

Presentation

Life is as cyclic as an ouroboros - the symbol of the snake which bites its own tail.

These cycles can be observed in our lives, in society, in the civilizations, on the continent coast and, who knew, even in the Big Bang and the big crunch of our universe.

The hindus and spiritists believe in reincarnation. Isn't it an ouroboros itself?

The ancients seemed to know things that nowadays we try to rediscover. Science has illuminated our path, but unfortunately it can't explain all that happens around us.

In the stories that come next I face human dilemmas. People are put in extreme situations and they seem not to be able to get rid of them. In moments like these people get rid of their look and have to run over these cyclic realities.

That's when fear, desamparo, solitude, hold us and oppress us. That's when our dreams are involved into nightmares and our lives seem not to be real.

Maybe you have already been in a situation similar to the character's in these stories. Not in the same scene, but with the same feelings of desolation and despair, facing cycles which you can't get rid of because they are part of your life.

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Cover:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'W', 'E', and 'M' in a stylized, cursive font. The 'W' and 'M' are larger and more prominent, with the 'E' in between.

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Mining

I have already had fear of the dark.

When I was younger, it was pure horror.

Teenager, I tried to convince myself saying: "C'mon! I am a man, there's nothing out there to be afraid" – but to be true, I was just too scared in those situations.

One thousand bad thoughts came up to my mind every time the lights in the cinema were turned off. Candles or any other luminous object could solve anything when there was lack of energy in the barrio I live.

So, when I was twenty-five, the fears disappeared as they had never existed. And I could start working in the asteroids mining with my brothers fearlessly.

- Companion number three doesn't work, Ton. Do you want to check it out or do I do it?

Ilia, my Ukrainian fellowship, always complained about moving his own 1,98m height through the narrow corridors of burden transportation. So I didn't even answer his questions: I got my tool case and went to the indicated place.

Mining carbon in asteroids to martians communities wasn't exactly what my mother wanted her younger son to do, but for an unemployed geologist and recently space lover, that was the best thing that could ever had happened. So, I followed my

brothers in their careers without making any questions about my decision.

My name is Antony, I am 42 years old and I come from a Spanish family of immigrants that went to the extinguished Federative Republic of Brazil in the early 20th century. I'm descendent of one of the few families that survived with no wounds, no genetic failures, after the explosion of the nuclear power stations in Angra dos Reis, in the extinguished State of Rio de Janeiro in 2015, which, according to the legends, was one of the most beautiful places in the world.

Our spaceship was called UNE¹ Rarus, mining and containers of eighty meters long equiped with a first generation plasmatic propulsor which almost always works and twenty mining serve-robots, commanded by Asimov XXV, our foreman robot.

Ilia is the human pilot, mine engineering and commandant in the free time. I work as a chief officer and we are the unique live beings abroad, but our ants colony.

The official commandant, with no good humor of any kind, is a STAR VII navigator computer, to which a mechatronic engineer friend of mine installed a coffee machine eight years ago.

Comfort is a banned word in our diccionary. We have exact 1m² to each other to take a rest ventically, what means nothing at all in no gravity and doesn't bother us that much in our three-

months trips, with 2 months of vacation in colonies and 20.000 sunnees per month. UNE is a good boss, though.

- Damned companion! - I screamed inside my helmet for myself to listen alone. It was the third time that the companion was working wrong in the month and I was afraid that I couldn't close it someday and all our abundance could escape from it, which was the greatest companion among the five ones for burden.

Half an hour later it seemed it was working well, but this strange feeling of lie I had already felt other times.

- OK, Ilia. - I talked through the radio in the helmet. - You can allow the robots to leave now, but I don't guarantee the repair.

Twenty mechanic monsters in drum shapes, with five arms each, left pulling the feet out of the spaceship, me leading, in direction of an elevation in the south in the small asteroid in which we had landed in some hours before.

- Asi - I talked to the robot-master - this great one seems to have much carbon. It's largest then Mars 12 the double, yet we have extracted two tons of carbon from it!

- I think you are right, doctor. My sensors can identify good concentration of carbon. We didn't waste plasma uselessly.

I liked Asimov. He had some sense of humor, and this I have to admit: scientists in 21st century did a great job with AI – but, sometimes, I was scared being with the serve-robots. They could make come to an end any first good impression of them with their 2,5m height and eternal muteness, though they were only some longer sensory parts of Asimov in fact.

The drills bellowed in silence, I could feel them by the vibration they caused in my feet, and pieces of rocks were catapulted to the space due to the very low gravity in there.

- Asi, this carbon is really deep. We've been digging for eight hours and there's not a single signal of it. Are you sure in this area we are going to find something?

- Doctor, my sensors indicate carbon forty meters far, approximately, in the deep. For we have already digged 34,12m, I calculate that in nine minutes we should obtain some results.

This delay was killing me. I thought that burden was enough for us to go back to Mars. Our three-month working period was almost ending, just like our

fouel, air and food, besides our nerves put daily in stress after twelve land-ins and land-offs.

- Doctor, we are almost getting there. – was it my impression or was there some relief in Asi’s tone of voice? Was the delay also affecting him?

In that exact moment, a deafening noise fulfilled my helmet making me lose the equilibrium and go to the floor.

- What the hell was that, Asi? Are you trying to make me go mad? – I screamed at the robot as soon as I could stand.

He promptly answered: - I’m sorry, Doctor. The comunication channel was open and the noise coming from the break of the drill from serve-robot 9 was transmitted.

- But how come did it happen? – I screamed. – Those drills are made from the purest titanium! – in that moment I had no idea of what was going on.

- I’m afraid to inform – the machine kept on saying – that other three drills were lost. So I interrupted the operation until more data of the digging are obtained. If you want to return to your lodges, I’ll get in touch as soon as I have news about it.

What could I do in a situation like this? After all, the robot-master had authonomy to act like this and he knew exactly what he should do. This way, I didn’t make me a fool and returned to the spaceship. I

really needed a rest and couldn't wait to take that damned spacial doth.

I woke up three hours later with a noise bipping on my ear and a terrible taste in my mouth.

- Say it. - I grumbled at the microphone.

- Doctor, I already have the results of the completed mediation. - Asi informed with impartial tone of voice.

"The drills were damaged when they were put in contact with an extremely hard material."

"In this asteroid of approximately four kilometers long, there are about three tons and a half of carbon, what is more than enough to fulfill the space of burden, which is missing, and return to Mars."

"Nevertheless, we cannot mine this material. Transformations occurred in the center of a star, which occurred before the transformation of the asteroid, affected the carbon."

"My afraid is that someday we find other asteroid with irrecoverably altered carbon, too."

"You understand that this will cause unimaginable disturbs, besides of extreme wastes, during land-in and land-off." (I could see from far my license fading away...)

"This way, the conclusion is that we cannot, in any way, use the carbon that there is in here due to the

fact that it had been completely transformed into diamond.”

I just couldn't believe my ears! What a misfortune! Despite of I knew Asi almost never failed his analysis.

Three tons and a half of precious carbon, which didn't exist in quantity enough in Mars and that was our only one raw material (even to food sintetization), was simply transformed into this scoria called diamond that, in spite of serving to the industry as the hardest material known, couldn't battle the versatility of its raw material.

In Earth, diamonds were produced in a giant scale, with quality much superior than the natural ones and a very cheap price. It couldn't have happened worse thing to us!

