

MONACHOPSIS

Part One: The Plummet

Only those who are truly ignorant do not fear the ocean. If one realizes that even sailors, men who spend more of their lives at sea than anywhere else, are scared of what lies beneath those rolling, crashing wakes... Then, one can begin to understand why it is important to fear the ocean.

No one truly knows what is underneath all that water. Rocks, sand, and some more water, sure, but what else? Strange fish, sea monsters? The creatures that populate the oceanic horror of works like *The Beast From Twenty-Thousand Fathoms*? Me, on the other hand...

I've seen what lies beneath the water.

Before anyone would ask, no, I would never claim to know all of the secrets of Poseidon's seven kingdoms. I would claim the very opposite, in fact. I now know just how little I know about the ocean. And I fear it so much more after my latest voyage into it.

It was an ordinary afternoon that I went out sailing, just another weekend day. Not to catch anything, just to admire the coastline where I live. East-side of Scotland. It's a downright beauty...

The waves crash and roar as they collide into the cliff sides next to their domain, the drowning noise of the gulls above, and the clouds above rumble and begin to rain down upon me. It's what I live for.

That's right... The storm. I've been a man of the sea for many, many years now, so I can recognize when one is forming. Hell, I can even tell how strong it will be. Some say they can smell rain before it downpours... I can feel the thunder before anything forms. Call it superstition, call me a freak, I swear on my wife's finest salmon recipe, I can do it. I can feel it in my aging bones, my aching knees, and my ash white beard and mustache.

This storm was normal, though. I could feel it... Rather, the absence of oncoming thunder. This would be nothing I wouldn't be able to handle on my tried and true boat of mine. This vessel has overcome tsunamis and even seen action in the Great War, so I wasn't too worried about a little rainfall without any thunder.

I remember distinctly how amidst my admiration of my surroundings, the gulls all went quiet. All of them. All at once. Their cawing and crowing just seemed to... Die.

That's when it began.

The water began to act in a way I've never seen before. It was like it was fighting itself, going left and right, forwards and backwards, down and up, even. Spires of water rose and swirled into the heavens above, just like a hurricane, but upside down. Defying everything that I believed that water was capable of.

Amidst the physics defying display I saw in front of me and above my ship, below me a whirlpool began to form. But this wasn't anything like I've even heard of before. It kept going down, and down, and down, and down... It went farther down than I knew the ocean floor was.

My poor ship was pulled down into the colossal vortex and pulled down into that ever descending spiral. Between the bellowing gales, swirling riptides, and gravity itself pulling us in all manner of directions, I felt seasick for the first time in what must've been years. Decades, even.

Once we had fallen some hundred meters or so, the hull gave way and the structure collapsed. It had survived cannonfire, explosive shelling, and brutal shark attacks, but this was... Beyond reality. I fell from the cabin, or what became of it anyways. With what little logic and reason still remained in this situation I somehow found myself in, it was almost comforting to feel gravity and gravity alone pulling me down into the aquatic well.

I remember I looked up as I fell into the ocean's maw. I saw the dark, bellowing clouds shifting, undulating, swirling... Churning. It was like I was staring at another ocean's surface. The ocean of the sky. The waves of a thunderstorm.

All of what I knew grew smaller and smaller as I fell deeper and deeper into this abyss, this uncertainty of what the hell was going on. Maybe it was the whirlpool collapsing, maybe it was me falling beyond the reach of the sun, I don't know, but I began to recognize less and less. I began to... See, less and less. I began to feel less and less.

Soon enough, I was in pure blackness.

There was no feeling anywhere across my body. I remember that I could feel my outfit; my overalls, my coat, my boots and gloves... But nothing else. Everything around

me was numb. I couldn't hear anything, only a tiny ringing in my left ear from a little tinnitus.

I couldn't breathe either. It wasn't painful, though. It wasn't like I was drowning in this void, I don't think I needed air in that space. I didn't need my sight either, or sense of smell, or touch, or taste, or hearing. I almost felt like I didn't need my identity, my self and body.

Once I felt that tinge of existentialism, no, that nihilism, I snapped myself out of that. This wasn't me thinking these thoughts, I remember myself convincing myself. It must've been that world infecting my head, invading my thoughts. I began to fight out against this blackness. Was it pointless, futile? Likely so... Fighting an abyss. But I did it, physically or mentally, I don't remember. Maybe both. I just remember my conscious dwindling as I began to fight back. A wave of nothingness sweeping over me. That numbness overtook me.

