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## KING IN THE MONSTER: A Story In Image Descriptions

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KING IN THE MONSTER  
A story in image descriptions.

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
Vanessa Bennett Shapiro

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
May 2021



To Mr. Nakajima and his comrades.



Thank you to:

Robert Kelly , for advising me.

My friends, for their input and support.

My mother, for listening to me vent.

My family, for believing in me.

Bard College, for all the good times.



## CHAPTER 1

Tokyo stands in a wide expanse, a dense, grey cityscape interrupted by a large square of green that makes up the Imperial Gardens, the last vestige of the ancient world that once stood there. It is beautiful, yet disquieting: the city is empty. From our vantage point, we can see no cars, no people, not even clouds. Tokyo, devoid of life.

A shadow emerges behind the view, towering over the sterile world.

Suddenly we are a pedestrian standing in the street. Buildings sway and shake ever so slightly. THUMP, THUMP, THUMP.

From the rooftops, a gigantic head appears, its hairline receding and its forehead shiny.

Finally, we see not a beast, but a man. He's Japanese, clad in a white tank top, blue jeans, and worn green tennis shoes. You can't quite tell how old he is: he is athletic in build, yet his eyes are sunken and tired in a way few young men are. He trudges across the streets, exhausted but careful not to cause any destruction. His name is GORO NAKAYAMA. He is the most famous man in Japan, and nobody has ever heard of him.



We see Goro's shoes and legs as he passes a particular complex, HOJO STUDIOS. It, too, is devoid of people, a large grid composed of grey warehouse-like buildings and concrete roads.

We zoom in, and Goro emerges from one of the warehouses. Nobody is around but him.

He sighs, placing a cigarette in his mouth, holding a lighter to it. From the distance, we hear a voice.

“Heyyyyy! Goro-aniki!”

We turn to see another man, younger and wider, a jovial smile on his face. He's wearing a baseball jersey and cargo shorts. He is RYO HIROSE, a former sportsman of little renown. He waves at Goro, who looks on with mild surprise.

“Oh, Hirose-kun. I didn't know you were going to be in this one,” Goro says.

“Yep! It'll be an honor to act as your rival this time, instead of your assistant. It's so early, though! I can't believe I woke up in time!” Hirose replies cheerily.

Goro smiles lightly as the two sit next to one another on the stoop of the studio entrance. His hand reaches out to offer his box of cigarettes, which Hirose accepts.

“That’s the price to pay to be the lead. Everyone’s relying on us,” Goro says plainly.

“Ehhh, doesn’t make all this less annoying though, does it? Leading men don’t usually have to go to all this trouble.” Hirose complains, taking a drag.

“I don’t think it’s annoying. It’s...meditative, in a way,” Goro replies.

“Meditative?” Hirose asks, a puzzled expression on his face.

The back of a young woman’s head, ponytail-clad, approaches the two-- a production assistant. The pair regard her politely, Hirose poorly concealing his excitement. Trails of smoke stream from their cigarettes and into the orange sky.

“We’re ready for you now. Nakayama-san, you’re in trailer three. Hirose-san, you’re in trailer five,” she instructs.

“Understood!” Hirose says.

Hirose gets up from the stoop, the two bodies in profile. His hands are on his hips, ready to roll. Goro puts out his cigarette, one hand on his knee.

“And so it begins. Well, see you in the battlefield, aniki!”

Goro looks wistfully at the city beyond the lot. Barely visible, in the reflection of his brown eyes, is the shape of a great beast.

“This one will be legendary!” Hirose shouts from where we cannot see him.

-

*It is like a great metamorphosis.* Goro narrates.

Hands encase his back in rubber flesh, made to look like rough, scaly skin. The seam is meant to look like a long, warped scar, hiding it in plain sight.

*I am encased in a cocoon, and I am replaced by something stronger.*

Goro, eyes closed, sweats inside the suit to the point that his hair is already soaked. A small tube leading outside leaves the smallest drop of light.

*Or perhaps it is eating me. I don't know for sure.*

A shorter man in spectacles looks at the body in front of him. From the angle we can see the fins leading from its neck to its face, the membrane between its arms and body.

“Ready?” He asks.

“Ready.” Goro answers.

-

The beast appears on the outskirts of the city. A sickly green fusion between a dinosaur and a catfish-- it has the face of a chinese dragon, shaped in a permanent grimace. Whiskers dot its upper lip, and large fins fan out on the sides of its head. A massive tail follows behind it, also finned. Enter GARGONDOS, EMPEROR OF THE SEAS.

“ACTION!” Screams the director from afar.

We see what Goro sees. He is not inside the head of the suit, but the neck, small pinpricks bored inside it to allow him to see. Everything is blurred, mostly light and shadow. Goro's imagination draws the rest, the buildings outlined in clean, angry red.

*I cannot see through my own eyes, so I see through his. I think his thoughts.*

Gargondos destroys the building in front of it, crushing it with its body., Powdered debris mists the air.

*I feel the suit's weight bare against me, all 90 kilograms. I cannot breathe well without the tube, and so I hold my breath as he releases his rage. I feel his anger.*

The creature looks up, mouth opening to roar.

*Such anger.*

Another creature approaches Gargondos. It is similar, somewhat, to the Minotaur: a noble bovine head atop a humanoid body. Yet, its body is an unnatural gold, its eyes glowing red, the half of its body meant to be human instead scaly and reptilian instead. He stands with his legs apart, body low like a wrestler's starting stance. He is AUSTRON, the newest of Gargondos' adversaries.

*The human part of me knows it is Hirose in there, consumed like me. I know the steps like a dance. I know how things will turn out.*

Austron lunges forward, clawed hands pushing his adversary backwards. Gargondos grapples, attempting to push the other back, snarling.

*Yet I fight with all I have. After all these years, I haven't lost yet.*

The two fall to the ground, crushing the cityscape around them.

*Nobody can last as long as we do. Nobody can take it except us.*

Gargondos stumbles up and backwards, readying his next attack.

*Nobody.*

“Ready the fire breath! And...” The director shouts.

“GO!”

Explosive charges blast around the two combatants, consuming the city in fire.

*Nobody.*

Within the creature, Goro remains concentrated, almost entranced. His face is red, boiling with heat. From outside the creature, we see that it has been set ablaze, the side of its head engulfed in flame.

*No--*

Darkness.

For a moment, we see the blurred vision of Goro, shadows outlined by the eyes of the beast.

Three figures surround him, one close to him, one slightly farther, and one watching from afar.

“Goro!” Someone shouts, far, far away.

Then, things become clearer, but not completely. The blurred form of the bespectacled man stands closest to him: KENTARO “KEN” TEZUKA, costume designer. A man we have yet to meet, an older fellow in a collared shirt, slacks, and newsboy cap stands just beyond Ken: AKIRA MIFUNE, the director. Finally, watching from afar, Hirose, lower half still costumed, the upper part of the hide folded forward to reveal his upper torso. Flames still burn the city, but far smaller.

“GORO!” He can hear the voice calling him clearly now, knows who it belongs to.

From the front, we can see Goro is slumped against the wall of the studio, the bottom part of the suit still attached to him. His white tank top is now completely wet, and a white towel is wrapped around his head. The right side of his face has a slightly pink blotch on it.

“S-sorry. Ken.”

From the side, we see Goro’s prone form, Ken crouched to his level. He puts a hand to his face, relieved. Hirose shares the sentiment, exhaling a large breath. Mifune crosses his arms, expression hard to read.

“Sorry, he says. Man gets set on fire and he’s sorry. Can you believe it, Mifune-san?” Ken asks.

“He says it every time he passes out, Tezuka-san. I can believe it,” Mifune responds.

“How long was I out?” Goro asks. He attempts to get up but Ken places a hand on his chest, stopping him.

“Only about five minutes, but we couldn’t get anything out of you for ten more.”

“F-fifteen, then?! The charges must have faded by now!” Goro stammers, voice ragged and frantic. “I-- I am costing everyone time and money, we have to keep going--”

“You’re going to cost us much more if you die!” Ken says bluntly, holding out a large canteen. “Drink, now.”

“But--”

“We got the shot,” Mifune interrupts, looking large and imposing from Goro’s point of view, only accentuated by the miniature set. “It adds realism. The fire actually makes an impact.”

Ken balks, horrified, he straightens up slightly, not matching the directors height (he wouldn’t be able to) but making himself as large as possible in his crouch. His glasses have become crooked.

“Are you insane? We’re not putting a shot of one of the actors getting injured in the cut!”

“If we don’t, we go a week behind schedule, and we’re barely gonna make the deadline as it is.”



Mifune turns to look at Goro, a sober yet confident expression on his face. In his mind, Goro reads it as almost fatherly, but he knows the older man would never accept such a sentiment.

“It’s a good shot. Realistic. The flames don’t just knock him back, they hit him full force. Makes good drama.” He says. “It’s your call. I can take the heat from the studio, but your pain ought to be worth something, I think.”

Suddenly, the world is sepia. Goro is a teenager again, sitting by a radio on a tatami-floored room. He is surrounded by little toy soldiers carved from wood, all fallen down. He is experiencing inescapable shock.

*“His Royal Highness--- surrender -- terms -- bomb--”* The words are jumbled in his recollection.

Then the world becomes monochrome. He’s in profile, a younger man than he is now, talking to Mifune, who somehow looks the same, aside from some stubble. His face betrays a deep helplessness, and deeper anger. Goro is listening intently.

*“This is not just stunt work. There has to be something inside it-- it has to feel wronged.”*

The world returns to technicolor. The two men remain in the same spots they once were, aside from the actor’s injuries, with Ken now in the middle.

“Keep it in.”

“Goro--” Ken starts.

*“Keep it in.”*

Ken falls silent as Mifune nods dispassionately. Goro would be offended if he did not know the man better, if Mifune did not know him just as well.

“We’ll start back up in 30. I’ll get someone to patch you up.”

“Understood, sir.”

We stare at Goro from the front as Mifune walks away. He stares blankly, ignoring Ken scolding him. He takes a drink of water, and we zoom out. His tail swishes ever so slightly.

-

We’re back outside the lot, the sky blotched with orange and pink, sun almost set. Goro now has a large bandage on his face, which is downcast as he walks with Ken.