- Thank you, Asi. - extremely disappointed, I answered to the robot. - You can enter with the serve-robots now.

Next, I called Ilia. - Did you hear Asi's report? We can say good-bye to our vacation plans, the girls will have to wait other three months to know Luna's aquarium. We can't even imagine returning Mars without the burden, UNE doesn't forgive failures.

- What a hell! - the ucranian yelled. - This just could've happen to us! All we can do now is to look for anothe asteroid and pray everything is normal in there. - he hept on talking right after, but on a

calmer tone of voice. – By the way, companion three doesn't close, Tony. Do you want to check it out or do I do it?

¹ UNE – United Nations of Earth

Darkness

I open my eyes.

At least, I think I did it, but I can't feel them.

Everything is darkness around me.

I've never seen such a deep darkness. There's no single clarity! Nothing!

Oh, God... I'm blind!

I try to take my hands to the eyes. I can't!

I try to feel my arm. Where is it?

I can't feel my legs, I can't feel my body...

Am I dead?

If this is death... oh, my God! WHERE AM I?

Jesus!

I try to remember who I am, but I can't.

Nevertheless I am a human being (or, at least, I have already been one...)

Am I dead??? MY GOD, ANSWER!!!

MYGODMYGODMYGODMYGOD!!!

I can't stand not knowing what I am. This sensation is horrible.

I close my eyes (I think I did; I don't know...).

Sleep.

I'm awake again.

Nothing changed. Darkness is still there.

(Did I have any accident and am still in a coma on a hospital's bed?)

How much time has passed? One second? One millennium? Whatever. I've no idea.

I am calmer... nothing else is hurting, so it's all right.

I have just noticed I can't feel my breath.

SHITSHITSHITSHIT!

I'm really dead! It's not possible!

I don't remember when I died (if I died)... do I exist?

Someone, someday, said "I think, therefore I am" (how come did I remember this?). So, I shall exist. I don't know either where or when or what or how... but I do.

(I must be in hell. There is no other explanation. This is not from God.)

The things which pass through my head...

How can I remember them all if I don't even know who I am?

I don't ever remember if I am a man or a woman!

WHY?WHY?WHY?WHY?

Why did it happen to me?

Am I a Fallen Angel? Am I quitting any debit that I have made against any merciless God?

Not even Satan deserves something like this.

I count sheep (what a joke! I don't know what I am, but I know what sheeps are...).

Nothing happens.

I can't sleep.

(Am I sleeping and going through an eternal nightmare in some stopped second in a dream?)

I'LLGOMADI'LLGOMADI'LLGOMAD!!!

DON'T WANNA FEEL THIS ANYMORE! GOD!!!

SET ME FREE FROM THIS SENSATION! I WANNA DIE NORMALLY!

(Maybe this is normal death, and everybody goes through it...)

That's not possible.

What's worth thinking if I can't do anything with my thoughts?

I can't move.... I can't breathe... I can't see... I DON'T KNOW WHO (OR WHAT) I AM!

If I am dead... I WANNA BE DEAD AT ALL!!!

FUCKFUCKFUCKFUCK!!!

I try not to think about it. It is hard.

My last mental explosion just didn't work.

I'm still awake (sleeping?), thinking (dreaming?), surrounded by the most eternal darkness (dead?).

(Not even a blind person should be drawn in such a deep darkness! He must feel any light, any bright [or the heat on his face]).

I don't feel anything.

Neither heat nor cold. Neither hungry nor thirsty.

I don't know if I'm lying on the floor or floating in a vacuum in the space...

I don't know how much time has passed since the last time I woke up for the first time.

(Time doesn't have a meaning anymore...)

I started feeling something...

Lightly, starting somewhere (where I think my stomach is, as if I still had one).

This feeling is unexplainable. It's like it wasn't there. But somehow it is.

Little by little it starts overwhelming me, insidiously...

It's difficult to describe it... (hungry? sleep? Pain? Pleasure? – what is it, then?)

It's each time stronger.

I'd like to know what it is.

I close my eyes.

I open my eyes.

At least, I think I did it, but I can't feel them.

Everything is darkness around me.

I've never seen such a deep darkness. There's no
single clarity! Nothing!

Oh, God... I'm blind!!!

The Last Astronaut

He was traveling on a light thunder since the beginning of the times. He crossed-over the miles one after another during billions of years without noticing time because time didn't exist for him.

He saw when uncountable stars were born and died without alleyming older; without one unique electron, among the ones which maintained his body, could move his orbit; and, after all, without noticing his inert situation.

He could only notice some very light colors nuances which floated around him during his eternal fall, standing in between a millisecond and another, and, surely, these differences had nothing to do with that thing that was surrounding him.

His transparent coffin with three meters long couldn't be seen by any external viewer for it could travel on the exact speed of light in vacuum, not even one part of second above or below, so it would look like a thunder only.

No solid body has ever traveled this fast in space. Time expansion had disappeared, there was only the eternal immobility that left.

His cryogenic pot, which had never been opened, was then converted into a real coffin, though its occupant wasn't dead or even alive, as they wanted.

The quartz which it was made of wasn't affected by its atypical situation. It was as lifeless as its content.

The last astronaut didn't want to say good-bye to his fellows, last alive beings on the Universe who would die. They had been on many things together, but now, not even their very sophisticated technology could avoid what was about to happen.

The Universe had finally alleyme shorter again, compressing even more the space-time and, in consequence, the body in it.

Only one space station, with hundreds of kilometers long and millions of inhabitants, had survived to the natural disaster, and this was only due to the N-M fantastic camp which could equilibrar the fantastic energies of them, creating, with this, a large inert energy space which includes all the structure of the station. This action took more than five hundred million years, allowing more and more generations of alive beings keep alive besides of the space-time colapse of the Universe.

Nevertheless, scientists knew a long time ago that one day the equilibrium would be shattered and, at last, everything would be smashed and joined the group that could no more be called Universe.

The last astronaut would be the only one who would try escape the holocaust on a despairingly technical handle and could, who knew one day, see the new Universe coming from the old one.

He went towards the cryogenical pot in the reception room and stood there looking at it during a long time. His mind went through all his life in that time lapse, concluding its uselessness just like all the efforts's uselessness realized until then to save something from this moribund universe. He felt he was too old in spite of his thirty-two normal years. But, besides it all, he walked towards the place by which the pot could be opened.

He could list all recommendations from the scientists, so he did everything automatically. The cryogenic system would be activated by a mental order when it was time to do so (if there existed any mind to do it).

Scientists from that race had created an unfaillable plan to send the astronaut safe and sound to the future with millions of trillions of information bytes about the most diverse kinds of science, history, arts besides DNA banks from uncountable organisms, compiled by them.

At zero time, when the protection camp around the spacial station had ruined on itself due to the space-time collapse, the station, with its millions of beings started splitting while strong generators from N-M camp catapulted the quartz esquife on speed of light – it means, in a non-detectable by the mensuration

systems, the skiff passed from the complete rest to the speed of light, freezing, this way, any kind of reaction that could go over it.

One second after the big-crunch, the new big-bang occurred and the Universe started expanding itself again with the astronaut's esquife, safe from the destruction of its original universe.

But something hadn't been calculated by the scientists...

