

AGNATHA ANATHEMA

By Dan DeBono



Doctor Noah Sterenko frowned. He was breaking a couple big rules at the moment, and he was none too happy. First, he was getting ready to SCUBA dive alone. Next, he was going against the wishes of his boss – not a good idea for anyone, but, especially when your boss was the cantankerous Dean of The Lake Superior College Of Fishery And Aquatic Sciences. The two had been working on a breakthrough they thought could have commercial applications.

They had picked an area where they had dispensed a chemical they hoped would eradicate a nuisance fish which had been making a comeback the past few years, but it all went to hell.

He crashed into the water backwards and raced downward. Years of SCUBA had made his ears so elastic, he could simply kick down as quickly as possible – not something every diver could accomplish. He looked around and saw nothing, so he finned onward. His sonar had picked up a school of his targets not twenty minutes before, but they must be moving ... hunting?

Suddenly, he saw them. Only they weren't doing what their species normally did; they swam directly at him. Their recent field work had supported their assertions that their experiment had gone wrong - the chemical had actually caused them to grow larger than expected and they seemed to be getting more aggressive, but this was absurd! And those eyes; those *green* eyes! He turned and started kicking toward his boat as quickly as he could. He should have listened to his boss; he may be a cranky old man, but he knew things, and he had been scared about what they had done.

He turned and saw that they were gaining; his thoughts raced. Why? How? It was simply impossible. They didn't *do* this! His last thought before they swarmed him was: *God, this is something right out of a B movie!*

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The two avid divers readied their gear; waiting to begin another of their countless underwater adventures.

"Well, this makes four," she said, strapping the buoyancy compensator device – BC for short - to her blue, metal-flake SCUBA tank.

"Four what?" he asked, just a bit perturbed at her giddiness, while he labored over the rubber raft's ridiculously sub-par engine mount.

"Four Great Lakes, goof!"

Instantly, his anger vanished upon the sight of her dazzling smile and real excitement. He was dragging her on yet another difficult little adventure and she was into it. She bent over, just able to peer him through spread legs, as she tightened the strap to her tank. "I want to make sure this doesn't slip like last time."

"Hurry up! I want to get there before midnight," he said.

"Spence ..." Angela's look and tone of voice cooled his jets. She knew it was always best to patiently get ready for any dive, and especially cold water shipwrecks. Things happened when people rushed; when they forgot a necessary piece of equipment or didn't strap something on correctly it could amount to death where they were going.

He started loading the equipment into the little inflatable, quickly and efficiently. "Let's see ... the two lights not already clipped to the BCs, knife, gloves, hoods, boots, penetration lines ..."

"Everything!" she interrupted.

She was nearly right.

"Yeah, but it's always some little shit that we forget." he said, stepping into the raft. "We have to leave the cells in the car because you forgot to pack my dry box."

"*I forgot,*" yeah, right.

When Angela stepped into the raft, it further reduced the freeboard to about over three inches.

"Spence!" she said, eyes scanning the obviously overburdened craft.

"Don't worry. We'll be okay ... unless there's a thunderstorm."

"Comforting."

It took the usual twenty or so pulls to get the little blue and white outboard running. Spencer smiled at the large flakes of blue, peeling to expose the ugly chocolate brown that he tried so desperately to conceal. *Practically an antique ...*

Finally getting underway, he eyed the red spot that would soon become a blister forming from the many pulls. "We're definitely getting a new one next season. I'm sick of this little piece..."

He stopped at the sight of Pictured Rocks National Shoreline, home of Miner's Castle.

"Do you think that sermon really took place up there?" asked Angela.

He smiled and shrugged. He loved it when they had synchronous thoughts, he believed it to be a true sign of love. They had many.

Miner's Castle was a natural phenomenon; rock eroded into the shape of a castle

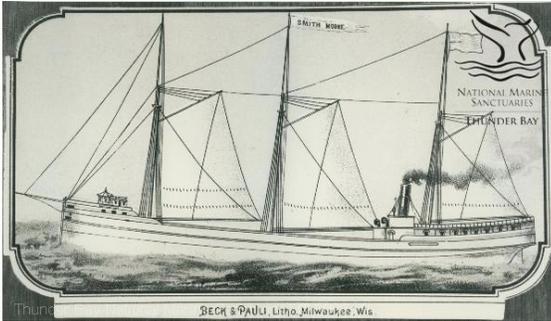


over millions of years' time. Legend said that the famous explorer, Father Jacques Marquette, gave the first sermon to the Chippewa Indians high upon the "castle."

