

PENGUIN READERS

Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea

Jules Verne

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Introduction

‘Where are we?’ I asked.

‘On the back of the giant whale,’ Ned said. Then he smiled. ‘But it’s not a whale.’

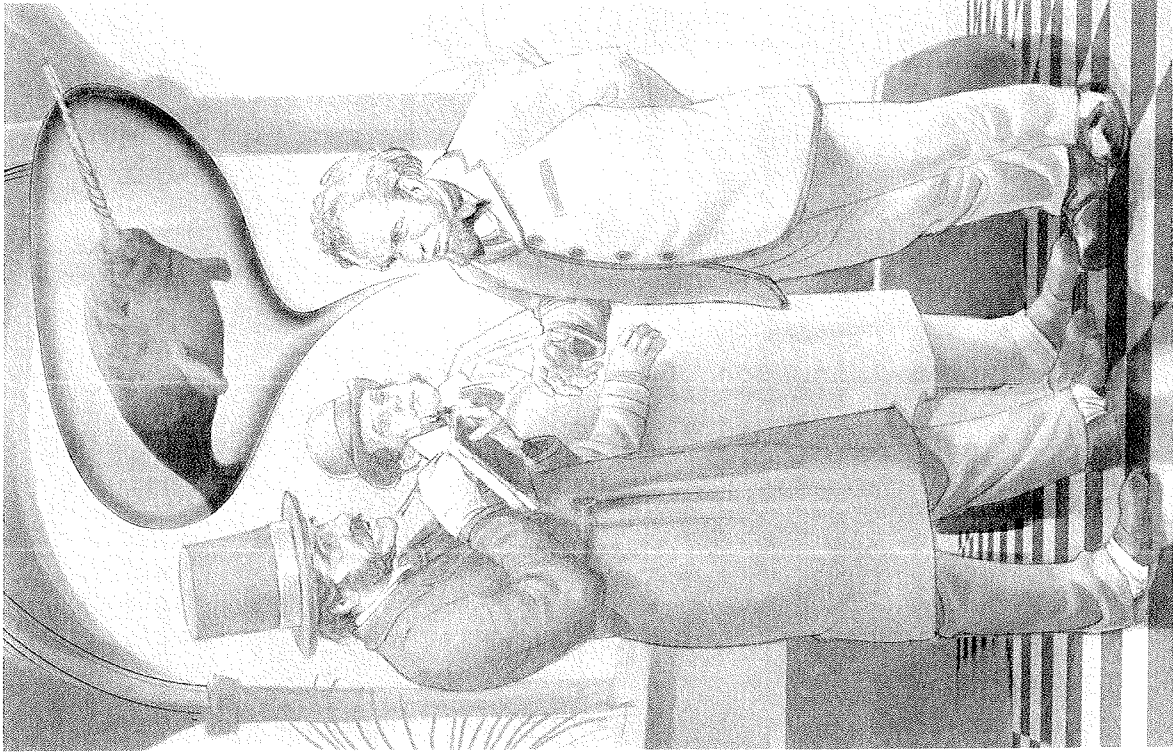
It is 1866. A French scientist, Mr Aronnax, wants to find a giant whale. But with his servant, Conseil, and a whaler, Ned Land, he finds a submarine – not a whale. For 20,000 leagues, the three friends stay on the submarine with its captain, Nemo, and visit many interesting places on the sea floor.

But who is Captain Nemo? Why does he want to live underwater? And how are the three friends going to escape from the submarine and go home?

Jules Verne (1828–1905) was French. His mother came from a family of boat builders and sea captains, and he always loved the sea. At twelve years old, he wanted to work on a boat in the West Indies, but his mother and father stopped him. Many years later, he had a boat and visited a lot of places in Europe on it.

Verne was the writer of *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* and *From the Earth to the Moon*. His books *The Mysterious Island* (also about Captain Nemo) and *Around the World in Eighty Days* are Penguin Readers, too.

There were no submarines or films in those days, and there was no television. But these things were all in Verne’s stories. Scientists in the 1800s wanted to build submarines, but their underwater boats didn’t work very well. Verne’s submarine, the *Nautilus*, had answers to the scientists’ problems. In 1958, an American submarine with the name *Nautilus* was the first boat at the North Pole – but this was ninety-one years after Verne’s *Nautilus* went to the South Pole in *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*.



'One small whale has a long spear on its head.'

Chapter 1 The Giant Whale

In the year 1866, a new boat came back from sea every week with the same story. 'A giant whale, a hundred metres long, came near our boat,' the men said. The story was in the newspapers and a lot of people talked about it.

'It wasn't a whale,' scientists said. 'A big blue whale is only twenty-seven metres long. Perhaps it was a coral reef.'

