

Journey to the Centre of the Earth

地心旅行记

Jules Verne

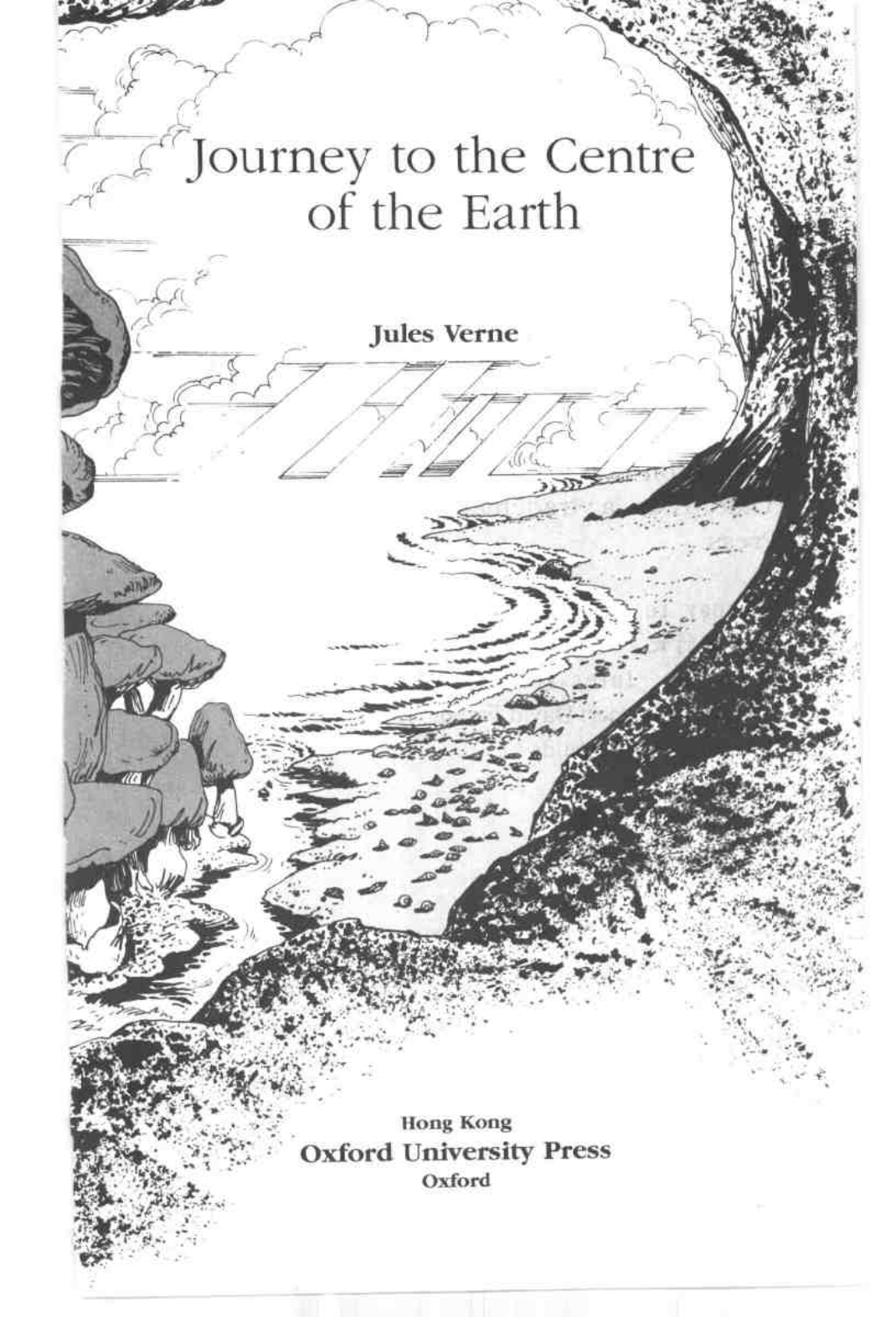
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THE MYSTERIOUS PARCHMENT

An exciting discovery

On 24th May 1863, which was a Sunday, my uncle, Professor Lidenbrock, came hurrying back towards his little house at 19 King's Street, one of the oldest streets in the oldest part of Hamburg. The front door was thrown open, footsteps shook the staircase, and the master of the house rushed straight through the dining-room, and into his study. 5

On his way, he threw his walking-stick into a corner, and his hat on to the table. 'Follow me, Axel!' he shouted as he went past. 10

Before I had time to move, the Professor called out again, 'Axel! Haven't you got here yet?'