After collapsing, one exact nano-second before the big-bang, the astronaut lost any possibility of having his velocity stopped and go back to the normal Universe. He stood going and returning eternally, going through many universes from the beginning until their ends, without leaving his imobilidade.

He was still going through his four-thousandth universe without having his velocity changed. And this universe was still expanding itself...

Fast

We should remember that things will never be as we wish. There nothing wrong with this, if the results were positives.

But we can learn good things when we're one step closer to die and, ready for our last breathe, and yet something is still making us scared and not allowing us to die in peace...

January, 1982.

The blade is craved in his stomach and he feels it passing through after each puffy breath.

It's enormous, probably a buthcer's knife. He doesn't even know how come he's still alive!

Blood jorra and, within it, a piece of his soul leaves him after each cardiac pulsating.

Pain does not exist anymore. The cold is terrible and the man can't feel anything else from his waist to the feet. He can't identify his headsman's face because there's too much darkness in front of him.

Everything was too fast. He was caught unprotected and now it means his death, in between that dark and stinky alley, between the dustbins and the fire stairs of the old building.

When he was about to close his eyes for a warm and simple death, the hot flush gets him right in the face. He opens his eye lids and the liquid burns his eyes. The damn man is pissing on him!

Into his silent indignation, he can't even notice his antagonist unbuckling his belt and, pull after pull, taking off his pants...

December, 2010.

It's been 28 years that a strange feeling is taking over Arthur. This anxiety is always stronger in this period of the year, but it's always there since he was a young baby.

It's something that grows through his back, a shiver, a discomfort, that, little by little, fulfills him inside.

When he is alone, Arthur knocks his head on the wall, softly and repeatedly, trying to solve the discomfort this feeling causes. It generally works, but some days after it the feeling keeps on disturbing him.

The psychiatric visits didn't work at all. Neither the medicines they prescribed did.

His relationships lasted a few times and, now, he divides a small apartment with his thoughts only.

January, 2011.

Arthur is unemployed. Some employers had to be cut off of the office in which he worked.

With part of the money from his rescission, he bought a butcher's knife which he carries under his overcoat wherever he goes.

It's cold that night, below zero degrees Celsius, but he doesn't matter. He needs to blow his mind up, he

can't stand the pressure of the feeling that scares him anymore.

The street is empty. Arthur walks three kilometers until a dark alley.

A dormouse passes by him running and crawling its feet, but Arthur didn't even notice it.

His eyes are fixed at a ragamuffin creature, lying ten meters far from where he is. Steam comes from the person's breathe and condensates itself in the air. If he stands there, he'll die of hypothermia soon.

Arthur quickly walks towards the man and, with no thoughts, craves the butcher's knife in his abdomen, turning it in circles in there, to maximize the damage. Happy, the murderer noticed he's saving that man from a cold and lonely death. He smiled, feeling the weight of the world out of his shoulders.

Standing up, Arthur opens his pants zipper and starts urinating on the indigent magaruffing. Next, he lowers himself and start taking off the man's pants...

In this moment, the eyes of the almost dead man open. A red, injected luminosity look at him. Without opening his mouth, words could be heard in Arthur's mind:

- Cursed demon! Our paths have been meeting for generations in a dark alley in which you keep killing me and takes out my honor. It doesn't have an end anymore! We'll live until the end of times changing places in this abject activity – one killing and taking out the other's honor after each generation.

Peaceless soul, with no understanding of who started it all, only keeping going with this revenge.

After these words, the indigent falls dead in front of Arthur. In a state of complete madness, he takes his hand towards his chest, on a death struggle, falling dead beside the already dead man next, on a great blood pool.

December, 2020.

David's tenth birthday party's on January, but in this period of the year a strange and oppressive feeling takes over him and even more over his mind, naturally disturbed since he was a young baby.

It's something that grows through his back, a shiver, a discomfort, that, little by little, fulfills him inside. When he's alone, David knocks his head softly and repeatedly on the wall...

Unfortunately, there was no God to take this suffer to na end.

And, this waym, both souls kept on this peregrination, entering body after body during the centuries, killing the other pitilessly, changing the abject places sometimes, on an endless and unknown start revenge, in which only hate has lasted in their miserable lives.

Detective

My sweating hand slid through the rain water outflow tube of the garret, five meters far from the floor and, the more I efforted myself, I couldn't go any further above. My heart was almost leaving my body from my mouth and I cursed myself for I hadn't dedicated more to the exercises.

I held on to the iron tube the best I could and squeezed myself to it. I was an easy target for a rifleman – holding there in that dark alley, but with a lamp right above me.

I doubted my persecutor had a gun – it doesn't fit a dead person.

That creature of almost two meters and a half height could only be dead, nothing survives to a 45-shooting on the face, at point blank range – I can still feel the humid pieces of bones that fell over me when I shooted – but, whatever, she kept on persecuting me, without worrying about the lack of half of her face and without emitting one single grunt.

How did I put myself in this situation? This was the question that pumped in my head that time...

Pasadena is a great city, with great problems and many people. This is great for someone with my speciality – private detective. I love looking at my clients' faces after they see the pictures of their

partners practicing the most obscene ever possible acts with other people – even with animals and objects – and receive the account of my fees! It's an entertainment! This city is heaven!

I forgot what my first case was, but from that time on I can only thank to the increase of my bank account – after all, it's difficult to maintain three ex-wives nowadays.

I also work with companies, acting in industrial anti-spy activities – these are the most wanted services – and it was exactly with them that my problems started...

I was calm that week, enjoying a good and deserved rest after I had caught a fool system analyst who thought he didn't leave any evidences behind when he sent money from one big bank account to another, private and secret, in the Cayman island, but, poor boy, I caught him and received US\$100,000 with no much effort.

I enter the web every day, searching for information and receiving and sending e-mails. Then, a headline in the Texas Chronicle caught my attention: a chemistry products industry was been prosecuted for throwing toxic dust in a fallow camp near a city hall's doghouse. But unfortunately a smart-mouth lawyer had started an appeal saying there was some technical failure in the process and the industry would probably escape the justice without paying one penny. It wasn't right. I noticed the

opportunity of getting some clues and obligate the industry to buy my silence. These guys needed to learn something and, on the other side, I deserved a financial add to my account for my effort.

I drove my Audi towards there consulting a map and when I noticed it wasn't working that much, threw it on the back seat and stopped near a bar.

- Hey – I told the guy who was drinking some beer at the counter – can you tell me where the XYZ company is (I prefer not telling the name because I love my life too much)?

He looked at me like a fool and pointed at the beginning of the street without even stopping drinking.

- Son of a bitch! – I thought. There was so much laziness that even speaking bores. Nevertheless I thanked him and, on first gear, I drove to the beginning of the street.

The industry was enormous and occupied many squares. Immediately, I started calculating how much they would be available to pay for my silence. I took some photographs of some trucks which were being filled and started waiting. I knew these kinds of things are usually done at night.

After a couple of hours, the trucks left the garage and, turning the motor on but not the lights, I started following them.

Going to the doghouse as supposed, the trucks stopped in front of the fallow camp and dropped the content of the barrels on the floor. I took many other pictures.

When they finished the operation and left, I drove towards downtown. I couldn't wait to send the files to my computes and wait until the bussiness hours to begin so as I could talk to the responsables for the industry.

