

[Hungry Darkness by Gabino Iglesias](#)

written by Peter Tieryas | June 9, 2015



Prepared to be crushed to death. Or at least feel the palpable intensity of [Gabino Iglesias's *Hungry Darkness \(Severed Press\)*](#). This is a taut, subterranean thriller that almost never lets up, an underwater descent into the nooks and crevices of human nature, or at least its absurdities. It's a short novella that will leave you gasping for breath, and part of the anxiety is trying to figure out the mystery behind the sea monster. Less Moby Dick, and more like Jaws mixed with Godzilla and tentacles, there is a whole lot of death. As the corpses pile up, Iglesias humanizes the suffering. These aren't just faceless victims, but each has a backstory, a set of relatable movies, heightening the sense that their deaths are as tragic as their attempt to flee the inevitability of a natural disaster:

“Jamaal saw his lifelong friend disappear under the water and knew that he had to move away as fast as possible, or he would face the same fate. He started swimming as fast as he could, but his speed was nothing compared to that of his pursuer... A second later the massive mantle had replaced everything around him. He screamed again. Bubbles moved over his face and reached the surface... Jamaal could only see the thing that was surrounding him and feel its incredible strength. Then the thing bit into his right left. He felt like a car had dropped on his thigh. The pressure was followed by a crunch and then a release. He knew his leg was gone.”

The voracious appetite of the monster is seemingly insatiable, and it ruthlessly devours human limbs like they were beef jerky. At least its motives are pure. The business minds who want to vanquish the monster don't do it out of any chivalrous desire to protect the people, but rather, because they don't want it to hurt local tourism. The hunt takes off at a rapid pace, and in this turbulent dive into madness, Iglesias takes the time to ground the creature in real life science, amping the tension while making the narrative feel more authentic with its mix of confusion, fear, and perverse curiosity (my below example is sparse on the scientific details as that would spoil a big part of the story, though it conveys the general tone of the explication scenes):

“What I'm telling you is that whatever's out there might be a new species... something that we haven't seen yet because they're very rare or their habitat is down at an incredible depth or because they're usually cave dwellers, or with everything that we dump into the water, it's a new mutation. In any case this one, for some strange reason, is now hunting out of its habitat and way out of what's considered usual fare...”

Gabriel is a fisherman whose principal motive is getting enough "money that would make him stop worrying about making enough for rent, gas, and food for a few months." No desire for vengeance, no scars, no altruistic desire to help innocents; rather it's his desire to survive every day existence that gets him to agree to try and kill the monster. In fact, several of the victims are living under harsh financial circumstances, highlighting the bizarre contrast of their lives being in some ways more difficult and torturous than the threat the monster poses. The wry social commentary pulses on the surface, but never overtakes the hunt.

My one gripe is that I wish the synopsis didn't reveal the death of the initial characters because it happens a few chapters in and would have been a big shock had I not been prepared. On the inverse, a happy mistake I made was that for big parts of the novella, I read the main character's name as Gabino rather than Gabriel and thought the author was projecting himself, which made for an even more intriguing ride. I realized my mistake later, but it didn't decrease my empathy for the protagonist. Instead, I became more absorbed into the aquatic nightmare.

"The water was tepid. The sun looked like a radioactive orange that was being submerged in black ink."

The best thrillers don't just provide mindless excitement, but expose the depths that fuel the action forward. Iglesias reveals that hunger in the darkness can be all consuming and destructive, but that sometimes, will, stupid courage, and shotguns go a long way towards survival.