

Squeals of Eels

By Philip Rainford

It was supposed to have been an uneventful test dive in an experimental deep-sea three-man diving bell. Like most diving bells, it was simply a ball on a string without manoeuvrability but equipped with powerful lights and cameras to record at depths never before visited. I was the only occupant and had planned to descend no more than 3000 feet. I'm not usually superstitious, but from the very beginning the warning signs were there, but I ignored them. You know when a day starts off bad it seems to affect everything else? This was one of those days.

The first sign, I developed a massive headache during the first 500 feet of the descent. This was something usually associated with greater depths. Insulated as I was in the cabin of the sub, I should not have had any such reaction as the pressure inside was carefully regulated.

We had scheduled that every 500 feet we'd do a systems check, so we stopped the descent - everything was going fine, my headache went away so we continued the descent.

The second warning sign was more serious. Out of nowhere, the bell was caught in a swift moving current. "Where did that come from?" It had not appeared on our instruments - definitely a freak current.

"You should descend below it... around 1030 feet." I acknowledged the instruction and felt the bell being lowered. At the same time, I was being tossed around violently.

"Hope you're right. It's very rough here."

"Very calm up here."

“Glad you’re comfortable.” I replied as I was being tossed around like a tumble weed in a tornado. It wasn’t until the thrashing stopped that I noticed I was descending faster than usual. “Hey guys! Isn’t this a bit fast?”

“Don’t know what you mean! You’re stationary! Did you land on a ledge?”

“No ledges. This trench goes down for miles and is five miles across. I’m still descending fast! Just passed 2000 feet!”

“Don’t understand, everything here says you’re stationary at 1200 feet” replied my handler Sasha Griffin, as she gave orders at the other end. “Pull him up! Pull him up now!”

Despite her order my descent did not stop. A slight jolt and I lost communication. I was in free fall; soon I would reach crush depth. This little bell would be my tomb. I watched in almost ghoulish fashion as the depth-gauge counted through each 1000 feet. I realised this would be the last thing I saw before I was crushed! It would be quick, one minute watching the gauge, the next the great mystery would be revealed.

When I hit 10,000 feet, I became uneasy for other reasons. I felt a strange calm as I waited for the end. I expected to have at least heard the creaking of metal as the hull became stressed by the water pressure. At the surface we have 14.7 pounds per square inch, for every 33 feet of my descent, that number increased by another 14.7 pounds per square inch. Now, I was heading for 15,000 feet, I was becoming incredulous. Had it already happened! Was I unaware that I’d died and was experiencing a weird after-death illusion? 20,000 feet; 25,000 feet; 30,000 feet. That was nearly 5 miles down! Almost as high as an international flight. But still no straining, no metal under stress, I should have been crushed by now! I was more than four times the crush-depth of the sub. What on earth was happening? 35,000 feet! Was I slowing down? Not possible... I was in free fall!

It was pitch black outside Therefore I could see nothing, not even the external lights from the diving bell revealed anything but inky black water. We were too far down to even

glimpse any light from the surface. This was the deepest of the deep! The unknown! This was further down than anyone had travelled before. I stopped at 40,000 feet and waited. I did not hit the bottom. But this was impossible; the deepest part of the ocean had been recorded around 36,000 feet.

Now I had stopped as if still bobbing on the end of my cable. Except no cable was that long, so what had stopped my descent? I waited, wondering if my fate would be to starve to death, or what was more likely, to run out of air!

My first hint that something was trying to make contact, was the return of my headache. It started as a niggling pain, but it grew quite painful then it toned down and I heard a voice in my head as if I was talking to myself. I thought it was some underwater delusion, my oxygen might be failing, or something about the depth was affecting my mind.

The voice was accompanied by a soothing sensation as if it was calming me down as it spoke. "Do not fear! We do no harm."

"Who are you?" I shouted out in fright.

"We live here, look outside." In response I turned up the lights and scanned the outside through the portal. The water was still murky and the light found it hard to penetrate the dark... then I saw it!. I could only describe it as a huge sea monster!

On closer examination I could see it was eel-like with whiskers like a walrus and four arms reminiscent of a T-Rex.

"What do you want?" I asked nervously. This thing was the size of a train.

