

BUGS is the story of toxic waste and environmental pollution combine to cause a handful of lobsters to grow out of control and wreak havoc on Portsmouth, NH while simultaneously including murder and the search for BlackBeard's lost treasure.

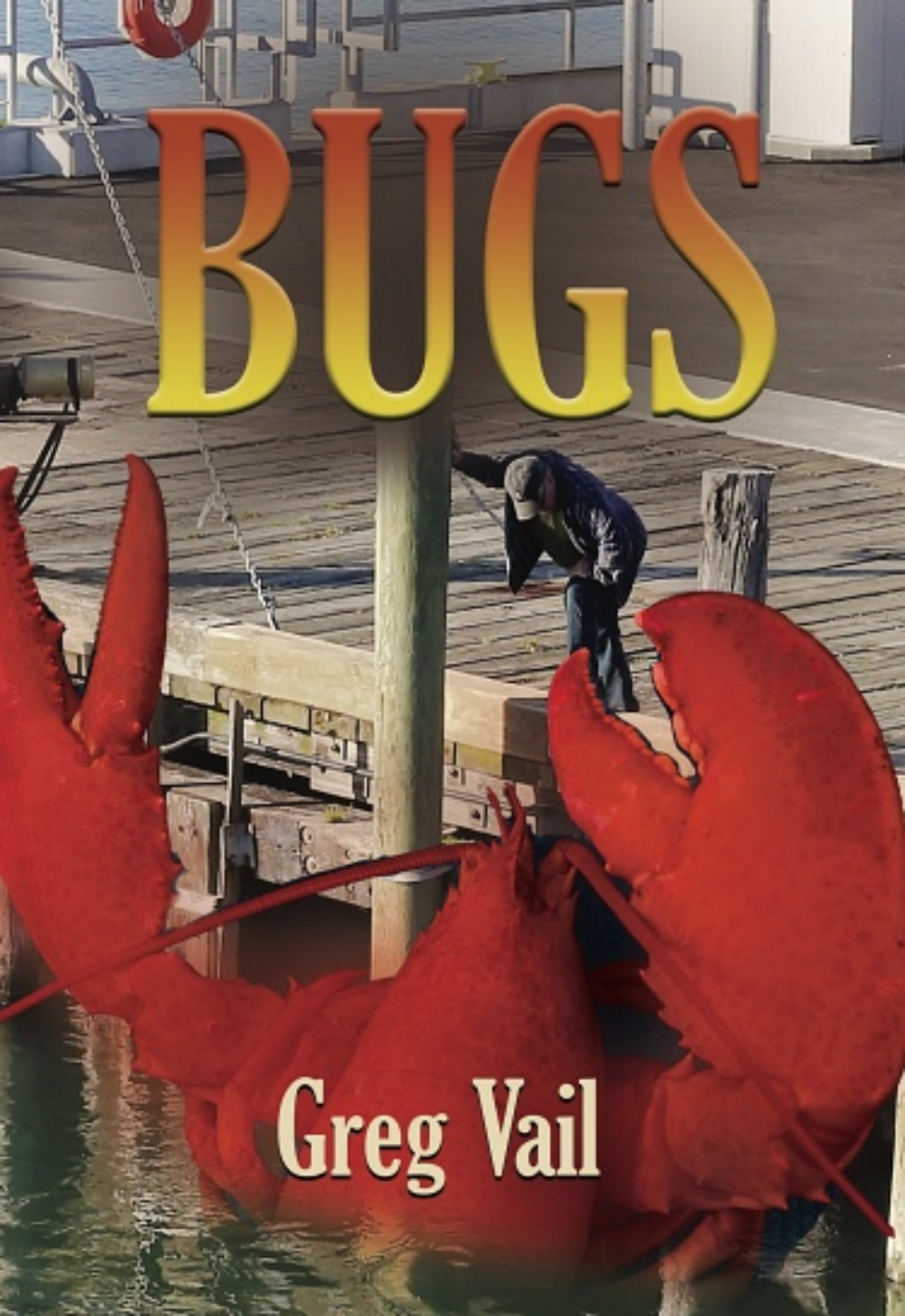
BUGS

By Greg Vail

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A large, vibrant red lobster sculpture is the central focus, positioned on a wooden pier. The lobster's claws are raised, and its antennae extend outwards. In the background, a person wearing a dark jacket and a cap is leaning over a wooden structure, possibly a boat or a dock component. The scene is set outdoors, with a body of water visible in the lower left corner. The overall atmosphere is one of a coastal or maritime setting.

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First Edition

Chapter 12

After hours of slowly searching the river and back channels, Bubba finally found the *Suzy D* nestled among some other fishing boats at a dock in Portsmouth's south end. Bubba guided the cabin cruiser alongside the *Suzy D*, jumped aboard, then pushed the stolen cruiser back out into the river's outgoing current. The stolen boat might drift back down the river for miles with a bit of luck. Within minutes the discarded cruiser disappeared into the early morning's darkness.

