

At the Bottom of the Trench

The pressure was slowly rising around the outer metal coating of the submarine. Inside, a lone figure sat, face peering through the front glass, seeing deep into the pitch-black Pacific waters.

The captain, an unconquerable force, was exploring deep within the lowest, unexplored regions of the Mariana Trench. Despite the loneliness and solitude of his steel contraption, the captain's curiosity caused him to miss the rendezvous time for the journey's end and instead, he continued exploration beyond where the scientific mission charted.

The pressure continued building around the sub. It was like a net, dragging the captain deeper into the heart of the trench.

Rocky remains of fallen oceanic cliffs hid almost hidden the smaller trench from view; this one seeming to go beyond even the great depth of the Mariana. The blackness in the massive sea crack was unlike anything seen before. It almost absorbed every ray of light, leaving nothing but a black mass in the expansive void.

It had been hours of barely seeing anything save an eerie barreleye fish, several anglerfish and a shark uglier than the devil himself, *Mitsukurina owstoni*, or the goblin shark as it is commonly referred. But this new find, the entrance to another trench, likely never before seen or explored, created a sense in the captain that not all was lost. If he could maneuver his sub between the rocks folded over the opening, he could go deeper than anyone had ever gone, and perhaps, uncover a world deeper than even the Mariana.

However, something put him off, just a bit, making him second-guess his decision to continue in his newfound quest. It was something about the blackness, making everything feel claustrophobic, much like the small space in the cockpit of the submarine. Only, rather than solid metal holding him in, it was nothing but his own mind.

The space between the rocks was tight, but manageable for the captain. In moments, he was past them, in between the stretch of void that appeared to go on ever further below the miles of sea above.

It was less black down here, as though a faint bioluminescent glow was all around, which provided just enough light to see. Strangely, the light from the front of the sub appeared dim, only showing, perhaps, several meters in front.

It was deep here and unmarked by anything coming before. Maybe this was the first time a creature from land had ever laid eyes on the misshapen black walls of this oceanic trench. They jutted out, much like the teeth of a Great White, though much wider and less smooth. Every minute or so through the tunnel, a deep-sea creature would appear and startle the captain with its unnatural form. There was nothing different from other previously discovered deep-sea life: a Mariana snailfish with its transparent body, several holothurians (sea cucumbers) scaling the walls, a small vampire squid. The captain didn't believe the latter could survive quite this far down, but here it was, floating with bat-like arms through the pitch-black water.

There was something eerie about this trench. The deep-sea life appeared to be moving toward the sub, surrounding it and swimming near it. The farther the captain went into the void, the more he noticed. There was a slowly growing number of creatures, all gathering round his sub. It was a sight he'd never seen before. Strange.

Through the darkness of the trench's waters, there was brief movement. It was something just out of the Captain's sight. Something large. Much larger than the small sub he occupied.

This should have been expected. The common idea of deep-sea gigantism was normal and documented. In these deep-sea areas, creatures needed to be more efficient in acquiring food due to the lack of resources so far down. Larger forms are known to be more efficient and therefore the life is larger. But this was only true in regards to colder waters. While the area he was in right now was deep enough to be cold, comparing it to other, much colder waters was barely a comparison at all.

What he didn't expect was the swift, fluttering movement of what first looked like a strand of seaweed, 60 full feet in length. It moved through the water as though it were gliding across glass. The current caused by such a massive object caused the captain's vessel to gain speed. He looked to the controls, trying to fight the sudden wave. Faster and faster the submarine sunk, pressure rising all around it. The creatures stalking were no longer there. The bioluminescence of the walls was slowly growing in glow, hovering all around one figure.

It was in the moment, the captain stopped. The shaking submarine had come to a standstill and there was nothing left outside the hull.

He felt a feeling churn in his gut. A sudden anxiety about this trench at the bottom of the sea. That moving thing, that had appeared much like seaweed, was obviously not something of the sort. It had looked slimy and textured, like rubber. It was in that moment that the captain knew, what he witnessed was a 60-foot tentacle.

He tried turning the sub, but there was no way to easily do so in such a tight trench. He would need to slowly progress in reverse to get out.

The bioluminescence glow began to beat like a drum. Glowing bright, then dim, then bright again, before turning dim. It dimmed and dimmed and dimmed until at last, there was no light, save the front of the submarine. The captain looked in front of him, seeing something glisten in the water like a lantern. Two eyes opened, glowing with an intensity that beat straight through the blackness like two fires of eternal torment. The eyes closed, the light on the sub went out, and the captain was left alone with the creature, inside his submarine, still sinking into the depths of the trench.