"I'm not sure. It could have, but then again it could be some *legend* for the tourists sake."

The little raft crept further into the Alger Underwater Preserve, ever closer to the shipwreck that patiently awaited for the lucky few who brave these cold waters.

Alger. The name rolled over and over in his mind. It was reputed to be a wreck diving Mecca--worldwide. The Michigan underwater preserve was home to his dreams, just as the other eight in the Great Lakes were. But Alger was like candy. It was further from home than most of the other preserves, but the thirty to fifty foot underwater visibility made their trip worth it. Most of the other wrecks they dove had anywhere from three to fifteen feet of visibility.



They spotted the mooring buoy which attached to the Smith Moore, a two hundred thirty three foot triple-masted steamer that sank in one hundred feet of water just off Grand Island in 1889.

Spencer was excited. His hands nervously worked at the mooring line. "Can you believe that the masts stuck out of the water after it sank?"

Angela laughed. "No. And I couldn't the last four times you mentioned it, either!"

"I'll have no mutiny on my vessel, Christian!" he cried in his best Charles Laughton, raising his arms over the encumbered little craft.

They busily worked at readying their equipment, checking again and again to make sure no safety factor was overlooked. The regulators and gauges were checked, so were the lights, tank straps, and vest inflators.

Finally they began suiting up. First the Farmer John pants, then the suit tops, boots, hoods, weights, gloves, and knives. The last items, were their dive watches and Spencer's new wrist computer. Diving could be a costly hobby for a newly married couple.

"I'll tuck your heater in; just give it to me," laughed Spencer, watching a bulked-up Angela fumble with her Heat Wave.

She handed him the device. He pinched the small metal disc in the upper right-hand corner. The sodium acetate/water mix within the soft clear plastic began to

crystallize, and with the hard white crystals came one hundred forty degrees worth of soothing heat, but even that would not be enough for these waters.

"Now YOU better hurry, I'm burnin' up," she said as she strapped on her tank.

"Ready when you are," came his response as he finished dressing.

A final tightening of straps and donning of the masks signaled they were truly ready for the adventure sprawling beneath them. On a signal from Angela, both did the well-known reverse entry, made famous by Jacques Cousteau, from one of his Zodiacs.

They checked their watches before letting out the air in their buoyancy compensating devices and sinking into the deep. They had to be wary of the time they spent at such depths, for a diver's true enemy ever stalked the unwary. If they stayed down too long, decompression sickness, commonly known as the bends, could set in, causing permanent damage and even death if they were not rushed to a hyperbaric chamber for recompression.

They plunged ever further into Mother Nature's cellar, watching each other in the process. They looked at each other. The great weather the past few days was working with them. There had been little rain and wind so the surface *vis* was about fifty feet! At about thirty feet, they reached the first thermocline. It was a "band" of colder water that you actually could see. The surface of Superior was a chilly fifty-seven degrees Fahrenheit; the first thermocline reducing that considerably. But as they passed into the second thermocline, they really felt the icy nature of the lake. But where Superior was again different than their typical wreck dives, they sank into a third thermocline where the temperature was further reduced to a numbing thirty-five degrees, year round. The visibility was also reduced; clearer blue-tinted water giving way to a bit of brown opacity due to particle suspension. However, the forty-foot visibility that they were now experiencing was still far better than virtually anything they had previously encountered during their numerous dives in the Great Lakes.

The Smith Moore suddenly appeared like a specter out of the haze. It was a thing of a time long past, historical and beautiful. The Moore was murdered in a collision with another steamer, the James Pickands, in 1889. The Ship sounded distress calls, but according to the accounts of Captain Ennis of the Pickands, he never heard them. He continued on to Marquette where he was later questioned about the incident. He also reported that he thought he had just grazed the ship, and, therefore, felt that there was no need to stop. His own day of reckoning came five years later near Isle Royale where his ship ran aground on a reef.

Fortunately, none of the Smith Moore's crew was lost, which was not the case with many Great Lakes wrecks, as a third steamer, the M.M. Drake, pulled alongside the Moore and picked everyone up. But nothing could save the ship.

