

# Galaxy

SCIENCE FICTION

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The  
Native Problem

By

**ROBERT  
SHECKLEY**

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TRACKING  
DOWN

THE  
"SEA SERPENT"

By

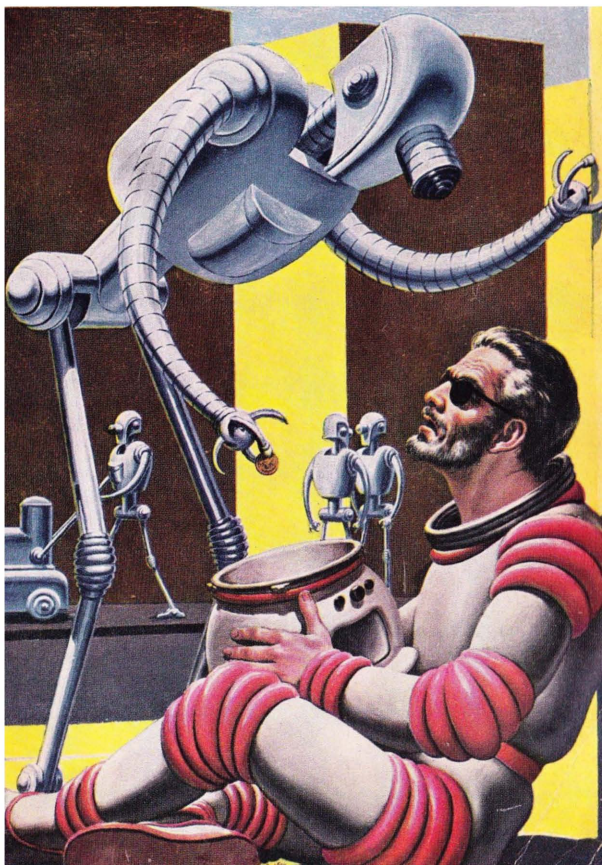
**WILLY LEY**

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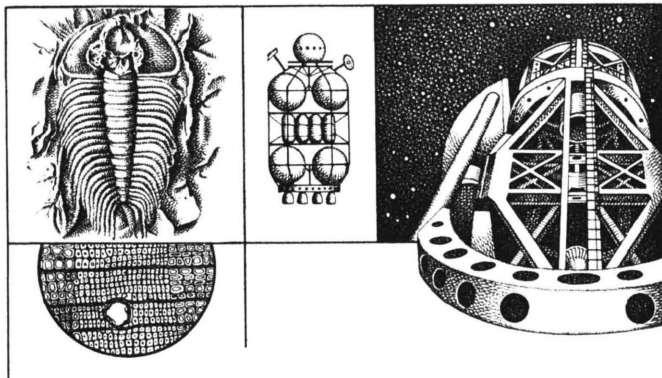
Continuing  
THE STARS  
MY  
DESTINATION

By

**ALFRED  
BESTER**



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OTHER STORIES

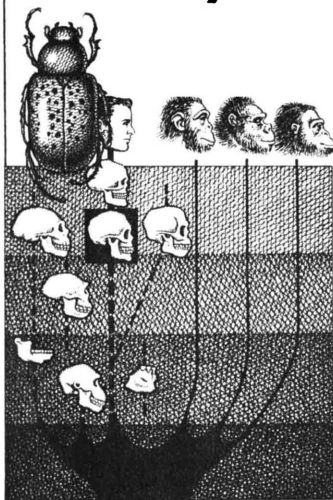


# for your information

By **WILLY LEY**

## TRACKING DOWN THE "SEA SERPENT" PART I

**W**HILE rereading a book of reminiscences of the famous Austrian reporter Egon Erwin Kisch, I came across a little story which somehow seems applicable to the theme at hand. Talking about his days as a newspaperman in Prague, Kisch recalled an old editor whose main function in his later years seems to have con-



sisted of belittling the news of the day.

If a local reporter came into the office with a story of a large fire somewhere, the old man would hardly glance at the report which he turned over to the composing room, but would tell the reporter about a much bigger fire that had taken place some forty years earlier when *he* was a young reporter. Egon Erwin Kisch remarked in his book that if a copy boy, white-faced, had come from the telegraph room with a wire stating that the Emperor (Franz Joseph of Austria-Hungary) had just died, the old editor probably would have replied: "Well, surely you did not expect such an old man to go on living forever."

