

**CLASSICS TO GO**  
**CREATURES  
OF THE ABYSS**



**MURRAY LEINSTER**

# **Creatures of the Abyss**

**Murray Leinster**

# One

The moment arrived when Terry Holt realized that he was simply holding the bag for Jimenez y Cía.—Jimenez and Company—in the city of Manila. He wasn't getting anywhere, himself. So, painfully, he prepared to wind up the company's affairs and his own, and start over. It seemed appropriate to take inventory, consult the police—they'd been both amiable and co-operative—and then make new plans. But first it would be a good idea to go somewhere else for a while, until the problem presented by *La Rubia* and radar and fish and *orejas de ellos* had been settled. He was at work on the inventory when the door opened, the warning-bell tinkled, and the girl came into the shop.

He looked up with a wary eye, glancing over the partition separating the workshop area in which the merchandise sold by Jimenez y Cía. was assembled. There were certain people he felt should not come into the shop. The police agreed with him. He was prepared to throw out anybody who came either to demand that he build something or else, or to demand that he not build it or else. In such forcible ejections he would be backed by the authorities of the city and the Philippine Republic.

But this customer was a girl. She was a pretty girl. She was pleasantly tanned. Her make-up, if she wore any, looked natural, and she carried a sizable parcel under her arm. She turned to close the door behind her. She was definitely from the United States. So Terry said in English, "Good afternoon. Can I do something for you?"

She looked relieved.

"Ah! We can talk English," she said gratefully. "I was afraid I'd have trouble. I do have trouble with Spanish."

Terry came out from behind the partition marking off the workshop. The shop was seventeen feet wide and its larger expanse of plate glass said, "*Jimenez y Cía.*" in large letters. Terry's now-vanished partner Jimenez had liked to see his name in large print. Under the name was the line "*Especialidades Electrónicas y Físicas.*" This was Terry's angle. He assembled specialties in the line of electronics and modern physics. Jimenez had sold them, not wisely but too well. At the bottom corner of the window there was a modest statement: "*Orejas de Ellos,*" which meant nothing to anybody but certain commercial fishermen, all of whom would deny it.

The girl looked dubiously about her. The front of the shop displayed two glaringly white electric washing machines, four electric refrigerators, and two deep-freeze cabinets.

"But I'm not sure this is the right shop," she said. "I'm not looking for iceboxes."

"They're window-dressing," said Terry. "My former business associate tried to run an appliance shop. But the people who buy such things in Manila only want the latest models. He got stuck with these from last year. So we do—I did do—*especialidades electrónicas y físicas.* But I'm shutting up shop. What are you looking for?"

The shop was in an appropriate place for its former products. Outside on the Calle Enero there were places where one could buy sea food in quantity, mother-of-pearl, pitch, coir rope, *bêche-de-mer*, copra, fuel oil, Diesel repair-parts and edible birds' nests. *Especialidades* fitted in. But though it was certainly respectable enough, this neighborhood wasn't exactly where one would have expected to find a girl like this shopping for what a girl like this would shop for.

"I'm looking," she explained, "for somebody to make up a special device, probably electronic, for my father's boat."

"Ah!" said Terry regretfully. "That's my line exactly, as is evidenced in Spanish on the window and in Tagalog, Malay and Chinese on cards you can read through the glass. But I'm suspending operations for a while. What kind of special device? Radar—No. I doubt you'd want *orejas de ellos*...."

"What are they?"

"Submarine ears," said Terry. "For fishing boats. The name is no clue at all. They pick up underwater sounds, enabling one to hear surf a long way off. Which may be useful. And some fish make noises and the fishermen use these ears to eavesdrop on them and catch them. You wouldn't be interested in anything of that sort!"

The girl brightened visibly.

"But I am! Something very much like it, at any rate. Take a look at this and see what my father wants to have made."

She put her parcel on a deep-freeze unit and pulled off its paper covering. The object inside was a sort of curved paddle with a handle at one end. It was about three feet long, made of a light-colored fibrous wood, and on the convex part of its curvature it was deeply carved in peculiar transverse ridges.

"A fish-driving paddle," she explained. "From Alua."

He looked it over. He knew vaguely that Alua was an island somewhere near Bohol.

