

Mesodma

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Editor's Foreword

By Emma Kathryn

As a child, indeed an adult even, Rudyard Kipling's Just So Stories always fascinated and enthralled me. I delighted in the fantastical explanations of the world, particularly the natural world, in stories such as 'How The Whale Got His Throat' and 'How The Leopard Got His Spots'. Much like the fables, these stories were full of morals and warnings, a way to navigate the world but dressed in absurdity and camouflaged in the bright colours of the far away worlds they told of.

To me, these stories had a dark undercurrent, one that hinted at the severity and harshness of the natural world, all the while delivered with an innocence inherent in storytelling, particularly when aimed at children. And isn't that what storytelling is, humanities way of exploring and dealing with ideas, themes and events that frighten us to the core, things that we might not want to deal with head on? Aren't we all really Peter Pan? And, on reading Mesodma for the first time, I was reminded of The Just So Stories.

Like Kipling's stories, Mesodma is told in a way that speaks of the darker aspects of nature through the lens of survival. Apt, isn't it, given today's climate of ecological destruction that might (well, let's be blunt, there's no might about it) just bring about our own destruction with it. But survival is a state that many people already live in, there's no need to wait for the apocalypse that is surely on its way. Survival is hard and forces us to change, to become less civilised and more animal, and 'Mesodma' chronicles the process.

As Julian himself says in the introduction, this is a work on 'absurd work on absurdity and extinction'. How very Kipling!

Introduction

(Practically) all the scientists are agreed; we are living in a 6th mass-extinction event this planet has ever experienced, and this one is because of this culture/humanity/society/us. Agriculture, industrialism and over population have decimated the earth. It is a pretty dire situation. No one has any real answers, or any definite idea about what the world is becoming. Hopelessness and despair are obvious and appropriate responses. Behind them I believe is a primal, gravitational desire for life.

The last mass-extinction event this planet has experienced is the meteor that wiped out the dinosaurs, other than the birds and other similar species. The Cretaceous-Paleogene extinction event, also known as the Chicxulub, or K-Pg impact, saw the death of 75% of all species on earth.

It was a period of extreme suffering and struggle, where the will-to-life, will-to-power, of those beings who kept fighting to-Be, could be considered a truly desperate and absurd act, with little point or reason. Food would have been difficult to come by. Skies darkened with the debris from an impact many of them would have no comprehension of. With little comfort or consolation to ease their experience, life would have been tragic by the standards of you or I.

This mass-extinction event that we find ourselves immersed within has the potential to be far closer to that of The Great Permian Extinction, where closer to 90% of life became extinct. We are undoubtedly in a desperate situation, where any endeavour seems increasingly absurd. We face the very likelihood of our own oblivion, and what that means for us.

This short story is of such a situation.

What palaeontologists call a *mesodma* is a description of a mammalian species that they believe existed across the Cretaceous era and into the Cenozoic era. Their biological lineage is thought to have died out during the Paleocene, rendering their endeavour, by the perceptions of those who would value progression and preservation over Life, pointless. A description of the hypothetical experience of one of these creatures is what follows in these pages. This is entirely a speculative work, and is by no means meant to assert any position or principle based in any authority, academic or political. Rather, it is an absurd work on absurdity and extinction.

Chapter 1

A sunrise is a familiar thing. It is an event we all have very much come to expect, due to its habitual return. Many a morning I have been woken by the sound of bird song, signalling the rising of the sun. The warmth it brings, with the promise of life and potential for new experience, is a process, I feel somewhat safe in assuming, we all know – not in that type of “know” that comes from books or experts, but that “knowing” that comes from our embodied experience.

We rarely ever consider what it would be like for us not to witness the sun’s rising.

On the morning where this account starts, the sun rose as normal, signalling time for all those who sleep under the moon to wake up. This sun rose upon a world quite unlike anything that you or I would know of.

