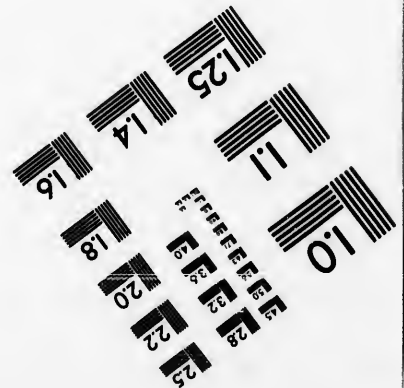
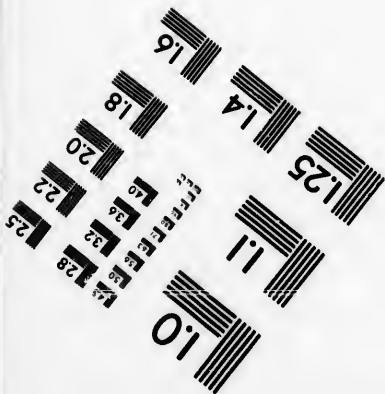
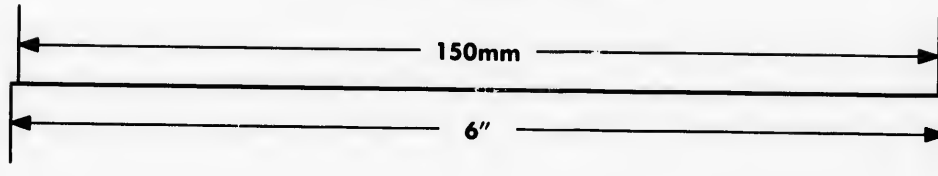
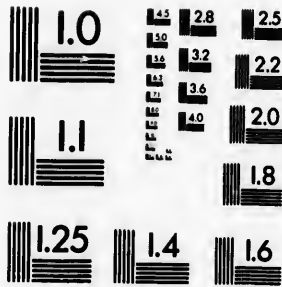
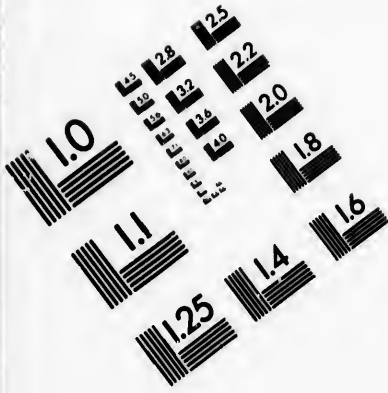


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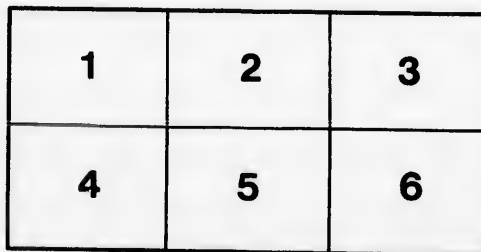
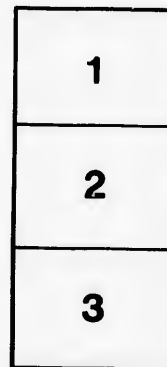
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# THE TADPOLE-MAN



BY WELDON E. STEERS  
ILLUSTRATED BY HERBERT EARLE

*Weldon E. Steers*

# THE TADPOLE - MAN

BY

WELDON E. STEERS



Dedicated to my son ROBERT

and to all who believe in

OGOPOGO !

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# THE TADPOLE-MAN

## CHAPTER I

**L**IFE to Guido Swartzhausen had been a succession of experiments. He had always experimented. From early childhood to adult manhood, those who knew him remembered him mainly as a small, freakish, sometimes fiendish and ever determined youth bent on strange, unusual occupation. He cluttered his bedroom with chemical paraphernalia; he filled the yard of his father's home with coops and cages, rabbit hutches and tanks; and gathered from every accessible quarter the luckless and varied captives which occupied them.

Herman Swartzhausen, a man of normal ways himself, and a druggist of Berlin, Ontario, decided to give his exceptional son an exceptional career. Guido with his one-track mind, almost if not quite a paranoid or mono-maniac from birth, decided that medicine and surgery would harmonize with his zoological and other obsessions. He acquiesced in his father's plan, and so eventually invaded the portals of a University, where his eccentricities quickly won him the epithet of the "Little Crazy Guy", and a measure of notoriety. It can be said quite truthfully that his departure brought a respite to Herman, because, during his son's absence, that worthy and long-suffering gentleman died.

His studies concluded and his degree obtained, and with both parents now deceased, Guido returned to take possession of the property and to step into the modest wealth that the German's thrift had accumulated, with a satisfactory sense of freedom due to the realization that he would not have to work for a living, providing he eschewed the more

prim-rosy and promising byways, and trod in preference and without digression the straighter, narrower paths prescribed by ethics.

But what the ethical code of Berlin, Ontario, ordained, and what the science-ridden mind of this eccentric desired, were as the poles apart. Not for him the precise, meticulous routine of a medical practitioner's life. Rather the laboratory with locked door, the garden of botanical vagaries and the menagerie-filled court where he could indulge his researches ad libitum. Endocrinology became a veritable mania. Dipping into, and disturbing the various life-processes of lower organisms, trifling with amphibian growth, refusing to leave life as it should be and as, invariably, he found it — these matters became the warp and woof of his existence and the ultimate reason why he gathered together his forces and finances, and, with a multitude of laden boxes eventually found himself settled on the shores of Warning Lake, one of the more isolated and lesser known bodies of water within the central districts of British Columbia. Here he had selected a quiet spot, a semi-abandoned farm on the shore of a sheltered inlet; an ideal place to enjoy seclusion and, incidentally, catch all the tadpoles his fervent heart desired.

It was here, then, a few years later another unusual character joined him. Stanalius Verver, with his infant daughter, Celeste and old Mrs. Simms, the latter housekeeper and dependent both, came to the fruit lands of the West and bought a strip of orchard land nigh to the neglected acres of the doctor, and reaching the waters of the inlet at its apex or point where it terminated. Apparently he also wished for solitude, and carried with him the price of his desires. Once the farm was purchased and the little family installed, the neighbor-

hood but rarely saw the owner. He spent his time alone and brooding, or, if outside the house, then vacantly gazing over the lake. It was soon obvious that Verver cared nothing for his farm, but nevertheless paid without quibbling for all the work for which the place called.

Rumour is a strange thing. Men whispered, almost with his arrival, that he had come there to die; that the disease affecting his was an incurable malady brought with him from the tropical south. Stranger than rumour is the fact that they spoke the truth, for Verver had volunteered them nothing.

Celeste, at that time was a child of about ten. When old enough she began attending the nearby school, where indifferently, in spite of an acute mind, she confronted the mysteries of the alphabet and the rudiments of simple arithmetic. Occupied thus and in other ways, she developed during the next two years into the elfin oddity that the age of twelve found her. Slender of build, slim-limbed and energetic, she questioned the world with strange blue fathomless eyes and lived the most of her day outdoors, ranging the woods or else, dauntless and naked, swimming the inlet. Frantic Mrs. Simms, when first she discovered this propensity for aquatic nudity, scolded and protested without either gain or impression. "Naked came I into the world and naked go I into the lake", might have been the youngster's slogan, had she troubled to reply, but like her father, she counted her words precious, and offered no contention. She merely persisted in having her own way, and day after day, from Spring to Fall, swam the secluded stretch of water, entirely divested and quite unabashed.

Verver never interfered. He dragged out his life of listlessness and idolence, hugging the secrets of his being, and leaving his little girl to do practi-

cally whatsoever she pleased. Of the few who met him, none ever came to know him except his eccentric neighbour Guido, who recognized in him a man who shunned the world, and had not long to stay in it. It was obvious that he had money, and did not need to earn; and equally obvious that he wished to be left alone. But perhaps, because of their mutual proximity, perhaps for deeper reasons, of Swartzhausen he made an exception, and quite frequently, the more so as their acquaintanceship ripened, he might be seen going slowly in the direction of the doctor's dwelling.

CHAPTER II

IT was during one of the earlier of these visits that Verver yielded the first real information concerning himself or his past. He had discovered the scientist—the Tadpole Man, the neighborhood had come to call him—busily occupied with several tanks of amphibia, some of which were Mexican axolytls, and the spectacle of these small and inoffensive creatures had produced such an extraordinary effect upon him that the science-absorbed Swartzhausen became alarmed over his visitor's unaccountable agitation. For a moment he forgot his potassium iodide crystals and thyrotoxin treatment; that he stood dispensing to a tray of larval newts, and turned to stare at the man beside him.

"Why do you trifle with those things?" Verver had asked him fearfully, "What interest do you find in them?"

"Plenty!" Swartzhausen assured him. "They can yield me secrets of life, and life interests me."

"Why does life interest you?" demanded Verver in a strange way, and for some reason hard to account for in one of his ilk, Guido had there and then unfolded his ambitions and dilated upon his theories to this unusual man who went into convulsions at the sight of a tadpole.

But he could not fail to notice, even while he talked and discoursed fluently upon these things that so absorbed his soul, the increasing pallor of Verver's face and the extraordinary fear steadily creeping into the lustreless eyes. So apparent did his companion's agitation show itself at last that Swartzhausen broke off abruptly to ask point-blank why the conversation was so disturbing, for the man was obviously trembling.

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"I have a horror of reptiles," breathed the emaciated onlooker, with an additional shudder, "I cannot endure them. The sight of them creates more than loathing—it produces terror."

"And for what reason?" enquired Swartzhausen with a somewhat supercilious smile, for the herpetologist could almost have slept with a "rattler" and shared his plate and his dinner with a Gila monster. "I find nothing objectionable in handling these harmless little brutes. Cannot you really understand," he continued, in tones that bordered on reproof, "what a wonderful thing it is to watch them grow, and yet more wonderful to compel their growth?"

Stanaluis Verver's cryptic answer startled the Tadpole-Man so much that he almost dropped his forceps into one of the tanks.

"Yes, growth is wonderful," the visitor declared, "but its terrible also! If only you knew how things like these can grow; but that you never will!"

The Tadpole-Man, having saved his instrument from immersion with a dexterous grab, continued to stare at the speaker uncomprehendingly.

"Whatever do you—" he began to ask, but the other interrupted him.

"Listen, Dr. Swartzhausen, he said, and pointed as he spoke, to the tiny creatures crawling or swimming about before them, "there are larvae and larvae all the world over, and most of them harmless as are these, but some there are that do not need the help of your wonderful research to make them grow—they can develop monstrously without it."

"I do not understand," exclaimed Guido, nettled, for to him it seemed that his companion had challenged his technical ability or at, any rate,

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his knowledge of such things, about both of which, with some excuse, he flattered himself. "I know my herpetology from A to Z"—this was said quite haughtily—"but never have I heard a statement such as yours before. Why not go further and enlighten me?"

"I cannot enlighten you. What I refer to—what I have seen—is beyond the realm of science: completely beyond it. It was the magic of savages, ghastly, loathesome and incomprehensible."

"Magic!", derided Swartzhausen contemptuously, "there is no magic but this." He lifted, as he spoke, an array of glass tubes set into a small wooden rack. In each tube was an amount of quite uninteresting greyish powder. "There is the real magic!" he cried again, then added boastfully, "and I have given it to Science."

"Yes," nodded Verver reflectively, "I long suspected that you had discovered some clever means of distorting life and transmuting the normal into the monstrous. But there is no need for it. It has been done already, and, as I say,—by savages."

"I do not believe it," Guido exploded bluntly. "Something unusual had undoubtedly fooled you. Bring me your magic, and I will reduce it to terms of simple, irrefutable biology."

Verver shook his head. "No," he said, "I cannot bring you magic to refute, for I hold no proof. I can only affirm what I saw with my own eyes; and would to God I had never seen it!"

"What did you see?"

"You will not believe me, but, at any rate, you shall hear. What I saw was not a survival of the Long Ago, a dinosaur or some such ancient form, for that is what you would have called it,—and you would have been wrong!"

The Tadpole-Man laughed scornfully. "Are



you alluding to those fabulous beasts men claim to have seen in South America, or what?"

Verver hesitated. A far-away look came into his eyes; a look the scientist failed to translate. It might have been horror, it might have been sorrow, and the shadow of bitter memories; and, again, it might have been all or none of these things. When at last he spoke, Verver's words were diffident, reluctant, as if he yielded a secret he would rather cling to.

"I do refer to the southern continent; in fact, to a district of the Amazon. But not to one of your fabulous beasts. What I saw was real, and Severin killed it. And now," he finished quickly, for Guido looked ready with more contention and another argument, "I am going to leave you. The sight of those things," he waved towards the tanks with a gesture of loathing, "has absolutely sickened me, and I must get away from them, but perhaps next time I can interest and just possibly convince you. But not to-day."

He left so abruptly that the man of science had not the opportunity to either hinder his going, or question further. He contented himself by watching his retreat, regarding his weakness and stumbling walk, but, one thing certainly, seemed very obvious to Dr. Swartzhausen. "He's done for," he mentally affirmed, "That fellow has not long to live. And there's something wrong with him that he will not disclose."

But what that something was, Guido, with all his science could not conjecture. So he went on feeding tadpoles.

CHAPTER III

SOME time elapsed before another visit. Stan-  
alius had sickened, and for weeks was unable  
to leave his house. Guido did not visit his neigh-  
bours, except as business compelled him. Inexor-  
ably he refused his professional services to all or  
any, and now he was not disposed to go to Verver  
to seek the cause of his indisposition or offer a  
medical man's assistance. Nevertheless, he was  
acutely interested and waited in the hope that the  
sick man would recover enough to enter his door  
again, and discuss once more the mysterious topic  
he had so abruptly terminated on that previous  
occasion.

But Celeste he did see, almost daily. For she  
roamed afar, and strangely enough there com-  
menced between the two,—the little girl with raven  
tresses and mysterious eyes that were in literal  
truth the shade and colour of the violet, and this  
diminutive scientist with close-cropped beard and  
glossy black hair,—an exotic comradeship.

Celeste had trespassed and entered fearlessly,  
demanding an inspection of his menagerie-like  
premises; and had eventually rewarded him by  
presenting her own contributions of jars of little  
fish and jars again of the inevitable tadpoles. She  
even dug him worms, and on one occasion came  
with a small grass snake, which Guido promptly  
accepted, to subsequently, but without her know-  
ledge, kill and dissect.

Verver's daughter was essentially a child of  
nature, and a lover of nature, who went well versed  
in the lore of outdoor things, of lake and mountain,  
stream and woodland. More than once had

Swartzhausen deliberately sought her aid in his varied and multitudinous quests for the unwonted, and, to all save a few beside himself, the insignificant things that other men passed by, or with indifference trod upon, but with which Guido sought and desired to spend his days and his money experimenting.

Not infrequently he received from far places specimens and consignments required to satiate his whims. There were the Mexican axolytls, for instance, and once there arrived an amazing shipment of baby alligators. Much as the neighboring farmers met the train at Cherry Wharf, where the railroad joined hands with Warning Lake, Guido sometimes arrived in his motor-launch, all indifferent to local curiosity, to quietly load his boat and chug away again, as unostentatious and as matter of fact as if his extravagant freight were common place cartons of fluffy chicks or bundles of orchard saplings.

Quite often Guido discovered Celeste in other places besides his own, and one such occasion he ever afterwards bore vividly in his mind. Without intent he chanced upon her taking her morning 'splash' in the tree-shaded inlet where her father's farm sloped down to the water's edge; a spot she counted her own particular bathing beach, though she had never actually disputed its privacy with anyone.

Hurriedly the little man retreated. Guido shunned women at all times, and the sight of this child unclad and unashamed discomfited him utterly, sending him in rapid and almost palpitating retreat beyond reach of possible discovery. Strangely, perhaps, during that startling moment when his eyes beheld this vision of pre-adolescent nudity, the thought in his queerly-motored brain

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was less of sex than of the similarity between a human being and a frog when swimming. Of course, he had noted the same thing on other occasions, but in this instance Celeste, moving with a swiftness and abandon that literally glorified her as a swimmer, impressed the resemblance upon his mind with more than usual force and insistency.

Never afterwards did he forget the sight of that young body flashing through the water with a lightness and buoyancy that left scarce a ripple or wake behind her. But a moment later, and with a safer distance separating them, he dared to stand secretively amid the trees and cautiously, in fact quite timidly, regard her, the while he cogitated upon so strange a phenomenon.

"That is the whitest skin I have ever seen," mused he, "and her hair is blacker than my own. But what a perfect frog she is."

A most unusual thing for Guido this. To stand regarding the antics of a girl in the water. Bye and bye, but still amazed, he stealthily departed. Then, as he walked homewards, his mind swung back to its tadpole theology, and, Guido-like, he almost, but not quite, forgot her.

## CHAPTER IV

[I]t was shortly after this that Verver brought the white roots. He had to some extent recuperated, and was again in condition to move around, so, feeling himself possessed of sufficient strength, once more he made his way to the doctor's straggling log house, arriving there with a small metal box in his hands.

