

PRELUDE

-cold open, beach ambience-

It's a summer day, and you're out for an ocean swim.

You take a breath - you head under. It's beautiful, at first. You're in a whole new world. You keep going, and going, and going. As you come up for air, you notice the people behind you are quiet, as nature's ambience has overtaken them. You just need one more look, though, and alas, you take one more plunge.

...But it appears that you may have had a slight miscalculation. As your eyes draw into focus, you realize that there's - nothing to focus on. No floor, no fish, no walls. All there is - is a void of darkness; a cold, endless, abyss gazing back at you. There is nothing there, but yourself, the water, and the vast - unknown.

-title sequence, FEAR OF THE DEEP-

WELCOME TO THE DEEP BLUE!

-music drop-

You know, I've been trying to figure out for years how to put into words the dread I get from something as conceptually simple as the ocean. The immeasurable expanse that remains one of the world's greatest mysteries. It is painfully - unsettling - that our current knowledge of it is miniscule, rivaling that of the moon - and even *Mars*.

Upon looking at the raw data, knowing that over *eighty percent* of this underwater abyss remains unmapped and unexplored to this day, drives home the gut-wrenching realization that we truly know next to nothing about what's actually down there. We know more about the surface of a planet we have never set foot on, than we do about the ocean engulfing the vast majority of the planet on which we live; and to me, that implication is horrifying.

It's called the Deep Blue for a reason, because it is incomprehensibly so. At just over 36,000 feet straight down, you can fit the entirety of Mount Everest with over 7,000 feet to spare. You could theoretically launch a jumbo jet off the bottom of the ocean's deepest point, and hardly make it to the surface at its cruising altitude. And if you stacked the Empire State Building end to end, you would need over 24 and a half of them, one on top of the other, to reach surface level from its darkest abyss.

-slight pause-

Thalassophobia is a concept that encompasses the fear of the ocean, yet what it actually entails might mean something entirely different to you than it does to me.

Some may fear the ocean's gargantuan, seemingly endless size.

Or fear nature's unforgiving wrath.

Or fear becoming stuck within it.

Or fear things that don't belong inside of it.

Or fear what we've found.

Or rather - fear what we haven't.

Much of what we think of when we imagine the ocean are visuals that we can logically comprehend. Reference points like coral reefs, the sea floor, and even sea creatures that share this world with us help us paint a mental picture that is coherent. In reality, though, once you tread off the beaten path and veer over the continental shelf separating our world from theirs, what's actually out there – is a seemingly infinite void, and a macrocosm that we may *never* fully explore.

All across the Internet, we can find troves of video demonstrating the oceans colossal scale. It's hard to put exactly into words, but viewing footage of divers like Jonathan Bird treading the fringe of safety and complete danger by venturing out and into what appears to be completely – *nothing* – will never not cause me to tense up. There is an entire world below them. A world shrouded in darkness. A world ripe for discovery. A world with caves, valleys, entire underwater oceans, and man-made relics, all just – waiting there – until the end of time.

-music drop – foreboding music-

IRON LUNG

Since I was a child, Thalassophobia has unknowingly held me with an iron grip. Jolly Roger Bay and its feeling of constant tension, as we explore a man-made creation ravaged by nature. Pinnacle Rock and its cavernous gorge, infested with creatures unknown. And Tomb Raider – with its multitude of claustrophobic underwater caverns - disorienting us at every turn.

It's funny, because paradoxically, I've always felt that the soundtracks to these levels are beautiful, which oddly *always* counteracted the dread I got from having to endure environments like this. Perhaps it was the fact that, in these games we are almost always racing the clock, lest we drown to death when our time is up. Or the fact that enemies *always* move faster than we do. Or maybe it's the lack of visibility, the – darkness that shrouds us just feet away, depriving us of any ability to prepare for an impending threat. Or, could it be, the *creatures* – the monsters who call this unforgiving habitat *home*.

