

Thoughts on the Laws That Govern the Universe

by
Ryan Northcott

Blood and Guts

I was assailed. I was out in the open. It was tenebrous, no traffic around, I was slightly drunk and not far from home. Just a peaceful nighttime walk to clear my head. It was suddenly knives out. I ended up with more than a fair share of broken ribs, a fractured jaw, a crack in my skull and not the least, an open wound with my guts spilling out.

My girlfriend and I had just broken up, for the umpteenth time. I was upset of course, but no more than normal. I was always upset about something, it wasn't like breaking up with her was unusual at this point. Honestly I didn't really give a fuck. I just didn't want to go to my shit home and my shit roommates so I thought I'd visit my mother. My mom was glad to see me, she cooked up some chicken fried rice and we hung out watching movies. It was nice to spend some time with her. I like to think that she enjoyed spending some time with her only kid as well. We had a few drinks while watching immortal bad guys disembowel stupid teenagers. By the end of it I was too drunk to drive home and she knew so, she told me to stay the night. I didn't object, of course. Her breakfasts were famous, so how could I not?

She was also famously alcoholic, but with a streak of luck that never let it get her down. A trait, I guess, I inherited. We luckily evaded arrest on numerous occasions. Neither of us ever caused an accident while driving, even while I, being too young to drive in any capacity, drove her home from wherever. Seven years old, driving home with a White Russian in hand...

Those were always my favorite as a kid. Now I drink expensive rums and craft beers. We'll leave the heroin and weed out of it for now.





My mom had gone to bed, I had settled into the couch for awhile, still watching cable TV and still drinking. I wasn't tired. I remember raiding her stash for some gin. As much as I drank I couldn't sleep, I was restless.

I decided to go for a walk, not too far, of course, just far enough to clear my head.

I was in my 20's when I walked out of the door, slipping out to get some air. Air wasn't what I got though. What I got was pain.

I made it as far as the corner of the block, between the schoolyard and the park. It was nighttime, but still, being a small town it was the last place you'd expect...

Some bastard kid on a bike rolled up on me. Drunk as I was, I didn't notice him or his friends.

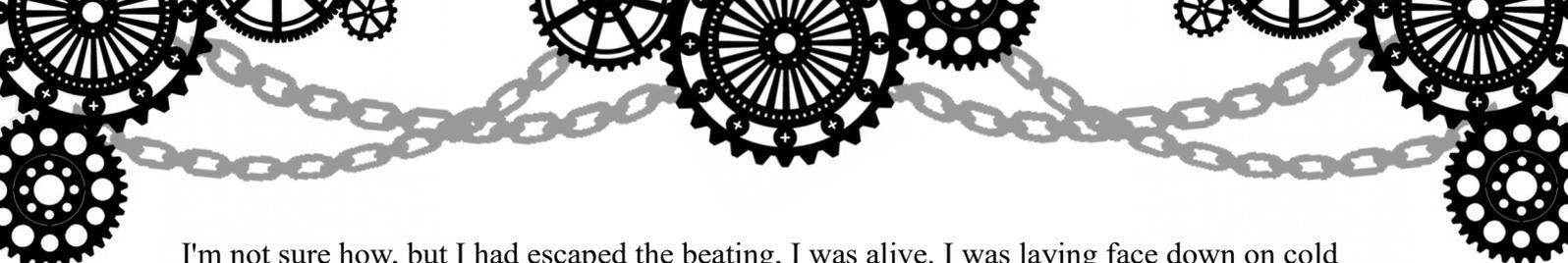
"You got any money?" he asked, trying to look tough, as tough as a 17 year old could be. In exactly so many words I told him, with an ironic smile, "Fuck off. Do I look like I have money?" Yet still I opened my wallet (Empty as it was) and said something smart ass he wouldn't understand. "Feed me". He looked at me indignantly. He then repeated his request to give him everything I had.

I stood there with my open wallet and said something to the effect of "Eat shit" I threw my wallet in his face and put a smile on my face, ready to fight. I already knew what was happening. If I'd had money or not, I was being targeted. Feel free to judge me, but if I had been armed, I'd have shot him right there. Obviously I didn't, because I wasn't.

