

PUFFIN  CLASSICS

# TWENTY THOUSAND LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA

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JULES VERNE





## A FLOATING REEF

In the year 1866 the whole maritime population of Europe and America was excited by a mysterious and inexplicable phenomenon. This excitement was not confined to merchants, common sailors, sea-captains, shippers, and naval officers of all countries, but the governments of many states on the two continents were deeply interested.

The excitement was caused by an enormous 'something' that ships were often meeting. It was a long, spindle-shaped, and sometimes phosphorescent object, much larger and more rapid than a whale.

The different accounts that were written of this object in various log-books agreed generally as to its structure, wonderful speed, and the peculiar life with which it appeared endowed. If it was a cetacean it surpassed in bulk all those that had hitherto been classified. Moreover, reliable sightings many leagues apart, yet close in time, showed that the monster could move at tremendous speed, and was at home in warm water or in cold.

In all the great centres the monster became the fashion; it was sung about in the cafés, scoffed at in the newspapers, and represented at all the theatres. It gave opportunity for hoaxes of every description. In

all newspapers short of copy imaginary beings re-appeared, from the white whale, the terrible 'Moby Dick' of the northern regions, to the inordinate 'kraken', whose tentacles could fold round a vessel of 500 tons burden and drag it down to the depths of the ocean.

Then broke out the interminable polemics of believers and disbelievers in learned societies and scientific journals. The 'question of the monster' inflamed all minds. The journalists who professed to be scientific, at strife with those who professed to be witty, poured out streams of ink during this memorable controversy.

In the year of 1867 some fresh facts changed it from a scientific problem to be solved to a real and serious danger to be avoided. On 5 March, the *Moravian*, of the Montreal Ocean Company, sailing in the north-west Atlantic, struck her starboard quarter on a rock which no chart gave in that point. She was then going at the rate of thirteen knots under the combined efforts of the wind and her 400 horse power. Had it not been for the more than ordinary strength of the hull in the *Moravian* she would have been broken by the shock, and have gone down with the 237 passengers she was bringing from Canada.

This fact, extremely grave in itself, would perhaps have been forgotten, like so many others, if a few weeks afterwards it had not happened again under identical circumstances, only, thanks to the nationality of the ship that was this time victim of the shock, and the reputation of the company to which the vessel belonged, the circumstance was immensely commented upon.



On 13 April, by a smooth sea and favourable breeze, the Cunard steamer *Scotia* was in the north-east Atlantic. She was going at the rate of thirteen knots under the pressure of her 1,000 horse power.

At 4.17 p.m., as the passengers were assembled at dinner in the great saloon, a slight shock was felt on the hull of the *Scotia*, on her quarter a little aft of the paddle.

The *Scotia* had not struck anything, but had been struck by some sharp and penetrating rather than blunt surface. The shock was so slight that no one on board would have been uneasy at it had it not been for the carpenter's watch, who rushed upon deck, calling out 'She is sinking! She is sinking!'

At first the passengers were much alarmed, but Captain Anderson hastened to reassure them by telling them the danger could not be imminent, as the ship was divided into seven compartments by strong divisions, and could with impunity brave any leak.

Captain Anderson went down immediately into the hold and found that a leak had sprung in the fifth compartment, and the sea was rushing in rapidly. Happily there were no boilers in this compartment, or the fires would have been at once put out. Captain Anderson ordered the engines to be immediately stopped, and one of the sailors dived to ascertain the extent of the damage. Some minutes after it was ascertained that there was a large hole about two yards in diameter in the ship's bottom. Such a leak could not be stopped, and the *Scotia*, with her paddles half submerged, was obliged to continue her voyage. She was then 300 miles from Cape Clear, and after three days' delay, which caused great anxiety in Liverpool, she entered the company's docks.

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T H E E S S E N T I A L C O L L E C T I O N

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The classic underwater adventure.

Professor Aronnax and his team set out on a mission to rid the seas of a giant monster only to be captured by the “monster” itself—a spectacular submarine commanded by Captain Nemo. But the prisoners are soon distracted from their worries by the wonders of their incredible underwater journey—a voyage the Professor wouldn’t have missed for the world.

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C O M P L E T E A N D U N A B R I D G E D

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