"A message. You live on the land; we live in the sea. We cannot go higher; our bodies explode in shallow depths like you implode in deeper ones. So we bring you here."

I was reeling from what I'd experienced. My head was full of questions, some of those questions involved querying my sanity. "How? It's not possible I can be here!"

“You live in shelters and build. We have no need to build, so we ‘think’. Develop and test our theories on how the world works. We developed telepathy for communication and mind over matter. We read the minds of your people as they move above us. You are in a thought bubble that protects you.”

“A mentally generated energy field?” I queried.

“Yes. When finished we shall return you to surface.”

“So... why am I here?” I asked tentatively. I assumed I’d be returned alive but maybe not undamaged. What could these creatures possibly want?

“Humans damage the ocean. Dump harmful substances. Take too much produce, upset balance of food chain. It must stop!”

“That is easier said than done. There are many humans who agree with you, but large corporations ignore them to gain wealth.”

“Wealth? We do not understand.”

“How do you understand anything? How can you know my language?”

“We do not. We communicate with images that your mind converts to language. When you speak, we see what you are saying. We cannot understand this image of wealth.”

“We all have needs, food, shelter; some have more than they need. That is wealth.”

“Your species seem to need lots of wealth. It takes too much from our seas and returns harmful wastes. It must stop. You tell your people, no more. Any ship that breaks this rule, the crew will be attacked by us and given severe migraines. If persist, we shall kill.”

On the surface, Sasha and her team of three were monitoring their equipment, searching for the submersible bell. Alan, a tall, young, red-headed crew member with a wisp of a beard, poked his head around the door. “The cable broke, we’ve reeled it in, and it’s snapped.”

“How did that happen? That’s a reinforced metal cable! It cannot just break!” replied Sasha. Alan scratched his head having no answers. Sasha felt helpless, what should she do?

“Sasha... listen to this,” yelled Darren, the sonar technician. He put a ‘sound’ on speaker resembling a very low note on a tuba. Everyone looked puzzled. “Ever heard of the loneliest whale in the world?” They all shook their heads. “In 1989, they detected this whale song they’d never heard before but no other whale every answered the call. They monitored it up to 2004 then lost it but could never identify the species. It’s unique because it resonates at 52 hertz; most whales use 10 to 40 hertz. That’s the 52 hertz whale!”

“How does that help us?”

Darren looked away, disappointed no-one shared his excitement. “It doesn’t, but there may be a connection.”

“You mean our mystery whale cut the cable and took our bell to the bottom of the ocean? No whale could break that cable!” replied Sasha scoffing at the idea, annoyed at the distraction.

Darren returned to his instrumentation. This time he saw something more relevant. He hesitated to report given the cold shoulder he got on his last report. “Sasha, I have a new reading.” She came over, irritated, and looked at what he was monitoring. “It’s a bubble ascending rapidly from quite deep down.”

“Identify it!”

“I can’t. It could be just a bubble of air. My instruments can’t analyse it. It will hit the surface in nine minutes... about 100 yards off our port side.”

Darren continued to monitor its progress as the others rushed to the deck to see what came up. On time and just where predicted, the bubble broke the surface with a huge splash and there sat my submersible bell, bobbing on the surface of the water. Not quite believing what they saw, they rushed to retrieve the bell, an object incapable of floating

Once the bell had been pulled from the water and lowered to the deck, the hatch was opened, and I emerged unharmed. Sasha hugged me very tightly, a little more tightly than just another colleague but then we had worked together for seven years, and she had been a great support to me during my divorce five years ago.

Once below deck out of the wind and cold, and with a hot cup of coffee, I told my story. “You must have been suffering from some illusion brought on by the pressure,” suggested Sasha

“No, I’ve got pictures,” I insisted.

“But if you were 40,000 feet down for every 33 feet you descend you double the pressure at the surface of 14.7 lbs per square inch. That’s nearly 18,000 lbs per square inch,” insisted Sasha.

“Even whales can only go down 7000 feet without being crushed, and then, only because they have flexible bodies and loose ribs to adapt to the pressure,” suggested Alan.

Simon, the oceanographer, who’d remained silent all this time, was flicking through the photographs on the bell’s camera. “This is definitely a new species, a cross between an eel and a whale... hmmm but they could not be living at those depths.”