I ran into the study.

Otto Lidenbrock was a professor at the Johannaum, where he gave lectures on mineralogy. He was a man of learning, and he was both a geologist and a mineralogist. Give him any small piece of rock, and he could instantly say to which of the 600 known types of any mineral it belonged. His name was well known in colleges and scientific organizations all over Europe. Famous scientists like Humboldt and Humphry Davy never failed to visit him when they came through Hamburg. They would discuss their most difficult problems with him. 15 20

This, then, was the gentleman who was calling me so impatiently. Imagine a tall, thin man, in excellent health. He was fair-haired, and had a youthful appearance that made him look at least ten years younger than his true age, which was fifty. His big eyes rolled behind his huge glasses, and his long thin nose looked like the blade of a 25 30

knife. When I add that whenever he walked, he took steps exactly three feet long, and that he kept his fists tightly clenched, as if he was getting ready to hit someone — a sure sign of a man with a temper — you will know
5 enough about him to understand why I always ran when he called me.

My uncle was quite rich, which was unusual, in those days, for a German professor. His house belonged to him, and so did its contents — which included his seventeen-
10 year-old god-daughter, Grauben, who came from the Virlande, old Martha, who was both housekeeper and cook, and myself. Both my parents were dead, and my uncle let me live with him. I was his assistant.

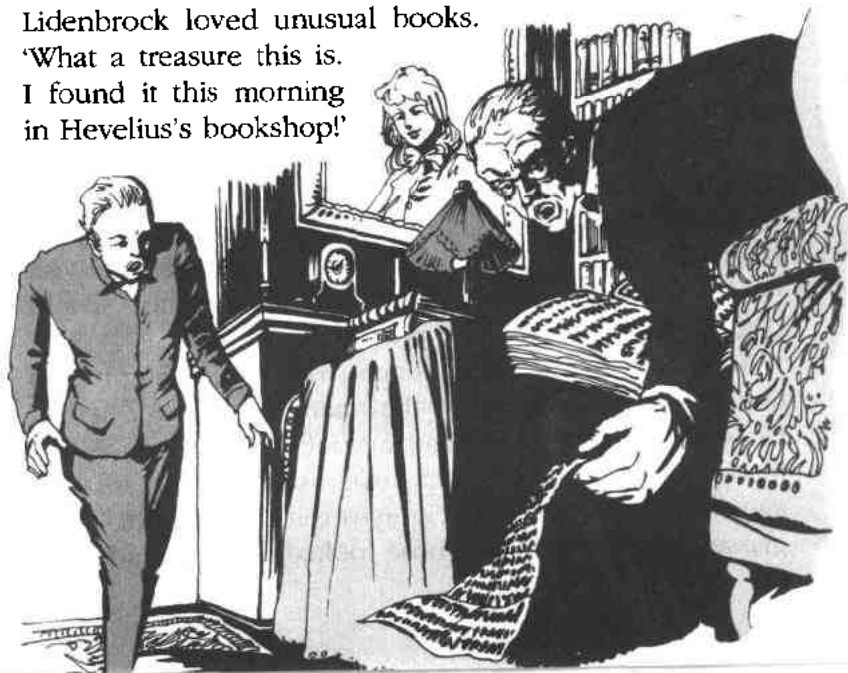
Altogether, life was happy in that little house on King's
15 Street, in spite of the master's impatience — the man could never wait for anything. He was always in a greater hurry than Nature itself. Such a man had to be obeyed. I therefore rushed into his study.

I found my uncle sitting in his big armchair, admiring
20 a large, old book.

'Look at this beautiful book, Axell!' he said. Professor Lidenbrock loved unusual books.

'What a treasure this is.

I found it this morning
25 in Hevelius's bookshop!'



He said that the book was a valuable manuscript, made in Iceland over 700 years ago. It was not written in the ordinary letters of the alphabet, but in Runic letters, that very few people knew how to read. As he turned over the pages to show me, a small piece of parchment fell out of the book, on to the floor. My uncle seized it. 5

'What's this?' he cried, carefully unfolding it on his table. The parchment contained about twenty lines of the strange letters.