At first Guido neither impressed nor interested, even when the other had removed the lid, and disclosed the contents.

"Why the roots?" he quizzed, after a moment's scrutiny, "have you turned gardener or botanist?"

"Do not touch them," warned Verver earnestly.

"Look at them, but on no account handle them."

"And the riddle?" demanded Guido, attempting to simulate extreme surprise. "What blood-curdling mystery do these dead things contain?"

"The mystery of death," returned Verver. "There is enough poison in these few roots to kill a whale!"

"But I am not in the whaling business," the little man parried facetiously. "Why bring them to me?"

"Because," explained Verver, "they contain the swiftest and deadliest poison known to men, and I have brought—"

"No!" abruptly interrupted Swartzhausen, whose measure of politeness was but shallow veneer even during his most courteous moments, "I can name a score of more efficient poisons and only skim the list."

"You are mistaken, Dr. Swartzhausen, I assure you, for I have seen this poison kill, and can bear witness to its potency. Nothing is swifter or more

certain, and no poison known to man can leave less trace."

"Marvellous!" derided Guido. "But Mr. Verver, really you disappoint me. I thought for a moment these were dinosaur eggs laid by your monster of the Amazon."

Verver continued to tolerate his raillery without impatience. "I want to tell you about them," he persisted, "because the two people I esteemed most in the world were killed by a distillate from this plant—instantly killed."

Guido pricked up his ears at last and became serious. "Severin?" he interpolated, "the man who killed the dragon?"

Stanalius bowed his head. "Yes, Severin," he answered in a lowered voice, "and another."

"Whom, may I ask?" said Guido.

"Severin," continued Verver, as if he had not heard the latter question, "Severin was killed in front of me by a little dart less than half the length of your smallest finger. Scarcely could lightning kill more quickly."

At this point Swartzhausen dropped his banter. Whatever Verver's story was, the man's solemnity and earnestness were too compelling to be ignored. He changed his attitude forthwith.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "I would like to hear about that. But why not sit down, Mr. Verver, and rest yourself? I want to hear that story of yours,—all of it. Have you forgotten how you whetted my curiosity, even challenged my knowledge of herpetology, and left me wondering?"

"No," said Verver, "I have not forgotten. That is why I have brought you these roots today. These," he touched the little box which he had again covered, "these and Celeste are all the evidence with which to prove that I am not a liar.

Perhaps when I am dead — — ”

But he did not continue. Instead, he suddenly flung his hands up to his face and with a moan bowed low in his chair, convulsed with some emotion that entirely bewildered Swartzhausen. For a moment the Tadpole-man thought the trouble to be of a purely physical nature, but quickly realizing it was distress of mind, he asked in a manner that was kindly for him.

“What is the matter with you? Why do things disturb you like this?” I am a physician. Surely you can unburden yourself to me.”

Verver rose from his chair. “You must excuse me, Swartzhausen,” he said. “I will tell you more about all this some other time; but now I cannot explain. All I can say is” — there was hopelessness, despair in his words now — “that life is hell! Hell!” he reiterated, “and the fiends who did it, the devils responsible are human.”

Again Guido had to see him go as abruptly as on the last occasion. That is, however, the way Verver's story, related as it was in aggravating fragments, began its unfoldment. It was hard to extract, and sometimes Guido compared the process to the chipping away of stone with chisel and mallet. In the end he had a fairly consecutive narrative, but not until Verver had paid him many visits, with occasional lapses in between, when, for days at a time, he lay prostrate and enfeebled, usually quite unable to rise, or even if convalescing, still unable to cover the distance intervening between his own dwelling and the doctor's.

Long, however, before the story was completed, Guido had distilled the roots, to learn beyond doubt, that here, in this instance, Stanalius Verver proved to be no liar. The poison was of the deadliest, and swift in its action beyond belief.

## CHAPTER V

RETICENT as Verver almost invariably was to all other men, perhaps for some unvoiced reason of his own he was now making an exception of his amphibian-minded neighbour. At any rate, after long years of silence he began to disclose these scraps and incidents of his past, and such was the nature of both man and narrative that speedily, although unconsciously, Swartzhausen became well nigh as engrossed in Verver's strange behaviour, and stranger reminiscences, as he was in his own rapt, undeviating study of amblystroma.

So, with a morsel of enlightenment one minute, a tantalizing silence the following, now a riddle flung to Science, next a touch of the weird, or necromancy and even the supernatural itself, gradually Verver unfolded to the astounded Guido the most intriguing legend to which this science-absorbed enthusiast had ever listened.

Sometimes timidly and in hesitation, again boldly and with fervid eloquence, this human wreck from the tropical South laid claim to his discoveries, vowed and re-vowed that his words were truth, until at last by his very fervour alone, for evidence direct seemed surely lacking, he nigh convinced his listener that all he related was sober fact.

It was never a clean-cut yarn; seldom was it clear or specific, but nevertheless, the fact he claimed, the point he stressed was that he, Verver, had actually looked upon the gargantuan counterpart of some huge reptile of the Long Ago, and had witnessed its destruction.

In vain the little scientist ridiculed, challenged each assertion, and sometimes, in outspoken lan-



guage, called his friend — if such he counted him — a liar. Again and again he shot his questions at him. What species was it? What fossil evidence existed by which it could be classified? And always the amazing answer was the same. None! It had no previous prototype; no paleontological ancestry. It was a creation of the present — a ghastly inexplicable triumph of Indian wizardry.

Here Guido, thoroughly exasperated, would leap to his feet, and gesticulate, ranting his expositions; shouting his denials. "Bosh, I tell you! It's all bosh! Away with your spontaneous creation — it's not biology — it simply is impossible. So much for your Indian magic."

Stolidly, gloomily Verver clung to his point. He had seen the Thing with his own eyes. Severin had killed it. And then, finally, almost desperately — yes, he could prove it.

But when Guido asked for this supreme proof, it was not forth coming. Instead, a look of horror oft repeated; a dread that he would not disclose; an agony of mind betrayed but not admitted; — all this in lieu of the evidence that Swartzhausen demanded.

Then, piece by piece, Guido contrived to link the tale together, writing each separate fragment down, adding a morsel at a time and putting each in its place. He did this just as soon as Verver had brought his visit for the day to a close, and gone stumbling back to his own abode. The result was a story that lacked an ending, giving neither clue nor argument to build upon; unless it were this horror unspoken that tinged and overshadowed the whole affair. It hinted, indeed, of some future unfoldment that Verver appeared to dread; some ghastly sequel for which he waited but of which he would not breathe aloud; and with it all was this

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torment of mind and body, a condition in itself difficult to account for. Could this condition be the key to the puzzle?, Guido would ask himself repeatedly, — and did the future really hold a solution?

Stanallus Verver had come to his doors a riddle, and he remained a mystery that the Tadpole-man could not unravel. But for the present, here was a man describing, and claiming to have seen with his own eyes, what practically amounted to a living dinosaur, a creature belonging to a race of beings the Earth had ceased to know. A race that lived and lorded it over all other life during the long Cretaceous. How in the world, then, could one be living now? But Verver claimed that the Thing was recently alive and that his friend, Severin, had killed it. No wonder Guido, thinking the problem over in the solitude of his laboratory, would shake his small, black head and declare his neighbour liar and madman both. The scientist would have given his life to have put his hands on such a specimen, and needless to say the avid carnivore would probably have accepted it.

Splashed with black magic, veiled in mysticism, darkened with shadows of savage necromancy, here the story was. And the one who had told it was this shambling wreck of a once strong man, who shied at a tadpole and indulged spasms and paroxysms of inordinate fear if a sluggish little eft but curved its tail.

When every detail that he could glean at last was written down Guido's version ran as follows.

## CHAPTER VI

WITH his friend and collaborator Severin, Verver had spent years of his life in tropical America, engaged in the arduous, albeit fascinating pastime of exploration. While scarcely a name of geographical significance was given, yet the upper reaches of the Amazon were clearly stressed, and a tremendous tributary, a river in itself of no mean span, was designated, but left unnamed. Almost everything else, that bore upon their adventures remained vague and indefinite. He would not divulge locations, nor betray in more intimate terms the course that they had followed.

Both men were keen investigators. Archeological and anthropological research drew them irresistably into far places. In short, any discovery of scientific bearing was alike grist to their mill, and gist to their joint enthusiasm, and seemingly both were financially fitted to indulge their curiosity.

At last the rumor of The White Tribe reached them, those almost mythical pale skinned savages who refused to be exploited or unearthed, and killed or submitted to sacrifice any inquisitive stranger, white or native, who came their way. There was the question of what had happened to a certain English officer who had gone investigating and never returned. Then finally, and more intriguing than all else, was the whispered legend of the Sacred Swamp and an aquatic God who exacted human sacrifice.

To men like Severin and Verver such bait was magnetic, and with scant preparation they launched out into those jungle labrinths, to ascertain for

## VI

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themselves what fact or fable lay hidden behind such crude reports, and what this voracious deity in actuality might be.

Verver was very indefinite regarding the long trail covered, and casual to an extreme, concerning the incidents along the way. His mind seemed always to waft him back to the spot itself, to hold him there, as it were, and drag him once again through all the vicissitudes and dangers that those days of terror had inflicted. His narrative was ever of the place itself, always of the tribe frequenting that awful jungle fastness. They were, as represented, a race of strangely pale-skinned Indians, Albinos perhaps, yet, even so, they still remained of indeterminable origin.

At all times he spoke of these savages with intense dread, he breathed of the Swamp in abject terror. Seemingly there had been no insurmountable difficulty in finding it. Swartzhausen concluded that the entire route was covered along navigable water-ways; certainly Verver made no mention of a portage or a stage of their journey conducted over land, and eventually a day found their light-draught motor boat riding the surface of the Swamp itself, practically a lake of no mean depth; assuredly deep enough to afford the so called God immersion.

While they were still engaged in looking around them, conjecturing in fact as to whether they had reached their goal or not, the Thing itself rose from the depths, a short distance from the craft, and in a thoroughly ominous way swam towards them. Verver described in vivid tones the threatening head surmounting a length of sinuous neck that emerged of a sudden and moved like a periscope in their direction.

For some ungiven reason it was always in terms of resentment and reproach that he referred

to Severin. Always he seemed to think that they should have left the God alive even at the immediate cost of their own lives.

"Severin was mad to do it," he would say to Guido repeatedly. "Fool that he was — he shot on sight. He killed the God with an explosive bullet."

"The God" was this enormous amphibian, alone of its kind, infesting the Sacred Swamp.

"It was a tremendous brute, registering its weight in tons. No, it was not scaled. Its skin was smooth but tough, like that of a pachyderm; its neck long with a rather snail head, but fortified with tremendous jaws. And it was wise with a man's wisdom."

No matter how Guido ridiculed or protested, how much he questioned, Verver stuck to his point. "The Thing was possessed of an extreme sagacity — and there was only the one."

"Absurd!" chortled Swartzhausen. "Like must produce like. How could there be only one?"

Verver could not explain. "It's not biology" he submitted doggedly, "It's magic — they grew the Thing."

"Impossible!" almost thundered the Tadpole-man, "It cannot be done. It must have had a beginning."

"Yes," agreed Verver solemnly, "It had a beginning. That is where Science is baffled."

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## CHAPTER VII

SEVERIN had, of course, shot at the creature's head, destroying the brain. They watched the monster pitching and writhing convulsed in its death throes, then, before its contortions ceased, it sank from sight. They had resorted to their paddles long before this, partly to converse their supply of gasoline, but as much to avoid attracting the attention that the noise of their motor would indubitably invoke. Now, they approached the far shore, and from various indications around the spot selected for a landing place, they knew that other human beings were in close proximity.

Severin, always impulsive, leapt ashore and struck out immediately, his rifle held in readiness, and following a narrow, but well-marked trail. Verver was still in the boat, rummaging around in search of more film for his camera, when the tragedy occurred.

The way he described Severin's death was all the more realistic because of his sheer simplicity of utterance.

"He just dropped," he would reiterate to Swartzhausen, whenever he told the incident, "dropped without a cry, only fifty feet away from me. I was still in the boat, but I leapt ashore at once and ran to him. When I reached him he was quite dead, with a little dart embedded in his cheek. He never stirred after he fell, and there was no one in sight."

Verver bent over his fallen friend, seeking for a sign of life or the cause of this swift death that had so mysteriously assailed him. So he did not see them advance from cover and draw up around

him. The first he knew of their presence they had their hands upon him, and were pulling him away from the poisoned body of the dead Severin.

He caught a glimpse of the white hands that touched him, and, before he saw their faces, thought, for a fleet second, that he was surrounded by men of his own kind. Next he looked up, and then he knew them for what they were.

He was in the midst of The White Indians. He saw their half-nude figures, the straight black hair, and the wonderful violet blue of their eyes. But the lank black hair, and the unwonted colour-tone of those eye-pupils, and again the over-defined cheek-bones, they might have been Europeans. They made him think at once of the Northern barbarians of Caesar's day, but the heightened malar bones conspicuously betrayed a Mongoloid descent. They held spears in their hands, and their blow-pipes explained the manner of Severin's death, though not the rapidity with which it had overwhelmed him.

"But they did not harm me," Verver would explain. "They never sought to harm me. They always treated me gently, and with a blend of firmness and kindness, just as if I were a child who must be looked after. They pulled me away from Severin's body. The little dart had killed him instantly, and, the poison it was steeped in was of so deadly a nature that it was not safe for me to touch him."

It was from this point onwards that Guido, in his task of extracting the narrative, found Verver the most exasperating. He would commence to recount something, only to pause abruptly, or more slowly and gradually lapse into silence, to remain in a kind of reverie, as if ruminating in his mind over the events that occurred after the Indians

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imprisoned him. As his body steadily wasted, his mental vigor dwindled with it, so that at times he sat in a haze or stupor only partially aware that he was in conversation with another person. But Swartzhausen wormed enough out of him by repeated questions, and the employment of extreme patience, to be able to piece together a fairly consecutive record.

They housed him in a spacious hut, that seemed to be more in the nature of a temple than an ordinary dwelling. Verver thought, at first, that they were rating him a God, but it puzzled him then to explain why they had killed one man and spared the other. It was clear that Severin lost his life in forfeit because he slew the God. Why Verver was spared was another matter. Guido, at a later date, determined the reason and well aware that Verver, during his narration, knew but would not reveal it. It was horror unspeakable that the doomed man seemed incapable of uttering aloud. Reading the sheets over, as he often did in search of more enlightenment, Guido would sometimes lay them aside to debate awhile with himself. "I wonder if he will ever tell me all."

In the course of time, came days and happenings when certain things became plain with a lurid tittle Verver yielded his difficult story, mystery and his own unwillingness veiled the truth, and Guido could not lift the veil.



## CHAPTER VIII

WHEN he spoke of Mara, Stanalius, for the moment, became a different man. He freshened up and even the dullness forsook his eyes, giving place to a perceptible brightening.

Mara was the Indian wife the tribe provided him. Even Guido, disdainful and impatient of all women, appreciated at once the change in his companion when the latter recalled to mind this jungle mate.

"It was I who named her Mara," Verver explained on more than one occasion. "I could never pronounce her Indian name and could not learn her language. I was never good at Indian languages — but Severin was. He could talk to almost any of them after a few days intercourse. It was a gift with him. But Mara learnt a little English, just a smattering of course, but enough with which to get along."

During his captivity that must have lasted several years, Celeste was born. Verver never told of her birth directly, but began referring to her existence as his narrative ran on. Once his mind drifted back to the Swamp and this rare tribe that held him prisoner, seemingly he recalled Mara more vividly than aught else.

"She was splendid for a savage," he would confide, "but then she was not a savage — only a primitive, and no woman could serve a man more devotedly than she served me. Some extraordinary fear for my safety dominated her, so that she did not want me out of her sight. And she could never explain. You see, we could not talk enough to one another. She would sometimes make

peculiar signs to me that I could not interpret, in fact, I missinterpreted them and thought she was warning me about the poison. Then again, the things she managed to say to me in English misled me utterly."

"It was at night she showed the most alarm. She would not leave me to be alone and she barred the hut, refusing to let anyone in besides ourselves. I never came to know the thing she dreaded, not till long, long afterwards, when it was too late. But those fiendish priests — they did their work; they had their way in the end, Swartzhausen! At last she contrived our escape; which was most difficult. But Mara was clever — and she was beautiful too."

Verver did not say it more plainly, but Guido gathered that she used her wiles on one of her lovers; bought his aid, in fact, with her allurements. First she managed to move the boat from its moorings and hide it somewhere where his captors could not find it. Then, cunningly she stocked it with food and other things.

"I was always watched," recounted Verver. "During the day I could move around a little, but at night she almost locked us in, and a chain of guards encircled our dwelling."

But Mara employed a ruse that was clever to an extreme. They had taken away his American clothing so that Verver was dressed much like a member of the tribe. Mara made him take the place of one of the guards — the Indian lover probably. Then in the middle of the night, or whenever it was darkest, she gave the alarm, feigning that she had just awakened to find Verver missing. In the hue and cry ensuing she rushed him to a hiding place deep in the jungle, and later gained the boat where she had secreted it. Because

of the gasoline that, almost miraculously, had been preserved, they were able to strike from cover, and speed beyond pursuit

But they were not quite fast enough. One of the little darts reached Mara, impinging itself in her breast. Verver, manipulating the boat, at its full speed, could only gaze on her still white form, and prolong his fight, with death for a companion.

