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Reptile

Reptile

by

Ryder W. Miller

Nobody he talked with seemed sure what it was or how it got there. It was big, “about the size of a dragon,” someone said. Some in the town were alarmed, but no official action had been taken as far as he knew. It was under surveillance and some people wondered what it would do when it got hungry. There was also the big concert in Reilly this weekend.

The story was that it just appeared one day and started walking around Reilly. It was a problem because of its size. It would knock over street signs and damage cars when it sat down on them. The officials had sent a few officers to keep an eye on it. The nearby Zoo was contacted, but they did not take responsibility for it. Nor were they sure what it was, either. It was bigger than the reptiles they had seen. It also did not seem to have supernatural powers. It did not escape from the zoo, but the only other explanation was that it walked out of the woods or crawled out of one of the nearby lakes. That did not seem likely either. Nobody as far as he knew said that they had seen it before.

The zookeeper should have known what it was, but she was a bit stumped by it also. The zoo was puzzled like most people in town and the word had gone out into the surrounding area that there was something unexplainable there. The big paper in town had yet to send someone out to verify the story, but the folks

at the local radio station had found the whole situation funny and laughed about it on the news.

They even decided to name the creature Rex.

Brad Ransom decided he would take a look for himself. He would take an afternoon off the phone work and take the bus to Reilly to take a look at it in person. He used to be at the Zoo and figured with the hierarchy there it might take them a few days to decide what to do or how to proceed.

Brad missed those days at the Zoo. He used to work there back when they had educators who could talk with the public when or if they wanted. There seemed to have been a change that took place where those positions now went to customer service workers. One figured if one studied natural sciences they would be a better fit at these places. People however were no longer there to be lectured at. They could look for themselves and read the signs. It was part of anti-intellectualism that seemed to be going around. Those taking the tickets and letting people through the gates did not need to pass too much other information along. This might have produced less message chaos, especially for the directors who were maybe ultimately responsible, but it did leave some educated people in the lurch. Maybe they did not listen

well enough? Or maybe they were too nerdy? Maybe the higher ups were getting tired of being told that they were wrong sometimes? They had reached a level where they could qualify for things, but it was sad to have an education that seemed to go to waste. Sad also not to be able to cash in on one's education and have to start again in a new field. Maybe he ruined his chances by talking too much, but maybe others cost less and were easier to predict and manage? They, though, were likely to have less interesting things to share than someone with a relevant education.

He found himself talking all days with others at his new job. This gave him more social time than he was used to, but now he was wasting what he went to school for. He, though, could be an informed person for days like these. Maybe he could help? Maybe the Zoo and town could use him today.

Brad liked to “commune with the other creatures of the earth” at the Zoo. They were ambassadors from the wild; he liked to think and say, “if someone saw a giraffe his day would never be the same.” These were phrases he thought up himself, not the ambassador one, but the other two. For Brad extinction was heresy of the worst kind. We shared the planet with other things, some of which that could not protect themselves. Zoos were not the solution to the problem, but they could help with it.

But what explained the scary and dark things that one could sometimes find in nature? It could be a tough world out there, especially in the wild. Being scary might have made it easier to survive. He also wondered about all those monsters that had disappeared. There were those old fantasy tales about them. Especially dragons, but other things as well. Were they extinct also? Or did they never exist? He also was interested in crypto zoology. He wondered if in an earlier age or if

he was more adventurous he could have been a sea-travelling naturalist. The experience the Naturalists had seeing the likes of things they could not even have imagined must have stayed with them their whole lives. Those must have been fascinating adventures. Young kids experienced those things at the zoo, but now there was so much information around that there was less to be actually surprised about.

This was, however, different. Here was an actual mystery that just walked into town.

He was going to Reilly anyway for a celebration and outdoor concert later this week, but he decided to go early also. Things, though, might change now that Rex had arrived. He decided he would go take an afternoon off the phones and go take a look before the crowds stopped by the concert later in the week.