It was now 3:42 in the morning, and Bubba was exhausted. He went below into the small engine compartment in the boat's bow, grabbed some life jackets to use as pillows, and soon entered a profound, troublesome sleep. As the ship gently rocked and swayed, Bubba tossed and turned his sweat-soaked body—a victim of his own nightmare.

Bubba's dream led him deeper and deeper into the horrible mind play he had created. He sat on a dock over unknown waters, repairing storm-damaged lobster traps. Though no one was within sight, he heard a number of muffled voices repeatedly complaining

about the current state of the lobster fisherman. One phrase kept repeating over and over: If we don't do something now, we will all go under. Another term among the jumbled grumbling of his nightmare: We are drowning, damn it. We've got to do something—now! Bubba looked up from the dock into the clear, calm horizon, and the *Suzy D* slowly glided into view. The faces of George and Glen were clearly visible as Bubba lurched in his sleep. Glen was slowly pulling a trap onto the boat. As he got it onboard and opened the trap door, bright green lobsters flew out of the lobster trap and attached themselves to Glen's face tearing it to shreds. George was screaming hysterically for help and tried to save his friend, but Glen's face was now incased in blood, with the green lobsters continuing to ravish it. Shredded chunks of pink flesh hung off his facial bones. Bubba sat frozen to the dock, unable to move, and suddenly everything quieted down. Glen turned around, revealing his grotesquely maimed face, and slowly raised his index finger at Bubba, a small green bug attached to it by one claw and said, "So you want lobsters do you? Well, I've got some lobsters for you, and you will get your lobsters!"

Bubba screamed and awoke with a start, his twisted mind a jumble of confusion and fear. It took a full minute before he could remember where he was. It

was 4:48 am, and Bubba's short-lived sleep had ended for the day.

George was awakened at 7:16 a.m. by a call from chief Mortimer of the Portsmouth police. The chief apologized for the early call but asked if George could come down to the station for some further questioning. George agreed and asked his wife to have Crey and Arnold wait for him before leaving the house that morning.

Upon entering the police station, chief Mortimer, an aging, friendly man, introduced himself to George, engaged in some small talk, and then got down to business.

“George, I’ve been over this case with detective Randall. The Seabrook police are holding a fellow named Mike La Fawn, who has confessed to being one of the accomplices in Glen’s murder. He has given us the names of the other two, William Morrissey, known as Bubba, and Thomas Underwood, who goes by Tunny. He tells us he and Tunny kidnapped Glen from the parking lot of the Broken Mast here in town and drove him out to the state beach in Rye, where they met up with this Bubba character. For what it’s worth, Mike

says that he and Tunny had no intentions of killing Glen and that Bubba murdered Glen, though, unfortunately, they did nothing to stop him. Of course, he may be just saying this to try and cover his own ass, but at least we are somewhat sure we know who we are looking for. Bubba and Tunny have both disappeared and are both considered armed and dangerous. We've got an area-wide manhunt in progress with the FBI to assist if it's discovered they left the state. From what they did to your friend, we are obviously dealing with a couple of psychopaths. I would like to get these two monsters off the street as soon as possible. We also seriously believe that your life is in danger, and we are going to try and take every precaution to protect you and your family's wellbeing."

"I appreciate that detective and want to see my family protected but don't worry about me. I can take care of myself. I can't stay at home worrying about these maniacs showing up; I have to earn a living to support my family."

"We have also got another problem on our hands. Somebody else may be involved in this mess. Mike insists that he, Bubba, and Tunny were together when we found the floater—Robert Smyth, known as Cunner. And from what detective Randall told me,

Cunner was also implicated in this mess. Can you shed any light on this?”

“I figure the “Brookers” were also involved in his death. I thought they had found out that Cunner had talked to the police and decided it best to silence him. I’m not convinced they were not involved. Mike could be lying.”

The detective seemed puzzled and disappointed with this answer and decided to change his tactic. “George, I am going to level with you. We have reason to believe that you wanted Cunner dead as much as the others did, maybe more. Until we can prove otherwise, you are also a suspect in the unanswered death of Robert Smyth. Where were you on the night of Cunner’s death?”

“When exactly did you determine his time of death?”

“He was found under the Memorial bridge around 6:00 am yesterday. The coroner estimates the time of death between 1:00 a.m. and 3:00 a.m. of that morning. Detective Randall said you had been with Cunner up until a half-hour before his death. That is why you are one of our main suspects.”

George could not believe the uncomfortable position he found himself in and did not have a good defense. “Look here, chief, I had absolutely nothing to

do with his death. Why would I? He had just given detective Randall and me some valuable information. When I left him ‘round midnight, it was in the hands of detective Randall. He may be the last one to have seen him alive. I went straight home. My wife will vouch for that.”

The chief scratched his head, then put his hand to his chin and again softened his tone. “I don’t deny your innocents, but the circumstances surrounding this case are very sketchy you understand. For now, I think it best to keep an eye on you. Stick around town, George, and be very careful.”

