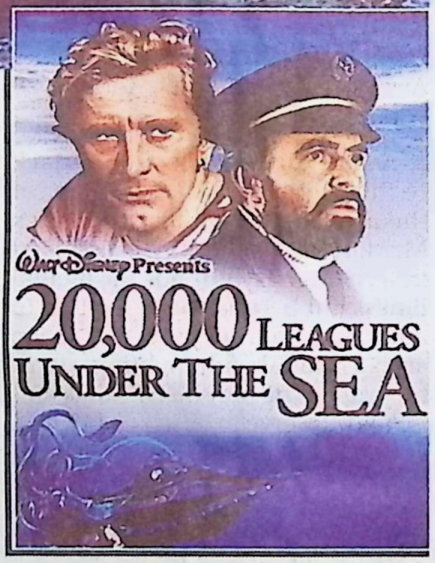


Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea



TWENTY Thousand Leagues Under the Sea is a classic science fiction novel by French writer Jules Verne (18281905), published in 1870 under the title *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*. The original edition, published by Hetzel, contains a number of illustrations by Alphonse de Neuville and Edouard Riou. The novel is about the fictional Captain Nemo and his submarine, *Nautilus*, as seen by one of his passengers, Professor Pierre Aronnax.

The story was written before modern sea-going submarines were a reality. It is narrated by Professor Pierre Aronnax, a noted marine biologist, who is accompanied by his faithful assistant Conseil and by a Canadian harpooner named Ned Land. As the story begins, a mysterious "sea monster", theorized by some to be a giant narwhal, is sighted by ships of several nations; an ocean liner is also damaged by the creature. The United States government finally assembles an expedition to track down and destroy the menace. Since Aronnax happens to be in New York City at the time and is a recognized expert in his field, he is invited at the last minute to go along, and he accepts. Master harpoonist Land is also brought on board.

The expedition sets sail from Long Island aboard an American warship, the *Abraham Lincoln*, which travels down around the tip of South America and into the Pacific Ocean. After much fruitless searching, the monster is found, and the ship charges into battle. During the fight, the ship's steering is damaged, and the three protagonists are thrown overboard. They find themselves stranded on the "hide" of the creature, only to discover to their surprise that it is a large metal vessel. They are quickly captured and brought inside the vessel, where they meet its enigmatic creator and commander, Captain Nemo. ("Nemo" means "no one" in Latin, and may have been inspired by a passage in Homer's *Odyssey* where Odysseus calls himself Ïõôéò, which is Greek for "nobody")

The rest of the story follows the adventures of the protagonists aboard the submarine, the *Nautilus*, which was built in secrecy and now roams the seas free of any land-based government. Captain Nemo's motivation is implied to be both a scientific thirst for knowledge, and a desire for revenge on, and self imposed exile from, civilization. Captain Nemo explains that the submarine is electrically powered, and equipped to carry out cutting edge marine biology research; he also tells his new passengers that while he appreciates having an expert such as Aronnax with which to converse, they can never leave because he is afraid they will betray his existence to the world. Aronnax is enthralled by the vistas he is seeing, but Land constantly plots to escape.

Their travels take them to numerous points in the world's oceans, some of them which were known to Jules Verne from real travelers' descriptions and guesses, while others are completely fictional. Thus, the travelers witness the real corals of the Red Sea, the wrecks of the battle of Vigo Bay, the Antarctic ice shelves, and the fictional submerged Atlantis. Back in the Atlantic Ocean, a group of giant squid (cuttlefish in the usual English translation) attacks the *Nautilus*, and kills a crew member. Nemo is plunged into deep depression, and allows the submarine to wander into an encounter with the Moskstraumen whirlpool off the coast of Norway. This gives the three prisoners an opportunity to escape; they make it back to land alive, but the fate of Captain Nemo and his crew is not revealed.