'But a coral reef can't send water fifty metres into the air,' the seamen answered. 'This animal can.'

It went near one boat in Australian waters. Three days later, it was seven hundred leagues away in the Pacific.

'Whales can't swim seven hundred leagues in three days,' the scientists said. 'Perhaps it's a submarine.'

But only a country with a lot of money can build a submarine, and the same answer came back from every country: 'We haven't got a submarine!'

One day a British boat, the *Scotia*, was in the Atlantic. Suddenly, water started to come into the boat. The captain looked for the problem. There was a big hole in the boat. 'The *Scotia* is very strong,' he said. 'I don't understand this hole. Is it the work of the giant whale?'

To me, a French scientist, the stories of the whale were, of course, very interesting. In 1867 I visited New York, and newspapermen there asked me questions.

'You're famous for your book about sea animals, Mr Aronnax,' they said. 'What do you think about this giant whale?'

'The sea's very big,' I answered, 'and it's the home of many thousands of animals. Scientists don't know about all of them. But one small whale has a long spear on its head. Perhaps there's a

giant whale with a spear, too. And perhaps this animal's spear can make a hole in a boat.'

A week later, a letter arrived at my hotel. It said:

You know, of course, about the giant whale. One day this whale is going to kill people. But we are going to kill it first. Please come and look for it with us. Our boat, the *Abraham Lincoln*, is waiting for you.

I wanted to see this interesting animal. I went quickly to the *Abraham Lincoln* with my Belgian servant, Conseil.

From New York, we went down the Atlantic coast of North and South America and into the Pacific. Week after week, all day and all night, the seamen watched the water. Conseil and I watched with them. But we didn't see the giant whale.

Only one man on the boat didn't watch the water. His name was Ned Land. Ned was a big, strong Canadian, about forty years old, and he was a very good whaler.

'You're never going to find this whale,' he said. 'It was near Japan in May, but it's now July. Where is it today? The Mediterranean? The Arctic? Who knows?'

For five long months we looked for the whale. Then the men started to say, 'Perhaps Ned is right.'

'When can we go home?' they asked their captain.

But suddenly, one day, Ned said, 'There it is! I can see the giant whale!'

The animal moved very quickly in the water. It came near our boat.

'We don't want a hole in the *Abraham Lincoln*,' the captain said. 'Let's move away.'

But our boat was slow. We watched the whale. 'It's going to hit us!' we said. But it didn't. It went under the boat, not into it.

All day we went after the whale, but it stayed in front of us.



'There it is! I can see the giant whale!'

'We're never going to kill this animal,' the men said. 'It's playing games with us.'

But at night the whale didn't move. 'Perhaps it's sleeping,' Ned Land said. 'Let's get near. Be very quiet!'

Suddenly, water from the whale's back went up into the air and rained down on our boat. Then I was in the sea.

Chapter 2 The *Nautilus*

I'm not a young man, and I can't swim well. I started to go underwater. But then there was a strong hand on my back. I looked behind me. My servant was there!

'Conseil! Why are you in the water?' I asked.

'You were in the sea and I wanted to stay with you. That's my job, Mr Aronnax,' Conseil said. 'There's a problem with the *Abraham Lincoln*. It can't come back for us. Let's swim, and wait for morning.'

Before morning, my legs stopped working. 'Go, Conseil,' I said. 'I'm a dead man, but you're young and strong. You can find a boat ...' Then water came into my mouth, and my eyes closed.

They opened a short time later. I was with Conseil, and Ned Land too.

'I don't understand. We're not swimming. Where are we?' I asked.

'On the back of the giant whale,' Ned said. Then he smiled. 'But it's not a whale.'

I looked, and he was right. We were on a submarine!

'You and I went into the sea at the same time, Mr Aronnax,' Ned said. 'After that, I waited here. We're OK now, but this boat can go underwater. What are we going to do then?'

Suddenly, the submarine started to move. 'Quickly!' I said. 'Make some noise. Hit the boat with your hands.'

A door opened and eight men came out. We went with them into the submarine.

'Where are you taking us?' we asked the men, but they didn't answer. We arrived in a dark room. The men went away and closed the door behind them. Ned tried the door, but it didn't open. 'We're never going to escape!' he said. 'Those men are going to kill us!'

We waited for a long time in the dark room. Then the lights came on and a man walked into the room. Perhaps he was thirty-five, or perhaps fifty. He was tall, with black eyes and an interesting, open face.

In French, I said our names and asked for food and drink. He listened quietly, but he didn't answer.

'He doesn't understand French,' I said. 'You try, Ned. Perhaps he understands English.'

Ned talked in English. Then Conseil tried in German. But they had the same problem.

