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Leviathan Manhwa: Declined Humanity, Civilization and Flourished Marine Life

Dr. Archana

Associate Professor, Department of English, Mahila Mahavidyalaya
Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi-221005

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ABSTRACT

Leviathan, referred to as Deep Sea Water, is a finished Korean manhwa set in a post-apocalyptic world. It was created by writer Lee Gyuntak and illustrator Noh Miyoung, and is published by Toomics, which manages its English translation as well.

Apocalyptic literature, characterized by its depictions of cosmic struggles and visions of the end times, originated in ancient Jewish and Christian traditions, emerging around 200 BCE and continuing to influence literature and thought until the Middle Ages. The genre's roots can be traced to the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, but it developed a distinct form during the period following the Babylonian exile, particularly in response to historical and political upheavals. Post-apocalyptic world refers to a world where apocalypse already happened and human beings are paying the price. They have to come to terms with the new situation and make desperate attempts at survival at any cost. Apocalypse in speculative fiction can be of different types. The apocalypse that already happened in Leviathan manhwa is an ecological crisis which took such a bad turn that it turned into an apocalypse.

Keywords: Manhwa, Declined Humanity, Civilization, Flourished Marine Life, Apocalypse.

Set on a post-apocalyptic Earth where rising sea levels have transformed the planet a century after a disaster, Leviathan traces the journey of siblings Bota and Rita after their father, Teon Ma, gives his life to protect them from a sea creature. Shortly after, they are taken in by a woman named Kana, who was a friend of their late father.

The prologue of Leviathan Manhwa starts with the line -“ The prosperous civilizations of man were submerged and humanity declined. But marine life flourished in this new world”

The prologue opens up in a panel which depicts a submersible land. Tall skyscrapers are on the verge of ruin. Only the skeleton of modern cities remains. Deep sea water creatures like sharks, whales swim across the broken remains of cities. The illustrator of the manhwa depicts deepest-dwelling

animals of the abyss. Some of the creatures of abyss like - black seadevil anglerfish, goosefish, viperfish, blaswallower, lanternfish, dragonfish, rabbit fish, deep-sea lizardfish, oar fish are seen roaming around the destroyed submerged roads of the underwater cities. Many deep-sea animals have developed unique adaptations to thrive in the abyss, such as light-producing organs to lure prey or communicate with one another. Others possess large mouths, expandable stomachs, or asymmetrical eyes. Despite their varied characteristics, they all have one common trait which is their thirst for human blood. They are the apex predator of the ocean. These creatures have evolved into their most destructive shapes. They have ditched hunting in deep waters and started hunting on the surface of the sea where humans live in floating sea vessels.

Leviathan manhwa is colorfully illustrated. The first panel of the manhwa is illustrated with shades of blues like - stone blue, deep teal, dark blue, marine blue, ocean blue. Comics written in Korean are called manhwa. Manhwa also follows the basic principle and format of traditional comics. The only difference is the arrangement of panels. In traditional comics the panels are arranged horizontally. But manhwa is usually arranged in a vertical arrangement for the ease of reading on a tablet or a smartphone.

The space between the panels is called 'the gutter'. In spite of having such an unceremonious title, the gutter plays host to much of the magic and mystery that are at the very heart of comics. Scott McCloud in 'Understanding the invisible art of comics' gives a description of comics panels. According to him 'comic panels fracture both time and space, offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments, but closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality' (McCloud, 67).

The small space between the panels is called 'the gutter'. In spite of having such an unceremonious title, the gutter plays host to much of the magic and mystery that are at the very heart of comics. This small space 'human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea' (McCloud, 66).

The gutter is usually white and nothing is seen between the two panels but the human mind fills the white gap between two panels with imagination. Leviathan manhwa is colorfully illustrated. The first panel of the manhwa is illustrated with shades of blues like - stone blue, deep teal, dark blue, marine blue, ocean blue. The bottom of the panel is a bit green, almost a shade of deep teal. Broken remains and skeletons of cars are covered in sea vegetation. Gradually the deep teal changes into the shade of ocean blue. But it was an impossible fight to begin with. His last desperate attempt at survival fails. He prays and cries for help - "Help me!! I want to live!! I don't wanna die!" His prayer for help arrives in the form of a woman with an eyepatch and four two-handed cleaver swords. She kills all the gigantic sea monsters and rescues Bota and his sister, Lita. She takes them to Union Busan.

