



KILLER

**A cold-blooded monster
is on the loose, and one
scientist is determined
to stop him.**

CROC

BY LAUREN TARSHIS

The people who live along the Rusizi (roo-SEE-zee) River, in the African country of Burundi (buh-ROON-dee), have many things to fear. There are venomous snakes. There are mosquitoes that spread terrible diseases. There is the war that has forced thousands of people to flee their homes.

And then there is Gustave (GOO-stahv), the most dangerous crocodile in the world.

Weighing as much as a small car and measuring longer than some airplanes, this monstrous reptile is nearly twice the size of a typical male Nile crocodile. He is also far deadlier. Over the past 30 years, Gustave has killed hundreds of people, and terrorized thousands more who live along this muddy river. He snatches people as they bathe, and attacks them while they're washing their clothes on the sandy banks. He rams small fishing boats with his powerful snout, and **devours** the fishermen who **tumble** into the water. Sometimes he swims downriver into the crystal-clear waters of Lake Tanganyika (tan-gan-YEE-kuh), where he hunts swimmers at play.

Most villagers here have a Gustave story to tell. Some even have scars to show from terrifying attacks they miraculously survived.

"The croc grabbed me by the leg," says one young man who was attacked while swimming

in the lake seven years ago, when he was 13 years old. He recently told his story to a writer from *National Geographic Adventure* magazine. "At first I thought it was one of my friends. Then I felt the pain. It was unbelievable." Nearby fishermen beat the water with long poles, hoping to scare the croc away. Their **ploy** didn't work, but the croc loosened its grip.

Amazingly, the young man survived. His leg, however, was crushed, and had to be removed just below the knee. Still, he considers himself lucky. "While I was in the hospital, I heard that four other people were attacked and eaten at the same beach. Five attacks at one beach: That's how Gustave is."

Bloodthirsty Croc

Terrifying stories like this are common throughout this region of Burundi, and have attracted the attention of herpetologists, (her-puh-TALL-uh-gists) scientists who study reptiles. One of the best-known of these experts is Patrice (pah-TREESE) Faye, who was born in France but lives in Burundi. It was Faye who gave Gustave his name, and it is Faye who has **devoted** the most energy to trying to catch him. Faye has become well known in Burundi. When he walks the streets, children surround him, chanting his name. They thank him for working to make their lives safer.

Look for four of my words on this page!





▲ **Patrice Faye with one of his "friends," on his farm in Burundi. Faye has been trying to find Gustave for years, but does not want to kill the croc. Rather, he hopes to study Gustave. What do you think he hopes to learn?**



▲ **Signs like this one warn swimmers about salt water crocodiles. Unfortunately, some ignore the signs and are injured or killed. Why do you think some people ignore dangerous risks?**

Faye first started hearing about Gustave back in 1988. Fishermen told him stories of a particularly enormous and bloodthirsty male crocodile who could eat four people in a single day. It was clear this was no ordinary croc.

There are 23 types of crocodilians, the category of reptile that includes crocodiles, alligators, caimans (KAY-mans), and gharials (GAR-ee-uhs). They differ in size and temperament, but almost all have sharp teeth and strong jaws and will—if provoked—take a bite out of a human.

But two species are particularly aggressive and dangerous. Saltwater crocodiles are most common in Australia, where signs posted on beautiful white-sand beaches warn: "Don't risk your life! Large crocodiles inhabit these waters! Do not enter the water!" Every year, a few swimmers ignore the signs and are attacked.

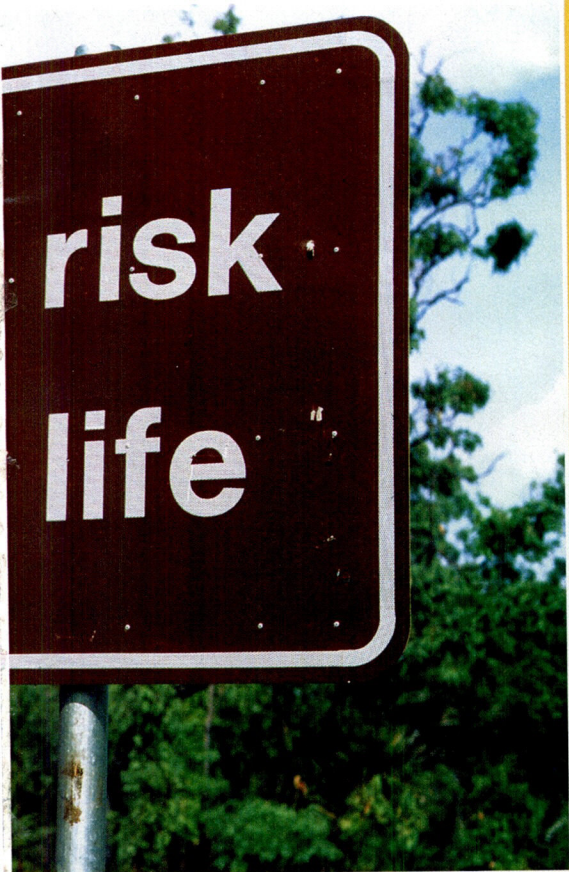
Nile crocodiles, like Gustave, are found in most parts of Africa. On average, Nile crocs are

actually smaller and less aggressive than their saltwater cousins. And yet they are far deadlier to humans, killing many hundreds of people every year throughout Africa. That's because these crocodiles live in the same rivers that millions of people rely on for their survival.

Fleeing a War

The Rusizi River is Gustave's territory. This muddy river runs through an area of Burundi that is desperately poor. Thousands of people live along its banks. Many are refugees, families who have had to flee their homes in other regions because of a war that has raged since 1993.