The two adventurers swam over the exposed main deck, taking in its surreal



beauty. They passed over one of the six huge cargo hatchways. Spencer did not even hesitate, but pointed his light into the black abyss and entered the hold with a few powerful thrusts of his long, teal fins. He was surprised by an enormous catfish, which fled even deeper into the blackness of the giant hold. Spencer noticed that the cat had an unwanted guest

riding on its underbelly: a rather large lamprey. He always kept up with news regarding the lakes and remembered reading about a resurgence of the vampiric fish in the area. A chemical was used to kill their larvae, developed in the sixties, but apparently it was not as effective as it once was and several scientists were working on others. He knew from his own biology studies that one mutant gene could grant a species immunity to a once deadly condition.

He raced for Angela, who was silhouetted at the entrance to the hold in the large "window of light" which would give him access to the open water once again. She was always a bit nervous about going into the wrecks.

In swinging arms language he tried to retell his discovery, but she could not understand exactly what he was trying to gesture. She gathered, however, that he had encountered one or more large fish.

They swam across the deck, making way for the stern. They noticed several large salmon, lying dead upon the deck almost as if someone placed them there for effect, which did indeed add to the mysterious and spooky seascape. They had large wounds in various places along their lengths which both of them found puzzling.

Angela had no inclination to further inspect the carcasses, but Spencer shot towards them with several ferocious fin strokes. She paused, floating nearly motionless and watching as he swam up on the nearest fish. His mask was within six inches of the dead thing before his gliding ended. He then swam to the next one, and, apparently not finding what he was looking for, grabbed it by the tail flipping it over.

Angela bit down hard upon the regulator, watching as bits of rotting flesh swam around like one of those water filled plastic snow scenes when you shook it. Spencer motioned her over, and reluctantly she swam alongside him. He pointed out his discovery to her; the fish had a three-inch diameter wicked-looking circular wound on its side. Angela shrugged. She wondered what was so important about a lamprey wound, even if it was a huge one. After all, they had decimated then merely harassed Great Lakes game fish since the opening of the Welland Canal. She was sure that she would hear an endless tirade of how man should watch his tampering with nature as soon as they surfaced. Sometimes her lover tended to become a little fanatical about whatever he was currently passionate about.

Spencer glanced at his watch, then the small dive computer strapped to his arm right above the watch. Both confirmed his guess – they were nearing the halfway point of their dive. *Already!* He decided that they would push on towards the stern, which was reportedly being covered up by sand for the past few years. On the way, he formulated the speech he would give to Angela regarding the foolhardiness of the men who were responsible for the lamprey catastrophe.

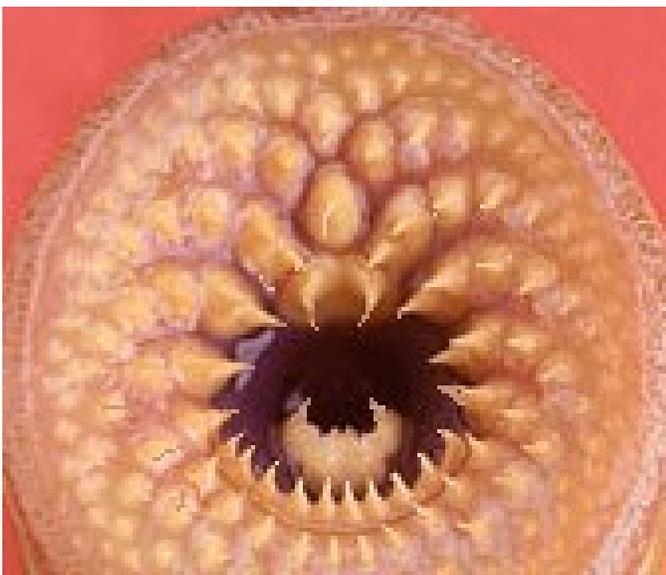
Looking out over the lathed rub rail, Spencer eyed a peculiar sight. He saw two of the largest lampreys he had ever seen idly moving closer to them. He quickly swung around, checking on Angela, who was inspecting the fancy woodwork of the old ship.

The lampreys came ever closer. At first, he simply glanced at them every now and then, just to see if they were still there. But with each glance, he felt more and more ill at ease. After about five minutes, he could not further enjoy the dive he had been so anxious to make. He then nervously watched as the two vampiric eels slowly swam a wide circle around them, eerily similar to how a shark would size up its prey before making the final lunge. *But that's ridiculous.* He unsheathed the knife strapped to his leg, rapping it against his tank to get Angela's attention.

