

**AGNATHA ANATHEMA**  
by  
**Jay Jarvis**

The two avid divers readied their gear; they were nearly ready to begin another of their countless underwater adventures.

"Well, this makes four!" she said, strapping the buoyancy compensator device to her blue metal flake SCUBA tank.

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

"Four Great Lakes, Homer!"

Instantly, his anger vanished upon the sight of her dazzling smile. She was bent over, peering at him through spread legs, as she tightened the strap to her tank. "Hurry up! I want to get there before midnight."

"Spence..." Angela's look and tone of voice cooled his jets.

He started loading the equipment on the raft, quickly and efficiently. "Let's see... computer okay, lights, knife, gloves, hoods, boots..."

"Everything!" she interrupted.

She was right.

"Yeah, but it's always the little shit we forget." he said, stepping into the raft.

When Angela stepped into the raft, it reduced the freeboard to just over four 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.

He eyed the blister that formed 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 "legend" for the tourists sake."

The little raft crept further into the Alger Underwater Preserve, ever closer to the shipwreck that patiently awaited.

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. Only, Alger was like candy. It was further from home than most of the other preserves, but the thirty to fifty foot underwater visibility was 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 told me, either!"

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

They busily worked at readying their equipment, fidgeting with all 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 finally the knives.

"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.

"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 that lay 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 basement, watching each other in the process. At about thirty feet, they reached the first thermocline. It was a "band" of cold water. 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. The temperature was reduced to a numbing thirty-five degrees at depth--year round! The visibility was also reduced; clear blue giving way to just a bit of brown opacity due to particle suspension. However, the forty five foot visibility which they were now experiencing was far better than any they had encountered during their numerous dives in the Great Lakes.

The Smith Moore appeared like a specter out of the haze. It was a thing of a time long past; historical and beautiful. The Moore was murdered by another steamer, the James Pickands, in 1889. The Ship sounded distress calls, but according to Captain Ennis of the Pickands, he did not hear them. He continued on to Marquette where he was later questioned about the incident. He 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. None of the Smith Moore's crew was lost, 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 giant teal fins. He was surprised by a huge 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 large lamprey. He always kept up with news regarding the lakes and remembered reading about a resurgence of the vampire 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. One mutant gene could grant a species immunity to a once deadly condition!

He raced for Angela who was waiting at the entrance to the hold; the large "window of light" which would give him access to the open water once again.

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

They swam across the deck, making way for the stern. They noticed a few large salmon, laying dead upon the deck almost as if someone placed them there for effect, adding to the mysterious seascape.

Angela had no inclination to further inspect the carcasses, but Spencer shot towards them with a couple ferocious fin strokes. She paused, watching as he swam up on the nearest salmon. His mask was within six inches of the 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 flesh swam around like one of those water filled plastic snow scenes. Spencer motioned her over, and reluctantly she went. He pointed out his discovery to her; the fish had a two inch diameter circular wound in its side. Angela shrugged. She wondered what was so important about a lamprey wound. After all, they had decimated 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 ecological preservation!

Spencer glanced at his watch. It told him that they were nearing the halfway point of their dive. 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 lampreys idly moving closer to them. He quickly swung around, checking on Angela, who was inspecting the fancy woodwork of the Smith Moore.

The lampreys came ever closer, so Spencer could not enjoy the dive he had been so anxious to make. He nervously watched as the two vampiric pices slowly swam a wide circle around them, kind of like how a shark would size up its prey before making the final lunge! He unsheathed the knife at his side, rapping it against his tank to get Angela's attention.

She looked at her husband wondering what was wrong. She followed his gaze until she saw the lampreys. She turned; motioned by lifting her arms questioningly. What were they doing?

Her answer came swiftly, as one of the two must have concluded that she would make a nice meal. Its rasping mouth grabbed onto the leg of her quarter inch wetsuit, trying to get to her nutrient rich blood.

Spencer rushed over, grabbed its tail, and sliced it clean in half. Its tail section twitched as it sank towards the deck of ship. 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.

The second lamprey, which was considerably larger than the first, grabbed onto Spencer's midsection. He quickly took his knife plunging it deep into the creature's back, but it did not let go. He grabbed its tail and heaving it away from his body; the wounded fish then making its escape.