The Professor looked at the letters for a few moments. Then, lifting his glasses, he said, 'I am sure these are Runic letters. They are exactly the same as those in the book. But I cannot understand what they mean. It must be a very old form of Icelandic.' 10

Professor Lidenbrock didn't know all the 2,000 languages used in this world but he knew many of them. If he couldn't understand this one, he would certainly lose his temper. I was waiting for it to happen, when the little clock over the fireplace in the study struck two o'clock. 15

At that moment, Martha opened the door saying, 'Lunch is ready, Professor.' 20

'Lunch! Don't bother me with lunch!' shouted my uncle.

Martha ran. I ran after her and, without quite knowing how it happened, found myself sitting in my usual place in the dining-room. 25

I waited for a few minutes. The Professor didn't come. As far as I knew, he had never missed his lunch before. And what a wonderful lunch it was! Soup, eggs, meat and fish, served with an excellent German wine.

My uncle was going to miss all this because of a piece of old parchment! Well, I was his nephew. I thought I ought to eat for him as well as for myself, and so I did. 30

'Professor Lidenbrock not at the table!' said Martha, shaking her head. 'That means something serious is going to happen.' 35

I didn't think it meant anything, except perhaps trouble for me, because I had eaten my uncle's lunch.

I had just finished when a voice roared. I leapt from the dining-room and ran to the study.

Saknussem's puzzle

‘It’s definitely Runic,’ said the Professor, crossly. ‘But I
5 cannot understand it. I think it is some kind of secret message, and I intend to find out what it means. Sit down and get ready to write.’

I was ready.

‘Now, I am going to call out to you the letters of our
10 alphabet that match these Runic letters. We’ll see if that solves it. But be careful not to make any mistakes, I warn you!’

I was as careful as I could be. He called out the letters one after another, and together they formed three lists,
15 each of which had seven words in it. But the words were impossible to understand.

My uncle seized the paper on which I had written, and studied it for a long time.

‘What does it mean?’ he kept asking himself. ‘It’s a
20 puzzle, where the letters have been purposely mixed up. Just think! Perhaps in their correct order they will lead us to some great discovery!’

I doubted it but, sensibly, I didn’t say so to my uncle.

The Professor compared the writing in the book with
25 the writing on the piece of parchment. ‘The writing is different,’ he said. ‘And that double ‘m’ at the beginning wasn’t used in Iceland until the fourteenth century. So the puzzle is at least 200 years later than the book. I think one of the owners of the book must have composed it.
30 But who was he? Now, I wonder if he wrote his name somewhere on the manuscript?’

My uncle lifted his glasses, and examined the opening pages of the book through a magnifying glass. On the back of the second page, he found a few faded letters.

35 ‘Arne Saknussem!’ he cried triumphantly. ‘That’s the name of a famous Icelandic scientist of the sixteenth

century. Those old scientists made some amazing discoveries in those days. Why, Saknussem may have written about one of them in this puzzle!

The Professor was excited by the idea.

'But why should a scientist want to hide a wonderful discovery in this way?' I asked. 5

'Why indeed? That's what we're going to find out. I shall neither eat nor sleep until I understand this piece of parchment. And nor shall you, Axel,' he added.

'I'm glad I ate two lunches today,' I thought. 10

'First,' said my uncle, 'we must try to find the key to the code. That should be easy. The words on the parchment contain so many vowels that they must belong to one of the southern languages of Europe. Saknussem was an educated man. When he was not writing in his own language, he would have written in Latin. So this is Latin, but Latin in a mixed-up form.' 15

'Well,' I thought to myself, 'if you can unmix it, my dear uncle, you are a clever man.'

'Let us study it,' he said, picking up the piece of paper on which I had written. 'Here we have 132 letters, Axel.' 20

But I was looking at a picture on the wall, a picture of Grauben. My uncle's god-daughter was staying with a relative in Altona, and her absence made me sad, for — I now confess — Grauben and I loved each other, and were secretly hoping to marry. Grauben was a pretty girl with blue eyes and fair hair, who was rather serious about everything, but that did not stop her loving me. I worshipped her, and looking at that picture of her carried me into the world of memories and dreams. 25 30

I was just thinking about walking hand in hand with Grauben along the banks of the River Elbe, when my uncle banged the table with his fist, and brought me suddenly back to earth.

'Axel!' he said. 'Perhaps all that has happened is that the words have been written down the parchment, from top to bottom, instead of across it.' 35

He solemnly read out the letters of the words going down the page — first all the first letters, then all the second, and so on — until I had written down many more nonsense words.

5 I admit that, by now, I was excited myself. I expected the Professor to read out a magnificent Latin sentence.

To my surprise, his hand struck the table. The ink splashed, and the pen flew out of my hand.

