

I dive into the ocean, my wings propelling me towards my goal. Deeper and deeper I go, until I reach a silvery, flowing cloud of tiny fish, my beak snapping at the sardines as I enter the school of them. There is confusion everywhere, it's hard to determine whether the silvery shimmering is water flowing or the fishes. Yet, there is something wrong, the other penguins in my group are not here, and I feel a deep, ominous pang in my gut.

Suddenly, the fish are scattering, and when I look down I see it, a shadow of immense size. I wonder if it is orcas hunting me, but no, this is different. The shape gets bigger and bigger, impossibly so, moving up towards me.

I frantically try to swim away, my wings desperately pumping, but it is no use and I cannot move in the right direction, even though the surface seems like a straight shot upwards. A big, wide jaw opens in front of me, rows and rows of teeth surrounding me. I simply feel dread and fear as the reality sinks in that I will not escape this horror.

I gasp and sit up in my bed, awoken by this nightmare of the deep yet again. I look over at the clock, 4:30 am. "Jesus, this dream again? I need to stop watching those documentaries before I go to sleep..." I grumble as my hand reaches for the lamp knob, switching it on.

"I guess I better get to the fish farm anyway, they are not going to collect themselves." As the light dimly illuminates my room, my picture frames come into view...South African beaches, Port Elizabeth, my old job at the fishery, my wife and I caught in an intimate moment of preening...

I shake it off. No time for getting sentimental. She is not here and she never will be, my job in Africa is gone, done for. Everyday I must face that it is time for moving on. This fact and my nightmare haunts me as I slowly get out of bed, and get into the bathroom to start my day.

The aquaculture plant is on the outskirts of Vancouver, kept inside an immense warehouse type facility with the latest technology in temperature control. Even so, it is difficult to maintain such a facility in the colder parts of Canada, so it is here that a good portion of Canada gets their fish from. It was a rather fortunate business venture; after it became evident that eating fish from a fishery was still like eating lead paint chips, even after clean up efforts of the nearby ocean.

I was proud to work for such an important facility it was one of the biggest of its kind, and the pay was decent, necessary for a fish eating bird like myself. I even tend to get my own stock from work. However, the work comes with its own annoyances, namely, the people I have to work with. Morton, the pit bull immigrant from America is nice enough, and we have become what most would call friends, but I can't deny he annoys the shit out of me on the daily.

I take one last drag on my cigarette through my beak as I sit in my car and mentally brace myself. Surely that hyper tail wagging fuck was waiting for me inside, eager to start my morning with a barrage of obnoxious behavior. He always means well, but as I stepped out of the car and walked inside I knew I was going to be having another day that left me drained.

I hoped he would buy me a beer when it was all over or better yet, have some of what they call "the dank" marijuana he was willing to part with. I had gotten into it after moving to Canada, it really dulled the pain of the separation from my wife, and everything else going on that bothered me on the daily. Plus, I have found no better solution for the pain this work leaves my muscles in.

“Ey' Jackass penguin!” Morton yells in my direction as I approach the station for clocking in, “I have told you Mort, that is a slur from the Apartheid time where I come from. Call me Mak if you must.” I sigh, exasperated, and the rowdy American pit bull just slaps me on the back heartily as I come up next to him.

“Aw come on, I ain't gonna git all up in your beak if ya wanna give me a little bite back! It's all in good fun Mak.” I glare at him, today I am in no mood for this dog's antics, “Last time I called you bloodmouth in jest, I got snapped at as if you wanted to eat me.” “Hey man, you know I was just-” an impressive noise interrupted the real “jackass” before he could continue.

“HEY YOU FUCKIN' SLACKERS, CLOCK IN!” My feathers ruffle in fear as I hear that booming voice coming from behind. Our boss stomps next to us, one of the biggest bulls I'd ever seen in my life frankly, I still wasn't used to his immense size; the bull towered over my relatively short stature in an intimidating way. “I don't give a shit about your dysfunctions today all right jackasses, and yes, Makalo, I know, slur and all that. Just fuckin' get to it, we've got a big haul today with the sardines and we need to get em' shipped to the packaging plant. GO! GIT!”

