

LETTER FROM MONTREAL



Hunting demons from hell

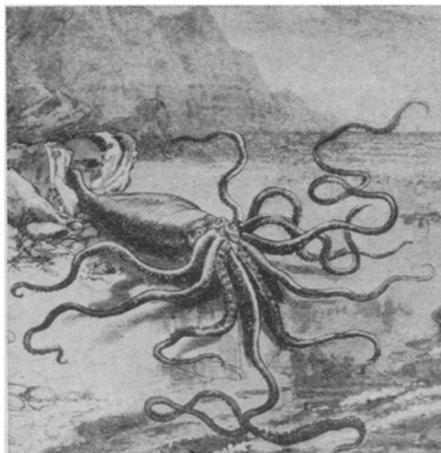
Newfoundland's fishermen are watching for a marine marvel

by Jacques Coulon

Throughout the summer, and beyond, fishermen from Newfoundland's east coast will be keeping a hopeful lookout on beaches, secluded coves and offshore waters for some sign of creatures that have often been described as demons from hell.

The demons are giant squids of a particularly ambitious extension, and the current enthusiasm comes from the fact that they seem to appear off Newfoundland in cycles of 30 years, which means that the next chance will be sometime in the 1990's.

Giant squids are found off the coast of Africa, in the Gulf of Mexico, and off Florida, but the kind of living in deep Newfoundland waters seem to be ab-



Public Archives of Canada
Monster Devil Fish: an 1877 version.

normally large. These monsters, according to some authorities, can measure up to 70 feet in length. And the Department of Biology of the Memorial University of Newfoundland is offering good money for specimens of the sea monster—dead or alive.

The fabulous animal is nicknamed Harvey after Rev. Moses Harvey, a Presbyterian minister in St. John's who reported the first local giant squid in 1873. The creature in this story was supposed to have split the gunwales of a small boat and caused five men to be thrown overboard and drowned.

Marine biologists know little about the giant squids, besides the fact that they exist. Thus the scientific interest in the beast.

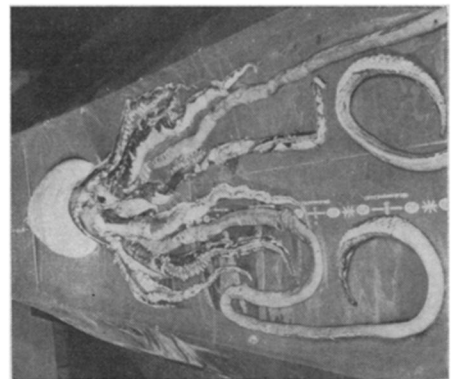
Eyes of the squids found in Newfoundland waters have been sent to Dr. Lorus J. Milne of the University of New Hampshire. Dr. Milne's interest in these animals involves the structure of the optic nerve and the retinal surface of the eye.

Samples of the cartilaginous brain box have gone to Dr. Phillip B. Person of the Veterans' Administration Hospital in Brooklyn: Dr. Person's specialty is the comparative chemistry of cartilages, and these samples afforded him a rare comparative view of the cephalopod.

The current interest in the squid dates back to 1963, when the University of Newfoundland began to gather evidence and information of the animals from local fishermen and historical references. The theory is that the giant appears in Newfoundland waters in more-or-less a 30-year cycle. Following a sensational squid-fisherman fight in Conception Bay in 1873, described by Rev. Harvey, the monsters continued to appear for a few years, then disappeared. They turned up again in the early 1900's on the island's east coast and returned again in the late 1930's.

The cyclic behavior is a mystery. "I am afraid," says Dr. Frederick A. Aldrich, head of Newfoundland's Department of Biology, "I will have to see more of these animals before I would venture even an informed guess. . . ."

Dr. Gilbert L. Voss, of the Division of Biological Sciences at the University of Miami, was the recipient of a live 47-foot squid found near Tongue of the Ocean in the Great Bahama Bank. The



Memorial University
Recent monster from Trinity Bay.

monster, the largest found in recent years, was captured by a U.S. Coast Guard vessel in the midst of a fight with a whale.

Dr. Voss believes the animals may have their spawning grounds and center of distribution in the warm waters of the Atlantic and Pacific and stray only seldom into cold waters such as those of Newfoundland. But this theory explains neither the large size, nor the cyclic character of the appearance of the animals of the northern coasts.