

Hope From The Ancients

By Gus Prouty | 2782 words

Henry Benatar sat at his desk. His head clutched in his hands. The white light from his monitor cast shadows on the bits of curly brown hair, overflowing his grip. With a groan, he glanced through his fingers at the empty word document that sat on his computer screen. Still unchanged from the last time he'd looked at it. Or the time before that. It was official. He had writer's block.

By itself, this was bad, but it didn't help that he had a manuscript due in a week. His current draft consisted of his name, misspelled he realized, centered at the top of the page. Now after three decades of writing, he knew his process well enough. He could probably pump something out in the time he had left. It would be rough and he wouldn't be getting much sleep over the next few days but it was doable. That was if he started right now. That now had passed by about thirty minutes ago and he still had nothing to show for it on the page.

Sighing he minimized the empty document and pulled up his research folder. Every article and research paper he collected since agreeing to take this project. If anything could kick-start the drive he needed it was in here.

Henry started his career as a nature writer. He'd penned a few small pieces that were well reviewed but never gathered him much public recognition. That is until the kaiju, or giant monsters showed up. Nature writing had seen a swift uptick in relevance in recent times, especially if it had to do with the nature of the giant creatures that were currently stomping around.

Back when the kaiju first emerged nobody knew what to think. But everybody talked about them and talking led to writing. There must have been hundreds of pieces published on the kaiju, Henries were among them, but he took a different approach.

Instead of speculating as to the many unknowns of the kaiju, where they came from, and how they worked. His pieces instead looked at the effects they were having on their surroundings, not just regarding people but the ecosystem and ecology. It turned out to be surprisingly minimal, given how little the creatures actually ate. He also looked at sociology and politics to observe the impacts the monsters were having on the less tangible parts of society.

The pieces razing success turned into a series of pieces, then into an offer to do a book examining the many effects of the kaiju. Before he realized it Henry had become the foremost written voice on the kaiju. No one was more surprised by this than him. But he was also more popular and successful than he ever dreamed of being so he wasn't complaining.

He was asked to write about all sorts of things that he had never anticipated even considering before. Military strategies, economic impacts, wide-reaching governmental policy reforms, if the kaiju had some sort of effect on it then odds were Henry had written about it at some point.

That's how his agent had pitched his current project to him, as just another piece on the kaiju. He had accepted it because that's exactly what it wasn't.

Even if his writing was rarely concerned with it, the world at large never stopped asking where the kaiju had come from in the first place. And within the last year, it seemed the answer had begun to take shape. Henry pulled up the earliest document he had in reference to this whole project. It was a newspaper headline from a few years back, referencing a small research vessel doing deep-sea exploration off the coast of Japan.

The team found a lot more than some new species; they stumbled onto an entire sunken landmass, several times bigger than Japan sitting at the bottom of the Pacific. People took to calling it Lemuria after the fictional lost continent of the Pacific, which didn't appear to be so fictional anymore. Henry thought back on the interview he had with the lead researcher as he glanced through the typed notes he had taken.

The man was tall and wirily with equally spindly hair that stuck up from his head as if suspended by static cling, or maybe it was shock. Henry figured that seeing a thing like that would make anyone's hair stand on end. It had been almost a year since the man first laid eyes on the sunken continent but he described it like he'd been there yesterday.

"You have to understand we were just looking for unusual rock formations. Stuff that didn't look like it belonged there naturally. So imagine our surprise when we crest a rise and our spotlight shines up a building," The lead researcher said.

"So it there really is a whole city down there? hiding at the bottom of the sea," Henry asked.

"Well its a little worse for wear now, I mean it looked like one of those artificial coral reefs, there was ocean growth over the whole lot of it but I can tell you that those structures were anything but natural. Though that stopped being so impressive once we spotted the bones."

"How many bodies were there?"

"Impossible to tell exactly, everything was all mixed up, scavengers will do that. But it looked like the whole population went down with the city."