-slight pause-

In early 2022, a video game released encompassing every fear that I have ever had regarding the ocean.

It's called *Iron Lung*, and you may have heard of it through my fellow creators like Markiplier, Pyrocynical, and Jacob Geller. The game puts us into the shoes of a convict, trapped in a world far removed from ours. We're told that, out of nowhere, every single habitable planet was demolished in a cataclysmic event known only as *The Quiet Rapture*. With this, the future of humanity was left dangling by a thread, as only those aboard spacecrafts were safe from it. For years, the remaining survivors have done what they could to jumpstart humanity, navigating the vast frontier that is the universe in search of any sliver of hope that a habitable planet remains out there.

Guided by nothing but dying starlight, mankind is confined to the vast expanse of nothingness, left to salvage the scant resources left behind on a multitude of barren moons. But on just a handful of them – we find strange anomalies. Oceans of blood, that may be the key to unlocking the resources we so desperately need to survive.

You and I are tasked with boarding a makeshift submarine that was not designed for extreme depth, navigating an ocean that is completely alien from anything we have ever seen or known, left to search and photograph natural resources that may not even be down there. To add insult to injury, the submarine will be welded shut, and the window reinforced with thick metal. Our only method of navigation – a map, a rudimentary control system, a single camera, and our own intuition, guided by whatever sounds we may hear down there. For all we know, we may not survive, but inside the Iron Lung, at least we won't know what killed us.

-fade in-

From the very beginning, we know this will not be simple. The Iron Lung flexes and creaks, seemingly reaching its limit under the crippling weight of the ocean. The radio cuts out – severing our only line of communication. And letters penned by previous convicts warn us of an impending fate.

For most of the game, we're left to follow a map, adjusting our rotation as we blindly navigate this foreign underwater sea in hopes of taking pictures at each designated point. Interestingly the Iron Lung is equipped with a proximity sensor to warn us when we come too close to an obstacle; and at first, it seems like a no-brainer. This ship is already cruising on its last leg, so any physical contact could spell the end of us altogether.

As we make our way to each checkpoint, we're able to utilize a shoddy camera system to view the outside world. And with intervals of just one *single* frame, we're granted nothing but grainy, black and white visuals that are more often than not, completely inexplicable. A corpse of a foreign giant. Unknown structures, with monsters just out of view. Legs from what appear to be giant spiders. And objects that bear no discernable shape. The horror of Iron Lung comes interwoven within the very fabric of how it's played. We are confined to an iron cell, left with none other than the dread stemming from our own biases, as our minds fills the blanks these grainy images leave for us. And, on top of this, as we navigate this underwater hell –

-proximity sensor going crazy-

The proximity sensor sure goes wild, even when we're certain there's no obstacle anywhere around us.

Whatever is out there is lurking, *analyzing* us for just the right moment. We cannot see them, we cannot prepare, and we have no idea what it is around us. In a way, it's sort of poetic because it resembles the real world. Blood oceans upon vast alien moons aren't too far off from the concept of our own, and I think that's what makes Iron Lung so horrifying. On Planet Earth, anytime we enter the ocean, we enter a habitat not made for us. We cannot breathe, we cannot hear, we cannot see.

But they can.

-slight pause, cut back to the Lung-

This game - is a painfully – silent – experience.

The ambience of nothing but the vastness of this blood ocean, the engine of our own submarine, and our unassuming clacking of buttons establishes a façade that encourages us to drop our guard. We want to believe that we're alone, safe within the confines of the Iron Lung like a child under a blanket. Yet, the second we cozy up to the game's conventions – directing our focus solely on completing this mission not only effectively, but promptly – it's only then when we're *always* given that reminder.

-play sound-

The entire game plays out this way, as we quietly venture from point to point in hopes of earning our freedom. Tonight, I won't spoil the ending, so if you haven't yet experienced this game, please do because it'll be well worth your time. The story is engaging and thought provoking, the atmosphere is unmatched for those afraid of the deep, and the ending has a catch that will stick with you for ages.

