

# Galaxy

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MORAL  
EQUIVALENT

By  
KRIS  
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TRACKING  
DOWN  
THE  
"SEA SERPENT"  
(Part II.)

By  
WILLY LEY

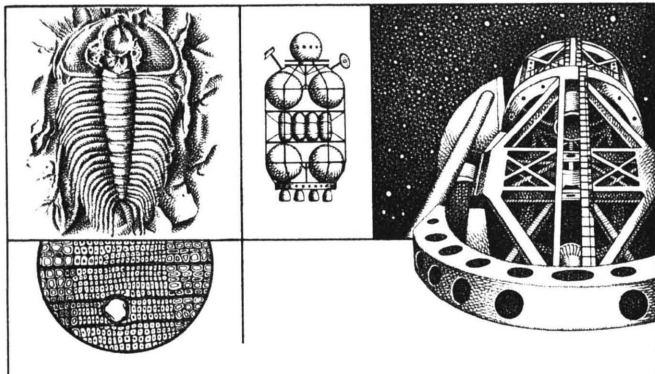
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The Blazing  
Conclusion  
of  
THE STARS  
MY  
DESTINATION

By  
ALFRED  
BESTER

•  
AND OTHER STORIES





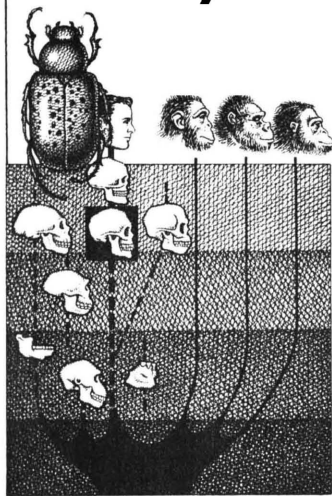


# for your information

By **WILLY LEY**

*Tracking down  
The "Sea Serpent"*

## PART II



**F**OR those who happened to miss last month's issue, it will be helpful to read in the most condensed form possible what was discussed in the first part of this article.

During the nineteenth century, probably as a direct result of a sharply increasing volume of ocean travel, reports about something called the "sea serpent" suddenly became rather frequent. There had been a few isolated reports from earlier dates, but all

the really well-authenticated and well-documented (as well as unexplainable cases) began to come in following about the time of the Napoleonic wars.

The climax was reached, in a manner of speaking, when H.M.S. *Daedalus* returned from India with the report that she had, quite some distance from the African coast and between the Cape of Good Hope and St. Helena, passed a "sea serpent" swimming in the opposite direction at close range.

After this report had been published, others were submitted for publication, written by captains who had had similar experiences, but had either not bothered to have them published or else had felt it better for their reputations to keep their mouths shut.

With all these people telling what they had seen — and mostly in fine weather, so that mistakes were virtually impossible — it was clearly necessary to arrive at some sort of explanation. That the oceans might conceal an animal, even one of large size, which somehow had avoided capture all along did not seem to be a far-fetched idea.

In 1892, the Dutch zoologist professor Dr. A. C. Oudemans published a big book of nearly 600 pages which was designed to accomplish several things:

One, by an exhaustive collec-

tion of all reports, it was to prove that there actually is an unknown animal in the oceans. Two, by presenting all the evidence, it was to encourage sea captains to pay attention to similar occurrences. (More or less directly, Dr. Oudemans' book led to an order to captains of the German merchant marine to have, at all times, a loaded camera on the bridge "in order to obtain photographs of unusual cloud and wave formations, sea serpents, etc.") Three, to make what is now called an educated guess at the nature of the unknown animal.

**WHAT** probably surprised many readers most was the nature of this guess. Dr. Oudemans declared that the sea serpent, in spite of the established and unfortunate name, was probably a marine mammal.

As to its dimensions, one could estimate from the various reports that it might be as much as a hundred feet long, equal to the length of the largest whales known. But in bulk, it was likely to be very considerably smaller. The comparison was then made that the "sea serpent" bore about the same physical relationship to the whale as the giraffe does to the elephant.

What shape Dr. Oudemans ascribed to the animal is now easy to explain, though it wasn't in his day.

Just imagine a brontosaur which had paddles instead of legs and—many reports insisted on this feature—a mane. As for the latter, Dr. Oudemans said, it might be a sexual ornament. Maybe only the males sport a mane. Or, possibly, only old animals of both sexes. Or only fully grown males.

The very next report that came in probably made Professor Oudemans wish that he had delayed publication of his book long enough to include it. It would have been a delay of only about two years.