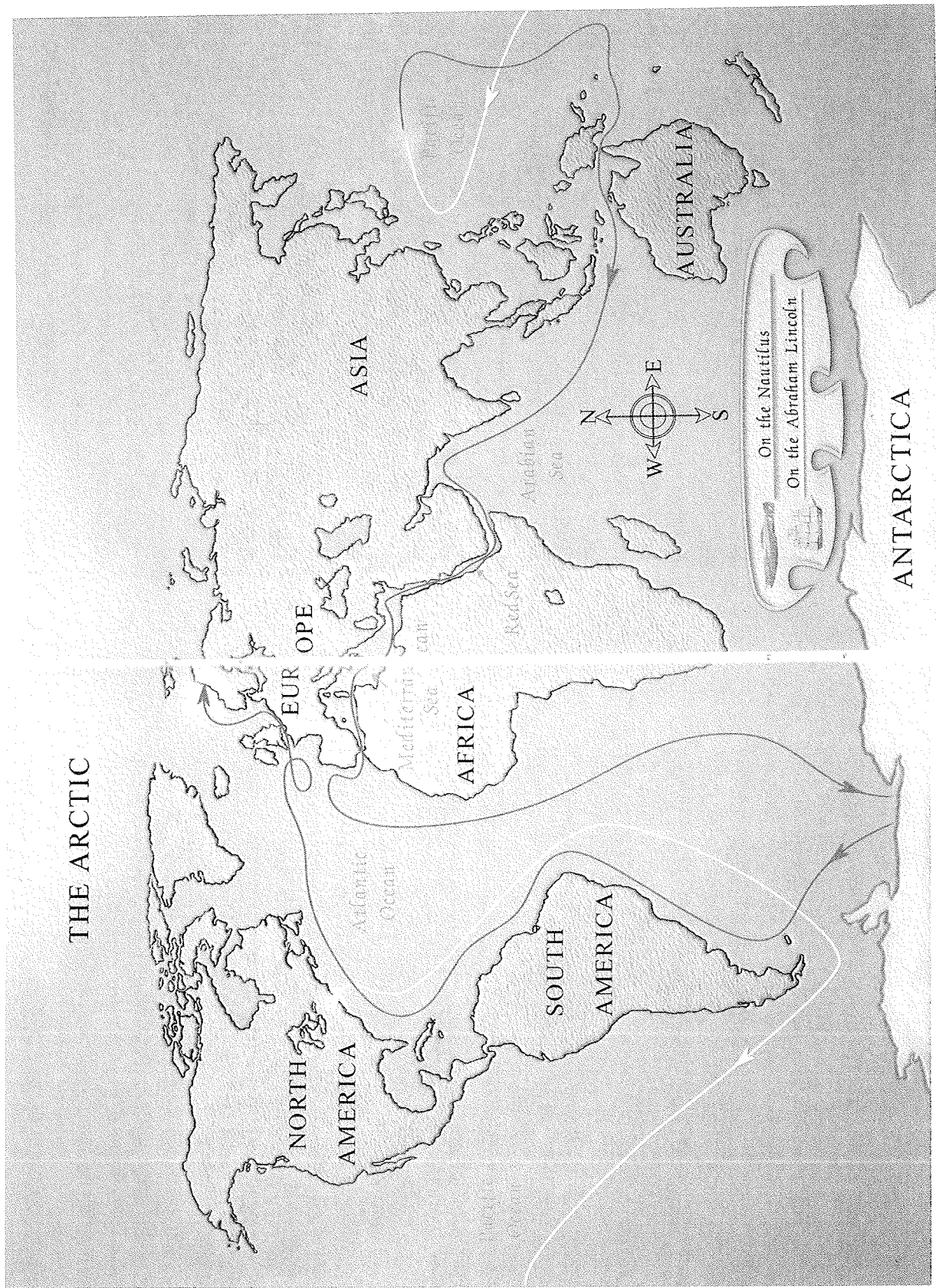
'What can we do now?' I asked my friends. But the man walked away and closed the door.

Again we waited. Ned was very angry. He didn't like the men on the submarine. He didn't like our room. And he didn't like waiting. 'I'm going to escape from this submarine,' he said.

A man came into the room, and Ned started to hit him in the face. Conseil and I wanted to stop Ned, but he was very strong. Suddenly, our first visitor was with us again.

'Stop, Mr Land!' he said, in very good French. 'And please listen to me, all of you. My name is Captain Nemo, and this is my boat, the *Nautilus*.'

'I didn't talk to you on my first visit. I'm sorry about that. But you're a problem for me. What can I do with you? My men and I are never going back to our countries; we're always going to live on the *Nautilus*. You can live with us, too, but you can't go back



At sea on the Abraham Lincoln and the Nautilus