The little motherfucker behind me felt it appropriate to hit me in the back of the head with a brick, as I went over forward the one in front of me plunged his knife into my stomach. which cut me open as I fell, there was another smaller cut where it seemed he'd attempted to get past my ribs to my heart, but failed. I put up a fight, but it was five to one odds, I didn't stand a chance. The rest of the kids used me as a soccer ball, stomping and kicking me. I had a Nike shoe imprint on my back for two weeks.

I suffered.





I'm not sure how, but I had escaped the beating, I was alive. I was laying face down on cold concrete when I noticed I was no longer being kicked and crushed underfoot. I stood up slowly and painfully to face an empty street, I immediately grasped my stomach to keep my guts in place. I was opened up, but still alive. It slowly dawned on me that I wasn't really where I had been anymore.

Yeah, I know that doesn't make any sense, even now, sometimes I think I might have just been in a state of shock or something. My surroundings were the same, except everything seemed muted and dark. No matter how many doors I knocked on, no matter how much I cried out for help, that help would never come.

Thankfully my attackers had vanished. At first I thought they had gotten spooked by a passing car or something. I gave up on trying to get any help from people that just didn't want to get involved and turned my attentions to just getting back home. In my mind it wasn't far, just a walk through the park so to speak.

There are days, still, that I'm not convinced I didn't die on that sidewalk, my therapist says that it's just my depression talking. I wonder sometimes if she is some devil in disguise. I wonder that about everyone though.

I made my way into the park, staying close to the trees, I hoped that it would hide me from my assailants if they chose to come looking for me, but honestly I was more worried about using the tree's trunks for support. I was getting weak and could feel everything draining away from me. I couldn't look but I could feel the blood congealing between my fingers. I walked, it seemed, forever. The deeper into the park the more surreal things became. The weather changed suddenly, my body became wracked with chills from bitter cold winds.

So very tired, I paused to rest under the cover of a large tree. Snow had begun to fall, but it was grey and dull, not the pristine white I was used to. As I slid my body down to the ground against the trunk I could feel that it wasn't what I had expected. In the place of rough bark was a surface that was wet and fleshy. I was so consumed by fatigue that it didn't even register as wrong.





Pain and Ash

When I woke up, it was still dark, the night sky seemed strange, stars in the wrong place. A layer of snow covered everything, but it wasn't cold. I began to panic at the realization that it was ash, not snow. How long was I out of it? What had happened?

This was the time I thought I might have died.

I stood slowly, it was intensely painful. Pushing the ash off of my legs, and using the tree as leverage I got to my feet and dusted myself off. Much of the stuff was caked on me where the blood had soaked my clothes. Maybe it had stopped the bleeding.

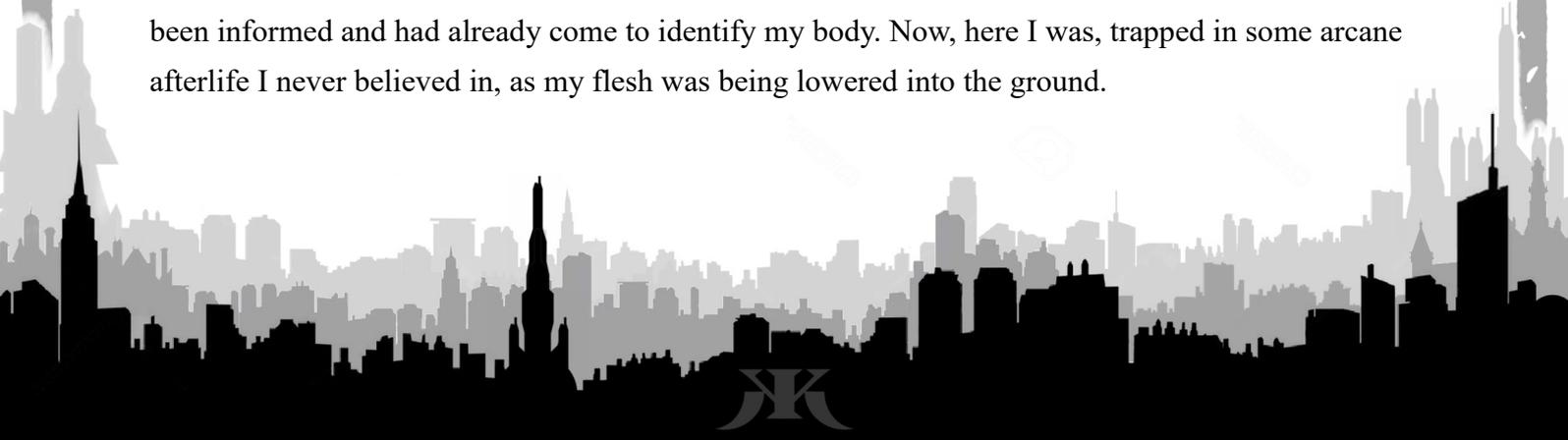
I started to make my way to my mother's house, unsure of which way to go. The park didn't seem familiar to me anymore. Where was I?