Angela looked over at her husband, wondering what was wrong. She followed his pointed knife until she saw the lampreys. She turned; motioned by lifting her arms questioningly. *Why were they so close?*

She also discovered another strange thing her husband had noticed several minutes before, the eyes of both lampreys glowed a green fluorescent color. Their gill slits also had a bit of the greenish glow. *Bioluminescence. But what are they doing?*

Her answer came swiftly, as one of the two must have concluded that she would make a nice meal. It made its way toward her surprisingly quickly until its rasping mouth was able to grab onto the leg of her quarter-inch wetsuit, trying to get at her nutrient-rich blood. She kicked and swam but there wasn't much she could do.



Spencer rushed over, grabbing its tail. It would not let go so he sawed at it with the long knife until he severed it in two. Its tail twitched as it sank towards the deck of ship while the half with the head still clung to Angela's suit. It took her several pulls to free the anchored

lamprey; the suction cup mouth lined with the razor teeth made the job so difficult. He had never seen a creature like this. The mouth was much scarier looking than any lamprey he had ever seen! The teeth were larger and the creature itself was far larger than it should be, so that also meant its mouth was much larger.

The second lamprey, even larger than the first, grabbed onto Spencer's midsection. He quickly plunged his knife deep into the creature's back, but it did not let go. He grabbed its tail and heaved it away from his body. The wounded fish then made its own escape, trailing blood, which at that depth had no red color whatsoever, but was a dark, greenish-black smoky looking substance.

He swam up to Angela, grasping her gloved hands. He then examined the spot where the lamprey had bored into her wet suit. The neoprene suit was completely compromised. Another instant and the vicious monster would have penetrated her skin.

He motioned for her to follow; beginning the long swim to where they made their descent. Nearing the area, Angela's growing relief reverted back to terror. She grabbed Spencer's fin, and when he turned, she pointed to her horrifying discovery. A school of at least a hundred of the oversized lampreys patrolled the bow section of the Moore, waiting for any hapless fish – or people – to blunder upon them. Most were at least the size of the larger one that had attacked them, but some were even larger, upwards of seven feet!

Again, Spencer glanced at his watch. If they were to stay within the no-decompression time limits, they would have to surface within seven minutes, and that would be pushing it a bit. Angela motioned to one of the cargo holds, then kicked over and entered it. Spencer followed, glancing at the blood-sucking school every few seconds.

Only part of their heads protruded from the utterly black holes; both of them hoping they would not be seen by the bloodthirsty mob. Spencer tried to think of a solution to their double-edged sword of a problem. The lampreys waited ahead, but if they did not ascend soon, they could surely contract decompression sickness when

they finally did surface, which could just as well prove fatal. Especially by themselves out on lake Superior!

He tried to remember everything he knew regarding lampreys. He dissected and studied the fish in college, but the memories were a bit hazy. The fish were of the few remaining members of the jawless superclass Agnatha, truly primitive vertebrates. Their ancestors ruled the Ordovician period, some four hundred forty million years ago; now they were relegated to nuisance status by Great Lakes fishermen.

But what good was this shit now? he thought. How would it help them get to the sweet land that he had gladly forsaken so many times?

And to relegate his knowledge even further into the useless category, these were not exactly typical lampreys. Lampreys weren't aggressive to large and mobile prey unless starving. Simply being human was usually more than defense enough against the parasitic fish. Even a large lamprey rarely topped thirty inches. Spencer estimated that these monsters averaged three and quite a few were around seven feet. But he had to calm down; get a firm grip on his ebbing reason. They would make it. *They had to!*

He glanced at his watch and dive computer and they told him what he already knew. Running out of air wasn't their immediate problem; time was their enemy right now. He gave Angela the ascent signal. The school was not going to move off in time and if they stayed much longer death was certain; if they left now, at least they had a chance.

Angela followed close to Spencer's fins; just far enough to keep from getting kicked. She checked her gauges. She knew the stories of rising from a deep dive too quickly. But it would be so easy to race to the surface and be free from the menace below. *No! Watch the smaller bubbles; rise only as fast as they.*

She did have to speed her ascent, however, just to keep up with Spencer. He was always less cautious than she, but this time she knew the reason wasn't male bravado – it was sheer horror.

He turned, checking on the school, but they were out of their limited-visibility range. It was comforting, yet at the same time distressing. The enemy could not be seen and might very well know where they were. He stopped kicking and threw up his arms. This slowed his ascent allowing Angela to glide past. He looked around again, then down at his knife. It gleamed dully in the faded light.

