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Fiction

ARCHIE TOOTHLESS

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By

Robert P. Herbst

It was a day never to be forgotten on the shores of Creepon Beach. A live giant squid had washed up on the beach overnight. Our ace news hound from the Mount Perry Newspaper and fish wrap, Mr. Badnews Hunter was raced to the scene for a first hand report.

Representatives from the Mount Perry Ichthyologist Society have identified the creature as the first known representative of the family Architeuthis to be captured alive. Immediately, the world famous Mount Perry Aquarium offered a pool to house the Architeuthis, at their facilities near Creepon Beach.

The Architeuthis was rushed, by special, truck to the massive salt water pool which had been set aside to house the giant squid. Naturally, Ichthyologists from all over the world raced to Mount Perry to see the giant while it was still alive. No one could believe the luck of finding such a creature still alive and kicking. One and all expected the giant to die within hours.

According to Badnews, the Ichthyologists were extremely puzzled in several areas. Why had the elusive and intelligent Architeuthis allowed itself to be washed up on a beach, here in Mount Perry, Florida? According to all the known research, the Architeuthis normally preferred to live a solitary life in the deep cold waters of the South to Mid Atlantic Ocean.

Why had it come into the comparatively warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico and allowed itself to be washed up on Creepon Beach while still alive? Thus far all known specimens of this giant were found only after they were dead. It was about as far from its recognized home waters as the poor thing could get. The creature was either sick or completely disoriented.

According to Badnews, the scientific community was completely at odds over these issues with ideas and thoughts being tossed wildly around from scientist to scientist.

Immediately, upon being loosed in the salt water pool, the Architeuthis swam to the nearest underwater window. It spread its tentacles out on the walls of the pool so that its mouth was centered over the window, then drawing close, it opened its huge mouth. Using a free tentacle, it pointed inside its mouth.

Obviously, the Architeuthis was very hungry. Being an intelligent creature, it was trying to tell its captors of its needs.

A dead fish was thrown into the pool for the Architeuthis to eat by an aquarium attendant. The Architeuthis slowly extended a tentacle out to the fish, grabbed it and drew it in

close. It seemed puzzled because the fish didn't struggle. It drew the fish in a little closer, examining the fish carefully with one of its huge eyes. "It also appeared to be smelling it." Wrote Badnews.

The thousands of scientists who had raced to Mount Perry from all over the world waited with bated breath to see what the Architeuthis was going to do with the fish. After all, no one had ever seen a live giant squid before. There were plenty of dead ones around but this was the only live one ever seen.

Not only this, but it was in captivity, and it was about to eat something. An act, no one in the world had ever seen before. The excitement in the room was electrifying as the scientists nudged and jostled each other to get a better view of what was happening in the tank.

Suddenly, and with apparent great disdain, the Architeuthis threw the dead fish out of the pool into the midst of the scientists gathered about waiting to see it eat. It was assumed the Architeuthis was hungry. Why then did it throw the dead fish out of the pool? It should have eaten it.

According to Badnews, "After throwing the fish, the Architeuthis raced wildly about in the pool in what could only be termed as either a venting of frustration or anger."

Again the Architeuthis swam to the nearest underwater window spread its tentacles out on the walls of the pool; then, drawing close to the window, it again opened its huge mouth. Using a free tentacle, it pointed inside its mouth. It was apparent there was more to its actions than was realized. Maybe the creature preferred live food.

A live fish was caught out of another pool in the aquarium and thrown into the pool with the Architeuthis by an aquarium attendant. Again the squid immediately caught the fish with one tentacle. The scientific community waited, hardly daring to breath, as the giant squid drew the struggling fish closer and closer to its mouth. Then quite suddenly, as it had done before, it threw the struggling fish out into the midst of the gathered scientists.

The water in the huge pool was whipped to a white foam as the Architeuthis threw what Badnews could only describe as a temper tantrum. It whipped the water in every direction, drenching the gathered crowd to the skin.

Finally exhausted, the giant squid hung its tentacles over the edge of the pool. It appeared to be gasping for breath. It was either this, or the poor thing was sobbing with frustration.

Badnews, who had been standing next to one of the windows under the water line, observed the giant squid had no teeth. There should have been something like a parrot's beak in there. There had to be some kind of teeth for the Architeuthis to chew with, but there was nothing but pink gums.

The scientific community, although startled by this revelation, quickly agreed. The Architeuthis bobbed its head up and down on the other side of the window, agreeing with the gathered experts. It was wide eyed with anticipation and gesturing with its tentacles towards its mouth.