You know how thoughts often connect the most improbable items that have occurred recently. A day or two earlier, I had received a letter from a reader in which I was asked whether I had any opinion about the tales of the "Sea Serpent." Presumably this letter had been inspired by my article on *Latimeria*, which was on the newsstands then.

But while reading Kisch's book, I remembered that letter and the thought occurred to me what the old editor might have said if the copy boy had brought in a wire announcing that the "Sea Serpent mystery" had, at long last, been solved, presumably by capturing

one or by the discovery of a fresh carcass having been washed ashore.

He might either have said: "Well, surely you did not really expect that all the creatures in the oceans are already known to science." Or else he may have said: "Did you really think that this creature, which has been seen on many occasions for centuries, would remain undiscovered forever?"

**B**EFORE I go into the story itself, it might be useful to mention that one does not have to dig through old newspaper files to come up with stories about something called the "sea serpent" and then have to wonder whether this is a *bona fide* report of a sea captain who simply told what he saw, or whether the story was made up at the office because there happened to be no other news, what with Congress adjourned, the President on vacation and European statesmen sitting out the hot months of the year at the seashore or in their mountain cottages.

There are several books on the problem, one of which, at least, deserved to be called "professional literature." It was published in October, 1892, by a Dutch professor of Zoology, "Director of the Royal Zoological and Botanical Society at The Hague," A. C.

Oudemans, Ph.D. It is an enormous book, nearly as large in size as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and about as thick as one of its volumes, containing 592 pages in rather small type.

It contains reports on 187 sightings of the disputed monster. In all cases where the witnesses were still alive in 1892, Dr. Oudemans got in touch with them by mail to obtain the fullest possible documentation.

Not quite four decades later, in 1930, the second book devoted exclusively to the sea serpent saw print in London. The title of Dr. Oudemans' book had been simply *The Great Sea Serpent* (though written and printed in Holland, it was in English). The second book, by the late Lieutenant Commander Rupert T. Gould (R.N.), bore the title *The Case for the Sea Serpent*. Like Dr. Oudemans' work, Commander Gould's book was carefully documented, with cross-check by correspondence of all the stories where witnesses could still be reached.

It is amusing to see how the professions of these two authors influenced both the style and contents of their books. Oudemans' is primarily a zoological treatise, sometimes dull, with interesting (if somewhat far-fetched) zoological reasoning attached. Commander Gould's book is better written by far and you never have to

wonder about such nautical detail as type of vessel, precise location, weather conditions, etc. But when it comes to zoology, he opened the door to some nonsense, presumably for the sake of completeness.

The same author later published another book called *The Loch Ness Monster* which is not as good a book, probably because it was rushed through typewriter and printing press. Professor Oudemans, then still alive, also wrote a few pamphlets on the Loch Ness monster, both in Dutch and in English. They don't much more than state that the Loch Ness monster, if captured, would vindicate his position taken in 1892.

Additional sea serpent literature can be found in a number of books devoted to the sea rather than to zoology. There is a round-up of the reports I thought most important in my book *The Lungfish, the Dodo and the Unicorn* (New York 1948, Viking), which at least has the advantage over the other two of being still in print.

**T**HE so-called sea serpent mystery can be stated in a few sentences. If you eliminate all the sightings which fail to furnish a reasonably good description or where there is the least doubt about the veracity of the reporter, you end up with about half a hun-

dred reports. They come from most of the seven seas, although the majority came from the Atlantic Ocean, which may simply be due to the fact that the Atlantic Ocean is more heavily traveled than any other.

There seems to be no special preference for any latitude. In the Atlantic, sightings range from Greenland and Iceland all the way south to nearly the southern tip of Africa. There are several along the coast of Norway, one from the English Channel, one from the Mediterranean. In the Pacific, there is one from the vicinity of Hawaii, one from the Gulf of California, several off the California coast and some off Alaska. There were one or two in the Indian Ocean. The only one from Antarctic waters I recall at the moment was most likely a mistaken explanation.

All these sightings could be explained by a specific shape, first drawn up by Professor Oudemans. This being the case, the easiest way out is to assume the existence of a large and officially unknown marine creature. If you do take this easy way out, you may speculate on what it is. Or what it could be.