Angela did not have to check her depth gauge to know they were nearing the surface. She felt the cold of the middle thermocline give way to the warmer surface water.

Two heads popped unceremoniously from the blue, into the vanishing sunlight above with little noise and just a few ripples.

"There's the boat," she said, not waiting a moment before initiating a furious stroke toward her target. Being on the surface always seemed even scarier to her than being below when she considered what baddies may be lurking nearby, but she never had that sensation in fresh water before.

Being a much stronger swimmer, Spencer kicked until he pulled alongside her. "Hurry! Fill your BC with a little more air."

He plunged his head underwater, expecting to see the mass menace ready to converge, but he saw only open water.

They reached the boat without incident. Spencer took off and threw his gloves into the raft, then hurriedly unstrapped the tank and BC.

Angela fumbled with her equipment, losing her weight belt and a glove. The belt raced quickly down, until it disappeared into the abyss, while the glove drifted lazily away from the boat.

"Screw the shit, Angela. Just get in the boat!" he shouted, hauling himself over the side. He then helped her up and over the side, then sank bank in exhaustion. He was the stronger of the two, but he was tired.

"C'mon Spence, let's get out of here." she pleaded, untying the mooring line from the large white buoy. Spencer shook himself out of his trance-like state and began he working at the reluctant little engine.

“Can you guess what happens next?” he asked.

He pulled several times, but it would not start. It never did. He tried pulling with his left, thinking he would save his right hand for when he may really need it. The morning's blister was a grim reminder of how long it took to get the little engine going.

If they were safe in the boat now, why did he feel so weird? Every pull became more frantic, until finally the little engine sputtered to life without stalling a few seconds later. It only took eighteen pulls that time; he counted! But it also seemed more difficult than usual. He finally realized he was freezing, even after all the swimming and his heart beating 200 times per minute. That water was cold.

They started into a bit of a brisk wind, which had picked up some since they made their way out to the wreck. Spencer pointed in the direction of where their orange crossover was waiting for them, safe harbor parked on the mainland.

"You think we should just head for the island?" asked Angela.

"I don't know. I thought I would head back. I know we're going pretty slow, but don't you think we're safe now?"

She shrugged.

Nothing further was said for awhile. The encumbered raft plied the waters slowly, much as it always did. To Spencer, it seemed as if the beckoning shore came no closer, taunting them with its presence, but allowing no access. But he knew that was simply an illusion. They would get to shore; it would simply take a while.

With each passing minute, they both felt better, yet neither wanted to speak. They both glanced from the island, to the mainland and back toward the ship.

Five more minutes crept by before something caught Angela's gaze. She looked into the sky behind the boat, expecting to see a cloud blocking the receding sunlight, but the sky was clear. Then what was it that cast the shadow upon the water? She squinted and wiped her eyes. *No, that is not a shadow; it's under water!*

"Oh, Spencer, look!" She pointed behind the boat to the dark mass, which was now slowly making its way closer to the little raft.

He quickly turned to look behind them and exploded inside when he realized what he was seeing. The school of vampires was just below the surface en masse, more than keeping pace with the slow-moving boat.

"Please, get us to the island; forget the mainland!" screamed Angela, sobbing for the first time.

"It's okay. We'll make it," he soothed, but he also wanted to cry out.

He looked at the mainland, then at the island, then back and forth again. They were definitely still closer to the island, so he changed course. The boat went faster, now that it wasn't moving directly against the wind.

But the lampreys continued to gain on them. Within minutes they were only twenty feet behind. Both could start seeing their slimy bodies sometimes breaching the surface. It was utterly incomprehensible that this was happening. Spencer looked back at the school, then toward the island and repeated this before he up and heaved one of the buoyancy compensators, tank and regulator still attached, into the water. They watched in horror as the lampreys swarmed over the buoyant vest, obscuring it from view, roiling the surface like so many large piranha! The gear swiftly disappeared as the fish bore into the nylon, letting free the trapped air that kept it afloat.

"They're not supposed to do that!" screamed Spencer, as though by will alone he could reassert reality as he knew it.

"Yeah, well tell Jacque Cousteau, but where the hell's the Calypso whenever we need it?"

Her humor, though strained, was not wasted. It allowed him to get a better grip on his sanity. They always seemed to help each other. When one was on the verge of losing it, the other was a rock, and vice versa. That was what love was all about. Being there when one needed it.

He began tossing various articles of equipment over, starting with the heaviest. They watched as small bits of the shadow broke from the main, badgering the jetsam until the creatures realized the offerings were useless.