There really was only black after that.

I say that, but after what felt like only a few moments later, I could feel again. I could see again. I could smell again, which is the sense I regretted the most in the moment.

Part Two: Questionable Surroundings

I found myself washed up on a beach, but not any Scottish beach. I would've recognized it. The coastline's features were foreign to me, alien looking, almost. These formations, these sand banks, the patterns of the gulls... These were all wrong.

This was disregarding the coloring of the sand, of course. It was so much more wrong than anything else in this foreign landscape. The sand wasn't the typical dark brown color of sand that had a tide recently wash over it... It was dark, almost pitch black, but I swear that I could almost see through it. It looked like it was almost opaque... It felt like sand, it looked like some type of sand, but it wasn't in a form that I've ever seen before.

I don't know if science could explain the strange sand, but in retrospect, I don't think science could've explained many of the things I saw or experienced.

While I was inspecting the beach I had found myself on, what seemed to be a local had approached me. I didn't even hear them approach. I'd like to believe that I wasn't aware of them because of the easing waves on the shore or my attention being directed elsewhere, as opposed to some other darker or more supernatural reasoning.

It was a rather scraggly, elder gentleman in various draped raincoats and sailing attire. The coats were waterlogged far more than what I've come to expect when seeing travelers out in the rain... His sailor-esque garb was tattered, torn, and worn... While he looked ancient, what with his gray skin with warts, blemishes, and an ugly, glossy sheen, his clothes looked even older than him. He certainly was much too old to ride the waves, from what I can recall. What I can remember, however, is what he next told me.

"Welcome, brother. I can see that you've lost your way. Do not be afraid, we all have found our way by being lost, just as you have. Come." He had beckoned for me to follow him to a shanty town in the distance with a bony, curled hand that creaked and croaked like an old seafaring vessel..

If someone looking like that, with glossy, sunken, yellow eyes and glazed-over skin tells you to not be afraid after waking up in this situation, do not heed his words.

The town was full of people who looked just like him, if not worse. People younger than him, younger than me, even, looking worse than the man introducing me to this strange land. They looked bloated, but not as if they were obese. They looked as if they had drowned and their bodies were left out in the ocean. Not for hours, or days, or even weeks. Far, far longer than that.

As I entered this shanty town, held up from the black sands by rickety, splintering, and soaked wooden stilts, I was observed by the locals just as I observed them. Be it being the new fellow in town or fear of seeing what was behind their dead eyes, I didn't match their gaze, I remember that much. They, however, seemed to be quite interested in me.

They didn't approach me or the man leading me. They seemed to keep a distance from both of us, in fact. I don't want to say that they feared me, more that they seemed to be wary of me? Why, exactly, I wasn't sure. Perhaps it was because they didn't expect someone to show up in their land who looked so... Normal? Alive? Or was it because it had been so long since someone had shown up who looked like me?

This only began to raise more questions in my mind, as I recall. Where was this place, exactly? How did I get here? What was that storm I was in? Who, or rather, what are these people? Apart from how to get back home, the biggest question in my mind was what this place was.

Was it hell? Was it some strange illusion or vision I was seeing? Could this be as simple as being a dream? A sailor's nightmare? Have subconscious fears conjured themselves into this world?

I remember I looked back to the coastline, past the black sands, to the ocean... Past the ocean. I looked to the horizon. I looked for some sign, from God, or whatever being had me fated to enter this realm. I realized then the true nature of the sky in this world. It itself was an ocean. Not in a metaphorical sense, it was quite literally another ocean above our heads.

"Do not fret, brother. Our sky may be different than yours, but you will soon learn to call ours your own." I remember the man telling me as we crossed over a rickety bridge.

What did he mean by that? Was I to be confined here? Whatever this guide meant by this cryptic wording, I was keen to do the opposite of learning this lesson of his. At the first chance I saw, I swore that I would do my damndest to escape this town, these stranger tides, this backwards world.

It wouldn't be any use attempting to escape at that moment, though. There were too many unknown variables, I thought. I wasn't sure of the capabilities of the townsfolk, much less this man leading me through this town. He seemed to have extensive knowledge of this world, so it wasn't out of the question to consider him capable of otherworldly abilities or feats. I don't know what specifically I was so afraid of at the moment, but I decided to bide my time and simply follow the man.

