greatness, awe and horror of those vast planes of Coth-Normador.

I speak in truth when I state that I was born with synaesthesia. Not a curse as it may sound but perhaps one of the brightest indicators of man's capability in mind, where upon perceiving fragmented music or other artistic undulations I both hear colours and see sound produced, among other examples. What some call superhuman, I merely say a gift in artistry.

Since my early days of youth, I bore tales and images of distant lands and abandoned epochs, ones that might I add both mesmerised and at times terrified both my parents and peers alike. I took them as nothing but a sure skill in story-telling, where from there I knew my career as an

author of both the cosmic and the weird would be gratefully consumed by the ravenous readers of the modern day. I soon grew and completed secondary education, migrating to the world's capitals in the studies of the greats like Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Lovecraft, Austin, Wordsworth and Poe. My younger years were spent in London, Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Hamburg and Florence. I learnt all there is to hear and know about the most eminent minds of literature, before the visions I had once seen in youthful days forgotten surfaced once more in sporadic episodes.

They came not as seizures or dream-induced comas, but as glimpses and flashes across my eyes, revealing such vistas of magnificence and at times blasphemy that I became engrossed in fascination, obsessed, but also drowned in terror as to why and how some malignant outside force taunts and pries at my sanity in such a manner. I'd be seated in a lecture theatre when with some word of the educator beneath me on the airborne freedom of the bird described so frequent in books and novellas, I would witness a scene of great winged leather rays upon Coth-Normador's swamp-green skies.

It is now I mention that the place I believe my mind so common takes me on frightful star-leap flights is indeed the accursed Coth-Normador. The name once resounded in a lethargic state before a slumber, where I drifted in and out of grounded reality beneath my boot-garbed feet, with the name echoing in stentorian undulations within my head. Somewhere from infinity's great expanse in dimensions beyond our own, across elongated planeness of light stretched so far so as to make darkness, in warping races of supernova and steaming nebula from a ceiling-less vestibule of black-shone onyx upon a throne of polished shadow, the distorted name of Coth-Normador vocalised from some deep entity consumed by the gloom.

I recall being bleached cold and pale and shaken so spasmodically by the experience so unearthly and harrowing that I lost all consciousness to only awake at dawn the next morning on the same street, relatively physically unscathed. I had swiftly returned to my apartment to record my findings. I still vaguely recalled my studies of the English linguistics and phonetics back in my younger years, and rummaging amongst old books and notes I uncovered an IPA chart, transcribing the cosmic sounds

my ears and eyes had, by accident or not, been exposed to. I shuddered at the lexicon I produced on the page before me, until I finally managed to achieve the hyphenated compound which seemed to match most closely to what was revealed to me by that malevolent monarch of the tenebrous galaxy my mind had soared through.

What followed in the pursuing weeks contrasted greatly with that incident mentioned before; for now, it came like a dream. In my breaks at the university, or during my recreational hours spent at home, I would seek out a comfortable sitting area or armchair, recline my head, and permit my visions to come. It was blissful is all I can say. Like by the effects of some drug I was immersed in resplendent and wondrous viewings of symbols, landscapes and people, for my imagination to run wild on the supposed meaning behind each image perceived. On days I'd witness bottomless wells through which fell armoured valiants upon dark cobbled road hirsute with fungi of the foulest sort. On other occasions I would soar over an ocean of clouds that sluggishly twisted in amorphous ways while the bright blue crystalline sky stretched overhead, with me whizzing through falling translucent pillars of pink and orange. It was wondrous.

As the phrase goes, I believe, I was lost in the clouds. The pristine skies. My mother soon took notices of these homecoming shenanigans, now mutatively increased since my childhood anomalies, and urged me to bring myself back down to Earth, put lead on my feet so to speak. Like the obedient son that I was, topped with the rest of the prying stares seated at that family gathering with cutlery in hand and masticating food in mouth, I nodded in meek acknowledgement and ensured that although my studies were undisturbed by my diurnal fantasies, I'd still attempt to retain myself. This was a blatant lie. One that I believe only led me down a darker path, astray from the light of surface plains and down into shadowed canyons where no grasses grow and the walls are sleek with oozing black transparency with the echoes of beings unknown resonating miles throughout.

I recall the evening of the occurrence so unsettling my head still shakes at its remembrance, being on a sultry Friday twilight after a late-night lecture on Romanticism at a class in Florence, Italy. I was heading back to

my leased apartment, intent on travelling to Budapest to a seminar and gathering of modern authors in a week's time, with my books and notes in a folio under my arm and my second hand in my trouser pocket, I strolled the vacant streets of that city of great pulchritude, gazing at the tessellations of the setting sun upon the heavens in its bright palette of yellows, pinks and oranges. I inhaled the fresh, invigorating air, and with a drop of my shoulders in an exhale I never felt happier. Life was swell and going ever upwards, with many of my writing projects drawing incredible inspirations from the visions I so commonly experienced. Yet I took notice of an unnatural change in the wind that had been billowing my way.

