

"IT'S OVER," SAID THE SPIRIT...

OVER

A COSMIC APOCALYPSE

by J.A. McCormick

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“It’s over,” said the spirit.

And the man looked out over the valley where towering buildings rose up from the valley floor and he could not help but marvel at their beauty. He thought then that they manifested the height of sentient conception and over the last century and a half, they had grown ever more fantastic, pushing the boundaries of physics and the capacity of architecture. He wondered at the people there. He pictured them in their apartments. He saw the children sleeping and imagined the bakers in a few hours, rising to their kitchens and preparing their cookies and pastries. He saw the businessmen, a few hours later, strolling out, some upon streets, others upon elevated causeways to catch commuters into their offices in the sky, and the women too, and the children shuttled off to nannies. And soon the city would be a mass of movement, like a great ant hill rising from the valley floor. And pulsing into their inner ear would be the latest propaganda. And they would dream of better days, always better days. “Upward, skyward we fly!” was the message. And no-one would dream that it was over. No-one would imagine, that though it had not yet come, that soon the lights would go out in this city, and every city upon this little colony in this remote outpost, in the midst of this remote region

of this remote galaxy. But now he knew.

“What do you mean?” he asked the spirit that stood before him. But the phantom only gazed more intently at the man and repeated his message.

“It’s over,” he said again, his voice sharper and rebuking, his eyes ablaze with fierce intent as if daring the man to disbelieve. And the man felt it now in his bones – a certain finality. And his imagination summoned an image of the city empty. And what he heard was silence. And surprisingly, what he felt was comfort. *Why? What did it mean? How was it over? How soon? Why did he feel this way? Was there any changing it now, or was it...* But he knew the answer to that one. It was over.

“Why are you telling me this?” he asked the spirit. But the spirit stood motionless before the man except for the long, light robe that drifted along behind him as if caught by a breeze from the unseen realm. After what felt like an eternity, the spirit raised an eyebrow and his face grew long. And the man thought that he was deliberating whether to tell him something.

“You will remember that you asked?” the spirit questioned.

“Yes. I want to know.”

“Then come with me,” he said.

And before the man knew what was happening, the spirit had taken him by the hand and disappeared. And as he did, the same sternness fell over the man’s brow and the same intensity lit within him like a fire. And a voice, this time from within asked: “are you ready?” But it was his voice that he heard and it was him asking the question of what seemed to be his lesser self. And then a wave of confusion and not a little bit of fear jumped up from somewhere in his belly. “Who are you?” the man asked. But he knew the question was not the right one. “*Who am I?*” he thought.

“We are one,” said the spirit. And now he could see the apparition plainly in his mind’s eye. “At least we are one in that which transcends the seen, though you have forgotten. For that reason, I am able to find a place within you. And for the purpose of this journey, I cannot lead you from without, for it does not concern outward things but the inward. Do you understand?”

He was not sure that he understood but he said: “I think so.”

“You will,” said the spirit. And with that, he felt the image recede back into some deep place within his consciousness where he could no longer distinguish between himself and the image he had seen in his mind. And again, the fire that he’d sensed in his apparition lit within his own breast and grew brighter and more intense, welling up like a pot boiling over. And as it did, the questions which he had asked also grew within him and swelled larger and larger until he thought, it flowed down upon the city consuming it and the people in it. And then, it reached out consuming the neighboring cities and eventually the entire planet upon which he was stationed and shot out toward his planet of origin and then spread like the mushroom cloud of some cosmic explosion to consume what he could only imagine was the whole of existence. And as it did, he felt the ground fall beneath him as he was propelled through the air over the great city that was his home.

And as he looked down, he became aware that he was searching for something and that his capacity to apprehend had been expanded. At first, he was able to contemplate the homes along a given street, and then he took in whole neighborhoods and apartment buildings, and then whole sections of the city. He sensed every office and every part of the multi-story factory complexes, all the while counting and adding it up. He counted the pencils in the drawers and the gum beneath the desks. He

measured the height of the appliances to the millimeter and the hairs on every head of every soul that slept in their beds. He thought then that his city was far more than he realized and that each person was more than he had suspected, for they wafted up to him from their dreams. And all of them were rejoicing to finally be free of all that they were and free too from all that they might have been. And their hopes and failures no longer held them captive, for they were finally reduced to that thing which existed before they knew desire. And each was gathered to his heart, and they were one.

Except of course for those that were not. And these troubled him for they slept obstinately in their beds. And he searched their set faces and pierced their deepest intent, wondering if there was anything in them that had an interest in something so real as this. But they clung relentlessly to their fictions, believing tenaciously in tomorrows that would never come. And he sensed the impending darkness into which they hurtled themselves. But they had planes to catch and sermons to preach and dissertations to finish. And he realized then that they had never been interested in the truths to which those things had pointed. For it was not the Real that they worshipped but its shadow. And if they could not be the means of bringing it about, then they wanted no part in it. And so, he let them sleep. But he did not know what it was that they would awaken to in the morning and he feared for them.

