

dr c's remarkable ocean world



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# CREATURES OF THE ABYSS

by William Chamberlin

## PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

This play was originally scripted as a Halloween lecture for my oceanography students at Fullerton College. Loosely based on Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, the play was created to expose students to the various habits and horrors of creatures living in the dark depths of the deep sea. In the dramatic version presented here, the play takes on allegorical meaning for our fears. The power of the sea to evoke fear and terror manifests itself in tragic "real-life" circumstances, yet our exaggeration of these horrors often takes on comic proportions, especially in our dreams. Here, then, is a comic tale of submarine horror, the story of a troubled student who discovers that Captain Nemo and his crew have little patience for those who neglect their studies.

## CHARACTERS

SCHOOLY: 19. Deeply troubled college student. Subject to narcolepsy.

CAPTAIN NEMO: 40-50. Commander of the submarine *Nautilus*. Scholar of the seven seas.  
Practitioner of pedagogical pranks.

SCUMBUCKET: 18-24. First mate. Buff. Dumb as a clam.

FISHBAIT: 18-24. Second mate. Effeminate. Brainy as an octopus.

GIANT SQUID: Age unknown. Sinister slithering cephalopod.

ROCK LOBSTER: Age unknown. Crafty crustacean villain.

WICKED WITCH OF THE ABYSS: Timeless. Powerful as fear.

**TIME**

Halloween.

**SETTING**

A typical college campus. The dream sequence (comprising most of the play) takes place on board a submarine.

**SCENE 1**

*Theater in the Black. Background music: Bach's Toccata & Fugue in D Minor. Lights fade up on Schooly studying on bench by pond . Music dissolves to B52s. song*

SCHOOLY. (*Reading. Deliberately.*) "What causes deep ocean currents and how does deep-sea circulation affect the distribution of abyssal organisms? (*Slams book shut.*) How should I know? (*Stands . Places book on bench. Begins to pace.*) This homework sucks! I'll never learn this stuff. I'll never pass this class. My dad will never send me to USC. My girlfriend will leave me for that jock in our ping-pong class. How am I going to be a famous lawyer if I have to take all these stupid science classes! (*He sits on bench. A couple - ROCK LOBSTER and WITCH , out of costume - walk by looking at birds through binoculars.*) I'm a failure! A failure at 19 years old! Mom was right. I should have gone into the flower business. (*He puts his head in his hands. Duck quacks.*) Stop your squawking, you stupid duck! I've got enough troubles without your racket! (*Picks a flower.*) What's the use... I'll never amount to anything. I'm sorry F. Lee Bailey. I'm sorry Jacques Cousteau. (*He lies down on the bench and falls asleep. Lights fade. Music fades.*)

**SCENE 2**

*On board submarine Nautilus. Theater is black. The thump of ship's propellers fades in. FISHBAIT and SCUMBUCKET are swabbing the deck .*

SCUMBUCKET. Looks like another boring day in the abyss.

FISHBAIT. I'll say. If this deck gets any shinier, I'll have to wear sunscreen on the bottom of my feet. (*Looks at bottom of his feet.*)

SCUMBUCKET. You're not worried about skin cancer again, are you?

FISHBAIT. Damn straight! This life at the bottom of the sea turns a man's skin delicate and sensitive. (*Inspects his arms.*) Not that you would know anything about sensitive.

SCUMBUCKET. I know more than you think. Captain Nemo has been teaching me.

FISHBAIT. You're an idiot.

SCUMBUCKET. I am not!

FISHBAIT. Am too!

*(They shove each other repeatedly. CAPTAIN NEMO enters )*

CAPTAIN NEMO. Stop that abominable quarreling! Scumbucket, Fishbait, come to attention!

*(They both stand promptly at attention.)*

CAPTAIN NEMO. Much better. At ease. (*They relax.*) Do either of you clownfish realize what day this is?

*(They look at each other and shrug their shoulders.)*

CAPTAIN NEMO. (*Aside.*) I daresay a squid has more brains than my crew. (*To the crew.*) Well, my absent-minded abalones, today is Halloween, a day with particular relevance to the sea!

