

Chapter 13

A Lost Continent

"That darned captain would have to stop the ship just as we were about to leave!" Ned muttered angrily the next day.

"Yes, Ned," I replied, "he had to see his banker."

"His banker?" Ned looked puzzled.

"Or rather his bank!" I then told him the story of the treasure at Vigo Bay.

"Well, everything is not over yet!" he said.

"For now it is!" I cried. "Look at the map! We're hundreds of miles from any land."

I must admit I was rather pleased still to

be on board the *Nautilus*, and I returned to my work eagerly. But I was even more pleased that night when I received an unexpected visit in my cabin from Captain Nemo.

“Professor,” he said, “you have seen the ocean depths so far only in daylight. How would you like to see them now at night?”

“Very much, Captain,” I replied, rather curious about this new excursion on which only I was invited.

Within minutes we were in our diving suits, walking on the ocean floor a thousand feet beneath the dark Atlantic.

It was almost midnight. The water was completely black, but Captain Nemo pointed to a reddish glow about two miles away from us. As we walked towards the glow, the flat ground started to rise and become quite rocky. The strange thing about these rocks was that they were laid out in a regular pattern—almost like a man-made road! I had no

way of questioning Captain Nemo about it for I didn't know the sign language he used with his crew underwater.

We were actually climbing a mountain, and the reddish glow was lighting up the whole area as we got closer to it. Captain Nemo pushed through the rocks and the forest of dead trees turned to stone like a man who had traveled this path many times.

When we reached the top, I looked out into the distance. There, unbelievable as it may seem, stood an underwater volcano! Its large crater was spitting out torrents of lava, giving the water its reddish glow.

As my eyes traveled to the base of the volcano, I was stunned to see a ruined, crumbled town. Its roofs were caved in, its temples were fallen, and its columns were lying on the ground. Off to one side lay the remains of a dock and parts of a ship. Further on were long lines of crumbled walls and deserted

streets. Here was an entire city buried beneath the sea!

What part of the world had been swallowed up like this? I had to know! I tugged at Captain Nemo's sleeve and pointed. He picked up a stone, went over to a black rock, and wrote a single word—ATLANTIS.

Suddenly, everything became clear. This was the ancient continent which once stretched from Africa to America. It was supposedly struck by a giant earthquake and, in a single day, it sank into the sea.

Many historians believed Atlantis was only a legend, but here I was, standing on a mountain of this lost continent, touching ruins thousands of centuries old! Would this volcano one day bring these sunken ruins back to the surface again? And would this miracle of the past be revealed to man? My head was spinning with these thoughts as we returned to the *Nautilus*.

Chapter 14

The South Pole

I spent weeks at my notes detailing all the wonders of Atlantis. But one day, Ned burst in and announced that we had just passed the tip of South America without turning west into the Pacific! We were still heading south, but south meant the icy wastelands of Antarctica and the South Pole!

We ran up on deck to ask Captain Nemo. Just as we climbed out of the hatch, Ned spied a herd of whales a mile from the ship.

“Can I go out and hunt them, Captain?” he asked. “Just to keep my harpoon in practice.”

"Mr. Land," replied the captain coldly, "those are kind, playful black whales. They have enough trouble surviving attacks from their natural enemies, the sperm whales. They don't need you getting into the act!"

Ned's face turned purple with rage, but the captain ignored him as he went on. "The black whales are going to be in trouble soon enough. Look at those dots behind them."

We turned and looked out to sea.

"Those, gentlemen," said Captain Nemo, "are the cruel, destructive sperm whales! People have a right to kill them. And that is precisely what the *Nautilus* will do with the steel spur on her prow."

We went below and the *Nautilus* dove. Ned, Conseil, and I took our places at the window while Captain Nemo went to the helmsman's compartment to lead the attack.

The *Nautilus* became a fierce weapon in the hands of Captain Nemo as he plunged its

steel spur into whale after whale, cutting each one into two twisting halves. The battle raged for hours, then the sea was calm.

The *Nautilus* surfaced, and we rushed up on deck. The sea was covered with cut apart bodies floating in an ocean of blood!

As February turned into March, and we continued heading south, we began to see icebergs. But we steered between them until they became joined together by ice fields—long, unbroken plains of solid ice. For a while, the *Nautilus* was able to split the ice fields open with her strong prow. But finally, on March 18, we could go no further. We were up against a chain of ice mountains whose sharp peaks rose like thin needles three hundred feet into the air!

“It’s the Great Ice Barrier!” cried Ned.

And truly it was. It was the one obstacle that no ship had ever been able to get through. We would have to turn back!

But as I looked back, I saw that that was impossible too! All the passages behind us had frozen together, closing us in.

"We're trapped, Captain!" I cried.

"Oh, Professor," said the captain calmly, "you always worry. Not only will the *Nautilus* free herself, but she will continue on and take us to the South Pole. We shall discover the Pole together. Where others have failed, I, Captain Nemo, shall succeed!"

"I'd like to believe you, Captain," I replied, "but do you plan to put wings on the *Nautilus* and fly over the Great Ice Barrier?"

"No, Professor! Not over it, under it!"

Suddenly I realized that this just might be possible! For every foot of iceberg *above* water, there are three feet *below*. So, these three-hundred-foot-high ice mountains only went down nine hundred feet below the surface. And nine hundred feet was a mere nothing for the *Nautilus* to dive!