‘That makes no sense!’ shouted my uncle. ‘It can’t be right!’

10 He rushed across the study, through the dining room, down the stairs, and out on to King’s Street, as fast as his legs would carry him.

The key

15 Martha ran out of her kitchen as the street door banged. ‘Has he gone?’ she cried. ‘What about his lunch?’

‘He won’t eat it,’ I replied.

‘And his supper?’

20 ‘He won’t eat that either, Martha. Uncle Lidenbrock is not going to eat, and nor is anybody else in this house, until he has worked out the meaning of some old puzzle that is impossible to understand.’

‘Oh dear! You mean we will all go hungry, then? The old servant went unhappily back to her kitchen.

I picked up the paper on which I had written the letters.

‘What can it mean?’ I muttered.

I tried grouping the letters to form words. It was impossible! Although I could find one or two English words, some Latin and French words, together they did not seem to have any meaning.

As I struggled, my brain got heated, and I could not think clearly. I was choking. I needed air. Without thinking, I started fanning myself with the piece of paper.

35 Imagine my surprise! As the back of the paper was turned towards me each time I waved it in front of my face, I thought I could read more Latin words.

Dying of hunger

Professor Lidenbrock seemed to be able to think of nothing except the puzzle. He sat straight down in his chair, picked up his pen and worked at a mathematical
5 solution for three long hours. He didn't speak, he didn't lift his head. He rubbed out, he crossed out, he started again hundreds of times.

At first, I trembled in case he solved it. But so many different combinations of the letters were possible that
10 there was really no danger.

Night came. The noises in the street stopped. My uncle saw nothing and heard nothing, not even Martha asking, 'Are you going to have any supper tonight, sir?'

The Professor said nothing, so poor Martha went away
15 unanswered. Soon afterwards I fell asleep.

When I woke up the next morning, the Professor was still working. His eyes were red, his cheeks were pale, and his hair was a mess.

I honestly felt sorry for him, but I did not say anything
20 about what I had discovered. I was not a cruel man. Why did I not speak? To protect him.

'I know him,' I said to myself. 'He will want to go. Nothing will stop him. He will risk his life to do something that no other geologist has done. If I show Professor
25 Lidenbrock how to read the parchment, it will be the same as killing him. Let him find out for himself if he can.'

And so I waited. But I had forgotten something.

When Martha wanted to leave the house to go to the market, she could not get out. The street door was locked,
30 and the key had gone. The Professor must have locked the door and put the key in his pocket when he came back from his walk the night before. No one dared to ask him for the key. So there would be no breakfast. I decided to be strong.

35 At midday, I still stood firm, but by two o'clock I felt really hungry. I started telling myself that the parchment

was not so important, that my uncle would not believe anyone had ever gone down into a volcano. that he would treat it as a joke, that we would be able to stop him from going, that it would be better for me to tell him about the secret, than to wait for him to discover it.

5

At that point in my thoughts, the Professor stood up and put on his hat. What! Would he leave the house, leaving Martha and me locked in, getting hungrier and hungrier?

'Uncle!' I said. 'Uncle Lidenbrock!'

10

'Eh?' he said, like a man suddenly woken up.

'What about that key?'

'What key? The key to the door?'

'No,' I cried, 'the key to the puzzle!'

The Professor looked at me over the top of his glasses. He could see that I knew something. He seized my arm. His hand became tighter and tighter until I had to speak.

15

'Read that,' I said, handing him the paper on which I had written, 'read it backwards.'

The Professor cried out. He understood.

20

Seizing the paper with tears in his eyes, he read out the whole message from the last letter to the first.

It was not very good Latin, but it this is what it said:

*Go down into the crater of Sneffels Yokul,
Over which the shadow of Scartaris falls,
Before the first of July, brave traveller,
And you will reach the centre of the earth.
I have done this. Arne Saknussemm.*

25

My uncle jumped as if he had received an electric shock.

30

'Of course' he shouted, 'of course! Sneffels — that's a volcano on the west coast of Iceland, and Scartaris is the name of its highest point. Sneffels has one large crater, inside which are a number of smaller ones. If we can get there before July, at midday the shadow of Scartaris will be pointing to one of the smaller craters. If we go down that one, we will find the way to the centre of the earth.'

35

His courage and joy were wonderful to see. He walked up and down, he held his head in his hands, he moved the chairs around, he took some of the rocks from his collection, and threw them in the air playfully. Finally, he
5 calmed down, and fell back, exhausted, into his armchair.