Celeste must have been more child than infant then, and Verver managed to bring her away safely. His story was for all intents and purposes finished once he told of this last tragedy and the gaining of the river. Whatever further anecdotes he volunteered regarding his return to security were desultory and the scientist found but little that was of interest in them. Much of Guido's version of this narrative was conjecturally written, and what might have filled a spacious book if told completely the Tadpole-man wrote down on a few odd sheets.

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## CHAPTER IX

IT was past the twilight hour of an evening in June when Guido, airing himself in his doorway, beheld Celeste emerge from amidst the stumps and shadows and continue rapidly towards him. She was clad as usual in a cotton blouse, tucked carelessly into a kilt-like skirt that flapped in rhythm with her moving knees; her legs were stockingless and her feet shod with canvas tennis shoes.

Less usual than her garb was the fact that throughout that livelong day she had put in no appearance, for during the past year and more the girl had rarely, if ever, missed her daily inspection of Guido's premises and the wonders of his meticulously arranged laboratory. She came that evening with unwonted haste and the Tadpole man knew well that something out of the ordinary had happened. For the ways of Celeste Verver were at almost all times easy going and she seldom hurried herself about anything. Instead, she sauntered or strolled in leisurely dignity, disdaining such matters as clocks or punctuality, all things in fact that made or were made for order and decorum. Celeste was a wilding, but her wildness was the silent, quiescent kind, displayed without flutter or hurry. So, as she came so late and walked so fast, it was easy for Guido to infer her errand, and sense at once that it had reference to her father and his condition.

For the visits had ceased entirely and during the last twelve months his neighbor had remained at his home, too enfeebled to venture away from the buildings, and more recently, unable to leave his room. Guido had not been to see him, and so far

had not been called upon in a professional capacity. But now he knew that the summons to attend was poised on Celeste's red lips and would be voiced within the minute.

So he waited expectantly, watching her approach, noting the while her quick decisive step, and the display of strength that seemed to flow from her. The swing of her slim young limbs, the abandon of every movement, were contrast indeed to her father's wavering gait and ever apparent weakness, aspects familiar enough a little while ago, before Verver had ceased his coming to the scientist's dwelling. Guido's thoughts at that moment centered less on the girl approaching than on her father, when at last she reached his threshold, and, without pause or preamble, made known the reason of her haste by confirming his conjecture.

"We want you over at once," she announced. "I think that Dad is dying."

He could not resist a callous answer; that was his nature.

"Your father has been dying for a long time," he bluntly told her. "What good can I do him?"

Celeste flamed instantly.

"Are you too mean to come?" she flashed back. "He's been asking for you all this evening."

"I am not refusing," the herpetologist reassured her. "I knew he would send for me sooner or later. I have waited for just this occasion. But, I warn you, I can do nothing for him—your father is done for."

Celeste was not the kind to flinch from verbal cruelty; his manner stirred hot anger in her breast, but then again she was used to him and, young as she was, in a measure understood him. Invariably she dealt with him with a sharpened tongue. She employed it now.

"I know he's done for. Dad can never live; but that should not stop you from acting like a neighbor, should it? He wants to see you, and I came to tell you so."

"He shall have his wish. But you know that I never attend sick persons. I am not a practitioner and I have not the time."

The girl's short laugh was as full of scorn as it was devoid of mirth.

"Yes," she shot back, "everybody knows it. And they know that you have no time for anything except those wiggling things." She included the entire laboratory in one exasperated gesture. You think more of them than you do of people. Human beings don't matter to you."

"No," agreed Guido complacently, "they don't, not as a rule. But your father is different, and I will do what I can for him. So, if you are ready, we will go back at once."

"I am not going back now," Celeste informed him decisively. "I have been indoors all day, and I am sick of the house. You go over now and I'll come later on. I'm going for a swim first."

"Do you go swimming at this time of day?" asked Guido in surprise. "Why, it's after eight o'clock!"

"That's nothing. If you can swim by day, you can swim by night, can't you?" contended Celeste in a superior way, as if herpetologists and surgeons could not be brought to follow comprehendingly so logical an argument. "Or do you think the moon will frighten me?"

Guido shrugged. "Do as you please," was all he could say.

He did not understand Celeste, but considered her unique among her sex, and in his father's tongue, "ein Ding am Dich"; but then, as he did

not know women, he could not be expected to agree with the rest of the world that they were, one and all, enigmas. He decided again that Celeste was most unusual, a decision he had arrived at many times before. And the Tadpole-man undoubtedly was right, for Celeste was just as unique in her strange way as the doctor was in his. They were not two of a kind, being vastly different from one another. They were merely two eccentrics harmonizing in an antagonistic kind of way, and their mutual attraction was the real enigma.

Celeste, being altogether accustomed to doing as she pleased, went swimming; while Guido, alone but obedient, traversed the intervening acres between his own bedraggled land and his neighbor's orchards—to see what could be seen, and to learn what could be learned of Stanalius Verver and his secrets.

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## CHAPTER X

FOR the first time since setting foot on the shores of Warning Lake, Swartzhausen went professionally to the house of a fellow human, to officiate or rather, ostensibly to officiate—as a ministering practitioner. Yet if truth be told, it was no errand of mercy that took him to the door of the Verver home. Apart from the extraordinary features that the case presented, for all he cared Stanalius could die and every denizen of the district die with him. But the man who summoned him to his side that night had piqued his curiosity a year ago, stirred his scientific zest and shaken his skepticism with that extravagant story of an aquatic God and white Indians; a reptile, deified by savages, that demanded human sacrifice, and answered the description of a Mesozoic Saurian, a demi—or fully aquatic carnivore, calling to mind such terrible depredators as Laelaps or Tyrannosaur. It was a tale that awoke the long dead past and stirred the ashes of an age so far remote that the years intervening between them and the present could be only vaguely reckoned in untold millions. Surely it was worth the breaking of his, so far, invariable rule never to respond to the summons of a sick neighbor.

He found the stricken man, on arrival in his room, stretched out in bed and in ordinary night attire, his form so shrunken, so diminished as to be hardly detectable beneath the coverings. But the head on the pillow told its own tale; the eyes that stared, not at Guido, but vacantly or wildly about the place, were the eyes of a being driven mad by some excruciating torment.

Guido drew up a chair by the bed, setting an



extemporised case on the floor near his feet. He had promptly locked out old Mrs. Simms who both scared and bothered him. Now, securely closeted with the man who would not finish his story, but had left it instead only three parts told, the herpetologist thought it worth his time to wait in patience and see what new unfolding the night might yield. He had come with this one purpose only, to wrest from the human wreck, laid low before him, the two-fold secret, embracing Verver's peculiar emaciation and its relationship to the God of the Sacred Swamp.

Verver was semi-conscious, though keeping up a continuous muttering in half coherent phrases, and Guido, listening intently, succeeded only in catching a chance word here and there; even to his keen ears the most was unintelligible.

Certainly the suffering man's appearance presented but little promise of hope or cure. The flesh was wasted, life at its lowest. As if his body had been drained of its blood by the lips of a Vampire, Stanatius Verver lay moaning and mumbling, presenting indeed the aspect of a living skeleton, a matter of parchmented skin draping a framework of bone, and so nearly poised on the brink of death's abyss, that Swartzhausen, callously yet curiously viewing him, found himself debating if there were any knowledge of surgery that could possibly restore him.

Could human agency resuscitate this emaciated being, and surgical skill fill again the veins with blood, restore color to ashen cheeks, brightness to leaden eyes? Could his own powers accomplish it, or would his unusual science prove impotent against the ravages of the mysterious, lurking thing that, during the past years, had steadily converted Verver into this ghastly remnant of a once strong

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man? Could Guido's cunning hand and brain re-  
build this wreck, or was the last chance irretrievably  
gone?

Swartzhausen shook his small, black-bearded  
head. Verver was as good as dead already; ought,  
in fact, to be dead. Why bother with him? So  
the cold man of science discussed the problem; and  
sat and waited through the hours, idle, emotionless,  
but well content to observe, to listen, and perchance  
to learn.

And if the moans that broke from those dry  
lips bore burthen of strange things, equally extreme  
were the thoughts now shaping in the watcher's  
mind. As if some shadowy tempter juggled with  
them, like phantoms danced the letters spelling out  
their urge. "Why not?—Why not?"—they seemed  
to read. "Why not try out the poison? Without  
your help he cannot live, and the best that you can  
do is but a fighting chance."

It was Verver himself who answered the doc-  
tor's problem.

Feebly he turned on his side towards the  
presence by his bed, and, so poised, remained for a  
moment regarding him. Then, as recognition  
seemed to dawn, of a sudden he spoke, and the man  
addressed noted with surprise that Stanalius was  
fully conscious now. Furthermore his speech,  
though weak, was clear, so that the scientist heard  
and understood distinctly. So pointed was the  
question it contained, so abruptly spoken, that the  
speaker might have read Swartzhausen's mind,  
for very near to the latter's thoughts was the gist  
of Verver's words.

"Swartzhausen," he asked, "have you brought  
the poison?"

It startled Guido from his guilty reverie.

"No," he lied hastily, "why should I bring it?"

Yet seldom did this man of science and of meticulous ways forget a detail when he went a-questing, and, safe in his pocket a small black leather case reclined, and within it a carefully shielded row of hypodermic needles—the distillate from the Indian roots. At one end of the case a slender, fragile tube, transparent as ether, translucent with death, more distillate!

For a moment or so Stanalius lay silent. When he spoke again it was as if his mind had wandered back to far-off places. His words, still spoken low, seemed stronger and more cryptic than ever he voiced before. Yet were they in actuality an argument addressed to Guido, for the man who asked for death sensed that he had been treated to a lie.

"They gave it to me in the jungle," he commenced again. "They gave it in mockery or mercy, I know not which. Sometimes I think it was given for one to use at the last—when this Thing had done its work and laid low its victim. Just like you find me now, Swartzhausen, cast down, done for."

"They use it on their weapons; they kill with it always. Drink it and you die; mingle it with your blood and you are dead! They were wonderful things, those pale, white roots, deadly, efficient—and sometimes merciful

"You must be merciful now, Swartzhausen, that was why I brought them to you. The time has come when I can no longer endure. Will you release me? Or are you afraid? Be merciful, I beg, be merciful!"

"What do you mean?" dissembled Guido, "I cannot give you the poison. Surely you know that."

He knew so well what Verver meant; knew on his own part that he wanted to do this thing, and

was afraid; and knew, in spite of his fear, that death would be instantaneous; the traces of poison hardly, if at all, detectable. He had tested its powers so often, and Guido was not the man to fumble his experiments

He sat guiltily indecisive until Verver spoke again.

"If you drink it, it's a little slower, but inject it into your blood and it's swift as lightning. Why did you not bring your needles, Doctor Swartzhausen?"

"They are safer home," Guido falsified a second time. "I had no idea you would ask me this—I cannot murder you."

"No," returned Verver slowly, "you would not kill me out of pity; but you will kill me presently for the sake of Science."

Again he had startled Guido out of his sangfroid. "What! the latter cried in sheer astonishment; then recovering his equilibrium he ejected brutally: "Why should I kill you? You cannot live."

"No, I cannot live," Stanalius agreed calmly, "nor do I wish to. But must I continue like this—to die in slow agony? You cannot gauge my suffering; you do not know its cause; but when you do—"

He checked his words, pausing to press a thin hand over his abdomen in a peculiar way. "This will persuade you, Swartzhausen. Now listen—there is much I have to tell you."

"Swartzhausen, they killed Severin, but they gave me life instead; life that was worse than death. This Thing that is killing me, living upon me, that has already robbed me, destroyed me and sent me here to writhe in deadly torment; to slowly, horribly die."

"Look your unbelief! But it's true—and you will know it soon. Life instead of Death! Life instead of Death! What punishment! What ordination! But Severin killed the God."

Was Swartzhausen hearing the truth at last? He sat bewildered, unable to speak, to argue or expostulate. What did it all mean? What could the fellow mean? But he held a glass of water to Verver's mouth and managed to maintain his usual poise, callousness, nonchalance, nevertheless his heart thumped wildly as he waited through a pause during which the speaker rested, to rally presently for his final effort — the telling of the last of his grim tale.

"They brought it to my lips while I was sleeping. What was the Thing they brought? Something that would not be destroyed. A vile, tenacious thing that grows and lives — grows and lives. Ah, God, how it has lived and grown."

Another silence; then Guido spoke. Still at a loss, he began mistily to understand; to grasp a truth that could not be believed.

"I want to know," he managed to say normally, "exactly what you think this is. What do you mean by Life instead of Death? What is this Thing that tortures you, and that you think is killing you?"

For answer, Stanalius Verver pushed back the coverings; his action was dramatic, awe-inspiring. "See for yourself," he said. "Now you shall know."

It was a long drawn out minute during which Guido stood gazing at the sight he saw. This was a refutation of biology, an impossibility, — this could not be. He stood in sheer perplexity. It baffled his knowledge, his lore, even his intuition. He hung over the bedside non-plussed, gasping at the spectacle. Then, because he could not fathom

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this physiological mystery he literally bridled with vexation, and vociferated when he spoke.

"I do not believe it! I will not believe it!"  
And then, a little later; "What can it be? I know of nothing like it."

Stanalius Verver essayed a laugh. It were better called a gruesome rattling of throat-muscles.

"The Conquering Worm, doctor! Do you think it's a worm now? But no, you know it's not; and you know that it baffles you. You cannot name it. You cannot rid me of it. It is there and it lives. Kill it and you kill me. But kill me first . . . ."

The halted words were so suggestive that Guido thrilled. Yes, kill him first. That was the thing. Kill him first. Kill this doomed wreck that could not live except his own rare skill restore him; kill him safely, quickly — instantly — and see then, what manner of being this Reptile God of the Sacred Swamp might be.

It would have been characteristic of Guido, if his conscience had waged no fight against wrong doing. But it did. After that startling disclosure, and the keen examination that inevitably followed, the Tadpole Man had retreated to his chair, to lose himself in thought and remain deep in a battle betwixt right and wrong

It was an urge on the part of his "alter ego" to exhibit and employ a clever surgeon's skill and put forth a strenuous bid for Verver's life. And again, it was a further urge on the side of the usual Guido to know more, even at the price of murder. For it came to this. If he would learn the secret of the Saurian God, Stanalius must die. If, on the other hand, he pitted his science and skill against the ghastly thing confronting him, there was a chance, a desperate supreme chance of restoring

Verver to life and a measure of health; in short, of ridding him of this extraordinary incubus by destroying it.

But if he were to obtain possession in living form of this unique creature, this riddle of herpetology, then must Stanalius be sacrificed, for he could not save both the man and the larval monster, that now, beyond all flicker of doubt, his technical knowledge and swift, sensitive fingers told him was there in the form of an awful, unimaginable parasite

Quickly his examination had convinced him that this lurking horror was no common form — no "taenia solium", but some strangely living batrachian or reptilian embryo that held to life exotically in such alien environment, and had no natural, biological right to be there. If his clever operation were successful, and providing he voiced it to the world, which probably he would never do, his name and achievement, as a nine days wonder, would blazon the banners of Science for just a little, a very little while, and then drift into oblivion, and he would never see alive this weirdly preternormal thing that now, firmly he believed, a prompt autopsy could safely wrest from death.

Long before the fight was over Verver spoke again. He raised himself, clumsily, and with difficulty. But he looked straight into the eyes of the man confronting him, and thrust his question at him, forcefully, at point blank range.

"Will you do it, Swartzhausen? You are safe — absolutely safe. No one can know. Give me the poison and put an end to this damnable condition."

"I will not kill you!" cried Guido savagely, for he was wavering and his words belied his true

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desires — "they would hang me if I did. I dare not give you the poison."

"It leaves no trace," the other man persisted. "One magic drop near my heart and then . . ."

Once more he paused to gather strength and stronger words with which to weigh his final argument. When moments later he found voice again, it was the soul of a gambler dicing his all in a final throw; the last trump of a player flung on the cloth of Fate. Finally he spoke.

"Listen. An instant's courage, and you would have in your possession a thing no herpetologist yet set eyes on. A thing that came to life in jungle marches, and now lives on the part of a human being. You would not need to develop monsters in your tanks. Give it your wonderful powders, and it will do the rest."

So contended Verver; so persuaded. And still, for a little while, the man with a mania for freak biology repelled temptation. In the end, not the pleadings of a tortured human, but the insistent urge of a mind gone mad over science, won.

Swartzhausen, still wavering, fought a brief instant more against his own desires; yielded at last, and, in his fervour, slew.



## CHAPTER XI

CELESTE returned from her swimming beach, singing as she came. There was a throb in the song, an under-rhythm of sadness, suggestive of a requiem. But then again, her dress was thin, and there was a chill in the evening air. Perhaps she sang to drive away the chill.