Let's look at some of the most famous cases now. It is traditional, to some extent, to begin with Archbishop Olaus Magnus of Sweden. But I'll just mention his

name, mostly because he was not an eyewitness himself, partly because he wrote his book far from home, in Rome, at an advanced age, so that mistakes and distortions are to be expected.

The oldest case to be quoted then will be that of Hans Egede, often called the "Apostle of Greenland," on one of his missionary voyages, when off the west coast of Greenland. I'll quote this verbatim:

Anno 1734, July. On the 6th appeared a very terrible sea-monster which raised itself so high above the water that its head reached above our main-top. It had a long sharp snout, and blew like a whale, had broad, large flappers, and the body was, as it were, covered with hard skin, and it was very wrinkled and uneven on its skin; moreover on the lower part it was formed like a snake, and when it went under water again, it cast itself backwards and in so doing it raised its tail above the water, a whole ship-length from its body. That evening we had very bad weather.

**T**HE last sentence sounds a little like a *non sequitur*. What it is probably intended to convey is that prior to evening and at the time of the encounter, the weather was not bad. The later printed version of Egede's journal is accompanied by the picture shown

as Fig. 1, which you will find on the next page of this article.

It is said to have been made originally by a Mr. Bing, who was one of the missionaries aboard; but there is no way of finding out any more how much time went by between the encounter and the making of the drawing. And unfortunately it never occurred to Egede to state the dimensions of his ship anywhere. If we assume that it was a vessel of around 250 tons, which is likely for the period, the raising of the head "above the main top" would bring it to a height of around 30 feet above the water. It may be useful to add that Egede's book contains several rather good pictures of the various kinds of whales seen during the same voyage.

The next report was made only a few years later, in 1745, by Commandant Lorenz von Ferry, who traveled on a small vessel along the coast of Norway from Trondhjem to Molde. The weather was fine and the animal passed close to the vessel, swimming faster than the men could row. For this reason, the Commandant took his gun, which happened to be loaded with small shot, and fired at the animal which immediately disappeared in the water and did not come up again, although the Commandant made the boat wait around for a

while in hopes of a reappearance.

Next came a flurry of reports from the New England coast, most of them in the form of solemn legal affidavits made and sworn to before the Honorable Lonson Nash, Justice of the Peace. The first witness—and, by a curious circumstance, also the last to have seen it—was shipmaster Solomon Allen, whose testimony began as follows:

I, Solomon Allen 3d, of Gloucester, in the County of Essex, Shipmaster, depose and say; that I have seen a strange marine animal, that I believe to be a serpent, in the harbor in said Gloucester.

I should judge him to be between eighty and ninety feet in length, and about the size of a half-barrel, apparently having joints from his head to his tail. I was about one hundred and fifty yards from him, when I judged him to be of the size of a half-barrel. His head formed something like the head of the rattle snake, but nearly as large as the head of a horse. When he moved on the surface of the water, his motion was slow, at times playing about in circles, and sometimes moving nearly straight forward. When he disappeared, he sunk apparently directly down, and would next appear at two hundred yards from where he disappeared, in two minutes. His color was a dark brown, and I did not discover any spots upon him.

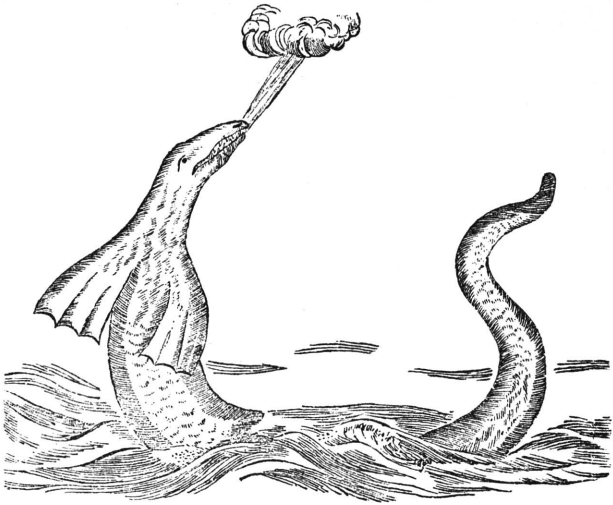


Fig. 1 Hans Egede's sea monster, as drawn by the missionary Bing

This ability of "sinking straight down" is one of the standard features of this series of reports as well as others. Lorenz von Ferry's animal also disappeared immediately under the water when hit.