“You’re extremely inconsiderate, do you know that?” Ken asks.

Goro does not answer.

“You think you’re acting like some kind of hero, but do you ever think about how I feel, huh? Watching you nearly get killed because of *my* mistakes and then throw yourself back into danger the next second?”

“You didn’t make any mistakes, Ken.”

“What the hell do you mean? It’s my suit! What are people going to think when they see we have an actor inside a *flammable* suit next to explosives?!”

“His fire breath was more intense than we expected. We lost the upper hand.”

Ken stops walking but Goro continues, his attention piqued by someone in the distance.

“...I sincerely hope this is still heat stroke affecting you, because otherwise you’re going mad.” Ken says to deaf ears.

“Ah, Hirose-kun.”

We turn to see Hirose, back in his street clothes, talking to two women. His arm is snaking towards one of them, a shorter woman in baggy clothes, looking relaxed yet formidable. Beside her is a taller, yet not actually tall woman, with large eyes accented by flyaway hairs of her short bob. A discerning look covered by faded red lipstick, a black top and fashionable white bell bottoms, hands in her pockets-- undeniably beautiful, undeniably embracing the times.

“Ken-san, Aniki! Thank goodness you’re okay, huh? Funny, I was just about to tell these two about what happened.”

Goro tries not to look at the taller woman, suddenly quite flushed. He rubs his hand over his face as if to cover it.

“You shouldn’t talk about gruesome things like that in front of women.”

“Ehh, speak for yourself! That bandage is too big to not know the story for.” The shorter woman pouts, and Hirose chuckles.

“This is my-- eh, well, this is Akane-chan. We’re dating.”

“He wants to call me his girlfriend, but you earn that sort of thing with me.” Akane declares.

Goro thinks absentmindedly that he didn’t expect Hirose to like a strong-willed sort of girl, but remains focussed on the other woman. He knows her from somewhere, he’s sure of this.

“And this is Aoi-cha-- sorry, Nijima-san, but I guess you knew that. Our non-lizard lead.”

AOI NIJIMA as Mika Hanasawa. He remembers the script.

MIKA

Gargondos is not some hurricane, it is not just disaster!  
It has a mind, a heart! I’m sure with my research, I will  
get through to him!

SCIENTIST 2

Even if it had sentience, it’s behavior has been nothing  
but destructive.

MIKA

We began this fight, not him. With the way we have hurt him, it is the only sane response.

He is looking at her now. Her eyes wide and open, ready to receive the world in a way Goro is not.

“Ah, and who are you?” She asks, and it does not sting but thrum like a dull, old pain.

“The star of the show, of course! Goro Nakayama, Gargondos himself!” Hirose declares, hands in the air with panache.

“Oh! I see! It’s very nice to meet you, Nakayama-san.” She bowes lightly, and Goro hurriedly does the same.

“...Is nobody going to introduce me?” Ken asks, suddenly back in our vision from farther away.

“We’ll explain on the way. You two fought hard today, so let’s all get some drinks, huh?” Hirose declares.

## CHAPTER 2

We are now in Shinjuku, about fifteen minutes away from the studio in Chiyoda by train. The group sits at a long table in a small, cushy bar. The walls are littered with photographs of various celebrities, the covers of fashion magazines, fliers for all sorts of events and locations: jazz concerts, karaoke bars (the latest craze these days), host clubs, ramen shops, model scouting. They're in the center of Tokyo's nightlife, and it shows.

Hirose, at the head of the table, downs a shot of sake, his face briefly clenching up only to release with a shiver and a loud "bwah". Judging by his flushed face, this is not his first drink of the night. Akane woops with delight, not as far gone as her date but certainly getting there. Across from her, Ken is laying his head down, leaving only the two stars of the film looking even remotely composed.

"Awright! That's one day 'a filming down, a jillion more to go!" Hirose booms. Ken moans in despair. Goro hums noncommittally. "Exciting one too, huh? I dunno how you do it, Aniki, I just don't. Ladies, this job is hell on Earth, but I swear I've never heard this guy even grumble before!"

"*Mou*, and here I am, complaining about people getting fidgety when I'm doing their hair. I'm not built to work." Akane laments, head resting in her hand. "I gotta get married to some rich

guy who has other people to cook and clean for ‘im. Then I don’t have to do anything. All those old money guys are total losers, though.”

“So you’ve really been doing this for all those years?” Nijima asks, somewhere between impressed and horrified. From the opposite side of the table, Goro nods dazedly, hoping it seems more due to the sake than nervousness. He opens his mouth to say something, only for Hirose to lean in front of him.

“Yup, since the very beginning! Me and some other guys covered for him to do some reshoots a few times, but just walking, mostly. Stunt work is all him! Still, he gave me a whole lecture on how I’m supposed to walk right! It’s based on, uh-- what kinda animal was it, aniki? Monkeys?” He gesticulates, before turning around to face his senior.

Goro pushes him away lightly.

“Gorillas and elephants,” he answers curtly.

We are given a look into Goro’s notebook, its cover a dark red. Inside are rough but meticulous illustrations of the massive animals, their postures, the flow of their limb movements. Small notes in bold, scrappy handwriting: “More weight on front than in movie” “slow with bursts of speed” “rhythmic movement, strides don’t change lengths” “less impact than expected--not trying to stomp, just move”. Postcards from Ueno Zoo picturing the animals are

taped to the pages, promotional stills from the giant gorilla film KING OF THE APES are clipped in.

“I see.” Nijima tilts her head. “You study the character, just like any other role.”

Goro looks a bit lost-- he doesn't get reactions like that very often. Acknowledgements instead of surprise.

“If it looked too much like a person, it would look silly.” His mouth is a hard line as he takes another drink, still flustered.

“I feel bad. I honestly never thought too much about who was inside the suit. People should recognize your efforts, Nakayama-san.” She says firmly.

“No, they shouldn't.”

We see all of them at the table, the two in profile, the others behind them.

“*Wha--?*” “*Huh?*” The young couple say in unison. Ken mumbles something about being quiet.

“Why shouldn't they?” Nijima's brow furrows.

“They shouldn't see an actor when they see Gargondos. If it is an actor, it ceases to be mythical. It means I've done a bad job.”

“Why do you do it then?”



Goro faces front. He is agitated. He has been asked this question many times-- he has asked it to himself many times.

“Because-- because it was the first of its kind. I can’t do dialogue, and I’m not good looking. This is the only way people see me. I do it because I am the only one who can do it. I can’t be replaced. This is *my* role, *mine* alone.”

Gargondos smashes Shinjuku to pieces. Mika runs for cover.

*Such anger.*

*Such grief.*

Nijima looks shocked. Goro puts his head down.

“I’m sorry. I got away from myself there.”

“...I respect your passion.” She is stone-faced, unwilling to submit to his will. It makes Goro uncomfortable. “Remember yourself next time.” She warns.

He rests his elbows on the table, and things are silent.

-

“Y-ya sure he’s gonna be okay, man?” Hirose slurs as they exit the bar, Akane under his arm.

“He barely even had anything! Wadda baby,” Akane chuckles, Hirose chuckling with her. Goro is looking out at the landscape.

The outside of Shinjuku is packed and teeming with life, joy, and sin. People of all kinds seem to be there: drinking businessmen, young bikers, lovers on dates, loners looking for some kind of trouble. People bark advertisements for their bar, their girls, their DJ's. The strip is long and alight with every color imaginable, nearly blotting out the night sky.

It is a beautiful place, this city that Goro has spent his career destroying.

"Wasn't 'sposed to make lizard suits....who the hell knows how to make lizard suits... 'm a prop maker, not a lizard...maker," Ken whines as Goro attempts to keep his grip on him. Luckily the guy is rather lightweight-- it makes Goro wonder if he's eating enough. He'd remember to discuss that with Ken later.

"It's fine," Goro confirms, ignoring his friends' lamentations.

"Seriously, Aoi-chan, I can ditch this guy and head back with 'ya if you want." Akane says.

"Oi!" Hirose pouts.

"I'll be alright. You live in Minato, right?" Nijima asks, turning to Goro. Aoi. That's her first name. Aoi. *Blue*. He commits it to memory.

"Mm," Goro responds curtly.

“Alright, that makes it easy. We can drop off Tezuka-san and you’ll walk me home.” She decides, no room for argument. Goro nods.

Hirose and Akane watch with mischief in their eyes-- gossips.

“Mmkay! See you Monday!~” Akane sing-songs, waving as she pulls Hirose away with her. They attempt to whisper when out of range, but he can still somehow hear them mumbling.

For a moment the two are alone, standing before the wide strip of Tokyo’s nightlife-- alone among hundreds. Goro dares not look at her. Nijima does not have the same worries.

There is a silence. A beat of a heart.

“Why are we standin’? I wanna siddown--” Ken returns to life. Goro jostles his friend a bit, and they get moving.

They continue to walk quietly, slices of the city lighting their way:

The quieter walkways of the shopping districts, mostly dark due to the closed boutiques.

The subway station, liminal, covered in errant people in search of a way out, blinded by the artificial lights.

The train itself, almost empty, Ken resting on Goro's shoulder. To the right, two high school boys out too late examine a Gargondos poster, discussing with quiet passion. Nijima suppresses a laugh. Goro is flushed.

The quaint residential neighborhood that Ken calls home, bicycles, sports equipment, signs of life all around. On the outside of the building's second floor patio, Goro walks Ken inside.

Finally, alone, they reach the artificial greenery of Minato. It's a nicer neighborhood, at least the part they've found themselves in. The trees shake in the wind, the streets outlined in the orange of artificial light, and the world is unspeakably beautiful.

Nijima breaks the silence.

"You love what you do, don't you?" She asks.

"Yes. Why else would I do it?" Goro answers. The question strikes him as strange.

"I can think of a lot of reasons. Fear of disappointing people. Wanting to be seen. Not knowing what else to do."

"Are those not based in love?" It's a legitimate question, an embarrassing one.

"Hm. Maybe. It doesn't have to be, though."

"Why do *you* do it?" Goro asks. The trees shake once more, a gust of cold.