In my opinion, Iron Lung is one of the greatest modern examples of Thalassophobia portrayed through video games, and as an avid fan of Subnautica – that's sure saying something.

-music end/fade, then waves-

THE THING THAT DRIFTED ASHORE

Hidden inside the second chapter of Slug Girl, part of the Horror World of Junji Ito collection exists a story – called *The Thing that Drifted Ashore*.

It involves the tale of a mysterious object that washes up on the coast of the Pacific Ocean. It's a creature completely alien. It's gargantuan, slimy, it's disgusting. On its face are massive cysts and tumors, with small appendages emerging from them, and worst of all, it *smells* – because it's rotting. Nevertheless, it draws a crowd in the hundreds, all eager to examine and preserve this colossal spectacle.

Among the crowd, we encounter a young boy with an acute fear of the ocean. All his life, he's had nightmares of floating in the deep sea, surrounded by hordes of massive ocean giants, and because of this, he questions why he'd travel out to witness this creature in the first place. While out there, he meets a woman named Mie. She explains that seven years prior, she had lost her fiancé in a ferry accident. No trace of him was ever found, however ever since, she's been afflicted with ocean nightmares highly similar to the boys.

As she's telling her story, though, the onlookers notice something. The creature's skin has transparent spots, and on the inside – are *humans* – entirely intact.

They cut the creature open.

-hard wind sound-

The people are still alive. And it's realized that one of them is - Mie's fiancé - the one who went missing years ago. Shortly after, the bile-covered people begin to panic, crawling in all sorts of directions like inhuman monsters. As it turns out, they were trapped inside of this beast for

years, living off it like parasites as it traversed the pitch-black deep ocean. And the dreams they had – of the ocean giants larger than a school bus – were in actuality – what those inside of it were seeing.

Because of their confinement, every person recovered that day was officially declared insane, and the story ends – pondering on what else might be out there.

-slight pause-

The Thing That Drifted Ashore is special because its horror is two-fold. On one hand, we have an ocean monster that lives off of shipwrecked human beings; yet on the other, we have the visual of what they saw while confined down there. Grotesque, giant fish with massive eyes and appendages. Beasts capable of devouring entire human beings. And creatures beyond our level of comprehension.

The ocean is uniquely fascinating because it is the one medium on earth in which fact can meet fantasy. Ocean monsters can be thought into existence, with hardly a way to disprove them within our lifetime. And the potential of what *could* be, overpowers our collective psyche as that curiosity may never be satiated. It seems that, until the end of time, legendary ocean monsters like the Kraken, the Hydra, and the Leviathan will always fascinate us given our sheer inability to explore the habitat in which they live. Tales of the high seas, of tragedy by the hands of fantastical beasts will persist evermore, fueling fans and fears of the ocean for generations to come.

The Thing That Drifted Ashore nails this mystique in the medium of legend, yet it plays on concepts entirely grounded in reality. Deep sea giants are not fiction, and the condition of abyssal gigantism – is in actuality - the farthest thing from fantasy.

-grueling music ambience-

ABYSSAL GIGANTISM

-click to projector screen, do a rapid slideshow of creatures-

At around 3000 feet deep, the ocean becomes frigid, devoid of light, and full of creatures inexplicable. In lieu of the octopi, dolphins, and vibrant ecosystems embedded within the ocean we know, we instead find species exhibiting bioluminescence, bearing foreboding teeth, and riddled with a curious affliction – *colossal* size.

-slight pause-

When we observe these photos, it's difficult to establish a sense of scale. The Colossal Squid, alone, looks relatively unassuming – until you're given a visual comparison respective to a human. The oarfish – appears like a miniscule eel, until you realize they can grow up to 36 feet long.