This world contained no streets, or buildings. There were no politicians or police. No matter how far you looked, you would never find a factory, a shop, or even a theatre. Books had never been seen, or even conceived of – let alone the concept of drawing symbols onto objects, so as to represent places and/or events.

Televisions, phones and computers could not work in this world devoid of plug sockets or charge points. Art and art galleries would appear totally out of place, in this space where art would be totally unnecessary.

Whom we are concerned with, in this tale, is a creature we have never known within modern times. This creature is something like what we would call a rodent. They have a tail. They are covered in short, soft hair. They dig burrows into the ground, which is where they sleep. Perhaps most importantly, they are smaller than almost everyone around them.

As our friend poked its head out of their burrow, they were instantly greeted by the altogether familiar sensation of sunlight upon their face. They poked their head up into the air, to investigate what scents they could find on the breeze. This morning was much like most mornings. The scent of the nearby vegetation dominated, along with the smell of the dung of the giants that were all but oblivious to the existence of this tiny creature.

After a few moments of looking around, to check that it was safe to do so, our friend scurried out of the undergrowth. The route they immediately took themselves on, in search of food of some description, would have been entirely the same one that they had done with practically all the sunrises they had woken to, since burrowing the particular burrow.

The fact that it was in many ways different was that it was different in that same way that each sunrise is different, with different encounters during their journey. To our friend, this was different, but familiar, and that was all they needed to navigate their way through the various plants and mounds, which they expected to come across in their search for food.

After a short trip through the undergrowth, our friend reached a particular tree they would often come to. Similar, but different, to many of the trees we have categorised within our modern age of scientific categories, this tree produces a hard, but nutritious, nut. Much like a raw acorn, that would be revolting for you or I to taste, but delicious to a squirrel; this nut would be less than appetising and would, in all probability, make you feel rather ill.

To our friend, this was delicious. This was chocolate. This was Christmas roast. This was a deep-dish pizza.

Every morning our friend would dine on these nuts. The earth as it is now is not like the earth as we know it in our modern age. The yearly cyclical motion of the seasons is a habit of life unfamiliar to these trees and our friend. Instead, the earth's state of flux is exemplified by sustained dry periods, with periodic rains. And, as there were not the seasonal changes for flora and fauna, that we would consider normal, it was reasonable to expect to dine on these nuts every morning, all year round.

If you are such a person who is inclined to say this sort of thing; you could go as far as to say that, these nuts were a wonderful little part in the reasonably content life of our little friend. But then again, that really depends on what you mean by content. It was not that our friend experiences no challenges or substantial fears in their day-to-day life.

Their position within their world is of being one of the tiniest members of the community of those who live there. As such, they often had to flee for safety, in order to avoid being eaten or trampled. But this is the life they have always known, so they there wasn't any sense of being burdened by their situation. Quite the opposite.

While they'd never considered it, in the way that clever men like to talk about it and say they understand it, while never having actually experienced it; our friend enjoyed a simple beautiful state of freedom. Not the freedom that armies fight over, or that governments promise. And it was not what some might call a spiritual, or Godly freedom. This freedom was simply the life that they knew to be living.

No sooner than after hearing the thud of a far larger creature than they, did our friend make a quick run in the direction away from the sound. They hid in amongst the growth, in quite the manner that they had done the day before. It was an expectation that they would be quite unnoticed, but it didn't hurt being a little careful. Far too small to be considered worth eating by most of the predators in the area, they were at greater risk of getting caught underneath a herd of larger herbivores – something hiding wouldn't necessarily help, but this was an instinctual response to a potential danger, not a well reasoned and reflective decision. It was a free decision, made totally out of their desire to continue Being the being that they are – there are more nuts to eat, and it would not do to be tramped and leave those nuts for some other creature.

