

AGAINST THE DEEP

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DEDICATIONS

For everyone who has helped me become the person
I am today.

CHAPTER ONE

“Hart, you have a call coming in. It sounds very urgent...” Bonnie says, while giving Naoki a frightened look

Bonnie was an ancient woman who Naoki wasn't particularly fond of. She's always complaining about something.

“It's probably nothing, but I'll go check just to make sure,” he answers with a smile.

Naoki was only slightly annoyed, because today had been an absolute *nightmare*; and he does *not* want to do any more busywork.

Naoki Hart, a young man, working as a marine engineer, calmly walks over to the phone, questioning who might be calling him at this hour. He checks his watch. 3:31 AM. *Victor shouldn't be awake now, he has the day off today*, he thinks. He reaches out to pick up the phone, but suddenly gets a shooting pain in his eyes.

“Agh!” He unintentionally yells.

“Everything okay over there?” The same woman asks.

“Perfectly fine,” Naoki says with an uncertain smile, and a hand covering his eye.

He tries to ignore it, but a very ominous feeling sets in. Just hearing the phone ringing and ringing, over and over, felt very unsettling. The unending pain in his eyes not helping the situation. A blood curdling chill runs down his spine. He lays his hand on the phone, and picks it up. Nothing but static...

Until a deep, raspy voice says, “They’re here Naoki. Be careful.”

Before Naoki could say anything in response, the cord connecting the phone to the wall suddenly bursts into flames; Making an ear piercing boom.

“Naoki?! What was that?” Bonnie asks.

“I- I don’t know! But I think I need to leave, can you ask Carson –the new guy– if he’ll cover for me? Thanks.”

“Oh- okay. But-” She tries to say.

Before waiting to hear a response, Naoki shoves his cigarette into the ashtray, grabs his bag, and bolts down the hall.

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As he bursts out the office door, the sky is pitch black, and the only light visible is coming from the worn down, broken streetlights. Another chill runs down his spine, he's beginning to feel more and more afraid with every step. *What the heck is going on? Why do they want me!?*

As Naoki gets closer to his car, he gets the feeling that something is wrong. He needed to get out of there. His heart begins to beat faster and faster. He can feel the blood rushing to his head.

Just to make matters worse, rain starts pouring down, pounding onto the top of Naoki's head. His shoes get soaked from running through the puddles, but he doesn't care. He just *needs* to get out of there.

Once Naoki reaches his car door, he practically rips it off the hinges. He gets in, slams the door shut, and turns on the ignition. His lungs sting from his heavy breathing.

Just then, as Naoki sits in his car, he remembers a story his Uncle had told him. When he was a boy, he never wanted to join the military. But he was instead recruited by a random, mysterious phone call...

Naoki's mind was going a million miles an hour.

Trying to forget the situation that had just occurred, he hurriedly turns on the radio, in a last ditch effort to see if he can calm himself down a little. He starts frantically switching through the stations, but they're all static... After scrolling for what seemed like hours, a station finally decides to work. It starts off a little fuzzy, as if the radio's phasing in and out between stations. He begins to make something out.

The government has ruled this as a global emer... It phases out again.

What the heck? Naoki thinks as he turns the volume up.

Agent Yuki, what the heck is going on? No one said anythi... occurring again-

Agent Yuki? Naoki thinks but... that's Uncle's name- I thought he was... retired.

Uncle Yuki was part of the Naval Defense Research Team during the second war -he wasn't actually Naoki's uncle. That's where he'd met his father. They'd worked on the Oceanic Recovery System together.

The radio cuts in again, *this is no national emergency, this is a threat fro...* More static fills the car... *We cannot alert the public, that would cause a massive panic. We don...*

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We can't afford another wa...

With every word Naoki hears, more and more dread builds up in his body. He has no idea what is going on. *Why the heck was I called by them?* He worries.

Naoki can barely see anything three feet in front of the car, the rain's so hard. The radio has gone completely static by now, and he's as horrified as ever. *Only a few more miles-*

SCREEEECH.

His car almost swerves off the road, but before it could crash, he slams his foot on the brake pedal.

For a moment, everything is still...

But that all changed the second he turned his head to the window.

'What in the world-' Naoki mouths, too terrified to speak aloud.

He slowly steps out of the car, and sees that the entire highway is blocked off by some massive... thing. The *entire* 8 lane highway was completely blocked off.

The thing is slimy... and smells awful. Naoki's eyes were practically burning at the sight of it. He had to take his shirt, and put it over his nose.

He couldn't even tell what he's looking at, it was completely unrecognizable. All he could make out was how slimy, and disgusting it looked. It was like some kind of... sea monster...

CHAPTER TWO

Naoki just stood there. He couldn't breathe. His clothes were completely soaked through. It was getting increasingly harder to breathe, for the stench was so foul. He just had no idea what in the world was happening. Barely any thoughts were going through his head, he just had no idea what's happening.

After standing in the pitch black darkness that was the highway, and staring at the thing for what felt like hours, Naoki finally decided to round up all of his courage, and find an alternate route home.

This'll all be over soon... He thought.

But he couldn't have been farther from the truth.

He quickly checks his watch, 4:12 AM. *Has it really been that long?!* He worries, with a look of pure confusion on his face.

Naoki begins to walk back to his car, when suddenly, he could breathe again. The horrid smell was completely gone. And the rain has stopped.

Naoki just stood there for a moment. Stunned. Feeling more afraid than he ever had before in his life. Water was dripping from his hair, and his shoes were squelching with the water. His heart beat slowly went up, and up.

What is going on? He begins to think, tears forming in his eyes. He just wants to go home. *I just want to see Victor again...*

Yet another time, Naoki has to build up the courage to turn around, and see what is happening. He slowly turns around, growing increasingly more and more terrified.

The horror he felt in his heart was entirely more than he could've ever imagined.

When Naoki turned around... There was nothing.

No foul odor.

No rain.

Absolutely nothing.

And most bizarrely, there was no giant slime thing.

“Wha- What? What is-” He says, his teeth chattering with fear.

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The highway is clear now, so he can go home if he pleases. But for some reason, Naoki feels he needs to find out more about what is happening.

He waits there for another moment. Nothing at all seems to be out of the ordinary.

By this time, Naoki's heart has slowed to a normal rate. He slowly breathes, attempting to further calm himself down.

Naoki turns back around toward his car. But as soon as he does, the rain starts again. And so does that... repulsive odor.

“What!?” He yells in dismay.

He turns back around yet another time, to face the road. And the rain yet again stopped. So did that foul stench.

What in the world is going on here? He asks himself, as more and more dread builds up in his body.

Completely ignoring anything that has happened thus far, he bolts back to his car, and starts up the ignition. He slams on the gas, making his way back to his home.

CHAPTER THREE

When Naoki finally reaches his house, he jams his key into the lock, opens it, and slams the door closed. He drops his bag on the floor, and immediately finds Victor, Naoki's best friend, and lays down; forgetting about his completely drenched clothes. Naoki had been looking forward to this moment all day; the moment where he could finally lay down, and take a rest.

Naoki had such a horribly long day... He just sunk into the couch, and fell asleep almost immediately. He doesn't wake up until morning. He hadn't slept that well in ages.

As the sun rose, everything almost seemed okay. Except for one thing...

Uncle... was gone. Naoki was absolutely distraught. Uncle Yuki was always home, 24/7, so not seeing him here... was a little frightening.

Naoki was orphaned very young, and he grew up in Japan. His father died in the war, he never knew his mother. So he moved to the U.S. to live with his father's friend, Yuki Seungho—who he calls Uncle—from the military.

“Victor?” Naoki calls.

“Mhm?” He responds from the other room. Before showing himself in the doorway.

“Have you seen Yuki this morning?” Naoki asks.

“...He didn’t call you?” Victor pauses, “He said he would...”

Naoki’s heart drops in an instant. Remembering the ominous phone call he’d received the night before.

“He wha-” Naoki starts, “Where is he?” He asks frantically.

“Well, I thought he would’ve told you. But the American government wants him back with them, working on something I wasn’t allowed to know, it’s extremely confidential I guess.” He says with a shrug, then continues, “He seemed to really be in a hurry though, it was around 2 in the morning when he woke me up.”

Naoki’s mouth drops open a little. The thought of Uncle being involved in this horrified him. His mind is running in circles...

Uncle was in the military for many years, after he fought in WWII, he was completely burnt out.

“What's wrong?” Victor asks as he walks over to Naoki. While noticing the discomfort in him, Victor puts his arms around Naoki's shoulders in an attempt to calm him down a little.