The boat picked up a little speed as the equipment was jettisoned, but it was not still enough to outpace the advancing horde. The first of the mass reached them not three hundred yards from shore. Spencer grabbed the paddle lashed to the starboard gunwale. Angela watched, then quickly took the portside paddle. They slapped and jabbed at the unbelievably aggressive monsters, who looked for tongue holds anywhere. Spencer was thankful that the little engine would remain fairly straight with the throttle still on so he could fight the monsters, but several times he still had to stop to make adjustments as even small waves caused the tiny raft to go off course.

Horror filled Angela's eyes as the port outside chamber began to deflate. "Shit, Spencer! One of them punctured the boat. We're gonna' sink!"

"No we're not. There're four chambers left, and we're almost to shore."

The outside starboard chamber went next, even though they both beat incessantly at the creatures on that side. As the boat plied deeper in the water, it lost speed, which it had precious little of to begin with, until it was crawling through the water. Designed to float with multiple punctures, the hydrodynamics of the craft still suffered greatly with three full chambers. When the stern chamber began to leak, the engine tested the remaining strength of the vessel; the transom began to vibrate while the engine mount bobbed up and down as if they'd part from the boat any second.

Angela, decorum and humor both entirely gone at this point, let out a piercing shriek as a lamprey bored it way through the bottom chamber. An enormous undulating buccal funnel filled with razor-sharp teeth blindly searched for something organic to cling to. She brought the paddle full force on the suction cup mouth; causing the creature to abort its mission, disappearing back into the water. The hole was filled with another presence, and other rasping, spiked tongues could be seen boring through the rapidly compromised vinyl bottom.

So much of the little raft's buoyancy had been robbed by the vampires that the motor finally stalled. The motor mount kept it from disappearing into the deep blue, but the weight now had the transom completely under the surface.

They were still nearly twenty yards from shore.

Outnumbered, but still valiantly swinging his oar, Spencer yelled, "Angela Swim for it! It's our only chance!"

The wet suits were cumbersome, but of extreme importance at this point, because the Agnathids were upon the two as soon as they entered the water. Spencer pushed her out in front, toward the shore.

"Spencer, help!" she screamed, flailing her arms as several of the wriggling lampreys went after her. She tucked her hands under her armpits after a slimy body slid past her left palm. She wished she still had her thick gloves.

Spencer tried to get to her, but he needed help of his own, as an even larger mass of razor-lined suction cups sought sustenance from his body.

"I can stand!" Angela suddenly shrieked with joyous relief. She began a half swim, half run for the sandy shore, swinging her knife at the lampreys searching for a hold on her.

A few seconds later she was safe on the beach and turned to see Spencer not faring nearly as well. Several massive lampreys clung to his arms, back and chest; the creatures slowed him down with their sheer weight and incessant wriggling. He slashed at them with his knife, but soon dropped it as exhaustion set in. Some of the fish were longer than he was tall, probably tipping the scales upwards of 40 lbs.

There was no hesitation as she ran about ten feet back into the water to help pull him to the beach. There was a lot of extra weight and as soon as Spencer reached land, he collapsed in complete exhaustion. Angela then worked ferociously at removing two enormous bloodsuckers that still clung to her lover's body. He screamed in pain as she ripped the largest off his chest with a two-handed grip, digging her nails into the slimy thing with nearly maniacal satisfaction, wishing they were much longer!

"You're in my work now, fucker!" she screamed. Blood covered the funnel mouth; Spencer's blood. She let go of the creature, watching in horror as it wriggled desperately; the stupid thing not understanding why it could not breathe anymore.

She rushed up to Spencer, fearing for the worst.

"I'll be okay," he said, holding his arm tightly against his chest, but she knew he was hurt.

"Let's see it," she said.

"I don't even want to see it" he said, but he pulled his arm away for her. The neoprene suit showed only a large tear, surrounded by a bunch of small holes in a circle. Angela took the knife out of the sheath on his leg and carefully cut away the suit. A deep wound oozed blood; the skin ragged around the edge of the hole. Spencer looked down, and started to feel queasy. Little dots played in front of his eyes before he passed out.

Angela was left alone with her fears as the sun continued to slip down to the horizon. She kept vigil over the now sleeping Spencer, and the beach to the south. He had told her to search the island for help, after briefly waking from his fainting spell, so she had taken a walk to several of the closest cottages, but found no one. She knew there were a few other summer homes on the island, but she did not want to leave Spencer for an extended period of time until she knew he was okay. Besides, she could hopefully flag down a passing boat, and ask for a ride to the peninsula.