"I can tell you are a contemplative man, brother." He said, alluding to my silence. "You are knowledgeable, you are cunning. Anyone could surmise that from your... Nervous glances. We will welcome you with open arms, you need not fear us."

The man then gestured to the end of the boardwalk we were on. Instead of walking on wood, barnacles, and what could've been bones of sealife, we were nearing land. True land. Grass, a pathway. Finally.

I recognize that this would imply that I was somehow relieved to be heading inland. While I was, to an extent, this only deepened my confusion, bewilderment, and dread of this strange land. Not only was the grass dark, a faded bluish gray akin to that of a squirrel's hide or certain shades of slate and rock, but I was now better able to see the surrounding landscape.

I seemed to have washed up on a shore that led to a valley that stretched for what seemed like innumerable kilometers into the distance. To either side of the valley, rocks, hills, and contorted cliff faces rose into mountains and plateaus, seemingly keeping us in.

I remember that, for a single moment, my brain fancied the idea of the rocky barriers being a way of keeping something out of the valley instead of keeping something in. I may be turning senile, thinking something like that at a moment like the one I was in.

The man led me across a winding dirt pathway, at least I hope it was dirt, through the plains at the foot of the valley, leading me to a shabby looking camp. Just like the shanty town, it looked like it was decades old. Centuries, even. The ragtag tents we passed by looked drenched beyond belief. They certainly didn't look comfortable, a feeling of which I can personally confirm.

As we approached a dimly lit fire pit burning, embers flickering from the logs and searching for any sort of dry surface in their surroundings, the man led me to a particular tent, beckoning me to enter it.

"This is where you will stay for now, brother. Make yourself as comfortable as you can be, I recognize this may be a step down from the luxuries you may be used to." He let out a wet, phlegmy belly laugh. "Someone will be sent for you when you are needed. Until then, do not stray from this camp, brother. For your own safety, do not wander."

On that ominous note, burned into my mind for however many years I have left in me, the bloated and sickly looking old man left me. Not having any other ideas of what to do, I lifted up the damp tent's entryway and entered my new abode.

Part Three: Unasked Questions

Inside the tattered, indigo tent, I found another person like the ones in the shanty town. After seeing one up close, I hesitate to call them people, or even humans. The one in my tent had pale gray skin, long, stringy hair that hadn't been properly washed in what seemed like an eternity, fingernails as long as some quill tip pens I've seen, and covered in rashes, welts, sores, and all the other symptoms of death via water. When their slow, sluggish gaze met mine, I remember how my very soul shivered.

"Are you... New?" A feminine voice emerged from their chapped lips. They covered themselves with a dull brown coat. "My name is... Lada." She croaked out with some difficulty and a vaguely foreign accent. It wasn't so much that she was having difficulty speaking, although she was, it was as if she had to force herself to remember her own name. Just how long has she been here?

I was apprehensive of introducing myself to Lada, admittedly due to her appearance. I don't believe judgment should be cast upon me, as I firmly believe anyone would be skittish in my predicament.

"Is your tongue gone?" She asked, feebly gesturing to her throat.

I shake my head and introduce myself... The first word I uttered in that strange land was my own name. It was reassuring, I remember, that I had that part of me from the real world still with me... My name, my humanity... My sanity.

It was at this point that I recognized how my tendencies to remain silent may impede my abilities to return home. That being said, silence is a part of who I am. I don't speak much, but whenever I do, it's incredibly raspy, croaky, and painful for me.

I sat down between some of Lada's belongings, or what I assumed to be her belongings, and attempted to make myself at home... Mentally, at the very least. The fading campfire outside hardly provided us any light, but it was enough to wash my roommate in a less than flattering light. I still found her appearance to be off putting, if not disgusting... She smelled of rank and rotting fish.

I didn't attempt to make conversation, nor did Lada. I'd hope that this was a way of her respecting my tendency to remain quiet... She didn't seem to be malicious in any way, just ambivalent towards everything. I can only assume that her confinement to this world for all her years left her rather jaded and nihilistic. I wondered if I would share a similar outlook if I was exposed to her life. Rather, I wondered if I would turn out the same way in this world.

I still had so many questions about this world... What was it? What was it even called? Did it follow the same rules of Earth, was it round or flat? What kept that ocean above us in stasis? What transported me and all these other people to this place? What turned Lada and all of those people back in the town into those... Things? Would it happen to me? Could I prevent that from happening? All those worries filled my mind as I drifted away into slumber.