The next important case, and one of the most famous ones to this day, is the so-called *Daedalus* sea serpent. On August 6, 1848, Her Majesty's ship *Daedalus*, commanded by Captain Peter M'Quhae, had reached a point in the South Atlantic, roughly half-way between the Cape of Good Hope and the island of St. Helena,

returning from duty in the Indian Ocean.

In the afternoon of the date mentioned, *H.M.S. Daedalus* passed a "sea serpent." When the *Daedalus* arrived in London, word about the occurrence got out and was published in the *Times* and the captain was requested by the admiralty to state his position. He then wrote a letter to Admiral Sir W. H. Gage which I'll quote in full, for authenticity, interest and flavor:

SIR,—In reply to your letter of this

day's date, requiring information as to the truth of a statement published in *The Times* newspaper, of a sea-serpent of extraordinary dimensions having been seen from Her Majesty's ship *Daedalus*, under my command, on her passage from the East Indies, I have the honour to acquaint you, for the information of my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, that at 5 o'clock p.m. on the 6th of August last, in latitude 24° 44' S., and longitude 9° 22' E., the weather dark and cloudy, wind fresh from the N.W., with a long ocean swell from the S.W., the ship on the port tack heading N.E. by N., something very unusual was seen by Mr. Sartoris, midshipman, rapidly approaching the ship from before the beam. The circumstance was immediately reported by him to the officer of the watch, Lieut. Edgar Drummond, with whom and Mr. William Barrett, the Master, I was at the time walking the quarter-deck. The ship's company were at supper.

On our attention being called to the object it was discovered to be an enormous serpent, with head and shoulders kept about four feet constantly above the surface of the sea, and as nearly as we could approximate by comparing it with the length of what our main-topsail yard should show in the water, there was at the very least 60 feet of the animal *à fleur d'eau*, no portion of which was, to our perception, used in propelling it through the water, either by verti-

cal or horizontal undulation. It passed rapidly, but so close under our lee quarter, that had it been a man of my acquaintance I should have easily recognized his features with the naked eye; and it did not, either in approaching the ship or after it had passed our wake, deviate in the slightest degree from its course to the S.W., which it held on at the pace of from 12 to 15 miles per hour, apparently on some determined purpose.

The diameter of the serpent was about 15 or 16 inches behind the head, which was, without any doubt, that of a snake, and it was never, during the 20 minutes that it continued in sight of our glasses, once below the surface of the water; its colour a dark brown, with yellowish white about the throat. It had no fins, but something like a mane of a horse, or rather a bunch of seaweed, washed about its back. It was seen by the quartermaster, the boat-swain's mate, and the man at the wheel, in addition to myself and officers above mentioned.

**S**EVERAL pictures were drawn by artists under the direct supervision of Captain M'Quhae (fig. 2 and 3). To this day, they look as convincing as they are inexplicable.

In the wake of the *Daedalus* story, several others were published, antedating it as far as the actual observation was concerned,



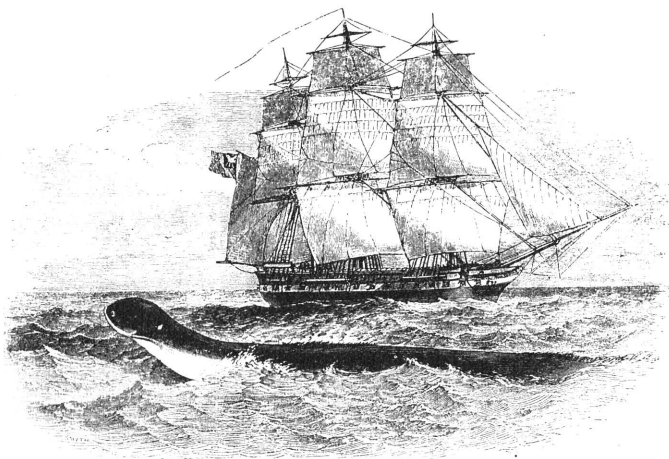


Fig. 2 The "sea serpent" passing *H.M.S. Daedalus*, as published in 1848

but not published until Captain McQuhae had stated: "This is what I saw, whether it can be explained or not."

