



“Creature From the Dead Pool”

A fan-fiction short story

By Jason William Karpf

Foreword

“Creature from the Dead Pool” is a fan-fiction short story that mashes up the Dirty Harry and Creature from the Black Lagoon franchises. In one of his earliest roles, Clint Eastwood played an absent-minded lab assistant in the second Gill-Man movie, *Revenge of the Creature*, 1955. This story creates the premise that his briefly seen character is the twin brother of Harry Callahan, a young officer in the San Francisco Police Department during the 1950s who would be promoted to Inspector and become known for several high-profile cases in the 1970s and 1980s.

Creature from the Dead Pool

1957

The skiff bobbed in the shadow of Angel Island, east of the Golden Gate, north of downtown San Francisco. A Nike air defense base stood at the far corner of the rugged enclave, its attention turned skyward to repel Soviet bombers, the missileers oblivious to the small boat. A wall of twilight fog surged from the Pacific, swallowing the seventy-story suspension bridge towers that straddled the bay's opening.

The man in the skiff, only a tall silhouette in the murk, ignored the cold warriors on the peak behind him and the chilly fog bank cloaking the distant city lights. He adjusted a rack of electronic gear before keying a radio mic.

"I'm in position. Ready to activate sonic beacon."

"Jennings, I still don't like you out there alone." The tinny speaker couldn't hide the tension in the woman's voice.

"We've proven the creature remembers. He's likely to avoid a bigger boat with a crew." Jennings hefted a tranquilizer gun. "I've got plenty of rotenone to knock him out." He set down the gun and returned to the electronics. "And I'm not alone, Marcia. Dr. Ferguson, Dr. Morton, Dr. Barton ... I feel they're right here with me."

"Only two of those men are still alive. Follow their example. And remember, only observation tonight."

"I'll see it, all right. The buoy test proved it's in the bay. Nothing else would leave those claw marks." Jennings locked the key on the mic and set it down. "I'll leave the mic open. Beacon on, commencing now."

Jennings flipped the switch, and a high-pitched oscillation filled the air. He waited. After a few minutes, a sonar ping punctuated the cacophony. Jennings peered at the viewscreen.

“It’s him! Same signature seen in the Everglades. Thirty feet, twenty feet—”

Water churned at the bow. Jennings seized the tranquilizer gun and a flashlight just as huge, webbed hands squeezed the gunwale. The creature vaulted into the boat—nearly seven feet tall, its purple iridescent scales piled on rippling green muscle, with constellations of old gunshot wounds scarred over with mottled flesh. Seawater rivulets traced the round head, dripping off the gill flaps along the thick neck. The bulging eyes sealed against the flashlight’s beam.

Jennings stood his ground, still reporting what he saw. “Morton’s theory was right. Gills have regrown. New scales, almost glowing—”

Blocking the offending light with its forearm, the creature bellowed. Jennings sank a dart into his hide. Roaring, the creature advanced, smashing equipment.

“The rotenone has no effect—”

Talons swiped Jennings’s chest, opening red ribbons of blood and knocking him into the water.

Covering its ears as the sonic beacon keened, the creature identified the source of its discomfort and brought down its fist on the offending machine. A final roar, and then the cove fell momentarily silent as the creature swayed, spent by the beacon’s blare. The scaly head cocked at the crackling radio, the mic dangling from its mount, the channel open and relaying Marcia’s frantic cries. The creature recalled women’s screams—echoes of the Black Lagoon, the observation tank in Florida, and the pen on a nearby shore where once it had been held captive.

The amphibian arced into the bay.

At dawn, a Harley FL Hydra-Glide rumbled onto Pier 94 at the San Francisco waterfront. The tall, lean biker wore a pompadour and a leather vest emblazoned with “Black Widows, Fresno.” The motorcycle threaded the traffic of trucks and forklifts and finally arrived at a vehicle gate. Two men carrying Winchester Model 12 trench guns waved the biker through.

The biker parked the Harley under a giant hopper used for filling dump trucks. A hulking longshoreman with a shaved head frisked him. Another man searched the Harley’s saddlebags, finding a duffel filled with bundles of cash. He ruffled the bills with a grin. The biker yanked the bag away once the pat-down was done.

A silver-haired man in a Brioni suit dismissed the second hoodlum and smiled at his guest. “Easy, Frank. Even I have to watch my step on the waterfront.”

“I thought we were partners, Mr. Parisi.”

“We are. I don’t let just anybody in here. That’s my fortune over there.” Parisi pointed to artificial dunes dominating the landscape.

“Sand?”

“Sand makes concrete, and concrete makes freeways, schools, swimming pools. All the things that make California great. Sand’s useful in other ways too.” Parisi gave a hand signal to a scoop crane operator. The crane dropped a load of sand into a sifter. With a loud buzz, the machine shook the sand away, leaving a tightly wrapped block of heroin kilos.

“That’s your first delivery. Take it back to your friends in the Central Valley. That’s why I decided to do business with you. I heard Frank Horrigan is the big man in the biker world. But”—he stopped, glanced down, then back up—“there’s just one problem.” Parisi gave another hand signal. A new man in leathers stepped into view. “*He’s* Frank Horrigan.”

The real biker laughed. “They let me out of the slam. My lawyer found a technicality.”

Parisi turned solemn as the longshoreman loomed behind the soon-to-be victim. "Save yourself a lot of pain and tell us who you really are."

"Officer Harry Callahan, San Francisco PD. You're all under arrest."

The surrounding men laughed. Harry rammed the duffle into the longshoreman's jaw, and the bald giant went down in a snowfall of currency. Harry tucked and rolled, coming up with the stiletto switchblade he kept hidden in his boot. A half-second later, he pressed the knife against Parisi's throat.

The men drew guns and scrambled, shouting to hold fire. Harry used Parisi as a shield, dragging him back to the Harley. He slammed Parisi face-first into the gas tank, tore away a saddlebag, and dove behind a stack of oil drums. As bullets flew, Harry ripped open the bag's false bottom, revealing a massive Smith & Wesson revolver and three Pachmayr speedloaders.

The hoodlums paused as one man charged behind the oil drums. A gun blast reverberated, and the man sailed back into view, launched off his feet by the point-blank shot. The men cursed and resumed shooting. Harry fired on the run to a new place of concealment, dropping another criminal. Ducking behind a truck, he watched several men climb metal stairs to take positions on catwalks.

Harry crouched lower as a fusillade rang along the truck's sheet metal. A hoodlum sprayed rounds from a Thompson, retreating behind a pile of crates as Harry popped up to return fire. Harry aimed at a crate. The wood split, and the hoodlum staggered into view, mortally wounded by the bullet that passed through. He squeezed the Thompson's trigger reflexively as the muzzle pitched upward. Two other men screamed as they fell from the catwalk, hit by friendly fire.

Harry took cover next at the pier's control booth. The two guards with the Winchester shotguns pinned him in the box-like room, their buckshot shattering the windows. Harry heard the kickstarter on his Harley. The real Frank Horrigan was at the handlebars with a revived Parisi climbing behind him for a getaway. Harry spotted the sand hopper's control and slammed the red button, entombing the Harley, along with the screaming Parisi and Horrigan, under ten tons of sand. The guards stared as their boss was buried alive, allowing Harry to easily pick them off.

Squad cars raced to the scene. Harry walked toward the first arrivals, prompting some officers to draw a bead at what they perceived to be a large, armed biker. A sergeant waved them off.

"Don't shoot. He's one of ours ... sorry to say." Sgt. Briggs marched toward Harry, accompanied by a slender, colorless man in civilian dress. "Callahan! This was supposed to be an undercover assignment, not World War III."