“Narcissism, I suppose. I want to be seen as an artist, whatever that means. I want people to know who I am, take me seriously when I talk. I want people to ask for my opinion on things that matter-- I imagine myself being interviewed more often than I should admit.” She chuckles. “I suppose it’s not as noble as your own goal, but--”

“Why do you want people to know who you are? Why art? Why your opinions?” Goro interrupts shakily.

“Why do I...? Well, I don’t know, really. It’s what I’ve always wanted. There are so many talented actresses out there, and none of them get what they deserve, not really. I want their struggles to mean something.”

*Mean something.*

“...Isn’t that love? Is it not wanting to share what you love?” Goro asks. Again, it comes out more desperate than it should.

“...I don’t think I’ve ever thought about it that way,” Nijima replies.

“I don’t think you’re a selfish person.”

Nijima smiles, puts her hands in her pockets.

“You just met me.” She finally says.

“I have good intuition. Only kind of thinking I’m particularly good at.”

“I don’t believe that, either, but I know better than to argue that. You won’t believe it.”

“I’m--flattered you think so.” Goro says, looking down.

They reach the gate of her home, a nice piece of classical japanese suburbia, white paint with black accents. It looks comfortable. On the side of the house is a well kept garden, cared for personally. Hydrangeas and ericas grow peacefully.

“This is me,” she says. “It was lovely meeting you, Nakayama-san.” She bows respectfully, Goro doing the same.

“Likewise,” he says, cursing his own lameness.

“Are you filming tomorrow?” She asks.

“No, not for a few more days,” he shrugs, trying not to anticipate what she’ll say next.

“If you aren’t busy, why don’t you come over tomorrow to run some lines with me?”

Silence. Zoom out on the neighborhood. Too far away to see their faces.

The shadow of a tail swishes across the houses.

“I’ll be there.”

### **CHAPTER 3**

The world is in bold and grainy technicolor, voices muffled by poor audio and the click-click-click of a projector. The reel begins to play.

**INT. TOKYO GAZETTE BULLPEN - DAY**

The bullpen is bustling with reporters, all scrambling to report on the arrival of AUSTRON. TOUYA (Goro, but more well groomed, hair fuller and slicked back, more life in his eyes than he is truly capable of: Goro as one of the lucky ones) however, is sitting at his desk, cigarette in hand, as MIKA grills him from above.

MIKA

You need to tell the people the truth!

TOUYA

You mean your theory. I can't risk my career based on a bleeding heart.

MIKA

I am a scientist, I don't make claims based on my feelings!

TOUYA stands up suddenly, getting a height advantage over MIKA, but she does not falter.

TOUYA

Then why are you yelling at me like a child?

MIKA

Because you all are the real children, unable to see reality! I have gone to everyone I could about this, but not even your *tabloid* will even *consider* that we are the problem here!

TOUYA takes a drag.

TOUYA

The hunt for Gargondos has been completely fruitless so far-- why exactly would the Sonar X be the thing to attract that other creature to us?

MIKA

It's correlation, not causation! Gargondos is far more intelligent than we choose to believe he is-- he knows that he is the only one of his kind! Don't you ever wonder why all these creatures, not just Austron, have been attacking us all of a sudden? After so many years of nothing?



TOUYA

There are have been many explanations--

MIKA

Yet none of them account for why they've suddenly come all at once, after thousands of years of dormancy! There is only one answer: Gargondos himself! His awakening, the strange power he possesses, must be sending some kind of signal, his own Sonar X, to *kaiju* across the galaxy!

TOUYA

They can't be serious with this-- are they seriously not going to--

The reel stops, colors return to reality. Goro and Nijima are themselves once more. What was the desk is now a sofa in a western style living room. The windows are open and airy, letting in the daylight and a breeze that sways the light curtains. Their positions have not changed, but Goro holds a script rather than a cigarette.

"I was actually doing well that time, you know. What's wrong?" Nijima asks, a weary look on her face.

“*Strange power*? Is that what they’re calling it now? It’s radiation, we know what it is,”

Goro grumbles, sitting down on the sofa to read the script in more detail. “Why are we pretending Gargondos appeared at random?”

“I suppose the studio decided mentioning that sort of thing wasn’t appropriate for a family-friendly film.” Nijima says, sitting in a loveseat next to the couch, hand on her chin.

“And who decided these were family friendly films?” Goro crosses his arms.

“Kids love Gargondos, I thought that was obvious.”

“It was never about the kids. Or. I don’t know, maybe it is, but it’s not just that. You know that’s what they called it in America? *Strange power*, however you say that in English. That’s why they stopped mentioning it, because the *gaijin* don’t like thinking about it, and so they think these films are some farce for children, and the studio has to oblige them.”

“They added some American actor, didn’t they? Instead of Yoshima-san and Sakamoto-senpai?” She crosses her legs. “I thought that was disrespectful. They both did their very best and got abandoned.”

“Forty minutes of footage, they got rid of. Anything that wasn’t just the spectacle. Anything that meant something,” Goro grumbles.

“I don’t disagree, but have you considered that maybe *we* don’t want to hear about it anymore?”

“What?” Goro freezes, legitimately confused, almost frightened. Sweating.

“People don’t want to be sad about something that happened fifteen years ago, no matter how terrible and life-changing it may have been. People want to focus on what's gotten better. I can understand that. I don’t think ignoring it is the answer, necessarily, but I understand not making it the focus of the film anymore, in a practical sense.”

Goro is silent for a moment, eyes closed. They open, and flash a brief, narrow reptilian.

“...This isn’t what I signed up for. Gargondos should be controlled by the people who give a shit about him, not the masses that don’t know what they want, not profit.”

“All art should, but that’s rarely the case,” Nijima responds.

“I don’t know how Mifune-san can put his name on these things sometimes.”

“Because what will happen when he’s not around to fight for his child?” She asks.

Goro hums, palm holding up his head.

Zoom out so both can be seen, dust floating in the sunlight. Nijima gets up.

“There reaches a point, though, where there's no choice but to leave. Eventually you stop mitigating the damage and start being complicit in it.”

Goro remains silent.

“I’m going to get some iced tea.”

-

Cut to the surface of a table on a tatami floor, populated by two glasses of iced tea; bordering the table are the crossed legs of the two actors.

“Do you have any advice on how to talk to Mifune-san?” Nijima asks.

Goro in profile, staring at both the window and his companion, sun in his eyes.

“What do you mean, exactly?”

“He’s a bit intimidating, I have to admit.”

“I’m surprised you find anyone intimidating,” Goro says, eyebrows raised.

“Why, because you’re so very scary?” She chuckles. He chuckles back. He wonders how much she’d have to see to be frightened of him. She saw a glimpse of it last night, and while she didn’t back down, he saw her flinch. He takes an odd pride in that, and feels disgusted with himself for it. He pushes the glass to his forehead, cooling it down from the summer heat.

“Eh, Mifune-san is...difficult to read, I guess, for most people. He’s not the type to get angry though, as far as I know. I’ve asked to make changes to scenes before, and at the very least he thought about them. He has a vision, and he’s very stern about that, but he’s not immune to reason.”

“You’ve known him a long time, haven’t you?” Nijima says, gingerly taking her glass up to her lips, center frame, watching.

“M--mm. Yes. Since I was nineteen.” Goro nods, swirling his drink to avoid eye contact.

“Nineteen...” Nijima mumbles, clearly thinking something through.

“I’m thirty-five,” he answers the unsaid question, cringing inwardly.

“...Sorry.” She places the glass on the table. “Since you won’t ask back, I’ll tell you that I’m twenty-eight.”

“Ah,” he says, not knowing what else to say. He wonders why a woman like her isn’t married, but at the same time, he doesn’t. Who knows what could have happened? Maybe she broke off an engagement or something. Maybe she’s just particular. Maybe she’s like him-- never had the time.

“Anyway, we were discussing Mifune-san,” Nijima leads the conversation back. “How did you get involved with him?”

“I was working on a cop movie he was directing, doing stunts. I guess he liked my work ethic, because he asked me to be his monster. He gave me a lot of instructions-- I could tell it was serious business, even back then.”

Images pop into his mind, imagined scenes in monochrome. A young Mifune standing guard at a POW camp, eyes watching the sullen people in his periphery, situated behind us. Mifune sitting on his cot, the radio in the same position as in Goro's own memory, listening to the same lines. Mifune clacking away at a typewriter, sweat on his brow, his eyes an angry bloodshot red.

Return to reality. The sun is just starting to set. They continue to sit in the airy room, backs to us. watching the day come to an end.

“He says he saw something in me. I'm not sure I believe him, but I'm grateful anyway.”

“Given that you're still working with him, I'd say he's correct.”

“Ehhh.” Goro grumbles.

A pause. A long one. Backs still turned, in silhouette.

“I...I don't want to have the wrong idea about this, because I don't want to disrespect you,” Goro says sheepishly.

“Okay. Then ask whatever it is you want to ask,” Nijima responds, not sheepish at all.

“What is this, exactly? What is it that you want me to do?” He asks.

Turn to their faces. Nijima chuckles. The spikes, momentarily existent on Goro’s back, point upwards. She turns to look at him.

“Generally speaking, these sorts of things are for figuring out what you want. Aren’t they?”

“Ah...” Words are hard. Very much so. Movement is much easier but he cannot do that either.

“I think you’re interesting. There are lots of men like you in my world, men who understand art, but they’re stuck in their obsessions. They’ve convinced themselves they are either the lowest of the low or gods among men. You are an artist in a realer sense. It seems to me you are doing this only to satisfy your self-image, not the image you put into the world.”

The sky is bright orange. They have yet to look each other in the eye-- it would be improper, somehow.

“The only reason I haven’t convinced myself of those things is because I can’t decide which I am. I’m going to disappoint you.”

Nijima gets up.

Maki confronts the monster, and somehow, it hesitates.

“That’s up to me to decide. And it takes me quite a while to do that. Can you be patient?”

“...I think so.” Goro says, still sitting. “I think so.”

## CHAPTER 4

“That smell is giving me a headache.”

