

Chapter 1

The Mysterious Monster

The year 1866 was marked by several strange and mysterious events at sea. Ships from many countries had met an "enormous black thing" hundreds of feet long. It was larger than any creature known to scientists. The "thing" gave off an eerie glow underwater and spurted columns of water hundreds of feet into the air.

The "thing" was sighted in July off the coast of Australia, then, three days later, in the waters of the Pacific Ocean more than 2,100 miles away. The next sighting, two

weeks later, was in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, 6,000 miles away. What an extraordinary creature this must be to move from one place to another in such a short time!

Reports of this "thing" caused great excitement in every country of the world. Wild stories about all kinds of sea monsters appeared in newspapers in every language of the globe. Scientists argued among themselves as to whether such a huge, speedy sea monster could exist.

Then, early in 1867, this sea monster stopped being a scientific problem and became a real danger. Merchant steamers and passenger ships were being struck by something! Was it a rock? A reef? Or this sea monster?

One ship, the *Scotia*, was examined in dry-dock after a collision at sea. Her engineers couldn't believe their eyes! A hole in the shape of a perfect triangle had opened up her

thick steel hull!

I had read about these events during my visit to the United States where I was gathering plants, animals and minerals for the Paris Museum. As Professor of Natural History at the museum and as author of a book called *Mysteries of the Ocean Depths*, I, Monsieur Pierre Aronnax, am considered an expert on undersea life.

But I was as puzzled about this monster as everyone else. I searched my mind for a creature that might fit the descriptions given by various sea captains. I came up with the *narwhal*—a kind of whale which can grow to a length of sixty feet. A gigantic one, hundreds of feet long, might very well exist in the unexplored ocean depths! Then too, the narwhal has a tusk as hard as steel. It could have made the hole in the hull of the *Scotia*.

The United States government decided to take steps to rid the seas of this terrible

monster. A very fast warship was outfitted with every known weapon—from harpoons to cannons—to track down and kill the creature.

Through the kindness of President Andrew Johnson, I was invited to join this expedition in search of the narwhal. Together with my loyal servant, Conseil, who for ten years had never left my side anywhere in the world, I boarded the warship *Abraham Lincoln*.

Commander Farragut welcomed us aboard, and soon the ship moved out into New York Harbor. Hundreds of ferryboats filled with cheering people followed us for an hour. The *Abraham Lincoln* lowered and raised her thirty-nine-star American flag in thanks.

We followed the coast of Long Island eastward and, by nightfall, we entered the dark waters of the Atlantic Ocean.

Chapter 2

The Hunt Begins

Commander Farragut had no doubt that he would find and destroy the narwhal. After all, he had the fastest, best-armed ship in the U.S. Navy. He had a loyal, enthusiastic crew. But he had something even better—he had Ned Land, the king of Canadian harpooners!

Ned's skill and courage made him the most valuable man on board. His eyes were like a powerful telescope, sighting things at great distances. And his arm was like a mighty cannon, always ready to explode!

By the time we had been at sea three

weeks, Ned and I had become good friends. We spent hours talking about his whaling adventures, but Ned stubbornly refused to discuss the giant narwhal. He did not believe it really existed.

“Why can’t you accept the idea of a huge narwhal?” I asked. “After all, you’re one man who knows all about large sea animals!”

“It’s all right for ordinary people to believe in such a creature, Professor,” he replied. “But I’ve hunted and harpooned hundreds of whales. And no matter how powerful they were, neither their tails nor their tusks were strong enough to crack open the steel hull of a ship. A wooden hull, yes. But never steel!”

“But suppose this creature lives several miles deep in the ocean,” I argued. “Just think of the heavy pressure of the water there! This creature would have to have unusually powerful bones to stand that pressure. A man like you, for example, at a depth

of six miles, would be flattened out by that pressure. You'd look like a steam roller had run you over!"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Ned. "Then the creature would have to be built with steel plates eight inches thick! And that's even thicker than the hull of a warship... But I still don't believe this creature exists!"

"Then how do you explain, you stubborn harpooner, what happened to the *Scotia*?"

Ned hesitated, then said, "Maybe it was a... No, no! It can't be!" And the stubborn harpooner refused to say another word.

As the *Abraham Lincoln* rounded the tip of South America and moved from the Atlantic Ocean into the Pacific, everyone began to search the surface of the ocean. Night and day, eyes and telescopes did not rest. We gulped down our meals and slept only a few hours at night.

Ned Land was the only one who refused to

search the ocean, except when it was his turn to stand watch.