"Lost my cover. Had to place the suspects under arrest. Unfortunately they resisted."

Sgt. Briggs scoffed. "Unfortunately." His eyes fell upon the revolver in Harry's hand. "What is that?"

"The new Model 29 Smith and Wesson." Harry held up the weapon to give Briggs a better view. ".44 Magnum, the most powerful handgun in the world."

"Barbaric. Where's Parisi?"

"Playing in his sandbox."

Briggs fumed. "You wrecked our joint operation with the FBI." He jerked a thumb toward the slender man. "This is Special Agent Farmer, in charge of the San Francisco field office. He can explain."

“Carlo Parisi was the linchpin in our investigation of organized crime on the West Coast,” SpA Farmer said, his voice as unemotional as his appearance. “I’ll have to report this to headquarters immediately.”

“Hoover’s finally getting serious about the Mafia? Tell him membership’s down this morning.”

Briggs waved his arm in a dictatorial swipe. “That’s *it*, Callahan! Insubordination. Unauthorized firearm. You’re suspended.” Briggs smirked. “I’m so going to enjoy this.”

Harry remained impassive. “Glad I could make your day, Briggs.”

Briggs frowned at his failure to get a rise out of Harry. He and Farmer waved men forward. Another squad car pulled up. A stocky patrolman jumped out and called Harry over.

“My old buddy DiGiorgio. You here to give me hell too?” Harry said. A grave DiGiorgio shook his head.

DiGiorgio drove Harry to Fort Point, the Civil War bastion at the southern abutment of the Golden Gate Bridge. A coroner’s wagon stood on the road above the breakwater. A corpse lay under a white sheet, attended by the coroner.

Harry and DiGiorgio walked toward the crime scene. “Got a call for a washed up body. I was first on scene. When I saw him, I thought it was you,” DiGiorgio said. “Then we found some ID. Just need you to confirm.”

DiGiorgio pulled back the shroud. Harry stiffened at the sight of the corpse, the face identical to his.

The man from the skiff.

“It’s my brother. Jennings Callahan,” Harry said. “He wrote me a few weeks ago, said he was back in town.”

DiGiorgio started to replace the sheet. Harry grabbed the fabric and pulled further, revealing the deep gashes across his brother’s chest.

“Doc, what caused those wounds?” Harry said.

“We’ll know more after the autopsy,” the coroner said. “My first thought was some kind of animal.”

“Shark?”

“Not a bite. More like claws. Something a Kodiak bear might make.”

“We’re a long way from Alaska.” Harry pulled the sheet over Jennings’s body, lingering only a moment before covering his brother’s face.

Harry sat in the shadows of his studio apartment, rereading the letter his brother had written:

Dear Harry,

I’m back in the Bay Area working on a special project. I’m resuming research my former director conducted in Florida. Please keep it quiet for now. I’ll be at the Barton Ranch in Sausalito. Let’s get together soon.

Jennings

Harry looked at the framed photos arrayed on a table. From 1954, a smiling Harry was in uniform, newly graduated from the San Francisco Police Academy. Jennings was in a lab coat, newly appointed as assistant to Dr. Clete Ferguson, director of animal psychology at San Francisco State. In a photo from 1939, young Harry and Jennings were with their father. The

three stood in front of the Ford Model A that took them on Harry Sr.'s circuit as a traveling preacher. Dad was long-limbed as the twins would become, clutching his worn Bible, staring down the camera wielded by an aunt who had insisted on the snapshot. Harry let the letter slip from his fingers and closed his eyes.

The Barton Ranch spanned the hills overlooking Sausalito, across the bay from San Francisco. Harry arrived at the main ranch house, his biker look canceled with a close shave, his pompadour relaxed into a James Dean quiff, and a windbreaker and chinos to replace the leather and denim. A servant received him at the front door.

"I'm here to see Mrs. Barton," Harry said.

He waited in the living room. The future inspector perused glossies in crystal frames atop the closed lid of a Steinway, a life revealed just as the photos in his apartment divulged the Callahan story. A society page clipping from 1946 showed Major William Barton, caduceus insignia on his U.S. Army uniform, with teenage bride Marcia. The ensuing decade of pictures depicted privilege and adventure—Marcia on the fantail of the yacht *Vagabondia III*, and another with Marcia on safari in Kenya, a trip that required braving both wildlife and the Mau Mau uprising. The most recent photo was a candid shot of Marcia in the arms of a tall, handsome man who was not the deceased William Barton.

Marcia Barton entered through French doors, a radiant blonde sporting jodhpurs snug at the waist, high boots, and a 20-gauge Browning Superposed trap gun, the hand-engraved action open in the crook of her right arm. She gasped when she saw Harry.

"I'm sorry," Marcia stammered. "I—"

Harry nodded. "People always confused me with my brother. It was easy to tell us apart once you got to know us."

"Are you here as a family member or policeman?"

"This is a personal call. Jennings asked me to keep his work confidential. Besides, there's no love lost between me and the department these days. At last report, they think my mob acquaintances mistook the two of us, like you started to." Harry bristled. "Maybe you'd like to set them straight about the Gill-Man."

Marcia kept her cool. "I take it you shoot, Officer Callahan."

"Whenever I have to."

"There are several guns in the study. I'm sure you'll find one to your liking."

Harry and Marcia stood on the ranch's trap range, a grassy plain bordered by a rocky cliff dropping to the bay. Harry held the 12-gauge version of Marcia's Browning shotgun.

"Jennings was convinced the creature was still alive after it escaped from the ranch last year. Fish carcasses washed up in the bay with the creature's bite pattern. He came to me for backing." Marcia turned her head. "Pull!" She fired two rounds, shattering the clays flying past the cliff edge.

"I reviewed the news stories," Harry said, "about your husband performing surgery that turned it into a land animal. It went back into the surf and supposedly died." Harry turned to the shot house. "Pull!" The clays disintegrated in his volleys. "My brother's wounds told me otherwise."

"The creature is hard to stop."

Harry nodded. “Jennings’s old boss, Dr. Ferguson, studied it in Florida. Nearly killed him and the lady he married. Killed a lot of other people.”

“Also in the Amazon and on this ranch, including my husband. Pull!”

He waited to speak until her volleys destroyed the clay targets.

“Out for revenge? I might join you.”

“No. The creature is an amazing specimen. We ripped it from its habitat, attacked it. We never really learned from it.”

“I thought the late Dr. Barton was the scientist.”

She shot him an irritated glare. “While I was the submissive wife, to be seen but not heard? That’s the way he treated me. The way a lot of people treat me.” Marcia ejected her spent shells. “I’m a self-taught researcher—the best gift from a decade of marriage, besides my inheritance. I want to complete the work of my husband’s team. One geneticist’s work in particular.”

Harry paused. “The guy in the picture on your piano?”

Marcia nodded. “Dr. Morton ... Tom.”

“Why isn’t he here helping you?”

“He says I’m obsessed, like my husband was, like Dr. Reed and the original team that found the creature in the Black Lagoon. He told me to forget about it, for my own good.”

“Sounds like good advice. Pull!”

More clays, more shots from Harry’s gun.

Marcia shook her head and swiped a sleeve across her face. “He thinks I’m weak too.”

Harry cracked a smile. "If he's seen you shoot, then he knows you're not weak. But he also knows chasing the Gill-Man is a lost cause. At least the way it's been done so far. A few eggheads with underpowered weapons, or a half-baked posse."

"Are you going to report all this to the authorities?"

"I should."