“Brother.”

A single word jolted me awake. The voice, scratchy, masculine, and rumbling, came from outside the tent. The flap opened and a shredded raincoat and umbrella in a similar condition were handed to me.

“Put these on.” He demanded. Despite the similar vernacular this man used, he seemed to be a different person than the fellow that introduced me to this strange land. To an extent, I did respect his explicit commanding tone as opposed to the vague, creepy nature of the other man... I just realized, I never learned the latter man’s name.

As instructed, I put on the pale yellow raincoat and prepared the umbrella. I hadn’t even realized it was raining until I exited the tent. I should’ve expected something to be off regarding the rain, but I was surprised at how heavy the drops felt. It was a peculiar feeling, not one I can easily describe.

Each raindrop felt as if a small pail of water was condensed into a singular point. Each drop hitting my outfit almost felt like it could bruise me. Perhaps it had some strange properties due to coming from the... Sky ocean?

The man who had beckoned me was sitting by the campfire, poking at it with a slender-looking sword. He also wore a raincoat, although his was much more wellkept than mine. His coat still had a sheen to it, while mine had lost its long, long ago. Similar to me, a long and unkempt beard and mustache covered his face.

“Good, you’re ready.” He grumbled, standing up as his joints popped and bones creaked. “You’re coming with me.”

I nodded in response. I assumed this is what that first man meant when he said someone would be sent for me.

The last words Lada spoke to me were said then.

“Don’t let the rain touch you.”

We exited the tent settlement and set out onto the same path that I had previously traveled upon. However, we didn't head back to the shanty town. We ended up diverting paths and heading towards one of the rocky cliff sides. As we hiked upwards through the plains, we began marching up a mountainous path. The ever increasingly steep incline coupled with the pelting of those raindrops sapped my energy and only served to make me at risk of catching a cold.

I don't even want to consider what catching a sickness from that place would've done to me.

Finally, we reached what felt like an apex of the valley's cliff side, although there was an easy several hundred meters of slippery rock above our heads, I realized our destination... My destination.

Overlooking the shanty town, whose name I still had not learned, there was a lighthouse. I wasn't too surprised to see what condition it was in, although I was surprised that it was still standing.

Perhaps fifty to seventy percent of the pale beige paint had been washed off by storms, rain, and general erosion. Here and there, bricks were missing. The majority of the windows were broken, shattered beyond repair, if not gone completely. From what I could see, the lamp at the apex of the building's height didn't look completely inoperable, but this only made me question more about this town.

If lighthouses are meant to signal ships and show them where rocky grottos are... Who, or what, is meant to benefit from the lighthouse?

Part Four: Anomalous Heavens

Before leaving me to my devices, the man gave me his name, Jusaiah, and told me to ring the bell by the door and send for him. Apparently, the townsfolk believed in my abilities to man a lighthouse for an indeterminate amount of time simply because of my... Mysteriousness? Silence? Tendency to observe? Regardless, I didn't end up seeing Jusaiah again.

I have the rudimentary knowledge of how to work a lighthouse, in theory, but operating one in that state would be a completely different question. I've known a few

lighthouse keepers over the years and they've imparted their knowledge in passing, which is what I hoped to carry me through this endeavor.

Surprisingly, the lighthouse seemed fairly functional despite its outward appearance. Despite the lightning rod at the top of the building being in no working order, at least I believe it was a lightning rod, everything else seemed to work just fine.

I figured out how to fill the rotating lantern with the fuel, started the mechanisms, and watched with a small sense of pride as the lens would turn at an appropriate interval. I marveled at the sight of the javelins of light pierced through the fog and dissipated into the distance.

The light seemed to reach about a kilometer or two onto the surface of the sea, giving me some sight into the surrounding waters. There wasn't much to see beyond the crashing wakes and occasional grottos jutting out of the watery abyss. That being said, I had the distinct feeling that I wasn't seeing everything.

I was reminded of the ocean above me when I heard an echoing crash above me. It was almost like thunder. I suppose I was able to faintly hear the sky's ocean from where I was because of my relative position to it. The quiet rumbling above me beckoned my attention, calling me to a balcony on the lighthouse and peering into its floating bizarrrity.

It mirrored the surf surrounding the town below, although I do remember confirming that the waves weren't exactly similar. I don't know why, but seeing that the oceans weren't exact copies gave me some semblance of serenity. I suppose this gave the sense that the sky's ocean was more "real" and less of some strange mirror created by my mind or other source.