“Let me see,” demanded Sasha. Simon plugged in the camera he’d been reviewing, into a computer and the pictures appeared on a large screen in the cabin. They all had a clear view of the Eel- like creature with T-Rex like arms.

“What do we do?” asked Sasha.

“We pass on the message,” I suggested.

A week later, a freighter carrying toxic waste for dumping in the ocean, reported it was unable to drop its cargo. This was due to the crew coming down with incapacitating

migraines every time they attempted to do so. This was followed by other ships including whaling ships, huge fishing trawlers and other vessels that could be viewed as performing tasks harmful to the oceans, reporting identical events.

My initial report, despite photos provided as evidence, was ignored and generally ridiculed. What I described was impossible to comprehend; my story was an unbelievable fantasy. The reporters came to me asking if this was the actions of my mythical deep-sea eels? But they were only looking for a follow up story, one which only further ridiculed my first story. It was a bad time for me. I knew the cause, but I was not believed and I knew what was to come.

It took about six months before ghost ships began to be reported. The entire crew dead from cerebral haemorrhage; it was a medical impossibility for all crew members to simultaneously suffer such an end. It had to be an enemy weapon – but what enemy? The media reported an escalation of the migraine attacks which were now put down to some human plot and my story was buried in favour of this new threat.

I was unaware that some thinkers in the government, several governments in fact, were starting to give credence to my story. They were not about to alarm the public, and actually encouraged the stories that were evolving... from one of an attack by some unknown nation, to that of some 007 villain who was a rich greenie. So, I was a little surprised when I had been summoned to a top-level scientific meeting, all under the pretext of being interviewed in regard to my knowledge of this ‘villain’s’ plan.

I found myself in a large boardroom with eleven people I didn’t know, having been escorted in by two suited agents. The formality of the meeting gave me some concerns and I felt on-edge. “Look, this is ridiculous! There is no super villain, but there certainly is a threat to the oceans and its inhabitants are defending themselves.”

“We know this. Take a seat,” replied a rather plump bald man seated at the head of the table. As I was being escorted to the seat at the other end of the table, he introduced himself. “I am General Horace Bluespan. I want you to tell us everything you experienced and all you know about these creatures threatening us.”:

“They are not threatening us. They asked us to stop destroying the oceans, their home. They gave you warnings indicating what activities were doing harm, and you ignored them.”

“They have attacked our ship!”

“They have never harmed a cargo ship, a passenger ship, small fishing vessels or any vessel that was not creating environmental damage.”

“None the less, they are a threat. Who’s to say they’ll stop there?”

I stared at the General and all the other silent faces watching me. Some were in uniform, others in suits. I didn’t recognise anyone so assumed they were a committee set up by the more powerful, with the purpose to find a defence strategy. “The best strategy is, to do as they ask. Most of the population want us to stop polluting and looting the oceans, so why not do it as a huge PR exercise against global warming?”

“We can’t do that.”

“You mean... commercial interests prevent you doing that? So, you’re prepared to go to war against a species that simply want you to stop polluting their backyard? How are you going to get to them?”

“That is strictly classified. Now, tell us what you know.”

Frustrated, I told my story while feeling I was betraying the Eels but, I had no allies. The public didn’t believe they existed, I might as well have said Mermaids were behind it all! I’d have to trust in the Eels to be able to defend themselves.

I was not disappointed. Five days later, a destroyer had been found adrift, its crew all dead from cerebral haemorrhage. Their mission was to drop depth charges into the trench into which I'd descended. Not one depth charge had been launched.

I was not surprised when I was summoned back to what I came to call the "Eel Committee". This was when I learned of the 'destroyer disaster' which had been kept secret until now.

"Can't say I'm surprised; they can read your intent and their reach is global. Did you really think you could wipe them out with one strike? They rule the depths all over the world, not just where I made contact otherwise, they wouldn't be attacking ships in every body of water, ocean and sea. I believe the death toll is in excess of 5,000 and counting?"

The General looked troubled as I stood waiting for his response. The rest of the panel remained silent, no-one else seemed capable of speech.

Finally, I broke the silence. "Why don't you just do as they ask?"