"You'll never find the creature without me. Your brother's death will have been in vain."

"I've seen plenty die in vain. On the job ... in Korea."

Marcia closed her shotgun's action without reloading. "What branch were you in?"

"Marines."

"Then they taught you to swim properly."

Harry cocked an eyebrow. "I was a frogman, 1st Recon Battalion."

"Perfect. I can use you."

"For what? My brother was the college boy."

"I have all the scientific knowledge necessary. To complete this project, I'll need someone strong and trustworthy." Marcia set her shotgun in a stand. "I'll pay three times your regular salary."

Harry placed his shotgun next to hers. "And I get to put the Gill-Man's head on my wall?"

"A five-thousand dollar bonus if we take it alive. What Jennings would've wanted."

Harry swore under his breath and drew his Model 29, eliciting a perplexed look from Marcia. "Pull!" He drilled both clays.

"It's easier with a shotgun, you know," Marcia said.

“Nothing’s gonna be easy from now on.” Harry holstered the revolver, reclaimed the shotgun, and walked back to the ranch house.

That evening, Harry returned to the Barton Ranch with duffle bags and a footlocker filled with gear. He lugged his belongings up a flight of stairs to quarters in the carriage house. Marcia was waiting for him, sipping a cocktail.

“Care for a drink?” Marcia said.

“A beer at some point.” Harry left Marcia in the doorway and set down his load. He opened the footlocker and took out reloading supplies—bullets, powder, shell casings.

She entered the guest room. “You’ll find the gunsmith bench in the back of the garage.”

Nodding his approval, Harry held up a box of bullets. “Steel core.” He extracted a booklet and a container. “Handloading specs and double-base powder from Elmer Keith, inventor of the .44 Magnum. Factory ammo doesn’t cut it against the Gill-Man.”

Marcia tensed. “I told you. This is a scientific expedition. Not a big-game hunt or a vendetta.”

Harry slammed the footlocker. “I don’t care what it is. I intend to come out alive.”

“Me too.” Marcia exhaled. “Why don’t you join me in the big house? I’ll find you a beer.”

“I think I’ll turn in early.”

“I don’t bite, Officer Callahan. Or may I call you Harry?”

“That’s fine.”

Marcia smiled to put her guest at ease. “Harry, as you already figured out, I’m still carrying the torch for Tom.” She craned her neck for a view of Harry’s left hand. “No wedding band. Anyone special in your life?”

Harry mustered a one-sided smile. “Peggy. She’s a nurse at San Francisco General.”

“Is she ‘the one?’”

“I thought so. But she sees enough crime victims on the night shift. She’s not sure about being with someone who might wind up on an operating table, or worse.”

“It’s sad when the person you love doesn’t share your passions.” Marcia finished her drink. “You better get your rest. We have a big day tomorrow.” She left the guest room, knowing Harry’s gaze remained on her.

The sun rose blood-red over the ranch. Harry worked at the gunsmith bench, his supplies from the footlocker arrayed on the shelves. A vein throbbed along his temple as Marcia’s words rang in his mind.

Died in vain.

He funneled a precise measure of powder into a shell casing and heard the words again.

Died in vain.

Harry saw his brother’s face, frozen in death. “Died in vain.”

Hands tightened on the press handle for another stroke. “Died in vain.”

Harry flashed back to the crimson surf of Wonsan, North Korea, scuba regulator bouncing below his chin. Mortar strikes geysered around him, flinging Marines.

Died in vain.

Sweat rose on Harry’s forehead as he assembled his ammunition. “Died.”

Finished rounds stood upright—brass glinting in the early sunbeams, bullet tips daubed green to disclose steel cores. “In.”

A row of Egyptian columns for a house of eternity.

“Vain.”

Later that morning at the ranch marina, workers loaded supplies onto a thirty-foot Chris-Craft Express Cruiser. Wearing shorts, a halter top, and Ray-Ban Wayfarers, Marcia supervised the preparations. Ranch foreman Ed Brown looked on, shaking his head.

“Mrs. Barton, the *Vagabondia* is ready to sail.” Ed pointed to the moored 100-foot yacht, used by the 1956 expedition to capture the creature in the Everglades after it escaped the oceanarium. “Let’s switch to the big boat with a full crew.”

“Jennings said the creature will avoid larger craft. We want to draw it in, not drive it away.”

“Yeah, and look where that got him.”

“We’re taking precautions this time.” Marcia nodded toward the path leading to the slips.

Harry stood sentinel above the marina, clad in a sport shirt and trunks, the Model 29 in a shoulder holster. Squinting behind Ray-Ban Aviators, he appraised the dockside action. Harry and Marcia locked eyes through tinted lenses.

Harry took the cruiser into the open bay. Marcia came out of the cabin in a one-piece swimsuit. She pointed to a rack of buoys at the stern. “Each buoy contains a remote-control model of the sonic beacon. Jennings developed the system with a scientist from Stanford,

Bainbridge Wells. The frequency is tuned to trigger a psychological response in the creature, acting as a lure.”

“Jennings and I used to play around with crystal radio sets when we were kids. Figures he’d come up with a gadget like that.”

Marcia approached the helm. “You said people could tell you apart once they got to know you. Did you have anything in common?” She smiled. “Besides your looks?”

He nodded. “We were determined to poke our dad in the eye. We technically lived in Potrero Hill but really grew up on the road with his preaching circuit. Nothing but fire and brimstone and baloney sandwiches in the backseat of that old Ford.”

“What about your mother?”

“Mary Jennings-Callahan. She was the rock when we left Oklahoma during the Dust Bowl. Died when we were young. After that, my brother became a bookworm like Dad, but he studied science. Very unbiblical, the old man said.”

“And you?”

“Traded church for sports in high school. Enlisted in the Marines the morning after I graduated. Joined the police force after Korea. When I was a kid, Dad tried to literally beat the Beatitudes into me. I chose a life where turning the other cheek wasn’t an option.” Harry stared into the swells. “Dad died in ’54. Now, Jennings checks out, all for a glorified fish”—he paused—“but he made his choices.” Harry finally looked at Marcia. “You said it. I don’t want him dying in vain.”

Marcia put her hand on Harry’s shoulder. She checked a chart. “Slow down. We’re getting near the location for the first buoy.”

Harry eased the throttle until Marcia signaled him to stop the boat. The pair moved to the rack of buoys. “We’ll create a line of beacon transmitters from here to the cove at the ranch.”

Marcia motioned to the first buoy. Harry tipped its anchor over the side. The weight plummeted into the bay, the attachment line paying out before yanking the buoy into the water. Harry and Marcia returned to the helm and piloted the cruiser to the next positions to repeat the process with the second and third buoy.

When the final float hit the water, it turned on its side and slowly sank.

“What’s wrong?” Marcia said.

Harry unbuckled his holster, stripped off his shirt, and hoisted scuba gear. “Anchor line’s probably caught on something, dragging down the buoy. I’ll try to clear it.” He strapped on the tank, fitted the mask, and donned an acoustic headset with earpiece and throat mic, connected by a reeled cable to a transceiver.

Marcia handed him an underwater spray gun. “Rotenone spray, triple the strength of what Jennings used.”

Harry ignored the offering and grabbed a spear gun. “No thanks. At least I know this’ll have an effect.” He squeezed into flippers and fell back into the water.

He dove along the straining anchor line. A mass of metal appeared in the swirling silt. He pressed the mic. “Shipwreck. Looks like the line is tangled in it.”