These peoples city, though it turned out that they weren't exactly people, Henry would later find out, had been sunken by a kaiju. That became painfully apparent after the research team woke it from its slumber in the ruins and the thing almost leveled Tokyo.

But Henry wasn't writing about that story, he was tasked to write about the residents of the sunken city. The ancients as people had so cleverly been calling them, the creators of kaiju. They had a scientific name of course but nobody ever bothered to use it outside of academia. Oblitus Hominis, Latin for forgotten man, belying their close relation to mankind.

He pulled up a diagram of one set of skeletal remains found in the city. Dating put it at over two million years old, more of a fossil than an actual bone. On the inside, they were not that different than people, the same number of limbs and digits, same basic skull shape. They were primates, like us. A branch split off from Australopithecus much earlier than our own ancestors.

Next, he pulled up a drawing of the same specimen but with its flesh returned to its bones. They were thought to be semi-aquatic creatures so the artist hadn't given it a lot of hair. They were taller and lankier than humans, more streamlined in the head and body. The face, in particular, compelled him. It was depicted as so similar to our own and yet still fundamentally different.

That was it, he thought. What was keeping up his writing? He didn't actually know what he was writing about. All these technical details were well and good, important in their own way. But they were not what his book was going to be about. If they were what people cared about they could just go read the same research papers he had. No, his book was supposed to give people something more, some kind of take away from the big picture. A grand encapsulation of these people and their connection to the kaiju. Something that didn't exist.

It wasn't just that most of that knowledge was still missing or incomplete. His books had never been strictly about facts. There had always been a good bit of theory and speculation, which is what drew readers in the first place. That wasn't the problem; it was that he didn't like the ideas he had about what happened to the ancients.

Even with what little hard evidence was gathered, one thing had already become perfectly clear. The ancients were far in advance of our own technology level. Nobody quite knew why but it seemed that they had quite the knack for genetic engineering. It was what allowed them to create their kaiju in the first place.

Why was a whole other issue. Many ideas abounded but the little evidence found pointed to an unsettling theory. To fight against other kaiju. This raised a whole slew of questions. Where did these other kaiju come from? Where had they gone, since there certainly didn't leave behind any fossils? Why had they picked the ancients as their target, especially when it seemed to be a unified front on the attack? This last question was particularly disturbing, as it was such different behavior from the modern kaiju which, with a few exceptions, mostly acted independently. Nobody in the scientific community seemed willing to talk about even possibilities as to answers. But Henry wasn't as concerned with the situation as much as with its results.

When you broke it down to the simplest facts, the ancients had means and technology that far outpaced our own, even the ability to fight fire with fire, so to speak, and they had still been wiped out by the kaiju. It painted a grim picture of humanities own fate.

He didn't want to paint that picture with his book, but no matter how many times he went back through the facts he always came away with it looking the same. In the end, he had chosen not to start writing until something better came to him, but he was running out of time. Yet still, he couldn't bring himself to put his thoughts to paper.

It wasn't some egotistical idea of having to lead peoples thinking in the right direction or anything like that. Though if he was being honest he would admit there was an aspect of that sure. But what really concerned him was his own thinking. Even if it was right, even if the facts

backed it up all the way, he didn't like it and so he didn't want to write about it. The root of his writer's block was as simple as that.

The minutes ticked by and he became more and more desperate to find something, anything that could lead him to a different conclusion. He found himself looking through a supposed last day for the great sunken city on Lemuria.

They still didn't know what had compelled the kaiju to do what it did. But whatever had must have been personal at the very least. Henry figured that was the only way the monster would have felt compelled to use its vibration powers so violently that it triggered an earthquake capable of crumbling the very place it was standing on. Somebody must have really pissed it off.

An odd detail stuck out to Henry, all signs pointed to the kaiju actually being of ancient creation. It was a slight wrinkle in his original idea. But their own hubris ending in their destruction seemed hardly to make for a much better end to their story. So he continued on.