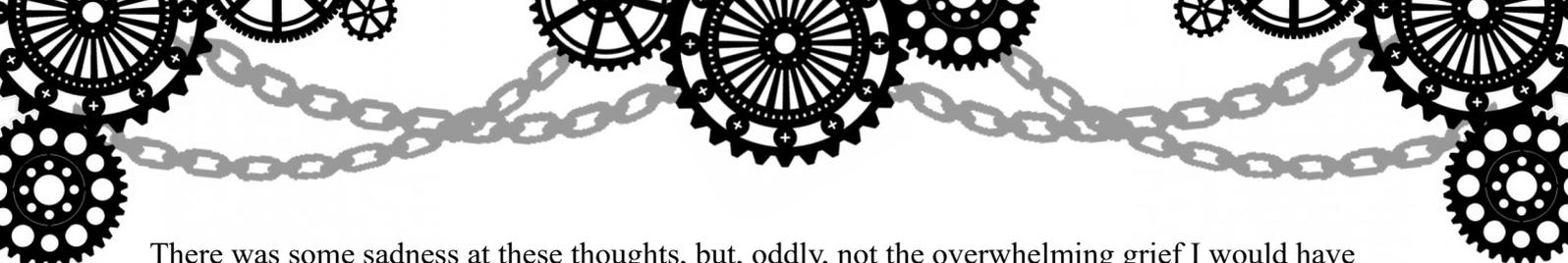
I rationalized to myself that I was rarely through here at night. Of course things look strange. I continued along the pathway ahead, passing many an unexpected landmark. The more I walked, the more I knew something had changed. Also the more I walked the more I had to bite down the fear. I still held onto my stomach hoping I wouldn't start bleeding out again, but I never did.

I passed a statue of something that was both man and beast, seeming to be guarding some enormous block of worn stone. Surely I would have noticed that during the day. Was it new?

Continuing along the path I came across what I can only describe as an altar, like something from a movie, only gigantic, so I couldn't see the top. Water flowed over its sides, but in the dark it looked like blood. The shadows pooling at its base exuded a bone-chilling cold in pulsating waves. There were stone blocks jutting out from the ground everywhere I looked, some plain, some ornate, some with outlandish carvings of frightening angels. Had I somehow wandered into a cemetery? Ahead, I could see the towering stonework gates that led to my eventual exit from the weirdness of this place.

I had started to convince myself that I hadn't made it out of the park after all, that some jogger would find my lifeless husk lying there in the cold November snow... that by now my mother had been informed and had already come to identify my body. Now, here I was, trapped in some arcane afterlife I never believed in, as my flesh was being lowered into the ground.





There was some sadness at these thoughts, but, oddly, not the overwhelming grief I would have expected. I did take some solace that there was something after death. I was by no means healed, but I wasn't bleeding any longer, there was still the matter of the half foot long cut in my gut, no doubt being held together only by the curdled mass of blood and ash.

I made my way, half stumbling from bewilderment, through the gateway. The bars of the gate were so massive, as if built for giants, that I was able to pass between them with ease. I'm not sure what I expected when I passed through the gate, but I was sure that what I saw wasn't anywhere on Earth. Abandoned streets in every direction were covered in ash, twisting through a snarl of buildings. In the far distance I could make out a tower so massive that it lacerated the sky with violence.

I wandered through the entanglement of roads and sidewalks for hours. The sky never changed and the sun never appeared above the horizon. Though I felt pain I didn't feel tired. Everywhere I went, there was ash falling from the sky.