A boom striped in rust and coral dangled from the hulk, snagging the line. Harry pushed against the encrusted surface and yanked the line. The line popped free and straightened, but the effort sent Harry tumbling. The boom swung behind him. Thrashing to arrest his movement, Harry turned to see the slow-motion peril. The boom struck his chest and pinned him to the hulk’s rotting deck.

From the bridge, Marcia heard Harry's muffled calls and the dull clank of collapsing metal over the radio.

"A boom fell on me." Harry's voice echoed over the transceiver speaker, punctuated by his labored breaths. "Sit tight. I still have plenty of air. I'll work my way free."

The buoy broke the surface near the boat's stern. The float rolled on its side before righting. The beacon wailed, and Marcia panicked.

"The beacon turned on by itself," Marcia said over the mic.

"Probably damaged by being pulled underwater." Harry grunted as he tried to shift the boom.

The sonar pinged. The long blip on the screen was unmistakable. "Harry, it's coming." Marcia said. "*It's coming!*"

Harry pulled his arm from under the boom and gripped the tethered spear gun. A school of stickleback swimming to his left exploded in different directions. Harry turned his head to the disturbance, giving him a critical extra moment to spot the creature rising from deeper water at stingray speed. He had to wait before it was almost upon him to manage a shot.

The Gill-Man's forearm deflected the spear.

The creature heaved the boom aside. Harry pulled his dive knife, a Vulcan prototype model with a curved hand guard like a cutlass. The serrated blade gashed green skin but glanced off a band of purple scales. The creature shoved Harry into a corner of the superstructure, trapping him. Trailing a spiral of blood, the creature pressed in.

A white cloud filled the enclosed space. Grasping its face, the creature fell away. Marcia reached through the billows for Harry, the rotenone spray gun dangling from her accessory belt. Harry re-sheathed the Vulcan, and the pair kicked for the surface. Harry pushed Marcia over the

bulwark and clambered after her. They dumped their scuba gear, and she took the helm while he cinched his holster around his wet torso.

The water churned at the stern. The buoy slipped beneath the surface again. Harry peered over the edge of the boat, his Model 29 drawn and cocked. “He’s grabbed the line.”

The beacon bobbed in a mad dance as its anchor line was jerked from below. It sank almost out of sight, and then rocketed back to the surface as if it had been shot from a cannon—or as if whatever was jerking it had suddenly let go. The beacon smashed into the bottom of the boat, making Harry recoil with the impact. Marcia leaned hard on the throttle, but the boat mustered only a feeble lurch. Harry looked over the edge again.

“The buoy’s anchor line’s fouling the props.”

He watched for patterns in the water that would signal the creature’s impending attack. When the splash he’d anticipated finally came, the Gill-Man’s silhouette didn’t follow it. Instead, an iron missile catapulted toward the boat—the buoy’s anchor, with the line whipping behind. Harry threw himself over Marcia as the anchor smashed the bridge canopy. He was clearing canvas and framing shards when the bay erupted again.

The creature leaped onto the stern, balancing on the balls of its feet, clenching and curling its claws. Harry fired a .44 Magnum slug into the creature’s shoulder. Marcia came beside him, shooting as well, but with a Polaroid Pathfinder instead of a firearm. Glowering at her, Harry shielded her with his left arm while leveling the Model 29 for another shot, but lost the target when the wounded creature toppled back into the sea, raking at its wounded shoulder.

“You wanna shoot with me again,” Harry growled through gritted teeth, “stick to the Browning.” Marcia’s eyes daggered him in response as she pulled the long paper tab out of the camera to begin developing the instant photo.

Harry moved to the stern, eyes darting, scanning for the monster. With his left hand, he cut a loop of the anchor line and pulled the bunched cord free. He called over his shoulder, “Starboard prop’s knocked out. Try it again.”

Marcia coaxed the throttle, and the boat wobbled to half-speed. Harry looked down, and in the creature’s blood splatter on the deck he saw a small metallic plate, cracked from the bullet’s impact. He picked up the object and brought it to the helm. Marcia opened the back of her Polaroid camera to extract the finished picture, which she held up.

“Like Jennings said, the gills have grown back,” she said. “Scales too, but they’re different from before. Purple as we saw, and irregular.”

“That round should’ve taken its arm off. It’s like he’s wearing a bulletproof vest.” Harry pointed out a bleeding cut on the creature’s torso. “But I caught him here with my knife. No scales.”

Marcia pointed at the metal in Harry’s hand. “What’s that?”

“I’m thinking it’s part of this thing here.” He pointed to another spot on the photograph. A flat collar sat beneath the creature’s gill line. “Did your husband’s team put that on him?” She shook her head, and he looked at the photo again. “Then somebody else besides your guys has been playing with the Gill-Man.”

The sonar pinged. Harry glanced at the screen. “Looks like I’m still up for that bonus. He’s coming back for more.”

Marcia flipped switches on the sonic beacon controller. She picked up the radio mic. “Ed, do you read me, over?”

A hollow voice from the radio answered. “Roger.”

“I’ve activated the remaining buoys and the beacon in the cove. We’ve bringing him in. Over and out.”

Harry shook his head at Marcia’s confidence. “Got him right where we want him.”

The cruiser limped to a narrow cove at the far end of the Barton Ranch shoreline. Harry and Marcia jumped from the docked boat and sprinted to a scientific station overlooking the inlet. Ed and his men stood ready, several armed with Winchester 30-30s.

A huge cage capped the cove like an aviary. The side bars were thick iron sunk in concrete. The roof was perforated sheet metal supported by cross members. A man with a rifle stood guard on top.

Harry pointed. “That roof’s a weak spot.”

“The creature’s not known for climbing,” Marcia said.

The now-familiar mix of sonar pings and beacon whine sounded from the equipment bench.

“It’s coming,” she said.

The creature torpedoed into the cove waters, leaving a domed wake. Harry unholstered the Model 29 while Ed’s men cocked their rifles.

“Drop the net!” Marcia said.

A submarine net unspooled from the cage wall at the cove opening, sealing off access to the bay. The creature came out of the water, hands on its ears when not pawing the air, seeking the beacon speaker outside the cage.

“Turn off the beacon,” Marcia said. The whine stopped.

The creature staggered onto the small margin of beach within the cage, shaking off the beacon’s effect, and then slowly tested the bars. A ranch worker approached the cage, aiming his

Winchester. The creature grabbed the barrel, pulling the man's arm between the bars. The man screamed as claws raked him. Ed and two other men pulled the worker away from the cage, leaving the gun inside the bars.

The creature bent the Winchester's barrel and threw the weapon aside. The bulging eyes looked in multiple directions, assessing the cage and the enemies beyond.

"Good. He's calming," Marcia said.

"No, he's not," Harry said. "He's thinking."

The creature dove into the water. A moment passed, and the creature breached before diving again into the inlet's depths. After another pause, the creature repeated the breach, arcing its entire body out of the water. The next stretch of silence broke when the submerged creature generated a new domed wake, swimming at terrific speed to the end of the cove. The creature surfaced a few feet from the back side of the cage, its muscular arms stretching out, and webbed membranes unfolding between triceps and chest. The creature soared to the top of the cage, seizing the bars and bracing its feet against them. It folded its legs, and in one explosive jump, the creature reached the underside of the roof. Its talons punctured the sheet metal.

Plating crumpled in the creature's fists as it traversed to a cross member. Dangling from the rod, the creature swung like a trapeze artist and slammed its feet into the sheet metal. The guard on the roof got off one shot. Shrapnel from the damaged metal roof struck him, ensuring he would not shoot again. The creature swung again from the cross member, snapping the bar, and emerged through the hole. Standing on the roof, it roared at its captors below.