The first chapter reveals the cause of the submerged cities. The first chapter starts with the lines, 'As the sea level rose, the continents were engulfed one by one. The prosperous civilizations of men were submerged and humanity declined. However marine life flourished in this new world'.

The second panel of the first chapter depicts the broken remains of the Statue of Liberty underneath the sea. The height of the Statue of Liberty is about 93 meters which is equivalent to the height of a 22 story building. The broken remains reveal that the high sea level rose so much that even the tallest monument of the New York skyline couldn't survive.

The title of the first chapter is 'The Fishbowl'. This chapter depicts the life of Bota and his family before his father's death. Bota and his father used to wear a driver's suit to dive under the sea in search of canned food and necessary everyday items like forks, pots, pans, utensils etc. Bota's father used to tell Bota about the 'ruins', which was full of people in the past. But Bota couldn't imagine the haunting and gloomy underwater cities full of human life. As only the schools of fishes and other aquatic creatures

live in the underwater cities which are almost like a giant fishbowl and humans are the fishfood. Bota and his family used to live in a floating vessel in the unending open ocean. They lived such isolated lives that they couldn't see birds for months as there were no lands for the birds to rest. Bota wondered if anyone else was alive apart from them. Lita, Bota's sister, once asked their father if everyone was in heaven just like their mom. Their father consoled them that they haven't met anyone as the ocean is big. Although Bota's family was small, all three members had their own duties on the ship. Teon Ma, their father, was responsible for hunting and maintenance of the ship and ruin exploration. Bota took care of the food and water. Lita took care of the laundry and cleaning. But there was an absolute rule which they had to follow. They have to hide under the deck of the ship after sunset. As the monsters are nocturnal. Bota had an argument with his father when he stopped him from exploring the ruins until he was at least seventeen years old for his own safety.

But feels that he is old enough to explore the ruins as there is nothing else to do and they are stuck in the boat anyways. 'There's only water anyway. We are trapped on this boat. Just like a goldfish' (Leviathan, Chapter 2, Episode 2: Fishbowl(2)) Bota realised that their lives were not different from the life of Lita's pet goldfish. They are also confined in the surrounding water. Bota once asked about his father's life before he was born and if there were sea monsters where he lived. Bota's father says that it is absolutely impossible to avoid the sea monster as they live everywhere in the water. Bota's father Teon Ma tells him about the harpoonists.

'Harpoonists were warriors who fought to protect their homes.'

Teon Ma reveals a tattoo on his left biceps and tells him it is the mark of harpoonists. There were six stars underneath the tattoo. Bota mistakes the stars as strange dots because he never saw stars. He had to live below the deck after the sunset in order to survive. Even seeing the stars in the night sky became a luxury for refugees like Bota's family. Teon describes the stars almost like a myth. 'A star is something so bright that you can even see it at night. A long time ago, people used the stars so that they wouldn't lose their way and used them to sail through the sea. It looks like millions and millions of bright jewels scattered in the black night sky' (Leviathan, Chapter 2, Episode 2: Fishbowl(2)).

One day when Teon Ma went to a destroyed building he saw a few human skeletons. It looked like a few refugees died in the building because of dehydration and hunger. He finds a few explosives which were almost antiques according to him. In absence of him, Bota sees a human shadow waving his hand and trying desperately to swim. He tries to find something to rescue him. When Teon Ma returns, he realises the human shadow was not human at all. It was a sea monster trying to lure Bota in and kill him. Sea monsters are already gigantic creatures which can crush huge shipping vessels with their physical prowess alone. But they are also extremely intelligent creatures which learnt to lure human beings as well. The biggest and most dangerous sea creatures are called Leviathans in the manhwa. The author uses the word 'Leviathan' to delineate the ginormous scale of the largest sea monster as well as to refer to the mythological root of the said word.