One quirk of the ancients seemed to be their preference for biological systems over mechanical ones. Perhaps it came from their mastery over genetics but it seemed if a creature could be designed to do the job they would make it instead of using a machine. What fossil evidence we have points to a huge variety in the beasts of burden. From tiny birds used as personal message delivers to huge reptilian hulks serving as living construction equipment. There is even evidence of endothermic moss used in place of refrigeration.

This mentality extended even to their computers, which were wetware, or based on organic neuron technology. This gave them much higher processing power but at the cost of a lower shelf life. There were only a few out of the thought hundreds of thousand ancient computers that were actually preserved in such a way that let us get anything out of them. But

archeologists did get lucky, as one of those few bio-computers had some info on proposed military projects.

It was funny Henry mused; we don't know how the ancients governed, what they worshiped, or how they raised their kids. But we sure as hell managed to find out about the kinds of weapons they liked to build. Maybe that says more about us humans than it did the ancients.

The project that most interested the scientists, and by extension passed before Henry's eye, was a proposed bio-organic rocket ship. The exact details were lost but it seemed to be a sort of Noah's ark, designed to carry the ancients away from their never-ending war with the kaiju. There was no way to know if the vessel was even considered past the concept stage, let alone if it was built and used for escape before the continent sunk. If it was then there were sure a great many who didn't make it onboard before it took off, the bones were proof enough of that.

Still, even if some of the ancients did end up making it off of our planet in time, would that really make for a better ending? To have been driven off of your home into the cold vastness of space? Henry didn't think so.

What was he even looking for? There was clearly no happy ending to this story. But he supposed that he at least wanted to find some kernel of hope buried somewhere in all this. Something he could reveal in his book so that people would not feel like there was no way forward. So that he wouldn't feel that way.

As he closed down that file he realized there was only one document left. It was one he had actually found himself on Google, way back when he first started doing research for this project. He didn't think much of the piece when he first found it but by this point, he was looking for anything he could get.

He skimmed the article, an idea sparked in his head. Henry pushed himself away from his desk with an exciting force. Before he even knew it he was up and pacing the small space of his office.

The article had to do with the genetic sequence of the ancients and its relation to humans. Despite their apparent fondness for genetic modification the ancients did not appear to practice it on themselves very much and so a genetic code for them as a species was actually relatively easy to come by. This is how their connection to our ancestors was first discovered. But the article Henry had read suggested that there was a second connection to our family tree.

It seemed that some of their genes were incredibly similar to those found in early humans. So similar in fact, that they could only be so if there was an evolutionary link between the two species. The article did not provide an explanation for this connection, content to simply point out its existence, but Henry's mind connected the dots quick enough.

There is no evidence of any ancient settlements outside of Lemuria. The running theory is that their conflicts with the kaiju kept them confined to their home continent. But what if there were some small settlements on other landmasses. Small outposts not large enough to draw a kaiju's attention. What would the people in these settlements have thought upon seeing their homelands destruction? Possibly even watched as the rocket carried a few lucky survivors into space, knowing they had been left behind.

Henry thought about what that knowledge would have done to the survivors, and what it would have taken for them to go on living. Perhaps even passing on their genes, mixing them with the next intelligent species that were just beginning to emerge. Their distant evolutionary cousins.

Of course, there was no way to prove his idea. Any evidence of ancient settlements on land would have been erased by two million years of erosion, not to mention the effects of the ice age. But to that same token, there was no way to disprove it either. And it was as good an explanation as any for the ancient genes that appeared in early man. And consequently, have been passed down into his present-day descendants.

The ancients found a way to survive the kaiju on earth after all. Were their holes in the theory? Sure, but that was a problem for his editors to sort out. For right now Henry had a book to write. He returned to his desk and opened the blank word document now far less intimidated by the empty page. He had finally found a bit of hope for the ancients.