“Sure will; I was planning on doing a little fishing out at the Shoals this afternoon with my brother and his friend who just got into town from out west...is that alright with you?” said George, audibly pissed off.

“Fine with me; I’ll be in touch. See you soon.”

George returned home at 8:30 a.m. Crey and Arnold were seated at the table having breakfast with Cathy and the kids. George had a seat also and grabbed some buttered toast and said, “I can’t believe these cops. They think I may have killed Cunner; Christ’s sake, they must really think I’m stupid!”

“Great, now my little brother has turned into a murderer. I think it is time we packed our bags,” laughed Crey.

“Come on, don’t pick on your brother. I think he’s upset,” said Arnold sympathetically.

“Ya, well, the way he’s shoveling those eggs down his throat, he can’t be too upset,” said Cathy winking at her husband.

“I’m too excited to be pissed off. You guys ready to do a little treasure hunting this morning?”

“Do those life jackets work? What about sharks. Okay, I saw *Jaws*. I know what’s going down out there in the ocean,” said Arnold, very concerned.

“Don’t worry, Arnold, unless you jump off the side of the boat, you won’t even get wet. Trust me,” said George.

“George, I think you’re crazy, always have, but if you want to spend the day playing *Sea Hunt*, that’s fine with me. I plan on doing an oil painting out at the Shoals.”

“I don’t want to dampen your already soggy spirits, but isn’t it a little difficult to paint in the back of a rocking boat?” asked George questionably.

“Who knows, we’ll have to wait and see. Perhaps the waves will add some stroked to the canvas that I might otherwise have missed.”

“Come on, you guys, let’s get ready. Honey, keep the doors and windows locked, and don’t go outside and don’t open that door for anyone unless you

absolutely know who it is. There is a cop outside in an unmarked car. You know where I keep the gun and don't be a stranger to the two-way radio. Call the boat once an hour, but don't tie up the air waves with gabby Creighton, dear," George kissed his wife goodbye and grabbed their lunch and a six-pack of Bud and some bottled water. The guys headed off to the dive shop in the pick-up truck.

George rented the necessary scuba diving equipment and wet suit in the dive shop. He didn't need a mask and snorkel because he always kept one in the boat to untangle any line caught in the propeller or any other unforeseen emergency which may require it. After loading the scuba equipment in the truck, they headed off to an art supply store where Crey purchased the paints, brushes, and canvas needed for painting. Arnold continued his uneasy grumbling as they headed for the dock. He was nervous about leaving dry land. When they reached the landing, George reassured Arnold that the weather conditions and the cooperative seas were ideal this day. They loaded onto the boat, fired up the engine, and were just getting ready to cast off when Arnold reminded George he needed a life jacket. George opened the door and was greeted by Bubba, pointing a .38 in his face.

“You ready to take a little ride?” sneered Bubba. George froze in his tracks. Bubba grabbed George by the neck, spun him around, put the gun to the back of his head, and walked him back outside onto the boat's deck.

“Well, looky here, you and that nigger get inside,” snapped Bubba. “Hurry up and get your asses below you two.” Crey and Arnold moved into the engine compartment, and Bubba slammed the door shut and locked it.

“Okay, skipper, cast off and bring her out to sea, and no funny business, or I'll shoot you dead on this spot.”

“You are out of your mind, you killed Glen, and now you will kill me over a few lobsters?”

“Shut up, ass wipe! You messed with the wrong person. Just slowly bring us away from the dock. Move it!” Bubba leaned over the gunnel to untie the back line of the boat when suddenly the water below him erupted with a ferocious splash and a quick flash of red followed by what sounded like a limb snapping off a tree. Another loud splash and Bubba was gone. As the foaming water was settling, George slowly moved to that side of the boat and peeked over the side. He saw what appeared to be a huge red object moving into

deeper water and then disappearing. George sprung to the door releasing the men. then killed the engine.

“What the hell was that noise? What happened?” asked Crey, visibly upset.

“I don’t know what happened,” said George bewildered, “but Bubba disappeared in a hurry.”

“What did you do, push him over?” asked Arnold.

“It sounded like something fell out of the sky and landed on him,” said George tying the boat to the dock. “All I saw was a flash of red followed by a huge splash.”

George finished securing the boat back up to the dock. As the three men looked into the water, Arnold was the first to notice a large red object slowly approaching from below.

“Jesus Christ,” screamed George, “run for shore!” The three men scrambled up the floats gangplank. When they reached the top, they turned around and couldn’t believe what they saw. A colossal lobster thirty feet long and bright red lunged a massive claw out of the water and swept the side of the boat, smashing part of the cabin's wood and rocking the boat so violently it almost capsized.

“Look at the size of that BUG!” said an incredulous George.

“Mutha F*cka! We know what happened to that missing cracker,” shouted Arnold.