“I...” Naoki falls off, “I don't know...” He rests his head on Victor's shoulder. Then he realizes, “Also, did I change this morning?”

“No, I changed your clothes. They were absolutely soaked.”

Naoki smiles warmly, “Thank you.”

The world is silent for a few calm minutes. The two of them sit there. Peacefully.

Quite the opposite from Naoki's night... Well... Morning.

Naoki contemplated on telling Victor what had happened last night. He didn't want him to worry, he knew Victor already had enough on his mind.

But the thing that's on Naoki's mind now, is that mysterious phone call... If Victor said Uncle would call him... does that mean the voice on the phone was his?

Naoki lets out a long, deep sigh.

Victor pats him on the back.

As the day goes by, everything almost seems normal. They sat all day, watching the television. Recently, they have really been enjoying Star Trek. It is the 1960's, after all.

The only thing that doesn't feel quite right was the fact that Uncle was gone.

Uncle had always been at the house, cleaning up things, tidying the rooms; but without him there, it just feels plain... wrong. Naoki has this weird feeling in the back of his mind, staying there, lurking in the shadows.

Randomly, Victor says, "Naoki, I'm happy you got off so early. Weren't you supposed to get off around 8:00 this morning?"

Naoki thought for a moment. Before replying with hesitation, "Well... yes. I got off early because..." Naoki has to think for a second on what to say next, "Someone covered for me."

"How nice! It's good to see you more anyway," Victor looks puzzled for a moment, "But like I mentioned before, did you get a call from Yuki? Or anyone?"

Naoki's insides feel like they're boiling. He had tried to forget about that... mysterious phone call.

After receiving no answer, Victor asks again,
“Naoki?”

For a second time, Naoki contemplates on whether
or not telling Victor about the phone call is
necessary.

But thinking back to the story Uncle had told him...
maybe he should tell Victor.

Naoki didn't know.

CHAPTER FOUR

Naoki reminded Victor of the story Uncle told him when he was younger.

“Victor... the reason I got to leave so early was because... I got a weird phone call,” Naoki hesitates saying any more, but a reassuring look from Victor encourages him. “On the call, there was a really deep, and creepy voice on the other line. And it said something like ‘They’re here Naoki’ before instantly hanging up. Isn’t that just weird? Anyway, some more... weird things happened, and I just decided... I had to get out of there.”

Naoki decides against telling Victor about the whole... “traffic” jam situation. Maybe it was just some kind of... hallucination.

Victor thought for a moment.

A very long moment.

Before saying, “So... do you think you’re getting... recruited?”

“I- I don’t know what to think...” Naoki replies.

All of the fears of war Uncle and even his father had told him about went rushing through his head. Uncle

and Naoki's father fought in WWII together, before his father died...

Naoki immediately grabs a pillow and shoves his face into it, sobbing his eyes out.

"Naoki, it's okay... we haven't even heard about anything going on in the world. Why would they be recruiting now?" Victor reassures him. He grabs Naoki's hand and says, "It'll be okay. I'm sure it was just some sort of prank call or something. Kids can be sick these days, you know."

Naoki chuckled a bit before starting to cry again. Naoki had no idea what to think, he didn't even have an idea of what was going on... he was just scared. He is scared of what may've happened to Uncle, and what is happening to him.

All Naoki's mind could think of right now was how horrifying war is... *But what were those strange people talking about on the radio?* Naoki thought. *Didn't they mention... some kind of global emergency?*

"What in the world is going on?" Naoki says in between sobs.

Victor gave him one of his award winning reassuring looks, instantly making him feel better.

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Naoki lifts his face up from his pillow, and quietly says, "Thank you, Victor."

Victor gives Naoki a warm smile, and wipes Naoki's tears away. Victor always knows how to make Naoki feel better.

After giving it some thought; Naoki decided *against* telling Victor about the radio, or the traffic jam.

Naoki thinks it would be better if he'd just kept that last part out.

Now the thing that's on Naoki's mind is what he's going to do with this information. He had absolutely no idea what to do. He contemplated for a long while.

Should I look into it more? Or should I try and find out more about Uncle Yuki... Naoki thinks.

Just before Naoki can get any deeper into thought -the phone rings.

When Naoki hears this his heart practically stops again. The trauma he felt after he got the last phone call was just too much. He just let it ring and ring.

"I'll get it," Victor announces as he stands up toward the phone.

Naoki gives him a pleading look, begging him not to.

As Victor grabs the phone off the wall, Naoki feels the urge to look away. He just *can't* think about what might be happening.

Naoki abruptly stood up, and went to another room.

“Naoki?” Victor calls, “It’s Yuki, it’s for you.”

He suddenly felt a bit better. Knowing who’s on the other end made taking the call a lot more bearable.

Naoki reluctantly walks back into the living room, and gives Victor a smile while grabbing the phone.

“Yes?” Naoki answers.

“Naoki, I don’t have any time to explain, but you need to come by the marina as fast as you can.” Yuki states.

“I- um...” Naoki has trouble thinking of the right words, “Right away.” He hangs up the phone.

Immediately after, Naoki grabs his bag, and gives Victor a hug goodbye.

As he heads for the door he mouths, “I’m sorry.” And walks to his car.

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Naoki failed to look back and see the sadness on Victor's face.

CHAPTER FIVE

Once Naoki gets out of the door, the air suddenly turns frigid. The hairs all over his body stand up, as if something was watching him.

Frightened, Naoki quickly hops into his car, and heads for the marina.

As he backs out of the driveway, rain once again starts pouring. *Of course* Naoki thinks.

As an attempt to comfort himself, Naoki reaches for the radio to see what might be on. To his delight, instead of ear piercing static, actual music begins to play.

Naoki gives a deep sigh of relief. At least he wasn't hearing odd conversations this time. Thankfully, the marina wasn't too far away. Maybe around 5 minutes. Naoki and his family live in a small town in Kauai, so they're always at *most* a mile from the ocean.

Waiting at a stoplight, Naoki once again turned his attention to the phone call. All of the things that could possibly be happening rush into his mind. *Why did Uncle call me again? Is he okay?* Naoki desperately wanted to know what was going on here.

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As soon as the light turned green, Naoki floored it.

He thought more into everything that's happened thus far. 1: He gets a call, scaring him from work. 2: He hears weird confidential conversations unwillingly over the radio. 3: He runs into this giant... thing in the middle of the highway. *Wait, I need to backtrack.*

Naoki suddenly remembers some of the contents of the conversations he'd heard over the radio. He remembers something about a national emergency... And something about... Sea beasts. Most notably hearing something about his uncle.

Finally beginning to connect the dots, Naoki thinks back to the thing he saw blocking the highway. He remembers it smelling... downright awful. He remembers it being slimy...

Could that mean-

There's another... invasion? I thought we'd taken care of those...

Terror fills Naoki's body to the brim. The last time anything like this happened, the entire world was almost destroyed.

Back during the second War, the world had been fighting against the horrors of the depths; for the second time in history.

Ginormous monsters rose from the deep, capsizing cruise ships, coming along coasts and destroying cities, the creatures carried parasites that took over human bodies...

It was horrifying. Entire cities were infested with parasites, over half the population was infected in some way or another.

A whole $\frac{1}{3}$ of the population died...

And his father was one of those unfortunate souls.

He began to remember all of this, and as he did, anxiety overcame his body. He began to hyperventilate, and cold sweat emerged from within him.

Does that have anything to do with what happened last night... Naoki thought.

It all started to make sense to Naoki; the phone calls, the thing in the road, even the radio conversations. They were all connecting together...

CHAPTER SIX

As Naoki gets closer to the Marina, the true worry starts to set in.

The world could end...

“Why me? Of all people?” Naoki burst out, “What have I ever done to be chosen for this?”

The fact that this was all happening again horrified Naoki.

By this time, the Marina was in his line of sight. As Naoki kept driving, he looked out over the bay –the rain obscured his vision only a little– and not one boat was on it. Usually this time of year there’s hundreds of boats out and about.

Maybe this really is serious.

As the rain continued to pound on the roof of his car, the clouds suddenly turned a dark shade of gray.

Slightly frightened, Naoki pushed down on the gas pedal.

Another thing that was unusual about the sight was the amount of cars on the road. Not one.

Nearing the marina's parking lot, he noticed a line of cop cars surrounding the area. The blinding red and blue light coming from the cars was unmistakable.

Beginning to get quite worried, Naoki drives up to one of the cars for closer inspection.

One cop in a car said to Naoki, "I need a name, ID and authentication sir."

"Oh, sure." Naoki says with some hesitance. Not expecting the interrogation, Naoki spent a few seconds digging through his pockets before realizing he didn't bring his wallet.

