

The North means Bach, and Bach means Stokowski. That raw, dramatic energy that exudes from cantatas and fugues, that summons up images as much of the soaring Gothic churches shimmering in the icy sun as craggy mountains piercing deep grey and tumultuous skies, was explored and unleashed by Stokowski in countless recordings. These recordings were given equally numerous hearings by Aremay as he stalked over wind beaten dunes and splashed through pebble-lined creeks disgorging between rough cliff faces.

Aremay liked the North. The architecture was earthier and yet somehow freer than that of the South, where regular lines and repetition of form, as though repeating the same proportions and shapes over and over would breathe life into long-decayed civilisations, dominated skylines and streets alike. The landscapes were much better, populated by skies of every shade of grey and blue, seas that surged with an equally dramatic spectrum and spread of landscapes from impossibly sharp mountains tearing at the sky to wide flat farmland that gradually melts into the sea through thousands of streams and marshes. The music – of Handel, Bach and Elgar, of Sibelius, Vaughan Williams and Greig – contained much of this barely restrained power, this mad jumble in celebration of the organic and the natural.

This joy was increased by being closer to home; England was across the rolling greenish-grey sea to his right, hidden somewhere amidst the pillars of sunlight that cut between the sheets of deep grey clouds. This seascape was narrated by Stokowski, guiding the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra to height after height of the Easter Cantata, pumped through Aremay's earbuds as he clambered up and stamped down the dunes next to the flat beach.

He paused a moment and turned out to face over the sea. Out, close the horizon, a container ship was slinking between the shadows cast by the clouds. A few sea birds were swooping around, darting back and forth on the sharp blasts of wind that whipped off the sea and up the beach. Beyond them and the distant crew of the freighter, he felt quite alone out here, being slapped in the face by the icy disapproval of nature. That was a pleasant feeling for the lagomorph, who had spent too many of the last three days trapped inside plasterboard cubes with plasterboard coloured people talking with all the passion and richness of plasterboard. International law was certainly vital to his job and his research, but those who studied it seemed to seek to make their work as dry as possible, as though it were some defence against those who sought to denigrate it.

The International Court of Justice had asked him to come to The Hague to help advise them on upcoming cases for their next session. His boss, Professor Alexander Trepov, head of the Office for Research & Guidance in the UN Department of Political Affairs, had been all too glad to pack his prickly subordinate off to the Netherlands for a week to give them the advice they sought on crafting the language of their judgements in light of the problems they had been given. It was a dry, thankless task for the most part, picking over sentences for a misplaced adjective, seeking to boil away all resemblance of interesting writing, it seemed, to leave parched bones of legalese.

But out here, on the sand dunes of the Dutch coast, facing into the wind that whipped over the open North Sea and sliced between the hairs of the fur on his face, Aremay could forget all that dullness and achingly slowly progress. He closed his eyes, inhaling the fresh air deep into his chest, and blasted it back out again through his nose.

Sometimes his job felt like this, and sometimes it felt different. When he had had to drive in a battered UN Land Rover across much of Chad to find a missing US Congressional aide, or when he had physically separated two Kenyan warlords in the reception of the UNDP office in Mombasa and kept them calm long enough to get them drunk enough to share a joke with each other. Those times were the sort of time it felt different; rough and ready and fully part of saving the world, little blood-stained bit at a time. If only such action would somehow mix with his favourite climes and

locations; though the North was, on the other hand, blessed with a fertile political climate for stability and hard decisions. At least one could find a willingness to give to his favourite causes up here, but it was little recompense for the fact that more often he was called here to engage in dull duties with dull people, who had been sent here by people who imagined the North as dull and so a natural home for things they knew were dull. The heated debates were reserved for equally heated climes, it seemed.

The cheap cheerfulness of the alarm tone on his phone snapped him back from his wandering thoughts to the present. He cast his gaze back over the grey horizon one last time with a wistful sigh, and then turned to walk back to his hire car. Perhaps he'd take a holiday up here; he was well overdue one. A week in the Hanseatic cities tended to cheer him up at the worst of times, and after surviving a week with the ICJ, he was sure Trepov would let him free for a week. But even if he didn't, there was always Bach, and Stokowski to tide him over until he got back to the North again. It would do.