I have no more words, I clock in silently without looking at the man as he stomps off; probably to go yell at some of the fresh meat botching a job at a collection pool. “Jesus, that guy is a prick, I always thought Canadians were supposed to be nice... but I suppose he got a point, we ought to git to work as it were. Anyway, my point was last time you just had the wrong timing Mak. I was in a bad mood.”

I glared in his direction before beginning to walk off to the assigned collection pool. “What?! Come on Mak, don't be like this.” “Perhaps I am in no mood, we should get to work.” I gruffly remark, at that he finally falls silent and goes to clock in, leaving me alone. Thank God, today is going to be hard enough what with all the matured fish and the two new guys.

As I predicted, the day was immensely difficult. There is a lot of stock to move to processing, the collection is easy enough after a few training sessions, the more difficult part was getting all those crates of fish from point A to point B.

Point B being the processing department of the facility, where all the fish has to be properly sorted to the right type of processing depending on size, and then shipped to the packaging facility. By the end of the day, I was beat. It is a lot of work since the employees are relatively sparse for cost cutting purposes. Everyone tends to have two, or three, or even four jobs regardless of actual title.

As I walk out to my car, I hear a familiar voice, “Ey' Jackass! It's payday, we're going out tonight! Who's driving?” I look toward the friendly dog bounding my way, his happy demeanor so infectious I don't bother to correct the slur this time, “Are you sure your wife will be ok with this Mort? I do not want to be seen as the responsible party for your antics again.”

Morton just waves me off, “Hey man its cool, I talked to her after I clocked out, we'll just have a couple'a drinks and she even said you can come over if you want.” I cannot really say no to that face, I beckon him to get into the car and we are off to downtown Vancouver to find a decent bar. I had just the right one in mind, located in Chinatown where all the avian immigrants flock to.

As we finally settle down in the bar with our drinks, the real talk starts. “Hey, Mak, I'm sorry if that jackass shit bothers you man. You just don't really talk about the apartheid stuff. I mean, I grew up in a rough neighborhood, my own kind shooting themselves up sometimes, but I can't imagine that kind of

blatant systematic hate.”

I sigh, which is a reaction that comes as natural to me as the rest of my brooding nature, “Mort I understand. It is hard to imagine what my family and I went through. If you must know, we were separated out with the rest of the carnivores because we primarily eat fish, except that we were a minority even to them, being penguins and all. We lived in fear not just from herbivore abuses, but from carnivores that felt the need to have someone to take their frustrations out on.” I paused. I could see the heavy look on Morton's face, perhaps the nature of such a slur beginning to sink into his heart.

I continue after I see no indication of wanting to respond yet to such heavy subject matter, “That term was what children and adults alike would throw around at us African Penguins, the ones that were different than both the herbivores, carnivores, and even the avian morphs that do not understand our culture. It is a term meant to insult us for our braying vocalizations that are an important part of our religious ceremonies. There are some days I do not wish to be reminded.” I left it at that. I feel no desire to go into the herbivore led violence, the carnivore gangs that formed in response, the arrests of some of my closest family, the way my father nearly was left to rot in prison before Neil Mantle rose to power, and worked to release many unfairly imprisoned obligate carnivore inmates.

“Shit man. I had no idea. Well hey, you know what, next one's on me pal. I think you're a real swell guy, even though you're one snarky, brooding motherfucker. But hey, I probably would be more like that too, if I had to go through that crap.” Morton gave me a warm smile, and I knew that he probably was going to end up picking up the whole tab, possible objections of his wife aside. “Thank you Morton. You are a true friend.”

“Hey don't mention it featherbutt. Now let's lighten up the subject with something you could really talk about all night, what about those big ol' ocean monsters you were on about last time? Anything new on that?” I chuckled, it was a bit immature, but I could not deny the truth of his newly chosen nickname in jest for me.

“Well, I watched this new documentary last night. There has actually been a significant sighting in the northwest pacific, probably about 200 km offshore from the British Columbia area. The stills were amazing, the shape under the water looked as if it could be at least 1 km in length, clearly much larger than the vessel they were in.” Morton looked about ready to spit out the last of his drink he had lapped from his glass, “YER SHITTIN' ME!” He exclaimed in excitement, I enjoyed that he was getting as into this stuff as I was.