He was so excited by this opportunity that he decided that he would not stop for a meal first. Maybe just a bag of candy. So many choices in the city, but Reilly might not have as big of a selection. The monster—no, Rex, would probably not attack him for them. He had to find where Rex was, but he probably could do so on his phone. There would also be people he could ask.

He missed his small town days, having now to travel to work in the big city. There were less trees and lawns. In a small town one could see the woods and the occasional deer. There were nearby fields, lakes, and streams.

But where did this thing come from? It could not have travelled far. As far as he knew the town was not warned that it was going to show up. He would know more after he looked at it in person,

Brad got off at Colchester Road and Grant Street. It was one of the few bus stops in the middle of town. There were a number of streets in this one. Most people lived in

houses in streets that veered off into the woods and hills. Five hundred or so people lived here. The town should make some extra money when the concert showed up in a few days. There already were tents and trailers at Yader's Field where the show was going to be. It was not a long walk, but he had Rex to find.

It was not going to be a giant show, but there was going to be a lot of fun. All kinds of music for this one. Some great rock and roll for these parts, even if not played by the original musicians. They had one of these every ten or so years. He was old enough this time so he would not have to go with his parents.

He decided to stop off at the corner store, the only one in town, to get chocolate and directions. The man at the counter was friendly.

"Two big events in the same week," he said with a smile.

"Do you know where I can find Rex?" Brad asked smiling back.

"We were hoping he would walk back to where he came from. We think he managed to hide in the woods out by Lake Bygone, but from what I heard he was seen on his way to Yader's Field. That is only about a mile up the road out front."

"Maybe Rex is here for the concert also?"

They both could not help laughing at this one.

"Wondered how he heard about the concert? It might need to be really old fashioned for that guy," said the counterman.

They both laughed again.

Brad said thank you and then made his way out towards Yader's Field. His legs were no longer up to this, him being used to sitting and talking on the phone all day. This was likely to be an adventure into the natural kingdom.

He would have to walk up the hill to get there. He did see some clues already. It was not reported where the creature had gone. Folks in town probably did not want to scare the public off from the big show on the weekend. He could see now that there was a street sign that something big had bumped into. There were also a few damaged cars along the way. There were a few people walking down the street that got emptier of houses as he walked along.

One person answered his question before he asked it. He knew why he was here.

"Yep, it went up towards Yader's Field. Hoping to get a good spot before the crowd arrives for the concert this weekend," she laughed. "Quite a surprise all around this time."

Brad was worried now. What if it stepped on somebody or knocked over some of the equipment? He decided to walk faster because he had gotten very curious. "Thank you," he said and speeded along on his way.

He could see the field in the distance. It was large and expansive. It would be a great spot for the crowd. The organizers were already there. So were the officials. There were trailers and make-do fences. There was also a stage that had been built already. He could see the set up and the speakers. It was modest. It was not going to be a giant crowd. It was going to be bigger than these parts were used to this time.

Getting close he found out the authorities cordoned off the place. There was a police barrier and few police persons who would not let him through.

"Sorry we can't let you through. We have an unexpected visitor. We don't know what it is.

"You mean Rex?"

"Yes. Rex now from Reilly. We need to

keep people away from it,” said a guard who was clearly not from this town.

“I was a Zoologist. Maybe I can help? I am a crypto-zoologist also. Can I take a look at it?”

“You have to talk to the officials. We cannot let people in yet. We might have to cancel the concert. It seems though to have picked the spot it wants.”

Brad could see now that it was sitting in the field. Not a prime spot to watch the show, but it had a lot of space to itself. Rex was big, with big eyes and could probably see well. Brad was sad now to think that he did not have a pair of binoculars to look more closely.

He thought about going back into town to buy them. The local stores would probably stock them because those going to the concert would probably want them. That, though, would be a long walk and he was too curious about Rex to wait longer. Now he was in a fix, not being able to go out onto the field to take a look because the area was cordoned off by the authorities. Some seemed to be wearing quarantine outfits. They had white suits and masks on. Some seemed to have equipment with them also. There were only a half dozen of them.