"José is still up there. No shooting!" Ed said.

Harry broke from the group and climbed the access ladder. The creature turned toward him as he came up. Hooking his left arm on the top rung, Harry aimed for a spot near the knife wound and fired, making the creature spin and fall to its knees with the impact.

Harry climbed up onto the roof and took a wide stance, preparing to pump a bullet into the crown of the monster's head. The creature wedged its hands into a gap in the sheet metal and yanked. The roof section under Harry's feet tore loose, sending him sprawling and the Model 29 skidding out of reach.

As Harry tried to stand, the creature lurched toward him, grasping its torso. A backhand from a scaly arm sent Harry airborne. He rolled to a stop near the creature's escape opening, close to the unconscious José.

The creature came on, its strides more deliberate, both hands raised to rend its adversary. Harry crawled away, blood dripping from his nose and mouth, with no way to reach his Smith & Wesson or José's Winchester before the creature was upon him. His fingers touched and curled around an object as gusts from the creature's air-breathing organs fell hot on his neck.

Harry turned and looked up for only a moment at the monster bending for the kill. Then he thrust the broken cross member into the creature's gunshot wound. The monster bellowed in agony as Harry stood, driving his lance deeper. The creature seized the cross member with both hands, lifting Harry off the deck, before ripping the bar out of its body. Harry recovered quickly and scrambled for his revolver.

The creature turned and fled, increasing speed like a locomotive, running away from Harry toward the edge of the cage at the cove opening. Spreading its gliding membranes again, it made a stupendous leap over the submarine net barrier toward open water.

Harry missed with his final bullet as the creature cleaved the surface and disappeared.

Harry descended the ladder, exhausted and battered. Marcia tended the wounds on his face while Ed and his men fashioned a rope harness to lower José.

“Now he’s a flying fish?” Harry said.

“Mutation, like the tougher purple scales.”

Marcia moved to a workbench. As Harry chugged from a canteen, she examined the fragment from the creature’s mysterious collar. She ran a Geiger counter wand over the artifact, and the radiation detector clicked repeatedly. “The metal from the creature is radioactive.”

Harry swallowed. “Great. How long before we die?”

“It’s not at the danger level.” Using tongs, Marcia dropped the fragment in a specimen container and sealed the lid. “It’s like the giant ants that attacked Los Angeles three years ago. Radiation transformed them. I think something similar happened with the creature.”

“Took a couple of battalions to wipe them out. It’s time for us to call the military. The Coast Guard should be going after the Gill-Man with depth charges and 40mm guns.”

“Not yet. We’ll rebuild the cage. We have to try one more time.” Marcia’s eyes pleaded. Harry slammed down the canteen and walked away.

In the late afternoon, Marcia, dressed to go out, spoke into a phone.

“Yes, darling, I’ll see you soon.”

She ended the call and dialed an intercom line. A phone rang at the cove wharf.

“Yeah?” Harry said.

“I have to leave. How’s the cruiser coming?” Marcia said.

“We caught a break. The starboard shaft was bent, but the prop housing’s still intact.”

Harry glanced at the ranch hands working on the boat. “She’ll be able to run by this evening. We can reposition the two remaining buoys whenever you’re ready.”

“And the cage?”

“Ed has the rest of the crew welding scrap metal and rebar to the roof.”

“Will it be enough?”

“Probably not. The Gill Man’s wounded and the beacon sets him off, even if he can’t resist it. Given those things, I don’t think any cage in the world can hold him.”

“We can modulate the frequency, maybe produce a less violent reaction.”

“You’re an optimist.”

“So was your brother. He’d be proud of you.”

The sentiment didn’t move Harry. “Hurry back. We take one more shot at this. After that I’m sending an SOS, and you can keep your money.”

He hung up and returned to the cruiser.

At the south end of the bay, Marcia turned onto a back street in Redwood City, her Eldorado convertible out of place. She raised the power top with the first thunderclap, and a sudden storm rinsed the grimy block to a twilight sheen.

She parked at an industrial building and went inside. The entryway was dark, dusty, and silent.

“Tom?” Marcia called out.

“I’m here.” Dr. Tom Morton stepped into view, handsome, baritone-voiced, nearly as tall as Harry. He took Marcia in a familiar embrace.

“What is this place?”

“I wanted to meet somewhere out of the way. I know you’re keeping the Gill-Man’s return quiet for now. When Ed called me about the capture attempt today—” He paused, then looked down at her. “Sweetheart, I’m sorry. I should’ve been there. I want to work with you again, be with you in every way.” Tom gave Marcia a lingering kiss.

“The sonic beacon works. Poor Jennings. He was right about the creature’s neural responses. And you were right about reversion to amphibian form. We have so much to learn.”

“Yes. Let’s study the creature correctly this time. We’ll use the beacon again.”

“My men are rebuilding the cage at the cove—”

Tom became evasive. “No—we, um—” He coughed. “It should be brought to another location.”

Marcia withdrew from the embrace. “What other location? Tom, this is my project.”

“It’s bigger than you ... and me. But we need the beacon—”

“*We*? What is this *we* business?”

Marcia pulled the Polaroid out of her purse that showed the collar affixed to the creature.

“Harry was right. There *are* others experimenting with the Gill-Man. And God knows what you’ve been doing. No, I won’t help you.”

“Marcia, please—”

A man in khakis and a graying crewcut stepped out of the shadows. “That’s enough.”

Tom turned toward the man. “Give me more time.”

“Your charm has worn thin, Doctor. We’ll do it my way.” The man gave a hand signal and two more men appeared, both toting M3 submachine guns.

At dusk, the wharf phone rang. Harry answered.

“Yeah?”

A muffled voice responded. “Officer Callahan, we have Marcia Barton. You will use the sonic beacon to bring the water creature to a specified location. If you don’t do what we say, she’ll die.”

“Let me talk to Marcia.”

“You’re not giving the orders.”

“Put her on, now!”

Marcia came on the line. “Harry, I’m all right. I’m sorry—”

She abruptly stopped, and the muffled voice returned. “If you notify anyone, she dies. If you come with no creature, she dies, and so do you. The ghosts are in the machine.”

Harry paused. “Understood.”

“Thought you would. Berth 42, two miles south of the Port of Redwood City. Midnight.”

The line went dead.

At 11:59 p.m., Harry brought the cruiser dead slow into Berth 42. The large dock was empty, the piers devoid of both equipment and people. Harry studied the monolithic back wall. The huge twin intakes were unusual, the shaft of light emanating from the stone face more so. The glow widened as the wall split and opened outward, a sea gate like those bracketing the locks of the Panama Canal. Cursing under his breath, Harry eased the cruiser into the opening.

An underground channel led to a manmade lagoon with cement shores, hidden beneath a stadium-sized roof. Men ran along the overlooks to take positions with their M3s, and Harry remained steady at the helm as a half-dozen muzzles pointed at him.

A circular island of concrete and steel dominated the lagoon. Harry steered around to a landing at the rear of the chamber. Scaffolds stood on the platform—one with chains, hooks, and marine gear, the second with huge game fish hanging from pulleys.

Armed men checked the cruiser's cabin and led Harry off the boat to a terrace above the landing where Marcia, Tom, and the man in khakis waited. Harry came before Marcia, holding the sonic beacon controller. "We need to quit meeting with such frequency," Harry whispered. Marcia pondered the remark as a guard took the controller.

Another guard yanked off Harry's windbreaker to reveal the shoulder rig holding the Model 29 and three pouched speedloaders. The man in khakis removed the rig, impressed with the weapon, and buckled the holster onto himself while Harry seethed.