*(They look at each other and smile.)*

CAPTAIN NEMO. And I, the famed Captain Nemo, Professor of the Profound, Scholar of the Seven Seas, Commander of the Cosmic Currents...I have a plan to glorify this day!

*(They get excited and begin to dance.)*

CAPTAIN NEMO. There are those who would mock the sea, those who would dismiss her subtle beauty and power. They haven't had a taste of the sea like you and me. For the sea is salty, like the blood of men. And a heart that beats with the salt of the sea has no choice but to follow the sea, or perish. Why every man, woman, and child is a progeny of the sea. The essence of our souls belongs to the sea.

SCUMBUCKET. Are we going to drown someone?

FISHBAIT. Can we feed them to the sharks?

CAPTAIN NEMO. My plan, you sea-soaked simpletons, is to scare someone and scare them good. Fear is the greatest teacher, they say, the most powerful ally in the War of Education upon which scholars such as myself must daily commence. A professor's work is never done, yet persevere we must! Like the ceaseless motion of the seas mighty currents, our mission flows forward at the breath of each dawn. (*Breaking into a smile.*) Now get on the sonar and find me some poor lost soul to shake a harpoon at!

SCUMBUCKET and FISHBAIT. (*Simultaneously.*) Aye aye, Captain!

(*FISHBAIT and SCUMBUCKET exit. Spotlight on NEMO center stage, posing Napoleon-like. The sound of a ship's sonar can be heard in the background. Lights up. The sonar stops. FISHBAIT and SCUMBUCKET drag SCHOOLY onto the stage.*)

SCUMBUCKET. Captain Nemo. We caught one!

SCHOOLY. Let go of me!

FISHBAIT. Bet you wished you'd never laid eyes on the likes of us.

(*NEMO turns to look at SCHOOLY.*)

SCHOOLY. Why would I care? I don't even know who you are. Dad? (*Looks at NEMO.*) Mom? (*Looks at FISHBAIT.*) The ping-pong jock? (*Looks at SCUMBUCKET.*) It can't be. What is this place?

SCUMBUCKET. You're on the *Nautilus*. It's a submarine. And we're twenty thousand leagues under the sea.

SCHOOLY. That's ridiculous! I was just studying next to the pond. I know it's not that deep!

FISHBAIT. It is remarkable how long men will believe in the bottom of a pond without taking the trouble to swim in it. Thoreau said that.

SCHOOLY. I'm sure!

CAPTAIN NEMO. Well, well, well. Look what the catfish drug in. (*Inspecting SCHOOLY.*) What manner of creature are you?

SCHOOLY. (*Sarcastically.*) I'm a student at Fullerton College. What manner of creature are you?

CAPTAIN NEMO. (*Proudly.*) I am Captain of the greatest submarine in the world and a loyal servant of the Abyss.

SCHOOLY. (*Aside.*) It's not just the ocean that's getting deep around here!

CAPTAIN NEMO. Let me introduce you to my crew. This is my first mate, Scumbucket, nearly drowned on a sinking ship but given a new life aboard mine. And this is Fishbait, ship's second mate, bound for a shark's dinner table but luckily swallowed by a greater destiny here. And you...let's call him Schooly...you are to become the fourth member of our abyssal gang!

SCHOOLY. Look, I'm really glad to meet you and all, but I've got an exam to study for, and if I screw up, I'm gonna end up at the bottom of my class!

FISHBAIT. Bottoms are our specialty around here.

SCHOOLY. I was afraid of that. Now if you will just excuse me...

CAPTAIN NEMO. (*Puts his arm around SCHOOLY.*) Not so fast, my finicky friend. As fate would have it, you just so happen to have found the greatest school of oceanography ever invented by mortal men. We teach things here you won't learn in other schools. Come. You're about to experience a deep-sea schooling you will never regret!

*(FISHBAIT and SCUMBUCKET grab SCHOOLY and sit him in a chair center stage. Nemo resumes his exalted position stage left. FISHBAIT and SCUMBUCKET stand behind SCHOOLY stage right.)*

CAPTAIN NEMO. Friends, today we are going to learn about creatures more frightening than any fiction you have ever read. The truth is stranger than fiction, they say, and where matters of the sea are concerned, nothing could be more true! Prepare yourself for the horrors beyond the depths, the graveyard of many a scuttled ship, the vast and unfathomable lair of pearly poets and briny bards. Prepare yourselves for ...