Leviathan is a mythological gigantic sea serpent or sea monster who is mentioned in both Jewish and Christian mythologies. Leviathan was first mentioned in oral tales which later was incorporated in various religious mythologies.

"There Leviathan,

Hugest of living creatures, in the deep

Stretched like a promontory sleeps or swims,

And seems a moving land; and at his gills

Draws in, and at his breath spouts out a sea."

-Paradise Lost

John Milton in his *Paradise Lost* gives the description of Leviathan. Herman Melville in the title page of *Moby-Dick* also quotes John Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

"That sea beast

Leviathan, which God of all his works

Created hugest that swim the ocean stream."

-*Paradise Lost*

There is another mention of Leviathan in *Paradise Lost*.

Francis Bacon's version of "The Psalms" also gives a description of Leviathan.

"The great Leviathan that maketh the seas to seethe like boiling pan." (Lord Bacon's version of "The Psalms")

"So close behind some promontory lie

The huge Leviathans to attend their prey,

And give no chance, but swallow in the fry,

Which through their gaping jaws mistake the way."

Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis*. Dryden's "Annus Mirabilis" also gives a description of the Leviathans. Harpoonists are essentially individuals who have received training, yet they often exhibit unusual strength compared to the average person. Notably, elite Harpoonists like Kana display physical capabilities that appear to exceed those of typical humans, potentially explaining why Sea Monkeys affected by Fish Disease continue to survive. The author suggests that Harpoonists may also be experiencing a form of evolution. The most frequently utilized weapons by Harpoonists include spearguns, different kinds of swords, and an assortment of blades. Harpoonists are ranked with stars, where each star represents the killing of one hundred monsters by a single Harpoonist. While some Harpoonists fail to progress beyond the first two stars, the highest ranking observed in the story so far is 6 stars, achieved by Teon Ma. A person is referred to as a Leviathan Slayer if they possess a minimum of 5 black stars or have defeated at least one of the Seven Sea Devils.

Biopunk focuses on the field of synthetic biology.

H. R. Giger's Biomechanical art emphasizes biotechnology rather than the information technology central to Cyberpunk. Biopunk narratives typically center around themes like genetic manipulation, biohacking, powerful biotech corporations, and authoritarian government entities that aim to alter human DNA.

Biopunk has a lot of visual similarities to Cyberpunk, but it places greater emphasis on genetics rather than technology. While both genres may share similar color palettes, Biopunk incorporates more themes related to DNA, chromosomes, gene-splicing, and biotechnology, often featuring horror-themed narratives that include artificially created machines. Biopunk is primarily expressed through literature, but it is also represented in various visual media, particularly in films such as the *Super Mario Brothers* movie, *Pokemon: The First Movie*, *Repo Men*, *Gattaca*, and the iconic *Blade Runner* along with its sequel. Japanese anime that incorporate biopunk themes include *Akira*, *Elfen Lied*, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, and even the *Haruhi Suzumiya* series, which features elements related to the character Mikuru Asahina. Video games with biopunk characteristics include *Bioshock*, *Half-Life*, *Parasite Eve*, *Panzer Dragoon*, *Prototype*, and *Resident Evil*, as well as attractions like Silo X. A notable example of biopunk can be found in the necrocapsule concept from the dystopian novel "Tau," authored by Tiago Andrade. A notable example of pantropy within the biopunk genre can be found in Margaret Atwood's novels *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013).

Atwood depicts a bleak near future where climate change has rendered vast areas of the Earth unlivable: rising temperatures and sea levels have transformed fertile regions into deserts, and humanity's energy demands have exhausted most natural resources. The privileged elite inhabit segregated communities, indulging in excess and ignorance, while the masses struggle to survive in poverty, facing constant threats from diseases, crime, and natural disasters. Traditional nation states have been replaced by global corporations and advancements in biotechnology, with rampant consumerism significantly affecting both society and the environment.

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