It’s a day later. Ken’s workshop is like that of an alien taxidermist’s. Pelts from various creatures are hung up in rows, joined by piles of rods, wires, acrylic eyes, sketches of all manner of creatures. Sculpted versions of Gargondos and Austron sit on a work desk, while folded up suits from monsters past hang in the back of the room: a bipedal silver triceratops-like creature, a four-legged mix of a mammoth and walrus, a humanoid wasp with twig hands. All foes Gargondos has defeated, trophies of a kind.

Focus on Ken standing on a stepladder, working on Gargondos himself, mounted proudly on a mannequin. He’s applying a pungent chemical to the suit’s fins and membranes, respirator on his face. Goro sits in Ken’s chair, watching from afar.

“You should’ve smelled it when I was stripping the finish earlier.” Ken says, muffled from the mask.

“So this is supposed to be less flammable?” Goro asks, leaning back.



“That’s the plan.”

“You won’t have a chance to test it if I die from the fumes first, you know.”

“Don’t joke about that! It doesn’t have a smell when it dries, okay?!”

Goro chuckles quietly to himself. He can’t help but bully his friend a bit-- Ken is just that sort of guy.

“Not that you’d mention it, since you need to martyr yourself every five minutes,” Ken continues. Though he is behind his friend, Goro can imagine that queasy frown of his with complete clarity. “You should be more like Hirose-san.”

“You want me to complain to you all the time?” Goro tilts his head, a bit irritated by the notion. He likes Hirose, sure, but his work ethic left something to be desired.

“I want you to honestly tell me what's wrong, not just what makes work easier!” Ken shouts back, the room in a horizontal slice as they talk.

“Those are the same thing,” Goro claims with an eye roll.

““Ah, Ken, the material on the tail weighs me down, so I can’t do the whip attack Mifune-san wants’ is not ‘Ah! Ken! The material on the tail weighs me down! If you don’t do something about it I’ll throw my back out!’””

“I’m being a professional.” Back to close on Goro, his arms crossed.

Ken prays for the sweet release of death.

“I thought us two were beyond professionalism at this point,” Ken sighs.

“*I’m* never beyond professionalism,” Goro continues to stand firm.

“This I know,” is Ken’s respirator-muffled, somewhat pitiful reply as he lowers himself from Gargondos, taking the offending item off when he gets far enough away. “*Mou*, you weren’t kidding. That smells like shit.”

“Told you,” Goro pushes his chair forward, giving Ken enough room to sit on his workbench.

“I really don’t want to be responsible for killing you, Goro.”

“You’re smart enough to know it’d be my own fault.”

“Clearly I’m not.”

The two are silent after that. Gargondos seems to watch from afar, judging Goro. He shakes it off.

“...If we get into this conversation, I won’t get the chance to tell you what happened with Nijima-san,” Goro eventually says.

A silence again.

“Fine. Tell me,” Ken’s shoulders drop.

“Nothing happened, really.”

“Great, good talk.”

“Okay, okay,” Goro puts his hands up in a mocking ‘spare me’ pose. He’s flushed, slightly. “She’s... very intelligent. She asked me a lot of questions. About all this, you know.”

“Really? Since when do the human leads even know we exist?” Ken leans down, watching Goro’s profile. “What kind of questions?”

“About how I started, about Mifune-san. I helped her run some lines in the script. Talked about the...direction this is all going in, I suppose.”

Goro’s point of view. Ken watches him with a sparkle in his eye, and Gargondos’ head tilts ever so slightly, eyes on him.

“Direction?” Ken asks.

“You know. Making it more... clean, I guess is the word.” Goro avoids eye contact. “...Why exactly do you keep doing this, Ken? What do you get out of it.”

Ken blinks, his glasses making his eyes look large and owlish. He looks out at the workshop, at his menagerie, his trophy room.

“I get to make things nobody has ever seen before. Scary things, fun things, beautiful things. I get to solve problems. It’s like-- a jigsaw puzzle, sort of,” He gesticulates. “And I’m slowly fitting all the pieces together. It’s satisfying. I enjoy it.”

Goro observes his friend's reverie. Satisfaction. Enjoyment. Foreign concepts in his experience.

"Even when the budgets get lower? When you get paid less, when you have less materials? It's still enjoyable then?"

Ken picks up the model of Austron from the desk. From close up, it looks like the roles are reversed-- he is giant, and it is small.

"Just another obstacle. It's...it's very stressful, it's torture, don't get me wrong. But it's worth it in the end, when I make something I love. Least that's what I tell myself, hah."

"What happens when it *isn't* something you love?" Goro asks.

"Sometimes I don't love it at first. My teacher always told me to approach each project with patience,, to see it in the light it's supposed to be seen. Eventually I end up loving it, even if it isn't perfect." He puts Austron back. "I guess if the time came that I truly didn't love the result, I'd look at other options. Not that there's many in this industry." He shrugs, and jumps off the table.

"Should be done now. You want to wait a while or get it over with?" Ken asks, head tilted towards their shared creation.

"I'll check it now," Goro says.

Sequence of images. Goro sticks his feet inside the suit. Goro places his arms in the proper spots with Ken's help. Gargondos's talons pull its head over Goro. Consumed once more. A dull rumble echoes Goro's ears.

"How's it feel?" Ken asks, muffled, hard to understand, blurred and outlined in angry red.

Gargondos thinks something hateful. From within the suit, we can see Goro's arms shake slightly under the weight of the arms and their new membranes.

"Feels fine," Goro says.

## CHAPTER 5

*We are supposed to be aquatic.* Goro narrates.

Ken's sketches appear before us, beautifully rendered in colored pencil: Gargandos swimming through the sea, sleek and powerful, something between an eel and a salamander, it's fins swishing back and forth. It does not lumber like it does on land: this is its true home.

*And yet every moment in the water is a moment I am convinced of my own death.*

Now we see reality, Gargondos struggling to move inside the water.

*The 90 kilograms become weighed down further. I am crushed under the pressure. I wonder if the beast feels the same, if his supposed home hurts him as much as it hurts me. I know he does not wonder the same. The beast has never once cared about me.*

Gargondos blasts out of the water, stomping onto shore, sopping wet. Cut to its face, savage and hateful, ready to destroy that which disturbed its slumber once again.

*He is the center of my life, and I am nothing to him. This is how one serves their god.*

Goro's point of view from the pinholes, the black and red of Gargondos' vision. A small port waits in front of them, complete with small, lovingly crafted boats, yet further still is void. Nothing. The eyes of the crew, Mifune standing by the principal camera. Ken is nowhere to be found-- he has been barred from entry due to his history of panic attacks during water shoots.

"Cut!" Mifune shouts. "Reset."

The effects team, a legion that changes from film to film and unit to unit, scramble onto the set, returning things to their original positions, erasing the beast's damage from the world. They prop back up the dock set to break in half upon Gargondos's arrival, place the boats in their proper places, dust the area with fresh, dry sand.

"Problem?" Goro shouts from under the suit, panting.

*Words are difficult in such a state. Mifune is used to this.*

“Water hit the lens. Nothing could’ve been done. Take a breather while you can,” Mifune states, staring at the neck of the creature in an odd visual display, despite the practical sense it makes. As they stand speaking, the ponytailed production assistant from the other day jumps into frame, oxygen tube in hand, inserting into the small slit at the back of the creature's neck.

Cut to Goro in the suit, drenched in water instead of sweat, yet still red from the heat, from the exertion. He takes a deep breath, and exhales right back onto his face. He is focussed and miserable.

*I don't know why they won't leave us alone, these other creatures. I don't know why they fight us. We don't care why. If someone fights us, we fight back.*

Flashback. Young Goro in the same tatami room as before. A uniformed man, strikingly similar to the adult Goro, kneels down, hand on the boy's shoulder, saying something inaudible.

“Alright. Get in.” Mifune orders.

*We fight back.*

Goro obeys.

Take two. Gargondos bursts from the water. Out of focus.

“CUT! Reset.”

*We fight back.*

Take three. Gargondos bursts from the water. Boats maintain too much gravity.

“CUT! Reset.”

*We fight back.*

Take four. Goro is gasping for air. Gargondos moves strangely, helplessly.

“CUT! Reset.”

*Why?*

Same image of Gargondos bursting out, over and over again.

“CUT! Reset.”

*Why are you doing this to me?*



“CUT! Reset.”

*Why do you all hate me so much?*

“CUT! Reset.”

*Why did you create me?*

A heartbeat. Gargondos steps up to the platform underwater. From inside, Goro’s hands tremble from the weight, center of gravity confused.

*Why am I doing this?*

The foot bends awkwardly,

*Why?*

From the surface, Gargondos compensates, slaps a clawed, finned hand onto the docks and rips them apart.

*Why?*

Gargondos emerges from the water.

*Why?*

And the shot is perfection.

“CUT! That was the one! Next shot, let’s move!”

The moment Mifune calls it, Goro’s balance shifts. The PA approaches, along with Mifune.

“You’re lucky that ended up looking good. Since when do you improvise, hm?” Mifune asks.

“Tripped a little.” Goro responds, muffled.

“You okay?” Mifune’s face, fish-eye lens, outlined in red. The PA is by the side, fiddling with the suit.

“Think so. I’ll be fine when you need me.”

“Alright. It’ll take us a while to get the charges set for this one, so take a load off.”

Goro is now freed from the torso, sopping wet. His face is neutral. He radiates anger.

Switch to side profile: Goro and Mifune, both gigantic against the destructible cityscape surrounding them. Goro passes in front of Mifune. His expression changes, gritting his teeth under some kind of strain.

Cut to Goro sitting on a bench, the miniature set in the foreground. Detailed models of tanks sit pointed away from him. He watches them.

*They think those things work. After all this time, they think it works.*

Gargondos, bombarded with tank fire, unfazed..

A black and white photograph in front of a faded piece of paper, a letter. A man, the same figure so similar to Goro, standing calmly in front of a large tank. His stance is proper, yet he is clearly holding in an even larger smile than he has on his face. Written in blocky letters, hiragana so it can be read by a child, “**never give up!**”

Gargondos rears up its foot. A plane flies through the night sky.

Black and white, the same image. A tank destroyed.

*Nobody has learned anything. Not since the beginning of time. We have learned nothing.*

Cut back to Goro, hand on his head, neutral expression switching to frustration.