“Look at the thing! It’s not moving. It must smell food. Christ, if we were still on that boat, we’d be dead meat,” exclaimed George.

“It’s moving away, damn you boys grow some big lobsters,” laughed Crey nervously.

“What the hell am I going to do? That thing is probably right near the boat; I can’t let it sink her?” groaned George.

“I’ll tell you what, you crazy mo-fo, I’m not going anywhere near that boat,” yelled Crey.

“I am not looking forward to this, but we better call the cops. Damn, they will think I’m screwy after reporting a thirty-foot lobster that just ate Bubba for lunch!”

The men stared off into the distant waters of the river, discussing the leviathan. After no sight of it, they went back to the truck and drove to the police station.

George, Crey, and Arnold met with chief Mortimer inside the station. All three men tried to explain what they had just witnessed at the dock. The detective could plainly see the men were highly animated and visibly shaken.

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“Okay, fellas, slow down. Now, let me get this straight. A giant lobster grabbed Bubba out of the back of your boat? You all saw this happen?”

“Bubba had them locked below in the engine room cabin and held me at gun point. I was casting off the bow line when I heard a loud crashing sound. I turned around and saw a flash of red, heard a loud splash, and that was the last I saw of Bubba.”

“Okay, then what happened?”

“I freed these guys from the engine compartment. I was retying up the boat...”

“That’s when I spotted it underwater, heading our way. It was huge coming right for us,” interjected Arnold.

“That’s right, we all saw it approaching. George screamed run, and we did. Up the gangplank, and we moved back from the edge of the landing. A few more seconds, and it would have grabbed us for lunch just like it did with Bubba!” added Crey, his voice shaken.

“So you all saw this giant red lobster? That is hard to swallow.”

“Chief, I swear on a stack of bibles, we are telling the truth. Why on God’s green earth would we make up such a story? How about coming back to the boat with us? It could still be around,” pleaded George.

“I’ll come down to the boat and look around, but if I find Bubba floating in the river, I will have to hold you three until I find some concrete answers about what the hell is going on around here.”

“That’s great, just great,” said George sarcastically, “I report a missing person, and you want to arrest me for murder. Next time I’ll think twice about volunteering any information to this office!”

Mortimer grabbed another cop and followed the guys to the pier. The crew cautiously walked to the end of the dock.

“That’s my boat down there tied to the float,” said George, pointing with a shaking finger.

“Well, let’s go down there and have a look,” said the detective.

“I’m not going down there,” stammered George in harmony with Arnold and Crey.

“Fine, you guys stay here. We’ll take a look around,” said Mortimer walking down the ramp followed by the uniformed officer.

“Take a look at the side of the boat and the cabin on the aft side,” yelled George.

After a few minutes of searching the boat and talking amongst themselves, the policemen ascended the ramp wearing a look on their faces implying that they had been duped.

Mortimer said, “George, do you want to level with me now? Giant lobsters? Come on. What is the purpose of dragging us down here? Believe it or not, we have more important things we could be doing right now. What are you guys on?”

The three men looked at one another hopelessly and, together, blatted out the story again, but the detective would hear none of it and was starting to show signs of anger.

“Well, how do you explain the damage to the cabin and gunnels of my boat? Where do you think that red stain came from?” asked the now frustrated and angry George.

“That red stain and the damage looks like you ran your boat into either another boat or the side of a dock or something, but what I’m concerned about at this moment is the truth about your encounter with Bubba. Was he really on your boat?”

“He sure as hell was, and if any of your men are crazy enough, you can probably find his gun right out there in the water. I can’t convince you we saw a giant lobster because if I hadn’t seen it myself, I too wouldn’t believe it...but I’m sure you will eventually believe me because that thing is right out there in these waters, and that beast looked hungry!”

“Sure, I bet it’s hungry. I don’t want any of you men leaving town. I will be getting back in touch with you real soon.” The chief and the other officer got into the patrol car and drove off.

“Now what, I think you just lost your treasure hunting crew?” commented Crey.

“That includes me, for the time being,” added George.

“I’m not getting anywhere near that water,” reiterated Arnold.

The cops quietly agreed that George, his queer brother, and that big black guy were up to no good on the way back to the station. They couldn’t understand why they had been summoned down to the boat.

The guys returned home and excitedly told Cathy what had happened.

“A thirty-foot lobster,” exclaimed Cathy, “What are you guys up to? Some kind of publicity stunt?” After hearing all the details from each guy and detecting no malice, she started to believe the story—skeptically.

“The cops think I’m lying and that I killed Bubba. Forget it, they don’t even believe we saw Bubba. The treasure hunt is off for now, and I’m pissed; there is only one thing left to do, call the press!”

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“George, no one will believe you. They will think you’re crazy,” she exclaimed, twirling her index finger near her temple.

“To tell you the truth, after what I saw today, maybe I am,” said George reaching for the phone.