But singing she came, and her singing reached the ears of Guido, bringing a frown to his brow, a flicker of anxiety to his eyes as he labored.

"The White Frog," he mumbled, "she must not interrupt." With relief he remembered that the door was locked . . . .

Nearer came the girl, nearer the song. At last he heard her light steps on the porch, and in lieu of the song, her call to Mrs. Simms, a demand for her belated supper. He worked more rapidly now, very rapidly; and there was concern on his face.

For Guido was bent like a ghoulish workman; busy over a dead man's body.

XI

CHAPTER XII

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“WHAT is it, Guido?”

Daily she came and daily asked the same thing, until she varied her questioning by joining with him in a second, and one that for the time being was of more moment. “Is it going to live?”

He had answered the first with his easily spoken lie that Celeste quite readily accepted as the truth. But the second, for months on end, Guido could not answer with any positive assurance. Today it still lived, still clung to life tenaciously and the period of its listless inertia had long since passed. But of tomorrow not even Guido dared prophesy. One chance mishap, and his travail could be counted vain.

Sometimes, looking through his laboratory window, out over the cool, blue lake, the Tadpole-man would grimly vow his determination that this Thing should grow and some day swim these tranquil waters. His brains, his science and skill pitted against adversity, against the very tentacles of Death itself, would win out finally. Yes, he declared, he would take this gruesome, extraordinary thing, filched from the dead and compel it to exist. Then, when life and existence were assured, then would be time enough to seek an answer to the riddle of its being.

In the meanwhile it would be best for Celeste to think that he had miracled a tadpole into something wholly different and unknown. And Celeste, who in his laboratory had seen fully matured frogs no larger than house-flies, frogs that would grow no more; and mammoth tadpoles, already the size of mice, that still were growing—believed his false-

hoods unhesitatingly. But then, Celeste was no biologist.

On the other hand, either reptile or amphibian he could not help but recognize it to be. It confronted him now, long-tailed, long-necked, with four stout, pentadactyle limbs, the hinder longer than the fore, and a flat, evil head, later on a terribly jawed head, that was as sinister as it was serpent-like. It might be lizard, it might be salamander; the thing was too distorted from the long entombment it had endured to make recognition or classification possible. Later on, perhaps, but not yet. But Guido somehow knew with a certainty he could not analyse, that its erstwhile development had been rather foetal than parasitic and that its future growth was going to be something wonderful, and unwonted, for him to experiment and conjure with.

So this strange man flung his gauntlet down, a challenge to Life, a defiance to Death, and to the World and his fellow men contained therein, a contradiction of all things ethical and normal. But ever he vowed to persevere, to win, and Celeste, all ignorant of the truth of things, nodded her encouragement.

## CHAPTER XIII

IT was now a year since her father's death. The girl was a trifle taller, otherwise she had changed but little. She was still a child, but with a beauty developing like the opening of rosebuds in a spring garden, as she passed, care-free and independent, towards an early adolescence. Within the precincts of his home Guido saw her daily. Queerly perhaps, neither could explain this unusual comradeship and did not stay to. Instead they quarrelled and argued as often as they met; usually to part in wrath, but only to seek one another immediately afterwards. Guido was now her appointed guardian, and Mrs. Simms still managed the Verver home, albeit one could not say that she managed the altogether incorrigible Celeste. But the maiden came repeatedly to view this prodigy of ill-shaped horror, and shudder at it afresh. Weirdly and inexplicably it fascinated her, had fascinated her, in fact, from the first time she saw it, and the more it grew in bulk and ugliness the more did this fascination grow with it. No inkling of the truth assailed her. Never once did she suspect that this creature she believed to be the genuine outgrowth of Guido's extravagant zeal invested in one of his tadpoles was in literal truth a scion, nay, almost the very flesh surviving, of her own dead father.

The scientist had kept his secret well. No one in all the world besides this little blue-eyed girl and himself knew of this extraordinary thing's existence. He alone could betray its origin, and, safe to say, Guido would never speak. Devoid of all suspicion, Celeste even missed the point of

differentiation he so nimbly stressed when he lied to her, as lie he must and ever did, that this was no tadpole of 'rena clamitans but a larval newt, carefully reared and fed with that mysterious 'ectolin,' another triumph of his outlandish science; a food derived from subtle sources he alone could name.

No, to her unfettered because unlettered mind, this sprawling thing at the sight of which she shivered, was only an overgrown polliwog to which this crazy Guido had fed his crazier powders.

Little chance was there that Swartzhausen would ever enlighten her, or recount to anyone those first hours following Verver's death. Hours indelible, burnt into his brain for all time; guilty, impossible moments of his past, spent in sustaining the spark of life in that inanimate shape, pirated away with his swift lancet, then borne in haste and secrecy to his own abode.

No, he could never speak of these things; never boast his triumph to another. Ever and always must it remain a crimsoned secret that not even in the cause of science dare he divulge.

But then, nor could he forget his triumph. Again and again his mind reviewed each instance of that fateful night. Those first weak movements, a faint pulsation, a hardly discernible quiver, but a sign and a promise in response to his carefully handled hypodermic and the cautious drop of adrenalin injected almost as a prayer. Until at last his own thrill of success when the inert thing aroused, and Guido Swartzhausen knew that life was there.

Afterwards he had dared administer tiny particles of his own blood, microscopic injections, but potent; until amazed but exultant, awed by his sheer success, he bent again to view this writhing

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What was this Thing that sprawled before him  
now, with squat head turned as if regarding him?  
Was it in truth what Verver's words denied. A  
strange reptilian relic of the Long Ago? A mon-  
ster of the Mesozoic? Or stranger yet, a lunged  
amphibian of the Carboniferous?

"What is this Thing?" he kept repeating. And  
when at last the morning filtered in, he still stood  
mutely questioning the mists, that came like grey  
ghosts stealing over Warning Lake—

"What is this Thing?"

## CHAPTER XIV

FOR a year this unknown atom of life had lived.

Not only lived but grown, and under the stimulus of Swartzhausen's amazing dietary its growth and development were prodigious. The mystery of its origin remained unfathomed, yet the question that had so beset him on that memorable night at least, in part, was answered. Today in Guido's mind but little doubt remained that this small creature he now occupied himself in rearing, and Verver's deity of the tropic swamp, were uncannily and so far inexplicably associated. The brain of the scientist reeled at times as the persistent truth assaulted it, so incredible was the phenomenon.

Was it indeed the larval form of that terrible beast which Severin's rifle had put to death so speedily? And could it be that those fearful priests of the jungle had bestowed upon its kind some abnormal power of growth? And was the secret of that power to grow a dependence upon an early parasitic stage of development in some involuntary host? He recalled to sight that dreadfully depleted body of his recent neighbor and remembered Verver's dying revelation: "They brought it to my lips when I was sleeping."

"It cannot be—it cannot be!" he often cried rebelliously, as he paced the floor of his solitary house by the lake-shore, and mentally threshed the problem over for the thousandth time. "It cannot be!" he would repeat, "such things don't happen in biology."

It rested with the future to decide; only the years to come could solve so deep a riddle. But if

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it continued to grow with the rapidity it had displayed, and still exhibited, then Guido could rightly determine that the dead man's story was more than a madman's myth, or a fantastic legend borrowed from a far-off, improbable tribe.

As for that tribe, there was Celeste herself to vouch for them, with her Indian blood, her skin as white as northern snow and her hair the sable splendor of a raven's wing. And then there were her eyes, those extraordinary blue-violet eyes, tribal eyes, the like of which he had never met before.

"It's wonderful and baffling," said Dr. Guido Swartzhausen, "but I'm going to read the riddle, if it kills me in the end."



## CHAPTER XV

THE Thing was now about the size of a small rat and steadily added to its bulk.

"If it can grow as fast as that in a year," bragged Guido to Celeste one day, "in just a few years' time it will be large enough to kill and eat an ox."

It was a habit of her's to ridicule him, to prick his pride, or dampen his enthusiasm; to anger him, by belittling his successes was to Celeste Verver a pleasure not to be relinquished. She contradicted him now by challenging his prophecy.

"What rot you do talk," she cried. "It might get just a little bigger than a kitten, but then it will stop. What will you do with your slimy little pet then, Mr. Guido? Kill it?"

She seldom called him doctor and certainly never offered either him or his calling the least sign of respect. To her he was always just a funny little man forever doing strange things, most of the times with frogs and tadpoles. "Of course," she argued to herself, "it cannot grow as big as he thinks. What silly things he does say."

But it did grow larger than the kitten-limit Celeste vouchsafed it, and ere that size was attained, in fact very shortly after this episode, another inexplicable thing came to pass.

The blind eyes slowly opened to the light; the hideous lids, with their lattice-work of palely crimsoned veins, lifted a little at a time, to expose to view the sullen eyes they sheltered. Always the grey lips dropped again, as if the effort of attempted vision were too great an ordeal. But the effort persisted, until a day came when the man

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looked into the eyes of his creation and the eyes  
of the Thing, brighter now, looked back.

The look they carried appalled Swartzhausen.  
These terrible orbs were not the eyes of mere newt  
or reptile; they were sinister, menacing, libidinous;  
but they were also weirdly intelligent.

When Guido looked into those eyes he trembled.  
And he could not have told one why.

## CHAPTER XVI

WHEN next Celeste arrived he promptly led her to the tank to marvel with him over this new development. But she screamed instead.

For the very moment she came within view, the Thing roused into animation, turned squarely towards her, then rearing forth its long neck, focussed its new-won sight full upon her.

"Kill it!" she cried in real and sudden terror.

"Why don't you kill the vile thing?"

Swartzhausen felt that he had the best of her on this occasion. "Your kitten has opened its eyes," he mocked.

For the one and only time in his life, he saw Celeste turn around and flee. This unwonted fear on her part drew less attention from him than it might otherwise have done, because he was staring hard at the forbidding creature in the tank. For all the world it looked like a midget kangaroo squatting on its haunches, but Swartzhausen instantly recognized the alert, erect posture of a dinosaur one so often sees in pictures or reconstructed models. He raised his voice in surprise, but it was as much an expression of triumph as of amazement.

"It's a little *Diplodocus*!" he exclaimed delightedly. "See how it stands now!"

Celeste had only retreated to the far end of the room. Gately she retraced her steps and came to look again, with her fear subdued and her usual courage to the fore. She now stared back at the Thing, refusing to be intimidated a second time.

"I hate the little beast," she declared, "but it's not going to bluff me like that again." And it never did

CHAPTER XVII

**DURING** the next two years the monster grew by leaps and bounds, accelerating its development with every month it lived. Stranger than its ever-quickenng growth, which was undoubtedly induced by the lavish rations of ectolin provided by the scientist, was the unfoldment of the brute's mentality, and the quality of its intelligence."

Dimly Guido suspected it at first; with clarity and conviction later on. But at last, with denial on his lips and positive assurance in his heart, he realized amazedly that this fearsome beast possessed a faculty of reason, a power of comprehension, and a power of discernment, far beyond the limits of its squat amphibian cranium.

That tiny brain, he inwardly contended, could not possess the faculties of which this reptile abnormality was master. But yet it did! Not only could the little monster think and understand; it could deduce and reason. Yet almost there was no brain, and the herpetologist, dumbfounded, intrigued, unable to explain in his usual physiological parlance a phenomenon so mysterious, confronted its gathering wits and accumulating brawn in daily perplexity and sheer bewilderment.

But he came to know without comprehendir ; to realize, without a mote of explanation, that these very faculties were on a par with human faculties and yet were very far from human. No, Guido, clever scientist that he was, knew and secretly admitted it was all beyond him. "It is not Science," he whispered sometimes to the silence of his hime; but he shook his head impatiently when his thoughts suggested Magic

Of one supreme and extant fact by now he stood convinced. It was the truth incredible, the Thing beyond belief. Which was that the nervous processes of this erstwhile parasite had been capitalized, high-mettled as it were, by Verver's own. It was more than parasite. It was re-incarnation. The dead expressed again in vital flesh—but loathsome, reptilian flesh. Impossible as it must ever seem, at last he intuited, that this larval thing had drawn not only sustenance but mentality as well from Stanalius Verver, its doomed and stricken host.

Celeste, on the other hand, who never argued in terms of biological divergences, accepted all she saw with her usual naive composure, and pronounced the ugly little creature 'cute'! She left the pros and cons, the puzzles and the problems for the enraptured scientist to handle with his active, piercing mind. She recognized carelessly, and admitted unconcernedly that Guido's drawn-out polliwog was 'smart' and let it rest at that.

## CHAPTER XVIII

IT was when the Thing had proved itself a carnivore, fierce and voracious, and a resistless killer, that Swartzhausen named it.

Then it was still small, still to be measured in just so many elastic inches and weighed in a few scant pounds of frailty, and the doctor still confined it to its tank. Despite its paucity of size, at the time referred to—a matter of only a few weeks since its eyes had opened to the light—it proved itself both fierce and terrible, and swift with a cobra's deadly thrust. So far it had never slain, never done more than display its rapacity over fragments of dead and unresisting flesh. Now came the day when Swartzhausen witnessed its first kill.

A broiling August afternoon, and the drowsy animal lay stretched its sullen length in the tank, a receptacle constructed with an inclined floor, the lower end of which was reserved for its pool and always filled with water.

A fly intruded. It was a large and noisy fly and equally ill-fated. Disturbed by its buzzing, Swartzhausen had raised his eyes from his book, and glanced across the room just as the unlucky insect alighted with a sharp impact on the inner side of the tank wall. Almost imperceptibly the slumbering occupant stirred, the pale lids lifted and for a meagre second the metallic eyes interrogated.

Afterwards Guido could not actually recount what happened, but there was a sudden flash of alertness, a harmony of greyness, swiftness, silence; a second sound of impact, this time a quieter

sound, and, leisurely swallowing, the reptile settled down again.

The man had seen but little. He could not recall to view the play of those engulfing jaws, perhaps the flash of an assaulting neck was for a moment visible. Guido could not be positive, but the buzzing fly had vanished.

Inspiration reached him promptly. To replace the fly with something larger, something that could not be swallowed instantly but must be captured, killed and rent in fragments.

In response to this sudden urge he produced a mouse from a shed outside; a prison-house for his rodent victims; small creatures doomed to his experimental caprices. A moment later he discharged the mouse from a glass jar into the tank.

A revelation followed. The long neck struck and the mouse sprang clear. The amphibian leapt in lightning leaps as the quarry evaded him; and while the brief chase lasted, Guido watched expectantly. A moment more and the pursuer held a central point, whilst the mouse ran round and round, clinging to the walls and brushing the water's edge as it passed the pool. The agile neck swung like a flexible rod, with the head held close to the fleeing prey, and never more than an inch behind as the body pivoted.

The end came soon. Just once was the little mouse too slow; never once was its pursuer. Never once did the fatal swiftness of that supple neck diminish. It seemed to flash from point to point, and behind the cruel beast the long, grey tail co-ordinated. The mouse shot under the reptile's body; at once the snake-like neck curved and the head swept under in pursuit. Promptly the head emerged, and in the vise of those ravening jaws the screaming rodent writhed and contorted.

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ed him; and  
do watched  
pursuer held  
n round and  
rushing the  
he agile neck  
ad held close  
than an inch

was the little  
rsuer. Never  
supple neck  
oint to point,  
grey tail co-  
the reptile's  
rved and the  
otly the head  
avenging jaws  
ntorted.

The rest is not delectable. It delighted Swartz-  
hausen, and no doubt was satisfactory to the lizard  
thing that slew. But to those who must peruse, the  
account need not be detailed further. Enough, that  
when the orgy ended the man had seen enacted  
what must have happened a myriad times and more,  
when saurian monarchs ruled the earth. The sight  
elated him, he stood there slapping his appreciation.

"No Diplodocus, you!" he cried, "that's no  
name for you. You're "Dinodan the Terrible —  
that's what I'm going to call you."

Thus Guido named his prodigy. But Dinodan  
the Terrible sunk his now lethargic bulk to the floor  
and drowsed. Anon, full gorged, he slumbered.



## CHAPTER XIX

DINODON had won his name and his spurs in an orgy of bestiality, and from that day on, Swartzhausen tested out the prowess of his reptile enigma in a number of carefully stayed little contests, from all of which the brute emerged victorious, proving itself a matchless killer.

Cautious at first, he never pitted the Thing against an adversary too formidable; contenting himself by confronting it with rats or birds, anything about the creature's own bulk that would show fight. Later on, sure of its superiority, the doctor ventured to introduce more formidable antagonists, until finally Dinodon had raised a victorious neck over a vanquished cat, and, a less easily conquered weasel.

The cat perished with futile claws raking invulnerable air, its crushed head wedged between the amphibian gladiator's vise-like fangs. And the weasel? Never could be more swift nor keen a fight than that, and never then nor afterwards, in any combat, did Dinodon display such ferocity and fury. For the weasel's leaps were quicker than the saurian expected, and its bites far sharper and more penetrating than were to his liking. But the weasel quivered out its life in a welter of blood and fur, with a rhythmic neck that arched and undulated over it, as if cadencing a silent paean of triumph — the while Guido yearned wholeheartedly for the possession of a mongoose, that could be matched against this peerless fighter.