"Little early to claim a prize, jackass," Harry said. A guard rammed his ribs with the metal shoulder stock of his submachine gun.

"You will address me as Colonel." The man patted the grip. "This isn't a cop's gun."

"I'm not here as a cop." Harry straightened and nodded toward Marcia. "I'm working for the lady. Who do you work for?"

"It's complicated. This is a multi-agency project."

"Did you build this for the Gill-Man?"

"No, this was built for something more important. The Gill-Man stumbled into it last year, or I should say swam into it. He got pulled into the intake tube. Made it all the way to the inner pool."

The colonel worked the main control panel. Heavy machinery rumbled beneath the island, and a translucent tank rose. A luminous obelisk thrust higher still from the center, the submerged portion scattering points of light through the tank. Hinged pipes dangled like

tentacles into the lagoon to circulate water. A motorized gangplank unfolded in two directions from a pylon at the island's edge, connecting the tank's steel lip to the terrace.

The colonel pointed to the installation's centerpiece. "The creature received a radiation dose from our reactor that would kill ten men. Went into a coma."

Harry looked at Marcia. "You were right. The Gill-Man got nuked." He turned to the anxious Dr. Morton. "And here's Tom, on the colonel's team all along while telling you to forget everything. In the end, he sold you out." He cocked an eyebrow. "Ain't love grand."

Tom lunged at Harry, who didn't flinch. A guard grabbed his arm.

The colonel shook his head. "Get ready." Tom slunk away, Marcia's eyes burning into him.

Harry returned his attention to the colonel. "You should've finished off the Gill-Man when you had the chance. Now you're stuck tying up loose ends."

"The creature has scientific value," the colonel countered. "With its recovery and mutation, we could study the project's radiation effects without excessive risks."

Harry sneered. "Excessive risks? *The ghosts are in the machine*. That's code for Black Ops—no questions, no rules, everyone's expendable. I heard it in Korea before my unit was sent on a suicide mission."

"You were at Wonsan. I planned that extraction."

Harry's face darkened. "Then you're responsible for what happened to the POWs we rescued. Brainwashed and tortured by the North Koreans, only to get the same treatment from our own people." His voice dropped to a tone reminiscent of sharp knives and razor blades. "They called it 'assessment of psychological warfare techniques.' Half of our guys died to bring you guinea pigs."

The colonel nodded. “We share the same war stories.”

“What’s your next bright idea? We know you’ve built a reactor out there. What’s on top? A bomb? A missile?”

“Something far more potent. A computer—atomic powered, the fastest calculation machine on the planet. That’s why we’re here. The locals call this area Silicon Valley. It’s where they invented a new generation of circuits made from silicon. Sand! Can you believe it?”

“Funny. I knew another psycho who was into sand.” Harry’s eyes narrowed. “I buried him.”

“More war stories? I’d love to hear ’em, but I’m on a tight schedule.” The colonel turned to the guards next to Marcia. “If the creature isn’t here in five minutes, shoot her.” Marcia drew quick breaths, but shared a stoic gaze with Harry.

The colonel motioned Harry to the gangplank. Two guards trailed them on the walk to the island, one carrying the controller.

“In a few hours, the USS *Nautilus* will arrive. The sub’s captain, Harriman Nelson, is one of the top scientific minds in the country,” the colonel said. “He expects to see a computer that can execute seven million instructions per second alongside a new-and-improved Gill-Man.”

“Gotta keep your mystery bosses happy,” Harry said.

“Sputnik has them on edge. Nelson is their independent inspector. They’re hoping for a good report, something that shows America still has an advantage.” The colonel looked back with a wry smile. “You’re doing your patriotic duty tonight, Marine.”

Two paces behind the colonel, Harry fought the urge to snap his neck before the guards could fire. Stepping onto the rim of the pool that surrounded the reactor and supercomputer,

Harry said, "I redeployed the buoys. The second one is outside the berth. Last reading said he's close."

"The sonic beacon lured him away when he was in the outer lagoon for a feeding. You can see we feed our guest well." The colonel indicated the big fish on the landing. "Tore right through the outflow pipe. We learn from our mistakes. All grates have been hardened, but I want him secured in the inner pool." The colonel swept his hand before the trembling, bronze water. He locked eyes with Harry. "Bring me the creature. Now."

Harry steeled. "You want him? You got him." He activated the controller, and the whine bounced off the walls of the chamber.

A guard watched the main control panel on the terrace where Marcia remained at gunpoint. Sonar pings sounded.

"Got a reading!" the guard called out.

The telltale domed wake split the sea gate opening. A pipe leading to the inner pool clattered and shook. Tom positioned a group of technicians in radiation suits at the rim, brandishing long cattle prods.

"Close the gate. Close the valves," the colonel ordered.

The creature reared out of the pool and roared from the electric shocks immediately delivered. Amid the frenzy, a calm Harry clicked off the sonic beacon. The creature collapsed, its torso draped on the lip, legs dangling in the water.

"You have a minute before he comes around," Harry said. "Don't waste it."

Sliding on suspended tracks, a bridge crane hovered over the creature. The crane held a vertical stack of stainless-steel disks with a thick conductive cable looping from the top, a fifteen-foot silver spine. The stack lowered to the creature, the metal segments flexing against the

rubber rings separating them. The end segment clicked into a receiver on the back of the creature's collar. Metal united in a powerful magnetic bond, tugging the surgically implanted bolts that affixed the restraint.

"The electromagnet is strong enough to lift a school bus. If the creature behaves, he has relative freedom."

Recovering from the beacon's effects, the creature treaded water, the crane moving on two axes to match the movement, the stack flexing.

"If not ..." The colonel pushed a control button. The crane locked and the stack stiffened and dropped, pinning the creature to the bottom of the pool. Laughing, the colonel reversed the control, allowing the creature to float back to the surface. The Gill-Man eyed its tormentor.

The colonel turned to a guard. "Keep the sonic beacon by the pool. Take it to the lab after Nelson is gone."

With the creature under control, the colonel led Harry, Tom, and the technicians back to the terrace, with two guards remaining on the pool lip. Marcia faced her captor.

"You got what you wanted," she said. "Let us go."

Harry shook his head. "He's not gonna do that."

"Not so fast," the colonel said. "Tom is important to this project. I want to keep his morale up. Mrs. Barton may still get out of here."

Harry stared the colonel down. "Too bad you won't."

The colonel patted Harry's cheek, making him flinch for the first time. "Thank you. I get tired of killing groveling men."

A new whine split the air, louder and higher than before. The creature convulsed, drawing the two guards to the edge of the inner pool.

“What’s that?” the colonel said.

Harry gave him a laconic smile. “Sonic beacon’s real touchy. Sounds like it went off on its own. Full frequency.”

The colonel pointed Harry’s own Model 29 at him and signaled two guards to grab him. The group marched back across the gangplank. A guard on the lip raised his submachine gun, and the creature clawed him from throat to thighs. The colonel hustled Harry ahead, yelling as he came.

“Turn up the magnet!”

The other guard increased the voltage and the stack plunged again, ramming the creature into the tank’s floor. The colonel pushed Harry to his knees at the beacon controller and cocked the revolver.

“Deactivate it.”

Harry worked the switches, but the beacon continued its piercing cry. “Must be a malfunction,” he said with mock earnestness.

The colonel turned the gun and blasted the controller. Harry shielded his face from flying debris and stood, giving the colonel an icy smile.

“Shouldn’t have done that. Once the controller goes offline, it triggers the buoy outside at full frequency. The buoy’ll run till the batteries die. Maybe you can find it in the dark before he tears this place apart.”