"Naturally a fish-driving paddle is used to drive fish," she said. "To—herd them, you might say. People go out in shallow water and form a line. Then they whack paddles like these on the surface of the water. Fish try to get away from

the sound and the people herd them where they want them—into fish-traps, usually. I've tried this, while wearing a bathing suit. It makes your skin tingle—smart, rather. It's a sort of pins-and-needles sensation. Fish would swim away from an underwater noise like that!"

Terry examined the carving.

"Well?"

"Of course we think there's something special about the noise these paddles make. Maybe a special wave-form?"

"Possibly," he admitted. "But—"

"We want something else to do the same trick on a bigger scale. Directional, if possible. Not a paddle, of course. Better. Bigger. Stronger. Continuous. We want to drive fish and this paddle's limited in its effect."

"Why drive fish?" asked Terry.

"Why not?" asked the girl. She watched his face.

He frowned a little, considering the problem the girl posed.

"Oh, *ellos* might object," he said absently.

"Who?"

"*Ellos*," he repeated. "It's a superstition. The word means 'they' or 'them.' Things under the ocean who listen to the fish and the fishermen."

"You're not serious." It was a statement.

"No," he admitted, still eying the paddle. "But the modern, businesslike fishermen who buy submarine ears for sound business reasons call them *orejas de ellos* and everybody



knows what they mean, even in the modernized fishing fleet."

"Which," said the girl, "Jimenez y Cía. has had a big hand in modernizing. That's why I came to you. Your name is Terry Holt, I think. An American Navy Captain said you could make what my father wants."

Terry nodded suddenly to himself.

"What you want," he said abruptly, "might be done with a tape-recorder, a submarine ear, and an underwater horn. You'd make a tape-recording of what these whackings sound like under water, edit the tape to make the whackings practically continuous, and then play the tape through an underwater horn to reproduce the sounds at will. That should do the trick."

"Good! How soon can you do it?" she asked.

"I'm afraid not at all," said Terry. "I find I've been a little too efficient in updating the fishing fleet. I'm leaving the city for the city's good."

She looked at him inquiringly.

"No," he assured her. "The police haven't asked me to leave. They're glad I'm going, but they're cordial enough and it's agreed that I'll come back when somebody else finds out how *La Rubia* catches her fish."

"*La Rubia*?"

"*The Redhead*," he told her. "It's the name of a fishing boat. She's found some place where fish practically fight to get into her nets. For months, now, she's come back from every trip loaded down gunwale-deep. And she makes her trips fast! Naturally the other fishermen want to get in on the party."

"So?"

"The bonanza voyages," Terry explained, "started immediately after *La Rubia* had submarine ears installed. Immediately all the other boats installed them. My former partner sold them faster than I could assemble them. And nobody regrets them. They do increase the catches. But they don't match *La Rubia*. She's making a mint of money! She's found some place or she has some trick that loads her down deep every time she puts out to sea."

The girl made an interrogative sound.

"The other fishermen think it's a place," Terry added, "so they ganged up on her. Two months back, when she sailed, the entire fishing fleet trailed her. They stuck to her closer than brothers. So she sailed around for a solid week and never put a net overboard. Then she came back to Manila—empty. They were furious. The price of fish had gone sky-high in their absence. They went to sea to make some money regardless. When they got back they found *La Rubia* had sailed after they left, got back before they returned—and she was just loaded with fish, and the market was back to normal. There was bad feeling. There were fights. Some fishermen landed in the hospital and some in jail."

A motor truck rolled by on the street outside the shop of the now moribund Jimenez y Cía. The girl automatically turned her eyes to the source of the noise. Then she looked back at Terry.

"And then my erstwhile associate Jimenez had a brainstorm," said Terry ruefully. "He sold the skipper of *La Rubia* on the idea of short-range radar. I built a set for him. It was good for possibly twenty miles. So *La Rubia* sailed in the dark of the moon with fifty fishing boats swearing violent oaths that they'd follow her to hell-and-gone. When



night fell *La Rubia* put out her lights, used her radar to locate the other boats who couldn't see her, and sneaked out from their midst. She came back loaded down with fish. There were more fights and more men in the hospital and in jail. Some of *La Rubia's* men boasted that they'd used radar to dodge their rivals. And that's how the police got interested in me."

The girl had listened interestedly.

"Why?"