“It’s all nonsense!” he protested when I scolded him for his lack of interest. “Why, we’re just wandering around blindly. You say this creature was last seen in the middle of the Pacific. But that was four or five months ago! If this creature travels as fast as you say it does, it’s probably far away by now... if it even exists!”

I had no answer for Ned. Yes, we were wandering around blindly, but what else could we do? We had spent three months cruising in the North Pacific, chasing whales and sighting reefs. We covered every mile of ocean between the coasts of Japan and North America. But we found nothing!

Everyone on board grew discouraged, then angry. How could they have been foolish enough to believe in such a ridiculous expedition? It was time to give up and return home!

But Commander Farragut persuaded his men to wait three more days. If, during that time, the monster didn't appear, he would turn the ship around and go back.

This promise was made on November 2. For the next three days the crew worked harder than ever. But on November 5, when the three days had ended with no monster sighted, the Commander kept his promise.

That evening, we were about two hundred miles from the coast of Japan. Conseil and I were on deck staring out at the sea. The crew, high up in the rigging, were still examining the horizon.

Suddenly, we heard Ned Land's voice shouting, "Ahoy! There it is!"

Ned was pointing to a glowing oval-shaped object beneath the sea. The glow was so bright, even from four hundred yards away, that my eyes hurt just looking at it. Could this creature be charged with electricity?

Like an electric eel, perhaps?

“Look, look!” I cried. “It’s moving. It’s going backward. No, now forward! It’s heading right for us!”

Commander Farragut reversed the engines, and the *Abraham Lincoln* started moving away from the light. Or rather, it *tried* to move away. The strange glowing animal rushed towards our starboard side with terrifying speed. But when it was twenty feet from our hull, it stopped suddenly. Its light went out and it disappeared.

In a few seconds we heard Ned cry out, “There it is, coming up on the port side!”

Ned was right! A shiny black body, shaped like a fish, was sticking out above the water. It had to be at least two hundred fifty feet long! And its tail was moving so violently, it turned the sea into foam.

Our cannons began firing and the shells struck the black body. But instead of explod-

ing, they simply bounced off the creature's back and splashed into the water.

Just then, I leaned over the rail and saw Ned below me. He was hanging onto a pole with one hand and raising his terrible harpoon with the other. The creature was now only twenty feet away.

Suddenly, Ned's arm snapped forward. The harpoon sailed through the air. I heard a ringing noise as it seemed to hit something hard.

Two huge gushes of water shot up from the monster and washed over the deck of the ship. Then there was a horrible crash! I didn't even have time to grab onto anything before I felt myself being thrown over the railing and into the sea!

Chapter 3

An Iron Prison

I had plunged twenty feet into the sea when suddenly a powerful hand grabbed my clothes and pulled me to the surface. Then these calm words reached my ears: "If Monsieur would lean on my shoulder, Monsieur would be able to swim more easily."

I seized the arm of my faithful Conseil and gasped, "Did the crash throw you into the water too?"

"Not at all, Monsieur! It is my duty to serve you, so I jumped in after you."

"But where is our ship?" I asked.

Conseil pointed to the fading lights of the ship, now miles away. "She is badly damaged, Monsieur. And I fear that no one on board has noticed our disappearance."

Conseil kept me afloat while we shouted at the ship in the distance. But after four hours, I realized he was growing weak.

"Let me go, Conseil!" I cried.

"Never, Monsieur!" he gasped. "I would rather drown first."

By now, my hands were numb from the cold, my legs were stiff and cramped, and my mouth was filling with salt water. I let go of Conseil and lifted my head one last time. Then I began to sink. . . .

The last thing I remember was something hard knocking against me. Then I passed out.

When I opened my eyes, I was out of the water. Conseil was kneeling over me, and behind him stood Ned Land.

"Where am I?" I gasped.

“On my floating island,” said Ned. “I found it when I was thrown into the sea.”

“A floating island?” I cried.

“You may call it that, Professor,” explained Ned with a smile, “or you may call it the back of your giant narwhal. But this narwhal is bolted together with steel plates!”

I sat up and looked around. I was on top of a creature which was partly in the water and partly out. My hand pressed its skin. It was not the soft flesh which usually covers marine animals. It wasn't even the bony shell found on turtles or alligators. This skin was smooth, polished black steel! This was not a living creature! This was an underwater boat built in the shape of a fish!

I was overjoyed! A boat meant a crew, and a crew meant people!

“We've been saved!” I cried.

“Not if this boat decides to dive before its crew discovers we're here,” said Ned.

We had to find some opening or hatch to contact the people inside. I checked every inch of the deck, but all the steel plates seemed to be bolted together.

Ned began stamping on the steel plates and shouting at the top of his lungs, "Open up down there! Open up!"