The General carefully considered his response. "We have a problem. There is no global authority powerful enough to make that decision. Who will tell the Japanese to stop whaling? Who will stop international corporations from dumping waste? Who will challenge the fishing industry, the food industry and the pharmaceutical industries? Politicians are weak, lobbyists are strong. There is no way to stop the process."

"So... what are you saying? We can do nothing? We let lives be lost?"

The General nodded. "We have been given carte blanche to wipe them out, but we know that isn't going to work. We want you to talk to them again."

Incredulously, I stared at the panel. "And say what? Stop killing and we'll just go back to destroying the oceans because we are powerless to stop it?" The General nodded. "That won't work and you know it. Best I can do is ask them to stop killing and go back to

migraine incapacitation. Perhaps if we cost them enough in failed dumping and fishing missions, make sailors afraid to sail with them, we might get somewhere!”

“Then do it! Otherwise this will scale up and I don’t think we’ll win,” stated the General. “And... I hate to admit that. Every instinct in me, tells me to destroy them rather than give in, but if they incapacitate our ships before we can strike, we’re not even in the fight. We know nothing of... their range, their numbers, their ultimate agenda.”

“I think their agenda is obvious. Stop us destroying the oceans. What would you have me do?” I asked warily. They looked at me in silence waiting for me to answer that very question myself.

They funded my return to the diving test site. This time, I had wireless comms and I had asked along the press, Teresa Kent and her cameraman Brian Cummings. Brian was to accompany me on the dive, while Teresa monitored the surface for any tricks. I wanted them to feel sceptical; I needed them to spread the story if this was going to work. We had to leak the story to the world and place as much pressure as possible on the offenders.

They inspected the cable; they made sure the submersible bell would sink like a rock if the cable broke. They examined the monitoring equipment for any tricks. Finally we were ready to descend. A little nervous, Brian joined me inside the craft and took charge of lighting and cameras. I took the lead chair, monitoring depth, air, and pressure. My surface team remained the same as on the last trip.

With the submersible lowered into the water, Brian looked terrified, his usually reddish complexion had turned ghostly white and I expected his black bushy beard to turn grey at any minute. The surface soon vanished, and we were descending into the murky depths...

The first sign of contact happened when everyone felt a mild migraine. On the surface, Teresa panicked. “They’re going to kill us! We have to get out of here!”

Sasha grabbed her. “Relax! They’re only probing our intent.” Teresa calmed and noticed her headaches were dissipating. She relaxed but for the first time felt this was very real.

Then it happened! The cable went from taut to slack in an instant, just like it had before. “They’ve got him,” announced Simon.

“Sonar shows them descending rapidly,” reported Darren.

“Haul in the cable, show Teresa here they are no longer attached, and they are dropping like a stone towards crush depth,” ordered Sasha.

Simon and Teresa left the bridge for the deck. Teresa looking at the same time, both very worried and very scared – this had become real, not some fantasy story, not the expose of a fraud she’d expected.

In the bell, I was having my own difficulties. Brian had frozen with fear as he stared at the depth gauge as it went into the red and still, we kept dropping. I knew what he was thinking; I’d been there myself. This time I felt more confident of surviving. We both sat in silence until we finally came to rest and then, we waited.

“We see your concern,” I heard a voice in my head. I looked to Brian who didn’t seem to hear. He was still staring wild eyed at the depth gauge.

“Can you speak to my companion as well?” I asked.

“You have a problem concerning this concept of wealth.”

I saw Brian’s reaction to the voice, his trance switching to panic as he looked around for the source of the voice in his head. “Who is that? Where did it come from?”

“They are talking to us; look at your camera monitors.”

Brian took up my suggestion and found the Eels hovering around the submersible. A new level of panic took over. “Are they going to kill us?”

“No, just talk. Relax and take your films, take notes, do what you need to do. Tell Teresa what you are experiencing,” I suggested. Amazingly, he made contact with the surface and filled them in. Teresa had found the severed cable and was convinced they were at extreme depths. As we spoke with the Eels, Brian conveyed the discussion to Teresa who recorded it.

Carefully, I outlined the problem. The Eels had difficulty understanding. They had a community that worked together and could not understand multiple communities working against each other. Finally, they understood the effectiveness of migraine incapacitation rather than death, and how this would make sailors afraid to go to sea and win goodwill among the people who agreed with the Eels that the oceans needed protection.