After a few minutes, our friend determined that it was safe to come out and get back to the task at hand, of enjoying their feeding. Our friend's eyes see in far more detail than the eyes of a modern human. The world they're immersed within is full of colours and movement, which follows no conceivable order or method, but somehow just makes sense, in that you could just accept it as it is and be happy with that. Their scent palate is far more refined than yours or mine too. And what scents their world was full of. From the flowers and the trees, to the mounds of faeces twice the size of them, their olfactory world is a rich tapestry of diverse variety, again, unordered and ever changing.

The sensuality of their life had with it a deep and intimate kind of knowledge of the world they live in. No one of our age of intellectuals would consider this knowledge, in the sense that

knowledge is ordinarily thought of. At best, this would be considered a dark and mystical wisdom, the kind only learned by people who have experienced sustained periods of suffering, or by people who have sat under trees meditating and eventually become one with the tree.

After several minutes, our friend decided to move on. The amount of activity in the area had increased, and they were not feeling entirely sociable. Not that they were feeling worried or alarmed by anything in particular. It is just a nuisance having to accommodate for the crowd, and the greater amount of bodies in the area brought the attention of any potential predator, who might like to try this strange little hairy creature.

Most of the creatures our friend knew of were thoroughly unlike it. There were the small hard-shelled creatures, which our friend would on occasion make meals of. These far outnumbered all of the other groups, which we would know as species', but were so small that they would seem to hardly pay much of a role in the normal day-to-day goings on. Then there were the scaly creatures, most of whom were far, far larger than our little friend. These monolith beings had a far greater impact on the day-to-day world our friend calls home. By all appearance, they were thoroughly unlike our friend, though slightly more like our friend than the hard-shelled creatures who were even smaller than they.

In much the same way that, while we might moan about our position in life, or our situation, for some reason or another, which is very important to us when we are moaning and feeling sorry for ourselves, but actually we don't mind what we are complaining about all that much; our friend didn't mind their position within the situation of the world, as they encountered it. Sure, there were moments of feeling frustrated and disappointed about the day-to-day goings on. Some mornings they would wish to be far larger, so that they might scare away some of the nuisances that they would encounter. Others, when there was less food than this one, they would feel sorry for themselves, that they had to work a little harder to get their morning meal. But these moments would pass by quickly. They had to! If they didn't the nuisances might get to the best food before they did, and that would not be at all acceptable.

When our friend reached where they were intending to get to, they stuck their nose into the edge of a pond, both to drink and to clean their face. The water was cool against the warm morning heat. A certain strangeness came with the pond. While they visited it's edge every day, often multiple times, there was a definite realisation that the creatures who live within the water occupied a world entirely different to our friend's world of soil and air. Occasionally, there was a curious sensation of wanting to dive in and see what it might be to be amongst the water dwellers of the pond – you perhaps might have considered something like this after reading about some far distant culture from a land you have never visited (or, if you are anything like me, when you daydream about becoming a bird or an orca).

The pond was also full of activity. Many of the locals had come down for a drink, or a wash, or to see if they could catch a meal from underneath its surface. Because of this, our friend did not stay too long. In fact, after a rather sizable local made an absolutely astoundingly loud noise, our friend thought it best to make their way to somewhere a little calmer.

The only problem was, where?! Life is rarely peaceful or calm – in the way that we usually think of peace and calm, in our very domesticated conception of the world. To our friend, calm meant somewhere that they could go unnoticed and did not have to notice.

It took quite a lot of searching before they found somewhere that they could rest. Not wanting to return to the den, due to the activity that was so close, they settled for laying down on a rock

that was largely hidden by ferns, which were currently going unnoticed by any large herbivores, and where they could be unnoticed for a while.

There is a freedom in being unnoticed, which we rarely experience with our 21st century technologies, that we use to seek notice. It is the freedom of not fearing the gaze on anyone else. It knowing you can do what you want, and not have to think about anything else in that moment. Our friend found in being unnoticed something wonderfully satisfying, where they could let the world move by around them, without having to move a great deal with it – after all, they had just moved a great distance.