However, I began to realize upon more careful observation that there was something truly horrible beneath those waves.

The sea was black, just like any other sea at dusk. That being said, I began to see pockets of water which seemed alien. Those waves didn't roll into one another, they moved in a more uniform manner... They moved in a way that no water should behave.

Those impossible waves cut through the rest of the water like rivers. They twisted, turned, and covered one another. However, those impossible waves began to reveal their true nature to me.

The glint of some unseen light source, which certainly couldn't have been the sun, bathed waves in a particular way. Like the nature of the ocean, the lighting of the waves was random. The light would tickle the surface, dotting it with little illuminations that could confuse a drunk into believing they were staring at a starry night. Instead, however, those alien waves were much more uniform. They had a periodic sheen to them, almost like a pattern.

They *were* a pattern. They weren't waves, I realized. They appeared to be... Scales.

Those unending scales moving in uniform rivers were serpent-like in form. They dipped into and out of the waves, as I realized something horrifying. There was hardly any water above me.

The dark scaly body, or bodies, covered the sky. I know not what was suspended in the sky, but something changed within me. Seeing that impossible sight, realizing that impossible notion, getting an insight into the unfathomable, I realized exactly where I was.

I had woken up on a strange beach after a physics-defying storm capsized my boat, greeted by a man who the most generous description of would be off-putting, who had brought me into a town of people who looked as if they were water-logged zombies, which has some leviathan in the sky which no one else seemed to care about, or even see.

I was in hell... I was going insane. I was... Not well.

I didn't care what the way out was, I just needed to find one away from this land. If I was able to return to Scotland, great. If I ended up in some other purgatory or just ceased to exist, fine, then. I needed a way out.

With the rush of adrenaline coursing through my veins, I realized my location once more. I was on the balcony of a lighthouse, overlooking an ocean, several hundred meters above sea level.

I didn't think about anything other than liberating myself from that world at that moment. I only thought of a quick and easy way for me to escape.

And so I jumped.

Down I fell from the lighthouse's balcony.

I fell faster than the heavy rain, which was both an interesting sensation and sight to behold. From my perspective, the rain fell up towards the heavens. The absurd sight felt almost normal in comparison to everything else I had beheld.

I felt a brief solace as the wind rushed against my raincoat and clothes and the sluggish raindrops splashed against my face and hands, their coldness numbing me as I fell. That brief serenity I felt was disturbed rather violently when I crashed into the cliffside.

My bones were shattered and my body was deformed on impact, causing me to intensely spin in the air. As my blood left my body and bones were exposed to the outside air, I plummeted further and further down, crashing into the cliffside once more.

I lost my right leg and a good portion of my head, the rushing wind being dialed out by my ears, rather ear, as a general ringing replaced everything I could hear. My vision started to blur and I began to grow lightheaded as I thundered towards my ensuing fate.

As I faintly saw another collision with the cliffside approaching me, I closed my eyes, expecting a release of all of my senses. As expected, a numbness overtook my body in a moment or two.

Then the numbness was gone.

I felt again.

I felt... The sun beating down on my back, shallow water lapping at my heels, the coldness of wet sand against my face.

Dazed and understandably confused, I looked around at my surroundings. No longer was I in that damned land, I was back on a shore I recognized... One that I knew like the back of my hand. I was at the sandbank just below my home.

I looked down to my leg, which I was certain I had lost in my freefall. It had returned to me. I had returned to Scotland.

I burst into tears, crying to the brilliant baby blue sky and kissing the sand. I don't know what miracle had brought me back to my homeland, but I wouldn't question it. I won't question it.

Anything to get me out of that hellscape.

I've written down all that I can remember into this journal. I might've left out a detail or two, which if I did, I apologize. Perhaps it wasn't the best idea to get a celebratory drink at my local pub before writing all this down... Ah well.

I'm leaving this on the beach that I had originally departed from as a cautionary tale to anyone who may sail the same waters I did. While I doubt any phenomenon like what I experienced would, or could happen again to anyone else, I don't want anyone to go through what I did.

I don't want anyone else to see what I saw.

I just want people to know what I know now.

I know that no matter how skilled of a sailor I am, no matter how long I've sailed the seven seas, no matter what I've sailed through, I should always fear the ocean and what lies beneath it.

-Herman Ahab