"Oh, Jimenez began to take orders for radar from other fishing boat owners. If *La Rubia* could dodge them by radar, they could trail her by radar even in the dark. So the skipper and crew of *La Rubia* promised blood-curdling things as Jimenez's fate if he delivered a radar set to anybody else. Then the skippers and crews of other boats made even more blood-curdling threats if he didn't deliver radar to them. So Jimenez ran away, leaving me to hold the bag."

The girl nodded.

"And therefore," said Terry, "I'm shutting up shop. I'll turn the inventory over to the police and go off somewhere until someone learns where *La Rubia* gets her fish. When things calm down again, I'll come back and start up business once more—without Jimenez. I'll probably stick to electric-eye doors, burglar alarms, closed-circuit television systems and things like that. Then I might make this underwater broadcasting device, if your father still wants it. I'd better not now."

"We heard about your problem," said the girl. "Almost exactly the way you just explained it."

Terry stared. Then he said politely, "Oh. You did?"

"Yes, I thought—"

"Then you knew," said Terry more politely still, "that I was leaving town and couldn't make the gadget you want? You knew it before you came here?"

"Why," said the girl, "your plans seemed to fit in very nicely with ours. We've got a sixty-five-foot schooner and we're sailing around. My father wants something like—what you described. So since you want to—well—travel around for a time, why not come on board our boat and make the thing we want there? We'll land you anywhere you like when it's finished."

"Thanks," said Terry with very great politeness indeed. "I think I made a fool of myself, explaining. You knew it all beforehand. I'm afraid I bored you horribly. You probably even know that Jimenez took all the funds when he ran away."

She hesitated, and then said, "Y-yes. We thought—"

"That I should have trouble raising steamer-fare to any place at all," he said without cordiality. "And I will. You had that information too, didn't you?"

"Please!" she said with distress. "You make it sound—"

"Did you have any idea what I'd charge to assemble the device you want?"

"If you'll name a price."

Terry named one. He was angry. The sum was far from a small one. It was, in fact, exorbitant. But he felt that he'd made a fool of himself, responding to her encouragement by telling her things she already knew.

She opened her purse and peeled off bills. She put them down.

"I'll leave the paddle with you," she said crisply. "Our boat is the *Esperance*. You'll find it...." She named the anchorage, which was that of Manila's most expensive yacht club. "There's a launch which will bring you out whenever you're ready to sail. It would be nice if you could sail tomorrow—and nicer if you could come aboard today."

She nodded in friendly fashion, opened the door—the bell jangled—and went out.

Terry blinked. Then he swore and snatched up the pile of bills. Two fluttered to the floor and he lost time picking them up. He went out after her, the money in his hand.

He saw a taxicab door close behind her, three or four doors down the street. Instantly the cab was in mad career away. The taxicabs of Manila are driven by a special breed of chauffeurs. It is said that they are all escaped lunatics with homicidal tendencies. The cab went roaring down the Calle Enero's cluttered length and turned the corner.

Terry went back to the shop. He swore again. He looked at the money in his hand. It totalled exactly the excessive amount he'd named as the price of an electronic fish-driving unit, including an underwater horn.

"The devil!" he said angrily.

He felt the special indignation some men feel when they are in difficulties which their pride requires them to surmount by themselves, and somebody tries to help. The indignation is the greater as they see less chance of success on their own.

Terry's situation was offensive to him because he shouldn't be in this kind of situation at all, or rather, his troubles were not foreseeable by the most competent of graduate electronic engineers. He'd trained for the work he'd undertaken. He'd prepared himself for competence. At

graduation he'd encountered the representatives of at least three large corporations who were snapping up engineers as soon as they left the cloistered halls of learning. Terry'd asked how many men were employed in the category he'd fit in. When one representative boasted that ten thousand such engineers were on his company's payroll, Terry declined at once. He wanted to accomplish something himself, not as part of a team of some thousands of members. The smaller the organization, the better one's chance for personal satisfaction. He wouldn't make as much money, but—

It was a matter of simple logic. If he was better off with a really small company, he'd be best off on his own. And he'd nearly managed it. He'd worked only with Jimenez. Jimenez was the sales organization. Terry was the production staff. In Manila there was certainly room for special electronic equipment—*especialidades electrónicas y físicas*. He should have had an excellent chance to build up a good business. Starting small, even without capital, he'd confidently expected to be going strong within months. There were taxi fleets to be equipped with short-wave radio. There were burglar alarms to be designed and installed, and all sorts of setups to be engineered. And these things were still in demand. His expectations had a solid foundation. Nobody could have anticipated the disaster caused by *La Rubia's* phenomenal success in commercial fishery. It was even irrational for it to be a disaster to Terry. But it was.