## CHAPTER XX

[I]t would be hard to say when the Sand Language had birth. Whilst Guido remembered vividly the first time he had made those marks, meaningless scratches devoid of purpose then, that Dindon, still in his days of insignificant proportions, had imitated — of the earliest occurrences of definite, intelligent communication he held scant recollection. Rather it seemed to have taken shape slowly and gradually as if evading actual record until it was at last a fact fulfilled, an accomplishment perfected. But previous to these events that he had failed to chronicle, the Tadpole-man had allowed the Thing an hour or more of liberty each day, permitting it to move about outside the house, hunt, browse or investigate. It was easily recalled with a whistle, and handling it, that could have been both hazardous and painful in the form of punitive jaws and lacerated fingers, proved nothing else than an act of harmless familiarity. Dinodon knew better than to bite the hands that ministered and provided him with the magic ectolin.

So it was that, while watching over his charge during its spell of liberation, (for he never permitted it to wander from his sight), Swartzhausen, one day, carelessly scraped out little ruts in the sand with a stick. Invariably the clever reptile noted every action of the man and immediately took cognisance of this. Then, to the human being's extreme surprise, Dinodon almost as promptly, but at first awkwardly, and with obvious difficulty, began making ruts of his own that were clearly and unmistakably contrived in imitation.

It was a marvelous thing; surely, but from this chance act of idleness on the part of Swartzhausen, evolved a code, the perfecting of which involved an education extending through the years: a schooling that was never tedious and altogether preternatural. Of all the mysteries that had penetrated his eccentric life this surely was the most mysterious, and of all miracles the most miraculous. For man and monster came to communicate in signs, — and the signs were scratched in the dust.

To what extent it was a simple code, or, conversely, intricate, cannot be said; for to none beside the doctor and his saurian scholar, not even to Celeste, was the manner or the means made manifest. But in some fantastic way, let one assume in single letters, ingenious abbreviations and monosyllabic words, they wrote their will and their wishes, the one to the other; the Man to the Monster; the Monster to the Man.

It was a language of silence and symbol; of sign and countersign. And it was more. It was the Writing in the Sand, pregnant with Fate. But Guido Swartzhausen, blind to all else save this crowning madness of all his mad endeavours, recked little then of ultimate consequences.

## CHAPTER XXI

SO, between triumph and amazement, between perturbation and elation, the Tadpole-man watched through the years, and Celeste watched with him

Celeste was beautiful at seventeen, with a beauty that nor blend nor strain of sheer Caucasian blood could possibly contrive. From that strange white Indian mother came her suppleness and grace, and a face that was Madonna-like, spirituelle — in spite of elfin impudence. But from Verver, and the untracked jungle sanctuaries came her silence and her dreams. Wood-nymph and naiad merged, the twain as one, she went her ways, but always and ever, though he quarrelled with her daily, she was Guido Sdartzhausen's wonderful White Frog.

## CHAPTER XXII

TIME came and went. Years of mysterious development trod one behind the other until the Thing at last was a three-ton mass of stark reptilian strength. Shapely now, to a degree of gracefulness, it possessed a skin that could offer resistance to either blade or bullet and was as tough and tenacious as that of any pachyderm. With a neck that could strike like a snake, and a caudal extremity as sinuous and flexible as living rubber, and as rapid in its stroke as the lash of a Titan, Dinodon had come into his own, and Swartzhausen, though he knew it not, was no longer master!

Here was his mad wish realized, his fantastic vow fulfilled. Here a literal monster repeating the salamander or reptilian development of long ago, towered before him, stalked over his premises, and raced in all its strength and swiftness, the length and breadth of Warning Lake.

Guido had conquered the Laws of Growth.

Yet now, after all these years, he could not name or place the Thing. Whether it were sheer amphibian or more highly specialized saurian, Guido might theorize and speculate, but he could not decide. His knowledge prompted him that it was not true dinosaur, less perfectly reptilian, in fact, than were those wondrous brutes that gained ascendancy during the long Cretaceous; but at the same time he considered it of far higher type than a mere water-hatched batrachian.

Still clinging to his theory that it was some chance survival, he thought, at times, it might be an intermediate link between newt and lizard, and that somewhere back in the Coal Measures he must

look for its antecedents — if ever antecedents this weird monster had

Whatever Dinodon was in terms of paleontological science, clearly he breathed with lungs, while still retaining gill-slits, and in or out of water, or under water, was as much at home as any crocodile. He preferred the shadows of cloud and tree, retreated during the heat of summer days, either seeking immersion in the lake, or retiring to his lair on land, actually a cave Celeste had found for him. But he moved about freely after sundown, or during sunless periods.

So Guido, ever full of biological exactitudes, gave Dinodon an ancestry receding back into the Carboniferous; the while a lurking spirit mocked: "You're very clever, doctor, but it's nothing of the kind! You know it's not! You don't know what it is."

No, Guido did not know, and after all these years of puzzling debate he could only, (when he sought to be honest with himself), proclaim it a jungle mystery that those equally mysterious savages had stumbled upon and woven into their wizardry. No believer in black magic or necromancy, yet still clinging to his theory of a Mesozoic survival, he remained at a loss to know how their priests had discovered that this Thing, in embryo, could be transmuted into a parasite.

It was riddle and mystery involved, but a greater problem was Dinodon today, and the situation that the creature's existence and present requirements evoked. For this embryo of yesterday was now very much alive, a gigantic three-ton mass of dangerous, rampaging carnivore that Guido could no longer hold in leash. By now it roamed at will, a constant frequenter of the lake, a formidable destroyer of fish, and, on land, a beast of prey,

even a cattle thief. Lastly, it was well with in the realms of probability for it to become an actual menace to man himself

Already, with body submerged, slealthily, silently, its sinister head alone above water, it raided and ravished, and at the same time, with a surfeit of cunning, almost invariably avoided observation. But there were occasions, when, perhaps a thoroughly scared boatman, or a rancher on the lake shore, watched with consternation over-riding curiosity the flat head moving smoothly along the surface — one of Dinodon's more indiscreet or careless moments! Then, it can be imagined, a frightened or bewildered man returned to his fellows with a shame-faced narrative of a weird sea beast trespassing the lake.

Only one thing now held any power over Dinodon. It was the priceless ectolin that Swartzhausen still rationed out each evening to the brute.

But cash and ectolin alike were waning. The doctor's bank account had vanished long ago and without adequate funds, when the last of the subtle food was consumed, it became questionable whether he could continue to supply this product of his laboratory. Even in moderate quantities, such as sufficed when the Thing was small, the precious powder was expensive, involving an intricate pharmaceutical process in its preparation. He had always paid hard cash for every grain and ingredient composing it; now with his money spent, his purchasing powers were at zero and he could not retrench.

From less than a handful of flabby, inert flesh, step by step, pound by pound, Swartzhausen had brought this monster to its present proportions. Now its weight must be registered in tons, its dimensions in linear feet. He had bought the big

brute meat until he could no longer make such expensive provision. Dinodon gorged and rested, slept for a while; then came again, demanding more — incessantly demanding.

All the vicinity could supply in the form of decrepit stock, old horses, aging milk cows, the dead carcass of practically any farm animal, had been bargained for and brought to his ranch long ago. He had freighted home sheep and pigs, turning them loose for Dinodon to leap upon alive. He had ferried quarters of beef from Cherry Wharf supplied him by a local butcher, and shipped in expensive consignments of meat on his own account from more distant abattoirs. But the hulking reptile was ever insatiable, and at last Guido left him to forage for his own

It was inevitable that rumors should gather force around the lake. The Thing had been espied too often in spite of its perpetual wariness. Stock had been killed and torn to fragments, and, at times, only partially devoured, by some strange beast that was neither wolf nor bear nor mountain lion. Even tracks, very indefinite, impossible to identify and extremely difficult to follow, were nevertheless detected on more than one occasion. Invariably, when this strange spoor was traceable it led into the lake.

Alarmed as the neighborhood became, suspicion of the eccentric doctor's responsibility for this unknown raider's existence was never manifested. Those two ranches, along the same bank of the inlet, the one at its extremity, the other which was Guido's — where the lake shore angled at the mouth, were isolated and very seldom visited. Celeste was as much a recluse as Swartzhausen himself, and as for Mrs. Simms, nolens volens—she received few callers.



So, though the settlers of Warning Lake continued to complain of various losses among their stock, though reports of the sea-beast's presence increased in frequency and steadily spread wider afield, yet for a while the rumours met with little else save ridicule and incredulity.

Bye-and-bye the papers heard of it and commenced to regale their readers with quasi-humorous articles, little veiling their unbelief, but cataloguing, instead, the whole affair as an old wife's tale or, at best, a resurrected Indian legend.

Celeste did not read newspapers; nor did she talk. Practically the girl held herself to secrecy of her own volition, and Guido could count on her unerring silence. Certainly now that the Thing was well beyond control, and gaining a very serious measure of notoriety, the uneasy scientist was not going to confirm its existence, nor admit his own responsibility.

Dinodon continued to swim and prowl to his heart's content as stealthily and obscurely as his cunning mind enabled him, but ever about the hour of dusk, still swayed by the same undiminished craving, the giant reptile approached the buildings for the measure of ectolin that Swartzhausen had never yet denied it.

Now an ordeal was forth coming. The scientist must convey to the big brute the unlucky information that he could provide the food no longer, and with uneasy spirit he turned his eyes towards the carpet of sand, whereon these two exotic beings, the human and the beast, had traced their messages for so many years.

It was a clear little stretch that reached from the water's edge up to the old log house and it was Guido's landing beach, an elbow of shoreline,

where the land curved in, and the lake thrust out an arm to form the inlet.

Instinct, foreboding, fear, reason itself, perhaps, warned him that he was about to provoke a crisis by conveying this message; but the situation was beyond his handling; the monster beyond his means. He must face an issue, and now with all his heart and soul Guido wished himself rid of Dinodon.

He could not persuade himself to kill him. In the first place he did not quite know how his death could be contrived. Swartzhausen had no high powered rifle, no adequate projectile such as Severin had discharged at the head of the god in the Sacred Swamp those many years ago.

Could he poison him? Perhaps. But if he slew this tremendous creature, with poisoned bait, how, later on, was he to remove from sight its mighty carcass, or explain the presence of such offal on his premises?

Nor, in truth, did he wish to kill it. It was his achievement, his triumph; it represented his life work, and alive it embraced the proof of his discoveries, the substantiation of his clever theories. It was his crown of success, even though he dared not flaunt that guilty miracle in the face of Science, because—but he had no remorse, no repentance yet—because he was a murderer.

And there was Celeste, the daughter of the man he slew. She also watched over Dinodon; she also had followed his herculean growth and shared with Guido, in her contrary way, his triumph and his ecstasies. No, for her sake again, he must not, could not destroy this Thing he had all but created.

In much the same way its guilty origin deterred him from handing it over, or making known its presence to some institute of Science, who, while accepting it with gusto, would ask their score of

pertinent questions and confound him. For, reflected Guido, it was one thing to lie glibly to an unsophisticated child, it would be a different proposition hoodwinking able scientists by promising to convert more tadpoles into dinosaurs.

In his perplexity the weary man did what for him was an unusual, an almost normal thing to do. He turned to Celeste, seeking, as many a saner man had sought before, counsel from the lips of a woman; trusting the solution of his problem to her quick intuition.

He pointed out to start with, the state of his finances; his inability to continue feeding this huge thing and so deter him from ravaging the settlements of Warning Lake. He almost whispered her the truth that now the ectolin was well nigh all consumed, and sank his voice still lower as he stressed the impossibility of providing more. Frankly he confessed that he feared the wrath of the brute when deprived of its favorite diet. In short the gist of his conundrum was: "What should he do with Dinodon?"

"Leave him alone," the girl gave answer promptly. "He's hunting his dinners already; why not leave him to take care of himself? He's big enough to, isn't he?" she finished flippantly.

Swartzhausen groaned, but Celeste had more to say. With that warm Indian blood leaping through her being, by now she was physically a woman, but in spite of this swift womanhood the fascination that Dinodon held for her had never waned; throughout its life she had endured it, a strangely mystifying influence. Actual fear of the brute had long since vanished and her earlier repulsion given ground before years of familiarity. Today, the reptile on its own part looked for her coming, sought her out and lurked in the water

long hours at a time, its fierce eyes focussed unswervingly upon her. As far as the Thing with its cold heart could cherish, it cherished this undaunted child of nature, and Celeste, in turn, stood ward over Dinodon.

No, crazy Guido was not to harm him! What mattered missing cattle or frightened humans so long as Dinodon went fed? Now plainly she spoke her mind and all the southern savage in her, all the quick, feral passion of her jungle breed awoke to arms on the brute's behalf, and just as quickly the guilty man of science was silenced. This glorified amphibian, he thought, so white and wonderful, quite suddenly became a very angry woman, and Guido cowered before her onslaught.

## CHAPTER XXIII

THE TADPOLE-MAN had sown the wind, now he must reap the whirlwind, for if crime and punishment grow on the same branch then surely in this case the branch was Dinodon.

He had not traced his message in the sand, because he was afraid. He was procrastinating, delaying the evil hour, but meanwhile he divided the remaining ectolin into seven portions, any one of which was less than a third of the customary ration. Swartzhausen was practically begging a week's grace. After the week of grace—what?

Dinodon answered that. He was hungry in earnest now and the first meagre ration presented to him awoke the very wrath the scientist so fearfully dreaded. He was not used to hunger, this killer of the night, and like a drug denied the lessened allowance of ectolin left him irritated and unsatisfied. For the first time in his life the reptile knew the gnawing pangs of an empty stomach. He could make no kill.

The fish in the lake of worthwhile size by now were few and far between. Even the smaller fry fled in swift shoals at the devourer's approach, and fleet as he was, the little fish were fleeter. Dinodon could not survive like that.

By this time, everything on dry land in the form of domesticated stock, from hoof to horn, from sucking pig to Percheron, was safe behind well barred and bolted doors, or, during the daytime, herded cautiously by well-armed, watchful men. Not even a barnyard hen rewarded him, for wise hens roost at night, and he dared not invade a thronging farmyard during the day.

In the small hours of the morning, frustrated and famished, he swam back to Guido's beach. In its usual place was the measure of ectolin—a meagre measure, but he greedily consumed it. Guido was sleeping and in the midst of his slumbers he heard the maddened saurian. He heard him bellow, for Dinodon was not without a voice and could bellow when he willed.

A sweat broke out over Swartzhausen as he lay there listening; but by and by the brute retreated, whereat Guido gave a sigh of relief, and endeavored to compose himself for sleep again. In the morning he determined he would notify the Thing that he must depend entirely upon his own abilities to provide himself sustenance; and there would be no more ectolin. This would keep him away from the building, reflected Guido hopefully, and so prevent suspicion falling upon himself. They could not associate the 'sea-beast' raider with him, he ruminated more comfortably, if from now on Dinodon kept away.

Exactly how he was to convey a message of such unusual length as the one he contemplated, by indenting crude glyphics in a bar of sand for a reptile's brain to fathom, is a matter for individual conjecture. Perhaps Guido was really expert enough in the Sand Language by now to write a whole treatise on *Amblystroma* in such a way. Enough to record that his message was never written.

In the morning he went to the beach, and to the spot where the exchange of ideas was invariably rendered. He felt very resolute, very determined, and quite probably he knew how to write his message. However, Dinodon had forestalled him.

There in the glinting sunlight, the grimmest of ultimata staggered him. Stragglings and uneven

were perhaps the marks, but very tense and terse:

**MEAT OR MEN . . . .**

Finally Swartzhausen went back to the house, his face as white, well -- as white as the White Frog!

There was only one clear thought in his brain just then. He must warn Celeste.

[The remainder of the page contains extremely faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.]

## CHAPTER XXIV

SHE came herself at an early hour to find a distracted man awaiting her. Quickly she realized that something out of the ordinary had occurred to render him more thoroughly demented than his usual self, and from Celeste's point of view, the usual Guido was, beyond all manner of doubt, a person 'non compos mentis'.

He poured his troubles out with scant delay. "What can I do?" he falsettoed at her. "The brute will soon be man-eater!"

"Who's eating men?" she demanded briskly, then asked again with exquisite frankness, "What's eating you this morning, Guido; you're crazier than ever."

Celeste was rarely as rude as that to the little doctor, but she also had heard Dinodon bellow during the night, and knew that noises issuing from that usually silent throat stressed some disquieting cause behind them. So she was herself a little worried and impatient to ascertain the 'raison d'être' of Guido's early morning perturbation. However, the man of science was so thoroughly distressed and distracted that her asperity passed unnoticed, in fact he almost bellowed himself as he spoke again.

"If I don't feed him, he's going to kill man! Now are you satisfied? What am I to do?"

Celeste threw back her head and laughed, but it was partly feigned hilarity. "Then why don't you feed him?" she asked in turn, "you know he's hungry."

"How can I find him meat? I'm broke," said Guido truthfully, "I have got to get rid of him."



"Listen, Guido," the girl addressed him less sharply for the moment, "leave Dinodon alone, he will never eat a man."