I couldn't close my eyes for one single moment that night. On the bed, I could only think of how much I would obtain from the industry. Carrying picture-clues just like I had they would surely be condemned. I think I'll get up to five millions!

At 5 a.m. I couldn't stand it anymore. I wore my agasalho and ran, according to my doctor's prescription. I couldn't concentrate myself on my musics in the Ipod. I could only think of how I would talk to the industry's corporate officers.

I couldn't stand waiting anymore and at nine o'clock I called the industry.

- I'd like to talk to mr. Johansen, operational manager. – I had seen his name on the company's

website, but I've changed here not to have any troubles.

- He asked not to be disturbed. Could you call later?
- the attendant answered softly.
- No. I want to talk to him right now. - my tone of voice was severe. - I have a topic of his interest. In case he doesn't answer me, I'm assure Texas Chronicles will. - I lied with much conviction.
- One moment, please. - her tone of voice wasn't soft anymore.

I waited five minutes in line. They were probably trying to rake this call, but they must have given up because my cheater would indicate it was from China.

- A masculine voice answered: - Who am I talking to?
- It doesn't matter. - I sharply answered. - I have some pictures that might accuse your industry for throwing toxic dust near downtown. I want to know how much they cost to you. - I shot right in the point.
 - No show, no business. - he said.
 - Give me you e-mail adress and I'll send some of them to you. And, by the way, don't you bother trying to rake this e-mail because it will be from Papue New Guinea - I loved demonstrating my superior intelligence.

He sent me his e-mail and a few minutes later I was sending him five very incriminator pictures. I kept in line with him during this.

- I've just received them. - the man said. - If the other ones are similar to these one, we pay ten

million dollars for your silence. If you try any small trick, we'll find you even in hell and make you pay it. – the threaten didn't intimidate me, it's usually done in the business field.

- Done. – I answered, feeling rich already. "This money will give me some good vacations in Brazil", I thought. I'll have to disappear for some time.

The man kept on: - I want the original pictures with the memory slot of your camera. We know you'll copy them for your safety, but it doesn't matter. If you use them, it will be your last trick. – the threaten was made on a tone of voice which made my back go cold.

- As soon as you depositar the money in the bank account I'm sending you now – I pushed the "send" button on the e-mail website – in Cayman islands.

- We'll make it until 2 p.m. Give us the pictures at Placid Avenue, 32 with no tricks. – and so he finished the call.

I checked the bank account and until 2:15 p.m. the money wasn't there. I started walking from one side to another in the office.

Would they have found a way to shut me?

At 2:22 p.m. the money was there. I could see number one followed by seven zeroes. Great!

I sent the pictures via FedEx to mr. Johansen in that same evening. I could see it, from where I was in Placid Avenue, 33, when the entregador left the building without the package. I went down

immediately and, getting in a bus, I went towards downtown to get my things and land off the faster I could to Brazil.

From my hotel in Bahia I followed the news about the toxic dust evacuation actions. The industry was free due to the lack of clues. Capital has won once more. That didn't hurt anything in my conscience.

Six months later and five million dollars poorer, I returned to Texas. But, this time, I decided to stay in Houston. Maybe I could get some incriminatory information about some aerospace company...

The days were long while I tried to find something about the company, and nothing. It looks like the aerospace offices have less to lie about than the chemical sector.

Nevertheless, on a Thursday, I received an enigmatic telegram.

It was written I had to go to a hangar on the northern part of the city to treat something of my interest. Strange.

I'm not the type who gives luck to mischance, but I couldn't stop thinking about that damned telegram. There was no indication about who had sent it. I could feel the smell of a trap, but even so, I drove towards the given address.

I drove for two hours towards the place. It was almost night when I arrived there. I left the car, checking my 45-gun on my chest holster and my automatic 38-gun buckled to my calf. I was calmer.

I walked to the other side of the street but looking at every direction, went towards the hangar ready to jump to the side at every movement. It wasn't necessary. Nothing moved.

I opened the door with the maximum care auxiliared by a piece of wood. I was prepared for a shoot in the face. But, once more, nothing happened.

The hangar was empty, except for a big wood box on the center of the floor. I walked towards it taking from my pocket an explosive material sensor.

There was no indication of origin on the box. The sensor didn't show any explosives. The cover wasn't closed with nails and I opened it with a sudden kick.

Straw. The box was all covered with straw. Whatever is inside it, it must be under this straw. My sense of trap sparkled in my head.

With a piece of wood, I started searching what was in the box.

Suddenly, on an incredible velocity, an immense and fluffy object jumped out of th box.

It was a blind ratazana with much more than two meters height, which stood on its back paws and

started kicking the air in my direction with its long tail.

I put myself aside and, taking my 45-gun from the holster, I shot directedly to the animal's head.

Pieces of skin and bones from its face shot me. I felt the stinky blood, almost completely coagulated, shooting me. Argh! What a disgust I felt in that moment. With a hole in where there must be the snout, the creature kept on persecuting me. I left the hangar running.

On the other side of the street, my car wasn't there anymore. What a surprise! Whoever tried to trick me didn't want to give me a chance to escape. Knowing how curious I am, they were sure that I wouldn't give up the chance of checking what was going on, even with all that trap smell.

I went up immeditely on a outflow tube on a small abandoned building with five floors. With that creature following me. My hands started sweating and I couldn't go up anymore.

Right under me the horrible creature was levantando its front paws with very sharpened claws in my direction. I shot the last bullets of my 45-gun on it. And I did it right! That thing didn't even move when it was shot.

My arm was aching around the tube on which I was holding while my other hand was keeping my 45 and taking off the 38-gun from my calf.

I shot other two times and, facing the same results, I decided to save munition.

In this moment, a tough noise echoed in my mind and I saw the tube cracking a bit above my head. I dropped some degrees out of the wall, holding the tube despairingly with both hands and tangling my arms around it.

The creature jumped a bit some meters below, trying to catch me.

I jumped towards a windows on the wall. When I hit it with my body, many bricks came down, me within, and we fell right over the creature.

I woke up one hour later, my head was buzzing, there was some iron taste in my mouth due to the bleeding from my tongue, which I must have bitten when I fell down, and there was much pain around my body due to the fall in between the bricks.

I stood up shaking the dust which covered me throwing the bricks to the side. Then I could see the horrible creature, completely impaled by the tube on which I was holding, shaking its paws with spasms, just like a dying cockroach.

What would the authorities say the next day when they saw the dead creature still alive under the rubbish?

I don't know. Nevertheless, I took my camera out of my pocket – and besides my peripécias, it was still working – and started taking photographs from the creature and the place, with special attention to the box in which it had been delivered to me.

I feel I have to talk again to mr. Johansen about this fact...

Insomnia

Damned tic-tac longs itself during the night.

John has always used mechanical alarm clock because he couldn't wake up with the sound of the radio-clock.

His sleep was too deep and with no dreams, or at least he didn't remember them.

He can't remember that clear when was the first time he couldn't sleep anymore. He knows that insomnia came suddenly, only.

On a summer night some weeks ago his nightmare began...

He opened his eyes wide and looked at the alarm clock on the left, on the bed-side table.

Three in the morning. What could have waken him up all of a sudden? He didn't remember of having heard any noise nor having had any kind of nightmare. Strange. He had never been the type of person who wakes up during the night.