He swam up to Angela, grasping her gloved hands. He examined the spot where the lamprey had bored into her wet suit. The neoprene suit was completely bored through.

Another instant and the vicious little vampire 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 saw something terrible. She grabbed Spencer's fin, and when he turned, she pointed to her horrifying discovery. A school of at least a hundred lampreys patrolled the bow of the Moore, waiting for any hapless fish to blunder upon them. Most were of the same size that had attacked them, but some were larger, upwards of five feet!

Again, Spencer glanced at his watch. If they were to stay within the no-decompression time tables, they would have to surface within seven minutes, and that would still be pushing it! Angela pointed to one of the cargo holds, then swam over and entered it. Spencer followed, keeping an eye on the blood sucking school.

Only their heads protruded from the 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 would surely contract decompression sickness which could just as well prove fatal.

He tried to remember everything he knew regarding the lampreys. He dissected and studied the fish in college, but the memories were getting hazy. The fish were of the few remaining members of the class 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 forsaken so many times!

It couldn't.

He had to reach out; get a firm grip on his ebbing reason. They would make it. They HAD to!

He glanced at his watch, then gave Angela the ascent signal. He concluded that the

school was not going to move on in time. If they stayed much longer death was sure; if they left they had a chance.

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

She did have to speed her ascent, 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 horror.

He turned, checking on the school, but they were out of the 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. It sent him descending, allowing Angela to pass. 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.

"There's the boat!" she screamed, not waiting a moment before initiating a furious stroke towards her target.

He pulled alongside her. "Hurry! Fill your BC with more air."

He plunged his head underwater, expecting to see the mass menace ready to converge, but he only saw 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, while the glove lazily drifted away.

"Screw the shit, Angela. Just get in the boat!" he shouted, hauling himself over the

side. He helped her up, then sank back in exhaustion.

"C'mon Spence, let's get outta here." she pleaded.

She untied the mooring line, while he worked at the reluctant little engine.

"Can you guess what happens next?" he asked.

He pulled a few 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 that fact.

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, but it seemed more difficult than usual.

They started into a brisk wind; Spencer heading back to where the truck was parked on the mainland.

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

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

She just shrugged.

Nothing further was said for awhile. The encumbered raft plied the waters slowly. It seemed as if the beckoning shore became no closer, taunting them with its presence, but allowing no access.

Five minutes crept by before something caught Angela's gaze. She looked into the sky, expecting to see a cloud blocking the receding sunlight. It was clear. Then what was it that cast its shadow upon the water--or UNDER the water!

"Oh Spencer, Look!" She pointed to the dark mass, which was now slowly moving closer to the raft.

He exploded inside when he realized what he was looking at. The school of vampires was just below the surface en masse, more than keeping pace with the slow moving boat.

"Just get to the Island!" screamed Angela, sobbing for the first time.

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

He looked at the mainland, then at the island. It was still definitely closer to the island, so he changed course. The boat went faster, now that it had the current against its back, but so did the lampreys.

They continued to gain on the craft, so Spencer heaved one of the Buoyancy compensators, tank still attached, into the water. They watched in horror as the lampreys swarmed over the buoyant vest, obscuring it from view. It 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.

"Yeah, so sayeth Jacque Cousteau, but where's the Calypso when ya need savin'?"

Her humor was not wasted. It allowed him 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.

He began tossing in various articles of equipment, starting with the heaviest. They watched as small bits of the shadow broke from the main, badgering the useless offerings.

The boat picked up a little speed as the heavy equipment was jettisoned, but it was not enough to slow the advancing hoard. The first of the mass reached them not three hundred yards from shore. Spencer grabbed the paddle lashed to the starboard gunwale. Angela grabbed the paddle tied to the port. They slapped at the unbelievably aggressive little monsters, who looked for tongue holds on the vinyl sides.

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

"No were not. There's four chambers left, and were almost to shore."

The outside starboard chamber went next, even though they beat incessantly at the

creatures below. The boat began to lose speed, which it had precious little of, until it was crawling through the water. Only semi-inflated the hydrodynamics of the craft suffered greatly. As the stern chamber began to leak the engine really tested the remaining strength of the vessel.

Angela let out a piercing scream as a lamprey bored it way through the bottom chamber. A undulating buccal funnel 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 deflating vinyl bottom.