Chapter 14

Underneath the Sarah Long Bridge, the middle bridge that connects Maine and New Hampshire, Jeff Wormhood finally stopped to rest. Sweat poured down his forehead as he rifled through the purse he had just stolen ten minutes ago in downtown Portsmouth. He needed cocaine, and he needed money to buy this expensive addiction. He was on the run from four local drug dealers to whom he owed money. He was running from six strangers he had ripped off after promising them drugs but instead stealing their money to use for his cocaine addiction. He was running from the few ex-friends he'd previously had after ripping them off any way he could. Most recently, he was running from an unknown woman whose purse he had just stolen off the back of a bar stool in the Broken Mast. She had foolishly left it on the back of her chair after getting up and using the restroom. The sleaze ball Jeff Wormhood swooped in like a red-tailed hawk shortly after the restroom door closed and the bartender turned to mix another's drink. So now, hiding under the bridge as he often had, he felt somewhat secure...but deep down, he knew his time was soon coming to a close.

Inside the purse was a wallet. Snapping it open, he saw thirty-three dollars in bills and some loose change, a few credit cards, a driver's license, and some blank checks. Hidden below the bill fold, he found a small white packet of paper neatly folded into a sealed rectangular shape. His greedy little eyes widened as he chuckled to himself. He knew immediately that inside were drugs, hopefully, cocaine. It didn't matter. He desperately needed something to calm his frayed nerves. Carefully, but with shaking hands, he unfolded the top of the packet and dipped his ugly, overgrown little fingernail into the white powder inside. Hmm...It didn't taste like cocaine; *Could it be heroin?* he thought. He quickly rolled up one of the newly acquired bills and emptied the half-gram packet up his nose with two mighty snorts, one up each nostril. His eyelids started to close in a few minutes, and he felt a tremendous warmth overcome his body. He imagined he was floating on a beautiful white, fluffy cloud, with a warm, gentle breeze lightly blowing through his entire being. After experiencing this incredible sensation for what seemed to be an eternity, he felt as if time had stopped; his head drooped forward. He casually fell to his side, smashing his head against a seaweed and barnacle-encrusted large, jagged rock. Ribbons of scarlet red blood streamed down his

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forehead and face as he flopped onto his back. His body and extremities now in a twisted mess. Though his head was severely damaged from the fall, his mind was still gently floating on cloud nine.

He would have been dead in a half-hour from a heroin overdose if a giant red claw had not sped up the process. Grabbing Mr. Wormhood by the ankle, *Homarus-Maximus* slid him gently over the jagged seaweed-covered rocks and slipped back into the cool, calm waters of the mighty Piscataqua River. That bugger of a beast would be a little sluggish for the remainder of the day after feasting on stoned cold prey.

Chapter 17

When the guys returned home from the meeting with the local, state, and military officials, they were somewhat pleased with their newfound notoriety but justly upset that they were still not in possession of *H-M's* photos and video documentation. They were also curious about what steps were being taken to eradicate the BUGS. They didn't ask, nor were they told any details of the large-scale military operations that were just now getting started in earnest.

Cathy tuned to the morning news and surprised the men with the latest turn of events.

“You guys are going to like this one. As I watched the morning news, a public service announcement came on every five minutes asking everyone to stay away from the Piscataqua River because there had been an accidental discharge of radioactive materials at the Naval Shipyard. All people on or near the river are to evacuate immediately. Everyone is to stay as far away from the river as possible. They say that the spill is contained to the river and not harmful to the air we are breathing. How do you like that?”

“I must say it’s not a bad way of lying. You get people away from the river without panicking the general population and, at the same time, eliminate crowds of spectators. I like it,” said Crey.

“I suppose it may work for a while, but people are bound to get curious. It can’t work for too long,” replied George.

“By then, our video will be out and clear up what is really going on around here, including how much Geraldo will pay us for our air time,” laughed Arnold.

While their discussion continued about the talk shows they would like to appear on and how much money they should get per appearance, the Coast Guard was stepping up their search for the monster lobsters. Another large Cutter had arrived, which gave them two Cutters, two helicopters, and six smaller craft. The Cutters, a Famous Class, and a Reliance Class used sophisticated sonar tracking devices but were confined to deeper waters. The Navy had four mid-sized ships coming down from Portland, Maine, and two attack helicopters, a Night Hawk and a Sea Dragon. These will be joining the search shortly. The Air Force had already flown in two F-15s and two F-111’s. Both were ready to scramble at a moment’s notice. A platoon of Marines was deployed to patrol the shores and rally if the creatures emerged onto land. The Maine and New

Hampshire National Guard were organizing on both sides of the river. Under the command of the notorious Colonel G. O. McKenney, New Hampshire's Army Reserves were stationed on the NH side of the Piscataqua with small arms and assault-style weapons. GO McKenney wasted no time complaining very loudly to his Commander.

“By the Jesus, Sir! I need firepower and not these goddamn peashooters you’ve given us!” His Commander reminded him, Colonel GO, as his men called him, that they didn’t want to startle the public with this military operation. They were only there for “Crowd Control.”