It was around this time that I noticed the oxygen levels getting low. This should not have been possible, there were two oxygen tanks, one for descent and one for ascent. The ascent tank appeared empty.

“As I understand, tank should show bubbles if it leaks...there doesn't seem to be one.”

“Is it possible for me to see through your eyes?” I asked of the Eel. Instantly I had a strange view outside of the sub. I was seeing clearly in the dark, but in colour. I was also seeing something else, a red glow within the second tank. “What is that?”

“It is energy, you call ‘nuclear’.”

I began to feel ill as my suspicion turned to fear. “Can we look closer?” The Eel moved in and I saw the second tank had been disguised as a bomb. We'd been betrayed! The Eel got the message as soon as I did and also noticed that we were not responsible.

“We have seen these before in the minds of men passing.”

I didn't respond, I was aware of Brian in the background sensing something was wrong, but I ignored him. I stared at the device. It was sealed; there was no way I could get inside even if I could access it. There seemed to be a timer - it was measuring depth; that meant it would probably go off as we began the ascent. I suggested the Eels make their escape and leave us, then I turned to Brian.

"Put us on speaker!" Brian complied. "The bastards have rigged a nuclear bomb to the sub. It will explode when we begin to ascend. You need to clear the area and get the message out to the world. Despite this, the Eels have agreed not kill us. Hopefully, migraine incapacitation attacks will discourage them eventually. Only attack vessels will be met with lethal force."

I could see the horror in Brian's eyes as he stared at me. He was not one to express his emotions openly, he carefully suppressed them. "What about us?"

"Even if I could get to the bomb... I'm an engineer not a bomb disposal expert. There is nothing we can do," I concluded.

"We can't just leave you," insisted Sasha.

"You have no choice; the blast will sink you if you're not vaporised. You must leave - get the story out there, the pictures, and the dialogue. Tell them what happened!"

"There is another way." The voice came from nowhere; we both heard it and knew the Eels had not left. "Open your hatch."

"If we do that, we'll drown," we both replied.

"We have protected you, created bubble of air from oxygen in the water. It is safe but hurry." I went to the hatch and released the latch hesitantly. At this depth I doubted it would open but it did and as easily as if we'd been on the surface. As I climbed out, I had a brilliant unobstructed view of the ocean around me. Giant eels, about a dozen of them, gathered and were swimming around. The ocean bottom lay only a few feet below us. Brian

followed quickly, switching on his camera. The water was crystal clear, but with only the light from our sub we could not see very far. Once we were in the air bubble, it broke away from the sub and we floated free.

I stared back at the sub and saw the bomb on the side disguised as an oxygen tank; from the outside it looked quite normal. Then it was gone!

. The whole sub vanished!

On the surface, something exploded out of the ocean at high speed, frightening everyone on the ship into thinking the bomb had gone off. The object streaked into the sky at high speed. On the border of space and the planet's atmosphere, it exploded a nuclear blast taking out several satellites and lit up the sky for a quarter of a hemisphere.

It was several hours before our bubble emerged on the surface near the ship. Having no communication, the ship was uncertain whether to wait. Although they had heard no messages, they had a strong urge to remain.

When Teresa's story was published, the media was awash with it. The 'hoax' was revealed as real, and the threat was our own government not sea monsters! When I was yet again summoned to meet my betrayers, I was not pleased. "You bastards! You tried to kill me and direct an attack on the Eels. It failed! You nearly started a war!"

"We were protecting our interests." The pompous reply did not go over well, me being in a foul mood. These guys were prepared to sacrifice every seaman on every ship, if necessary, just to satisfy their own greedy needs.

"That isn't going to happen! Every conservationist group in the world has united to protect the Eels and the oceans from the likes of you. Any attack on the Eels will result in a lethal retaliation against you. Any crew doing damage to the ocean will be incapacitated. Every sailor in the world is seeking clarification on their mission and their cargo; even

defence personnel are questioning their missions. If you persist, this will not end well.

Corporate greed is beginning to become very obvious, and people are now finding ways to fight back.”

With that I walked out, leaving them to plot their next move. I was hopeful they might give up, but powerful men do not surrender their power so easily.

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