OFFSTAGE VOICE. Creatures of the Abyss.

CAPTAIN NEMO. We begin our story at the surface of the sea. In the lighted portions of the ocean waters, a rich flora glides haplessly on relentless ocean currents, driven by winds of trade, spun by Gaia herself. These tiny organisms relish the sun and drink merrily on the fruits of land-borne elements.

What are these creatures called men?

SCUMBUCKET and FISHBAIT. (*Simultaneously.*) Dog-plankton!

CAPTAIN NEMO. Precisely. The dog-plankton, otherwise known as the fido-plankton, are the loyal servants of all living things. Through the process of fido-synthesis, the fido-plankton create a rain of food that serves the nutritional needs of many a creature and many a creature's creature.

SCHOOLY. Wait a minute! That's ridiculous. Dogs do not live in the ocean.

CAPTAIN NEMO. Wrong again, starfish breath. Many a poor pet -- and a score of horses -- have been thrown into the merciless sea. (*Slide screen shows Uki the snow-white dog.*) This Fido served Madame Cousteau. Unfortunately, his need to pee caused him to slip accidentally into the sea. We found him washed overboard in the south Pacific on the heels of a terrible typhoon. The poor fellow-- he just had to go.

SCUMBUCKET. (*to SCHOOLY.*) Careful such a fate doesn't cross your path!

CAPTAIN NEMO. Next come the creatures that all of us have swallowed on occasion. Have you ever swallowed a fly?

SCHOOLY. Yes...once.

SCUMBUCKET and FISHBAIT. (*Simultaneously.*) He swallowed a fly! I don't know why! I think he'll die!

CAPTAIN NEMO. Have you ever swallowed a drop of seawater?

SCHOOLY. I'm sure. Who hasn't?

CAPTAIN NEMO. Do you know what lives in seawater?

SCHOOLY. Fish?

FISHBAIT. Insects, you moron. The ocean is full of them and every time you swallow, they crawl down your throat and burrow through your chest and clog up your heart until there's too many of them, then they swarm to your brain and come out your ears and you can hear them at night clicking their tiny

claws as they march on your pillow...

CAPTAIN NEMO Enough, Fishbait.

SCHOOLY. You mean, zoo (*pronounced zoh*) plankton.

SCUMBUCKET. Zoo (*pronounced zuu*) plankton. Schmuu-plankton. I go to watch the gorillas.

FISHBAIT. You are a gorilla.

SCUMBUCKET. Oh yeah!

CAPTAIN NEMO. Stop it! Our new comrade is correct. Seawater is full of zooplankton and every time you swallow a gulp, a thousand zooplankton burn to death in the acid pits of your stomach.

SCHOOLY. That's gross.

CAPTAIN NEMO. Gross but true are many tales of the sea. But we digress. As the hordes of insect-like zooplankton gorge on the succulent phytoplankton sweetened by a day's photosynthesis, they engage in another more common, more perfunctory practice, a most necessary function for all living creatures bound to the flesh.

SCUMBUCKET and FISHBAIT. (*Simultaneously.*) They begin to poop!

CAPTAIN NEMO. Precisely, my pernicious periwinkles. The zooplankton digest their delectable diatomaceous dinner and spit it out the back end in a delicate but beautifully shaped spheroid known as a fecal pellet. And what do we know about fecal pellets?

SCUMBUCKET and FISHBAIT. (*Simultaneously.*) One man's feces is another man's feast!

CAPTAIN NEMO. Marvelous! You're learning to love this stuff. Many creatures of the abyss are a scavenging lot. They make their living feeding on the poop of others. And what do we call this delightful habit of feasting on feces?

SCUMBUCKET and FISHBAIT. (*Simultaneously.*) Coprophagy!

CAPTAIN NEMO. Of course! Not to be confused with the eating of corpses.

FISHBAIT. (*to SCHOOLY*). Yours, perhaps.

CAPTAIN NEMO. This habit of coprophagy is a way of life for many organisms. In fact, most organisms

that live in the abyss and at the bottom of the sea depend on a rain of food from above...like this.