The federal government officials in charge of operations abandoned an earlier plan to capture one of the creatures alive for scientific observations, deciding that it would be too risky, adding additional delays that would likely cause unnecessary deaths and destruction. The local and state police worked the previous night sealing off the waterfront as best they could and preventing any spectators or media from approaching the river’s edge. One of the significant concerns organizing the growing operation was the plan of attack and the best way of minimizing destruction to personal and public properties as they battled these gargantuan lobsters with some hefty fire power. Of course, the

Marines and Colonel GO directing the NH Army Reserve were already prepared and chewing at the bit to blow the hell out of those sons of bitches. HOORAH!

The Navy's huge and genuine concern, along with the local government officials, was whether depth charges could safely be deployed in these urban waters. And how was the public to be informed when the large group of military personnel with weaponry and equipment was reported. It would be quickly observed that this was no ordinary "toxic cleanup." Spectators, and of course, the media were sure to hamper operations.

The mobility of the BUGS throughout the river's main body and back channels allowed them miles upon miles of waterways in which to hide or stay concealed. Though they were all an average of forty feet in length, they remained only ten feet in height in their normal walking position. If needed, they could reach much higher with their long claws. They had the possibility of moving west up the river to as far away as Dover, NH. If they skirted past Great Bay. If they headed east, they could make their way down the main body of the river or enter the back channel, both routes allowing the BUGS access to the Atlantic Ocean.

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Another problem facing the BUG hunters was the total number that had mutated. Two were known to exist, but the possibility of more was likely given the largely unknown circumstances.

As for the BUGS, one of the main disadvantages for them was their bright red color which was easier to detect, in or out of the water. Normal lobsters are a black and light greenish color that offers much better camouflage.

The Brickmen household had stayed around the home, relaxing with the kids and discussing how they could maximize profits through their photos and video tape. They also paid close attention to the TV and local radio stations throughout the day, not wanting to miss any of the latest developments. At 6:00 p.m., much to their surprise, a breaking news flash was broadcast on all the local New England news stations, and the existence of the giant lobsters was finally revealed to the world. The nuclear waste fake news was dismissed, much to the pleasure of the environmentalist, and *Homarus-Maximus*, in all its bright red glory, was introduced to the planet.

The military was close to being fully in place and ready to strike. In the news report, all civilians were strictly forbidden near the river, and local beaches were all closed. An 800 number was plastered across the tv

screen with instructions to contact the authorities if any of these creatures were spotted.

Widespread panic never broke out that evening, at least not with people fleeing Portsmouth. Instead, it became difficult to reach the city as spectators poured in, mainly younger people. The crowd was gathering downtown, away from the river, hooting and hollering as if the Super Bowl was being held in town. The crowds massed along the police and National Guard barricades and filled the streets, bars, and eateries. Oh, how the people love themselves a freak show! The only bars and restaurants closed were those on the river's waterfront, which was now occupied by Marines in full combat gear and armed with sophisticated anti-tank missile launchers, and Javelins. Colonel GO and his squad of Army reserves were finally issued a handful of Stinger missile launchers which ultimately put a smile on the Colonel's face.

By the time the last call for alcohol arrived at 1:00 a.m., over one hundred people had been arrested for disorderly conduct and public intoxication. At least ten fights had broken out among the drunken rowdies on top of all the other mayhem that was growing out of control as more and more spectators made their way into Portsmouth's downtown. As 3:00 a.m. finally rolled in, there were no signs of the monsters, and the

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crowd finally started to subside, leaving only a handful of rowdies and media members.

The BUGS, though minor in brain and intellect, had sensed a need to move into deeper waters because of the increase of bright lights and river traffic from above. The large ships now patrolling also made much noise as they cruised the river and froze the BUGS in their tracks as they passed overhead. Because of this natural reaction and the innate ability to hide and blend into the rocky and debris-littered riverbed, the leviathans avoided detection from the patrolling ships and aircraft with even their highly sophisticated underwater detection equipment. The presence of the military had already scared the BUGS away from the downtown area where they were previously hanging out and feeding on any opportunistic meal that presented itself. Two of the beasts slowly made their way up the river towards Great Bay, and the others were moving in the opposite direction towards the open waters of the Atlantic Ocean.

Branching off the river's back channel and moving inland to the south is Sagamore Creek. This waterway is narrower and not as deep as the Piscataqua or the main branch of the river's back channel. Its mucky riverbed made moving slower for one of the larger BUGS but did not discourage it enough to change its

course. For unknown reasons, this massive crustacean continued its heading leading up and into Sagamore Creek. The banks of the saltwater creek are very gradual in many spots offering easy access to land for the leviathan when and if it chooses to emerge from the creek onto land.