There was a preconcert set up and all sort of craziness would set in once the crowd arrived and the music started. People would flock here from the surrounding areas and maybe even farther. People would be spending their weekend here. Some might camp out. All those folks were not here yet, but Rex was here.

Brad decided to jump the fence and take a look. He could argue that he was on some bad grass or had too many drinks if he got in trouble. Maybe they would understand that he had a scientific interest in this thing? There might be some folks from the zoo there? Maybe they would recognize him and know

more about this thing?

Nobody had approached him when he walked to the fence. Most folks were in the distance. Some were “hanging around” with Rex. Some were still working on the concert set.

But what was Rex? A zoologist like himself should know. He was also a crypto-zoologist. Brad looked around to see that most people were busy and not paying attention to him. He decided to jump the fence and make a run for it. There were not a lot of security guards there yet. The scientists would probably not get in his way.

After getting through the fence without difficulty, he decided to jog through the site rather than run hoping that he would look less suspicious. Most people were busy and did not notice him. He was able to get within throwing distance of Rex without disturbing anyone. From here he would have to take it real slow because there were a bunch of scientists there.

Looking closer he could now see that the beast had a shiny white skin, and sometimes a hue of blue and green. Not exactly scales, but it glowed in the sunlight. It turned around and looked at him when he had gotten closer. He could now see its big face. It sure looked a bit like a dragon Brad thought, but actually it was more likely to be a dinosaur. There was an interesting look in its eye. It belonged here in some way. It was part of the community, but somebody who was not seen that often.

When he thought about what had been said to him over the last few hours he thought that maybe this creature was part of the community that would show up for these events. Had he heard some subtle hints that this creature was a part of the community who used to show up for these events? It might though have been a long time since this creature had visited, but some people did not

seem very surprised by it. Here it was a silent and not widely known member of the community. A wild neighbor. It sure seemed like Rex could help with security. Here was this community's Mascot, returned. Sort of like the big buddy friend some people had.

Maybe it was also like the Loch Ness Monster? Something that had learned to hide most of the time. There were not a lot of stories about Rex in these parts, but maybe he had not heard them? Rex could be a local secret? The townsfolk for Reilly sure seemed amused about Rex, a bit more than the concert that was going to take place there in a few days also.

Brad did have a question he needed to get an answer to understand. He would have to take a close look at the creature's neck. Maybe the technicians could answer the question so he did not have to get too close. He could see now that some security folks were getting close to his scene. He would have to act fast.

"Does he have gills?" Brad yelled at the technicians as he tried to get a closer look. He did see wings, but they were small and probably vestigial. It did not seem like this fellow could make it into the air. Nobody had said that they saw it fly around town. Meanwhile Rex was looking at him in a puzzled way. The technicians did not know how to answer at first.

Brad walked to the side to get a better vantage point to answer his question, but he was hearing the security guards now instead of the technicians.

"Sir you need to leave. You cannot get so close to the animal?"

"Does Rex have gills? I was a zoologist."

Brad was surprised when someone grabbed his arm.

"All right I will leave, but let me ask a question first."

He should have expected this. He should have known that the security guards would stop him.

"Okay. I will leave," he said getting the hand off his arm.

"He appears to have slits on his neck," said one of the technicians responding.

Brad squinted his eyes and could see them. He also saw big teeth when Rex made sort of a smile. He was happy he did not need to smell its breath. It probably also did not have fire.

"All right, I am leaving," Brad said as a hand squeezed his arm.

"I was a zoologist," he said trying to look as long as he could as Rex as they escorted him off the field.

"Sorry sir, but you cannot be so close to that animal."

"It has gills. It is probably a marine mammal of sorts. Strange unknown creature that can live on land and in the water. Maybe there once were dragons here and they decided to hide in the lake to be left alone. Maybe it was something nobody had yet catalogued."

The guard did not look interested.

"A local secret, maybe, but an interesting zoological find. I have some expertise," Brad pleaded, but he realized he needed to leave. Somebody will be studying this creature and he would be able to find answers later, maybe, but he would have to search and wait for them.