*(NEMO waves his hands and a rain of candy pelts the audience.)*

CAPTAIN NEMO. A rain of food from above. Feast on, my fecal-fond friends, feast on!

SCHOOLY. *(Stands and begins to make his way to the exit.)* That's quite a tale, but I really have to be getting back to my books. My dad expects me to make good grades this semester and I'm barely keeping my head above water.

CAPTAIN NEMO. *(Signals to his crew to grab SCHOOLY) and return him to his seat.)* But you've only begun to get wet! *(SCHOOLY is sat.)* Now, as one descends deeper into the abyss, one encounters the strangest orbs of flesh ever to inhabit this earth. We call these creatures...

SCUMBUCKET and FISHBAIT. *(Simultaneously.)* Peanut butter, anyone?

CAPTAIN NEMO. Of course, the jellyplankton. These ghoulish armies of gently glowing gelatinous forms inhabit the darkened waters of the upper abyss, pulsating through the sea like a millions stars on a moonless night. Composed of nearly 96% water -- barely a life form, some would say -- these gelatinous blobs have devised some of the most devilish means for obtaining nutrition of all living creatures on the planet. Armed with a million poison daggers stretched across the fabric of their tender tentacles, these creatures of the abyss sting their unwary prey -- permanently paralyzing it -- and curling it into a frozen morsel towards their pulsating mouths. A few of these creatures are among the most deadly animals in the world. The sting of the sea wasp, a jellyfish found in the tropical waters of Africa and Australia, can kill a man within three minutes.

SCHOOLY. You mean jellyfish can kill people?

SCUMBUCKET and FISHBAIT. *(Simultaneously.)* In three minutes.

CAPTAIN NEMO. Oh yes. It is said that jellyfish have caused more human deaths in the sea than sharks. Listen to this account of a young Australian girl, aged 11, whose Christmas celebration was cut short by the sting of a deadly sea nettle.

*(He pulls out The Abyss by Idyll and reads it like a World War II movie reel)*

"December 13, 1957, North Mission Beach, Queensland, Australia. When in water about 2.5 feet, about 15 yards from the shore, she gave a loud scream and appeared to be in pain. Her grandfather, who was in the water, grasped her and carried her from the water in an unconscious state. As he did so he noticed a jellyfish about a foot away...light blue in color and about a foot across. When the girl was placed on the sand at the water's edge, her eyes were closed, her lips and nose were blue, and numbers of jellyfish tentacles were seen clinging to her legs from ankle to thigh. A few minutes after being stung she made two successive convulsive movements, and became limp, apparently dead."

Terrifying, isn't it?

SCHOOLY. Are all jellyfish so deadly?

FISHBAIT. Feeling a little frightened?

SCUMBUCKET. I think he's scared.

SCHOOLY. I'm not afraid of anything. And I've had enough of this abyssal agony!

*(He starts to leave but FISHBAIT and SCUMBUCKET grab him. A quack is heard. The duck carrying a rope ambles across the stage. The duck drops the rope, then exits. They tie SCHOOLY to the chair).*

SCHOOLY. What did I ever do to you guys?

SCUMBUCKET. It's you, you fool. Don't you recognize yourself?

FISHBAIT. It's what people know about themselves inside that makes them afraid.

CAPTAIN NEMO. Yes! And our new friend apparently knows too little still! Let me continue. Some jellyplankton form colonies of individuals as long as a football field. Working together as one harmonious string of jelly, they perform all the functions of eating, digesting, and reproducing as if they were a single creature. Together, they accomplish much more than the sum of individuals alone.

SCUMBUCKET. Just like our ship, isn't that right, Captain Nemo?

CAPTAIN NEMO. Right you are, my sympathetic symbiont. Though deadly to the touch, the pulsating motions of these cooperative creatures has a poetry all of its own! Perhaps a demonstration is in order! Immerse yourselves, my friends, in the delicate dance of the devilish jellyfish.