Little either of them knew it then, but the wood-nymph spoke prophetically. Rather, Swartzhausen, for one, firmly believed that morning that Dinodon went ready to raven and fatten on human flesh.

"How can I buy him meat?" repeated Guido wearily, "he has cost me my fortune already, and I have nothing left. You know that yourself."

"You didn't spend it all on Dinodon," admonished Celeste, "you spent your money like a fool,—on everything. And I can quite believe you would spend mine too — if you were allowed to take it."

"Oh," said the hepetologist blankly; then, "oh," again, "what makes you say that?"

To speak fairly for Swartzhausen, this was not true. He had never desired his ward's inheritance.

"Because you're crazy," she announced a second time, "you spent your money on tadpoles,—yes, tadpoles!" she reiterated, "as if there were not millions in the lake for you to mess with; and people say you paid out thousands on your stupid old experiments and the things you had shipped in to you from—from all over America."

Such words were more outspoken than the Tadpole-man had ever heard from her young lips before, but they helped him pull himself together so that he almost 'squared up' to her when he spoke again.

"And pray why shouldn't I?" he inquired defensively, "it was my money and my life-work."

"Life-work!" she parroted contemptuously, "there's your life-work, out there!" and she waved an impatient arm towards the lake; "now it's up to you to feed him, money or no money! — and if you

can't find him food, I can and will!"

"You!" gasped Guido, his mouth wide open with astonishment. "How can you get meat for him unless you buy it? How much stock is left around this lake?"

"Why can I not buy it?" she demanded in turn. "I have money of my own, haven't I?"

"Yes," assented her guardian, "you will be rich when you are twenty-one."

"Well, I'm going to spend some now, before I'm twenty-one. And you are going to see about it; so go to town and get it for me — you must have food for Dinodon at once."

"I cannot find him food at once, that is impossible!" cried Guido despairingly, "you know that yourself."

"Well, if you can't, I can," she repetitioned, and turned to go. But Guido stopped her.

"Look here," he said with sudden courage, "you must keep out of the lake — it's not safe!"

"What isn't safe?"

"Dinodon," said Guido.

"You fool!" she sibilated at him, and walked away.

## CHAPTER XXV

SWARTZHAUSEN went to Cherry Wharf, where, with much talking and a fair amount of lying he succeeded eventually in persuading the owner of the general store to advance a sum of money. This he handed to his ward.

It can be said of Celeste Verver that she was brave as she was beautiful, and as much and as remote a recluse as Swartzhausen, her guardian. They seemed almost to vie with one another in shunning more sociable humanity but now boldly and determinedly she undertook her quest of viand and victual for the hungry maw demanding it.

It was a ripening experience for the solitary girl, this thrusting herself for the first time among the lake people, to bargain and prevaricate, to smile guilelessly, and adroitly deceive men and women who had been her closest neighbours ever since she came a child to Warning Lake, and yet were strangers to her.

She had sailed the lake alone ever since she was big enough to handle her own small boat, a valiant little craft rigged with a tiny sail, as daring as it was diminutive. In this, very occasionally, she voyaged to Cherry Wharf, sometimes taking Mrs. Simms, her aunt, along; but always such a trip was odious to her and, as often as not, a cause for dissention in the Verver household. It was, at any time, an undertaking only prompted by necessity, when things from the store were required, and the old housekeeper meekly insisted that wardrobe and larder must be replenished. Quite probably Celeste at first would refuse outright, procrastinate and delay for another week, then

having finally promised to go, as likely as not she would disappear for the day instead.

Now she went willingly and without explanation; only she commandeered the tattered handbag that the old housekeeper had clung to since time alone knows when. In this she deposited her newly acquired wealth and in a flash was down to her boat and away.

She was startlingly attired when late that evening she re-entered her home to walk silently past her astonished aunt and parade herself before a mirror. Positively Celeste could not have explained the sudden urge that motivated her to transform herself into this flaming vision of carmine and crimson, high heels and silken hose. It was as free from vanity as it was flambuoyant, as unsophisticated as it was bizarre, this lightning change that was, the first time, conducted on her bathing beach, the very moment that her boat had grounded. But from wisps of almost nothingness, from flippant kilt and careless khaki shirt to this extravagant yet quite fastidious costume — from naked, sun-brown legs to sheen of silk and haughty, conspicuous heels, the wild girl passed—and passed withal as in a breath—from childhood into womanhood.

That it was the influence of her jungle ancestry, some instinct handed down from the aloof and isolated tribe that bore her, can be only chronicled as a suggestion. But to instinct, urge of influence, whatever thing it was, Celeste responded, taking over her new role of forager and provider in her forthright, matter-of-fact way, without ostentation or embarrassment except insofar as this effort of sartorial immaculation declared itself; and yet she donned the lavish ensemble without more visible concern than if she were thrusting her arms into

some simple, Sunday frock at Mrs. Simms' mild bidding.

Yet in all truth there was another aspect to this transformation; a darker, subtler aspect. It was as if Celeste became a vestal virgin, a solemn priestess, robed and ordained to serve the sanguinary whim and equally sanguinary appetite of this aquatic Moloch demanding bloody sacrifice.

## CHAPTER XXVI

THIS sudden search for Dinodon's daily bread was not as simple a matter as one might suppose, and Celeste must needs go warily if she would avoid suspicion. First, there was always this urge for secrecy, next it was out of the question to purchase a supply at ordinary prices and in the usual way; for Dinodon's three tons of vicious health demanded copious nourishment; and lastly, the farmers whom she found accessible were not stock raisers in the wider sense, and while most of them had cows and swine, some a few sheep, in the main they restricted themselves to the raising of fruit and poultry, and very few could be induced to sell at normal prices, what obviously they needed to retain for their own requirements.

Almost at once she decided to confine her effort to the purchase of sheep alone, and here she trod on safer ground and could give a fairly plausible pretext; for at her home were two young ewes that had been given to her, when lambs, by no less a donator than Swartzhausen. But then their mothers had gone the same way as all other flesh that came to Guido's beach alive—and disappeared.

It was easy for Celeste to say she wished to add to her flock and acquire an increase. But demurely as she told her tale of baby lambs and silky fleeces, she met with poor success. There were very few sheep left for sale; Dinodon's many raids had seen to that.

Another disconcerting factor to be countered wherever she turned her prow was the inevitable

question asked: had she seen the 'sea-beast'? And was she not afraid to invest in sheep while this mysterious raider was still at large?

To all of which Celeste returned her smile of innocence—and fibbed engagingly.

## CHAPTER XXVII

PERSISTENCE wins, and in the end the girl discovered an undisturbed farm and a real flock of sheep, well back from the lake, so that she had to leave her boat moored and ride a borrowed horse in order to get there. These people did not ask questions about Dinodon except to invite her theory as to how the rumor originated, and to join with them in ridiculing it. Evidently Dinodon had not wandered any considerable distance from the water, preferring no doubt to remain assured of a safe line of retreat in case he were attacked. But he was intrepid enough to have crossed the continent and on doubt hunger would have driven him eventually to penetrate much farther inland. Celeste purchased eleven sheep, and accepted a promise of a few more later on. The farmer undertook to deliver them to the lake ferry which would in turn run up the inlet, and deposit them on the Verver premises. It was too indiscreet to arrange delivery directly into Guido's hands; he already had aroused country-wide curiosity with his many previous purchases and odd behaviour generally, but even so, never a word of suspicion in her hearing was coupled to his name as far as this reported lake monster was concerned.

So, a few days later, one could have seen the girl and her guardian driving the little flock through the stumps and brush towards Guido's dilapidated old barn, the door of which he very carefully strengthened and barred against a possible invasion on the part of Dinodon. The reptile, if it could be prevented, must not feast one day and famish the



next, and only a steady supply of meat properly parceled out to him could forestall such contingencies. If Dinodon once broke down that door there would be few sheep left for another meal; what he did not slay outright would obviously scatter over hill and dale and be difficult, even for him, to find again, whereas only one sheep every second day, together with his success as a fisher would, they thought, keep the big brute's appetite appeased.

Celeste's achievement gave Swartzhausen a breathing space, but the battle was only just begun. There was a future to provide against, as indeterminate as it was difficult, and he might well ask how long this condition of affairs was going to last, or for that matter, the trifling sum of money recently obtained from the storekeeper. It was more than a difficult, it was an impossible situation to contend against. Here was a three-ton carnivore at large, a beast possessing a sagacity as keen as a man's, an indomitable will and a spirit of intrepidity that flinched or quailed before nothing. The proper place for such a monster was the open sea; Dinodon needed an ocean range for his activities. When one considers that the grizzly bear is the largest known terrestrial flesh-eater, and that he is a veritable giant at one thousand pounds, it is easier to appreciate both the size of this gigantic saurian and Swartzhausen's dilemma.

It had become a conspiracy against society, this attempt to prolong the secret existence of so terrible a creature, and at the same time it was an ordeal from which the scientist quailed and retreated while Celeste stood firm. Many and long were the discussions held concerning Dinodon's disposal; few were the solutions discernable and only two things giving promise of feasibility did

they decide upon. The first was to prepare more ectolin now that there was money again with which to purchase the required ingredients; and the next, to buy up breeding stock and raise a supply of meat themselves. This latter was Celeste's idea. Guido must turn farmer and raise pigs—dozens of pigs! And Celeste on her part would become a shepherdess and provide sheep—dozens of sheep.

And it was all so hopeless, so impossible! Until Celeste was twenty-one there would be no money for such a venture; and she was not yet nineteen.

But the ectolin, certainly, was more feasible. Guido thought he could make it now in larger quantities; though it would be a different ectolin, not the miraculous life-builder such as he had raised this colossus upon, but a less subtle diet, in fact a kind of glorified stock food that would provide a maximum of nourishment without inducing abnormal growth.

"How long will it take to get these drugs?" Celeste inquired.

"Three or four weeks at the quickest," Guido told her, then warned her that it might and probably would take longer. Sometimes he had waited three months before the rare and expensive ingredients were delivered to him. He led her to understand that some of the factors in this clever preparation were so rare, and so little known, that very few chemists or apothecaries handled them, and on most previous occasions they were obtained for him as a special order, and only then after much searching and delay.

"We will keep Dinodon satisfied until you get them," Celeste determined with her usual naive optimism. "We will buy up everything we can."

This decision Guido Swartzhausen openly and audibly agreed with, while secretly, and with a

weary soul he wished that he were sending for a high-powered rifle, and the kind of bullet Severin had used so very effectively that day the God of the Sacred Swamp expired

*[The following text is extremely faint and illegible due to fading and bleed-through from the reverse side of the page. It appears to be a continuation of the narrative.]*

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**CHAPTER XXVIII**

**A**ND Dinodon knew! He knew well that the man who had raised him, who stood responsible at this hour for his very existence and for his enormous size as well, desired his extermination.

Whether it were brain or other processes that had capably mastered the intricacies of an alphabet, assuredly his mental powers were keen enough to read the signs and gather home the truth. Clearly the saurian realized that if he dared, Swartzhausen would destroy him.

More than this he comprehended. Celeste alone stood between him and danger, even unto death. She it was who sought to feed him at the present time, and but for her Swartzhausen would plot his destruction, no doubt succeeding in the end, while in the meantime leaving him to forage and hunger.

Perhaps less clearly did this giant creature recognize that he stood alone in the world, a being unique and without rightful place in the scheme of things; that once revealed to the eyes of human kind, every man's hand would be against him. Not in vain had he gazed upon the big lake steamer, or watched the cumbersome ferry plough back and forth, leaving a wake of froth and disturbance behind it. He did not understand these things, but yet he somehow sensed that they were powerful things controlled by forces and endowed with forces he could not, dared not, contend against. And that was why, when a big boat hove in sight or when Dinodon felt the throb of its engines vibrating through his element, warning of its approach, he was always deep at the bottom of the lake,

leaving this rival monster to pass safely and fathoms high above him.

How could this unwonted being who was, as it were, the adopted denizen of a minor lake in the heart of the Rockies, stand aware that there were wider stretches of water that could afford him security and food in plenty. Or how determine for himself that beyond the encircling hills embosoming the only habitat he knew, was league after league of plain and mountain, and mile upon mile of waterways; waters that were worthier of his mighty bulk and prowess? No, Dinodon had not the means to know that did he but turn his long neck to the West and travel straight he would find a safe abiding place in the vast Pacific.

## CHAPTER XXX

IN the meantime Celeste kept busy and whilst she sought by hook or by crook and this is very literally said—a sufficiency of victims for her ponderous charge, there arrived at last the vital consignment of cannisters and boxes that would ultimately mean a new and greater store of ectolin.

Swartzhausen awoke with freshened energies. He swept away the long accumulated dust from his virtually abandoned laboratory; for the place that once had been so immaculately clean and filled with tanks, replete in turn with monstrous and exotic life, had lain inanimate and still for many a long year past, and was today but little else than the tomb of his dead aspirations. The innumerable receptacles that once had held or penned that strange array of frogs and tadpoles, newts or axolytis—in short, a diverse host of small amphibia—were stacked away in corners or piled forlornly on shelves and tables. Intricate paraphernalia stood idle and shrouded in dust and cobwebs, and row upon row of books reproached him, technical works, far-brought and costly, that had rarely if ever felt the touch of thumb or finger—since Dinodon grew up!

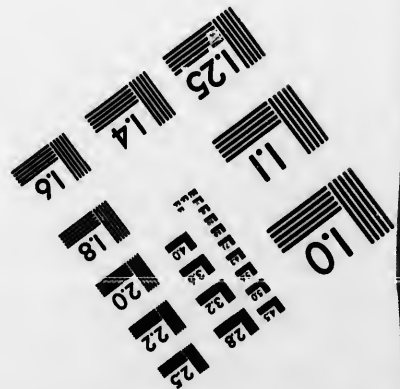
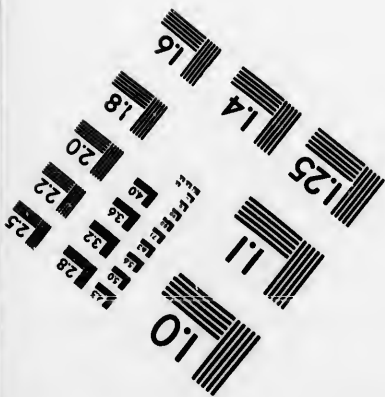
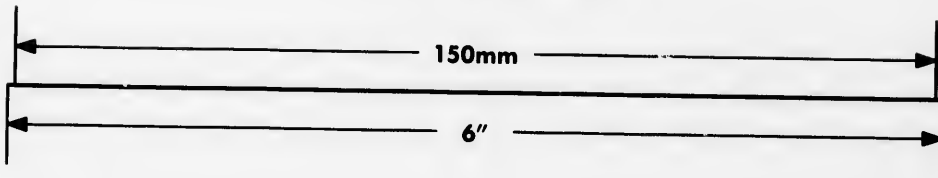
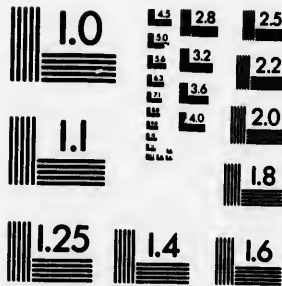
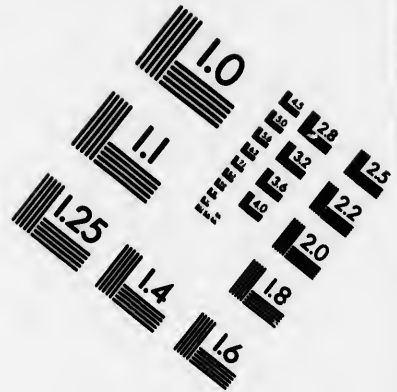
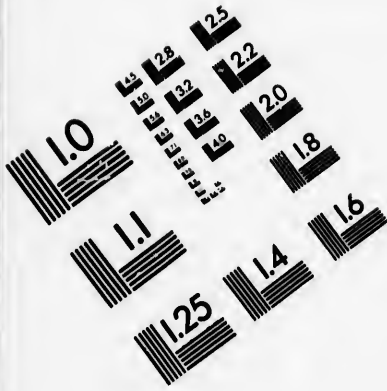
Some of his old skill reasserted itself when he resumed his erstwhile work; to weigh and measure, grind and pulverise; to mix and pour, then pour and mix again, strange powders and ingredients. This was to be a different ectolin, compounded in greater bulk and stored away in hundred-weights instead of ounces. What had once been weighed by dram or grain on a set of delicate scales was now sieved and collected into pails and barrels; for







# IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (MT-3)



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the whole idea was this: if Dinodon would fish and be content with a minimum supply of expensive meat, this bulkier ectolin would fittingly sustain the anabolic growth of his vast body and at the same time satisfy his hunger. But it was yet in preparation, and not to be forgotten were its speculated merits awaiting test and proof.

## CHAPTER XXIX

SWARTZHAUSEN failed. It was a clever combination, but it was not ectolin. Leastwise it was not the miracle-food and magic stimulant that Dinodon knew and craved. By one means or another the herpetologist had informed the Thing that he could expect a resumption of this much-loved esculent he had well-nigh grown up on until recent times. It was a promise written in the sand, and, like the sand sustaining it, the promise crumbled, leaving in its stead disaster and a final holocaust.