“Oh yeah no joke. The Canadian government is still denying it though. Trying to pass it off as an exceptionally large school of fish, but I tell you I saw the shape of arms on that thing, almost like a morph.” I finally was able to take some more to drink from my pitcher like glass made especially for patrons with beaks. Not every place had them with the relatively small avian population; but I picked this place because in Chinatown barely anyone understood us, and I enjoyed the presence of avian morphs.

Morton pondered this, “I wish I could go on an expedition like that, it sounds wild, and I was fascinated when Nicki took me on a cruise for our honey moon and we saw that orca morph pod. I can't imagine how crazy it would be to see something like that, to see something most people never will, that our own government tries to deny.”

“Yeah, well us men can dream.” I simply stated. As time passed, we had a good long conversation, but

it got very late very quickly and finally Morton said, “Aw shit Nicki's gonna skin me, good thing we don't work tomorrow, you better get home though buddy. You cool to drive?” I nodded, with all the fat hiding under a penguin's feathers we had a higher tolerance than most. I took it upon myself to get Morton home to his lovely wife, and left before I could really say hi to her, only having enough time to exchange money for weed in the car. I had other things on my mind.

It is about 1 am when I finally get home to my apartment, but I did not care. I walk straight to my desk, powering on my laptop and logging into the forums. Forums.DeepSeaMysteries.ca, a wonderful Canadian centric “macrophile” discussion site I had found shortly after immigrating; and my main outlet besides Morton for all things related to what huge leviathans may lurk in the deep.

At 40 years old, I had to adapt myself to internet culture, but I was really getting the hang of it at this point in time. I clicked around on the new discussions, but something caught my eye in particular. A relatively new discussion titled, “*Seeking Paid Companions for Expedition in Northwest Pacific Region*” and it was getting tons of replies.

Out of curiosity I click and begin to read, a little skeptical the more I read on, but intensely intrigued:

*“Hello.*

*I am a rich benefactor for a company that conducts deep sea research. I am seeking to build a small crew of highly skilled men to accompany me and a couple of researchers on a research vessel. The recent sightings off the coast of British Columbia by the fishing vessel you all heard about is something we believe to be significant enough to look into.*

*Because this would be a privately funded venture, we do not have to fear certain government intervention and direction. We require those that have experience in boating, particularly farther from a coast line where it may be dangerous to navigate. If you are interested, please fill out a reply with your relevant skills, general location, and your e-mail.”*

As I scrolled through replies, most everyone was questioning, skeptical, or outright trollish with outcries of “FAKE!!!” It seems that even if this man was real, he was going to have a hard time strumming up the people. I had doubt in my mind, and yet something in my heart resonated with truth and a gut feeling.

I thought back to Morton's words, about how he would love such an opportunity, about how it would be amazing to witness proof of something the government actively denies. That dog has a way of stirring my spark for this stuff, as ridiculous as most other people think it is. My own wife even would fight with me over how it was a “ludicrous obsession” and that I needed to “grow up from chasing sea monsters.”

My wife was not here anymore though. I could do what I wanted, for once. The worst thing that could happen by posting my reply would be that some dumb kid would e-mail me a poor attempt at trolling or a shock picture. I finally decided to take the chance, typing my reply rigorously:

*“Hello there benefactor,*

*I am skeptical of your claims, but I am a South African with 20 years or more of experience with boating. I have recently immigrated to the Vancouver area. I used to work in a South African fishery in Port Elizabeth before the contamination became so bad my family was forced to close. I have*

*experience in navigating very rough, deep sea waters, sometimes farther from the shore. I have been interested in the leviathan legends ever since I was a small child, and believe I may have even sighted one when I was around 21 years old. My e-mail is on my forum profile if you are interested."*

By the time I had finished reading replies and writing my own, it was past 2 am. I yawned and decided to turn off the computer and call it a night.

As I crawl into my bed and lay down, I let the same darkness that the jaws of my dream leviathan entrapped me in invade my eyes, falling into a deep slumber.

END PART 1