He moved around his bed, but he couldn't sleep. He stood up and went to the living-room to watch TV. Maybe this way he could fall asleep again.

The alarm clock rang at seven, as usual, but he was still woken up, he had already had a shower, shaved and feeling a cursed headache. He left earlier to

work that day. He arrived two hours before the other employees.

He checked all his e-mails, read some news until the beginning of his work and started working as usual. The headache didn't leave him.

He had lunch, instead of he didn't want to, and talked only a bit to his mates.

At 6pm he left and went back home. He ate the usual congelada food, with no hungry and watched some TV, but he couldn't fix himself at it. The headache was unsupportable.

At 9, as every day, John lied on the bed. He didn't close his eyes. He rolled around the bed until his bed sheets tangled him all over, just like an Egyptian mummy. He woke up at midnight and went towards the kitchen to drink something because his throat was as withered as a parchment.

When he opened the refrigerator, he felt an incredible desire of eating meal. He opened the freezer and took some mince meat from it, the unique piece of meal in his pantry. He took it off the plastic and ate it there, raw, standing in front of the open refrigerator.

He lied on the bed at one am, satisfied, and closed his eyes. When he woke up, he felt like he had been sleeping for hours. The headache had returned. The stomach was boiling in acid. He looked at the alarm clock: 1:15 am! Only five minutes had passed since

when he went to bed again! He stood up and went towards the restroom to vomit.

He didn't go to work that day. The stuffed stomach and the pulsating-pain on his head blocked him from doing so. At 9am he called his boss. "It's okay", he said, "but go to the doctor to check this out." He did not.

He spent the whole day lying in bed with that headache pulsating endlessly and the stomach burning due to the great quantity of analgesics he had taken, with no visible effect.

He missed his marriage. His wife has died of cancer two years before. They had no children. Better like this, he wouldn't know how to take care of any child. He was forty-eight and felt old already.

He didn't eat anything that day. But, at midnight, a terrible meat-hungry has taken over him. There was none in home, he would have to leave to buy some.

He dressed himself and, with the headache, left the apartment. He didn't remember entering the elevator or where he went to, only remembered of lying nude on the living room's sofa. Did he dream? The headache was over, but the sleep didn't come.

He was preparing himself to go to work, the headache returned, lighter, but it was still there, when a knock on his door scared him. Who would be so early in the morning?

- New Orleans Police Department. Could you please open the door?

John looked through the peehole. A dark skinned police officer, of almost two meters tall, put the badge in focus.

- Yes, detective? – John had just opened the door and kept on saying – I’m preparing myself to go to work.

- We’ll just take a few minutes, sir. – the expression on the officer’s face didn’t agree with his words.

- Did you hear something yesterday night, around midnight? – the detective kept on.

- No from what I remember. – John became thinkative and, after a couple of seconds, he remembered something and kept on: - I wasn’t here this time, detective, I left to eat something.

The police officer looked at him incredulous and commented:

- Strange time to eat something. – he kept on. – It seems someone had the same idea yesterday night and at the same time, but gobbled up your neighbor of the floor down this one.

- How did this happen? – John asked, feeling dizzy and holding on the door’s post not to fall.

The officer shrugged off the question and answered:

- That's what we would like to know. No-one in this building heard anything yesterday night. There are no security cameras nor anything else which can give us any clue. Nevertheless, it seems it was done by an animal, more specifically a dog. Do you know if Mrs. Holmes had one in home?

- Animals are not accepted in the building. - John answered without looking at him.

- Could you help us identifying the body? - the officer asked, gesticulating at John to follow him.

He knew Mrs. Holmes. Very well. Since he had become a widower, he usually searched for her services.

They went downstairs and entered her apartment, in front of the stairs.

The scene was hair-raising. Elma, that was her name, was lying on the living room's floor, on a blood pool, around which some legist had already marked her body with a chalk. That was not the worst, nevertheless. She didn't have face or breast. They had been gobbled up. Her belly was opened and a piece of the internecine was lying outside her body.

John felt his stomach bad. His head was pulsating and his eyes were covered with blood. He noticed a butterfly tattooed on the victim's groin.

- That's her. – he held the detective's arm not to fall on the floor. – Which kind of animal could have done it to her?

- Bites like these could only have been done by a very huge dog or a bear. I don't believe a basset could do it. – the man laughed in a very low voice.

- May I go, detective? I am late already. – John left the detective's arm and walked towards the door.

- Wait! – the cop gave him a card. – Call me if you remember something that might help us.

John got the card he gave and left, without looking at him.

* * *

He couldn't go to work. His head was almost exploding of pain and his stomach wasn't really good. He felt it making him stew.

He ran to the restroom and vomited copiously. Pieces and more pieces of non-digested meat left his mouth and fulfilled the toilet.

In between the tears that blurred his eyes, he saw something that made him cold.

All over that vomited meat, there was a human nose!

Yes, that soft nose could only be Elma's! What did John do to that poor prostitute? He ate her! That was the only thing that could explain those non-digested insides in his toilets.

He fainted on the restroom's floor. That was the only one dream he had since then.

* * *

When he woke up in the afternoon, the first thing he felt was the acrid smell of meat in his toilet. He flushed three times until he could send that to the sewer. He leaned on the wall. He couldn't believe what he had apparently done. That could not be true! He didn't remember anything!

The headache started pulsating again. Then, all of a sudden, he had an idea. He ran towards the telephone and called detective Taylor.

- Good afternoon, detective. This is John, from the down floor, I've met you this morning.

The detective promptly answered.

- Good afternoon, mr. John. Did you remember something?

- Actually, not. - John apologized on his tone of voice. - I call you because I'd like to ask you

something. How do you know my neighbor was attacked by an animal and not by a human?

- Mr. John – the detective answered – we don't know exactly what attacked the lady. At least we don't know, until the expertise make a complete autopsy on her body. Do you have any idea?

- No, unfortunately I do not. – John apologized again. – That was just because you looked so sure that it was an animal...

- The first impression wasn't any other. – the cop answered. – The wounds didn't look like they had been made by a human jaw. But I don't know, everything is possible for it seems they had found some human blood on the victim and it wasn't hers. Maybe the murderer had used an animal to kill her – and, changing the subject, the police officer apologized and told John he had to pick up the phone.

John stared at the mute telephone on his hand. What the hell happened yesterday? How wounds made by an animal jaw appeared on Elma? A thousand crazy ideas crossed his mind. Would he be a werewolf and didn't know it? But it wasn't blue moon night! The legends he had read or watched on TV mixed themselves on his head.

Drowned in a terrible headache, John let his body fall on the sofa and remained there all day long.

* * *

John didn't go to work the whole week. He told his boss a doctor had asked him an endoscopy and, because of it, he would need a week off.

The necessity of eating meat didn't repeat during those days. But he couldn't sleep one single minute or feed himself either for he had no hungry. The head didn't stop aching. John imagined he would have a cerebral tumor and drowned in the blues.

Delirium lapses started happening. The lack of sleep and hungry started affecting him.

During those lapses, John saw himself a reptile – a Komodo dragon, which he had seen on Discovery Channel and had impressed him much – which, in its waddle walk ran towards a complete nude and scarred Elma, until it reaches her and starts eating her face.

He got rid of these lapses flooded of sweat and feverish. He couldn't wait anymore for a solution, whatever it was. He imagined detective Taylor in his delirium, shooting John with a beanpole and wearing reptile cloth.