From this position they could not see much, but they could hear the sound of the activity that they had sought to free themselves from in the distance. Far closer to them, there was the sound of a creature far larger than them feeding on the shrubs a little off to the way. There was the familiar buzz of flying insects, going about their travels. These sounds found little resistance from the wind, which was particularly quiet as the sun started to reach its highest point in the sky.

Our friend remained here until they started to feel hungry again. At that point they made their way in the direction of their den. They made sure to stop for a drink at the pond, though did not stay long – mostly out of hunger. As they arrived at the trees with the nuts they love, a particular sense of relief was felt. If they spoke English, they might even have said “thank goodness, they haven’t eaten much”, but that would have been very strange to hear.

At this point, the sun was starting to set, and with it the moon rise. In all the ways this day had been the same as others, it had been different. Equally, in all the ways this day had been different than others, it had been the same.

There is a certain unpredictability to the world, which those who are alive are all familiar with – though many will try to deny this. What would occur shortly after our friend had tried to start sleeping no one could have predicted.

What is about to happen to our friend is, in-itself, neither good nor bad, in the sense that modern people like to think of good and bad things happening. It is just something that happened to them and the world.

I would also say that what our friend is about to do, or did (however you wish to view this history), is neither brave, nor foolish. It simply was.

It seems to me that our world might be a more beautiful place if many of us simply were. But were more of us that way inclined, who knows what the world would be really? The unpredictability of the world really makes that something we can only imagine.

Chapter 2

If you have never experienced the ending of a world, it is hard to really grasp what it is for a world to end.

Somewhere across space, outside of this tiny rock in this tiny solar system, worlds are being consumed by entities scientists call black holes. Before they are even aware of the occurrence, worlds are pulled into their gravitational pull, leaving an apparent nothingness.

A world’s ending isn’t always as dramatic as this. Many of us – parents who have lost their children, indigenous communities who have witnessed the violation of the lands they call home,

believers who have found what they at one point held to be true to be empty lies, and many others – have known what it is to have worlds end. Every day apocalypses happen every day.

I have walked along the edges of coastal paths, to the points at which the coast will allow me to go no further, felt the wind on my body and stared out to the sea, with the smell of salt entering me with every breath. The fury of the sea can be apocalyptic, and the edge of a cliff is the end of a world. Those who would jump over the edges of cliffs, to have their lifeless bodies drift upon the beach, with the tides, are the enders of worlds.

What you are about to learn of our friend is of the ending of the world they knew. And as much as many of us are apocalypse survivors, you are about to learn whether or not they are to be a survivor of an apocalypse.

By all immediate appearances, this event was a not an all too unfamiliar one. While not an everyday occurrence, our friend had experienced an earthquake before, and this is what they immediately assumed in to be. The familiarity brought with it an immediate sensation of horror, as they woke to find the world moving.

Driven by a visceral energy coursing through their body, our friend made an attempt to escape the commotion via the entryway to their den. Now, the idea of running away from an earthquake has an immediate absurdness to it, given the impossibility of the desperate act. Despite this, I am sure all of us, were we in the same situation as our friend, would react in the same way.

As they exited the den, our friend found that they were in a world quite unlike the one that they had known for the entirety of their life.

For no reason that they could comprehend, the world had changed in such a dramatic way, it felt near unrecognizable. There was no warning sign to inform them that the earth's gravitational pull was about to bring a gigantic lump of rock from space down upon the land. And, while the world before them was an obvious sign that something had happened, there was no way of our friend knowing what.

This did not matter though. The world quite clearly is changed. That was what mattered. Even more so, what mattered was what every muscle, every bone, their eyes, their ears, their heart and every other part of their body was screaming at them.

Thick black clouds covered the skies, unlike any our friend had witnessed before. If you've ever seen a thunderstorm in the day, when the light is having to force its way through the grey gloom in the sky, you will have some awareness of something like what this sky was. These clouds were black, and the sun light did not breach them like it does on moody thundery days. With them, all of the light of the world was sucked up, and everything seemed full of emptiness.