A quick glance at her dive watch told her it was past 10:30 before she spotted a fishing boat approaching. It was a twenty-five foot Pursuit, shining white in the moonlight. Outriggers lined a rail over the stern, looking like so many television antennae.

The boat started to turn, traveling parallel to the shoreline. Angela ran for the beach shouting and jumping up and down, waving her arms frantically to try and catch someone's attention. Just as she thought the skipper did not see her, the boat turned, slowed to a stop, but she continued to shout.

A voice crackled over a loudspeaker. "*(kssst)* You okay, little lady?"

Angela continued her yelling.

Delbert Reese checked his depth gauge, and swung in for a closer look. He could not quite make out what she was yelling. *What the hell was with her*, he thought.

As he approached, he saw that she was wearing a wet suit, and he saw the prone figure further up on the beach.

He scrunched up his already deeply creased face, muttering to himself. "Uh-oh, must have lost their boat, stupid kids."

A beeping sound indicated that he had reached shallow water. He glanced down and was confronted with the fact that he was in fact in 2.8 feet of water. He engaged the windless, dropping his anchor with the flip of a switch, then took his shoes and socks off, rolled up his pants, and descended the transom ladder.

"Gads, I'm getting too old for this shit," he mumbled, nearly falling into the cold, wet below. The young woman was wide eyed as he approached the beach, almost as if waiting for something to happen.

"Damn!" he shouted. He plunged his hand into the water, grabbing his foot.

"What? Are you okay? Be careful," screamed Angela.

"Yeah ... no problem," his forehead wrinkled. *What was with her? Step on a stupid rock and she goes crazy.*

Angela waited until he was ashore before the words began spilling forth. "We were attacked by a school of lampreys. My husband is..."

"...right here," interrupted Spencer. He had awakened when Angela started to scream for the boat, but waited until the fisherman was on dry land before getting up – he was still pretty weak and sore.

The old fisherman extended his hand. "Hi. I'm Del Reese. And you are?"

Angela took the initiative. "My name is Angela, and this is my husband, Spencer."

"Now, what's this about lampreys?" smiled Del.

"My wife is not kidding ... or crazy." He added when he noticed the man's look. "We were attacked by a school of lampreys. But they were huge ... and ... vicious."

"They sank our raft," added Angela.

Both stopped at the cocked eyebrow they received from the fisherman after Angela's last revelation. To the fisherman's credit he didn't say what was on his mind, or even suggest that they were drunk.

Spencer thought for a moment, then pulled aside the cut section of wetsuit on his chest. "Look at this!"

Del made an ugly face at the sight of the wound. It did, indeed, look like the circular wound of a lamprey, only larger. God knew how many he had seen in his time, but he had never witnessed anything such as this. His mind searched for an answer.

"Probably a rogue, or sumthin'. I don't know. Probably mistook you for a fish," was all he could come up with.

"No way," said Angela, a little loud for Del. "There were many of them. Didn't you hear me? They SANK our raft!"

"Okay, okay, little lady. I'm sorry. It's just that things like this don't happen every day."

"It doesn't happen any day – but it did!" Angela suddenly realized she was taking the past events out on Del for no reason. She would have been just as suspicious hearing such an outlandish tale, at least before today.

"Sorry for raising my voice," was all she could muster.

"No apology necessary, Angela. Why don't I get you out of here?" They carefully padded out to the boat, all three of them looking this way and that; even Del seemed spooked at that point, but none of them saw a thing.

They were soon speeding toward the Upper Peninsula. Nothing much was said. Del was trying to reason out the story, while the two young passengers continued to stare out over the water, as if waiting for something terrible to happen.

They thanked Del for the ride, and offered him some soggy bills, but he would not take them.

He wheeled the boat around, and just before they were out of earshot, he yelled. "Now make sure you report this to the DNR right away. This has to be important."

Michigan's DNR – Department Of Natural Resources - would certainly be more than interested in their tale – if they didn't think the two were crazy, but any of their

field offices would be closed, especially in a small town like Munising. "We will, Del, but first we're heading to the hospital. Even if Spencer is okay, I want to make sure that wound doesn't get infected," said Angela, waving.

"We'll call them first thing in the morning, I promise," added Spencer. "Thanks, again!" he yelled as Del waved, then backed his Pursuit away from the ramp.