The people here are deeply aware of the threat of Nile crocodiles. But unlike the swimmers in Australia, many of those who live along the Rusizi cannot simply choose to stay away from their crocodile-infested river. They gather their water, do their laundry, bathe their



▲ Nile crocodiles are common in many African countries, including Burundi. What country borders Burundi to the west? The north? The east? What countries border Lake Kivu? What is the capital of Burundi?

children, and fish for their dinners here. They have no other choice. Sadly, the threat of being attacked by a human-eating crocodile is just one of a long list of daily dangers the people must face as they live their lives.

At first, Patrice Faye wanted to hunt and kill Gustave. But he soon changed his mind. Certainly Gustave was a killer who needed to be stopped. But he was also an important scientific discovery. A unique specimen should be captured alive and studied, he believed. The more Faye learned, the more determined he became to solve the mysteries of Gustave—how he got to be so huge, and why he hunts humans with such **ferocity**. “He’s a fascinating monster,” Faye has said.

An Enormous Trap

Over the years, Faye has kept close tabs on Gustave, and has launched several expeditions to capture him. In 2002, he built an enormous

trap, which was hauled by 30 people onto an area of the river where Gustave had been spotted. They baited the trap with crocodile favorites—a live chicken and a goat. Gustave stayed away. They turned to a witch doctor known for his powerful potions. That didn’t work either. Each day, the trap sank deeper and deeper into the mud, until Faye realized the situation was hopeless.

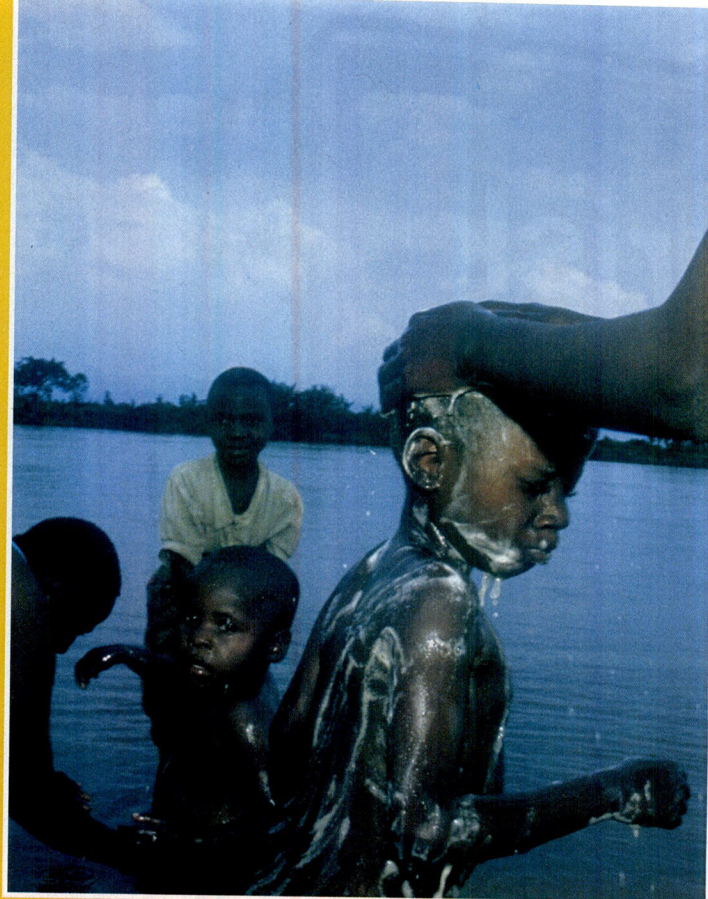
Recently, Faye tried a different approach. He teamed up with Brady Barr, host of *National Geographic’s Crocodile Chronicles*, hoping to turn Gustave’s capture into a television special. Barr is the only researcher in the world to have captured all 23 species of crocodilians. Faye had high hopes for this expedition.

But as Barr and his team arrived in Burundi, war violence broke out along the river. It became too dangerous for the teams to venture into Gustave’s territory. The expedition was canceled.





▲ This young man was attacked by a huge croc — he is certain it was Gustave — while swimming in Lake Tanganyika. Though his leg was destroyed, he considers himself lucky: he survived.




▲ Though the Rusizi River is filled with Nile crocodiles, families have no other place to bathe, fish, and gather water.

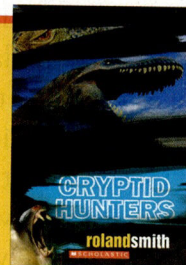
Taste for Human Flesh

Faye is frustrated by his failure to capture Gustave. But he is not surprised. Crocodiles are cunning and adaptable. They have survived, in some form, for more than 220 million years. Clearly, Gustave is a superstar of his species—more adaptable, more likely to survive.

Perhaps Gustave's taste for human flesh is yet another example of his survival instincts. Nile crocodiles prey on large mammals like gazelles and wildebeests. Because of the war, these animals have grown scarce in Gustave's territory. Maybe Gustave has adapted his eating habits to prey that is more plentiful and easier to capture: humans.

Of course this is just theory. Until Faye—or someone—captures Gustave, the mystery will continue. And so, unfortunately, will the killing. 

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Are you fascinated by the search for Gustave? Complete our Sentence Chef activity on page 15, and mail it to us. We'll pick 10 paragraphs and send their writers copies of *Cryptid Hunters*, the new novel by **Roland Smith**, one of our favorite writers. The book is about two kids who go to Africa to help their uncle find a mysterious beast. Send your entries to "Croc Contest" by October 15, 2005. See page 2 for more details on where to mail your paragraph.