The report is known as the *Umtuli* report.

The steamship *Umtuli*, commanded by Captain R. J. Cringle, was en route from London to Natal. The sighting occurred while the steamer was at lat. 21°

40' N. and long. 17° 30' W., which means off the west coast of Africa in about the latitude of Havana. The ship still had some distance to go until the bulge of Africa had been left to the north. The date was Monday, December 4th, 1893.

At two P.M., the mate entered "calm & smooth sea" into the log. At four P.M., he wrote "same weather," adding "P. L. 43," which means that the Patent Log showed a run of 43 miles since noon. At 5:30 P.M., he made another entry: "Sighted and passed about 500 yards from a Monster Fish of the Serpent shape, about 80 ft. long."

In addition to the mate—C. A. W. Powell, who made the log entry—the animal was seen by the captain, several members of the crew and a number of the 80 passengers she was carrying. One

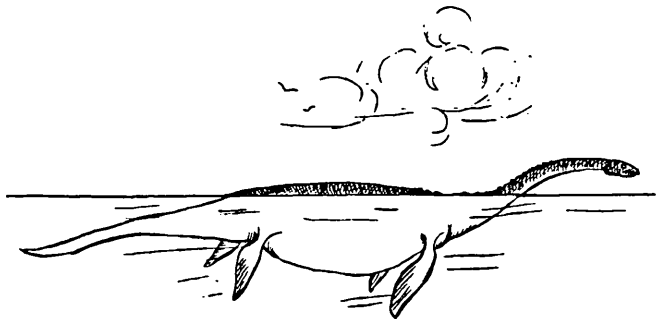


Fig. 1 Professor Oudemans' concept of the sea serpent

Drawing by Olga Ley

of the passengers had a camera on board (still fairly rare then) but was so excited that he did not remember it until later. But Captain Cringle made a sketch (copied here as Fig. 2) and wrote a report in which he said:

It was rushing through the water at great speed, and was throwing water from its breast as a vessel throws water from her bows. I saw full 15 ft. of its head and neck on three several occasions. The body was all the time visible. . . . The base, or body, from which the neck sprang, was much thicker than the neck itself, and I should not, therefore, call it a serpent. Had it been breezy enough to ruffle the water, or hazy, I should have had some doubt about the creature; but the sea being so perfectly smooth, I had not the slightest doubt in my mind as to its being a sea-monster.

I turned the ship round to get closer to it, and got much nearer than we were at first; but the sun

was then setting and the light gone, so that to have run the ship further off her course would have been folly. . . . This thing, whatever it was, was in sight for over half an hour. In fact we did not lose sight of it until darkness came on.

**U**NDER observation, the "sea serpent" repeatedly dipped its head into the water, causing quite a bit of spray. (Did it catch fish?) Captain Cringle believes that he saw teeth when the mouth was open. He could see the eyes clearly. The color of the animal was dark brown and the skin appeared smooth — but at a distance of 500 yards, it would be hard to tell smooth skin from wet fur.

What Captain Cringle saw and sketched was, of course, precisely the shape which Prof. Oudemans had predicted. Although I had some correspondence with Prof. Oudemans at a much later date (just before the outbreak of the Second World War), I forgot to

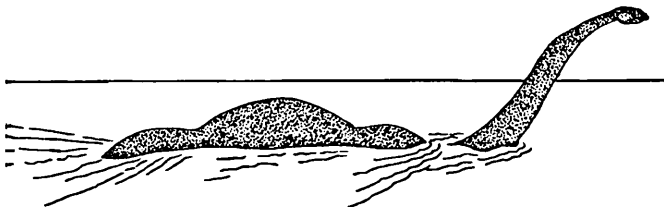


Fig. 2 Capt. Cringle's sketch of the *Umfuli* serpent

ask him whether he ever got in touch with Captain Cringle. I know of no other report which seems to corroborate Oudemans' conclusions in such a definite manner.

But while there is none which does that, there are a few other reports that are even better. So far, the unknown animal had been seen by missionaries, by commissioned officers of the Royal Artillery of Canada, by ordnance storekeepers, British Navy officers, American merchant captains, British merchant captains, by clergymen and by Army surgeons—in short, by practically everybody except a trained zoologist.

This did not happen until 1905 and as if to make up for the delay, fate let the "sea serpent" be seen by two zoologists at the same time. They were Mr. E. G. B. Meade-Waldo and Mr. Michael J. Nicoll, both of them Fellows of the British Zoological Society. They were on board the yacht *Valhalla*, owned by the Earl of Crawford, who used it to escape the British winter, which had proved bad for his health, and who was in the habit of taking naturalists along with him on his cruises.