And all the while, hosts of souls were gathered to his heart. And they danced and shouted and raced about within him, exploding into fits of laughter, for they were finally free.

And when he had comprehended his city, he moved on to the next and the next until he knew his globe. And it wasn't the living alone that he counted, but the dead also, for he searched out their

essence in what was left of their graves and contemplated the ashes that were cast upon the sea. And though these were long ago swallowed by the equivalent of whales on his own planet and then eaten again by lesser sea folk, he found their intent buried deep in the ligaments of crablike crustaceans. And the souls of the living and the dead were far more than he had imagined. And he rejoiced over those that were his. And he did not bother those who were not. They were not to be found in their graves. For instead of rest, they had chosen to cling to the dreams of what they once were and to drift about upon the winds of other dreamers, unwilling to take part in any new creation of which they were not the authors.

And when he was done with his globe, he looked out upon it from what he thought was a great distance out in space and wondered again at its beauty, and he was filled with overwhelming gratitude that shook him from somewhere deep within like a man is shaken at the contemplation of a most beloved horse which he must soon put down. And the host within him grieved, each for the loss of the life which had loved them so well. But there was something more than life before them now, something more exquisite than nature, even the thing from which all nature sprang and to which it was pointing all the time. And when they had measured their loss and mourned it thoroughly, there was only one thing left to do. And each reached out in their memory to those who still slumbered obstinately and gathered to themselves the thing that each sleeper was before they had become so enamored with the fable of their lives. And each mother, in her heart, clung tight to her child and the brother to his sibling and friend to friend. So, though the ungrateful might be lost to themselves, they were not lost to those who loved them best. And the man wondered how long

the slumbering host would choose darkness before they'd seek out these living ones who held the key that would unlock their dungeon. He did not know. But he feared that it would be a long time. For once a person is persuaded that he is his own creation and that the answers to his problems lie within the capacity of his own mind, he is not soon to abandon what he perceives as his only lifeline.

And when the reality of the slumbering horde was safely locked away within the bosom of their loved ones, the man turned outward in what felt like an eternal forsaking from the world that was his home to look upon the rest of the cosmos with eyes a legion. And his mind reached out to comprehend the worlds that were before him, even worlds heretofore unnumbered. And he numbered them with uncontemplated figures. And there he met with the strangest of creatures, some, the very appearance of which would frighten the bravest of his sort. But he knew them. At least he knew those that were his and they gathered to his heart. And in the end, they were one thing, to spite their varied expressions. And in every region of space where there existed beings capable of choosing, there remained those who could not be roused to any life but the one that they had chosen. And he left them sleeping.

And when he was done, he stood in the midst of the cosmos and his guide was again beside him holding a large book which he handed to the man. And the man opened the book to find it full of blank pages.

"Write," commanded the guide.

And the man began at the beginning and wrote, page after page in the book until he had written all that which he had seen and had accounted for all those who were now within his heart. And as he wrote, he sensed the intent and essence of all creation

gathering to his pen and pouring itself out upon the page. And when he knew that there was nothing left unexpressed in the words of the book, he looked up into the eyes of his guide. And he thought that there was not so much sternness in the expression of the spirit now and that he had grown far less phantomlike. In fact, the being that stood before him appeared far more real than anything he had seen in all his travels up and down throughout the cosmos. And he knew that he and his guide were one, for though they stood looking at each other, the messenger had never left his heart. And again the question rose within them, but they knew the answer. *It was over.*

And the man looked down at the book which he held open before him and knew that it was good. And a wave of gratitude washed over him, and joy. And then, with one quick movement, he shut the book closed. And as he did, the whole of existence folded in upon itself and disappeared within the book. But not the man. For he and those with him knew that they were more than the words of the book, more than the shadow that was their corporeal existence and more than the fictions which had served them so well in their cosmic journey.

And in and around them was complete silence, not the silence they had known, but the silence which had always lain just beneath that which can be perceived as silence. And they rested in and upon it. And no one spoke a word, not even to themselves. They had no desire to speak for they rested now from all that which they once were. And the silence healed them from all that which they had once desired. And as they slept, there arose, not unlike dreams, images and experiences as different as their varied expressions. But the substance of those dreams was more real than anything they had experienced in their corporeal realities. And each carried the others within their heart and they

were one thing and they could no longer be separated by what they thought they were.

And as the man dreamed his own deepest reality, he shot upward and flew high into the sky above a waving field of grain. And the sky was bluer than any he had known, and the field more golden than any he had seen. And as he flew, his heart reached out to souls still lost in what they thought they were. "You are not lost to me," he said. "I will never let you go. And when that day comes that you realize that darkness needn't be your prison, I will fly to you and lift you up. And together, skyward we'll fly until we reach that silence that will bind up your wounds and remind you of all you are. And then there will be better days, old friends, always better days. And we'll spend them always knit together. For we are one, you and I, though, for a little while, you have forgotten."