Before Naoki could say anything, a harsh, deep voice emerges from the officer's radio saying, "No need, officer, let 'em in."

"Sure thing boss," The officer says, "You'll see a person in a mask waiting outside over there." He says, pointing a finger in the general vicinity of a building.

Naoki gave an ingenuine smile, "Thank you, officer."

Naoki starts up his car again, and slowly goes toward the building. It was so dark outside, Naoki could barely see anything.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Once he reaches what looks like the front entrance, he parks, and heads toward the door.

Naturally, Naoki had absolutely *no* idea what to expect. He has absolutely no idea what's going on.

Naoki steps out of his car, and uses his arm to shield the torrential downpour from further wetting his clothes.

Half running, Naoki nears the door, recognizing the masked man the officer had told him about.

“Go on in.” The mysterious man says.

Reaching for the door, Naoki realizes it's locked. “Um- Sir?” Naoki starts, “It's locked...”

Naoki couldn't see the lower part of the man's face, but he could tell his eyes were giving him an odd look. “Are your fingerprints not registered?”

“Uh- No sir?”

The man's face immediately changed into a look of confusion.

After a few awkward moments, the man says in a voice of realization, “Naoki Hart?”

A little frightened, “Y- Yes sir, that’s me,” Naoki said in a worried voice.

Immediately, he raises a part of his collar, speaking into it, “He’s here.”

Suddenly, a soft click fills the air.

“You’re good to go sir,” the man says with an encouraging nod.

Naoki nervously smiles, and rushes through the now unlocked door.

Once reaching inside, Naoki notices the black void cloaking the room, only illuminated by a faint blue light.

A shiver runs down his spine.

Naoki squints his eyes to see if he can see anything, to his surprise, he can.

The building is a long dark hallway, with steel plated doors running all along it.

There wasn’t a single noise to be heard; only the squeaking of the tile floor beneath his still wet boots.

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Every once in a while, Naoki heard a haunting, deep reverberation echo through the halls.

Every time he heard it, he could feel the vibrations going through his head. The noise was reminiscent of a mournful cry...

From the depths of the ocean.

Naoki just stood there; no idea where to turn. He had no idea what to do.

He didn't know.

CHAPTER EIGHT

There wasn't another soul in sight.

Walking through the hall, Naoki realized it had a downward staircase every 15 feet or so. The building just keeps getting deeper and deeper. Each level, there were two doors on either wall.

Absolutely clueless, Naoki noticed one door in particular.

It was at the end of the hall; It had a piece of paper taped on it.

The paper said, "Naoki."

The second he read it, his blood chilled to ice. He was too paralyzed to do anything. His breathing quickened, in fear of what might happen next.

Staring at the door in fear, it suddenly cracked open.

Coming out of the door, a soft, blue glow spills out, gently illuminating the surrounding darkness with an otherworldly hue.

Too stunned to do anything, Naoki hesitantly called out, "He- Hello?"

He waited for a response... an answer... anything.

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Suddenly, Naoki felt light headed.

His vision started to go blurry, soon fading into black.

Before Naoki knew it, he too faded away in the darkness.

CHAPTER NINE

He was out for what seemed like an eternity. He had no recollection of what happened after he blacked out.

As the darkness lifted like a heavy veil, Naoki slowly reopened his eyes. They began to readjust to the terribly bright light pouring into his eyelids.

His senses slowly reemerged, as the soft noises of life came back into existence.

The subtle beeps coming from his left slowly quickened.

As he began to reacquire his senses, the events prior to this situation flooded back into his memory.

He suddenly jerked up from where he was lying, *Where am I? What's going on?*

Naoki started to take in his surroundings.

He was in a very bright, almost silent room.

Naoki took a breath in. *Ugh*. There was an overwhelming scent in the air, the only word he could use to describe it was: sterile –antiseptic even.

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His eyes were open, but he couldn't tell where he was. There wasn't anything he could remotely recognize around him.

"Where-" he was interrupted by a sudden sharp prick in his arm.

"Ow!" he screeched. A sudden jolt of discomfort courses through Naoki. He tries to pull it away, but someone is holding him down.

He quickly looked down at his arm, realizing where he was.

There was a thin IV needle sticking into Naoki's arm.

A look of total confusion was immediately painted on his face.

"Don't worry Naoki, it's okay," a voice said, out of the blue.

For some reason, the voice seemed eerily familiar.

He takes a second to process.

"Uncle?!" Naoki excitedly says, practically jumping out of the hospital bed.

His eyes were still getting used to the bright ambiance of the room. Ignoring that, Naoki looks at

the front of his bed, and realizes that Uncle is there waiting for him.

“Don’t feel alarmed, everything is under control at the moment,” Uncle continues, “Now boy, you need to get some rest; you look like garbage.” Uncle says with a half serious tone.

Naoki leans forward to hug him, but Uncle stops him. He gestured toward his arm, reminding Naoki of the needle inside it.

Looking back down at his arm, a million questions flooded Naoki’s mind.

“Wher-”

“No time for questions, you’ll find the answers to everything soon.” Uncle says with a harsh tone.

Naoki didn’t know how to respond to that.

“But-”

Uncle gave Naoki one of his famous death stares –instantly letting you know you should stop while you’re ahead.

Naoki instantly backed down. The fact that Uncle was sitting in front of him, after he had been gone for days, kind of scared Naoki.

He didn't really know how to feel. Millions of questions fled through Naoki's mind, but he wasn't allowed to ask any of them.

As he began to let the situation at hand sink in, he tried to make sense of all of it. But before he could make out anything useful, a loud siren came from the intercom.

Before a booming voice came over it.

"This is not a drill," it said, "Every officer on duty please make your way immediately to the weapons wing. Once again; this is *not* a drill."

"What?!" Naoki yelled as the sirens blared over him.

"I told you. It will all be okay. You don't need to be worried, you're safe here," Uncle said in a loud, but calming tone –barely audible over the sirens.

Even more confusion filled Naoki's mind.

"Why can't you just tell me anything?!" Naoki screamed, trying to be heard over the blaring sirens. "Where the hell am I, and why aren't you telling me? I'm scared half to death!"

"Naoki I told yo–"

“No! Please just tell me what’s going on here,” Naoki pleaded with tears forming in his eyes.

For the first time, Naoki stared at uncle with anger.

Uncle calmly turned his head to one of the nurses, and nodded at her. Everyone quickly left the room.

After everyone was gone, the sirens had finally stopped.

“Thank god,” Naoki said under his breath.

Quickly turning his attention back to Uncle, Naoki stared at him. To see if he would speak.

Taking his eyes off the door, Uncle turns his head back toward Naoki.

He let out a long, deep sigh.

CHAPTER TEN

“Well? Aren’t you going to tell me?” Naoki said with a tinge of annoyance in his voice.

“Let me start by saying: you’re not doing this for you. You’re doing this for the greater good.” Uncle says.

“Doing what?”

“I’m getting to that,” he starts, “As you know, I’ve been called back to my position in the military.” He paused, waiting to see if Naoki was getting every detail.

Naoki hesitantly nodded, worrying about the things he might be about to say.

“And this time, the invasion is *far* larger. *Far* more dangerous. Creatures from the deep have attacked landlocked places, not just on the coastlines.”

Even more questions flooded his mind.

“Why hasn’t the public heard about any of this?” Naoki quietly asked, worried for an answer.

“Well, because they’d all freak out, and try to go to Mars or something stupid like that. Back to the subject at hand: The anomalies –so we’ve begun to

call them- possess the capability to manipulate the weather based on their emotions-”

That explains a lot. No wonder that rain thing on the highway happened.

“-We’ve managed to isolate the affected areas of the globe from the outside world. Entire countries are infested with oceanic parasites...” Uncle paused, looking as if he was too afraid to continue, “in lust for human blood.”

A look of pure horror appeared on Naoki’s face. All of the hair around his body stood on end. Nothing could’ve prepared him for this.

Naoki slowly started connecting the dots. Realizing the enormity of the situation, he was brought back to reality.

“Co... Countries..?” he asked, his face pure white with terror.

Uncle took in a deep inhale before speaking again.

“Yes Naoki. I know, this is all hard to understand now, but I’ve got to keep explaining what’s going on.” He softens his expression, with a warm look of compassion he says, “Is that alright?”

Naoki gave a slow, uncertain nod.

“The entire world is under isolation. And all cross-continent communication is strictly prohibited. What’s worse about this time, is we’re being attacked not on just the coasts, but highly populated areas. 100 foot long serpentine creatures have burst up from the ground, with no sign at all, killing millions of people, laying their cursed eggs, and implanting their parasites within people’s bodies.” Uncle says with an intense grimace.