Deep Sea Gigantism has created a multitude of monsters – Japanese Spider Crabs bearing twelve-foot legs. Deep Sea Isopods growing multiple feet in length. Sea Spiders up to nearly two feet long. Anglerfish – the size of humans. The Bigfin Squid – with tentacles extending upwards

of 26 feet long. And even creatures like the Siphonophore – a floating amalgamation made of a colony of zooids – chaining themselves into beings *hundreds* of feet in length.

For over 90% of the ocean, sunlight is not able to penetrate, fostering an environment in which life like this needs to adapt to survive. A region known as the *abyssal plain* makes up 70% of the entire seafloor as we know it, however because of the lack of sunlight, plants and vegetation are unable to thrive down there. This, in a way, presents a natural conundrum – as the bottom of the food chain typically relies on flora for satiation.

And so, this is where a phenomenon known as *marine snow* comes into play. Made up of decomposed organisms from up near the surface, on top of fecal matter, sand, and the remains of fish, most of the known deep ocean fauna rely on it as their main source of food. With this in mind, it would only make sense for creatures to evolve by *shrinking* - as not only are they compressed by the oceans sheer weight, but are also left devoid of solid meals. As we've seen, though, reality is quite the opposite.

Kleiber's Law states that the larger an organism's mass is, the more efficient its metabolic rate becomes. This notion results in colossal, highly efficient sea life lurking within the ocean's darkest depths, scouring, waiting, and *grazing* – for their next meal. I would be remiss, however, if I did not state that these are mere postulations, as the phenomenon of abyssal gigantism is still being studied. Because of the historical impossibility of exploring the deep ocean, much of how sea life survives in the depths is entirely unknown. On top of this, it's believed that over 91% of the ocean's species have not even been discovered, compounding with the already extraordinary statistic that the vast majority of the deep blue remains completely unseen by human eyes. Up to this point, everything I've shown you in this video has fallen within the mere 9% of creatures we *have* seen.

Now imagine what we haven't.

-fade, then reveal blue ocean ambience-

THE YURI LIPSKI TRAGEDY

It goes without saying that the ocean – is treacherous, yet that hasn't slowed those eager to explore it. The allure of underwater caves, blue holes, and ocean cliffsides make for an experience both riveting and spiritually fulfilling, however it's unfortunately fairly common for deep sea dives to go awry.

On the 28th of April 2000, 22-year-old Yuri Lipski geared up for a dive within the Blue Hole in Egypt. Known as one of the most dangerous diving locations in the world, traversing this environment is no small feat. One of its standout features is its underwater arch, a massive, 170-foot tunnel resting 164 feet below the surface, and extending 85 feet in length. It's been reported that the Blue Hole is deceptive, appearing much shorter than it is when you manage to get down there. Alongside this, it bears areas with strong down currents, making for a physically grueling experience. When inside, depth and oxygen monitoring are a must, yet Lipski, fully aware of the risks involved with such an intensive dive, maintained optimism in his physical ability.

At 5:03PM, Lipski embarks into the depths. Contrary to standard procedure, he attempts this dive, *not* in a group, but alone. For the first two minutes, we can observe Yuri swimming parallel to surface, until he's over the deepest point of the Blue Hole. He then begins a slow, controlled descent, before he begins releasing air from his BCD, or buoyancy compensation device, in hopes of sinking faster.

-play snippet of footage to 3:30-

At this point, his regulator begins to work harder to supply Yuri with the increased amount of air he's taking in, evident by the numerous wheezes we hear throughout his footage. At this point, he's descending rapidly – likely more so than he realizes, and soon after, the alarm from his dive monitor sounds, signaling that his depth is reaching a critical level.

-play alarm, pause at 270ft-

Yuri is now over 270 feet below surface, signaling a multitude of inconvenient truths. The oxygen in his tank is quickly becoming toxic. His buoyancy is dwindling. And an effect known as nitrogen narcosis is plaguing him, instilling a sensation of complete drunkenness.