Every so often I would catch echoes of strange voices, the muffled sound of feet running across pavement or some piece of detritus crashing against the asphalt. At no time did I see signs of life though. I would catch light in a window out of the corner of my eye, but it would vanish when I looked directly at it.

Distance and Shadow

I passed endless rows of motorways and alleys I dared not traverse, found a hundred dead ends and walked over bridges spanning bottomless water drain ways. I found myself being forced to struggle up stairs going fucking nowhere, only to have to climb back down them and finding myself somewhere new to climb.

I stood under catwalks going from one ruin to another. There were cages holding cadaverous bodies hanging from scaffolds. It seemed each step was more horrific than the next. I followed miles of razor wire and crawled over concrete barricades, hid from packs of skeletal dogs inside demolished cars. At least there was something else here that was alive.

I ascended mountains of shattered concrete infested with rebar – like fingers – jutting out of them, avoided grates covering depths too dark to see how far down they went and found myself in tunnels slick with sewage and algae. Everywhere I went I endured the smells of fear, iron and burnt meat.



No matter how far I walked, no matter where I found myself there was the ash, even inside the few buildings I dared rest in.

Just as I'd started to give up on crossing paths with another human being I was impetuously coerced to navigate down yet another arcane passage because I thought I heard a voice. Though I couldn't understand the language, I could feel it was a cry for help.

Fear and Darkness

I had no idea how much time had passed before I found myself inside an annular open mall. At the center of this space was a colossal fountain with an impressively ornate clock tower in the middle. Arranged around this whole space were buildings and landmarks frozen in the moment of being shattered by something like a massive shockwave. Leaning towers, impossibly suspended from collapsing. Splatters of bricks and concrete cracked loose from architecture tumbling before an invisible impact, but hanging motionlessly in the air. Nothing moved anywhere around here, not even the air itself.



Ash hung in the air as if frightened of striking the earth. The sky, unusual in its brightness, was immaculate fire. I could see where this holy light touched matter, things just dissolved into first shadow and then dust. So monstrous this sea of flame, but I felt no heat.

It took me long moments to move toward the fountain, drawn to it though I was, my fear held me back. The closer I got to the center the more it seemed that all the buildings being pulverized all around me were all looming toward the center of the mall. My fear was unfounded however, it all remained quiescent as I encroached there.

The buildings never fell, the enormous clock hands, apoplectic, never moved. They read two minutes till midnight and I felt they had done so for a very long time. Even the water in the fountain did not ripple when I reached for a drink. Droplets of water trailed behind my hand as it moved to my lips, suspended in the air.

I heard the voice again, desperate and weak, coming from high inside the clock tower.

It was still meekly begging for help.

Invoked, I looked for a way into the tower, walking around it, several times in full circles. It wasn't until stepping into the gelid water of the fountain that I found the doorway uncannily obfuscated by the ornate designs furrowed deep inside and outside the walls of the tower. I left a path of splashes hanging in the air and aborted ripples in the water as I moved toward the doorway.

After I had stepped inside I looked back almost by instinct. I no longer saw the entryway. It was like being trapped in a funhouse mirror room. The designs on the walls made me feel a strange sense of vertigo, they desired to be read, but were repulsive to look at, like seeing a dead body in a terrible car accident. I knew that they told a story, but I couldn't quite wrap my head around what the story was.

I would have said the building was nightmarish, but I'd seen things by now...

A spiral staircase, also covered in the same baroque images, led upward into the darkness. I followed the assurgent spiral skyward, following the command being made. The further I advanced up the stairwell, the more I felt drawn upward and more confused I felt. When I finally reached the top it was like waking up from a dream.

I have clouded memories of studiously investigating something, like a great and complex mechanical contraption, and of industriously and purposefully tinkering with it. Repairing it... or rather breaking it, perhaps?

I felt gratitude wash over me like an uplifting wave, then a slithering thing in my skin. Fire, noise, and a long dark fall.

I woke up in a hospital. They later told me I had been out of it for a good long while.

Still not sure what really happened to me that night, but I still feel the call. There had been a promise in its pleading, and a pledge. We had forged something in that dark tower, and both escaped – though each a different plight, and by different means.

Every once in awhile I dream a little more about the ending, but nothing I can put down on paper.

Just one word... COATL.

