**Statement of Intent**

The piece is set underwater, specifically deep ocean sea beds which, even to those that study them for a living, appear alien, inhospitable and frightening. A very foreign setting as far as place and environment go. Additionally, the images of the merfolk and dragon are designed to be unfamiliar. Using an eastern rather than western dragon broadens understanding of another culture’s view on the same creature while employing an unfamiliar and therefore foreign imagery. A similar idea is set with the merfolk, here named anguils after Latin Anguillo meaning eel, but rather than unfamiliar I have attempted to make the audience experience discomfort at the thought of them, by making them very different to standard merfolk and by giving them more psychologically unappealing morphologies. The situation the audience find themselves in by the end of the piece is a foreign situation, with humans being eaten callously and without regard for our species emotion. Being egotistical and self important as a species, the intentional overlooking of humans as an intelligent species and being used in a similar fashion to deer, hunted for both sport and food, is employed to create foreign emotions not usually associated with stories about mermaids and dragons such as disgust and fear.

*Homo Anguillo*

**Note: Best read while listening to Donnie Darko Credit music and selected darker Gregorian Chanting and orchestral accompaniment.**

*She'd always had a soft spot for human.*

His voice was far deeper than she had expected. The young mermaid stared up at the great scaly mass before her. Her long dark hair floating about her, like gossamer in the wind, trailed over a pale face and huge dark eyes. Her tail coiled below, a loose fleshy spring. It matched the colour of her skin, and was long and slightly flat, not dissimilar to an eel. The deep intonation started up again as the huge shining chest rumbled, scales vibrating. “...and furthermore, the western dragons are far less polite than my brethren and I. The land dwellers are far too sure of themselves and their fire.” The dragon she listened to was long and serpentine, with fine whiskers protruding from his feline-shaped face of emerald and blue. His horns were jagged and brown, like a young deer. The mermaid held herself, arms clasped tightly about her bare chest. The chill of the canyon was unlike any Atlantic or arctic current she’d ever ridden, and her already cool blood felt like it was freezing in her veins. “Pietho, you are cold…” It wasn't a question. A warmth washed over her, soothing her skin and relaxing her muscles. She breathed in the heat, trying her hardest to suck it into her bones. “Thank you Nachash.” He smiled at her, thousands of black shining teeth flashing. The chill seen to, the dragon nestled down to finish his lecture. Hours could pass like this for Pietho, curled up at the bottom of the world listening to the giant predator. The two made a strange pair: a top of the line predatory killing machine and a pale scavenging waif of the ocean. A dragon and an anguil, an eel person. He shared his food with her sometimes, but whale was not her preferred meal. She had a finer palate. Besides, his methods were...destructive and did not sit well with her. She had seen him hunt only a few times, and it had been both terrible and awesome,. His antlers were thrust into the underside of the whale, a short sprint from the darkness below lending the force to sink himself in, down to his skull. His forelegs would raise up, twisting into the whale’s flippers, clutching the joint and shattering the bones. Having crippled it, he'd twist his tail around the grey body and crush the sternum and pull the whale in two. He would extricate his head from the lungs and butcher the body with his claws, neck to tail, removing the meat. Then running his head across the parts of the body that remained, his rough tongue sought out anything not bone and shredded it to nothing.

*They were so much more tender and sweet than the other creatures that scuttled and swam in the ocean.*

The swim home was not a pleasant one. The dragon’s meals lay scattered about the sea bed, white and rotting, with hagfish and sleeper sharks skulking around them. The carcasses of the great whales Nachash preyed upon were easy to pick out among the whale fall and human waste. A normal whale skeleton was whole, with varying levels of decaying flesh and other disgusting bottom feeders swarming them. The dragon’s...bones were shattered and torn, not a single scrap of flesh remained. The dragon’s needle-like teeth saw to that. She ran her large powerful tongue across her own large canines and sharp scissoring molars, designed for cutting chunks of flesh, rather than devouring. Similar in some ways to the sharks slithering across the chasms floor. An absence of light made it difficult for even her huge eyes to see and in her first weeks of lessons from the drake now below, she had often had to slide through the rot and detritus to feel her way to where the dragon lay. Her long eel-like body had slipped through the black and slick muck. Now she swam above it, her trunk longer and her fin reaching from her neck to the end of her spine, almost at the end of her body. Her arm fins helped her balance, stretching them and flexing to bank and direct the propulsion coming from her tail’s powerful rippling. Her thoughts had gotten away from her, and she adjusted her course, taking her to a small glimmer higher up the canyon set in the wall; a high pressured vortex created by the differing pressures on either side acted as a wonderful, albeit frightening, shortcut to the world above. The pitch black hole barely fit her, and the rock was jagged and pitted with obsidian glass shards. She felt the skin of other creatures caught in the bottled maelstrom rush past, scraped off by the crystalline thorns of the tunnel. Flesh, lost forever in the dimness and the violent dark. Spat out the other side, her ordeal over, Pietho ran a finger gently over the dark black gashes in her fins and down her body. They would heal. They always did… Blood. Not hers. There was blood in the water. Snapped from her reverie, Pietho flicked her nostrils open, tasting the blood through her nasal cavity and drawn across her tongue. Her body pulsed, throwing her form after the scent. Man.

*The large ones could be butchered so very easily, and the small ones were delightful to shear through for a light meal.*

Her people had been hunting men since he dared returned to the water. Man-flesh was considered a delicacy by some of her people, tender and sweeter than the fish and carrion they usually fed on. The bodies were torn apart by the hunters and the wild cetus, skeletal regressive anguils, more monster than merman. Grown huge on man-flesh and physically regressing to giant armed eels, they were dangerous creatures, but generally stayed away from the anguils and their home, unless blood drew them out of the dark, as it had her. She was driven towards the floating hunks of meat, some thrashing and screaming, some just floating. The crushed prow of the boat and the mangled corpse of a cetus told her all she cared to know. It had been desperate, and tried to destroy the boats hull with its teeth and claws. She greeted some of the hunters ripping the edible soft meat from the bodies, and was offered an upper arm which she gratefully took and began to tear chunks off, swallowing the forearm almost whole. Content with the hot, bloody meal in her stomach, she continued her journey to her home. Home was a thin rock tunnel, worn smooth by generations of anguils swimming through the dark, confined space. The tunnel itself was not home, but it felt like it to Pietho. Soft darkness and crushing black were so comforting to her, her eyes and skin soothed by the dim and the rock. Inside the pit was slightly lighter, with moonlight striking through the surface of the ocean to rest gently in the seething mass of bodies and skin sliding over each other at the end of the tunnel. She came out of the tunnel, and the smell and warmth of her species washed over her. Hundreds of anguils lay there, slipping over and around each other in the soft ooze of decay and excretion. She floated down to the swarm of creatures, burying herself in its writhing chaos. Home… She let herself relax, sinking to the bottom among the detritus and the eggs laid by the older women. She glanced at one of the eggs, pale and transparent. She watched the wriggling little form inside, the light from the moon reflecting out through her huge dark eyes, slowly dimming as she fell into the slithering sleep of the pit.

**Luis Munro – 2016**