*The “strange power”, that woman dangling hope on a string, Ken thinking **this** is beautiful. Mifune pushing and pushing and pushing--*

*I'm so tired. So very tired.*

“Ready for Gargondos!” Mifune shouts.

Goro gets up, takes a step towards us. Another. Grit teeth. Another. Sweat. Another,  
  
and falls.

Everything sounds muffled. Slow. Confusing. He cannot tell if he has passed out or if his mind is going. His leg hurts in a way that he is not familiar with. He is not used to unfamiliar pain.

Reality returns. Goro is being sat back on the bench by two crew members. Mifune looms from behind us.

“You said you were fine,” He says coolly.

“I am fine,” Goro says, voice low, voice strained. He moves to get up, only to stumble again.

“Get the suit off him,” Mifune orders. The crew complies, even as Goro attempts to struggle. Eventually the bottom half of the suit pops off. Goro’s foot is hideously swollen, blotched in red and purple. Goro looks at it in shock. Mifune’s expression doesn’t change.

“That’s a sprain. Maybe worse,” Mifune states.

“I’m fine,” Goro growls.

“Is Hirose here?” He turns to one of the crewmembers.

“I said *I’m fine!*”

“He’s doing promo photos a few lots down,” A PA supplies.

“Call him in.” Mifune orders.

“*You can’t do this to me!*” Goro shouts, nearly snarls, the monster in his voice. The crew looks at him with wide eyes.

Mifune raises an eyebrow, and leans forward.

“I need this scene finished today. I need you back in there as soon as possible. I cannot have both. I am doing my job, now you do yours and *do as I say.*”

Goro blinks blearily, breath becoming ragged. His eyes dart across the room, glowing red and trailing light. His vision is caught by boots hitting concrete. Hirose, running in. “I-I’m here!” He pants.

“Get him in the suit,” Mifune turns away, Goro grasping at him.

“He can’t! He doesn’t know what he’s doing! Mifune-san, *listen to me!*”

Hirose, already surrounded by the costume crew, looks at Goro, confused, almost hurt, before smiling genuinely.

“Aniki, don’t worry. You taught me what to do, remember?”

Goro says nothing, stunned, head in his hands, eyes staring at his foot, back to Hirose, to Mifune, to his father, to anyone who can help him.

No time seems to have passed, yet Hirose is already in the suit. Gargondos’ eyes glow with life once more.

A montage of destruction. Of tanks and planes being crushed, of buildings toppling to the ground, of a loud and beautiful and terrible ROAR.

*Gragondos is alive. He is without me and he is alive. How can he be alive?*

Goro is frantic as each image bursts through his mind. Gargondos’ head snaps into eye contact with him, nostrils flaring.

**WEAK.** Gargondos thinks.

Goro’s eyes widen, and everything goes dark.

## CHAPTER 6

The Hojo Studios infirmary-- a surprisingly well stocked affair, prepared for any kind of contingency imaginable. On staff are four paramedics and one semi-retired doctor with an interest in the movies. The place is cluttered yet not disorganized; variously film memorabilia and signed photos are on the crews workspaces, while all many of medical devices that Goro cannot name are placed in clear boxes. A drawn anatomical model of a bisected human head is framed on the wall behind the examination table he is sitting on, now bandaged leg dangling.

“He said not to do that,” says the ponytailed production assistant from before, standing just shy of a respectful distance away. Goro had not considered her much before. Young, almost as young as he was when he started here. Has freckles. Looks nervous, fiddling with her orange Hojo Studios Crew jacket.

Goro grumbles something and places the offending foot flat on the table, leaving him in an awkward position even closer to the girl. Not worth arguing, he had decided, considering she’d most likely snitch on him to Mifune.

Though maybe fuck Mifune. Goro recoils at his own thought, at the anger of it. He’s been angry before, but this feels different somehow. There had always been respect in his anger. Now he isn’t sure, or maybe he just wants to be unsure. He is hurt. The way Mifune spoke to him hurt.

“I, um--” The girl keeps her nervous tell, stammering. “I’m a big fan, Nakayama-san.”

Goro raises an eyebrow.

“A fan?”

“Y-yes. I’m a fan. I mean, I guess I’m more of a Gargondos fan than anything--” obviously. “But... when I first watched the movie with my father, I was so fascinated by how they made it look so real, how they made these giant things, who was controlling them. I started looking at magazines and things to learn more about it, and I guess that led me here,” she explains, avoiding eye contact the whole time. Goro tilts his head, leans down, relaxes ever so slightly.

“...Did you even know my name before coming here?”

“No, to be honest,”

Hm.

“But that doesn’t mean I didn’t admire your work! I remember how hot it would get in my rainboots sometimes-- I couldn’t imagine being covered in rubber like that. But because of your work, I ended up discovering my dream, so thank you.”

She finally looks at him. Her eyes betray a sense of hope that makes Goro deeply uncomfortable.

“I--”



Before he can say anything, the doctor, a white haired man with a well trimmed beard walks in, a large plastic boot in his hand.

“Well, it is certainly a sprain, so we’re going to deal with it the usual way. C’mere, let me make sure this fits okay.”

Goro complies, placing his leg back down, the bisected head now directly above Goro’s own. The doctor fits the boot, fiddling with certain things, before attaching it.

“Got to say, Nakayama-kun, I’m surprised it took this long for something like this to happen.”

“I’m here all the time, doctor,” Goro retorts.

“Well, hopefully I won’t be seeing you for some time. You’re out for two weeks minimum.”

Goro says nothing, just stares at the ground and attempts to breathe. He knew it was coming. The knowing did not help it hurt less. *Two weeks*. Two weeks with Hirose out there doing who knows what, with some other stuntman on Austron doing who knows what. Two weeks that could kill a film.

~~And yet Hirose was good.~~ Hirose could only carry this for so long. They needed *him*.

God damn it, they needed him.

Zoomed out from Goro’s delirium, the doctor hands him the boot with moderate force.

“Be sure to make sure everything is tight enough. It’ll hurt like hell at first, but it keeps the swelling down. Ice it, too.”

And with that, he walks off, leaving us with Goro, the PA, and the bisected head illustration once again. They are silent for a moment. Goro begins to set up the boot. The girl continues not to look at him, yet has stopped messing with her jacket.

“...Um, please don’t tell on me for saying this, but...I was sort of relieved to see you get mad like that.”

Goro turns to her, brows raised in distinct confusion.

“I mean, you’ve never complained before, despite everything, so...I don’t know. I guess it’s nice to see that you’re not okay with things, sometimes.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.” Goro says.

“...Sorry,” The PA responds.

“Can I be left alone now, or are you going to stay here?”

“I’ll leave if you want. He just wanted me to make sure you put on the boot. Neither of us could, you know, really make you...”

“No, you cannot.” Goro crosses his arms, looking at the boot once more. He shakes his head, looks back at the girl. “Excuse my rudeness. It’s not about you.”

“It’s okay.” She says simply. “Besides, I bet you want to get back to Gargondos as soon as possible, so I have no reason not to trust you.”

She turns, her hair swishing slightly with her movement. “I’ll, um, I’ll go now--”

“Wait,” Goro says, hand up, surprising himself.

“--Yes?” The girl asks.

“You watched Gargondos with your father, yes? The first one?”

“Yes.”

“What do you think of the new films? Of the ones we’re doing now?”

The PA puts her hand up to her chin, considering.

“I like this one. I think it’s interesting, having an emotional angle with Gargondos. Also, it’s interesting to have a mammalian *kaiju* as an opponent rather than a reptilian one. The use of the Minotaur myth is also very interesting to me-- it’s like Japan is the people of Knossos, having to reckon with the evil of their ancient past.”

Goro blinks.

“So Gargondos is Japan in this case?” He asks.

“Well, yes,” She says curtly, nodding to herself.

“But Gargondos terrorizes Japan. He was awoken by the bomb-- he is the trauma of it, destroying everything in its path.” Goro says, but faded around him, so is Mifune.

“People heal from trauma, though, don’t they? It’s like a tragic backstory. Gargondos fought us in our grief, but now tries to ensure it never happens again.” She says, suddenly alight, as if Goro said some magic phrase to break her out of her shyness.

“Gargondos isn’t fighting for the people,” Goro states, a fact.

“Not in the text, no, but...can’t metaphors change? Shouldn’t they, as we do?”

Goro looks at her again, her face passionate and twisted in some mix of delight and determination, eyes sparkling in a way Goro doesn't think his ever could. He envies her in this moment. Deeply, and shamefully.

“What is your name?” Goro asks, eventually.

“Akemi. Ch-Chihiro Akemi,” she answers.

“You should let yourself speak more, Akemi-san,” Goro says coolly. “I’m going to smoke outside. You should get back to set.”

“Yes sir. Thank you, sir.”

“Don’t call me-- agh, whatever. Just go.”

She does, shuffling slightly, an indistinct murmuring trailing her as she leaves. Goro methodically gets up, his weight on his good leg, and limps into the now darkened sky.

## CHAPTER 7

As he smokes, people begin to visit him.

It begins with Ken, walking parallel to the building towards the back lots. The two make eye contact, and Ken begins to walk faster, avoiding Goro's gaze.

"Oi! What's your problem?"

"Y-you know what my problem is, moron!" Ken stumbles over himself, clearly not that used to being confrontational.

"I don't, actually, so come here and talk to me about it like a man!"

"I have places to be!"

"I'll run after you, Ken, I swear."

Ken growls in frustration, stomping over. He leans over Goro, not taking a seat next to him.

"Listen. I am not fighting with you right now, because I know you're not as stupid as I should probably think you are, and that you're paying for your mistakes, but this is *exactly* what I meant by you not telling me things."

"I know that--"

"Yeah, you know that, and you don't care if it affects me or not. Your friend. Your *partner*."

"Everyone knows I'm out of my mind, Ken, nobody is blaming you."

“That’s not what I mean by affecting me!”

“Then what do you mean?”

“It means I give a shit about you! *You!* As a human being! But you’re just gonna keep on doing this to yourself and make everyone watch!”

“Maybe I won’t. Maybe I’ve learned my lesson.” Goro grumbles, hand on his chin.

“That’s real cute of you, Goro, really, I--” Ken stops. Breathes. “I’m stopping this. Right now. Maybe later I’ll be mad at you about this, but I’m not doing that right now. So just leave me alone and stop yelling across the lot!” Ken huffs, adjusting his glasses, before leaving without a response.