If you looked down the creek towards the ocean while standing on the Sagamore Creek bridge (also known as the singing bridge because of the sound auto tires make when crossing the decks metal grid), you would have noticed that the tide was half out, but coming in and also an occasional boat moored in the creek would be seen to rock back and forth on its own. Some of the boats moored in the creek came close to capsizing in the monster's path. You would have observed a large, bright red hump pushing water ahead of itself as it made its way up the creek at a shallower spot in the creek. Crossing the bridge to the other side, if your night vision was good, you would have noticed the burly BUG slowly emerge from the water and quietly make its way up a beautifully manicured lawn.

Fifty yards up the sloping lawn sits a cute little white cape owned and occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Shultz, who have lived here for the last thirty-five years.

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It was now 3:30 a.m. and the Shultz's lay in bed asleep, as snug as two bugs in a rug. Had they made a habit of watching the evening news, perhaps they would not have slept so soundly. They had been overlooked by the police and were oblivious to the mayhem taking place earlier that evening a mere three miles away in downtown Portsmouth. Except for the distant sound of an occasional passing helicopter, it was just another peaceful, beautiful summer night with a small chorus of crickets lullabying the Shultz into dreamland.

Precipitously Mrs. Shultz was awakened. Had she heard something outside? Except for her husband's light snoring, all seemed quiet. Then she heard a banging sound against the back of her house. It was loud enough to wake her husband.

"John, did you hear that? I think we have burglars?" said Mrs. Shultz quietly but with a frightened, concerned voice.

"Yes, I heard something. You get on the phone with the police. I'm getting my gun and going downstairs."

"John, I don't know if that is a good idea. Maybe we should wait for the police."

"Don't worry, just make the call, dear. I'm going downstairs. It's probably just kids horsing around."

“John grabbed his 9mm pistol from the draw of their nightstand, entered the hallway, flipped on the light switch, and yelled, “You had better get the hell out of this house, I’m armed, and the police are on their way!” He stood at the top of the stairs listening but heard nothing. Perhaps they’d already left, or the intruder was a raccoon or a skunk, he thought as he stood there, hands trembling. Everything seemed in order and quiet. He slowly crept down the stairs and flipped on the living room light—nothing, all seemed fine. He slowly made his way to the living room window, opened the blinds, and peered outside the window. He fell back onto the floor in disbelief at what faced him through the glass.

Mrs. Shultz hung up the phone after talking to the police, who assured her that they were on their way. Relieved, she headed into the hallway at the top of the stairs when she suddenly heard a thunderous sound of breaking glass and splintering wood, so loud and violent that it almost drowned out her husband’s blood curtailing screams. Time itself stopped for her as she listened helplessly to her husband’s unmerciful howls and relentless screams, and the awful sounds of destruction below her continued. It was as if a runaway train was tearing through the downstairs and her poor husband lay on its tracks. Seconds later, the screaming

stopped, but another alien sound followed. It sounded like a garbage truck churning and packing its refuge. Moments later, all was quiet. She gathered her strength and courage and moved to the hall window. She peered out and saw what had caused the explosive, crashing, and breaking sounds and her husband's awful, haunting shrieks of pain. An enormous red lobster was making its way back down their lawn towards the creek, with her husband's limp, broken, bloodied body in its giant, right crusher claw. She fainted, hitting the floor with a loud thud.

Mrs. Shultz awoke to hazy, bright lights with two medics by her side and two policemen behind them. Red, blue, and yellow lights flashed through her bedroom window as she lay on her bed where she had been placed in shock.

"It took my husband! It took my husband!" she repeatedly wailed hysterically.

"Ma'am, Mrs. Shultz, your safe now. We are here with you, and there is nothing to worry about. Could you please tell us what happened?" asked Chief Mortimer.

"A huge lobster had my husband heading for the water. It had my John in its claw. It took my John," she pointed towards the creek as she lay there wide-eyed and mumbling as white as a ghost.

“I so sorry, Ma’am, that’s awful. I’m so sorry,” Mortimer ordered the medics to get her to the hospital and then ran downstairs. “Sargent, get the men down to the creek with their lights but be careful. It was one of those giant lobsters, all right. Get some men with lights to the bridge also. It’s probably moving back down the creek to the channel. I’ll be right back I’m going to the car to call the Coast Guard.

Mortimer made the call and then rushed down the lawn to the water edge. He was shown the trail of blood and where the leviathan had reemerged.

“Damn,” said Mortimer inspecting the trail of blood, “That poor man doesn’t stand a chance. Sarge, Why weren’t these people evacuated?”

The Sargent shook his head and told the chief he would find out. Mortimer grabbed one of the patrolmen and told him to get on the horn and let the Coast Guard know that the giant killer crustacean was coming their way.

“Damn it all, I wish I had a boat. If that frigging thing hits deeper water, we will lose it!” said Mortimer.

The Coast Guard boats were finally spotted a half-mile away as they slowly traversed the bend in the creek and headed their way towards the bridge. Mortimer was now in the center of the bridge with a walkie-talkie in his hand and in contact with the Coast

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Guard. Mortimer told the captain of the lead boat that they were most likely nearing the vicinity of the marauding BUG if it was moving in the direction he predicted.