One of these belated reports is the *Lady Combermere* sea serpent—in the vast majority of cases they are named after the ship from which they were seen—which had been encountered in 1820. This sighting had taken place in the northern Atlantic and when the vessel approached the animal, it "reared head and neck out of the water and after taking a survey it all at once vanished."

Another report was that of the *Royal Saxon*, made by Dr. R. Davidson. The *Royal Saxon* was going to India and was "a considerable distance south-west of the Cape of Good Hope." The water was "fine and smooth" and "it was in the middle of the day, and the other passengers were at lunch." But though there were few people on deck, the captain (Petrie by name) was among them. As for the animal:

It passed within 35 yards of the ship, without altering its course in the

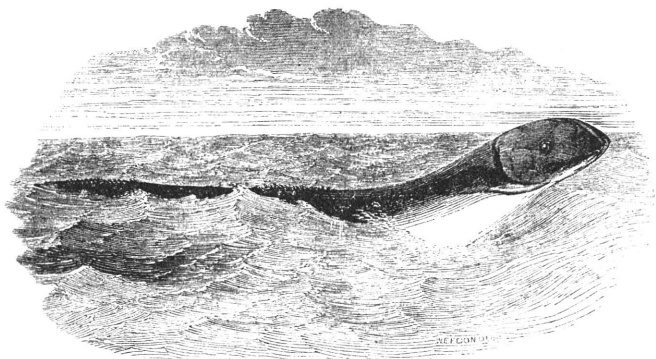


Fig. 3 The *Daedalus* serpent, drawn under supervision of Capt. M'Quhae

least; but as it came right abreast of us, it slowly turned its head towards us. Apparently only about one-third of the upper part of its body was above water in nearly its whole length, and we could see the water curling up on its breadth as it moved along, but by what means it moved we could not perceive.

Since Dr. Davidson wrote his report because of the *Daedalus* story, he was writing about twenty years after the event and did not remember the date any longer. He only knew that the *Royal*

*Saxon* had sailed for India in 1829.

The next well-documented sighting took place only a few years later, a long distance away, on May 15, 1833, off Halifax, Nova Scotia. The observers were four commissioned officers of the Canadian forces and a Mr. Henry Ince who, though not holding a commission himself, was closely associated with the military, being the ordnance storekeeper at Halifax. They were all on a fishing excursion together. The statement signed by everybody con-

tained the following paragraphs:

At the distance of from 150 to 200 yards on our starboard bow, we saw the head and neck of some denizen of the deep . . . in the act of swimming, the head so far elevated and thrown forward by the curve of the neck as to enable us to see the water under and beyond it. The creature rapidly passed, leaving a regular wake from the commencement of which, to fore part, which was out of water, we judged its length to be about 80 feet . . . There could be no mistake, no delusion . . . It is most difficult to give correctly the dimensions of any object in the water. The head of the creature we set down at about six feet in length, and that portion of the neck which we saw, at the same; the extreme length, as before stated, at between 80 and 100 feet. The neck in thickness equalled the bole of a moderate-sized tree. The head and neck of a dark brown or nearly black colour, streaked with white in irregular streaks. I do not recollect seeing any part of the body.

**A**NOTHER report published and presumably written in the wake of the *Daedalus* report was that of Captain George Hope, of *H.M.S. Fly*. Publication took place in the *Zoologist* (1849, p. 2356), but the observation had been made in 1838.

It was really an observation rather than an encounter: "In the

gulf of California, the sea being perfectly calm and transparent, we saw at the bottom a large marine animal, with the head and general figure of the alligator, except that the neck was much longer and that instead of legs the creature had four large flappers, somewhat like those of turtles . . . the creature was distinctly visible, and all its movements could be observed with ease: it appeared to be pursuing its prey at the bottom of the sea."

During the three decades following the *Daedalus* incident, other reports came in, less spectacular than the *Daedalus* story, but most of them just as authentic. And then came somebody who could explain everything. His name was Henry Lee, his book was published in London in 1883, and the title he picked for it was *Sea Monsters Unmasked*.

Most of the time, Mr. Lee said, the sea serpent was merely a string of porpoises. Leaping through the water, the individual porpoises appear to be the separate convulsions of an enormous snake.

