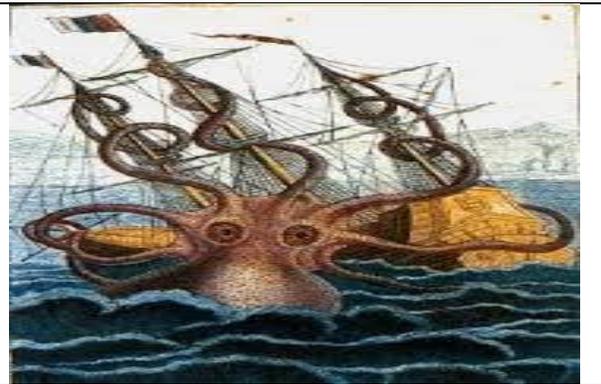


The Awakening

The professor woke up strangely refreshed and rested in the early morning, around 7 a.m., local time... Slightly disoriented, he looked around and realized that he was in his apartment, and then suddenly relived in his mind the events of the day before and his strange vision, as well as the "disembodied journey" to the bottom of the ocean. Humph! Weird, he thought, I should discuss this with the President, but for now I need some time to put my thoughts back in place. It's still early, let's go to the *Kraken* for breakfast...

At the entrance to the restaurant, the professor casts a glance at the mural depicting a medieval work that inspired the name of the establishment.

I who go for the legendary, he said to himself, here I am enmeshed in a Guamian legend.



Noticing his usual waiter, he waves at him and waits until he becomes free. The place is not too busy at this time, and the waiter soon comes with a big smile saying: "Good morning *Monsieur*! I hope you slept well, but don't worry, I'm told that the storm is moving away and that we will resurface at the end of the day. Your favourite spot is free. Sit down and take the time to browse the menu, unless you already know what you want?"

Indeed, *Antoine*, I have an irresistible craving for anchovy eggs. Can you have this prepared for me with well-buttered toasts and I'll have a black *Kopi Luwak* to top it all."

The server cannot suppress a raised eyebrow. "Um," he says, "it's going to make a pretty salty breakfast for you, not to mention a hefty bill, but we have it all, of course. Could it be that *Monsieur* is nostalgic?"

"Not precisely, *Antoine*, but I had a funny experience last night after a surprise party at the office. We were celebrating an important milestone and I had a single glass of champagne with a few sandwiches so as not to break the general good mood. It still earned me a fleeting dizziness and a brief feeling of "disembodied travel", as some people call this feeling of moving about as a ghost. It was, however, rather short (or so I felt) and after that, I slept very well without my usual discomfort related to habitat immersion. I'll tell you all about it if we have a moment between your calls for service."

"Certainly, *Monsieur*, I'll place your order and we'll see what happens next..."

[The waiter walks away to the kitchen counter and talks in a low voice with the manager, then returns to the professor's seat]

"It won't take too long, *Monsieur*. As you are a regular who knows how to appreciate our specialties, the management offers you a 30% discount on the price of the coffee. I'll take care of the other clients and will be back soon."

After 15 minutes or so, the waiter returns with a Japanese porcelain coffee cup and a steaming pot. "Here's your *Kopi Luwak*, for a start, and I see that your eggs and toasts are ready [...] Bon appétit, *Monsieur*."

The professor enjoys his breakfast while sipping this coffee of uncommon quality and meditates on what he should reveal to the waiter about his moods. *Antoine* returns to make sure everything is well to his liking and the professor takes the opportunity to quickly tell him about his vision and the dreamlike excursion that followed. "I don't know what to make of it," he says to conclude.

"Trust *Antoine, Monsieur*, I will think about it for a moment, and give you my opinion when I come back to settle. For now, I'll let you finish..."

Soon after, the professor takes one last sip of coffee and glances at his watch; he realizes that it is already passed 9 o'clock. "Oh! I have to go right now." He motions the waiter. The latter comes back and presents him with the bill that the professor pays with his universal card.

Antoine then tells him: "*Monsieur* seems to have two concerns. I would say that the first is related to the fact that the lady who appeared fleetingly in your dream is inaccessible, while the second seems connected with your research work. Maybe the solution to both situations is at the bottom of the sea. Listen to the advice of your subconscious ... Good day, *Monsieur!*"

Musing about the shrewdness of this interpretation, the professor leaves the *Kraken* and walks swiftly towards the lab, while thinking "What a coincidence! This is the second time I've been so advised. Maybe I should investigate the matter in greater depth..."

Upon his arrival, a few minutes later, he stops at the front desk and asks *Sakura* to call the technician in charge of the inspection of the deep-sea facilities near the Pit and ask him to phone him as soon as possible. Surprised, she asks him if any problems have been reported, but he tells her that he simply wants to use the remote-operated vehicle to observe the exotic underwater flora and fauna and their behavior for research purposes.

"Will do, she says, but don't forget this morning's meeting."

"Thank you for reminding me," he replies. Let me know when the habitat will return to the surface and communications be restored."

"It is so scheduled for this evening around 20:00, sir."

"Fine! I'll be at my workstation until 10:30 a.m. if the technician can call before the meeting. [He walks away]

Half an hour later the technician contacts him to let him know that he won't be able to see him today, but that he can book a time slot to use the ROV the following day. However, the vehicle will not be able to go down more than 20 m below the depth of the facilities and the autonomy will be reduced to one hour of useful time, including round trip.

"Understood, the professor replies, that should be enough for an initial survey of the terrain. I will request more if necessary."

That's settled, he thought. For now, there is nothing to do but take care of the meeting and follow up on the reports that will be given to me. I'll let Sarah know as soon as possible. I'm curious to find out what she will think about all this.

[Later in the evening, the professor is whiling the time away, reading scientific papers until the habitat returns to the surface and communications are restored when the call tone suddenly sounds. A message displays on the multifunctional wall screen]

<p>INCOMING SECURE COMMUNICATION DO YOU WISH TO ACCEPT IT HERE OR TO REDIRECT TO ANOTHER DEVICE?</p>

The professor puts his hand on the sensor pad and says "accept" and then waits for the computer to read his fingerprint data and recognize his voice. The next moment, Sarah's smiling face appears, and she says:

"Good evening Anton, we were informed at CERN that communications were about to be restored and I thought you would be waiting for my call tonight. So what exactly happened? Your last communication was rather mysterious."

"To begin with, let's say it's a good thing that our communications are encrypted. Indeed, it seems that my actions are being shadowed. I was expected when I arrived in Guam for what was meant to be a health getaway. This Security guy (Singh, I mean) followed me and approached me at Puntan dos Amantes. He then informed me outright that I was being summoned to a meeting with the new President at his private residence in Guam. It was informal and rather friendly, but this implies that Singh has agents at the Cooperative, or even in the lab itself. I would not be surprised if some of the disgruntled people I have already told you about have volunteered information, or he might have spies in all strategic locations. We'll have to advise... He must have been watching the interview from another room and was surprised and disappointed with the result, since he didn't say a word when he took me back to my boarding house by helicopter. Apparently, I have an important trump card up my sleeve, but it would be wise to use it only in case of absolute necessity and especially to be discreet.

In terms of production, we have had a first success, but further analysis is required, and the crystals must be created again under identical experimental conditions. I will send you samples later. It may take a little while since the product must be transported in containers with extreme temperature and pressure stability.

Furthermore, when I came back, I had another weird dream episode, but this one ended well [he tells it briefly] and then I slept like a log."

"It's a bundle of news all in one shot, she said. Well, since I don't have anything special to report on my side, I'm going to think about it all and let you go to sleep for now. We shall see what needs to be done upon our next communication. Good night!