Goro continues to sit on the stoop of the infirmary, smoking nonchalantly, faced screwed up in an anger he knows it isn’t fair to feel. It’s fine. Ken deserves to be angry with him. they’ll both get over it eventually.

Probably.

He watches the people of the studio go by. Hojo doesn’t only produce kaiju films, of course. Men in fake police uniforms sit by a golf cart, eating sandwiches. Two PA’s wheel a large model space ship into one of the warehouse-like indoor studios. A man in a suit, presumably a producer, argues with a man in a tank top, presumably a director. It’s always noisy this time of day. Goro prefers it in the early morning, when nobody else is around. Still, there is a beauty to it, he supposes.

Flashback, black and white. A young Goro, excitement breaking through his already jaded eyes, looking at the hustle and bustle of his new job. He's going to make *movies*. Isn't that incredible?

Cut back to Goro's front, cigarette in hand, exhausted and injured. He sighs.

"Don't end up like me, Chihiro-san," He says to nobody.

"Who's Chihiro?" asks someone out of our vision, temporarily spooking Goro before he quickly regains his composure. We turn to see Nijima in costume: a green tank top with a Kyoto University logo, khakis and boots, a lab coat tied around her waist. He remembers this scene from when they ran lines: Maki is doing field work in the mountains.

She sees the head of GARGONDOS, close enough she could touch it  
if she ran fast enough, and slowly, slowly, approaches.

He hopes Mika brought bug spray or her bare arms will be bitten up like crazy. The whole outfit reminds him of insect collecting as a boy. He shakes the thought from his mind, and turns to her.

"Production assistant had to walk me over here earlier. 'Was a kid, just got started. Reminded me of myself.'" He explains, deciding not to mention her gender for fear of some kind of negative reaction, even if that is paranoid of him. He would hope Nijima would assume better

from him than to have an interest in what he considered a child, but it was best to avoid it altogether, he thinks.

“Heard you had a *primadonna* moment on set,” she says, hands on hips, the foreign word cleanly sounded out, a well-worn favorite.

“I don’t know what that means,” Goro responds lamely. “Do you want a cigarette?”

“It means you made a spectacle of yourself in front of the crew. And yes, I do,” she says, but does not sit down next to him. She remains standing up.

“Word travels fast,” he sighs, handing her a cigarette and the lighter.

“When it comes to Mifune’s Silent Monk having a fight with his master, I suppose it does,” she shrugs, expression hard to read. Is she mad at him as well? He doesn’t really know. Maybe disappointed is the word.

*Hate to say I told you so.*

“Is that my reputation?” Goro asks, taking a drag.

“Outside of the Gargdonos crew? I guess so, but you didn’t have one until today,” she too takes a drag, and is momentarily silent. The sky’s still blue, and Goro wishes it were orange.

“Made a fucking fool of myself,” he says.

“If you expect me to say you didn’t, that’s not going to happen,” she responds.



“I don’t expect that.” Maybe he’s lying. He doesn’t know.

“You’ll be fine, though. You’ll recover. If it were *me*, I’d never work again-- be branded a difficult *woman*. You wouldn’t believe the amount of times I’ve almost gotten there,” she grimaces, “but I never did. Wait til you’re alone like the other half of the world next time, for your own convenience.”

A silence, because Goro can’t think of anything to say.

“I am sorry about your foot,” she eventually says. “But it’ll heal. You’ll be back there in no time.”

“I don’t know about that,” Goro says.

“Of course you will,” she reassures.

“I mean, maybe I won’t come back at all.”

“I’ll believe it when I see it.”

“Why does nobody *listen to me* when I speak!?” Goro shouts. Nijima is taken aback momentarily, before frowning in a deep, stern anger.

“...You are *not* talking to me that way. If you talk to me that way, I’m leaving and I’m not talking to you again.” Her hands are balled at her sides, her voice shakes but Goro knows that she’s serious.

Goro blinks, before his face reddens with shame. He looks down.

“Forgive me. It’s--it’s been a very difficult day,” he swallows hard before taking another drag to mask the sound.

“Just don’t do it again,” she orders. Her shoulders relax. “...Anyway, yes, I suppose it must have been. Are you seriously considering quitting?”

“I don’t know,” he answers honestly. “Maybe.”

“What would you do instead?”

“No idea.”

“I thought you said you loved doing this,” she says, sounding oddly sad.

“Love doesn’t mean enjoying. It means love,” he responds.

“You said only you could do it,” she challenges again.

“I think I was wrong,” he answers. “Hirose’s managing just fine.”

“I sincerely doubt Hirose can do it like you can,” Nijima says.

Goro sighs.

“He can do just fine for what they want out of him,” he nearly growls.

“This isn’t Hirose’s fault, you know, Goro,” Nijima raises an eyebrow.

“I know, I know, it’s just--”

“Just *what*? What exactly are you trying to say?”

Zoom out. The two of them, shaded by a large, unseen force. Goro is ignoring it. Nijima does not see it. Goro swallows.

“...I was thinking about what you said the other day, about trying to save something for so long that you become complicit. I think maybe I’ve reached that point. Except...well, like you said, I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.” He fiddles with his cigarette, rolls it his hands with surprising precision. Nijima watches his face.

“This is part of me. I can’t just... not do it.”

“Of course not,” Nijima says.

“Of course not?” He parrots.

“If I were something else, something more profitable, something less stressful, maybe some parts of my life would be better, but...I do this because I have to. Because I love it. That’s what you said that I’ve been thinking about. What it means to love something.”

Goro flushes for a moment but is suddenly bogged down by a profound, childish despair, as if something she said triggered something he didn’t know he had in him.

“I don’t know-- what I’m supposed to do, Aoi.” His voice cracks and he curses himself.

**Weak.** Just like the beast had said. Weak, weak, weak.

There’s a silence, a contemplation. For a moment, there is stillness. Then, Aoi moves, gracefully as always, to sit by his side.

The wind shifts and the sky, slowly ringing itself in pink, brims with life. There is no more shade.

“I think you’ve had a rough day, a very rough day, and that any decision you make needs to be one you keep making, over and over, for at least a few days. I think you should spend however long you have in break time to think about this. About what you want. About what you need.”

Her hand is in his. Goro commits the feeling to memory. He nods.

“Okay. Okay.”

“Okay,” she says back.

Goro isn’t sure how long the moment lasts. Maybe just that, a moment, maybe minutes. He wonders if anyone saw. If anyone derides her for this. *Twas beauty killed the beast*, says King of Apes. Eventually, though it stops. Her hand moves. He is alone, but she is still there.

Front view of the two.

“I got into a bit of a tiff with Mifune myself the other day, you know.”

“You did?” Goro balks.

“Mmhm. That line you and I talked about, the *strange power*, I talked about it with him.”

“That was a studio mandate, though. No way they’ll change it.”

“I didn’t change it, I added to it. Wanted to, at least. I said, ‘Gargondos’ strange power, the product of our own sins...!’ et cetera, et cetera. Least I did for a take or two. Like I said, you have no idea how many times I’ve almost ended up in your position,”

She chuckles.

“I’m, well, I’m happy you did that, but I doubt they’ll actually put it in the final cut,”

Goro grimaces, immediately regretting saying that. And yet...

“I did what I could, though. I tried to mitigate the damage, in a way that some actors wouldn’t have. I did, in the limited amount possible, my duty to make this film turn out well,”

Aoi says proudly. Goro smiles wryly.

“That Chihiro kid I mentioned earlier, they talked about all these ideas about the kaiju being metaphors, changing metaphors each time. It seemed like they were really serious about it. I never really met a...well, I guess you can say an *adult* that grew up with the films before. That loved them like that, that wanted to work on them.”

“Eventually that’s who the studio will hire. Right now we’re in this awful phase where any old sci-fi shlock writer can make a Gargondos film, but soon enough the young will catch up to us, right? That’s when the wind will really change,” Aoi smiles.

“If we survive ‘til then,” Goro smiles back.

“If we survive ‘til then,” she agrees.

## CHAPTER 8

Goro’s apartment, while in the same neighbourhood as Aoi’s, is not as nice as hers is. It’s an older house, pre-war and still standing, rickety but proud. The garden is a mess of dandelions.

Crickets chatter in the moonlight. He stands at the step, light pouring from the open door. In far far distance, Gargondos stalks through the night.

“*Todaima.*” He says to nobody, taking off his shoes and heading inside. He heads towards the kitchen first, a sparse affair aside from an out of place marble countertop, worn as it may be. From the view of the fridge, Goro is haloed in light as he grabs one of many cheap beers.

What? Just because he doesn’t act like a fool in public doesn’t mean he can’t be pathetic in the privacy of his own home. Besides, he supposes he does act like a fool in public now. He looks down at the boot, mocking him. He growls at it, takes some more beers with him and heads to the living room.

We see the living room from many angles. It’s floors are tatami but it's furnished with a sofa and cheap coffee table. A *butsudan*, a shrine for the dead, sits humbly, centered with a professional looking photo of the man we now know as Goro’s father. It gathers dust-- he hasn’t dared touch it in some time. Next to it is a shelf littered with VHS tapes, and atop it, a CRT television.

Goro looks at the whole affair, regards each object like they are somehow new to him. He considers the *butsudan* longer than he usually does, but continues his trend of not going near it. He walks to the VHS collection, and picks out a tape.

Slowly, the screen comes to life, and the title screen appears. GARGONDOS, the monochrome original, made all those years ago, only five years after the war had ended. Just five.

RIN

I can't simply ignore him, Takashi! Before anything, Hideo is my childhood friend, and his research is killing him! Please, don't let jealousy consume you the way his own paranoias consumed him!

TAKASHI

Tch--! He's lost, Rin-chan! If you keep delaying telling him,  
we'll never get to be together!

RIN

I promise, this will be the last time. My final attempt.