Now it is quite possible that one or another landlubber was taken in by such a string of porpoises. But most of the reports quoted speak of a "wake" left by the animal; they say that it reared its head far out of the water as if to look around. Or

they say that the animal progressed through the water at a rapid rate, but that they were not able to see the means of locomotion. All of this is something porpoises cannot possibly do.

But Mr. Lee's main explanation was a creature which, only fifty years earlier, had been every bit as "fabulous" or "mythical" as the sea serpent itself. It was the *Kraken* of Norse folklore, the giant squid.

Actually, the giant squid had an even longer history than the sea serpent. A case of catching and subduing one had been reported by Pliny the Elder. In disguise, the giant squid appears in Homer's *Odyssey*, strangely enough (or interestingly enough) in the same place where Pliny's squid was killed.

While generally doubted to be real at the outset of the nineteenth century, the giant squid had been established as an actual creature during the decades preceding Lee's book. It is not too illogical that Lee may have felt that the establishment of the actual existence of a marine monster should explain all the sightings. So the *Daedalus* case was redrawn as a giant squid swimming at the surface with its long tentacles trailing (Fig. 4). And Hans Egede's sea monster could also be redrawn as a squid (Fig. 5).

It was all very ingenious, but unfortunately it did not fit. The position of the squid drawn to explain Egede is probably an impossibility. And the captain of the *Daedalus*, even though he probably never saw a giant squid traveling in this manner — nobody else ever has — would have given a different description if the animal was so close that he would have recognized a man at the same distance.

**T**HEN came Professor Oudemans and his big book. After, as has been told, quoting and collecting everything ever written on the sea serpent, he sat back against the background of his zoological knowledge and tried to sum up.

The fact that the animal had so often been seen raising its head high out of the water indicated that it could as easily be a true serpent as a string of porpoises — meaning that it could be neither.

A serpent can raise its head when traveling, whether on land or when swimming at the surface of a lake or river. I have watched swimming snakes rather often — and I admit in passing that it usually happened because I threw them into the water to watch them swim — and from these personal observations, as well as the reported observations of others, I know that they raise at best ten

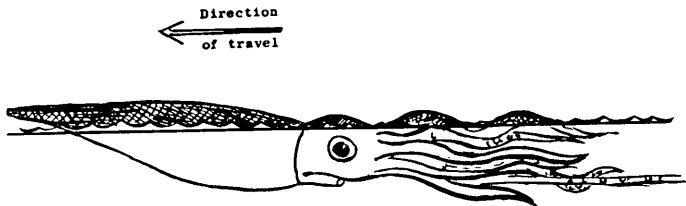


Fig. 4 The Daedalus serpent as "unmasked" by Henry Lee

per cent of their total length.

If the head of the snake is raised three inches above the water, the snake is in all probability 30 inches long, perhaps a little more. If the "sea serpent" raised its head 10 feet out of the water, that would make it 100 feet long, which is at least three times the length of the largest known land snake. Moreover, a swimming serpent, even one of colossal dimensions, would not leave a "regular wake."

Most important, since a snake's undulations are horizontal, no observer would ever be in doubt about the means of locomotion — they would be plainly visible.

And as a final clincher, paddles were seen in quite a number of cases, some of which have not been mentioned in this article for lack of space. A serpent with paddles is no longer a serpent.

Taking all this into account and also the fact that observations in rather cold water are fre-

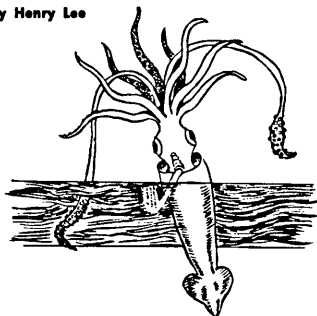


Fig. 5 Lee's "unmasking" of Egede's monster

quent — the true sea snakes which have adapted themselves to a marine life live in the Indian Ocean and other decidedly warm bodies of water — Professor Oudemans proclaimed that it was his considered opinion that the sea serpent was actually a *mammal!*

I have to confess that, at this moment, I feel very much like the TV announcer who is told that he has 30 seconds left to introduce the "mystery guest." Since I've used up my space for this month, I'll finish the story in the next issue.

— WILLY LEY