*(Saint-Saen's The Swan begins to play. Fishbait and Scumbucket begin to dance. A video of jellyfish*

*plays against the background. Helium-filled balloons dressed like jellyfish are set adrift across the audience.)*

CAPTAIN NEMO. A beautiful harmonious spectacle, aren't they? And while we're on the topic of life's larger links, we shouldn't forget that these jellyplankton -- these helpless but deadly sacs of water -- ultimately depend on a rain of food from above. Whether eating feces directly, or feeding on the fish and zooplankton that delight in these morsels, all life in the abyss depends on a rain of food from above.

*(CAPTAIN NEMO waves his hands and a rain of candy pelts the audience.)*

SCUMBUCKET. *(to SCHOOLY)*. I bet they would enjoy eating our passenger, too!

SCHOOLY. *(to audience)* It would better to be eaten than to suffer through this madness.

CAPTAIN NEMO. Be careful what you ask for. The devilish deeds of the darkened deeps have only just begun to unfold. As we dive deeper into the cradle of terror, we find ourselves in a realm that is beyond the imagination of all but the most heinous of poets. The horror we witness at abyssal depths falls nothing short of apocalyptic. No stranger to the screams of torn flesh, no less a witness to the churlish grin of these most ferocious predators, I submit to you, the most dazzling and destructive denizens of the deep, the deep-sea predatory fishes.

*(CAPTAIN NEMO points to a viperfish on-screen.)*

Witness the viperfish. Unlike their mild-mannered relatives, the salmon and the herring, these cold-hearted predators slash their unlucky victims with cruel fangs and gulp them down with huge mouths. In fact, this family of fish takes its name from the Greek word for stomach.

SCHOOLY. It's more than I can stomach.

FISHBAIT. Feeling seasick?

SCHOOLY. I think I need some air.

FISHBAIT. One snap of those jaws and you'll be breathing easy.

SCUMBUCKET. Yeah, he won't have a head!

CAPTAIN NEMO. I'm afraid your shipmates are right. These pugnacious predators possess an enormous jaw armed with fangs that snaps viciously on its prey. The fearsome barbed fangs are so large they won't even fit in their mouth. The viperfish swims with its mouth open to offer its prey the full impact

of impending doom.

SCUMBUCKET. (*to SCHOOLY.*) Get the picture?

CAPTAIN NEMO. Their skin is velvety black dotted with thousands of tiny light organs, called photophores, that make these creatures stand out in the night. These photophores have been said to resemble a miniature lighted ocean liner, a decorated Christmas tree, or a legion of glowworms on a cheery Halloween night.

SCHOOLY. Don't some deep-sea fish use lures to catch their prey?

SCUMBUCKET. Much the same way we lured you...

SCHOOLY. I was asleep!

FISHBAIT. Soon you may be sleeping again!

CAPTAIN NEMO. Luring helpless prey has been raised to an art form by the next predator in our carnivorous catalogue. This animal alone holds the patent on a sport heretofore thought to have originated with humans. I speak of none other than the anglerfish.

(*CAPTAIN NEMO points to an anglerfish on-screen.*)

CAPTAIN NEMO. Equipped with an extraordinary lighted appendage that dangles above its head, this bizarre little fish must certainly be the most specialized creature of any that live in the deep sea. Their enormous mouth extends across their head like the grin of a jack o' lantern. Their spiny teeth are long and curved, designed to stab their victims in a single bite. Yet, it is only the females that fish, for it is only she who has been equipped with the curious fishing "pole" that protrudes from her head. The motions of her lure are said to resemble that of a deep-sea zooplankton or another tempting morsel.

FISHBAIT. Like a helpless Schooly!

SCHOOLY. I'm not as helpless as you think! At least I have a girlfriend!

(*SCHOOL is wiggling his hands to get free.*)

CAPTAIN NEMO. I wouldn't be so certain if I were you. How many men in love with a woman have found themselves in the relationship of an anglerfish? For the male anglerfish spends his entire life as a parasite on the female. When a male finds a suitable female, he plants his buck teeth into her flesh and forever holds his peace. Once attached, his digestive organs degenerate and the lip and mouth tissues begin to fuse with the body of the female. Soon, the blood streams of the male and female are one and the same; his eyes fall off, and his testes become extraordinarily large. In short, he becomes nothing more than and nothing less than a reproductive slave of the female. In a short time, he spawns and inseminates her and then, he dies.

FISHBAIT. What a way to go!