At this point, Naoki’s mouth was slightly ajar, and tears were streaming down his face. Uncle leaned forward to hug Naoki, in an attempt to calm him.

It wasn’t working.

“But what is good,” Uncle starts again, pulling away from Naoki, “is that the government and military have created radio wave powered devices to track where said creatures are. We can track their waves from thousands of feet below the surface. Just by that invention alone we’ve already saved an estimate of 300 million lives...” he trails off. “But our head engineer was infected...”

The room is filled with an overwhelming silence. Naoki’s head is racing with horrified thoughts. *Why hasn’t the public been told about this? Why is this happening? Are we going to be okay? Why now..?*

He begins to break down again. His throat began closing in on itself. His whole body began to shudder.

Breaking the silence, Uncle says, “And Naoki, your role in all of this is extremely important.”

“My... role?” Naoki looks back up, with a look of pure confusion plastered on his face.

“Yes, Naoki. *Your* role.”

He sits in an uncomfortable silence. Sometimes interrupted by the sobs of his crying.

“What.. is my role?” he asks.

“Well Naoki, because of your background in high pressure engineering, you've been chosen to help with these tracking devices. I know it might seem stupid –all of the secrecy– but I promise you it will all come together.” Uncle says with complete seriousness.

“Pfft, you can't be serious! I'm only 28, why choose me?” Naoki chuckles.

He stares at Uncle, trying to look for an answer behind his deep brown eyes.

“Because...” Uncle interrupts, “Because you’re the only one I trust. I know no other engineer as dedicated to their work as you, and I know you can take it.”

Naoki took a long time to process what’s going on. He lied there, in the hospital bed, without having any idea of what to do.

He broke the silence, “Do I have a choice?”

Uncle looked at Naoki with a warm smile, which then turned into a frown of confusion.

“I... Naoki, if you don’t do this, we have no one else for the job. I know this must be very scary and difficult, but if you say no, there’s no telling what could happen.” He ended with a stone face.

Why don’t you have anyone else? I thought this was a military operation! Don’t they have people for the job? Naoki ponders. After what seemed like an eternity, he mustered up the courage to say something.

“Well at least you coul-”

The door to the room burst open with a woman dressed in black, looking as if she’d just run a marathon.

Both Uncle and Naoki looked at the door, Uncle immediately started getting up.

In between breaths, she said, “Agent Yuki! We need you in room 7-b02. It’s an emergency!”

“Understood.”

The woman rushed out of the room as soon as she entered, letting the door slam behind her.

Naoki looked worriedly at Uncle.

As Uncle hurriedly stands up, moving quickly for the door, he says, “Naoki, I’ll give you time. But I want you to think about the immensity the power of your decision holds. Don’t be stupid.”

Before anything else could be said, Uncle too, rushed out the door.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Naoki sat there; With IV's in his arms, and dressed in a hospital gown.

He had no idea what to think. He had no idea what to do. He had no idea what to believe. He had no idea.

As Naoki thought deeper into the situation at hand, he realized the enormity of it. The choice he was given could reshape the very fabric of this world.

Now that he thought about it, he never found out why he was in this hospital room.

Naoki sighs, sinking his head low into his hands.

“Why me..?” He paused, taking in a long, deep breath, “In what world would they choose me? What experience do I have?!” he began to escalate, “Aren't there other people in this world who work in my field?”

Tears begin to fill up Naoki's eyes. With his head still in his hands, he began to sob. “Why...” he says in between choked sobs, “me..?”

Then the realization hit him: *Wait...*

'This world.' Didn't Uncle say something about... cross country communication? He pondered a moment. He did, didn't he...

"all cross-continent communication is strictly prohibited."

Is that why?

Do they not have anyone else because they can't find anyone else..?

What should I do...

Naoki felt his soul sink deeply into the bed, burdened by the confusion. His body feels heavier than it ever has before.

He let out a deep sigh; a sigh so deep, it was laden with the weight of the world.

Naoki finally worked up the courage to lift his head from his hands. Taking a look around the room, he could tell that it was quite modern, with new countertops, and decor. There were some cheesy posters hung upon the wall, as well as a few fake plants.

After absorbing information, Naoki notices something on the desk opposite him. A phone.

Against The Deep

“Thank god,” Naoki slips under his breath.

He sat up quickly, pulling the scratchy gray blanket off of him, and ripping his IV’s from his arm. He hurriedly climbed over the front of the bed, and leaned forward to reach the desk.

Almost falling off the bed into the desk, Naoki grabs the phone and dials Victor’s number.

Victor can help me... He always has the best insight on things like this. He thinks as he wipes the remaining tears off his face.

Hearing the rings go by, Naoki worries. After the fourth ring, someone *finally* answers.

“Hello, this is Victor Seungho speaking?”

Feeling his heart skip a beat, Naoki hurriedly responds.

“Victor? It’s Naoki,” he says, coming out more worried than he intended.

“Oh my god, Naoki, are you okay? Do I need to come get you?”

“No, no. It’s okay... I think. I think I’m fine-”

“What do you mean, ‘you think’?” Victor cuts off Naoki.

“I- I’m okay. But I need your opinion on something...” waiting for a response, but not getting one, Naoki continues, “Okay... this might be a little hard to explain- but I’ll give you the basic gist of it. So, there’s another war-”

Victor cuts him off again, “Naoki...” in a soft, hurt voice. “They never tell us this stuff...”

Hearing the pain in Victor's voice, Naoki continues, “I know... *I know*. I didn’t know either.” he pauses, “I’m at some underground base underneath the marina, and they *need* me...”

There’s a long pause before either *dares* to speak.

Finally Victor takes a chance, speaking first, “Naoki, I don’t want you to think about me, okay? Do whatever they need you to do. This isn’t about us Naoki... you don’t need to tell me. If they need you, they need you.” He says with a tone of resignation.

A little shocked, Naoki responds, “I- I’m telling you anyway,” he takes a breath, “So, they need me to design some kind of... deep sea radio tracking device. And apparently I’m the only one they have for the job. I need your help-”

Against The Deep

“Naoki, I’ve heard enough. They need you more than I do right now. I can take care of myself... I promise. And the way you’re making it sound, they sure do need you a lot right now. Take the job. Please. For me...” Victor says, with an undertone of melancholy.

Naoki could hear the emotion in his voice. He could tell Victor was serious. He sounds as if he’s on the verge of tears.

“Okay.” Naoki finishes.

Another blaring siren fills the hospital room with an ear piercing scream of agony.

“Victor, I have to go now. I love you” Naoki yells over the sirens.

“I- I love you too, be careful. Please...”

After a moment, the dial tone plays.

Naoki defeatedly puts the phone back on the stand. Ignoring the sirens surrounding him, he cautiously walks over to the door, putting his ear up against it.

He didn’t hear much of anything. The only thing audible were those horrid sounds of the sirens screaming.

After Naoki takes his ear off the door, the sirens finally stop. *Thank god*, he breathes.

Now that he thought about it, what were those sirens for anyway? They've sounded twice since he's been here, and he hasn't even been here for more than a day.

Thinking back to what Victor had told him, Naoki once again feels the immense weight of the world throw itself onto his shoulders. He knew what he should do, but it somehow still doesn't feel right...

CHAPTER TWELVE

Naoki went back to the bed and sat on it. He had no idea where anyone was, and he didn't have the heart to go looking.

He was absolutely bored out of his mind. Naoki's eyes search around the room, looking for something to distract himself.

His eyes landed on a radio. *Perfect*, Naoki thought. He stood up, and walked over to the table with the radio. He put up the antenna, and flipped the on switch. To his surprise, the radio actually did work this far down.

He turned the dial to station 102.9. Naoki had always been a sucker for rock pop. One of his favorite songs was playing, "Twist and Shout," by The Beatles.

Turning the radio on was a stroke of genius on Naoki's part. It really did help his nerves. Somehow, a combination of the methodical sounds, and soothing feeling of John Lennon's voice let Naoki relax for the first time in a while.

He just sat, listening to music for a few hours, before eventually drifting into a calm, dreamless sleep. He only slept for around 40 minutes, but to Naoki, it was everything. He so desperately needed that sleep

after all of the pressure that's been put on him in the past 24 hours.

The only thing to wake him was a nurse, gently shaking his shoulder, giving him food and water. He didn't realize how hungry he'd been; he hadn't eaten in days probably.

Several times during the day nurses came in, offering him food and other necessities. Occasionally, Uncle would pop in, checking in on him.