On Saturday he went to the police department to talk to detective Taylor.

- Mr. John! I didn't expect to see you! – he held out and he kept on. – What brings you here?

With a sweating hand, John shook the detective's hand. – I'd like to know if you discovered something about Mrs. Holmes' death.

- Yes! We did! – the detective looked very happy and kept on. – According to the analysis, he was bitten by a very big Komodo dragon. We just don't know how it entered the apartment or who took it there.

As white as snow, John let his body fall on the chair in front of the detective.

- I've got a confession to make. – he said, sad, to the cop.

The detective jumped off the chair.

- Are you telling me you took the animal to her apartment?!

With the eyes covered in tears, John told the policeofficer: No! I didn't take any animal to there. I was the animal!!! – the despair took over him.

The policeofficer sat down and, calmly, told John, looking deep in his eyes: - That's impossible, mr. John. I see you're upset enough with mrs. Holmes' death, but we didn't find any clues of any person in her apartment.

- And what about the human blood you found on her? – John's eyes begged an answer.

- That was only infection. – the detective said. – That wasn't really human blood. Only a few proteins were human's, mixed to reptile's blood.

John became upset. – But I am telling you! That was me, who became a reptile! I've even vomitted some victim's body parts that day!

The detective didn't impress himself. – Mr. John, if you don't calm down, I'll call an ambulance which will lead you to a public hospital... – and, calmer, he kept on. – I believe you should go to a doctor immediately. You don't look much normal to me. By the way, I'll tell you some things that will maybe let you calmer.

Looking deep in John's eyes, he continued – Don't you think we didn't investigate well. Since the beginning you were our main suspect, and you became it even more when we knew you were a victim's "client." But truth is we found some images of yours leaving the building in the period of time you told us you left it. Police makes miracles with the street security cameras.

After a quick pause, he continued. – We saw all the way you went and when you returned to the building. Our expertise affirms that when you returned, the victim was already dead. So, go to the doctor and stop this bulshit.

The officer courtly, but hard, followed John until the office's entry door.

The sun lighting his aching head, John sat on the bank in front of the police office and stood there during some time.

* * *

Next week he didn't go to work either. The headache was each time worse. Even so, he didn't go to the doctor. He was afraid of what the doctor could say.

On Tuesday, his boss called him. That was about his walking papers. He would have to go to the company to receive his incomes.

The depression took over his soul. An incredible desire of suiciding took over him. But he was afraid of death, more than the miserable life he was living since the death of his wife.

In that night, the hungry for meat returned. John couldn't help the headache and stomachache. He didn't leave home because he was so weak that couldn't get out of bed. His pants could even dance around his waist. He would have probably losen about 15kg since the crisis began.

He fell on the floor twisting out of shape. It seemed he was being scratched alive! Sweat was flooding all around his body. His head was opening itself!

Little by little he got better and opened his eyes.

Standing in front of him, a more than two meters tall Komodo dragon was staring at him, one paw on his chin and the other with an overcoat around it. Not believing his eyes, John yelled until he had no more voice to yell.

The dragon didn't even blink. After John had stopped yelling with no voice, the dragon opened its mouth and said, using the most understandable English John had ever listened to:

- Don't you wait for me to dinner. I'll have dinner out. I don't know if I'll be back tonight.

And after it said it, it turned and left walking in such an elegance through the apartment's door.

John's head wasn't aching anymore. But that didn't matter because he fell dead when the dragon closed the door.

He could rest in peace, then.

Pyrolysis

Feeding nine billions of souls is not simple. Our industry, agriculture and livestock have destroyed our planet in the end of the XXI century.

That's when the dust pyrolysis and other organic components started kidnapping carbon from the atmosphere, gripped on the agricultural plot.

Pyrolysis has saved the planet, more than wind, solar or nuclear fusion energy power together.

But, what is this pyrolysis made of?

It's simply the burn of every organic matter, it means, things made of carbon, in high temperatures and in almost complete absence of oxygen.

This way, the harmful carbon dioxide, greenhouse effect gas, isn't set free in the atmosphere and keeps in the waste of this burn – almost pure carbon!

Pyrolysis has also promoted a new industry on the planet: recycling, in addition to carbon mining.

Vegetables weren't planted anymore. A prosperous food synthesis industry and other raw materials from carbon appeared in the middle of XXII century, until it started scarcing and humanity had to discover it in other places outside Earth.

Carbon mining led researches to a more than one billion people immigration not only to moon communities in the middle of XXIII century, but also to Mars and its moons Phobos and Deimos, and Palas, Ceres and Vesta asteroids.

Earth became a federation of states called UNE – United Nations of Earth, and, for the first time in its history, a government started effectively controlling the planet.

Nevertheless, there are still nine billion people to be fed on Earth. And here, carbon has become even more rare, forcing us to import it from the communities at high prices.

Nothing would be more obvious than recycling it *ad infinitum*.

Due to this, nothing escapes the pyrolysis, including corpses and animal skeletons, even those ones condemned to death.

It's about these last ones I'm talking about, because, by the way, I am one of them and next week I'll be "pyrolysed" – that's how everybody's call the pyrolysis process.

* * *

- Pyrolysis on him! – the crowd screamed, while I was taken by cops, handcuffed. The policeofficers

held those people so that the most heated didn't hit me right there.

There's no need to say I became voiceless after screaming my innocence. About that time I didn't accept that someone would believe I could be able to perpetuate such a great barbarity.

People thought I had raped and killed a young lady in Belfast. They said they found some DNA of mine on her body. Impossible! I had never seen that young lady before! That could only be a trap from someone who wanted to be on my chair at the University. That's normal nowadays, this kind of accusation through implanting some DNA somewhere.

Even more normal were the jobs steals. After all, almost seven billion people survived with some aids from the State, with a miserable unemployment financial support, only to make that person live in the deepest aspect of poverty.

Of course, this help didn't bother many people. Human being is naturally lazy, many of them are, and so that help was better than begging or working.

The others, employed, besides of the low salaries, were restlessly persued by the crowd, anxious for work. The use of robots was widespread, what avoided new jobs to be created and the exportation of manufactured goods to the communities was the

main goal of the industry. Death was usual among the workers.

The colonists were in a better situation, but their life wasn't easy. But, for them, the environment was the main problem, and the importation of goods was a necessity for their survival.

* * *

My lawyer, payed by the government, was completely fool. Lazy and ignorant, he didn't care much about my situation. I was another one in his list of prisoners.

Our criminal law isn't unfair, it's nonexistent. Someone who is in the hands of the legal system has only two possible destinies: a long punishment mining coal in some forgotten community in the space, or pyrolysis. Being pyrolised isn't the worst, the problem is the person is thrown to the furnace alive! The executioners love this part.

If I look calm while I write this narrative, be sure I am. I am tired of despairing, screaming, hitting the wall with my head or pulling out my hair. During the first week I've been in jail, I was on hunger strike. They didn't notice me. From the third day on, they didn't give me anything to eat. I had to beg for it.

I am resigned to die before I am thirty. My unique pain is that I'm innocent. If I knew it would occur to me, I would have had it coming. As a teacher, many young ladies tried to have something with me. Rape

and kill one of them wouldn't let me in a situation worse than this one.