More immediately, though, he was indignant because this girl had known all about him when she came into the shop. She'd probably even known about his gimmicking a standard-design submarine listening device so it was really good and really directional. But she'd let him talk, asking seemingly interested questions, when she knew the whole business beforehand. And at the end she'd done a most

infuriating thing by paying him in advance for something he'd refused to do, thereby forcing him into the obligation to do it.

He fretted. He needed the money. But he objected to being tricked. He went back to the probably senseless business of taking an inventory. Time passed. Nothing happened. Nobody came to the shop. The police had been firm about *La Rubia* crewmen calling on Terry to make threats. They'd been equally firm about other people calling to make counterthreats. No casual customers entered. Two hours went by.

At four o'clock the door opened—with the sound of its tinkling bell—and Police Captain Felicio Horta came in.

"*Buenas tardes*," he said cordially.

Terry grunted at him.

"I hear," said Horta, "that you leave Manila."

Terry asked evenly, "Is that a way of asking me to hurry up and do it?"

"*Pero no! Por supuesto no!*" protested Horta. "But it is said that you have new and definite plans."

"What do you know about them?" demanded Terry.

Police Captain Horta said pleasantly, "Officially, nothing. Privately, that you will aid some *ricos americanos* to do experiments in—*oceanografía*? Some study of oceanic things. That you regret having agreed to do so. That you consider changing your mind. That you are angry."

The girl, of course, could have inferred all this from his angry charge out of the shop with the money in his hand,

too late to stop her taxicab. But Terry snapped, "Now, who the devil told you that?"

Police Captain Horta shrugged.

"One hears. I hope it is not true."

"That what's not true? That I leave? Or that I don't?"

"I hope," said Horta benignly, "that you do as you please. I am not on duty at the moment. I have my car. I offer myself to chauffeur you if there is any place you wish to go—to a steamer or anywhere else. If you do not wish to go anywhere, I will take my leave. With no pre ... prejudice," he finished. "We have been friendly. I hope we remain so."

Terry stared at him estimatingly. Police Captain Horta was a reasonable and honest man. He knew that Terry had contributed to matters giving the police some trouble, but he knew it was accidental on Terry's part. He would hold no grudge.

"Just why," asked Terry measuredly, "did you come here to offer to drive me somewhere? Is there any special reason to want me to get out of town?"

"That is not it," said Horta. "It could be wished that you would—take a certain course of action. Yes. But not because you would be absent from here. It is because you would be present at a special other place. The matter connects with *La Rubia*, but in a manner you could not possibly guess. Yet you are wholly a free agent. You will do as you please. I would like to make it—convenient. That is all."

He paused. Terry stared at him, frowning. Horta tried again.

"Let us say that I have much interest in *oceanografía*. I would like to see certain research carried on."

"Being, I'm sure, especially interested in fish-driving," said Terry skeptically. "You sound as if you were acting unofficially to get something done that officially you can't talk about."

Horta smiled warmly at him.

"That," he pronounced, "is a logical conclusion."

"What's the object of the—research, if that's what it is? And why pick me?"

Horta shrugged and did not answer.

"Why not tell me?"

"*Amigo*," said Horta, "I would like nothing better than to tell you. I would be interested to see your reception of the idea. But it would be fatal. You would think me cr-a-zy. And also more important persons. But especially me."

It was Terry's turn to shrug his shoulders. He hesitated for a long moment. If Horta had tried to apply pressure, he'd have turned obstinate on the instant. But there was no pressure. First the girl and now Horta tried to lure him with mystery and assurance of interest in high places.

"And *La Rubia's* involved in the secret?" demanded Terry.

"Innocently," said Horta promptly. "As you are."

"Thank you for faith in my innocence," said Terry with irony. "All right. If I'm involved, I'm involved. I'll try to devolve out of being involved by playing along."