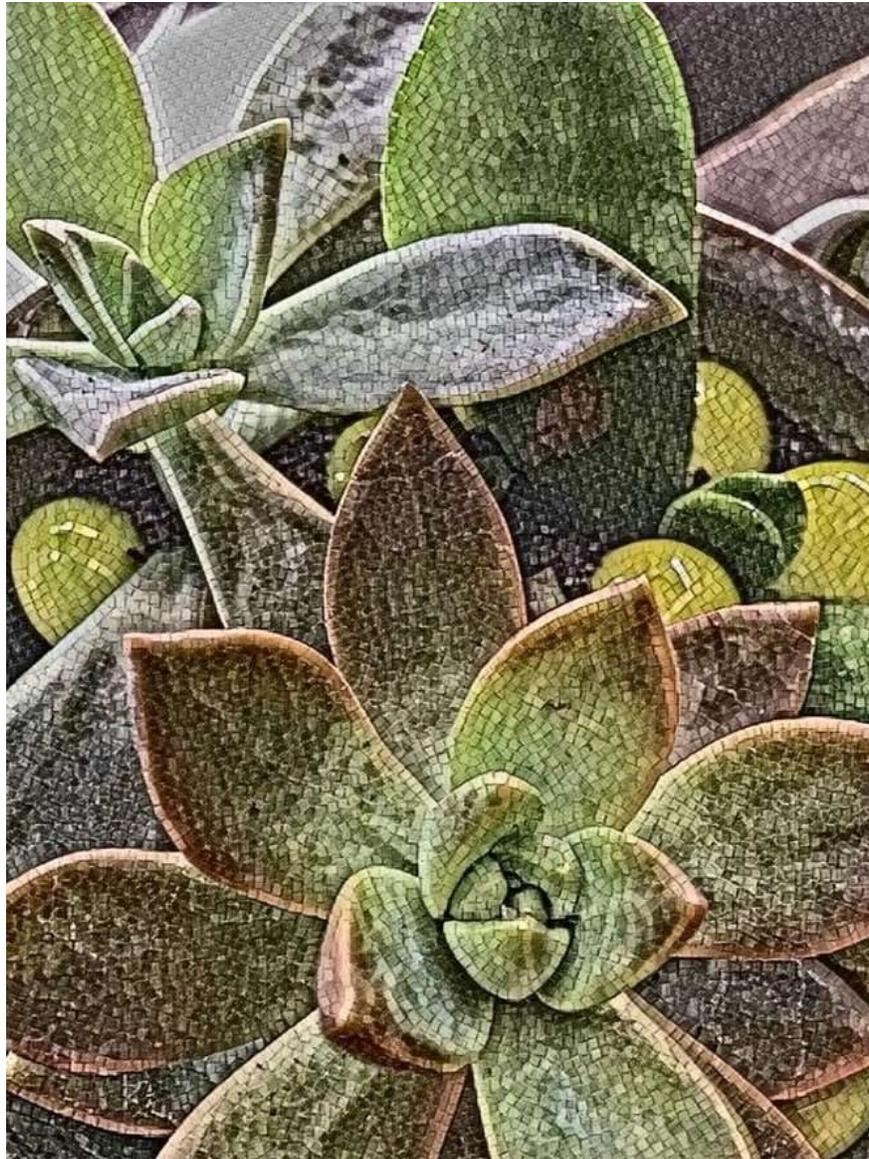
Of more immediate concern was whether there was going to be concert. Rex might have spoiled the show, but maybe Rex was a secret that people knew about here, but did not talk openly about? It could be part of the community? A protector and neighbor of sorts? It sure seemed like the show was going to go on. Rex would be given plenty of room to sit and listen.

A land-living reptile which also had gills.
Defunct dragon wings also. Why had he not
heard about it? Such were the ways with some
secrets. Some probably hoped that it would

—The End—

leave, but some might welcome it like a
mascot of sorts.

It sure did seem like the show was
probably going to go on like usual anyway.



“Succulents.” Photograph by Janet Brennan Croft