* * *

Didn't I tell you the executions are broadcasted on television in the solar network? Yes, billions of people will watch my torture in the middle of the fire across the Earth and the communities. A nice entertainment. Deals at stake will be realized to know how fast I'll die, if I'll die burned or up to my neck or other sordid details. Humanity doesn't care about a person anymore, I mean, if sometime they did. A human being is more worthless than the carbon which he's made of.

I've been in jail for six months and my execution is tomorrow. Our law system is very fast, isn't it?

I haven't seen my lawyer anymore after his presentation to me. As I thought, that was only a matter of form: some signs on a paper and that's it, I was unnecessary. False "democracy" worked once more!

Be all humans cursed! What an ignoble species we became! If God really exists as many people say, what is he doing now? Can't he see my tragedy? I can only believe I'm unnecessary just like all my corrupted race.

* * *

The guards that will escort me arrived. I asked them more five minutes alone. I finished my writings, put them in an envelope and addressed it to my father. He needed to know I'm innocent and would die about proudly. I let the envelope on the table. I'll keep my narrative mentally.

The guards takes me through a very illuminated corridor. I can't identify anything around me, the light dazzles me. A hundred meters after I started walking, the great pyrolysis furnace which generates energy and carbon to the prison is in front of me. Its very white and innocent structure contrasts with its use.

The door is open, a contention area avoids any heat to leave it.

I got a shot by the guards on my neck and immediately lost control of my body – a precaution about desperate condemned ones. That's unnecessary saying that my intestinal and bladder muscles became relaxed. My excretion, fallen against the television parquet, that's my last breathe in life. I am thrown in the furnace. The fire embraces me in an agonizing pain and my lungs burn due to the sudden absence of oxygen. I am going to die.

The last thing I notice is the envelope addressed to my father, with my narrative, being thrown in the fire over me. No-one will know about my innocence. But it doesn't matter anymore...

The Muhaloo

1880, April. After my father's death, a rich farmer in Devonshire, and, for I'm not the firstling of the family, I received my part of the money inheritance and took a steam train to Durban, in Africa, next entered the large jungle and the desert until Kukuanaland, where they said some famous King Solomon's gold mines are hidden. The idea was to become rich by myself. Nothing even wronger. During the path the baggage men stole most of my food and clothes, leaving the clothes I was wearing only, besides the bag I carried in which there was some food, a Colt revolver with space for six bullets and the money that lasted from the work and that I had wisely hidden in my journey belt.

I quickly found that another English man, Allan Quatermain, was six months preceded than me in my survey and returned from Kukuanaland with his pockets full of gemstones. Even so, I try to go over his steps, but that was useless, due to the already mentioned experience with the baggage men.

There, in the desert coast, in the oasis of Al-Makashiba I've cursed my lack of luck and rashness, in the small tent I've improvised with some palm tree leaves.

I returned to Durban, under burning sun and heat. Five days later, thirsty and hungry, I arrived to the

large Kurkala jungle, through which I had passed two weeks ago.

When I saw the first lagoon, I threw myself on the ground on its shore and drank too much water.

I was about to stand up when a penetrating pain started along my left arm. A snake had bitten it with its fangs. My vision started blurring right after the pain and, once more, I've cursed my lack of care. My life would be punished for it.

* * *

I could think I was dreaming, but the pain I was feeling in my left arm demonstrated I was not.

Lying on the ridiculous straw hammock, raving due to the fever and without understanding what the strange natives screamed outside the tent, I tried to remember what I was doing there.

I stood up and left the tent. A young boy, not older than fifteen years old, pointed his spear at me and made me go back inside.

He also entered, spear down this time. In a zulu dialect, which I knew a bit, he said:

- It's dangerous being outside when Muhaloo is hunting.
- What's this Muhaloo? – I asked, gesticulating for him to understand me.

I had no answer from the boy. He left and, next, a woman enwarpped in lianas and ochre painted, came in carrying a bowl with fruits and signed for me to eat them.

Starving, I started devouring the fruits while she changed a stinking cataplasm they had put on the snake's bite.

After the meal and the "medicinal" care, a great torpor took over me and, lying on the straw hammock, I fell asleep immediately.

* * *

When I woke up, there were three children lying on the floor, starring me. I smiled at them that, then, ran outside. The same old lady came in and, next, checked my curative.

- Your wound is almost dressed. In two days you'll be able to leave. – the woman said, without looking at me.

- I am very pleased for the treatment I've received from you. I would like to reward you somehow. – I said it more for the polite person I am than for anything else.

The old lady stared at me for some time, turned around and left the tent.

Fifteen minutes later, three adult men with spears and shields made of leopard skin entered the tent. The oldest of them said:

- Our Gagool told us your offer. We're glad to accept it. We'll leave tomorrow morning, early.

I was shocked. I didn't expect them to accept my offer. To be true, I didn't know anything but it: we would leave on an expedition tomorrow morning. And nothing else.

I couldn't sleep that night for my great excitement. I ate the fruits Gagool brought me and she "discharged" the bite saying it was cured and healed. The arm wasn't aching anymore. I felt strong and reborn.

The ancient hardly left the tent and the three giant men returned carrying in their hands a leopard skin the warriors dressed. I put it covering my shirt, which was already very threadbare.

I checked my revolver munition. I wouldn't trust a wood spear in the middle of a jungle with uncountable quantities of free savage animals.

After everything was checked, I rested for some minutes, showered the best I could and, yet in the dark, the three adult warriors entered to take me.

We left the place in a group of twenty men. All of them were very tall. I felt like a dwarf, with my

1.85m tall, near them. The smallest of them must have been almost two meters tall!

We ran towards the first daylight and after $\frac{3}{4}$ h walking, we stopped on the shore of a stream to drink and supply our gourds.

I took that time to approach the older warrior, the same who had talked to me in the tent, and asked him:

- Where are we going, leader?
- Towards those mountains. - he answered, pointing to some far strains and kept: - It's a three days journey.
- Right. - I said. - And what will we do there?
- Kill Muhaloo. - he turned and said nothing else. His attitude demonstrated he wouldn't answer any other questions in that moment.

* * *

On the second day of walk, talking to the other warriors, I knew the Muhaloo was a horrible beast which devoured warriors and devastated villages by which it passed. No-one had seen it yet and survived to describe it. I noticed all of them were really afraid, but the leader, whose name I knew: Kwala. Actually, his hate against the beast, which killed his family all at one single attack, headed him. Luckily he was on an hunting expedition with his warriors. In all forty-three people had died in his village.

Kwala was a good leader. Fair and benevolent, he knew how to be implacable if needed. If he were English, I've no doubts he would be the general on her Majesty's service of Queen Victoria.

The troop reduced the velocity of their walk for me to follow them. I really didn't like that condescension, but, secretly, I thanked them because I was still feeling very weak.

Around two pm, we stopped at a glade and I could see among the vegetation something that looked like a mast to me. I couldn't believe my eyes.

I asked Kwala what that thing was and he ignored it, saying only: - The grandfather of my great-great-grandfather told me it has fallen from above a long time ago. - he turned, it means, he wouldn't tell me anything else.

I aperted myself from the group and approached the object. A hundred feet far from it, I could notice there were some ship rests. A spanish galleon, more exactly. As dark as night. Part of its name could still be read, incrustated in nacre on its side: *Pilar*.