In this new world, all shapes seemed distorted and confusing. As our friend attempted to look out and determine what they would do, nothing appeared whole, or really present. The air was thick with ash, smoke, dust, heat and fear.

I have often watched the air above a flame move in that curious way it does. The strangeness of the sight amuses me and is oddly satisfying. I don't know why, though I have my suspicions – something about primordial weirdness and elemental anarchy.

On this day, fire rained from the sky, with liquid fury. Like a cosmic tsunami, sent from the heavens to purge the world, for some terrible evil, fire fell like the wrath of some vengeful God, who had been angered by their creations.

The world our friend is now immersed within is one full of fire, and motion, and air so thick you can barely breathe, and lightlessness. Everywhere they look is danger. Standing still is an

even more terrifying prospect though. Not moving when everything is moving is an easy way to find yourself moved.

For no particular reason that would make any sense to you or I, they picked a direction, and ran.

With all their body could muster, our friend ran, desperate to escape the abject terror that surrounded them. There must be an end to all the black, and fire, and death! But as far as they ran, the new world was totalizing.

All around them, the cries of those who were caught in the flames, or under fallen trees, desperately trying to escape. The sound of agony was thick on the air. It was as if they were swimming in a sea of pain and anguish horror.

If you can imagine the suffering of those who have spent time as prisoners in torture camps, but amplify it all substantially. Nazis, Islamists and Communists could never reproduce the pain that surrounded our friend.

Wherever they turned, our friend could not escape what had happened to the world. Running from one spot to another, until they could run no more. It was the same everywhere they turned – everything was different.

All the spaces our friend knew were now strange and unfamiliar. The safety they had once found in one place had been lost, in the blackness and the fire.

Eventually, after what felt like forever, our friend stopped, fell to the ground and slept.

Chapter 3

When our friend woke, the world was still very much changed. This was disappointing. A sudden sense of wishing that what had happened hadn't had consumed our friend before they opened their eyes. And now that their eyes were open, they could only accept that this had become, at least for this moment, their world.

The sky was still black. The air was still thick with ash, smoke and death. The world was still strange and horrifying.

What was noticeably different was that there was a lot less motion, and that everything was a lot quieter. Where there had been life and activity, there was now a lifeless emptiness, which was not something our friend had ever encountered before.

As they attempted to find food, to quench the hunger they felt from having gone without food the previous day, they found that the world had become far emptier. Food was far harder to find. Where there had once been plenty, it was now nearly impossible to find anything. More so, where there had once been a great amount of activity, enjoying the plenty, now there was but only a few, desperately searching in the scarcity.

Suddenly everything became far more hostile. Snarls, hisses and screeches followed our friend, as they moved from place to place. At one point, as if from nowhere, some creature, that had quite escaped their notice, charged at our friend and knocked them to the ground. The message to move away was clear. After getting up, which took a great deal more effort than usual, our friend ran as fast as they could, to get away from the brute.

Frustrated and hurt, they eventually found a stream. Relief surged through their body, at the prospect of quenching their thirst. But when they went to drink, the water tasted foul, like the

black death on the air. This wasn't going to stop them from drinking though. One large gulp was enough to satisfy their thirst, though it tasted revolting.

It wasn't very long before our friend decided to move on. They could hear the sound of something far larger than they in the distance, and after what had happened earlier didn't want to risk getting hurt again. It was still quite sore where they had landed.

Much of the day followed this pattern of moving from one spot to another, ceaselessly trying to find sustenance, while avoiding hostility from others in this new world. Eventually, after many hours on the move, they found somewhere to sleep.

Chapter 4

This time when waking, our friend knew not to expect anything other than the strange and hostile new world that they had awoken to the previous morning. In all honesty, it wasn't entirely clear that it was morning. Light attempted to push through the still-black sky, but failed desperately.