Guards grabbed Harry’s arms again. The crane groaned overhead, and the stack rose slowly. The creature pressed its hands and then its feet against the tank’s plexiglass wall, battling the magnetic downforce. Standing on the island’s surface, a terrified guard looked into the creature’s face.

“Emergency power!” the colonel ordered.

The stack drew more energy from the reactor, the machinery howling past its limits. The creature fought back, grinding the stack against the tank wall, inching to the surface. Enraged, the colonel stuck the Model 29 in Harry’s face, trigger finger tightening.

“Better save your bullets for the Gill-Man,” Harry said.

Nodding at the logic, the colonel raised the weapon, poised to pistol whip Harry to death. A rattle filled the lagoon chamber, the rhythm of an invisible drum corps. Metal objects sailed toward the top of the stack—a wrench, the guards’ M3s. The .44 Magnum was torn from the colonel’s grasp.

As the colonel looked over his shoulder in astonishment, Harry pulled his right arm free and landed a hook to the man’s exposed jaw. As the guard on the right tangled with the strap on his magnetized submachine gun, Harry brought back a knifehand strike to his throat. He neutralized the guard on the left with a knee to the stomach.

The last guard on the lip charged Harry, trying to pull a knife from his belt. The blade thrashed in his hands before cartwheeling across the deck and wedging in a slat. Harry threw him to the island below. Before Harry could turn, the colonel scored a blow to his kidney. Harry fell into a chokehold, his feet slipping on the deck.

The overloading magnet increased its haul. The gangplank popped bolts, dropping sections onto the island and into the lagoon, cutting off the inner pool from the terrace. Tubing from the cruiser’s mangled canopy tumbled through the air. The buoy anchor awoke on splintered planks, skimmed the lagoon, and bounced up the island, slamming into the tank’s wall opposite the stack.

Harry turned his head toward the crook of the colonel's arm, reopening his airway. His left foot curled behind the colonel's ankle and his left elbow found the other man's gut. Harry broke the hold and pivoted to work the body. The colonel parried his third punch and staggered Harry with a front kick.

The stack bowed against the tank wall. The anchor carved the outer surface like a glass cutter. The tank wept through the fissures before a section finally surrendered. The magnetic embrace complete, the anchor's fluke wedged between the stack's end segment and the receiver on the creature's collar, breaking the connection. The creature pinballed through the liquid before tucking its arms and shooting the gap in the glass.

A downward elbow strike to the collarbone put Harry on the deck. Standing over him, the colonel lifted a foot to smash his face. Harry caught the boot, but the colonel slowly overcame the resistance. Cracks zigzagged from the tank's rupture, including one that stretched toward the slat where the guard's knife trembled on its point like a tuning fork. The deck split, freeing the blade for flight to the top of the stack, a straight line through the colonel's calf. Jumping to his feet, Harry punched the colonel's open, howling mouth. Bleeding heavily from face and leg, the colonel nearly toppled backward into the roiling waters. Harry caught him by the holster rig.

"I'm a cop again." Harry opened the buckles. "And this is stolen property ... Colonel." With a final scream, the colonel fell out of the rig into the atomic bath. A blistered hand clutched at the steam for a few seconds before his body sank to the bottom.

The creature lay in a necklace of plexiglass shards at the edge of the concrete island, the pool's waters draining past. Hooded technicians beached a Zodiac boat, cattle prods ready. A pair slowly approached. The creature sprang to life, seized their prod shafts, and rammed the electrodes together. The technicians screamed, blown backward by the reversed charge. The

creature pulled the boat completely onto the concrete, launching the remaining men into the lagoon. The guard at the foot of the tank tucked his submachine gun under his right arm and kept his left hand tight on the magazine receiver, firing wild shots while fighting the magnetic pull. The creature hurled the inflatable craft like a giant discus, smashing the guard into the glass and creating new cracks. The Gill-Man dove into the lagoon as guards fired from the opposite shore.

Alarms sounded and blue emergency lights replaced the main illumination. Guards scrambled on the terrace, paying scant attention to their prisoner, Marcia. Tom ran to the main control panel. "The reactor's overheating!" he shouted.

The stack's electromagnet shut down. The collected metallic objects clattered onto the deck while the metal disks separated and splashed into what remained of the inner pool. As Harry picked up his Model 29, bullets rang from the far end of the damaged gangplank. Retrieving weapons from concrete nooks in the terrace, guards moved to the shore-end of the walkway, some firing on the run. Harry ducked toward the twisted section nearest the lip, taking cover. Four bullets silenced four guards.

The creature came ashore on the cement embankment. A line of guards concentrated their M3s, compelling the creature to lower a thickly protected shoulder to the fusillade. The .45 ACP bullets from the M3 'grease guns' pocked the purple scales. Two swipes, and two guards writhed on the ground. The remaining guards backed up to a concrete wall. The wall exploded, killing the guards before the creature could reach them. Another section of wall ripped apart, and the creature jumped back in the water.

"Low water pressure in the steam boilers. They're exploding." Tom pulled Marcia toward a tunnel behind the landing. Marcia resisted going with her betrayer, but Tom dragged her along.

Harry vaulted a missing gangplank section. Gunfire erupted from the lagoon. A trio of guards in a Zodiac sped after the creature, one shooting into the water while the other dropped grenades over the side. The lagoon fountained. Spotting Harry, two of the men peppered the gangplank while the third worked the tiller, weaving toward their kill. Harry went prone and fired into the bow, bursting the craft like a balloon. Floundering in the flabby rubber capsule, the guards turned at the sound of displaced water.

From thirty feet away, the creature caught the air with its membranes and dove through the center of the destroyed boat. The guards screamed as they went under. None resurfaced.

Harry rose from the gangplank, mentally counting his shots—did he fire six or only five? Technically both, as he discharged five and the colonel one. He unsnapped a Pachmayr from the rig and reloaded while scanning the terrace for Marcia. A section detached at one end served as a ramp. Harry descended to the concrete outer shore and ran toward the landing. The terrace above shattered in another boiler explosion, knocking Harry off his feet and covering him with rubble.

Underwater, one guard bobbed lifeless from the creature's impact. Another swung a knife, but the creature tore into him. The last pulled pins on two grenades with his teeth and tried to keep the safety levers closed until the last instant, when the creature snagged and clawed at him. The grenades detonated, and with the blasts, the stunned creature drifted into an opening at the lagoon's rear wall.

Marcia and Tom reached a rocky chamber behind the lagoon. Pumps and compressors crowded the space. Fans the size of DC-6 propellers pushed air through an expressway of ducts and vents. The machinery panted like an enormous set of lungs. A pond stood in the center, connected by a pipe to the lagoon.

“We’re in the pressure stabilizer ... keeps the sea from flooding the lagoon. It’s the deepest part of the installation—” Tom stopped, listening to battle echoes from the tunnel.

Marcia was spectral in the faint blue glow. “I could’ve been killed tonight. And the night’s not over.”

“This is all Callahan’s fault.” Tom winced at twin explosions. The pool sloshed.

“No. It’s yours,” she said. “You turned the creature into a freak show. You kept me at arm’s length.” Marcia sneered. “Until now.”

Losing his composure, Tom shuddered at Marcia’s contempt. “I wish we were back at the beginning.” The shudder grew with another muffled blast, more pool agitation, and dirt trickling from the ceiling.

“Just you and me, studying the creature?” Marcia noted Tom’s pathetic nod. “All right. Turn around and give me an analysis.”