SCUMBUCKET. They've reduced the males to sex objects!

SCHOOLY. Are you making this up?

CAPTAIN NEMO. A teller of tales I may be, but I have stretched the truth no less than the sea. Are you game for more?

SCHOOLY. *(to audience)*. Is there any escape from this abyssal madness?

SCUMBUCKET and FISHBAIT. *(Simultaneously.)* More, master, more.

CAPTAIN NEMO. The next creature on our fishy parade needs no introduction. Legendary for its reputation as the ultimate killing machine, no Halloween would not be complete without ...the great white shark.

*(A great white shark enters stage right next to SCHOOLY. SCHOOLY begins to whittle away on the rope using the teeth of the shark..)*

CAPTAIN NEMO. We found this one near San Francisco, a favorite breeding ground for great whites, big and small *(indicating FISHBAIT)*. Faster than a speeding mackerel, more powerful than a small submarine, able to eat tall people in a single bound, this dark lord of the deep swims wherever he wants to, eats whatever he wants to, and never sleeps.

*(SCUMBUCKET and FISHBAIT empty the contents of the shark's mouth, including a human limb and clothing, to which FISHBAIT takes a liking. Once they are finished, SCHOOLY sets back to whittling.)*

CAPTAIN NEMO. Though humans often serve as an hor d'oeuvre on his menu, his favorite foods tend towards the blubbery end of the spectrum. Seal lions, seals, and even whales find themselves flesh-to-jaw with this insatiable monster. Yet, for whatever terrors he inspires, whatever horrible mischief that has been attributed to his name, not even the great white shark deserves the treatment that has been bestowed upon him by an even more vicious and ruthless killer. Man himself has hunted the great white shark to such an extent that great whites are now considered an endangered species. One fisherman describes hooking a 400-pound shark, bringing it on board, and finding the poor fish without its fins. The shark's limbs were cut from its body and the hapless creature was thrown back to the sea to die. Such tragic stories mark the cruel relationship that man shares with the sea. And while we're speaking of relationships, we must remember that no matter what rank of creature lives in the sea, ultimately, they all depend on a rain of food from above (*CAPTAIN NEMO waves his hands but no candy is thrown this time.*) or they starve! (*to audience*) A greedy lot, aren't you?

SCHOOLY. (*Smiling. His hands are now free.*) I like sharks.

FISHBAIT. You'll be swimming with them soon enough.

SCUMBUCKET. Can we drown him now, Captain Nemo?

CAPTAIN NEMO. Soon, my restless remora-fish, very soon. For as we leave the monsters of the fishy domain, we come face to face with the largest and most feared sea monster of them all.

(*CAPTAIN NEMO waves his hands and a giant squid appears .*)

CAPTAIN NEMO. Yes, my friends, sea monsters do exist. This specimen, caught off the coast of Santa Catalina Island, is none other than the giant squid, the largest of all spineless animals. Its eight muscular tentacles reach more than 12 feet long and bulge as thick as a human thigh. Extending from this writhing mass are two specialized tentacles reaching lengths of more than 60 feet. The ends of these tentacles are sharp as a Ginsu knife and studded with suckers that grip with the ferocity of the fiercest lion. While little is known about the function of these longer tentacles, I suspect they may be part of the reproductive rituals of these cartilaginous creatures, functioning to stab a packet of sperm into the ripe belly of a reluctant mate.

SCHOOLY. (*to FISHBAIT.*) I bet you wish you were a squid.

FISHBAIT. Such a short time on board and already he's a comedian.

CAPTAIN NEMO. Giant squids have been reported to overtake a ship traveling at twelve knots, but only one account of an attack by a giant squid on a ship of men has ever been recorded on film. And that attack, as we all know, was directed against none other than the submarine *Nautilus* herself. Witness for your own horrific pleasure, the near-deadly thrashing to which we were subjected by one gargantuan slithering mother of a cephalopod.

*(Video clip of giant squid attack such as in Disney's Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea.. The squid, FISHBAIT, and SCUMBUCKET engage in a mock battle to Moussorgsky's Night on Bald Mountain.)*

CAPTAIN NEMO. Calamari, anyone?

FISHBAIT. I must say, Captain. I find these tales of the deep most illuminating.