*In color, a familiar scene: young Goro talking with Mifune. They sit outside a lot.*

*"...So, if I got this right, you're making miniature versions of different parts of the city, and the stuntman in the suit will look bigger in comparison."*

*"That and low camera angles, some editing trickery, and suspension of disbelief, yes."*

*"I mean, that sounds interesting, sir, but I don't understand why you want me to be the one to do it."*

*“Well.” Mifune crosses his arms. “We’ve been shooting this thing for a while now, and I know you’re good at what you do. You take instructions, you don’t complain, you work hard. I like that.” Goro brightens at that in a way we haven’t seen before.*

In the present, Goro drinks a beer. Sighs.

RIN

Oh, Hideo-kun, you can’t keep doing this! The past is gone! If you keep living like this, I--I simply don’t know what’ll happen to you!

HIDEO leans onto the table, staring at his work, trying to parse RIN’s words through his addled brain.

HIDEO

I...I have to keep going. I have to atone.

RIN

Atone for *what*?

HIDEO



I wish more than anything that I could tell you, Rin.

*“But there’s more to it than that. You’re a young guy, aren’t you? Too young to get drafted, am I right?”*

*Goro looks uncomfortable. Touches his arm.*

*“Yes, sir.”*

*“I see that look in your eyes when you’re working, when you’re really focussed. I think you’re angry. I think you feel like they cheated you by not letting you fight. Am I correct?”*

*“...Yes, sir.”*

*Mifune begins to pace around.*

*“Well, that’s what I need. This monster, I haven’t gotten a name for it yet-- this monster isn’t just a monster. It’s **our** monster. Radiation made flesh. Old stories come for revenge. We awoke it, created it. We made it the only one of its kind, and it is angry. That’s why I need you, Nakayama-kun. This is more than just stunt work. It needs to feel...wronged, somehow.”*

GARGONDOS destroys Tokyo Tower with a swipe of it’s claw.

*Goro destroys Tokyo Tower with a swipe of his claw.*

GARGONDOS bites down on the plane with it’s gaping jaw.

*Goro bites down on the plane with his gaping jaw.*

GARGONDOS *Goro* bellows in victory.

In the present, the world has blurred, and *Goro* goes under.

-

The city is on fire. It's old, very old, and it's burning. Ash stands in the silhouette of bodies, strewn across the heated ground. A siren goes off in the distance. Something breathes. *Goro* stands in the middle of the street. He looks down at his hand, and realizes he is holding a toy soldier. He drops it, and breaks apart on the concrete. He turns back, and faces the attacker.

Gargondos stands illuminated by flame, its eyes an angry red. His face moves with miniscule, realistic movements. He grimaces in anger. Air puffs from his nostrils, and the force of it shakes the ground.

**WEAK.** Gargondos thinks.

*Goro's* breath shakes. He sweats. He closes his eyes, collects himself, and opens up.

"You--you don't get to talk to me that way."

**WEAK.** He huffs again, stance changing, ready for battle. Always ready for battle-- the only thing he knows.

“I’m not weak!”

**YOU ARE WEAK. YOU ARE GIVING UP.**

“I haven’t given up! I haven’t!” Goro pleads.

**YOU THINK IT. YOU WANT TO.**

“Since when do you care what I want?! Since when have you done anything for me but take?!”

**LIAR. I LET YOU IN. THAT IS YOUR REWARD.**

Goro is silent.

**YOU ENJOY IT. THE DESTRUCTION.**

“I hate it. I’m tired of it.”

**LIAR! WEAK, LIAR!** Gargondos roars, pushing the city’s debris back. Goro struggles against the draft, and walks forward. The city, burning, becomes somehow less detailed. Wood is replaced with paint. Cars lack engines. There are no bodies, anymore.

“I’m not lying! I do hate it! I hate the work, I hate the way it makes me feel, I-- I hate that I enjoy it! That’s not what I want to be! I don’t want to be you!”

**YES. YOU. DO.** The beast roars again. The angle we see him from is less low now.

“But Ken doesn’t want me to be that! Aoi doesn’t want me to be that! People-- people who care about me, I want to be better for them!”

**THEY’LL GROW TIRED OF YOU. I WILL NOT.**

“Now who’s lying?!” The angle is getting higher.

**YOU NEED ME.**

“I don’t want to need you anymore.” And higher.

**I AM YOU.**

“Maybe you are. But you’re also Ken. And Mifune. And Chihiro. And radiation. And all of Japan! You are not all of me, I won’t *let* you be all of me!” Goro shouts in the face of the beast. They are at an equal level now.

Gargondos **ROARS.**

And the fight begins.

They’re on each other instantly. Gargondos attempting to grapple Goro, Goro resisting.

**NOTHING. YOU ARE NOTHING WITHOUT ME.**

“FUCK YOU!” Goro screams into the face of the beast. Gargondos pushes him, and they tumble to the ground, the houses breaking under them with a sickening crack.

**YOU CAN’T GET RID OF ME.**

**“I SAID SHUT THE FUCK UP!”**

Gargondos claws at him, leaving three sickening bloody slashes on Goros face. Goro screams, rolling them over, punching the beast with brute force.

**YOU SAID YOU WOULDN'T GIVE UP.**

“You said you wouldn’t leave!” A punch. “You said you wouldn’t die!” Another punch. Suddenly the face is human, familiar, his father. “I’m not giving up, I’m *saving myself! Unlike you! Unlike all of them!*” Another face, Mifune. “If you won’t move forward, then I’m leaving your pathetic, angry, obsessive ass behind!”

Himself.

And then Gargondos once more.

He pushes Goro backwards, and Goro uses the moment to get up and breathe. Gargondos mirrors him. Both are covered in blood. He doesn’t think he’s ever seen the beast bleed before.

They stand there, catching their breath, the city turning to ash behind them.

**YOU WILL DIE. WITH OR WITHOUT ME, YOU WILL DIE.**

“Then we’ll die together,” Goro says plainly, breathlessly. “Like we deserve.”

Gargondos disappears.

Goro looks down at his hand: scaled, taloned, yet still, somehow, human.

## CHAPTER 9

### SOME TIME LATER

Aoi and Goro walk quietly together, neither daring to break the silences they hold so dear. Aoi is wearing a white sundress, radiant as always. Goro is wearing nothing special, nothing except for the boot. Still, he feels somehow more stately than usual, perhaps due to her company, or perhaps for what he is about to do.

“We’ll be there soon,” she says in the happy tone that Goro knows to betray great sadness. He’s heard it before, on many different people. “One more chance to back out.”

“No. No,” Goro shakes his head. “I’ve made up my mind. You said before that I do things for my own self-image, and, well...I don’t know how I can keep looking at myself without doing this.”

“I’ve been thinking about that,” she says. “And I’ve been wondering if that’s the truth. If that’s just another form of narcissism, maybe an even purer form. Obsession with one’s own reflection, not through other’s eyes but through your own.”

“Maybe that’s what we all have in common. We all want to see someone else in the mirror,” he says. “We all want to be something else, anything but ourselves.”

“Maybe so,” she smiles. “Maybe so. We give ourselves over to a character, to an audience, to anyone who will take us off our hands.”

“Yup,” Goro affirms, nodding. Aoi brushes at his arm, prompting him to stop his forward march and look at her. She’s smiling, and cocks her head to the side. He turns to look. Ah. So they’ve arrived.

“For what it’s worth, I think it’s very brave, what you’re doing. It’s not something I could do, that’s certain.”

“It’s not something you’ll need to do: you’re smarter than me, smart enough not to get into this position,” he replies. He glances at the door again. “Thank you for coming with me, Aoi.”

“Of course. And Goro?”

“Yes?”

She takes a step closer to him.

“I’ve made a decision. Or rather, I haven’t. I have too many questions, far too many, about you, about what we do, about all of this. And while I’m not a scientist-- at least not until eight o’clock --” She chuckles. “I want to find the answers to them. So, for the sake of my search...” She grasps his hands, looking down at them shyly for a moment, before meeting his eyes. “I’d like to ask you to stick around.”

“...Of course,” he says, his only hesitation being his shock.

“Good,” she lets go of his hands, his own chasing after them for just a moment before giving up. “Now go.”

Goro, from the front, takes a breath, and enters the Hojo Studios lot once more. The sky is orange once more, dawn, early enough that Hirose and whoever replaced him as Austron are still preparing. A time to talk to Mifune alone, man to man. He takes a step. The boot clacks on the pavement.

He catches a brief glimpse of Chihiro, her face emblazoned with cold shock, maybe fear. It seemed that everyone from the crew was looking at him that way. He wonders, vaguely, what they thought he was going to do. He wonders if they’re right. From behind a gathering of legs, we see him walk forward.

It feels like a funeral march, the walk there. Perhaps it is.

We reach the usual lot, second furthest to the left. Goro, from the side, opens the door, into the boundary between small and large. That never got old, he realizes. That movement, the opening of that door, it never got old. *Larger than life.*



We see Mifune as soon as Goro does, arms crossed as usual, looking lost in thought, pacing ever so slightly. It seems to Goro that Mifune is always in such a state, probably even when he's alone.

"Mifune-san," Goro addresses him, voiced raised to make up for the distance. "I need to talk to you."

Mifune turns to him, face sunken and exhausted yet composed as always. His sparse eyebrows perk up in muted surprise.

"You don't have long. So talk," he says, or as usual, orders.

Deep breath.

"You saw something in me. You saw I was angry, and you let me be a part of something larger than myself, you let me be your creation. I cannot thank you enough for that." He bows in a hard right angle, completely serious. "However, this injury allowed me time to think, and I simply do not believe I will be able to continue this work in the way you want it done."

Mifune opens his mouth, but Goro keeps talking.

"Hirose does good work. He is more than capable of replacing me. I am...not as indispensable as I believed I was. Perhaps I used to be, but this has grown beyond all of us."

Mifune remains silent, awaiting more explanation.

“I cannot be Gargondos anymore, sir. I don’t know what else I can be, but...I cannot be that.”

The two stand off on the diminutive Tokyo, two silhouettes, facing each other as if ready for battle. Mifune sighs.

“You picked a bad time to do this, Goro,” he finally says.

“I’m telling you I can’t do it!” shouts someone bursting into the room. Goro turns to look. A tall, boyish fellow with brownish hair sits in the half-opened Austron suit, his face pink with some emotion-- embarrassment, Goro thinks. He realizes he’s been followed by Chihiro and Ken.