Captain Nemo ordered everyone below, and the *Nautilus* started down. Sure enough, when we reached a depth of nine hundred feet, we floated freely in the water.

For the next three days, we sailed underneath the ice, but continued on our southerly course.

We finally surfaced on March 21. All of us rushed up on deck. A few icebergs were scattered here and there, but the sky was full of birds and the water, full of fish. At 37° it felt like spring!

“Are we at the South Pole?” I asked.

“I’ll take our position at noon and know for sure,” answered Captain Nemo. “If, at noon, the sun is cut exactly in half when we look at the northern horizon, then we will be at the South Pole.”

So the *Nautilus* cruised slowly along the surface for several hours until we reached a mass of rocks surrounded by a beach. The

dinghy was put to sea and Captain Nemo, Conseil, and I got in. We rowed towards the sandy shore swarming with penguins, seals and walruses.

“Monsieur,” I said to Captain Nemo, “if this is the South Pole, you should have the honor of being the first to set foot on it!”

“Yes, Professor,” he said, “and the only reason I’m setting foot on dry land is because no other human being has been here before.”

Captain Nemo then jumped out of the dinghy and climbed up on a rock. Conseil and I waited several minutes, then followed.

I checked my watch. It was noon.

Captain Nemo lifted his telescope and pointed it to the north. Then he announced solemnly: “Today, March 21, 1868, I, Captain Nemo, reached the South Pole. I now take possession of this part of the world!”

Then he unrolled a black flag with a gold *N* on it and planted it in the rock!

Chapter 15

Trapped Beneath the Ice

We now had to make plans for leaving, since March 21 was the beginning of the long polar night. It would be another six months before the sun shone here again.

The *Nautilus*' air tanks were filled and it slowly sank beneath the surface. We began heading north again.

At three o'clock the next morning, a violent blow threw me out of bed. The ship was leaning on its side, but I managed to crawl into the lounge. Ned and Conseil were there.

We sat stunned for several minutes until

Captain Nemo came rushing in.

“Have we had an accident?” I asked.

“Yes, Monsieur, an accident of nature. It seems that an enormous iceberg has turned over. As its base rose up, it trapped us between that base and the underside of the ice on the surface. We are in a kind of ice tunnel, Professor, but the *Nautilus* can still get out by moving forward or backward.”

Just then, the propeller started up and we were underway, traveling forward at high speed. But two hours later, the *Nautilus* collided with something ahead. It was a wall of ice! There was not enough room in the tunnel to turn around, so the engines were reversed, and we began moving backward.

For three hours, the *Nautilus* sped south through the ice tunnel, but at 8:00 A.M., a second collision took place.

Captain Nemo entered the lounge in his diving suit and explained, “Our route to the

south is now blocked too. The iceberg has closed off every opening. But we shall not die without trying everything possible first. We still have a three-day supply of air, and we shall breathe it as we try cutting ourselves out through the walls of ice."

Ned then spoke up. "Captain Nemo, I'm as good with a pickax as I am with a harpoon!"

"Thank you, Mr. Land," said the captain. "We shall need everyone's help! My men and I have just been checking the thickness of the ice outside. Above us, it is 1,300 feet thick, on the sides, 50 feet thick, and below us, 30 feet thick. Therefore, we shall start digging a trench on the floor of the ice off to the side of the ship."

Ned left with the captain to join the first group at work. After two hours, Conseil and I joined the second group.

We alternated shifts for the next twelve hours, but we were able to remove only three

feet of ice. If work continued at this rate, we would need five nights and four days to cut through the ice. But we only had two days of air left in the reservoirs!

And then, even if we managed to dig ourselves free, who knew how long it would be until we could surface and get fresh air?

By the next day, the ice overhead and on the sides of the tunnel had frozen thicker. How long would it be before the walls and ceiling came together and crushed us?

The air on board was becoming more and more difficult to breathe. Whatever was in the tanks had to be saved for the men working out on the ice. But even that supply would be empty the day after tomorrow!

Hour after hour, we chopped away at the ice. Thirteen feet remained, then ten, then six. But the air reservoirs were now almost empty! The two days were up!

The men on the ship were overcome with a

terrible weariness from the lack of fresh air. Some were unconscious and a few were close to death.

Still three feet of ice remained. The work was going too slowly for us to survive. Then Captain Nemo decided to try crushing the last three feet of ice with the ship itself. Even though he was breathing as little air as we were, he still managed to think, plan and act!

He raised the *Nautilus* off the ice where it had been resting and moved it over above the trench. Water was pumped into the reservoirs to increase the ship's weight.

Slowly the *Nautilus* began to sink. We waited and listened and prayed. I was dizzy from the lack of air, but I soon heard the ice tremble and crack beneath us.

"We're going through!" Conseil murmured in my ear. I was too weak to answer, but I squeezed his hand to let him know I heard.

As soon as we were free in the water, the ship started traveling north at a terrifying speed. But how long would it take to reach the other side of the Great Ice Barrier where we could surface? Another day? I would be dead before then!

My face was purple, my lips were blue, and my mind was no longer able to think. I couldn't hear or see anything. As the hours passed, I felt death approaching...

"Hold on, Monsieur," whispered Conseil. "We are below an ice field now, and the captain is going to try to break through."

I felt the ship slant upward and heard the roar of its powerful engines. On the first try, the ice cracked a little. We went back down and struck again at full speed. An opening! Finally, with one last effort, we rushed up and broke through to the surface. The hatch sprang open, and pure air came flooding into the *Nautilus*!