All that mattered was that they were awake. With waking came an instinctual push to go out into the world and live, which would seemingly defy all reason and logic to our very 21st century way of thinking about the world. This came with a heavy bitter feeling of frustration.

This day was very much like the previous, and the next the same. There was no clear way of knowing whether it was day or whether it was night anymore, as it was always dark and confusing.

Rather than live by the habits of the sun and moon, which had usually worked well for them as a means of knowing when to go to sleep and when to wake up, our friend had to live like they had never done before. Instead of by this usual routine, our friend was having to measure the world in ways that they had no experience of doing.

Each time they woke, our friend brought with them greater experience of this new world. This new world required that they live by their rhythms, in the absence of the rhythms they had lived by. Instead of living by the flow that the day brought with it, our friend learned more and more that they needed to enforce their will upon the world, and how to do this.

As this strange, terrifying world became more and more familiar to them, our friend became harder. Their eyes became accustomed to the black, and learnt to see clearer and clearer in the lightless gloom.

They learnt to survive on the scarcest of sustenance.

The sounds of the world, while harsher than those of the world before, became clearer and clearer. Their sense of smell became increasingly refined, as they had to search more and more through the ash and black for food. Their muscles became stronger, as they had to travel further daily, and search through increasingly difficult terrains.

The more our friend became part of this new black, gloomy, strange and utterly hopeless world, the more powerful they became. The transformation from the creature they were to the creature they need to be to fight to survive was striking. Like a dog once tame, now feral, our friend's savage nature had intensified with the intensity of this new world.

This should not be a surprise to you or I. A great philosopher apparently once said that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. I'm sure you know of someone who wasn't killed by an event and are now stronger for it. Perhaps you are someone like this.

Our friend had survived the ending of their world and had not been killed by the birth of this new one. They were stronger for it, this is undeniable. It is true that, were they able to, they would have gone back to the world that they had known. But such a notion had not come to their mind. When you live in now you rarely consider what was or what will be, as now rarely allows you to turn your attention elsewhere.

Chapter 5

What is the fastest you have ever ran? Perhaps it was at a school sports event. Perhaps you once ran from the police, after an act of daring rebellion. Perhaps you were once walking through dense forest, stumbled across a family of bears who thought you look like a tasty meal, and found yourself pelting as fast as you could.

Our friend was having to run, as fast as they possibly could. What is chasing them is having to run as fast as they can, to try and get their first meal in several sleeps.

What had started as a search for food had become an effort to not be food for the colossus that had them in pursuit. Terror surged through their body. They could hear their heartbeat as they ran. It didn't matter so much where they were going, only that they got away.

To our friend, this pursuer was gigantic. To be fair, relatively speaking, it was. Compared with our friend, this creature was colossal. Imagine a small insect running away from a frog or rodent.

They knew that they had to get away. Anywhere else was safe, or at least safer, in this new world where nowhere was safe. They knew this with a visceral gut feeling, very (very) much influenced by their desire to get away and continue living.

The funny thing about knowing something is how often you find you are wrong.

A scientist who knows that if they just get the right formula they can create this chemical compound, which will be their rise to fame and fortune, who finds that their experiment has caused their laboratory to burn down, taking half the street with it.

The member of some strange cult, who knows that their leader can bring people from the dead, commits suicide for their leader and never learns how wrong they were.

There are, of course, far simpler everyday examples of knowing something and being wrong.

The mother who knows that there is enough at home to feed her family of 4, who has forgotten that they used up the last of the eggs and finds herself back at the shops to fix the problem of not enough food for everyone's breakfast.

Our friend knew that if they could only get away they would be safe. However, when they got close to away, they realized how wrong they were.

Like the insect fleeing the frog, who finds a cat before them, ready to make sport out of them and a lunch out of the frog, our friend knew this isn't safety.