“W-we’ve been trying to figure this out, Mifune-san, but I don’t know if it’s-- Goro?” Ken stammers, poorly masking his panic. The tall man’s hand rests on Chihiro’s shoulder, who is holding him up. “What’s going on here?”

“He’s being an idiot!” Another voice shouts, and Goro startles, realizing that all this time, Hirose has been hunched over at the other side of the set. “Aniki, I’m honored you believe in me, but this-- this can’t work! I’ve been trying to help, but--”

“What’s the problem?” Goro asks, suddenly the only collected person in the room.

“I--I can’t work like this is the problem!” The lanky kid’s voice cracks. “This suit is fucking heavy and the legs are all awkward, I can walk in them, but it looks like a guy in a suit! I can’t do it!”

“I’ve been trying to help, but...” Hirose trails off. “Look, I know how to use the Austron suit, and he doesn’t, and you know switching places wouldn’t help much either. If only I can do Austron, only you can do Gargondos.”

Ken takes a shaky breath, adjusts his glasses. He meets his partner’s eyes, a silent plea to do something, because he is at a loss.

For a moment, Goro considers. He turns back to Hirose, thinking he’d see Gargondos, but he doesn’t. It’s just Hirose, looking lost. He wonders what this means-- does he haunt Hirose now? Or has Goro simply become him in full?

He approaches the kid. Ken moves out of the way instinctually. Chihiro looks on.

“What’s your name?” He asks.

“N-Nobunaga, sir.” The kid responds.

“You said you can walk in the suit okay, Nobunaga-kun?”

“Yes, but I can’t concentrate on the rest of the moves if I’m in all this.”

“Show me how you walk,” Goro orders.

The boy does. It's a cautious walk, a human one, his back arched in a man's posture. Controlled. Goro shakes his head.

"Have you ever seen a bull move? Or a horse?" He asks.

"Not..really?" Nobunaga answers.

"Their posture is different from ours, obviously. They're not bi-peds, though, so we have to find a middle ground. First of all, bend your knees more, put more weight on your shoulders. Keep your arms out for balance." He explains slowly, as Nobunaga follows his instructions. His posture transforms, now low and looming, almost like a wrestler.

"Better."

"I can't see shit like this!" Nobunaga cries.

"Part of the territory, my friend. If it were me, I'd walk around the set a few times, enough to have it basically memorized. Then, use the lack of coordination to your advantage. This is a massive creature-- it doesn't need goodsight, because it doesn't need to be careful," Goro responds calmly.

"What about when the fight starts?" The boy asks.

"Follow Hirose-kun's lead, first of all. He has all this memorized better than you have. Second of all, don't think it through so much. You seem like the thinking type-- maybe not the best for this kind of work, but we can power through it. Don't focus so much on the exact

movements, the movements will come when you *feel* it,” Goro closes his eyes, nods his head at his own words.

“Feel what?”

“What does Austron feel?”

“What?” The boy tilts his head.

“It’s an ancient being that’s been awakened, only to see its world destroyed. It sees something as large as it is, an impossibility. What does a bull think when it sees something close to its size?” Goro asks.

“I don’t know, that it’s in the way, I guess?” The boy replies shakily.

“That it’s in the way. So what do you do?” Goro asks.

“...I get it out of the way.”

“Exactly.”

Goro looks around to realize that everyone is now staring at him, stunned. Chihiro looks like she might explode. Ken looks conflicted. A hand touches his shoulder, and he turns to see Mifune.

“Goro.” He says gravely. “We need you here.”

“I told you, Mifune-san, you *don’t*, Hirose can handle it--” Goro begins to speak, but he’s cut off.

“I didn’t say we needed Gargondos here. We need *you*. You were the first one to do this job and you know it the best. Hirose is a fast learner, but he didn’t research it like you did, didn’t

fine-tune it like you did. Neither have I. I've always left that to you. Your body is replaceable. I won't lie to you and say otherwise. But your knowledge isn't."

"I--"

"He's right." Ken intervenes. "Nobody knows the suits better than you do, not even me. Even the ones you haven't played, you've at least modeled for me. You have the most experience. We...I can't lose you."

"You don't need to be Gargondos. But...I think, if we want this film to be some semblance of good, you need to be on set," Mifune sounds, for the first time, almost desperate.

He thought Gargondos could burn, for all he cared.

But what about Mifune's vision? What about Ken's beautiful things? What about Aoi's starring role? What about Chihiro, and the stories she's yet to write?

Could they burn too? Could they die together with him, one way or another?

No. He couldn't let that happen.

"I'll stay. If you need me--" *like I need you*, "I'll stay."

## CHAPTER 10

The premiere is as flashy an affair as it's always been. The red carpet is littered with paparazzi, studio execs, family and friends, key grips and dolly operators and everyone that made up this one, strange film. Goro is in a suit-- a formal one, not a lizard one. He turns to see that that particular outfit is being worn by someone else tonight. He assumes it's Hirose, doing photo ops for the various guests. Akane stands by the sidelines, laughing at him. Goro smiles. He can only imagine the grumbling underneath the rubber.

Nobody takes pictures of him as he goes this time. Nobody has ever needed a picture with Goro Nakayama. That's fine. He never needed pictures of himself, really. Still, he watches all the various actors pose for the cameras.

He sees Aoi, clad in a blue dress, like her name, beside a tuxedoed Mifune and what's-his-face, the guy who played Touya. A flame of reptilian jealousy burns in his throat for a moment, only for his eyes to meet hers. She flashes the smallest of smiles, and the flame dissipates.

MIKA

The strange power Gargondos emanates-- the evidence of  
humanity's sins--!

He's sure Mifune fought like hell to keep that in. He can't say it didn't make him grin. Sure, it wouldn't make it to America, but this wasn't about them.

“So what’d you think?” Goro turns to the unseen voice, revealing a similarly tuxedoed Ken, looking far more put together than he usually does. It’s a bit weird to see him like this. He’s smiling, and it makes Goro smile back.

“Eh, aside from the corny ending, I thought it was okay.” Goro shrugs. “What’d about you?”

“I can’t be trusted with my opinion right now-- all I see are my mistakes. When I see it later, I’ll be able to tell if I really did do a good job or not.”

“You always do a good job, Ken.”

“Ah, jeez...” Ken chuckles, rubbing his neck. “Anyway, the non-kaiju parts were more interesting than usual. Even if it was super weird seeing Nijima-san get all *kissy* with uh-- whatever his name is.”

“How do you think I feel, huh?!” Goro laughs as well, slapping his friend on the back. “Anyway, I’m just glad it all worked out in the end, mostly. *I* could tell which scenes had Nobunaga-kun in them, but I doubt the rest of the world will.”

“Nobody but you, man. You *are* the Official Lizard Expert, after all,” Ken says.

“I believe the term is *acting coach*.”



“Ahh, very fancy. Maybe too fancy for you.”

They share a laugh again.

“Well, listen. I was talking to some script guys, and they had some interesting concepts I wanted to start work on. They want to do higher budget kaiju films, ones *without* Gargondos, and this one draft they had--” He trails off, swishing the words he wants to say around in his mouth.

“Well, I know you said you were done with being in the suit, but...I think you should give this one a chance. One last ride. What I have planned-- I think you deserve to take it to fruition.”

Goro crosses his arms, thinking.

“It’s gonna require even more bullshit in the workshop than usual, gonna have to do a plaster cast of your head, if you’ve ever seen that get done. But seriously, will you hear me out?”

Goro smiles a small smile, and nods.

“I’ll hear you out. We’re partners, after all.”

“Great. We’ll talk more *after* the after-party, yeah? I’m sure Hirose is at the end of his rope doing those photos, and *someone* has to make sure he doesn’t destroy the bar,” Ken says.

“I guess that means me, since you’ll probably pass out again.”

“So mean to me, so very mean. Guess that won’t change.”

“Meh, you never know,” Goro replies. “Things change quite a bit.”

-

We're back in the trailer, same as before, a dark silhouette in the foreground. Chihiro, Ken, and a new person, presumably the director of the new film, are gathered around it.

"How are we doing on time?" The director asks.

"About four hours in. Assuming everything dries fast enough, we should be good to go in about ten minutes."

"Ahh, I'm so excited for this one!" Chihiro gushes. "Usually kaiju films are metaphor play, but this one is so much more human, literally! Two monstrous brothers, one raised in the wild, the other raised by humans, forced into a war against one another! We see one as on the side of good, but is learning to obey humanity truly the right path, or is nature where he truly belongs? Brilliant!"

"I should get you to talk to the screenwriter, Akemi-san. I'm sure they'd love your input." Ken says, a smile in his voice. "I do think this one is gonna be good, though. Humanoid kaiju, that's something nobody has ever seen before. I wonder what they're going to think."

"Is it dried yet? Sorry to rush you, but I wanna make sure we stay on schedule." The director, younger than Mifune but not young, asks.

"Well, let's see. Goro, you ready?"

The dark figure perks up, looking in the nearby mirror.

Zoom. A fanged, toothy smile.

“Ready.”

“Alright, let’s go!”

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*It is like a great metamorphosis. Goro narrates.*

Bare-looking feet step on artificial grass, pass artificial mountains.

*I am not encased. I am added upon. I am armored.*

A furry, lithe torso looms past the miniature village.

*I am me. That, I know for sure.*

We see what Goro sees-- clearly, humanly, watching the smiles of Chihiro and Ken as they watch him move.

*I see through my own eyes. Feel the beating of my heart. I feel the weight of the suit, all 70 kilograms of it, but it feels like an extension, like an honor.*

From within the beast, we see Goro-- sweaty, tired, but determined, Smiling.

*It's head is my head. It's face is my face, obscured but not hidden.*

*The monster is me, but I am not the monster.*

*For the first and last time,*

We see the full face of the creature: NEANDA, the beast raised by humanity. It is not a mask this time, not fully, but rather intricate special effects makeup. While clearly monstrous, and impossible to know who it is underneath without intimate knowledge, Goro's determined, powerful brown eyes are fully visible. It is his face underneath, and it is unmistakable.

*They will see me. And this one...*

Full shot on the beast, battle ready, letting out a powerful, joyous ROAR.

*...will be legendary.*

終劇.

**END.**