That was a typical ship from the end of the XV century. I could see cannons partially covered by the vegetation. It would still make it in the Spanish Armada of Philip II, besides its age.

I didn't say anything about it, but one of my passions in life and my father's proud is my interest for navy and its history. Nevertheless, his proud

was over when I affirmed I wouldn't register in navy because my interest was merely academic. I really liked history.

I approached the ship, searching some hole through which I could enter the structure. In this moment, I had completely forgotten Kwala and our mission.

I found a very small hole on the starboard and, after many trials, I could enter Pilar, "wringing" myself in it.

Light entered through the spaces between the bad tables of the poop. I checked around me in the half-cleared area.

Close to some rests of a draught, I noticed the breast of a light suit of armour incrustated on the wood. At first sight, I thought it had gone through the rotten wood, but when I approached it, I noticed my thought had nothing to do about it. The breast was *really* incrustated on the wood, as if it had melted like wax and, then, solidified around the iron! I thought that was very strange.

A door on the back with a very strong locker caught my attention. It didn't look like part of the storehouse. Before it, it reminded me something like a pantry. What could I find there?

Holding on to a dry, bold branch I had found on the floor, I forced the locker putting my weight over the handspike. I fell on the floor and hurt my knee

because the “strong locker” was rotten and didn’t resist my attack.

Laming, I stood up and opened the door. An incredible darkness waited for me on the other side.

I searched for something that might illuminate the room and didn’t find it. I decided to enter even so and hit the walls of the room with the wood I used to force the entrance, hopeful that they would be as rotten as the other objects in there.

The walls were more difficult to me, but in a couple of minutes I could make a crack through which the afternoon sunlight could enter. I turned and fell on my knees when I saw what was in the room!

Millions of golden objects, in the size of tea plates crowded on an ammount that would cause envy to the Real Treasure. I got one of them and started admiring it. It remembered me of Mayan’s stars, or something like this. I couldn’t tell it for sure. I saw the others. Besides they had exactly the same size, there weren’t two examples of the same object.

I got really excited! I hadn’t found King Solomon’s mines, but what I was holding in my hands was godlike! I kept the most quantity of them I could in my bag and some of them in my pockets. Despairingly, I looked at the enormous ammount of things I’d have to leave behind. I decided not to comment anything to Kwala or the others and remember that place carefully, so as I could return in the future with an expedition to get the other

objects. I calculated millions of pounds would be left behind.

I covered the crack I made on the wall with the whole vegetation which had invaded the ship during the centuries, I blocked and covered up the door of the room the best I could and left the ship through the same hole I entered.

Happy for my discovery, the most important of the questions didn't even pass through my mind: how did a Spanish galleon from the XV century arrive in the middle of an African jungle, hundreds of kilometers far from the ocean?

* * *

Neither Kwala or his warriors noticed my absence. All of them were occupied hunting and getting some fruits for the next day's campaign.

We passed that night at the glade. My mind couldn't stop thinking of a way to go back to the galleon and get some other golden objects. But when I realized the weight I was carrying on my back was tiring enough, I gave it up. I couldn't carry any more weight on the return to the village.

As soon as the first sun lights appeared, we started our walk. Kwala wouldn't let anything avoid him to obtain his so desired revenge.

The more we approached the beast's territory, the more my heart became anxious. I wasn't so anxious

for the adventure, for I was carrying so many pre-columbian old gold. Even so, I wouldn't let Kwala notice my anxiety. After all, those people saved my life! I wasn't a Majesty's soldier, but my English ancestry wouldn't let me disappoint them. There was nothing holier than my promises.

We arrived at the bottom of a mountain which top was covered with clouds. The vegetation was going to the top, towards the clouds. The stranger thing about this is that, besides it was very dense, we couldn't listen to any animal. My back became cold. Kwala was calm, as if that was the most natural situation of the world. Nevertheless, silence remained.

We started climbing the mountain, holding on to the vegetation to help us on this process when the pandemonium has taken over us.

A light bolt got Kwala right on his forehead and left by the back of his head! Scarred, the warriors let their spears and shields drop and ran away. That didn't help them. The bolt shot one after another and made them fall on the floor, sometimes with a hole on the belly, other times on the chest, other times in the middle of the head, just like Kwala's shot.

I was terrified. The silent bolts didn't stop reaching the warriors. Horrified, I hid behind a stone and put my hands on my ears not to hear the horrible yells of the panicky zulus.

Less than five minutes and a sepulchral silence returned to the jungle after it had been forgotten by the terrified yells of the warriors.

I have never seen such a terrible thing and I wish I never ever see it again. The following scenes had driven me crazy.

A very tall animal, more than three meters tall, got out of the trees. He looked like a giant octopus, but with ten tails from a horrible triangular head with one single eye in the middle. There was a rod, or something like this, in one of the tails, and it was silver. Its skin, just like some octopus, vibrated on a sequence of colors, mainly red and yellow, but sometimes blue or green appeared in some slippery strips.

Walking, it seemed it was fluctuating on the ground, but it was the slippery of its tails that created this illusion. The animal didn't stop looking around while approached the fallen warriors.

It held Kwala in one of the tails, just like the great warrior was nothing more than a cloth doll, and took him to the triangle base, which was its head.

A ripple in its skin opened itself and a terrible neb, just like a parrot's one, came out and ate the zulu's leader's head, grabbing it from its base.

I couldn't see anything else, my eyes became dark, I covered my mouth with both hands avoiding

setting free the scream that was echoing in my head facing that horror scene, and I fell on the floor.

* * *

Ten days later, I woke up on a bed in a campaign tent. My eyes were blurred and my head was horribly aching. A thirty-something year old cloistress entered the tent and started speaking in french with a belgian accent.

- How do you feel? We found you fallen on a shore near here, dying in fever due to insolation and your skin was raw because you walked too much!

My french wasn't good, but I tried to tell her something:

- I don't remember anything, sister, but I know I was carrying a bad with me... – I really didn't remember anything that happened, but the gold I had in my bag, that was the first thing that came up in my mind.

- Rest here. – she said. – Your gold wasn't touched. You didn't stop talking about it in your delirium. It must be very important to you.

I didn't answer, but my relief expression must have been enough to her.

- Now, rest. We'll talk later. – the doistress said.

* * *

I spent twenty days in this campaign, until I recovered myself. After I gave one of my golden pieces to the missionaries, my life became way much easier. They were really honest people. They didn't touch anything that was mine, but they accepted the gold with no demands.

When I remembered the adventures I passed after Muhaloo with Kwala and his warriors, I couldn't believe how come I was still alive.

After waking up from the faint caused by the beast's attack, I must have been out of myself for several days, walking nowhere around the region. Truth is I must have walked hundreds of kilometers on a very different direction, because the mission was very close to Durban city, from which my journey started.

I took the first steam train to London. I didn't want to get any more gold from the Spanish galleon after what happened to my zulu friends. I was lucky for not being devoured by the monster. I was even luckier for not being reached by one of those mysterious death bolts. I imagined I wouldn't probably have such a great lucky another time, if I returned to get the gold.

Besides, I was taking back to Devonshire more than my father had obtained during all his life. I'll become a rich landowner!

But, the more encouraging the future would look like to me in that moment, something inside didn't let me rest because of the horrible scenes I've been through in the bottom of the cursed mountain. And this feeling wouldn't get rid of me anymore.