Spencer slept very well; he was exhausted, and the prescription pain pills he gladly accepted from the nurse at the hospital helped. Angela ended up taking one, because she had trouble sleeping; visions of lampreys swam through her mind! She was not sure if she would ever go diving again!

Early the next morning, they packed – they had far less than when they came to town, so that was easy enough, but they ate a leisurely breakfast at the small diner across the street from their hotel. They discussed simply going home and then emailing or calling ... whoever, but decided it was best to drive out to the DNR field station across town. It was strange but if Spencer hadn't had been wounded, it would have been difficult at best for anyone to believe their outlandish tale, because they now had the emergency room report, which indicated "wound from lamprey buccal funnel?" clearly written under the Final Diagnosis section at the end of the report. Even with the question mark, it highlighted that the attending physician could not dispute the claim; the wound was fairly tell tale.

At about the time they pulled into the parking lot of the field station, Del Reese finished yet another unproductive night of fishing. He used to feel pollution was the main culprit behind the ever fewer game fish, but now he was not so sure. The past few years in particular had gotten worse so there were endless debates. Over fishing was the number one reason many of the DNR enforcement officers cited. Habitat destruction was the favorite of the state biologists, and the sportsmen generally preferred to blame the native Americans – who had different fishing rules – and pollution. The native Americans generally blamed the paper mills and such, many of which were now long closed, but there was still quite a bit of industry along Superior's vast shoreline.

Of course, Del's lack of fish last night could have been his own fault; he had been distracted! He spent the entire night thinking and re-thinking about what the kids had told him. Of course it seemed too wild, but there certainly was quite a bit of evidence – and even the longer-term circumstances – to support it. There was Spencer's wound and the kids themselves; they seemed intelligent and as sane as the next person. They also did not seem like the type merely looking for attention. Then there was the lack of good fishing in the formerly productive waters, coupled with the very recent increased sightings of fish kill and lamprey activity. But would the creatures actively hunt people? Could they sink a boat, even if it were only a little rubber raft? And could they grow as large as the divers claimed? Those were the big questions. The glowing green eyes may have been a figment of their imagination, and even if it was of no real consequence, it still had home wondering.

He sped past a mooring buoy, which a small boat had tied to. Two young men were busily donning equipment, obviously getting ready to dive. He turned the boat around, heading straight for them.

He came off plane well before he got to them – they already had their diver down flag flying – and slowed to idle speed. He came up alongside seeing they were ready to get into the water. "Hey! You guys might want to cancel your dive. A young couple was attacked by a bunch of lampreys near here just last night."

"Whhaaat?" came the reply.

He saw the mocking looks on their faces, and mumbled. "I didn't think it was true at first myself, boys, but one of the wounds on the man was pretty convincing and they seemed pretty genuine. I really think you should talk to the DNR first– the couple is reporting it first thing this morning."

"You fishermen, always thinking us divers are scaring off your fish. Now, you're all reduced to bullshit stories like that!"

The smaller, stout diver laughed at his lean, tall friend. "Really, these guys are to much!"

Del shook his head and looked at his watch. "Look, I just wanted to warn you; no need to get smart."

"Sorry, old-timer, no harm no foul, but we're big boys now and can take care of ourselves."

"Whatever," said Dell, popping the Mercury into forward and turning away from the boat. "Don't say I didn't warn you!"

He hated when young people called him "gramps" or "old timer" like they actually didn't believe they were headed in the same direction. Of course, idiots like that sometimes don't reach old age ...

For a few seconds, he concluded that from now on he would mind his own business, but when he was about 100 yards from the divers' boat, he sped off toward the municipal docks. Even if they were rude jerks, he was going to the DNR field station to report ... something! Perhaps an enforcement officer could check on them; he didn't want anything on his conscious.

"Weird old coot, eh?" asked the short, blue-and-black suited diver, to his tall green striped neon neoprene companion. "I think you're right; probably wanted to scare us off his favorite fishing spot."

"Whatever," said the neon diver, strapping on his day-glow orange fins. "Ain't gonna' happen! He can find another wreck; those stupid fishermen want everything for themselves."

Not too long later, the neon diver with the day-glow orange fins shined his light down upon the deck of the Smith Moore. He spied the blue-vinyl coated weights and pink belt that were lost by some careless diver, quite recently by the look of them.

Just then his partner spied a school of huge, eel-like fish, hovering menacingly over the bow of the ship.

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