He turned to the workshop space at the back of the store. He found boxes to pack his working tools and the considerable stock of small parts needed to make such things as burglar alarms, submarine ears and the assorted electronic devices modern business finds increasingly



necessary. He began to pack them. Surprisingly, Horta helped. Any man of Spanish blood is apt to be sensitive about manual labor. If he has an official position his sensitiveness is apt to be extreme. But Horta not only helped pack the boxes with Terry's stock of parts; he helped carry them to his car outside. He helped to load them.

Terry turned the key in the door and handed it to him, with the nearly complete inventory of the shop's contents.

"Jimenez having run away, I leave the shop in your hands," he observed.

Horta put the key and document away. He started the motor of his car and drove along the Calle Enero. He drove with surprising moderation for a police officer authorized to ignore traffic rules on occasion. Presently the dock-area of Manila was left behind, and then the rest of the commercial district, and then for a time the car tooled along wide streets past the impressive residences of the wealthy. Some of the architecture was remarkable. A little further, and the harbor—the bay—appeared again. The car entered the grounds of Manila's swankiest yacht club. The design of the clubhouse was astounding. The car stopped by the small-boat pier. There were two men waiting there. Without being given any orders, they accepted the parcels Horta handed out. Also without orders, they carried them out to the float. They loaded them into the brass-trimmed motor tender which waited there.

"They knew we were coming," said Terry shortly. "Would I have been brought anyhow?"

"*Pero no*," said Horta. "But there are telephones. When we left the shop, one was used."

The men who'd carried out the parcels vanished. Terry and Horta stepped aboard. The tender cast off and headed out

into the harbor. There was a Philippine gunboat and a mine-layer and an American flattop in plain view. There were tankers and tramp steamers and a vast array of smaller craft at anchor. A seemingly top-heavy steamer ploughed across oily water two miles distant. The tender headed for a trim sixty-five-foot schooner anchored a mile from shore. It grew larger and seemed more trim as the tender approached it.

The smaller boat passed under the larger one's stern, and the name *Esperance* showed plainly. On the starboard side a boat boom projected. The tender ran deftly up and a man in a sweat shirt and duck trousers snubbed the line. He said cheerfully, "How do you do, Mr. Holt?" Then he nodded to Horta. "Good to see you, Captain." He offered his hand as Terry straightened up on deck. "My name's Davis. We'll have your stuff aboard right away."

Two young men in dungarees and with crew cuts appeared and took over the motley lot of cartons that Terry and Horta had made ready.

"Have you everything you need?" asked Davis anxiously. "Would some extra stuff be useful?"

"I could do with a few items," said Terry, stiffly.

He had quickly developed an acute dislike for the patent attempt to induce him to join the *Esperance*. He had no reason for his objection, save that he had not been informed about the task he was urged to undertake.

"Also," he added abruptly, "Captain Horta didn't think to stop at my hotel so I could get my baggage."

"Write a list of what you want," suggested Davis. "I'm sure something can be done about your baggage. Make the list complete. If something's left over, it won't matter. There's a

desk in the cabin for you to write at." He turned to Horta. "Captain, what's the news about *La Rubia*?"

"She sailed again yesterday," said Horta ruefully. "She was followed by many other boats. And now there is a moon. It rises late, but it rises. Many sailors will be watching her from mastheads. It is said that all the night glasses in Manila have been bought by fishermen...."

His voice died away as Terry went down the companion ladder. Belowdecks was attractive. There was no ostentation, but the décor was obviously expensive. There were armchairs, electric lamps, a desk, and shelves filled with books—two or three on electronics and a highly controversial one on marine monsters and sea serpents. There were some on anthropology. On skin diving. On astronomy. Two thick volumes on abyssal fish. There was a shelf of fiction and other shelves of reference books for navigation, radio and Diesel maintenance and repair. There were obvious reasons for these last, but no reason that could be imagined for two books on the solar planets.

Terry sat at the desk and compiled a list of electronic parts that he was sure wouldn't be available in Manila. He was annoyed as he realized afresh the smoothness of the operation that had brought him to the *Esperance*. He found satisfaction in asking for some multi-element vacuum tubes that simply couldn't be had except on special order from the manufacturers back in the United States. But it took time to think of them.

When he went abovedecks, half an hour later, he had listed just six electronic components. The tender was gone, and Horta with it. Davis greeted Terry as cordially as before.

"The tender's left," said Terry with restraint. "Here's my list."