Looking up at the warm-coloured horizon I received spasms and flashes of a warping void across the city skyline while a sensation of immense repugnance seemed to wash over me in a sickly wave of nausea. Horrified by the recurring images of the whirlpool of darkness that succumbed my limbs and body into limp paralysis, I jolted back into action and eyes diverted to the sidewalk beneath my feet sprinted to my apartment in petrified haste. I recall bolting shut the door behind me, oblivious to its immaterial safety against forces unearthly, before collapsing into my leather armchair while exhaling a painful sigh, my chest shaking uncontrollably. I felt leaden and my arms and legs seemed not to obey, with whatever final strength I had managed to muster in the horror of that street now fully depleted.

I remember gazing down at my legs stretched out before me, until glancing up without reason of logic I saw the vast expanse of Coth-Normador. How does one express sheer hollow terror unyielding when they are the only one to perhaps ever in the history of mankind's place among the stars have witnessed such impious imagery?

I now stood upon a sea of black oozing mud, stretched as far as the horizon permitted to be seen beneath a foul-green sky of darkness. The squalls howled across the formidable landscape, and it was for the first time I realised that I experienced a third sense within my visions that I had not before - sense itself. Lifting my feet from the succulent banes of the ground beneath me I felt the cold of the mud sludging against my ankles, and I felt an analogous chill from those winds that whistled on

relentlessly. I knew not where I was in a place that existed or didn't on either Earth or any other plane of reality familiar to man, and wished so strongly to return to the comfort of my warm living-room abode. Yet no matter how hard I mentally aimed at pushing the vision away, my feet still squelched in vile slush and the evil skies still gazed down upon my minuteness.

A gnawing panic began to eat away at my insides. How was a man to become trapped in his own thoughts and visualisations? How can one plunge so deep into an odyssey in vision that no mental strain permits escape? Perhaps, I thought, this is to be my punishment. My greed for knowledge and pleasure in the sights of the bizarre and fantastical had waded me so far into the shallow dark waters of things unknown, that I have lost sight of the shore and now remain stranded. Yet even as I contemplated on these matters so, I felt the urge to scour the surrounding lands in hopes of epiphany. Why so must daytime fantasies be different than their nocturnal dream counterparts? I mused on the concept of man's consciousness untwisting and unknotting the gnarls and roots that creep in during daytime duties every night, with each dream that a man experiences in sleep bearing some kind of conclusion, unless the host is abruptly awoken by an outside interference.

Living by myself and situated in a foreign country in the waking world, I realised that now I was alone in my venture, where the only way to flee from my nightmarish present was to seek out some key or anomaly within the vision, which perhaps as a catalyst could spark a reversal to occur and thus free me from the planes of Coth-Normador. How this was to come about - I shivered at the lack of answers laid out before me. Gazing around I saw what must've either been the east or west of the dimension I now inhabited, for there the green skies blended into darkness impenetrable, signifying night. But ahead the heavens appeared lighter with a hint at white brilliance emerging from over the horizon. Telling myself to avoid cursed blackness in this kingdom of doom I now inhabited, I made for the light, sludging through the neither liquid nor solid ground beneath me.

I walked on for what must've been hours, with only the desert of foul mud extending in every direction known to man. The light ahead, which

saw no signifiabile shape resembling a sun or a rather, neither seemed to grow nor shrink during the time I spent marching boldly towards its source, so be it dawn or dusk I would not be able to say. On occasion I'd be grasped by a sudden panphobic terror that I cannot explain, one which caused me to snap my head around and stare long into that void I was separating myself from, where the grounds and the skies merged into one band of darkness that stretched far and wide. My mind, now accustomed to breeding fantasies, would ponder on what cruel beasts might live in such gloom, though considering my present location where I had not yet seen a single species, I concluded that nothing could ever make a home in the long nights this queer planet seemed to possess. Yet the dread still remained. Shuddering uncontrollably before managing after some many minutes to contain myself, I trudged onward.

I recalled how many of my prior visions had once set place in the very planes of the land I now walked across, yet nothing I had witnessed within them now seemed to inhabit the barrenness. No great winged rays borne with flesh cities for the damned. No cursed stone beasts that stood taciturn until disturbed, upturning the earth. None of these I now saw. This caused heavy expostulation from my side as I wandered onwards – was anything of what I previously witnessed ever real? Now trapped in this mental desert, I realised that the line between what I once knew and what I understood was frightfully blending into a foul-made mixture, which made my mind grow numb at any attempt to decipher the meaning behind.

My hopes were falling as the skies shewed no signs of impending dawn or dusk – leading me to the horrifying possibility of being imprisoned within an oil-painted dome for the amusement of deep space idolons and deities as I trudged on to my doom. How could such craftsmanship ever be created by a human alone? Give Michelangelo a thousand years and still I'd doubt he'd draw such a vista above my inquisitive head!