'What time is it?' he asked.

'Three o'clock,' I replied.

'Is it really? I'm dying of hunger. It feels as if I haven't had anything to eat today. Let's have some lunch, and
10 after that ...'

'After that?'

'You can pack my box.'

'What?'

'And your own,' said the Professor, going into the
15 dining-room.

At these words, my whole body shook. To go to the centre of the earth. What a crazy idea! But I decided to say nothing for the moment, and I gave all my attention to the business of eating.

20 After we had had a good lunch, my uncle spoke to me about his plans.

'Axel,' he said quite gently, 'you are a very clever young man. You shall share the glory we are going to win. But the most important thing is to tell no one about this. I
25 insist on complete secrecy. My rivals in the world of science must not hear about this journey until we return.'

'Do you really think,' I asked, 'that there are any who would risk it?'

'Of course! There are geologists in many countries who,
30 once they knew what Saknussemm had done, would rush to follow his example.'

The heart of a woman

When I saw that my uncle had made up his mind to go to the centre of the earth, and that he had also decided to take me with him, I did not know what to think. I decided that some fresh air would do me good, so I left the house, and walked round the town. I reached the Altona road. Perhaps I might see Grauben. Soon, sure enough, she came into sight, walking towards Hamburg.

'Axel!' she said in surprise. 'You have come to meet me.'

Then she saw my face.

'What's the matter?' she asked, giving me her hand.

Three sentences later, she knew.

'Axel!' she said. 'It will be a wonderful journey. The right sort of journey for the nephew of a scientist.'

'What Grauben? Aren't you going to say I should not go?'

'Oh no, my dear Axel. And I would gladly come with you if I could.'

How difficult it is to understand the hearts of girls and women! This girl, who loved me, was encouraging me to go on a very dangerous expedition, and she would not have been afraid to come herself. I was amazed and, to tell the truth, ashamed of myself.

'It's still a long time until July,' I thought. 'My uncle may be cured before then of this mad interest in underground exploration.'

It was dark by the time Grauben and I reached the house on King's Street. I expected to find the place quiet, with my uncle in bed as usual. But I had forgotten how impatient he was. We found him outside the house,

shouting and waving his arms about among a crowd of men who were unloading goods on to the pavement. Old Martha was running about, this way and that, not knowing what to do.

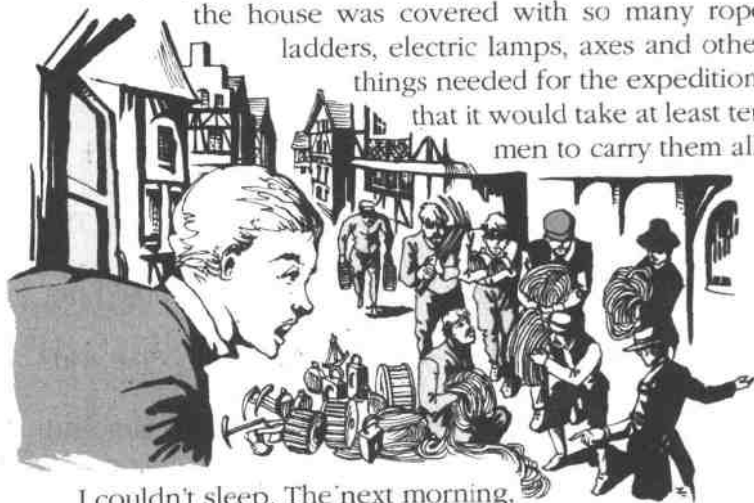
5 'Hurry up, Axel!' exclaimed the Professor as soon as he saw me. 'You haven't packed, my papers aren't in order, and I can't find the key to my bag.'

I was horrified. I couldn't speak properly. I could only just whisper, 'Are we going then?'

10 'Yes, of course. At dawn, the day after tomorrow.'

I ran to my little room.

There was no longer any doubt about it. My uncle had been buying things for the journey. The pavement outside the house was covered with so many rope ladders, electric lamps, axes and other things needed for the expedition, that it would take at least ten men to carry them all.



I couldn't sleep. The next morning, 20 I was called early. I had made up my mind not to open the door, but how could I disobey the sweet voice I heard.

'My dear Axel!'

I came out of my room. I thought that my pale face and red eyes would make Grauben feel sorry for me, and 25 change her ideas.

'Ah, Axel,' she said, 'I see that you have had a good night's rest, and now feel better.'

'Feel better!'