Naoki still isn't 100% set on accepting the offer. But the more he thinks about it, the less freedom of choice he realizes he has. He knows it's the right thing, but he just doesn't understand *why* they chose *him*.

"Naoki," Uncle started, "We need an answer soon. We're running out of time," Uncle says.

Naoki sighs, and puts his head down.

He waits in silent for a few long moments, before facing his head back up, and abruptly saying, "I'll take it."

Uncle's face immediately turned into a look of pride. He wasn't sure if Naoki had it in him to accept the offer, but he was very proud of him for making the right choice.

Against The Deep

“We’ll get you started tomorrow. The engineering isn’t too far off from what you design on a daily basis. The only thing different is the radio signaling,” Uncle explains.

Throughout the entire conversation, Naoki’s face was stone. He knew he made the right decision, but he was still scared of what might become of it.

Uncle saw right through his thoughts.

“I understand your hesitance Naoki. I truly do. Thank you for putting the world first, I know it wasn’t easy. But I promise you it will all be worth it.” Uncle says, putting his hand on Naoki’s shoulder.

They look at each other with a mutual look of compassion, and Naoki hugs him.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The next morning, Uncle woke him up bright and early. Well at least that's what his watch told him. He couldn't tell, the only windows in this place were under the surface of the ocean, making him unable to tell what time of day it was.

Someone came in the door.

"Hello Agent Hart, I'm your new mentor. My name is Agent Princeton," A woman with a slick blond ponytail said.

"You can just call me Naoki-"

Uncle nudged him, "It's a policy here. Unfortunately," He gave the woman a funny look.

"Agent Yuki -I don't make the rules. I just enforce them," Agent Princeton said with an ingenuine smile, "Anyway, Agent Hart, we deeply appreciate you agreeing to work with us."

"You're... welcome..?" He says, as the woman guides him to a door down the hallway.

Gesturing to the door, Agent Princeton says, "This is to be your workspace. I talked to Agent Yuki about your work environment, we have all of your

preferred supplies on your desk. I'll show you around your new office."

Naoki gave a quick nod.

She opened the door with ease, holding it for Naoki to follow. He was surprised at how heavy the door was. As he looked closer at it, he notices it was titanium plated. Heavy duty.

As they walked into the room, Naoki was slightly amazed at the sight of it. The room has a workbench in the center of it, with all kinds of 3D modeling supplies. Along the walls of the room were bulletin boards with blueprints plastered all over.

"Wow," he says, in a voice of pure amazement.

Agent Princeton gestures Naoki to a group of people waiting in the office. Two men, and two women.

"This will be your team. Allow them to introduce themselves." Princeton says.

The first man steps up, "Hello. I'm Jackson Logan, I'm native to Hawaii, and I'll be the main physicist on this project." They shook hands and moved on.

The second man stepped up, "My girlfriend Rosa and I are from the Netherlands, I'll be doing most of the

mathematical work on this project. The name's Bram Morgan."

The next person to introduce themselves is a very small woman, "Hello, I'm Rosa Ina. I'm the main mechanical engineer on this project." She steps back with a small smile.

The last person on his new team introduces herself, "Hi. I'm Sariah Ayo. I'm from Kenya, I specialize in infrared signals."

After everyone finishes, Naoki shakes their hands, and thanks them. They all leave the room to let him get used to his new office. He was happy to see that he got along well with his new team.

Taking the time to explore, he walked up to his desk in the corner of the room, he noticed his favorite pack of 3b pencils, as well as the highest quality tracing paper he's ever seen. They had steel plated rulers, protractors, and even pivot squares. Naoki hasn't had the pleasure to work with this quality of supplies since school.

This office was the best thing Naoki had ever seen. Let alone the best environment he'd ever been able to work in.

The entire room was shrouded in a fluorescent blue light, for there was a giant window covering the

entirety of the wall to his left. It had taken Naoki way too long to notice it, but now that he did, he couldn't look away.

As he stared out the ocean window, he wondered how he could have possibly missed it; the window was bigger than any he's ever seen before. He was absolutely mesmerized by the sight that beheld him, it was truly breathtaking.

The window showed the beautiful blue waters of the deep. However, something was slightly off.

Naoki observes the window in silence, trying to figure it out. It took him a second, but he realized it was the fact that there wasn't one fish in sight... for some reason, this deeply disturbs Naoki. *The ocean looks so healthy in this area, so why weren't there any fish?* He thought.

Breaking his concentration, Agent Princeton asks, "I just wanted to mention some of the noises you might hear while working here. Occasionally there's quite loud noises made by some of the creatures that we study here, so look out for that. But other than that, is this office to your satisfaction? Do you like it?"

A little surprised at the question, he answers, "I- Yes, I do. Very much," with a warm smile.

“Well, “ She says with a small laugh, “I sure hope so. Agent Yuki says you’re *very* particular.”

Naoki rolls his eyes, “Of course he did.”

Just as had happened multiple times before, the dreaded alarm sounds.

Agent Princeton put her finger to a device on her ear, as if listening for something.

Then suddenly, she announces, “Agent Hart, you’re coming with me this time.”

Not giving Naoki any time to think, she grabs his arm and pulls him out of the room, and into the hallway.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

As Naoki was dragged into the hallway, panic began to set in. With clammy hands, his heart felt as if it were to beat out of his chest. He still wasn't exactly sure about what to do, but now is *not* the time to panic.

The air is still filled with the sound of sirens as Naoki is ushered into another room. Inside, seven men sat around an oval table, speaking in hushed tones. At the table, two seats were open.

"And speaking of," said the man at the head of the table, raising his voice above the rest, "this is Naoki Hart, Agent Yuki's nephew. He's our new engineer."

A few of the men nodded in acknowledgment.

"Well, Hart, you're just in time. Why don't you come in and take a seat?" one of the men suggested, gesturing towards an empty chair.

Naoki glances anxiously at Agent Princeton, he could feel his heart beat in his ears. But Princeton responds with a reassuring look, and gestures to the chair.

As Naoki sat down, each man introduced himself. They all appeared to be high-ranking government officials, which only added to Naoki's anxiety. He

wasn't sure if he'd ever felt this much pressure on himself. His body was extremely fidgety from all of the anxiety.

The sirens wailing faintly in the background certainly didn't help.

Sensing Naoki's discomfort, the man across from him said, "Oh son, there's no need to worry. Think of this as a collaboration; we want to work on some ideas with you."

Naoki appreciated the man's attempt to calm him down.

Throughout the meeting, Naoki struggled to maintain eye contact, with his anxiety overwhelming his thoughts.

"So, Agent Hart, as you've been informed, you are the *new* head engineer of our marine defense project. We're changing up tactics a bit, because our previous method of using radio signals to track the creatures... gave them our locations. I'm sure you've been told the enormity of the situation at hand, but we think you're perfect for the job," The man at the head of the table said.

Adjusting his posture, Naoki says, "I- I appreciate that... very much sir." After he says this, Naoki feels

silly. With shame, he faces his head to his lap, fidgeting with his thumbs.

The man across from him nudged Naoki's foot with his own. Naoki looked up, and adjusted his posture again. The man gave him a reassuring look. Naoki responded with a slight smile.

Continuing on in the meeting, the men explain what Naoki's expectations are for working this job.

As the men continue speaking, Naoki actually begins to feel a bit more confident in his work. He can feel his heart rate slowing to a regular beat, and his palms are a lot dryer.

The men in the room explained their plans for this project, and Naoki felt he was capable of completing those tasks.

One of the older men at the table, who Naoki thought looked a lot like Colonel Sanders, suddenly brings up, "Hart, we know Yuki told you a bit about how these machines you'll be working on operate. But we've actually begun to rethink the mechanics a bit. With the radio signals we've previously used, the beasts moved too quickly and sporadically for our bathymetric maps to track them properly."

Another man chimes in, “The movements appeared as dotted lines, sometimes completely blanking out. So we’re trying some new kinds of technology.”

They explained how instead of using radio signals to locate possible threats, they’ve resorted to infrared signals, as well as sonar sensors to track them.

For the first time in the whole meeting, Agent Princeton speaks, “Also, Agent Hart,” she continues, “We’d like to tell you that we’re also putting the idea of satellite tracking on the table.”

A few of the men nod their heads, and converse among each other.

Another man at the table mentions, “Now, we’re not going to create new satellites, we’re actually going to repurpose our government's existing satellites for the job.”

Responding to this, the man at the head of the table says, “So, we’re hoping you have the skills and experience to design such machines. We’re confident in your working ability with sonar, and infrared.” Reminding the table, including Naoki, the man says, “We know your experience is very limited with satellite technology, so we’ve hired a separate team for that. However, we’d still appreciate your input on the matter.”