One evening Guido stood at the water's brink and whistled, giving the same familiar signal that, countless times had called the reptile from afar, bringing him in one swift flight, a rapid shadow just below the surface, to thrust himself ashore and eagerly advance to where the ectolin was ordinarily placed for his consumption.

Avidly he answered now, swiftly gained the beach and in a flash had reached the platform-like arrangement on which the cherished food was heaped invitingly. Perhaps he noted then the liberality of the amount provided; possibly he gave no heed to quantity. But the quality disturbed him instantly. This mass of coarse drab granules was not ectolin. Certainly it seemed to hold the same constituents; its flavour was suggestive of the old entrancing flavour but potency and palatability both were lacking. This did not please his palate nor send that entrancing thrill of satiation through him. Dinodon found as he tasted just one outstanding quality, the quality of disappointment,—and, a mom-

ent more, the frenzy of the brute was past all bounds.

Lucky it was for Swartzhausen that he had shut himself inside his house. He never braved the dissatisfied amphibian nowadays. This was an outlawed Dinodon, a thing of ferocity and anger; an hungry dangerous thing he could neither trust nor satisfy. So Guido, taking thought, had installed himself behind stout walls to watch results more safely.

Well for him that he did. A moment later Dinodon was flinging his tons of fury around the yard, lashing with his formidable tail and bellowing his wrath in thunder-tones. Men told in wonder of that strange tumult afterwards — told without comprehending!

Spent at last, the brute ceased its gyrations; the long tail subsided from lashings into quiverings; the serpent-neck stayed its thrusting and contorting, commencing instead to sway in slow rhythmic side to side — a characteristic motion of Dinodon when stirred. But the pantomime of wrath had been extreme, holding the man petrified with horror, and with terror sparkling from his eyes. He had never seen the reptile display such rage as this before.

Dinodon quietened presently as if resting from his frenzy, but his baleful eyes were ever turned towards the house, seeming to search the windows with a flickering hate that boded ill for the trembling man within.

Then swiftly, suddenly, the saurian spun himself towards the beach of sand and gravel that reached up to the house. In full view of the window, methodically, calmly and in a manner most extraordinarily human, he dragged his claw about

the ground, framing his vindictiveness in four appalling symbols:

GIRL.....

It was plain to see in the moonlight. Swartzhausen saw and read; then almost in a swoon he flung his weight against the door, to hold an object body there and shriek — then shriek again.

But Dinodon had vanished.

There was one sheep left in Guido's barn, and Guido had determined during the hours of a fear-racked night when terror denied him slumber, that on the morrow he would put into effect a maxim he had learnt at school, to strike first, and do the talking afterwards. Expanded, it expressed and embodied one supreme resolution: the remaining sheep would be Dinodon's last meal and the poison, still fluid and potent, though it had lain inert since the coming of this Thing, the medium of his own emancipation.

It would be time enough to talk the following day, when the beast was dead; interim, he would have his story ready, which meant, his lies prepared for the staggering world who came to exclaim over the corpse of a dead dinosaur.

So far he could see his desperate way, but what would he say to Celeste? If cravenly, at least honestly, Guido admitted that much as he feared the reptile's rage and the constant peril of its presence, he dreaded as much or more the wrath of his ward and her inevitable condemnation later. But linked with the horrors of the recent darkness went a vision that would not forsake him. It was the vision of Celeste's white arms flinging off the spray, and in the background Dinodon — fangs avidly extended.

Therefore had Guido Swartzhausen vowed to destroy this Thing, come weal, come woe.

## CHAPTER XXXI

SHE still swam her inlet; still, scornful of convention, shot her slim, fair body like some glistening torpedo through the water, in all her splendid nudity! And very near the mouth of the inlet where tall trees flung their shadows from the shore, ever a curiously formed shape, that girl and guardian only could identify, rode as it were the surface of the lake, and watched. Dinodon watched—while Celeste, dauntless, intrepid, disdaining all things, disdaining most of all the scientist's perturbations—bathed and derided.

It was not possible from Guido's farm to look upon the little bay she so fondly called her own and so constantly frequented. A slight promontory on which grew a clump of sturdy cedars screened the view from his abode, and unless she swam away the view from his abode, and unless she swam well out towards midstream he could not see her. Celeste, on the other hand, from her snug shelter, could observe along the inlet and out over the lake. Neither from her beach nor from her home were Guido's buildings visible. Here again the forest timber intervened.

Within the sanctuary of that secluded cove Guido had never a second time intruded, but often he stood somewhere upon his own domain and watched her swimming from afar, a tiny speck of raven tresses against the sapphire stillness of this cradled strip of water. Often of late he scanned the lake as well, seeking a view of the serpent head and as often as otherwise, not very far away, he could descry it. Sometimes the neck protruded a living, sinister periscope, and always Guido knew with a sickening certainty that those evil, libidinous

eyes were rivetted upon the same small profile—the alabaster torso of Celeste!

She had ceased from her labors for a day or so; her boat was drawn high on the beach and sheltered in the bushes. The second delivery of sheep from the distant farm was due immediately, and now that her money was expended there was little to be gained in undertaking further errands. So for the present the girl was well content to swim, and dream, and idle after her usual wont, and, upon occasion, argue with, or dismay her guardian. To the latter, standing at the bend of his shore she was very plainly in sight that morning where she swam freely and unconcernedly about, as much at home in the water as any frog!

Just that very thing the Tadpole-man was thinking as he contemplated her, yet his face was fearful and pallid from the dread that surged his heart. For, at a point out in the lake, just opposite the inlet, was another object that did not swim about, but instead remained still and rigid. It was the ominous head and neck of Dinodon, and Guido shivered to behold him. Had Celeste no apprehension of her risks? Could not this head-strong girl appreciate her danger? The agitated scientist shook himself together. Determination strengthened in him. He would warn her once again; compel her to forsake her folly



## CHAPTER XXXII

HE found her presently, standing half submerged with the water lapping her slim, lithe waist. Celeste was staring at him. She had never been disturbed like this before.

"What have you come here for, Guido?" she demanded sharply

In answer he pointed to where, out on the lake, a mass of brush and forest debris floated in a tangled pile.

"Do you see that?" he asked, with his agitation very plainly visible. But she ignored it.

"I see a bunch of brush," she returned carelessly, "what about it? Why don't you clear out? I want to land and get my clothes on."

"Look again," exhorted Swartzhausen solemnly, "what is that behind it?"

Celeste looked indolently towards the distant thing at which he pointed with a straightened forefinger. The object might have been a derelict hat afloat, but it seemed to purposely lurk behind the brush half screening it.

The swimmer laughed. "It's Dinodon," she said indifferently. "If you can watch me, why cannot he? Now get out of here, I want my clothes."

Guido spoke rapidly then. He was so much in earnest, so thoroughly controlled by fear that he had no mind for the unconventional situation his invasion of this virgin privacy produced. His one thought, one desire on earth at that moment was to save this undisciplined naiad from the fangs that threatened her. She was always bathing, and Dinodon always watching. He had known her to

swim all day, he was aware that quite frequently she swam by moonlight, she had in fact often told him so; once she had playfully described herself as diving for stars in the water—the little stars that tumble at night-time from the sky. Dinodon also swam all day; sometimes Dinodon watched by moonlight. Guido must, he would prevent it. He had authority—she was his ward—his own—his very own White Frog.

“He shall not slay her! He shall not devour her!” he was breathing the words to himself. Then aloud he spoke and in his emotion his voice rose high, shrill-pitched and quivering.

“This has got to stop!” he cried to her. “He is always watching you, and I am warning you, it is no longer safe for you, or anyone else, to bathe around here. That brute must be disposed of. He has become dangerous and you must keep away from him. Now come out, and dress yourself.”

A peal of laughter answered him. Then next the maiden did a very vulgar thing. She put her small thumb to her nose and grimaced behind it, while tauntingly she chided him.

“And you must dispose of yourself, and not come peeking around me again. I’m not one of your specimens, you know.”

She stayed to smile a moment’s mockery, then keeling over, one supple arm flexed like a bow above her, the clean stroke propelling her, graceful and shimmering, further from the shore.

She called back to him. “Here’s for a race with Dinodon. I’ll tell him not to eat you.”

He was so desperate, so very much in anguish that he could not brook her mockery. It stung him, whipping him from fear to anger. He screamed his last words at her.

"What if he eats you first?" Go swim and be damned—I hope he gets you."

It came to his ears like little bells achime, that farewell, rebei laughter; but Guido in his dudgeon swung furiously away.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

HE went back to his lonely house. It was high noon now and he had not eaten since his supper of yesterday; nor had he slept. He searched around for food, then, finding nothing cooked available, necessity routed his fears temporarily, driving him towards the preparation of a meal. When this was ready he sat down to his dinner and ate hungrily. Satisfied at last, he rose and, leaving the buildings, walked to the water's edge for another anxious survey.

He could see no Dinodon, no Celeste. The floating rubbish was still at the mouth of the inlet close to the farther bank, but nothing suggestive of the amphibian could he detect. Reflecting that in all probability Celeste had likewise retreated to her home for her own midday repast, he re-entered his dwelling and idled about

A feeling of drowsiness crept over him but for a while he stood contemplating the barrels of ectolin. It reveals the character of the man that never had it entered his head to commercialize the miracle product. Sold as a stock-food in competition with the best of such commodities, and with its potency reduced to a less startling ratio, this discovery would have brought the Tadpole-Man the wealth of a millionaire. But Guido could only think in terms of science, he had no conception of commercial values, his wits were not for fortunes or finances. To be sure, he had long since determined to give in the end his secret to the world; the innate conceit of the man prompted that, and when he was dead, he expected Science to honour and mankind to remember him. But as far as converting

it into dollars now, probably he did not realize it could be done.

What he did at that moment, was to scoop up a little and eat it from the palm of his hand. Certainly there was no magical result, but quite possibly some drug that it contained increased his sensation of lassitude and may have been responsible for the heavy sleep that enwrapped him a few minutes later, and after he had dropped to his bed and stretched himself out. All this without bolting the door; therefore he was very fast asleep and quite unaware of her intrusion when, an hour later, Celeste, who never knocked and never asked admission, stole in to discover her slumbering guardian, and without disturbing him, go quickly and noiselessly out again.

Guido awoke to the realization that the day was over and moonlight streaming through the panes. He had slept since midday, and it was now nine o'clock. With this return to consciousness, at once his fears resumed their sway, this time the more intensified because for all these hours he had, as it were, been off his guard. Now his trepidation took the form of a compelling desire to know if Celeste were safe and keeping away from the lake, or if instead, she had been foolhardy enough to go swimming again after his warning.

Without hesitation he repeated his visit to her sanctuary. He did not care now, she could scold and be offended to her heart's content; in contradiction to his angry words that morning and in spite of his personal fear of Dinodon, he went determined at all costs to protect her.

High and bright the moon shone over lake and mountainside, and by its light all objects were very plain to see. If she were actually swimming at the moment he could easily have discovered her.

somewhere out in the water, for from that vantage point practically the whole of the inlet came under observation. But land and water both seemed deserted. He found the impressions of her bare feet in the sand but they led helter-skelter in all directions and so told him nothing. The obvious assumption was that, long before this, she was safely at home and under the maternal wing of Mrs. Simms.

Guido detested the idea of calling at the house to make enquiries. It meant contact and conversation with a woman and the only woman he ever tolerated was this girl, for whose safety he now distressed himself. Mrs. Simms annoyed him, bothered him tremendously. But for the sake of his White Frog, to the harmless old lady he went forthwith, to discover at once that Celeste was not at home.

"I have not seen the child," wailed the housekeeper in response to his inquiries, "since early in the afternoon. She never tells me where she's going, and she doesn't know there's such a thing as mealtimes. There's her supper, look, still waiting for her."

It was an all-embracing gesture that accompanied her words, encompassing a multitude of suppressed complaints, a host of woes and worries, but Guido felt the burden of his own dismay sufficient for the evening and hastily departed.

He had not expressed his fears to the aged woman; how could he, when, after all these years, she did not even know that Dinodon existed. Back to the little cove straightway he went, heart-heavy and despairing.

There was a miniature path that Celeste invariably followed from her dwelling to her beach, a ribbon of trodden earth that ziz-zagged through

the stumps, and terminated short of the shore-line in a grove of poplar saplings; it was her disrobing spot, and if it be questioned how Guido knew this, know it he did, and passed into its shadows without scuple.

He found them, then, and gauged the worst. Two little shoes beside a tiny heap of clothing, and where the ground was soft and bare, the indents of her ten small toes—the White Frog's toes!

He reeled a little as he read the signs. There was no proof; she could be safe and sound; she could be lurking mischievously nigh, ready at any moment to mock him from her ambush, just like she had mocked and tantalized that morning. But Guido knew that there would be no sound of mockery; he knew that he had heard the last of her soft laughter.

Room for uncertainty, even for assumption of her safety there was a plenty; yet in his heart dwelt certainty that he would see Celeste no more. So Guido clutched at the little shoes, lifting them to his heart, then ran in cold panic to the water's edge, to call and shout, then call again: "Celeste, Celeste, Celeste!"

So he stood there, how long he knew not, calling to the shadows and the moonlight, calling to the water and the silence—and against his heart, the little shoes.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

[I]t was more a ghost than a man, this stricken thing that presently stumbled back to the desolation of the log buildings and a bitter loneliness that numbed, while yet it tortured. Surely the carnal flesh of Swartzhausen returned that night, but the soul of the man, the spirit of his science alike were slain, and in place thereof a madness magnified with lust to kill. No fears assailed him now. He went his way to seek revenge and, if must be, to perish in the consummation of that vengeance.

He still had the poison; in all a plentiful supply. Would it see him through? Would those death-dealing needles serve him now or fail him? Dinodon was huge, stupendous; three tons of wicked, vital flesh; but had not Verver claimed that those few shrunken roots were filled with death enough to kill a whale? Enough to kill a whale! And Dinodon was no leviathan. But the midget of a whale was he! Well, soon would Guido know.

He came to the patch of sand as he approached the house and all at once the maddened man felt impelled to write his words of wrath, to vent his spleen in furious lettering. But Dinodon had been first again! There stood the reptile's challenge:

MEAT OR U . . . .

Defiantly they greeted him, those straggling marks that seemed to leer from out the sand. This time they induced no fear; only a greater urge to kill.

The Tadpole-man danced on them in his frenzy, obliterating every line and curve, until the spot was nothing better than the havoc of a thousand heels. If Dinodon were lurking near, Guido neither feared



nor cared; somehow he seemed to feel himself secure; even to know that he would triumph. Steadying himself at last he very carefully smoothed down the sand, using a rake turned over for the purpose. Then Guido answered Dinodon:

**MEAT YOU SHALL HAVE !  
TONIGHT YOU FEAST !**

He shrilled the words aloud as one by one he gouged them out with the handle of his rake, and having written, awhile he stood surveying his promise, gloating and gibbering over it; talking to himself and to the night as his maniac-anger ebbed and flowed within him.

## CHAPTER XXXV

SWARTZHAUSEN killed the sheep. He dragged it close to where he had just written, and cut its throat, wetting his hands in the crimson flow and splashing it around; counting, no doubt, that the smell of fresh-spilled blood would coax the saurian home if he were not foraging too far away.

He poisoned the carcass next, thrusting his needles far and wide into the still warm flesh, until satisfied his bait was loaded with destruction, he took the case of hypodermic needles to the house and placed it, still open, on the table in his laboratory. The little shoes that had been carried about in his pockets all this time he now stood on a shelf in the kitchen; such a shelf as one sometimes sees erected for a clock to stand upon, slightly above one's head.

Guido fortified his home. Inside and out he nailed thick planks across his windows and also over his laboratory door. But the kitchen door he could not plank outside; he must not block his one retreat in case he were attacked too suddenly; therefore he carried in, first a sturdy log to be braced against it, and then a bar of iron which, when he had locked himself inside he meant to lay across by fitting it snugly into auger holes that he bored for this purpose in the door-frame.

"You will not break through that," he growled aloud, grimly satisfied with his achievement, "but try, you fiend!"

He was ready now, ready to stake his life against the life of this fell beast, for whose existence he stood responsible. But one thing yet remained for him to do. He must call the monster home.

He could not chance its non-appearance now that his snare was waiting, nor could he wait himself. He must be avenged tonight.

He stood for a moment by the water's edge, motionless in the moonlight, and swept the shimmering expanse with his eye. It was so calm, so still and beautiful, that moon-kissed surface. It seemed so hard to think of death, to realize Celeste was dead. There stretched the slumbering lake, a thing of vast serenity, a thing sublime, of silence and profundity. Surely the man was mad, but even so, the silver splendor of the night compelled his nerves to quieten, the flames that scorched his brain to wither down. Swartzhausen stood a long while gazing at the scene, somberly brooding, even as once a spirit brooded over the face of the waters. It was mental rest and balm, with fear for the moment swept from his being; but not his hate, not his lust for vengeance. These last were all unquenchable.