The *Valhalla* was cruising off Parahiba, Brazil, offshore of the easternmost point of the South American continent, when the animal was seen. The account

written by Mr. Meade-Waldo for his Society (and published in the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society*, 1906, p. 719) gives all the details:

On Dec. 7th, 1905, at 10:15 a.m., I was on the poop of the *Valhalla* with Mr. Nicoll, when he drew my attention to an object in the sea about 100 yards from the yacht; he said: "Is that the fin of a great fish?"

I looked and immediately saw a large fin or frill sticking out of the water, dark seaweed-brown in colour, somewhat crinkled at the edge. It was apparently about 6 feet in length and projected from 18 inches to 2 feet from the water.

I got my field-glasses on to it (a powerful pair of Goerz Trieder), and almost as soon as I had them on the frill, a great head and neck rose out of the water in front of the frill; the neck did not touch the frill in the water, but came out of the water in front of it, at a distance of certainly not less than 18 inches, probably more. The neck appeared about the thickness of a slight man's body, and from 7 to 8 feet was out of the water; head and neck were all about the same thickness.

The head had a very turtle-like appearance, as had also the eye. I could see the line of the mouth, but we were sailing pretty fast, and quickly drew away from the object, which was going very slowly. It moved its head and neck from side

to side in a peculiar manner: the colour of the head and neck was dark brown above, and whitish below—almost white, I think.

**I**N SPITE of the turtlelike head, both zoologists had the impression that it was a mammal they saw. (The sketch, Fig. 3, is a copy of the one Mr. Nicoll prepared for inclusion in the *Proceedings*.) And they also said that the creature seen by H.M.S. *Daedalus* "might easily be the same."

In retrospect, it looks as if things should have built up to a climax about then. After the scientific guess came its general vindication by another encounter; after that, the first sighting by professional zoologists. Next thing should have been discovery.

But it wasn't.

There only were more reports.

In May, 1917, a British armed merchant cruiser, the *Hilary*, com-

manded by Captain F. W. Dean, was cruising around looking for German submarines. The place was the ocean to the south of Iceland. In fact, the vessel was so close to Iceland that the peaks could be seen from board in the brilliant sunshine of an exceptionally clear and calm day.

At about nine A.M., the captain was in his cabin, which was directly beneath the bridge, when a voice shouted down to him: "Object on the starboard quarter."

Captain Dean raced up to the bridge which, he said, took him three seconds. He took it for granted, of course, that a submarine had been sighted and asked: "Was it a periscope?"

He was assured by the officer of the watch that it had not been a periscope. "It looks more like a living thing, but it is not a whale."

Wartime must do something

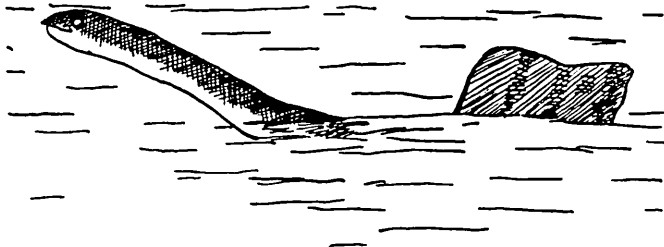


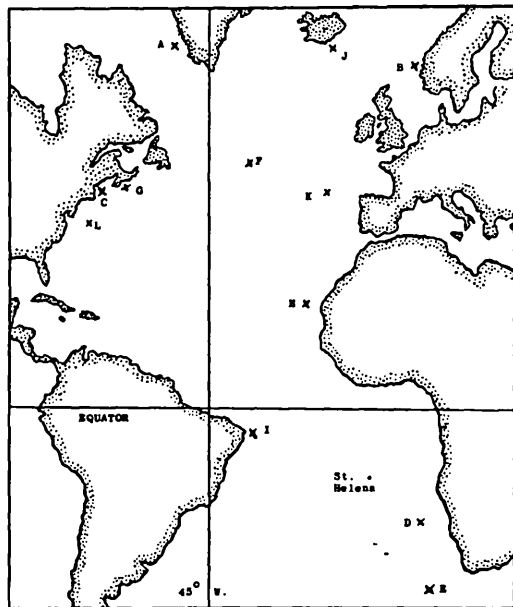
Fig. 3 Mr. Nicoll's sketch of the *Valhalla* sea serpent



peculiar to the nerves, for Captain Dean did not have the faintest thoughts about investigation or discovery or anything of the sort. Instead, he decided that the object, even if not a German submarine, was still a good opportunity for target practice. The gun crews let go with their six-pounders and one may be permitted to remark that they did not shoot

too well. Their marksmanship was such that it might have frightened a human enemy into surrender while still undamaged. Finally, however, one gun crew did score a hit.