Naoki lets all of this information sink in a bit before piecing together what to say, “I have extensive experience with sonar detection, and infrared tracking.” He suddenly has an idea pop into his head. He knew it was a very out there idea, realizing he could possibly humiliate himself, his hands start to sweat again, and his heart pounds. But he decides to ask anyway. He pauses for a moment before continuing, “Is... Is it possible to track the beings individually? Suppose... chipping them for example.”

More discussion develops among the table.

Naoki wasn't sure what to expect from this suggestion, but he didn't think they'd actually consider it. He suddenly feels more confidence filling his body.

“Y'know Hart, I don't think anyone's brought that up yet. It's crazy for sure, but it just might work.” Agent Princeton whispers.

As the seconds of waiting turn into minutes, Naoki feels his mouth begin to dry, worrying of what he might hear next. His stomach churns with anticipation, until he hears this.

“We'll consider looking into it.”

As the color returns to his face, and he begins to feel more calm, he gives a long, deep sigh. Followed by a quick, "Thank you sir."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

After the meeting concluded, Naoki began some brainstorming.

He racked his brain for all possible ways to design this machine efficiently. Sitting at his new workbench, he begins jotting down all of the factors that come to mind.

- 1.) How far will the waves emit
- 2.) Which areas devices will be stationed
- 3.) Active, passive, or side-scan sonar
- 4.) How much power one of these devices will use up
- 5.) Detection range for infrared signaling
- 6.) Ensure waterproofing

In other words, Naoki had a lot on his mind.

He ended up writing down about 50 things on this list. Even after he finished this, he was still worried that something might go wrong... but he still felt confidence in his work.

Accounting for the factors, he began listing the proper materials, environmental changes, and conditions for his machines. He'd gathered enough information from his higher ups about where his devices would be stationed, and worked these factors into his designs. Even if they were secretive about the exact whereabouts.

Every once in a while, when doing his work, he would hear loud moans -cries even- coming from his oceanic window. They were spine shivering, blood freezing. He could feel the vibrations from the noises throughout every inch of his body. Every time he heard one, all of the hairs along his body would stand on end, and Naoki felt increasingly less safe as the days went on.

He could never figure out what made these sounds, but he had some sort of clue.

Every now and then, Yuki would allow him to take phone calls. Victor didn't know where he was, or what exactly he was doing, but he felt much better after Naoki had called him on his weekly time.

Naoki felt horrible that Victor was all alone, with nowhere to go, except to stay in their house. He missed Victor so much. He longed to go back. But Naoki knew his work was important, and he's sacrificing himself for the greater good.

In the following weeks, Naoki and his team would continue making great progress. Although working in such an environment made it difficult at times.

His team worked wonderfully together, and everyone was very productive. They'd spent hours upon hours creating sketches, calculating equations, and thinking through environmental changes in

order for this machine to be successful. And after many weeks... it did.

As the same men from Naoki's first meeting gathered at the same table, he grew increasingly more anxious. As he'd been working in this facility, he'd grown the habit of nail biting. It was his way to deal with all of the stress.

His nails were half the length they used to be. And he'd even have infected hangnails at times. Especially in situations like this, where he had more pressure on him than normal.

While the same seven men were sitting at the table, there were many others getting ready to observe his final blueprints. Naoki's goal of this meeting was to begin building these machines

The first person to speak was Officer Murphy. Starting with, "Alright everyone, quiet down. The contents of this meeting are being presented by Agent Hart, and the research team for the Marine Defense Project."

Naoki's heart raced in his chest. He wasn't sure if it was because he was nervous, or because he was excited to present. His mouth was dry, and he could feel his nerves buzzing through his body, desperately wanting out.

He took a few deep breaths as a desperate attempt to calm himself.

Naoki took one final look at his colleagues around, remembering how passionate they all were about this project, and how hard they all worked. He finally convinced himself that they were ready. Naoki began his presentation, "First of all, I want to thank everyone who helped me with this project. You've been such a huge help, and we cannot thank you enough. Now, as you may know," Naoki continues, "This project has been no easy task. We've been through lots of struggles, and have had to do a full 180 multiple times..."

As he continues his presentation, he and his team's notes appear on the projector. They are filled with numerical graphs, calculations, and maps to prove the team's work. He and his team switched presenting throughout the presentation, speaking on the topics they were most familiar with.

As they observed, the people watching them begin writing things down in their notepads.

And as he kept speaking, the nervousness slowly began to back down. He spoke more confidently, and with more pride than ever before.

The entire room could tell how intricate and scientific this project truly was.

“As you can see by this demonstration,” Naoki says, putting a remote control toy dinosaur on the table with a sonar detector, “It doesn’t matter which angle the entity is coming from.” The toy walks around the sensor, and the projector shows what the sensor sees.

“By using different frequencies, we can see where these objects are positioned.”

“But how do you know what the device is tracking is a sea beast?” One of the men asked.

Naoki looks to Ayo, and she steps up with confidence.

“Well sir, we actually have multiple kinds of tracking with our machines. We also use infrared heat sensing technology.” she explains.

No one responded. The room was unsettlingly silent. Naoki’s breathing seemed to stop. Until someone spoke again.

Beginning to panic, he looked at one of the men at the table. He realized the man looked quite intrigued, “Alright, you may continue.”

Ayo steps back with a smile, and Naoki takes the lead again. “And as you can see with this model,” he says, taking the previous device off the table, and

replacing it with another, “Here, we have a rat, his name is Mr. McCarthy,” Naoki says, showing off the rat. The crowd let out a few chuckles. Naoki puts the rat on the table, and continues, “As Mr. McCarthy moves around, the infrared tracking can tell that it is a living creature.” One of Naoki’s team members switches the observer’s attention back to the projector screen. On it, you can very well tell that the red object is a rat. “And here,” Naoki continues, pointing to the projector, “Is a representation of what Mr. McCarthy looks like, just by using heat sensing technology.”

The atmosphere in the room changes from being skeptical, to pure interest. The men in the room suddenly appear to be more intrigued, and are beginning to believe that this might just work.

But just as everything seemed to be finally working out, the room fillsd with the piercing sound of a siren. All of the men at the table immidiately stand up, ad leave. Officer Murphy says to Naoki’s team, “We can finish this later, right now, we have an emergency.”

He slammed the door shut.

After what felt like hours, the sirens stop.

Naoki let out a short, deep sigh. He throws his paper on the ground and exclaimed, “Why does this always

happen?! We never seem to finish anything without that stupid siren going off!"

He slumps into one of the chairs, and his head sinks into his hands. Naoki was so filled with anger. His teeth were tightly clamped together, and his entire body was tense.

His team looked at each other awkwardly. Not a word slipped out of their mouths. The room is once filled with an uncomfortable silence.

Until one of the men slowly approaches Naoki, and politely says, "Excuse me, Agent Hart?" Naoki lifts his head up, and looks at him.

"I've never seen you so upset. But I just wanted to tell you what those sirens are for. But I agree, they are very intrusive sometimes." Naoki looks at him with a worried face.

"I- I'm sorry I didn't mean-"

"It's fine. We technically aren't supposed to tell you," Logan says. Looking at the group for reassurance, "But the only time those sirens ever go off is when a new leviathan emerges..."

"A new one?" Naoki asks slowly, obviously very confused.

Ayo chimes in, “New as in... Ones we haven’t discovered yet. So...” She trails off.

Naoki looks around with confusion, “What do you mean ‘Haven’t discovered?’” He pauses for a moment before saying, “What’s really going on here? Lay it on me. Just... don’t leave me in the dark.”

“Well-” Just as Logan was about to start speaking, the room was filled with a deafening crash. The sound reverberated throughout the entire room

All of the anger Naoki previously felt turned into fear.

The group looked at each other in horror, not daring to make another move. They each stood there, bracing themselves for something more to come... but it never did.

They stood like that for a few minutes, too terrified to speak. Standing in the horror, they were surprised to hear Ina speak. She’s definitely the shyest of their group, Naoki can count on one hand how many times he’s heard her talk. “What... was that?”

“Like hell if we know.” Morgan blurts in anger.

Trying to calm the situation, Ayo says, “Guys! Stop. We don’t know what that was, but if we were in any danger, we’d know...” she paused, “Right?”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

“But- what if we are in danger?!” Ina exclaims.

Visibly growing more frustrated, Logan says, “I don’t think we’re in any danger. If we *were* it, would’ve been told to us over the loudspeak-”

A sudden announcement interrupts Logan:

Attention all personnel: This is not a drill. Everyone remain in your position until further notice. There is no breach, we are all currently safe. Do not panic. This is not a drill.