So the avenger stood; this Tadpole-man who once had been herpetologist and scientist-surgeon; who tonight was only passionate man against feral beast; fury pitted against fury. Thus he halted in the hush of night, a warrior on the brink of battle, biding the lull before the fight, the silence that precedes the clash of arms, when waiting ranks confront their foes.

He broke the spell at last, waking the stillness with a long, vibrating whistle. Thus had he summoned Dinodon of yore, so summoned he the brute tonight, the call to meat, the call to ectolin—the last call!

## CHAPTER XXXVI

DINODON came. In response to the long familiar signal and, perhaps, to that inviting smell of blood which, wafted from the beach, had in all probability already reached his nostrils, the giant amphibian sped to shore. He knew the sheep awaited him, and had landed once before that night only to find the one that served him absent, and his intended victim bleating companionless in a well-locked barn. Hence his irate challenge: "Meat or you." Famished he was, and spurred to wrath by hunger, for little enough was left in all that lake or its environs to give the Thing his fill. So he returned ravenous from fasting and Swartzhausen, by this time safe behind his ramparts, watched him drag his slim length from the water.

Dinodon was never once a fool. Nor had Verver been. Though he had no sense of poison-danger, though he could not analyse the nature of the snare, he knew it was a trap; something hostile, treacherous and ominous, that he must keep away from.

He smelt the sheep. He did not nose it; he kept his dreadful snout a short, safe length away, and who can paint with thought or word the process of his reasoning? But instead of a victim left alive for him to seize and kill, there was that slain body, with blood about it everywhere; yes, blood and Guido's very recent presence.

He could not deduce the literal truth; that was beyond him. But he could argue mistily that this well-slaughtered sheep was there to harm him;

that Swartzhausen had set it there setting, withal his hand against him. And, though the door might not break down the door, his bellow rocked the house.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

THE kitchen and the laboratory were the rooms that faced the lake. Back of them, in the form of a 'lean-to', were other rooms filled with miscellaneous things, but one of them Swartzhausen's bedroom. If Dinodon broke through a window he could not enter, his bulk would be too great, but he would be able to reach much farther in, driving the man to the far recesses; and what might happen in the end? If he broke through once it was safe to reckon he could break through a second place, and then a third, until, in the end, he could leap from aperture to aperture, thrusting his long neck in at any point. Could Swartzhausen evade him?

Fear returned to the man imprisoned in that house. Fear of physical death and torture from those fierce, insistent fangs. He writhed and trembled as his mind dwelt on such horror, and, in imagination, the cruel teeth rent and tore his body. He had seen them rend so many things; often creatures larger than himself.

What an awful doom! What a death to die! Now the attack commenced. A succession of crashes against the building, a whirlwind of fury hurling itself upon the resistance of stout timbers. By this time the brute was raging and in his paroxysms he did not stay at first to select one point at which to batter. Instead, leaping high in air he flung the whole of his immane bulk against the walls as if to sweep the structure from off the ground it stood upon. No such effort could endure for any length of time; soon Dinodon was stalking

around the place seeking some less strenuous way by which to destroy his foe.

Then the real horror of the thing began. The creature's faculty of reason took the field; he commenced to test the doors and windows, the very tactics Swartzhausen most dreaded. He selected finally the entrance to the kitchen, seeking with his claws to tear his way inside. Failing in this, the terrible teeth began their assault, wrenching away the woodwork. But here again the brute was baffled. Quite easily he tore the outer frame to pieces, ripping the rough hewn planks that formed it like paper from a wall. But the smooth, sheer boards of the door itself he could not get his teeth into, and wrench as he would at the logs on either side of it, the barrier withstood him. Again the brute desisted, but first he swung his tail in one tremendous blow against the portals that resisted him. It shook the building but availed him nothing and Swartzhausen, trembling within, knew that the reptile had inflicted pain upon himself by this tremendous impact, for once more the monster helloed

Then, for a space of time, Dinodon's efforts ceased, and Guido, shivering in his death-cell home, moved fearfully about, creeping from window to window, peering out wherever he could between the interstices of the planks that shuttered them. The saurian had moved away, and now, a short distance from the house performed a watchful sentry-go, stalking back and forth, as strange a sight as it was awesome and forbidding. But seldom his eyes of hate were turned away, and, if they were, then very quickly focused back again.

In spite of the horror of the situation, to some extent Guido felt secure. He did not believe the monster was able to break in, unless he wrenched

away part of the roof, and even then the scientist thought his attacker could not reach him; for the walls were high, and under the rafters was a well-floored attic. What Dinodon was thinking as he stalked about, apart from thoughts of bestial hate, his prisoner could not know. It began to take on the aspect of a siege. Would Dinodon retreat at dawn, or would he continue to beleaguer his enemy throughout the day?

The Tadpole-man commenced in turn to wander about. Once he looked at the time; it was long past midnight. Once and more, he looked through a window at the Thing outside, who swung without variation back and forth continuously, monotonously even; once he looked at the little shoes, and very suddenly his terrors left him.

They were Celeste's shoes, or they had been hers, just a little while ago. How many hours since he had placed them there? How long since her white feet had worn them? And then, as grief and anger outstripped all else — how long before this child would be avenged? How long, indeed, when that huge tower of death rampaged without, biding its time to slay him.

The night wore on. Outside a monster prowled; within a man walked to and fro, who ever and anon stopped to look at two little shoes on a shelf above him.

They were elfin shoes; Celeste the elf that wore them. They were magic shoes, casting their spell upon him. They seemed to beckon, to call to him insistently: "Revenge, revenge, revenge!" Like Abel's blood those little shoes clamored for requital. "Vengeance! You must avenge!"



## CHAPTER XXXVIII

**G**UIDO stood more than willing to avenge. His whole being cried out, in turn, for vengeance, burned for requital; but his hands were impotent, he lacked the means.

Presently he took the lamp in his hand and passed into his erstwhile laboratory, his mind intent upon the poison. Apparently Dinodon, watching always, noticed the passage of the light from room to room. He stirred at once, advanced again towards the house, and commenced nosing the laboratory door, which, unlike that of the kitchen, was well fortified with planks firmly spiked across it both inside and out. The imprisoned man halted in the centre of the floor and, lamp in hand, remained eyeing the entrance. But he did not believe Dinodon could tear loose the solid walls of planks that served as double protection to him.

Dinodon's every effort was concentrated upon wrecking a way into the house and destroying his foe. The Tadpole-man's one object was to convey a part of that efficient poison into the gargantuan body of the amphibian, and he did not know how to do it.

He had discharged his needles into the sheep, and Dinodon had warily rejected the meat. He looked thoughtfully at the leather case now. There were just three needles left and one slender phial. But in that slim crystal cylinder resided death and destruction enough to recharge a hundred needles, and slay a host of Dinodons. Yet here he stood, incarcerated in his own abode and in deathly peril.

Oh, for a rifle now! How easily had Severin killed that menacing god, because armed with a suitable weapon. In all these years Guido had

never kept a rifle on the place. He had at no time thought to possess himself of one. He was a scientist and student, not a hunter. So here he was in this dread hour, unarmed and helpless except for this shabby black case spread harmlessly upon the table.

Almost ignoring the lurking brute outside, who fretted at the door scarcely a dozen feet away, for a brief space of time Guido stood motionless in the centre of the room, lost in deep thought, and concentrated upon his problem. He recalled to mind how quickly Verver died following that one slight injection, the giving of which had transformed him into a murderer. But just a few seconds after the withdrawal of the needle his victim was stone dead! Before he realized the trend his thoughts were taking, he found himself deciding which of the two methods, the needle or the draught, he would employ if the worst happened and he needs must resort to self-destruction in order to avoid the torture of Dinodon's sharp fangs. And thinking thus, he recalled his long-dead neighbor's words: "If you drink it, it is a little slower; but inject it into your blood, and you are dead."

Surely there would be time to thrust a kindly needle into his flesh if Dinodon broke in.

On top of this reflection came another, a gloomy thought, but, for all that, comforting. If Dinodon touched his body after that injection, Dinodon also would be dead.

The idea caught his fancy; it even drew a smile to his face, or more aptly described, a gleam of satisfaction. He would be sure of revenge even though dead himself. It would be Victory won, not in Defeat but in Death.

A few minutes later he was back in the kitchen with the case in his grasp, and gazing again at

Celeste's small shoes. They fascinated him so that he could not keep away for any length of time. As he scrutinized them now, the greatest, the most stupendous thought of all occurred to him. It was so extreme, so vast in its completeness, and yet so simple because all things truly great are fundamentally simple, that he shrank from it. Then again it demanded so much of Guido Swartzhausen's ipse se, that he flung it from him fretfully. He could not do this thing—not even for Celeste!

For with that one swift flash of thought the way had been made clear. He knew now how to consummate his vengeance.

To drink the poison and cast himself to Dinodon!

All sentient creatures cling to life; small wonder that Guido quailed. He shrank from such a sacrifice. Throughout his span of years he had never proved himself willing to do things for others, he had lived for science, and for himself alone. He could not kill himself deliberately while there was yet a chance to escape—to live. No, he thought a second time, not even for Celeste.

Again his eyes crept up to the little shoes as if to ask exemption. The little shoes smiled back—but smiled encouragement.

“Vengeance—you must requite!”

He thought he really heard the words. Surely they were spoken. Guido set down his lamp and stood there very still. The shelf above his eyes had become an altar; it was sacrosanct—and he, himself, as a knight keeping vigil, so long he stayed in a rigid pose and silence. And all the while the little shoes were smiling, whispering down to him: “Your blood for mine! Your blood for mine! Avènge! Requite!”

CHAPTER XXXIX

DINODON, and his patience parted company.

The dawn was nearing; he wanted his enemy, and he wanted him before daylight. The monster resumed his attack upon the house; once more he hurled his tons of fury in the air, and crushed against the building. The stout logs creaked at their well-notched ends, but easily resisted the impact of his weight.

Swartzhausen, startled from his reverie and almost shaken off his feet, held no fears now. Instead, he shook his fist towards his unseen foe and advanced a step or two towards the door.

"Wait, you fiend! I'm coming out."

## CHAPTER XL

[T did not seem to trouble him thence-forward, this thought of self-devised, and self-inflicted death. He found himself inwardly discussing it, analysing his own emotions, and wondering, the while, how he came to accept this fate so calmly. Perhaps, Guido did not realize the truth, that he had reached at last his supremest hour of life; his hour of immolation. He only felt a sense of satisfaction, a feeling of security, based on the thought that his resolutions would stand the test. Now he was ready to die, actually wanted to die, in order to avenge his White Frog; the perfect little frog whom Dinodon had devoured

So Swartzhausen, whilom herpetologist and surgeon, the Tadpole-Man of Warning Lake, awaited immolation, with fear dislodged, disdained; while in its place a grim determination settled, steeling his soul to sacrifice. And because this hour must be his last, embracing his last act of life, he felt it his prerogative to shorten or prolong it.

He could bide a little longer, a very little longer, to stand before Celeste's small shoes and think.

She had seemed so very wonderful; how could he have lived throughout those solitary years without her? Sometimes, for weeks on end, this child had been the only human being with whom he spoke. Certainly she was always the only one he joyed in talking to. To her, so often, he had boasted his triumphs, unfolded his fond schemes, and upon occasion glibly told his lies.

Now Celeste was dead, and Guido felt that he, himself, had slain her; he who deliberately had killed her father when, perhaps, he could have saved, or prolonged, his life. For the sake of his mad science he slew him, and now, directly as a sequel to that act of murder, this monster-thing that he had raised and reared had killed Celeste. Therefore, he argued fiercely, he, himself, destroyed her.

He did not note the lamp was burning low, nor yet that Dinodon was tearing at the planks again. He stood transfixed before the little shoes, the while uncounted pictures of Celeste were conjured into retrospect. He held her in a myriad postures, visioned her in a myriad scenes, followed, as it were, the while she tripped her care-free road from child to woman. . . . Again, and yet again, he watched as he had watched so often her white arms fling the spray, and marked ecstatically the flash of her slim body torpedoing its silver way. Entranced, once more, he viewed the splendour of that perfect nudity — the White Frog's nudity.

Still Guido lingered. So this was to be his end. He had trifled with Life, and Life at the last had overcome him. He had wrought against Death, even against God, if there were a God, and Death as the left hand of God was now stretched out towards him. But he had triumphed! Surely he had triumphed? Had he not swerved the laws of Growth, the annabolic and the katabolic of physical fulfillment? Was not this Peril at his door his proof — his evidence? Surely he had triumphed? And just as surely this victory over Life and Death, won in the path of God's just wrath, now spelt debacle for him.

## CHAPTER XLI

THE lamp was almost out. He woke from his tense reveries and turned towards the door. The heavy log was braced against it: he moved it carefully so as to make least noise. He felt the bar of iron, freeing one end a while, to make sure it would not hinder at the last. What there was to do must be done swiftly, adroitly — there must be no impediment.

He began rehearsing mentally; anticipating every act and movement of what was soon to be the closing drama of his life. He must not fail nor falter. He would lower the bar, cautiously, silently. He would hold the phial with one hand, the door-knob with the other. Then he must move rapidly. He would drink the poison to the last drop—enough to kill a whale—then quickly open the door.

And then again?

He dared not think on that. But' now the Tadpole-Man did the most extraordinary thing of his whole life. He took down the little shoes, one in each hand, and gently, reverently, kissed them! Then, just as gently, just as reverently, slowly and deliberately, Guido placed them back upon the shelf above — the little shelf that come to be the Altar of his Love.

"Celeste," he whispered, "I make amends — I will requite!"

CHAPTER XLII

HE lowered the bar.

Yet, but one lingering moment. One blessed flash of time; one little measure begged of all eternity — in which to view again Celeste's white arms fling off the spray. One picture more of supple limbs and silver water. Then back to grim determination; stern requital.

This time he cried aloud his words: "My little frog — my innocent White Frog — thus I revenge."

He drank it then.

One more breath to breathe; one second left to go. Swiftly, swiftly, he must move swiftly. But the door is open now.

A smile beneath the trim, black beard, a smile of ecstasy. A wonder-light in the small, dark eyes, the light of exaltation. A cold wind sweeping over him, through him — Ah!

But Guido Swartzhausen has passed the door.



## CHAPTER XLII

HEADED for Guido's strip of beach Celeste's small boat drove slowly towards the shore. There was very little breeze, but what there was had served her across the lake. Becalmed the night before, the girl had slept curled up under her sail, her craft snugly moored in a sheltered nook she knew, somewhere along the opposite banks. She crossed with the first of the daylight, picking her way unerringly through the clinging mists that wrapped the breast of Warning Lake like a nebulous cerement. Celeste sprang lightly from bow to land, the bearer of important tidings.

For she had been again to the delinquent farmer who was to have delivered the remaining sheep and now, due to her happy mingling of smiles and coercion, they would be landed from the ferry at her own wharf early in the forenoon, and Guido must be there to help her drive them over to his barn.

It was strangely still at that early hour as Celeste commenced to walk the few yards intervening between beach and buildings. Of a sudden she felt, without sign or substance prompting it, that the unusual or unwonted confronted her. All at once she saw the tracks.

Why did Dinodon tread so heavily in that soft stretch of sand? Why had his caution left him? And why again had he not kept a less visible course over the gravel bars?

Uneven, agitated tracks they seemed. She looked at them contemplatively, keenly. Then: Why had Dinodon rushed from the house like that?

Sure by now of something very wrong, she hastened to the buildings. There was the still, dead sheep, there the open door, and there, in front of the door—a splatter of blood! She saw with dismay the five-toed monster tracks abounding everywhere.

Celeste began to understand. The untouched sheep, the splatter of blood; an open door and an empty house, no Guido anywhere. But, on the threshold of that silent home, a shattered phial — the poison.

At last she understood.

Her hands went to her breast and crossed upon it. They clutched her struggling heart as if to hold it still; but she looked alertly about the rooms, and, in a moment all was as plain to read as a printed page, and every phase of that grim drama repeated its gruesome tale

Yet she gazed in wonder at the two small shoes, her shoes, that nestled side by side on the little shelf above her. Why had Guido taken them? Why had he put them there?

Then in a flash she comprehended.

"Oh, Guido, Guido! Could you not know that I had changed my clothes — I always changed them there!"

She followed the tracks again from the door. Past the piteous sheep; past the splatter of blood; down, down, how far this time it seemed, as she traced those tracks of death to the lake's chill edge where they disappeared.

But wherever the pentadactyl feet had trod ran an ominous grove beside them: a sinister rune that she could read. Oh Dinodon! Oh Guido!

The breeze stole in from the riffled lake and softly stirred the crimson dress that clad her, as over the mountains to the east a golden day arose;

while yet she stood, and looked, and read, and understood; numbed with a strange, disturbing loneliness.

Dumbly she read. The Writing in the Sand was manifest that morning. Dumbly she realized that both were gone; that she was left alone.

In crimson and carmine, high heels and silken hose the wilding stood bereaved. And we, ourselves, are left conjecturing for whom she mourned the more —

The Monster or the Man?

FINIS.

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