The animal, which had paid no attention to the earlier near misses, thrashed furiously and disappeared, never to be seen again.



- A. Hans Egede
- B. Lorenz von Ferry
- C. New England Sea Serpent
- D. H.M.S. *Daedalus*
- E. *Royal Saxon*
- F. *Lady Combermere*
- G. Halifax officers.
- H. S.S. *Umfuli*
- I. *Valhalla*
- J. H.M.S. *Hilary*
- K. Submarine U-28
- L. S.S. *Santa Clara*

Fig. 5 Sketch map of the Atlantic Ocean with the most important sightings

**B**EFORE the shooting started, Captain Dean took a careful look at the animal, which he later described as follows:

The head was about the shape of, but somewhat larger than that of, a cow, though with no observable protrusions such as horns or ears, and was black, except for the front of the face, which could be clearly seen to have a strip of whitish flesh, very like a cow has, between its nostrils. As we passed, the head raised itself two or three times, apparently to get a good look at the ship. From the back of the head to the dorsal fin no part of the creature showed above water, but the top edge of the neck was just level with the surface, and its snake-like movements could be clearly seen. (It curved to almost a semi-circle as the creature moved its head round as if to follow us with its eyes.)

The dorsal fin appeared like a black triangle, and when the creature was end on, this fin was seen to be very thin and apparently flabby, as the upper part turned over sometimes like the top of a terrier's ear when cocked. The fin was estimated to be about four feet high when in the position highest out of the water.

The distance from the head to the fin was estimated at about 20 feet or slightly less by the captain, the first lieutenant, the officer of the watch and the naviga-

tor. From this, Captain Dean inferred that the total length must have been about 60 feet.

Before that, one of the German submarines which Captain Dean was hunting had had a curious encounter itself, but the commander of the submarine deemed it wise not to talk too much about it while the war was going on. He was Captain *Freiherr* (Baron) von Forstner and he might never have written about it if it had not been for the Loch Ness case.

When the first reports from the Loch Ness were printed prominently in all European newspapers, the newspapermen, of course, badgered professional zoologists, like directors of zoological gardens, about their opinions. Since the scientists had not been to Scotland, had never seen the supposed animal reported from there, and had a few other things on their minds anyway, they could not give much of an answer. But one said that all sea serpent reports were so old that one might distrust them on principle and that he would prefer to hear something more than the *Daedalus* story.

Whereupon Baron von Forstner decided to tell him something more recent, namely his own wartime experience:

On July 30, 1915, our *U-28* torpedoed in the North Atlantic the

British steamer *Iberian* (5223 tons) loaded with valuable goods. The ship, which was about 180 meters long, sank rapidly, stern first, the depth at this point being a few thousand meters. When the steamer had disappeared for about 25 seconds it exploded at a depth which we could not know, but one thousand meters will be a safe guess. Shortly afterwards pieces of wreckage, among them a huge marine animal which made violent movements, were thrown out of the water, flying approximately 20 or 30 meters high.

At this moment we were six men on the bridge, myself, the two officers of the watch, the chief engineer, the navigator and the helmsman. We at once centered our attention upon this marvel of the seas. Unfortunately we had not time to take a photograph because the animal disappeared in the water after 10 or 15 seconds. It was about 20 meters (66 feet) long, looked like a giant crocodile, and had four powerful paddle-like limbs and a long pointed head.

The explanation of this event seems easy to me. The explosion of, or in, the sinking steamer caught the "undersea-crocodile," as we called it, and forced it out of the water.

When somebody tried to cast doubts upon this, Baron von Forstner declared firmly that this was what happened and that he "would not give up a single meter of the length of his animal." And

another German submarine captain came to his aid. He had seen such an animal while cruising submerged in the North Atlantic.

Captain von Forstner and Commander Gould then collaborated on a German edition of the latter's book *The Case for the Sea Serpent* in the hope of uncovering more reports. But to the best of my knowledge, none came.

**T**HERE have been a few more sightings, however, in addition to the somewhat dubious Loch Ness case. There is one from the sea near Scotland, one from Alaska and one from the vicinity of San Clemente island off California. But like many others, they are just sightings, probably exciting enough to the people to whom they happen, but nothing really new.