Their pursuer did not notice as quickly as our friend who they had stumbled upon. For a brief moment, their last moment, the pursuer thought they had our friend for a meal. Before they could strike though, jaws almost as big as the pursuer clamped down on their back, and the chase was over.

Our friend had only a moment to find somewhere to hide, as who had been their pursuer attempted to thrash against the jaws of this being the size of which our friend could never really comprehend. As luck would have it, a hiding spot wasn't too difficult to find in the gloomy blackness. The charred remains of a tree provided ample cover for our tiny friend.

The terror remained, though they were relieved to have gotten away from their pursuer. Exhaustion took over. You or I might have advised them to run, now that there was no threat – the owner of the giant jaws had forgotten all about our friend and was too busy eating to care.

Too terrified and exhausted to run, our friend lay down and slept. While far stronger than they had been before, our friend was weak from tiredness, lack of food and water, and was experiencing an emotion similar to what you or I would call melancholy.

I read somewhere that there are 3 types of pessimist – the crier, the sleeper and the laugher. Pessimism is largely the sense that there is some failure within whatever you are feeling pessimistic towards. It is also the sense that the situation is ultimately futile (though not necessarily fatalistically). In the space they find they are, sleeping under the burnt remains of a forest that will never return, our friend could be classed as both the crier and the sleeper. The bleak awfulness of the situation never escaped their gaze – the blackness was everywhere.

Chapter 6

You might well have experienced on of those mornings where the melancholy from the previous night can still be smelt on the air. You wake up and find little point or reason in having woken. Everything seems futile. Everything seems black and gloomy. You might think to yourself that it would be better to stay in bed all day, to not see the outside world and to binge watch your current series on your laptop.

Our friend's world is entirely black and gloomy and outside. There is no bed, or laptop, let alone any series for them to watch.

When our friend woke they were full of melancholy, missing the life that they had known. This world was full of futility. The trees that had seemed permanently skyward now lay on the ground, burnt black. The rising of the sun was lost to this never ending gloom, that was showing no sign of moving.

If you were very close to our friend, you would have heard the whimper of a creature utterly desperate. The sound was very small. It went almost entirely unnoticed, save for someone who looked up for a moment and decided that it must have been on the wind. The sound was honest – more honest than any word ever spoken.

The whimper was not followed by silence. No! Not too far away came the sound of a herd or pack of some kind or another, of creatures far bigger than our little friend.

A feeling we might describe as bitterness or spite came over them. If they could speak our words, they might have said “damn all of this and damn them”. This feeling of revulsion came with it a visceral urge to move on and away, to refuse to be part of that space and be with whoever it was heading in the direction of our friend.

So they ran away from the sound.

They weren't running towards anywhere in particular. There was simply nowhere to go. Everywhere was full of the gloomy blackness. This new world that our friend kept finding didn't end was covered with ash, fallen trees and the bodies of creatures far larger than they rotting or reduced to bones.

Each time they fell asleep they closed their eyes to this. Each time they woke, rather than the sun's sweet return, they woke to this.

The melancholy and revulsion followed our friend, wherever they travelled. An absurd and visceral desire to keep travelling followed them too. Neither hopeful nor hopeless, their refusal to let this new world stop them was more like defiance. Irrational, devoid of reason or purpose, but as honest as each whimper (there was more of those than we could count).

The more they travelled, the stronger our friend became.

Chapter 7

On another sunless day much like most of what life meant in this new world, our friend experienced an encounter unlike most of life here. While searching for water, shortly after they woke, they came across a creature almost identical to them.

All creatures know what it is to mate. Reproducing is the process that keeps life processing from one generation to the next.

After thoroughly inspecting this individual similar to they, the pair mated. Not as dramatic or as enthusiastic as what we consider good sex to be. But it was what it was.

The decision to mate might seem absurd. Why bring new life into this new black gloomy world, which presents no promise of improving? Some might call it cruel and immoral to condemn anyone to be born to this world. It holds little logic or rationality.