-play landing-

At 5:09PM, he approaches the bottom of the Blue Hole – at over 300 feet deep. Immediately, he fully inflates his BCD in hopes of returning to the surface, however it's entirely ineffective as the down force of the ocean negates any semblance of buoyancy. This realization appears to cause him to panic – because his tank is empty. He's disoriented. Yuri Lipski – is trapped.

-play ending, then emotional montage-

Yuri Lipski met his demise in one of the most dangerous diving locations in the world. He embarked to set a personal record, to achieve a depth that he had never before seen – yet in that pursuit lost his life to the grueling conditions of the deep blue.

Since the incident, Yuri's body was recovered, however the same can't be said for a multitude of others that have met the same fate. Online, you can find footage of divers discovering the remains of their counterparts – with their gear still intact, and it's haunting knowing that if those specific divers did not dive in that specific spot, their remains may have *never* been found - forever confined to the pitch-black crypt that is the sea floor. These people had a life, a story, a reason for venturing out that day. Perhaps it was to chase a thrill. Or to tame an area they have always wanted to. The ocean is not our home, though. It never has been and it never will be, and when fate decides to rear its head, *that* is when humankind and misfortune come face to face.

-fade-

SUBMECHANOPHOBIA

Humanity and the ocean have a – bizarre – relationship with death.

-storm footage-

Superstorms leveling entire cities. Gargantuan waves rocking man's largest ships like a bath time toy. And rogue waves that emerge from nowhere, destroying even the largest and safest of oil rigs.

To this day, remnants of over 3,000,000 shipwrecks exist on the sea floor, with thousands, upon thousands, of massive, man-made objects accompanying them. Much like the remains of divers, these relics imply and signify death and defeat. Loss by the hand of an environment we had set out to tame – and an everlasting token of failure.

There is an interesting subset of Thalassophobia – called *Submechanophobia* – that delves into the *very* specific fear of encountering these relics in the wild. It's this primordial repulsion caused by the crippling uncanniness of an object that does not belong, compounded with the lack of *any* ability to determine its true size.

[slow]

Photo and video - of the Titanic, of forgotten animatronics, of ancient relics, a massive anchor, derelict mineshafts, of sunken airplanes, and the interior of shipwrecks are effectively fueling a newer, more recently discovered phobia made possible by the rise of cameras able to document them.

-slight pause-

But it isn't always abandoned structures, though, as footage – like this:

-show diver under ferry-

Also exemplify this phobia in its purest form.

For me personally, Submechanophobia persists because of the total inability to fully see an object as it truly is. Like we touched on earlier, our minds are hard-wired to fill in blanks with what *could be*, and more often than not, we achieve this with the most horrifying possible outcome. The sentiment of feeling inconsequential, small, and miniature; all while existing within a habitat we cannot thrive in lend to a primal repulsion to this type of phenomenon. On land, fog is always seen as a mood-setter for the strange and mysterious, and inside the darkest confines of the Deep Blue – we can see this idea at work, too.

-fade-

CLOSING REMARKS

It's hard to find the words to conceptualize the fear of the deep in just a single YouTube video, as there are so many ways we can and have taken it. Whether it's the fear of sea life, or it's infinite size, or how dark it is, or how much we truly don't know about it, or its capability of devastation, or its grip on human life, or – dare I say - even *sharks* – one thing *has* and will always hold true:

The ocean is fucking horrifying.

It's an unforgiving frontier harboring some of the most harrowing life and environmental enigmas on the planet. It is, and always will be, one of life's great mysteries. An entire world we share, yet know so little about. The vast majority of the planet, yet completely uninhabitable by mankind. In a way, Thalassophobia is the fear of something that we don't fully understand. It's the fear of what-ifs. The fear of the unknown.

Throughout history, it's been said that the moment you enter the ocean, you enter the food chain. Yet contrary to how it is on land, in *their* world – in their vast abyss of darkness – humankind is nowhere near the top.

-roll credits-