The only ships the Coast Guard could get down the creek were two smaller patrol boats, each armed with a 50-caliber automatic weapon on the bow and six crewmen per vessel armed with M-16 combat rifles. The boats slowed down, scanning the creek's bottom with their sonar, then the first boat radioed that they had found an enormous hump a mere eight feet under the surface on their starboard side, and they slowly moved towards it. The underwater object was not moving, and it was determined that it was too big to be a rock. Both ships showed their search lights into the vicinity but could not ascertain anything below the creek's surface. Both vessels dared not get any closer to the large object. The Coast Guard Captain radioed the Naval commander that they had affixed on one of the beasts but had no way of successfully attacking it with their limited firepower. The Navy replied to sit tight and move back out of its reach and that they would have two attack helicopters armed with depth-charged, sidewinder missiles and 50-caliber machine guns there shortly. A minute after the call, as the Coast Guard was moving away from the object, a giant red claw rose up

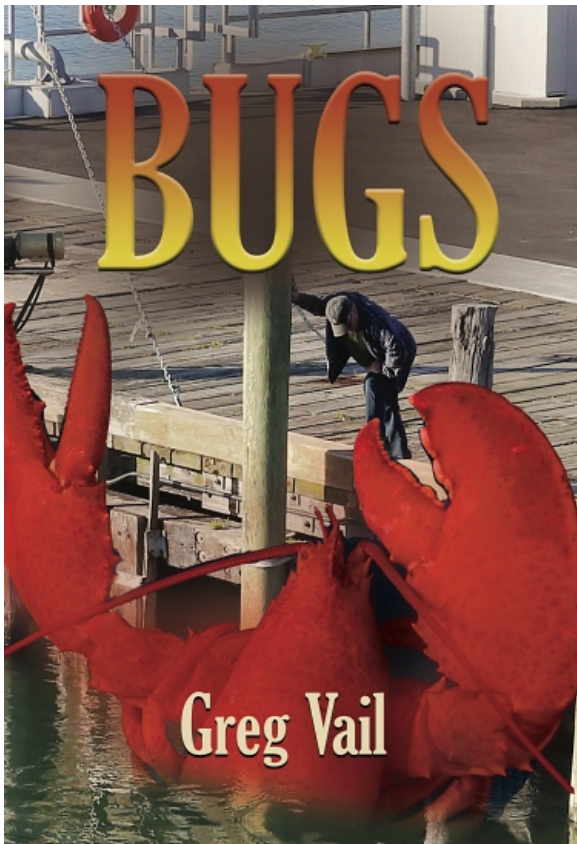
out of the water and came crashing down, barely missing the bow of the nearest boat. Both crews opened fire with their insufficient artillery as the claw quickly disappeared below the water's surface, and both boats rocked violently in the wake of the giant claw. The bullets that managed to hit the enormous claw bounced off it like BB's hitting a metal garbage can. Both boats retreated as they scanned the creek's waters with their sonar looking for any movement. Sure enough, the monster was on the move and heading quickly down the creek for deeper, open waters, a mere eighth of a mile away. In the dark waters of the back channel, at the mouth of the creek, a much larger Coast Guard Cutter awaited. Heavily armed but certainly no battleship, it nonetheless was prepared to try and stop the approaching leviathan. It could barely traverse these shallower waters, but it was the largest ship that could get into the back channel. The Navy destroyer had to wait in the river's main branch, another half of a mile back from this position.

Mr. Shultz became the catalyst that refueled the BUG's strength. It had started moving again once it had voraciously devoured its meal. It was now in forty-feet of water and 600 yards away from the Coast Guard Cutter, approaching it a steady ten knots. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, the Navy's attack copters

Bugs

swung quickly into position and got the coordinates they needed. They radioed the other ships to move back. Both helicopters unloaded two anti-submarine depth charges set for detonation at thirty-five feet below the surface. Moments after dropping the bombs, four vast fountains of water blasted into the sky in close succession, followed by four ear-splitting explosions which rocked the surrounding shoreline and sent up a massive cheer from all who witnessed the spectacle. It would take more than a forty-foot, man-killing, giant red lobster to survive those explosions!

As the waters settled, the Coast Guard moved back into position with the helicopters above, training their search lights on the still foaming waters. Suddenly the beastly, bright red lobster floated to the surface, most of its mammoth exoskeleton blown to bits, exposing what was left of the monster's meat. It rolled over, belly-up. One of the BUG's antennae stuck fifteen feet out of the water resembling a medieval knight's lance. This armor-plated knight of Neptune's underwater kingdom would charge into battle no more.



BUGS is the story of toxic waste and environmental pollution combine to cause a handful of lobsters to grow out of control and wreak havoc on Portsmouth, NH while simultaneously including murder and the search for BlackBeard's lost treasure.

BUGS

By Greg Vail

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