Confused, Tom slowly turned. The creature stood behind him, a mass of shadows and juts in the emergency lights, wet footprints leading from the pond, heavy breathing masked by the heavier equipment noise. Tom cried out, and the creature picked him up over its head. With a roar, the creature threw him into a fan. Marcia screamed and looked away as the blades sectioned and ejected the body.

Marcia froze while the creature quietly appraised her. A louder explosion shook the chamber. The creature blocked a falling slab with its forearm, saving Marcia from being crushed, and wrapped its other arm around her midsection. The creature carried the struggling Marcia back through the tunnel as rocks and dirt rained.

Harry shook off the dust and concrete fragments and took up position on the landing as the creature and Marcia emerged from the tunnel. Marcia’s body covered the scaleless portions

of the creature's torso, the top of her head level with its chin. A headshot would be risky. Harry aimed for the creature's shin. The leg bent, the massive foot snapping backward with the bullet's impact. Staying upright, the creature held Marcia to its chest with one hand and grabbed a pipe with the other, swinging at Harry before throwing the object. Harry dodged the pipe and stopped next to the fish scaffold, calculating his next move.

"Run, Harry!" Marcia said. "Get out now!"

"Who'll sign my check?" he said dryly while his eyes darted, seeking an advantage. "All I need is one good headshot."

Harry glanced at the controller for the electric pulleys suspending the game fish. He hit the reverse button and jumped onto a counterweight. The weight ascended while a bluefin tuna lowered to the floor. Harry looked down at the creature prowling under the perpendicular scaffold, half-hidden by the hanging chains and gear. He waited for a clear shot.

A dangling metal hook brushed Marsha's cheek. An instant later, she lodged the hook into the creature's gill. The creature bellowed and dropped her, hands going to its neck to pull the hook free, snapping the chain. The Gill-Man hurled the hook, setting it spinning like a scythe through the air, and the hook sliced the stout nylon rope holding the tuna. Harry fired and missed. The counterweight plummeted to the ground, bringing Harry along with it. Dragging its wounded leg, the creature came up from underneath him.

The creature plucked Harry before he hit bottom, holding him by the shirt in one hand. The other hand pressed talons under his chin. In the same moment, Harry jammed the muzzle against the creature's skull. Both hunters paused as the seconds elongated into their infinite subparts. Both knew death was a millimeter away.

The talons drew a trickle of blood.

Microbeads of sweat formed on Harry's trigger finger as the distal joint curled.

Huge gears clanked and the sea gate reopened. Marcia stood at the top of the cracked stairs leading to the terrace remnant, working the main control panel and unsealing the lagoon.

"Go!" Marcia shouted.

Looking toward freedom, the creature relaxed its hands, releasing the muzzle's contact and dropping Harry, who fell into a heap on the floor. The creature limped to the lagoon and fell into the water.

Harry propped himself up on one hand as he regained his breath. Marcia ran to him and helped him to his feet. They watched the creature's slow wake transit the gate.

At dawn, the *Nautilus* was tied off in Berth 42. Her skipper strode the gangplank to the pier, followed by a group of junior officers and sailors armed with M-14s. Bedraggled, Harry and Marcia met the landing party.

"I'm Captain Nelson. Where's the Colonel?"

"What's left of him is in there, along with a lot of other casualties. The colonel went rogue," Harry said.

"Who are you?"

"Callahan, San Francisco PD. I wouldn't go running in. Had some trouble with the reactor. Of course, I'm not a nuclear engineer—"

"I am," Nelson said, his tone matter-of-fact. He turned to his landing party. "Get the decontamination squad in there on the double." As the XO relayed the order via walkie-talkie, Nelson addressed another officer. "Lieutenant Crane, contact Admiral Rickover in Washington. Code Red. He'll need to brief President Eisenhower."

“Aye aye, Captain. As soon as we raise the admiral, I’ll patch him through to you,” Crane said.

As the tall, dark-haired lieutenant reentered the sub, Nelson turned back to Harry and Marcia. “And the Gill-Man?”

“On his way to South America, I imagine,” Harry said. “Pretty shot up, but I think he’ll make it. Of course, I’m not a marine biologist—”

“I am.” Nelson turned again to his men. “Send the life sciences team to the facility lab. Find all the files they have on the creature.”

Harry cocked an eyebrow. “Maybe you want to rev up your nuclear sub and go after him.”

“No. *Nautilus* is a warship,” Nelson said. “Someday we’ll have a proper research submarine.”

“If you’re interested in research, talk to Mrs. Barton,” Harry said. “She’s the brains here.”

Nelson gave Marcia his attention. “Ma’am, after I get our teams underway, I’ll be ready for your report.”

Nelson led his party forward. More men streamed off the *Nautilus*, some in radiation suits. Marcia rested her head on Harry’s shoulder. Harry patted her arm.

“I’m sorry how things turned out with Tom,” he said.

“Heck of way for a gal to get her heart broken,” Marcia said. “Don’t want to see you break any hearts. You should call Peggy.”

Harry gave a small laugh. “She doesn’t want to hear from me.”

Marcia looked into Harry’s eyes. “Yes, she does.”

A sailor motioned for Marcia from the hatchway leading into the lagoon facility. She kissed Harry on the cheek and walked away.

Harry went to the water's edge, distancing himself from the commotion at Berth 42. He stared at the early sunlight patterns on the bay. "Lord, you know how long it's been since I've talked to you. That's good, because I don't remember. Jennings is gone, a lot of people are gone. For what? The monster got away again."

Harry steadied his breathing. "I'm not saying he's made in your image, but if the Gill-Man is any sort of man, maybe we should've left him alone. My brother would still be here." He shook his head. "I pulled through. You got a reason for that? Dad said you always have a reason, even if it doesn't make sense. Just like the Beatitudes didn't make sense when I was a kid."

He paused for a moment, watching the waves. "Now I think I get it. I'll stick with 'peacemaker.' You probably won't like the way I go about it, but I'll make the peace so other folks can be meek, merciful, pure ... you know, all the stuff I'm not. That should cover it."

Harry turned from the water to find a pay phone. Peggy would be getting off work soon.

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JASON WILLIAM KARPf

About the Author



Jason William Karpf grew up with storytelling. The son of a screenwriter, he was a child actor guest starring on classic TV shows. Jason is the author of the novels *Brimstone 1* and *The Deliverer*, the award-nominated novelette *Basilica Obscura*, and the instructional books *Brimstone 1 Study Guide* and *Developing a Christian Marketing Plan*. He teaches for Christian universities across the country and plays bass and guitar in his church's worship team. A history and trivia

aficionado, Jason was a four-time champion on the game show *Jeopardy*. He lives in Minnesota with his wife, Ann. They are parents of three grown children.

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Jason William Karpf does not own the Dirty Harry and Creature from the the Black Lagoon franchises or any of the related characters. Warner Bros. is the owner of the Dirty Harry franchise. Universal Studios is the owner of the Creature of the Black Lagoon franchise. The story also features cameos from Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea characters, a film and TV series released by 20th Century Fox.

Harry Julian Fink and R.M. Fink wrote the original Dirty Harry screenplay. Harry Essex, Arthur Ross, and Maurice Zimm wrote screenplay and story for Creature from the Black Lagoon. Irwin Allen and Charles Bennett wrote the screenplay for the theatrical version of Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea. Many talented writers created additional characters and dramatic situations for the five Dirty Harry films, three Creature from the Black Lagoon films, and the four seasons of Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea, some of which are also used in this story.

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Jason William Karpf has generated “Creature from the Dead Pool” and related materials out of his lifetime love of the aforementioned franchises. His transformative works are presented in tribute.