SCUMBUCKET. *(to SCHOOLY)* Yes. My brain is brighter already.

SCHOOLY. *(SCHOOLY has his hands free and starts to leave.)* You're mad! All of you are mad! I've had enough of this deep-sea drama. You can't stop me from leaving.

CAPTAIN NEMO. Just watch me.

*(Lights out. Theater in black. The haunting cry of a whale fills the theater.)*

CAPTAIN NEMO. *(Spoken in the dark.)* How many of you have lay awake at night, unable to sleep, surrounded by such silence that you could likely hear a tick breathe? How many of you have found yourself alone, immersed in the milky black of the night, trapped in a strange place, unfamiliar, unfriendly? How many of you have thought you heard something in the silence, but couldn't be so sure? Well, that my friends is how many a sailor lives his life, entombed in a tiny bunk on a creeping ship, only praying that daylight comes before his mind bursts from his skull with madness. Only...the sea is not always so silent.

*(Spotlight on SCHOOLY's face. NEMO FISHBAIT, SCUMBUCKET, and WITCH appear one-by-one in spotlight surrounding SCHOOLY.)*

SCHOOLY. What is happening to me? Why can't I get out of here? How did I ever get into this nightmare?

SCUMBUCKET. You should have been more careful!

FISHBAIT. Words are more powerful than deeds and yours have come back to haunt you.

CAPTAIN NEMO. He who mocks the sea must pay the price.

SCHOOLY. I'm a failure at the age of nineteen!

SCUMBUCKET. You should have been more careful!

FISHBAIT. Your words have come back to haunt you!

CAPTAIN NEMO. Mock the sea. Pay the price.

WICKED WITCH OF THE ABYSS. I'll get you my little pretty, and your duck, too!

SCHOOLY. I'm a failure! A failure at the age of nineteen!

*(Lights up. All except Schooly are in their original positions. Schooly is standing at the edge of the stage. Nemo beckons him and he reluctantly returns to his seat.)*

CAPTAIN NEMO. No one ever leaves the abyss. Like the haunting lure of the humpback whale, the song of the sea fills our veins. It creeps up on us at night and sweeps across our dreams in a cold black current. It sends us back to ancient times when we ourselves were but a slimy blob of jelly drifting helplessly in the murky sea. It taps our primitive fears, the shadows of unfathomable monsters roaming the seas, when the sharp fangs of death snapped at every turn. The song of the sea wraps us in a cradle of emotion and dashes us upon the shores of our selves, spineless, helpless, gutless, afraid. In the dark whirlpools of our mind swims the creatures of the abyss, forever lurking, forever haunting, forever reminding us of the inky void from which we came and the inky void to which we must return.

*(Whale song broken by the sound of a siren.)*

FISHBAIT. Red alert!! Red alert!!

SCUMBUCKET. Man the battle stations!!

*(FISHBAIT and SCUMBUCKET exit.)*

CAPTAIN NEMO. *(Peering through binoculars)* I don't believe it!

SCHOOLY. What is it? What's happening?

CAPTAIN NEMO. We're being attacked!!

SCHOOLY. Attacked? Attacked by what?

CAPTAIN NEMO. By a rock lobster!

*(B52s song Rock Lobster is heard. FISHBAIT and SCUMBUCKET return with harpoons. ROCK LOBSTER appears from the audience. The crew run after it. and chase it out of the theater. SCHOOLY is left helpless on stage to watch. CAPTAIN NEMO exits.)*

SCHOOLY. Help me, please. Someone please help me!

*(Lights out. Music stops.)*

### SCENE 3

*The quacking of a duck is heard as lights fade in. SCHOOLY is napping on the bench.. His boom-box is playing Rock Lobster. SCHOOLY awakens from his nap. He looks at the duck. The duck quacks.)*

SCHOOLY *(looking at his watch)* Wow! What a nightmare! I'm late for class. Thanks for waking me, little guy. Sorry about what I said earlier. *(He stands, starts to run, but stops and looks at the duck )* Hey, know any oceanography? You must know something. You're a duck, after all. Come on, little fella. Let's go ace that exam! *(SCHOOLY exits followed by the duck.. Rock Lobster plays on!)*

THE END