The truth is that our friend had not considered the fate of the offspring that might become. They would never know. It hadn't been a calculated and considered decision. This was the manifestation of unconscious desire – what you might even consider love, if only of the fleeting desperate kind, which only lasts as long as is safe.

No sooner than they had met, the pair parted ways. Any romance we would wish for in a relationship was utterly lost on them. This was hardly the space for romance.

This was a fleeting grasp at life, in a space that crushed most opportunity for life out. Our friend was still growing tougher and tougher, learning to live in the emptiness of it all. It would be a lie to suggest that they didn't get some amount of enjoyment from the experience.

Chapter 8

I would like to tell you that things would improve for our friend, as they continued to travel through this new world, for what remained of their life (really, I would)! To do so would be a lie.

They never knew the sun to rise, like it once had done for them. They never knew forests or food, as they had always known before.

They grew tougher, stronger and fiercer, the more they travelled. Their muscles would ache with exhaustion, but our friend would not end their ceaseless search for whatever it was they were searching for.

What it was our friend would search for I couldn't tell you. Hope, life, promise, meaning, all these would seem entirely absent to you and me. Nowhere was there more food or water than anywhere else. The gloom was endless, and all was death.

What kept our friend moving was a visceral, primal desire to find something that I simply have no way of describing to you. If you spoke to a mystic, they might call it “the nameless”, or something else that sounds very *wooo*.

If it were a crime to act irrationally or absurdly, our friend could certainly be guilty of such an act.

One day, after a long period of wandering without rest, our friend stumbled across 2 creatures who cornered this small, tired creature. After a few desperate attempts to escape, as well as one brief and utterly pathetic attempt at seeming fearsome (even in the hardened form this world had made of our friend), the pair had a meal – albeit not one that satisfied their hunger.

You will be pleased to know that our friend suffered little in their death, save for the existential terror they experienced in their last moments.

You might say that this ending makes all the wandering, fighting and struggling our friend went through, pointless. You might wish to throw down this book and not continue reading to the end.

I'd apologise, if I felt that I had treated you poorly, but I don't and shan't.

The choice to wander, struggle, fight and live, amongst all the death and gloom their new world presented, was our friends – not mine! Their new world is our old world, or maybe our old world was their new world. We knew that this was a tale of the end of a world at the beginning of this ending. And that is what this is.

We do not know whether our friend's children found beauty in this world they were born to. The species we call Mesodma survived the mass extinction event that continued on for the next several thousand years. But the scientists tell us that their genetic lineage ended in the Pleistocene.

You might question again whatever the point was in going on. Again, our friend was driven by visceral, irrational, primal and absurd desires, which were entirely theirs.

We too live within a mass extinction event – one that the species we call Humanity might not survive. You might question why we should go on, as this world ends? You might also wonder if the new world will be one we can survive in?

Scientists, priests, politicians, uncles, sisters, teachers, friends, journalists, strangers at bus stops, bar tenders, neighbors, colleagues, therapists and many other species of human might give you answers. They might be very definite answers, even solutions or strategies of how to produce solutions. These might be very sensible, rational answers, in this world that we have lived in.

For the new world that this event that is becoming more and more what life is now, such answers might not be appropriate.

Our friend had no answers and was given none. Their desire, their truth, their life, didn't allow for certainty.

I'm not going to attempt at giving you any answers. That wasn't what I promised you. I have told what I can of our friend's story. Undoubtedly, in keeping with the pessimism held within these pages, this is a story of futility. But it is not a story limited to that of the crier or the sleeper, as our friend's desperate life seems to me to be that of defiant laughter, immersed in the gloom and black – albeit an entirely inhuman laughter.

Perhaps it could be said that the harshness of the world might be cause to whimper, but it doesn't need to be reason to stop wandering.

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Julian Langer
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