Suddenly a loud clanking noise came from inside the boat. One of the steel plates lifted up and two men appeared at a hatch.

They wore otter-skin caps, sealskin boots, and loose-hanging clothes made of some strange material I had never seen before.

One of the men was short, with broad shoulders, strong arms, a large head, and thick black hair.

But it was the other man who interested me even more. He was rather tall, with a straight nose, firm mouth, and piercing eyes. He had the look of a calm, courageous man—a man accustomed to taking charge.

He was obviously the captain of this underwater boat.

The captain studied us carefully for several minutes without saying a word. Then he turned to his companion and said something in a language which I did not recognize.

Hoping that perhaps the captain understood French, I began explaining to him who we were and how we came to be on his boat.

He listened politely and quietly, but nothing on his face showed that he had understood anything I had said.

"All right, Ned, it's your turn," I said. "Try out your best English and see if you have any better luck than I did."

So Ned began the story, giving the same details I did. But he had no better luck at making himself understood than I had.

Then Conseil offered to try it in German. In his calm, soft voice, he repeated our story for the third time. But his German had the

same result as Ned's English and my French.

What language would these strangers understand? I tried once more, this time using some of the Latin I remembered from school. Still no response from the two men!

After several minutes of silence, the captain called down the hatch in his strange language. Immediately, eight crewmen came running up on deck. They grabbed us, pushed us towards the hatch, and led us down an iron ladder into total darkness.

We groped our way along a narrow gangway until we came to an opening. We were pushed through this opening, then a door was slammed shut behind us and a bolt fastened. We felt our way around iron walls, but there was no sign of windows or even of the door through which we had entered. In the darkness, we tripped over a wooden table and four stools in the center of the room.

"This is a disgrace!" shouted Ned. "We were

friendly and talked to those idiots in French, English, German and Latin. Not only didn't they answer us, but they locked us in this dark iron prison as well!"

"Calm down, Ned," I said. "Anger won't get us any answers. Perhaps they..."

But before I could finish, the lights went on. Strange glowing lights! Then the door opened and a steward appeared. He brought us underwear, shirts, and pants all made of that same cloth the other men wore. As we got out of our wet clothes and into dry ones, the steward began setting the table with the finest china and silver I had ever seen. Each piece had a large *N* engraved on it. Was this, perhaps, the captain's initial?

But we didn't waste time admiring these serving pieces for we hadn't eaten in fifteen hours. We began devouring our food.

There were many delicious types of fish along with other tasty dishes which I had

never seen before and could not identify.

Once we had finished, we stretched out on some floor mats and were soon sound asleep.

I had no idea how long we slept, but I was awakened by the hissing of cool air blowing into the room. Ned and Conseil awoke soon after me, but Ned was still as angry as he had been the night before.

“Do you think they’re going to keep us locked up in this iron box forever?” he shouted.

“I don’t know any more than you do, Ned,” I answered. “My guess is that we have stumbled upon a very important secret, namely this submarine! And if the captain wants to keep this secret, then our lives will not be important to him. If, however, this is not the case, then he will probably return us to dry land as soon as possible.”

“But Professor,” cried Ned, “we have to do something! We can’t just sit and wait!”

“Do what?” I asked, puzzled.

“Escape!”

“Escape from an underwater prison?” I cried. “That’s impossible!”

“No, Professor,” said Ned. “It’s not impossible if we take over the ship!”

Arguing with Ned’s wild plans wouldn’t help our situation, so I simply tried to calm him by saying, “Let’s wait and see what happens, Ned. Just try not to lose your temper, or we’ll never get the chance to do anything at all.”

But as the hours went by with no sign of our cell door opening, Ned’s anger increased. He paced back and forth like a wild animal in a cage. He kicked the iron walls and swore at the men outside. He shouted and yelled, but the steel walls were deaf!

I began to wonder just what kind of man this captain was. How could he lock us in here for so many hours and simply forget us?

Perhaps he wasn't the kind, courageous man I thought him to be. Perhaps he was nothing more than a cruel killer!

Just then, we heard footsteps on the metal floor outside. Bolts were pulled, the door opened, and the steward stepped into the room carrying a tray of food.

Before I could move, Ned rushed at the man. Dishes went flying as Ned knocked the steward to the floor and leaped on top of him. Ned's strong hands began choking him.

Conseil and I jumped on Ned and tried to loosen his grip on the half-conscious man. We struggled for several minutes until a voice above me froze me to the spot.

The voice spoke the following words in perfect English, "Calm down, Mr. Land!" Then, in perfect French, the voice added, "Thank you, Monsieur Conseil, and you, Professor Aronnax, for your help. And now, gentlemen, if you please, listen to me!"