Immediately an expert from the world renowned Mount Perry Modern Molar Company was summoned to the aquarium for consultation. Their reputation for supplying the worlds finest indestructible bicuspid was about to be tested.

It was about this time, Badnews decided to call the toothless squid Archie Toothless. The name seemed appropriate so it stuck. After all, what else would you call a sixty foot long, eight

ton Architeuthis, that didn't have a single tooth in its mouth?

The man from MPMCC indicated he could make no decisions unless a qualified dentist was also present and participated in the diagnosis. Our very own, doctor of modern dentistry, Dr. I. Grindum arrived in his brand new "Tooth Mobile". This proved to be the hit of the day with bystanders outside the aquarium.

Then the two men consulted for many hours, gesturing and pointing through the window in the pool, on the best course of action. All the time the two men consulted the Architeuthis watched them through the underwater window with one of its huge eyes.

At last the good doctor donned his diving wet suite and dove fearlessly into the pool with Archie Toothless. The gathered scientists crowded to the underwater windows to see what was going to happen

The Architeuthis did not attack but instead seemed to welcome the attention. Badnews write, " The beast seemed to understand what the doctor was trying to do and not only cooperated, but assisted the doctor in the procedure as the doctor poked and probed around inside the squids mouth."

After a tense moment or so of jockeying for the proper position, the doctor shoved a huge glob of some pink colored plastic goo into the gaping but toothless mouth of the giant squid. Oddly enough the squid seemed perfectly at ease as the dentist made impressions of its mouth. It even seemed to help the dentist exit the pool after the impression was removed from its mouth.

Using the doctors impressions of the giant squids mouth, the MPMCC worked tirelessly, both day and night, until a reasonable semblance of what they thought a giant squid's teeth were supposed to look like, were fashioned from the indestructible material human false teeth are made from. Oddly enough, they looked exactly like the false teeth people wear, only much larger.

When asked about this the representative from the MPMCC simply shrugged his shoulders and said, "The only model we had to work from, that was large enough, was Dr. Grindum's Tooth Mobile. It was the best we could do without knowing exactly what a Giant Squid's teeth were supposed to look like."

Then our intrepid doctor of modern dentistry dove back into the pool and shoved the false teeth into the giant squid's open mouth. Using a portable underwater grinder, there was a short period of adjustment and alteration until Archie seemed quite happy with its new teeth.

The squid seemed to experiment with them a while, using them to snap and gnash a bit at various objects scattered about in the pool. Then it moved over to the window where the largest number of scientists had gathered, spread its tentacles around the window and flashed what could only be described as, an thirty-three inch wide, ear to ear toothy grin at them.



Dr. Grindum's new Tooth Mobile

Archie Toothless was no longer toothless. The Architeuthis seemed very pleased with its new dentures. It swam about in the pool flashing huge smiles and toothy grins at anyone who would look at it.

As no one had ever seen an Architeuthis with a full set of upper and lower dentures, especially dentures the size of these things, the scientific community gathered about the pool completely absorbed with interest. Flashing cameras lit the area from every direction and the Architeuthis performed for every picture with great smiles and grins.

The Architeuthis then proceeded to munch on over one hundred pounds of fish, consuming all with equal gusto. Finally, stuffed quite full and with the tail of the last fish still sticking out of the corner of its mouth, the giant squid moved back to the window and gave the gathered scientists another toothy grin, followed by a monumental belch.

Satisfied that all was well and the Architeuthis was comfortable in its new home, the scientists retired for the night. Badnews returned to the newspaper office to write up his report.

Sometime during the night, the squid escaped from the pool. The track it left went right to the spot at Creepon Beach, where it had been found. The trail then vanished into the Gulf of Mexico. Archie Toothless was nowhere to be found.

Archie Toothless was gone and the scientific community was absolutely crushed, to say the very least. The only known living specimen of the Architeuthis had been lost forever.

The scientists sulked about blaming each other; they were like little kids whose new toy had been stolen. No one knew quite what to do as the Mount Perry Coastal Patrol cruised along the shore line looking for any trace of the giant squid.

The search went on for three days, but to no avail. It was over and the scientists began packing to return to their homes. Then a report came in from the beach patrol. There were at least fifteen giant squid laying about on the shore of Creepon Beach. They were all just lying at the waters edge with their mouths gaping open. They seemed to be using one or more tentacles to indicate there were no teeth in any of their mouths.