As Naoki listens, he wonders what could possibly be happening now. The tone in the room shifts, making Naoki worry even more.

“Told you.” Logan utters.

The jitteriness in Naoki’s body kept growing and growing, “B- Breach?” He worriedly asks.

“In the windows. If they broke in some way.” Ayo explains.

Logan juts in, “Which is highly unlikely,” he reassures Naoki, noticing his nerve, “Because the windows are 4 inches thick of laminated glass. It’d be pretty difficult to break that. Trust me.”

“But there’s *always* a chance.” Morgan mutters.

Ina gives him a chilling look, and he backs off.

Well that conversation certainly didn’t make Naoki feel any better. All of his questions still went unanswered.

“Why don’t we just check it out?” Logan proposes.

Ayo shoots back, “What are you, crazy!?! What if something is out there?”

Logan jokingly rolls his eyes, and says, “You guys don’t have to come, but I’m going. Anyone who wants to come can.”

Naoki looks around the room, to see if anyone was brave enough to go.

Just then, more moaning cries came out of nowhere. Naoki was scared out of his mind. His entire body was visibly shaking. “I’ll go.”

Morgan scoffs, and says, “Auf Wiedersehen! Enjoy yourselves, but I’m staying here. Can’t leave Mr. McCarthy all alone.” He looks at the rat, and gives his head a little pat. Ina gagged at the sight of it.

“Well, best be leaving now.” Logan said.

Naoki hurriedly followed him, "I'm right behind you."

Logan opened the door, and held it open for Naoki. As they walked out, the first thing they noticed was a *putrid* smell. It was very similar to the smell that Naoki had smelled that day on the highway.

Naoki shuddered at the thought of it.

Logan put his hand around his nose and mouth, "Agh! What is that?!"

"I think it might be... one of the creatures." Naoki said.

Logan turned to face Naoki, "How would you know what that smells like? I've been here for years, and I don't even know."

"I'm not sure..." Naoki quietly said, walking behind him.

As they made their way closer to the root of the stench, Logan held his arm out beside him, "Wait."

Naoki stopped in his tracks, and tried to look over Logan's head. The biggest window in the facility is in the main room, and that's where they had arrived. Except, instead of seeing the usually crystal clear window, he saw a giant crack that resembled a bullet hole.

“I think we found it.” Naoki whispered.

The crack had a clean cut hole in the center, which had already been patched up by other personnel. It still leaked a little though. But what was weird about this, was the giant... thing, lying in the center of the facility. Its smell was absolutely *rancid*, and it looked disgusting. Naoki thought the thing was around the size of three school buses... His teeth chattered, and the all of the hair covering his body stood on end realizing that something like this just *lurks* in our oceans

Naoki was horrifyingly amazed at the size of it.

The thing reeked of rot and decay. But it was still drenched, making them believe it had just died recently. There were impossibly long fins all along its spine, and sides. Its leathery, slime covered skin was covered with bioluminescent markings, which Naoki was surprised to see still glowed.

Averting his gaze to the front of the creature, he noticed its snout was covered with a viscous black liquid, and it was covered in shards of glass.

Logan and Naoki had just only noticed the swarm of researchers sitting around the being. They were taking vials of its slime, skin samples, and trying to find out anything they could.

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Naoki moved next to Logan. They both stood in fear, eyes wide, with shaking limbs. They had a mutual understanding of what had just happened.

It was pretty obvious that the thing was dead, but the scientists still kept trying to find a heartbeat.

“Naoki? What are you doing here!?” A voice quietly yelled.

Both of the men turned around, and saw Yuki standing behind them.

Naoki immediately felt ashamed, his face was hot. He adjusted his posture, and bowed at him.

But as soon as he wanted to apologize, the men heard all of the researchers simultaneously gasp.

Logan turned around, but Naoki remained looking at Yuki.

He looked into his uncle's eyes, but he saw no anger. Naoki was relieved at this, and slouched back into his normal posture.

He saw his uncle's eyes widen with a grave face of fear, just before Logan tapped his arm, urging him to turn around. But by the look he saw on his uncle's face, he didn't exactly want to.

“Naoki-” Yuki said. He pointed behind Naoki, and said, “Look...”

Taking in a deep breath, Naoki reluctantly turned around.

And the sight that beheld him was horrific.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

For a moment, everything was silent.

The scientist's were still surrounding the creature, but this time, they all stood in horror.

The scene that was laid in front of them was horrifically gruesome. The creature had been cut open... maybe to see what was inside, but no one was ready for what it was.

The contents inside the beast were horrifying. What should've been the same creature, lying in the center of the facility, was now a giant pile of mush.

The scientists were covered in pink goop. And the same black liquid that covered the mouth exploded out of the creature. The scene was truly out of a horror movie.

"I..." Logan started, "They were just cutting it open- and now this-"

Yuki pushed aside Logan and Naoki to go investigate.

As he neared the scene, the scent, growing even more overwhelming, assaulted his nose. His eyes teared up, and he gagged from the smell alone. Yuki put his shirt over his nose, and continued on.

Naoki and Logan watched in horror. The creature must've lost gallons of black... fluid.

“So... They just... cut it open?” Naoki hesitantly asked.

Logan thought for a moment, “And it burst.”

In the split of a second, the dark liquid began to bubble. It looked as if it were violently boiling.

The scientists who were covered in it started frantically trying to get it off. They tried squeegeeing it off with their hands, but to no avail. They then averted to taking their lab coats off entirely.

As the 20+ researchers threw their coats off, they started shriveling up, and turned into some kind of crumbly substance.

Before they could witness anything else, Logan grabbed Naoki's arm, and they shared an understanding look.

They bolted back to the room they were previously in, their boots made quick pattering on the cold tile floor.

As they entered the room, their team must've noticed the looks on their faces.

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“Oh my lord, what in the hell happened?!” Morgan yelled, “Are you two okay? I told you not to go!”

Ina rolled her eyes, and ran to help them.

Logan and Naoki slowly walked into the room. The looks on their faces were unmistakable.

“Oh... my,” Ayo whispered, “Whatever happened must’ve been pretty bad.” She said as she looked at Morgan.

Ina got up to them, and began calming them down.

She tried her best, anyway.

Naoki and Logan began to describe the scene they witnessed. Every gruesome detail.

Ina tried her best not to gag. Morgan just absorbed the information. And Ayo understood everything.

“Do you...” Ina started, in her usual quiet voice, “Do you think that was the leviathan they discovered? I mean, it was pretty coincidental, was it not?”

Logan blankly stared into the room. Every emotion in his mind was numb; completely blank, “No, it couldn’t have been,” he stood up, “Our facility for discovering new leviathans is in the Mariana trench.

And that's like 4,000 miles away- It'd be impossible for it to be the same one."

"He's got a point." Morgan utters in Ina's direction.

Ina quickly turns to Morgan, "Would you be quiet!?"

Morgan chuckled a bit.

Just then, a new announcement appeared overhead:
Attention all personnel, an undocumented leviathan has been discovered for the first time in our facility. Do not panic, it is no longer alive. Stay in your current position, however continue work as usual.

The group looked at each other with confusion, which then turned into fear.

The ginormous beast that Naoki and Logan had seen was *undocumented*? How was that even possible?

No one had the courage to speak, however Mr. McCarthy was squeaking just fine. Morgan picked the rat up, and put him on his shoulder. Ina slapped his arm, signaling him to be serious.

Suddenly, a knock appeared at the door. The group continued looking at each other. Until Naoki stood up, and went to answer it.

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As he got closer to the door, his heart beat once again decided to increase. Naoki ignored it however.

Another knock sounded, and Naoki opened the door. It was the head of the meeting, Officer Murphy.

“Naoki, there’s no time to speak, give us all of your team’s notes immediately. We’re going to start construction at once.” He said.

Naoki quickly nodded, and rushed over to the projector, and grabbed the papers. He immediately handed them over to Murphy, and he left.

After Naoki gave the notes to Murphy, he told his group what happened, “Well, I guess our project was a success. They’re going ahead with the building!”

Ayo looked at him, “Well... yeah that’s great. But shouldn’t we be more worried about the fact that there’s a giant hole in our facility!?”

Logan snapped back, “It’s patched up! But it’s okay, our hard work paid off. They liked our ideas. They’re going through with them.”

The group seemed lost in thought. They all thought differently about the situation.

Some were happy, some were scared. But they all knew that their work was worth it.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

A few weeks after the tracking devices had been given the go ahead for assembly, everything seemed to lighten up a bit.