I remember collapsing in fatigue beyond measure, where the cold of the winds squalled on to no end, and I felt the squelching, bone-like texture of the mud beneath me, embodying formless fleshy mouths of a hundred teeth that bluntly ground against my knees and feet. It was then in that moment, that from the darkness behind me, that I had so boldly marched

from, a horrible animalistic moan began to emanate, reverberating against the earth beneath and my bones within. The winds turned to stalwart gales that arched my back against the grip of the mud, pulling me into the darkness miles behind where I was.

At first, I paid no heed to the unnatural forces, for I was overwhelmed by all the strange visions witnessed that as of now I had no fear. It was until I was ripped out from the ground and taken on a soaring journey at the speed of a thousand Valkyries to the point that the grounds beneath blurred beyond a blend of black and grey but into bands of white and unparalleled bottomless canyons, that I felt true horror had opened up within me while my screaming din was lost to the roar of the thundering winds.

For a brief moment the world turned dark, before I felt my back impact some membranous material that halted my flight and slid me to the floor. Opening my eyes, I saw the ground beneath was of velvet black and grey stone, etched with hieroglyphs, jutting spiral carvings and images of horrific beings that made me shudder at their sheer repulsive makeup. Now glancing ahead, I saw the onyx vestibule that I once glimpsed in a distant vision, where once a being spoke the name of the plane he governs as Coth-Normador. Yet his throne here did not stand, and the presence of the shapeless king who warmed its seat was not imminent. The only thing I saw was a quasar of shadow that merged with the walls on my left and right, pulsing slightly and flowing from its levitative origin in the centre of the hall.

The wall I now leaned upon was solid, yet somehow it had transformed into a structureless cushion to soften my airborne speeding. Looking back ahead at the tube-like cosmic apparition, I felt a peculiar degree of familiarity towards it, or rather, as I now recall, whatever laid within. It wasn't long before I arose back onto my feet and paced down the extent of the vast hall I now inhabited, nearing the sight before me. Every step performed sent a tumultuous echo into the infinite ceiling above, which came back down in powerful reverberations that shook my inner skeleton to harmful degrees, repeating over and over in its actions until I had to halt and await until the cacophonous vibrations ceased to tremor the walls and myself with them.

Finally, the shadow before me was less than a metre away, its blackness opaque and ever-moving. I knew that whatever answer I was destined to seek, or key to free me from this nightmare fever I inhabited, somehow lay within the contiguous quasar I now observed. Yet the fear of the unknown and what lay within hiccupped me to stay my ground. It was until a monstrous lowing emitted from behind my position, causing me to twist around, that I saw the wall I once leaned upon gaping into a rectangular portal of black that stretched to infinity above, from which a breeze colder than the deepness of space came flowing, and the sonorous enunciation of alien voices resounded, accompanied by monotonous drums.

I only took a single step back before being consumed by the quasar and falling through reality and time, witnessing visages of a thousand horrors and scenes of elongating nova beyond that which even an immortal man may ever see. With my flight soon shards of light began materialising, floating around me, amalgamating together into a single eight-point jagged crystal star of white that soared just ahead of my face. Looking past its form, I once more heard the wicked sounds of that nameless race that had sought me out in the hall forbidden for the mortal eye, and without thought I reached out and clasped the crystal firmly in my fist.

I had shut my eyes, but upon opening them I was back in my apartment with the iridescence of dawn beaming in through my window to the right, my hand still clutched into a fist. Relaxing my fingers and opening my palm I witnessed for only a brief moment the crystal that brought me home, before my reality was questioned once more as it crumbled into dust, floating on the wind and to the outside world through the window ajar, fading into nothingness.

For the rest of that day, I knew not what to think or believe. My journey, albeit sans answers and a long one, had changed me. Looking into the mirror above my washbasin my hair had grizzled, silver strands now sprouted from my scalp. I recall seating myself down, cross-legged, by the window and watching the skies in their cyan beauty, listening to the songs of morning birds and the accumulating clamour of an awakening city. No visions came that day.

I soon departed Florence and instead of taking the train to my intended Budapest, travelled to my late uncle's cottage in the Swiss alps with rations to last a month. I now sit beneath the shade of orange autumn oaks, with the cool and pleasant winds billowing gently against my garments and upon my face. I've taken to nature, like a true Romanticist author. Though I still shudder whenever recalling whatever illicit vision I had experienced that night, and the place it had taken me.

I try to draw sense with what I witnessed still to this very day, and I can only say this. The cosmos as we know them are ever-expanding, and what lays at the birth of a place in the universe is yet beyond human comprehension, still moulding into the laws that we know. Geometry is abstract, material shifts from physical and incorporeal by its own will. And somehow, the tunnel I travelled through to return to Earth, was engineered by some eldritch beings unknown to us humankind. The very thought of another race beyond our understanding inhabiting some edges of the universe yet observant of our people terrifies me to the core.

I still use visions for inspiration for my work, but with caution and in a wary state. Somehow one's connection with mind to places yet not fully explained or materialised in what we know as the spaces between the cosmos, is one of an evident and frightening reality.