It seems that the god of the sea may need to put a bit more effort into training his messengers. The last ones he sent—to warn us about an impending earthquake didn't do a very good job. For one thing, only two of them showed up. Also, the messengers made their appearance in California, but the earthquake was in Japan. Did they get lost?

The messengers in question were mysterious beasts called oarfish. Despite their association with the sea god (more on that in a moment), oarfish are not mythical creatures but—as their name suggests—fish. They are, to be sure, unusual fish. Their silvery, eel-like bodies can grow to 35 feet long. They have giant, feather-like red fins crowning the tops of their heads. They have superlong, skinny red fins trailing from their bellies. They have an odd way of swimming. They sometimes swim in a horizontal position. They sometimes swim in a vertical position.

These strange fish are seldom caught or even seen, so when two of them were found in Southern California last fall, it presented a rare opportunity for scientists to study them. The first oarfish an 18-foot male was found in the water near Catalina Island on October 13. Five days later, a 14-foot female washed up on a beach 50 miles away. Both fish were quite dead—but their bodies to the delight of...
scientists, were in good condition. The media seized upon the story of the oarfish. Almost immediately, speculations that an earthquake was about to hit California started up—which brings us back to the sea god. In Japan, the oarfish is known as ryugu no tsukai, meaning “messenger from the sea god’s palace.” According to Japanese folklore, when oarfish wash ashore, it’s a sign that an earthquake is coming. And guess what: On October 25, there was an earthquake. However, it was not in California but off the coast of Fukushima, Japan—thousands of miles away. (It caused no significant damage or injuries.) The oarfish to what must have been the sea god’s great frustration were a just little bit off.

In reality, there were almost certainly no connection between the oarfish in California and the earthquake in Japan. Though some have theorized that oarfish may be sensitive to shifts in the seafloor prior to an earthquake, most scientists dismiss the idea that oarfish has any special ability to predict disaster. Most likely, a strong ocean current brought the oarfish to the California shore last fall.

Still, there has been many stories about animals being able to sense oncoming earthquakes. For example, back in 373 B.C., the rodents, snakes, and insects of the ancient Greek city of Helike are said to have fled just before an earthquake and tsunami destroyed the city. In February 1975, officials in Haicheng, China, ordered an evacuation based in part on the strange behavior of local animals; a huge earthquake rocked the city the next day. In April 2009, a large group of toads in L’Aquila, Italy, suddenly hopped away—five days, as it turned out, before an earthquake hit the region.

For the most part, such stories are not backed up by scientific data. However, some scientists believe that there may be something to the theory that animals can sense earthquakes before humans can. So who knows? Maybe oarfish really can predict earthquakes. But if so, the god of the sea probably have little to do with it.

**FIND IT/FIX IT**

**DIRECTIONS:** Can you find the following errors in the article and fix them? Write the answers on your own paper.

**Paragraph 1:** A dash has gone missing! Can you put it back?

**Paragraph 2:** There is something fishy about how so many of these sentences begin the same way. Rewrite this paragraph with more sentence variety.

**Paragraphs 3 & 4:** Do oarfish eat commas? Because *something* has swallowed five of them. Please put the commas back.

**Paragraphs 5, 6 & 7:** Here’s what we predict: You will have no trouble fixing the four subject-verb agreement errors.