In 1864, when this story was written, people did not know what the center of the Earth was made of. One science fiction writer, Jules Verne, imagined what it might be like. In Verne’s story, Professor von Hardwigg discovers a crater in Finland that leads to the very center of the Earth and sets out with his nephew, Harry, and a guide, Hans, to explore it. They descend many miles downward. Finally, they reach a deep ocean and decide to explore it on a raft. Young Harry keeps a diary of their adventures.

**Tuesday, August 20.**

At last it is evening—the time of day when we feel a great need to sleep. Of course, in this continuing light, there is no night, but we are very tired. Hans remains at the rudder, his eyes never closed. I don’t know when he sleeps: but I find I am dozing, myself.

And then... an awful shock! The raft seems to have struck some hidden rock. It is lifted right out of the water and even seems to be thrown some distance. “Eh!” cries my uncle. “What’s happening?” And Hans raises his hand and points to where, about two hundred yards away, a great black mass is heaving. Then I know my worst fears have been realized.

“It’s some... monster!” I cry.

“Yes,” cries the Professor, “and over there is a huge sea lizard!”

“And beyond it... a crocodile! But who ever saw such a crocodile! Such hideous jaws! Such terrible teeth!”

“And a whale!” the Professor shouts. “See those enormous fins! And see how it blows air and water!”
And indeed two columns of water rise from the surface of the sea as he speaks, reaching an immense height before they fall back into the sea with an enormous crash. The whole cave in which this great sea is set, its walls and roof invisible to us, echoes with the sound of it. We are at the center of the most tremendous uproar! And then we see—and how tiny we feel! —

that we are in the middle of a great circle of these creatures. Here, a turtle, forty feet wide: here, a serpent even longer, its ghastly head peering out of the water. Wherever we look, there are more of them: great teeth, frightful eyes, great coiling bodies! They are everywhere! I snatch up my rifle and think at once how useless it is. What effect would a bullet have on the armor that encases the bodies of these monsters?
There seems no hope for us. Though, suddenly, most of the creatures have plunged under the surface and are no longer to be seen, they leave behind a mighty crocodile and a prodigious sea serpent: and they are making toward us, and the end seems near. I think that, useless though it is, I will fire a shot. But Hans makes a sign for me to wait. For these monsters, having come so close to the raft, suddenly turn and make a rush at each other. In their fury they appear not to have seen us. And at that moment we realize how very small we are. To their great eyes, we must seem nothing bigger than an inch or so of floating scrap.

And so, in a thunder of broken water, the battle begins. At first I think all the other creatures have come to the surface and are taking part. There is a whale!—there a lizard!—a turtle!—and other monsters for which I can find no name. I point them out to Hans. But he shakes his head.

“Tva!” he cries.

“Tva? Two? Why does he say two? There are more than two!” I cry.

“No, Hans is right,” says my uncle. “One of those monsters has the snout of a porpoise, the head of a lizard, the teeth of a crocodile . . . It is the ichthyosaurus, or great fish lizard.”

“And the other?”

“The other is a serpent, but it has a turtle’s shell. It is the plesiosaurus, or sea crocodile.”

He is right! There seem to be half a dozen monsters, or more, but the truth is there are only two!
And ours are the first human eyes ever to look at these
great primitive reptiles! I am amazed by the flaming red eyes of
the ichthyosaurus, each bigger than a man’s head. Those eyes,
I know, are of enormous strength, since they have to resist the
pressure of water at the very bottom of the ocean. The creature
is a hundred feet long, at least, and when I see his tail rise out of
the water, angrily flicked like the hugest whip you could imagine,
I can guess at his width. His jaw is larger than I’d ever dreamed a
jaw could be, and I remembered that naturalists have said the jaw
of the ichthyosaurus must have contained at least one hundred
and eighty-two teeth. They were making their calculations, of
course, from the fossilized bones of creatures they imagined

had been extinct for millions of years. Now I, and Hans, and the
Professor, are gazing, from our tiny raft, at a living ichthyosaurus,
rising from an ocean deep inside the Earth!

The other creature is the mighty plesiosaurus, a serpent with
a trunk like an immensely long cylinder, and a short thick tail and
fins like the banks of oars in a Roman galley. Its body is enclosed
in a shell, and its neck, flexible as a swan’s, rises thirty feet above
the surface of the sea.
No other human being has ever seen such a combat! They raise mountains of water, and time and again the raft seems about to be upset. Time and again we imagine we are drowned. The creatures hiss at each other—and the hissing is worse than the sound of the wildest winds you can imagine, all blowing together. Then they seize each other in a terrible grip, giant wrestlers: and then, break away again. And again comes the great hissing, the furious disturbance of the water!

And in the middle of it all, how tiny we are! We crouch on the raft, expecting that any moment it will be overturned and we shall drown in that wildly disturbed sea, hundreds of miles below the surface of the Earth: far, far from the sky, trees, the blessed fresh air!

And then, suddenly, ichthyosaurus and plesiosaurus disappear together under the waves. Their going down, in one enormous plunge, draws the sea down with them, as if a great hole had been made in the water, and we are nearly dragged down with them. For a while there is silence. The water grows calmer. And then, not far from the raft, an enormous shape appears. It is the head of the plesiosaurus.

The monster is mortally wounded. All we can make out is its neck, a serpent’s. It is twisted and coiled in the agonies of death. With it the creature strikes the water as if with some great whip. Then it wriggles, as some vast worm might do, cut in two. Every dreadful movement stirs the sea violently, and we are nearly blinded as the tormented water sweeps over the raft. But bit by bit the great writhings die down, and at last the plesiosaurus lies dead on the surface.

As for the ichthyosaurus, he was surely recovering from the struggle in some deep cave. He could not have been unhurt. He must need to lick his wounds.

Or was he on his way to the surface again, to destroy us?