There were many fewer sirens, and weird moans occurring, making the facility feel all the more safe. And *substantially* less invasions above ground occurred.

Now that they've resorted to using different kinds of signals, cross continental communication is possible again. The world was no longer isolated.

All thanks to the work of Naoki and his crew.

The tests for the creature that crashed into the window have come back... and it wasn't good.

Almost all of the substance collected contained human DNA... suggesting that this particular creature was one of the invaders that killed thousands of humans.

There was nothing they could do about it now. The only thing they could do now is try to prevent something like that from happening again.

They've conducted research on many *smaller* specimens before, but nothing that big. The

accumulative length of the creature was around 150 feet, unlike anything they'd ever seen.

The creature had given the scientists many new specimens, it turned out, the thing was pregnant. This gave many more opportunities to conduct more research on these beings.

So much research had been conducted, in fact, that they've come up with multiple cures for the parasitic infections transferred from the creatures to humans.

Everything seemed to be going fairly well, but there was still one problem.

They still had no idea how to find a way to stop the creatures. But because of that, a new project was created.

Not surprisingly, Naoki's team was handed the new project.

They'd spent weeks figuring out ways to possibly stop the beings. Obviously, the team weren't the most educated on that topic, but they were the only ones who *could* do it.

"What makes them think *we* are able to crack this? Were engineers... not biologists." Ayo said.

Naoki sighed, “Well, I asked Yuki, ‘Hey why’d they pick us? We don’t do this sort of thing.’ and he said this facility is so understaffed, there’s no one else to do it. All of the people who could, are doing research on the thing itself.”

“I guess that explains it then.” Morgan butted in, as per usual.

Logan thought for a long moment, “What can we do? Seriously, I have no idea. We’ve been on this for weeks. We don’t have any ideas. What the hell are we supposed to do?” He mutters.

“Hey... why don’t we just go with my idea? We’ve no other ideas. And we’re running out of time. These creatures can do a lot of harm, and you never know what’s next.” Ina proposes.

Everyone had forgotten about Ina’s idea. They’d all thought it was stupid at the time, but they have nothing else.

The idea was a bit out there.

Ina was the one who first introduced it. Everyone agreed it was their best bet. They had nothing else to work for.

For some context: The other research teams -working on cures and such- have aged the embryos

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from the original creature, and conducted studies on them. They'd spent thousands of hours seeing what affects them, and what they've found is that they're weak to heat. Their bodies crumble into some kind of chunky, dry substance.

They noticed that when one of the creatures is exposed to an excessive amount of heat, their organs begin to fail. The exact temperature at which this happens is according to the creature, but they've come up with an average temperature to go off of. All creatures' bodies fail at the temperature of 190° fahrenheit.

The researchers *also* found out that the creatures are actually blind and deaf, they attack solely on feeling waves -specifically radio waves. Something about the specific frequency attracted them. No one really knows why, but they do.

Ina's plan was simple: Disable all radio usage in the world, lure all creatures to a specific spot using the highest frequency radio waves possible, kill them all somehow with heat.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The group decided that they had no other option. This was it. This was their answer.

The military already had many vessels that they could attach some kind of “heat producer” to. So that gives them *one* element to their plan.

The next few are a bit harder to find.

The first idea came from Ayo, “What if we made some kind of sous vide?”

“No, that would be insane,” Naoki admits, “How about...” He trailed off in thought.

Logan utters, “We could use some kind of explosion..?”

The group shake their heads.

“I know they’re quite new, but we’ve used lasers in the past,” Morgan brings up, “Could we make one high powered enough to heat up say... a 1 sq mile area?”

Ina thinks for a bit, before answering, “I mean, I suppose we could. I’ve worked with lasers that can melt iron doors, I’m sure there’s some way to do it.”

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Everyone thought about it for a while. Every other option they've come up with was a dud. Maybe a high powered laser was the way to go.

It made more sense than an explosion.

And so they set off, doing extensive research, tests, and experiments.

So extensive, in fact, that Mr. McCarthy couldn't have free range of the lab anymore. Morgan was very against it, but he had to stay in a cage from now on. Ina, however, was thrilled.

Many *many* tests, over weeks and weeks of work, failed. Nothing was working. The team was exhausted out of ideas.

But one day, something did manage to work.

Instead of using electricity to create the laser, they decided to try something different.

They chose to use a new kind of semiconductor; the diode. By using the diode, they were successfully able to harness the correct amount of energy to heat the area they chose.

The lasers were so incredibly powerful, that they were able to heat a 1 sq mile of water to 200.

fahrenheit within one minute, which was something the world had never seen before.

They presented their findings to the same team, and the presentation was a success.

Within weeks, 9 lasers were constructed, with the ability to attach to the bottom of the ships.

They did a few test runs in the area they selected, around 20 miles off the coast of Honolulu. They put the ships into a square formation with three ships on each side, and one in the center.

The trials went just as planned. It was perfect.

CHAPTER TWENTY

The end was near. It was almost over. We've almost won.

As the military began gathering the required materials for the operation. Everything was set up.

After years of the world being in agony by these terrible beasts, we've finally created a way out.

For the first time in two years, Naoki was able to go back to the surface. He and his team helped get everything set up, and everything went according to plan.

As the ships got into position, Naoki, his team, and Uncle Yuki were stationed at a radar system in Honolulu. They had contact with the captains, and teams.

The government had communicated with many countries around the world to stop their use of radio waves for the time being.

On the center ship, there was a 50 foot high radio tower, ready to emit the most powerful signal these creatures had ever heard.

Once everything was set up, and in position, Uncle Yuki gave the ship the go ahead to turn on the signal.

All surrounding areas with civilians have taken shelter, and know what to expect.

After more than 35 years studying these creatures, learning their abilities, tracking their behavior, and sacrificing his life for these beasts, Yuki Seungho finally saw that the end was near. He'd waited so long for the world to turn back to normal. He'd waited so long for these disgusting beasts to finally get what they deserve.

Using the tracking devices Naoki and his team constructed, Captain Perceval, the leader of the fleet of ships, informed Naoki that the creatures were nearing.

Looking to his Uncle, the man that he'd always admired for everything he's ever done, the man who took him in when he had nothing else, the father that he never had, Naoki grabbed Yuki's hand, and said, "It's almost over," tears welling in their eyes, "It's finally almost over..."

Yuki grabbed everyone in for a group hug. Even Mr. McCarthy, Morgan convinced Yuki to let him into the radar room. The once work partners, now family, joined together by the horrors of this world, embraced each other with a love no one in this world had ever seen.

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“Y’know, Etha- I mean *Morgan*, that rat is kind of growing on me.” Ina said with a big silly smile.

Morgan grabbed her hand, and said, “I knew he would.”

An announcement came from the speaker in the radar room, *Yuki*, *every creature is within the borders of our formation, tell us when.* Captain Perceval said.

Yuki grabbed his microphone in his hand, he had been waiting for this moment for 35 years... it was almost time to end these creatures. To bring back the world to its previous self. “On my count...” he started.

“3...”

“2...”

“1...”

Just then, the entire facility began to shake. But instead of freaking out, the group was filled with excitement and anticipation.

All they had to do was wait.

One minute doesn’t seem like much to the average person, but to them, it felt like an eternity.

Everyone had their eye glued to their watches;
counting down the seconds.

So close...

Just then, they began to see *ginormous* splashing
coming from the formation.

The splashes were so humongous, that they could
see waves starting to form outside the window of
the radar room.

*Yuki, our boats are rocking quite a bit... Capsizing is
possible,* Captain Perceval said.

“Just hold it out! We have anchors down, you should
be okay, just a little longer!” Yuki pleaded.

Aye.

Everything was silent.

No one dared to speak.

Pools of sweat formed on everyones body. The
moment has come. Their work is almost paid off.

“Perceval, any news on the beasts?” Yuki interrupts.

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Well... all we can see right now is some weird chunks of... something floating to the surface. It's crumbly... and weird.

Yuki looked at everyone before saying.

“That’s exactly what we wanted to hear.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Miner is a young girl with a passion for reading. Her whole life, she's held a book in hand. She has always wondered what it would be like to write her own book, and now she presents to you *Against the Deep*, her first ever novel. Emily has always loved the science fiction genre, and she hopes you do too. She has many inspirations for this novel, including *Pacific Rim*, the games *Subnautica*, and *Iron Lung*, as well as many books written by *Junji Ito*. Emily wants to pay homage to all of the ideas that these creations have given her. She is extremely excited to have shared this book with you, and hopes you've enjoyed it.