Yet something may happen any day.

I am quite sure that nobody thought of sea monsters between Christmas and New Year of 1947. But the Grace Line steamer *Santa Clara* literally ran into one on December 30, 1947, at 11:55 A.M.

The time of day is so exactly established because the officers of the ship were just getting ready for the noon sight. The place was 118 miles due east of Cape Lookout and the *Santa Clara* had just crossed the Gulf Stream while

sailing for Cartagena. The weather was perfectly clear, with blue sky and bright sunshine, and the sea was calm.

The story by the master of the *Santa Clara*, J. Fordan, which was distributed by the Associated Press, read in part:

Suddenly John Axelson (the third mate) saw a snakelike head rear out of the sea about 30 feet off the starboard bow of the vessel. His exclamation of amazement directed the attention of the other two mates to the sea monster and the three watched it unbelievably as, in a moment's time, it came abeam of the bridge where they stood, and was then left astern.

The creature's head appeared to be about 2½ feet across, 2 feet thick and 5 feet long. The cylindrically shaped body was about 3 feet thick and the neck about 1½ feet in diameter.

As the monster came abeam of the bridge it was observed that the water around the monster, over an area of 30 or 40 feet square, was stained red. The visible part of the body was about 35 feet long. It was assumed that the color of the water was due to the creature's blood and that the stem of the ship had cut the monster in two, but as there was no observer on the other side of the vessel there was no way of estimating what length of body may have been left on the other side.

From the time the monster was first sighted until it disappeared in the distance astern, it was thrashing about as though in agony. The monster's skin was dark brown, slick and smooth. There were no fins, hair, or protuberances on the head, neck or visible parts of the body.

**W**ELL, what now? The answer is unsatisfyingly simple—now we wait.

To doubt that there is a large, long-necked unknown animal in the ocean would be very foolish under the circumstances. In appearance, it seems to resemble the extinct plesiosaurs rather closely. True, they were all smaller than the dimensions reported for the "sea serpent," but this is no argument. Today's horses are also larger than those of the past. Yet in spite of the external resemblance to the plesiosaurs, Oudemans was probably right—the animal does not seem to be a reptile, like the plesiosaurs, but a mammal.

The rather numerous appearances in cold waters speak in favor of this assumption. So does the mane, even if it was seen only rarely, for where there is a mane, there is likely to be a fur. Finally—this happens to be the age of mammals.

Whatever it is, it seems to be an animal of the high seas which does not come close to the shore,

save in most exceptional circumstances. It is obviously rarer than the whales, though nobody can say how rare. But the case of the fish *Latimeria* comes to mind here again. Once thought to be wholly extinct, a single specimen was caught by accident and, since it remained the only one for about a decade, the fish was thought to be incredibly rare. Actually scientists just did not know where to look for *Latimeria*.

One may ask, of course, why no dead "sea serpent" has ever been washed ashore. The claim that just this occurred in one locality or another is not really rare, but when the "sea serpent" could be inspected by naturalists, the claim was always found to be mistaken.

Sometimes the dead "sea serpent" was a half-decayed large shark. More than once, it turned out to be the mutilated body of a dolphin — mutilated not by some sea monster, but by such prosaic an agency as the propeller of a steamship. Quite often, the dead or still barely living "sea serpent" turned out to be an oarfish, also called ribbon fish. This strange inhabitant of the Atlantic will grow to a length of 30 feet and possibly more, being only inches thick.

It is true that there are a few reports of things washed ashore that could not be identified, but

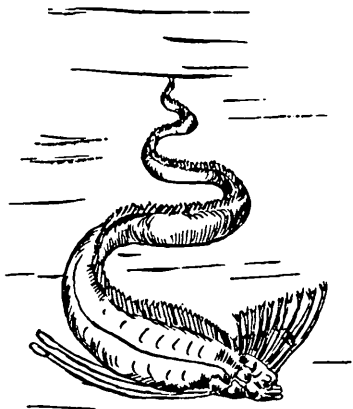


Fig. 4 One culprit — the ribbon fish or oar fish (*Regalecus*)  
Drawing by Olga Ley

they could not even be definitely declared to be unknown.

Since a good number of the various species of whales sink when dead, there is no reason to deny this possibility for the unknown "sea serpent," too. There is no virtue in indulging in long speculations, however, until we know more.

The animal — or various species — can't remain a mystery forever. The oceans are becoming too well traveled and explored to let it — or them — stay out of sight indefinitely.

— WILLY LEY