So much of the little raft's buoyancy had been robbed by the vampires, that the motor finally stalled, just before submerging into the deep blue.

They were still nearly fifty yards from shore when Spencer yelled. "Swim for it! It's our only chance!"

The wet suits were cumbersome, but of extreme importance, for the Agnathids were upon the two as soon as they were immersed in the water.

"Spencer, help!" she screamed, flailing her arms to rid herself of the wriggling menace.

He needed some help of his own, however, as a mass of razor lined suction cups sought sustenance from his body.

"I can stand!" she joyously screamed. She began a half swim, half run for the sandy shore.

A few seconds later she was safe on the beach. She turned to see Spencer not faring nearly as well. Several large lampreys clung to his arms back and chest; the creatures slowing him down with their sheer weight and incessant wriggling.

He reached the beach just before collapsing in complete exhaustion. Angela worked

ferociously at removing the blood suckers from her lover's body. He screamed in pain as she ripped the last one off his chest with her two handed grip. Blood covered the funnel mouth; Spencer's blood. She tossed the creature on the sand, watching it wriggle desperately; the stupid creature not quite 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.

"Let's see it," she said.

He pulled his arm away, but the neoprene suit showed only a small hole, 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.

The sun left Angela alone to her fears. 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 waking from his fainting spell, so she had taken a walk, but found no one upon the island. She knew there were several summer homes, but she did not want to leave Spencer for an extended period of time. She decided to wait for a passing boat, flag it down, and ask for a ride to the peninsula.

A quick glance at her dive watch told her it was after 1:00 am 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 screaming and jumping up and down. Just as she thought the skipper did not see her the boat slowed then stopped.

A voice crackled over a loudspeaker. "pppffftyou okay, little lady?"

Angela continued yelling.

Delbert Reese checked his depth sonar, and swung in for a closer look. He could not quite make out what she was saying. 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. "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 2.8 feet of water. He dropped his anchor with the flip of a switch, took his shoes and socks off, rolled up his pants, and started to descend the ladder.

"Gads, I'm gettin too old for this shit," he mumbled, nearly falling into the cool 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.

"Are you okay?" screamed Angela.

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

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 awoken when Angela started to yell for the boat, but waited until the fisherman was on dry land before getting up--he was still pretty 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. We were attacked by a school of lampreys. They were vicious. They sank our raft..." he stopped at the cocked eyebrow he received from the fisherman.

He thought for a moment, then said. "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. God knew how many he had seen in his time! 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 him? They SANK our raft!"

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

Angela realized she was taking the past events out on Del for no reason. She knew that before today she would have had trouble believing such a story.

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

The made it out to the boat, and were soon speeding toward the lower peninsula. Nothing much was said. Del was trying to reason out the story, while the two young passengers just stared 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. Could be important."

"We're going back to our hotel, then first thing in the morning were going to the field

station. Thanks, again!" yelled Spencer.

Spencer slept well, probably due to exhaustion, but Angela was plagued with vampiric nightmares. For her the night was painful and enduring.

They packed, ate breakfast at the small diner across the street from their hotel, then sped out towards the DNR field station.

Meanwhile, 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.

He spent the entire night thinking about the story. It seemed wild, but there were odd circumstances to support it. First of all there was Spencer's wound. Next, the lack of fish coupled with the many sightings of lamprey laden fish. But would they actively hunt man? That was a big question.

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

He slowed when he came close enough to say. "Hey! You guys be careful down there. A young couple was attacked by a lamprey last evinin'."

"Whaaat?" came the reply.

He saw the mocking looks on their face, and mumbled. "Just thought I'd tell ya."

He sped off, thinking he must have been crazy to try and "warn" them of something so preposterous. He concluded that from now on he would mind his own business.

"Weird old coot, eh?" asked a blue suited diver, to his neon neoprene companion.

"Probably trying to scare us off his favorite fishin' spot." said the neon diver, strapping on his day glow orange fins.

"Whatever," said the blue.

A few moments later the neon diver with the day glow fins shined his light down

upon the deck of the Smith Moore. He spied the blue vinyl coated weights and belt that were lost by a diver, quite recently by the look of them.

His partner spied a school of eel-like fish, hovering over the bow of the ship.

End Of Part I