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# 0,000 Leagues nder the Sea y Jules Verne



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# 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea Jules Verne

Translated by  
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With an introduction by  
Ray Bradbury



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## Jules Verne

A love for the sea, travel, and adventure runs through Jules Verne's life. He was born into a family with a seafaring tradition in Nantes, France, in 1828. At an early age he tried to run off and ship out as a cabin boy but was stopped and returned to his family. Verne was sent to Paris to study law, but once there, he quickly fell in love with the theater. He was soon writing plays and opera librettos, and his first play was produced in 1850. When he refused his father's entreaties to return to Nantes and practice law, his allowance was cut off, and he was forced to make his living by selling stories and articles.

Verne combined his gift for exotic narratives with an interest in the latest scientific discoveries. He spent long hours in the Paris libraries studying geology, astronomy, and engineering. Soon he was turning out imaginative stories such as *Five Weeks in a Balloon* (1863) and *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864), which were immensely popular all over the world. After *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865), Verne received letters from travelers wishing to sign up for the next lunar expedition. His ability to envision the next stage in man's technological progress and his childlike wonder at the possibilities produced *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1870) and *Michael Strogoff* (1876). His biggest success came with *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1872).

Verne's books made him famous and rich. In 1876 he bought a large steam yacht, outfitted with a cabin in which he could write more comfortably than on shore. He sailed from one European port to another and was lionized everywhere he went. His books were widely translated, dramatized, and later filmed. He died at Amiens in 1905.



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## INTRODUCTION

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### THE ARDENT BLASPHEMERS

by Ray Bradbury

CONSIDER AMERICA, first of all the new breed of nations.

Consider America, a nation, because of its newness, ardent in its blasphemy.

Set in motion by the centrifuge of the great wheel of the Industrial Revolution, this people flung themselves across sea prairies to stand on New England rim-rock and fling themselves yet on across land prairies. Shocking other ages, they blasphemed down the meadows and over hills as ancient as the memory of Jerusalem.

Consider America, her fire-dragon locomotives huffing out vast devil bursts of fluming spark, setting the lion-grass afire as they went.

Come to a forest, cut it down. Come to a mountain, quarry it to pebbles. Skip the pebbles across God's lakes. Build *new* mountains, finally, upright, and ornamented with man's prideful encrustations. Then run men up and down elevator shafts to a heaven no longer believed in from a hell much better ignored.

Consider the authors who lived in and with these men and wrote to channel this blasphemy, express it in symbols about which such men could enthuse like devil children. With a new nation being dreamt to life, set to rights with fabulous new toys, the uneasy dreamers cast about and came up with two most ardent blasphemers:

Herman Melville.

Jules Verne.

"American" authors, both.

Melville, the New Englander, and Verne, the Frenchman, you say, Americans both?

"American" yes in their newness and their attack upon the universe and this world rolling through that universe.

Another nation could have been "American" first. The seeds of man's mechanical reaction to Nature were cast forth first in England and France. But the flowering of what other ages might have considered an insidious tree was in this raw nation under God which would soon ask Him to move over, jump aside, step down. We might not even ask His pardon while we scourged the mineral gut, packed once-holy echoes in electronic boxes to deal them forth commercially, split atoms as handily as peas, and dared God to answer back in equal thunders.

I say, another nation could have done this. But the accidents of time and circumstance dubbed us unholy first. Others follow us in our sacrilege: the Japanese and his insect-clicking camera, the Frenchman flung about by our L.P. jive, the Italian hopping Rome's hills on angry adaptations of our motorbikes.

The sacrilege was inevitable.

Once set the wheel invented by some fine fool of a first blasphemer in motion just beyond old Egypt and it rolls up in the late 80's of our time such dust clouds as would dim the bright visage of any spoiled God. Wheels within wheels within wheels rolled forth upon our land and, later, way in the middle of our outraged God's air.

And being firstest with the mostest, we not only *did* but *read*, and having read did *more*.

And Jules Verne was our text and testament, followed close by packs of "evil" boys like Tom Swift and his Flying Machine plus his A.C.-D.C. I.B.M. Power-Circuited Grandmother.

I Sing the Body Electric! cried Whitman.

And Americans wound tight their robot devices and set them free to gnaw ugliness across the territories which now, very late, we must clean up after.

But let us go back to our literary beginnings.

Why, in introducing you to this book by Jules Verne, do I summon forth the lunar name of Herman Melville? What relation do I see between a Frenchman benevolent as a good uncle in his eccentricities, and strange cousin Herman who some thought best kept in America's attic?

From the viewpoint of Gothic times peering ahead at the tidal wave of the future, let me set up these two men.

God, after all, was in His heaven a long while, and things went well for Him, if not His children, upon earth. Those born-but-to-die inhabited His churches and if they questioned,

questions were best kept mum in one's mouth or like gum behind the ear.

But send these God-doting children free from Europe, strew and scrabble them across a whole continental surprise, hand them commotions and contraptions of steam and whiffing iron and they pant up frenzies of revenge against God for having maltreated them down the eons.

Out of questions suddenly posed and needs suddenly found most needful, as the steam blew off and the proud dust settled we found:

Mad Captain Ahab.

Mad Captain Nemo.

Moby Dick, the great White Whale.

*Nautilus*, the whale-seeming submarine, first of its hidden and terrific sort, soaring through sea-meadows amongst sinner sharks and true leviathans.

Look how these two "evil" men implement their "blasphemy."

"Call me Ishmael."

So Melville strikes forth on his search for Moby Dick. In his first chapter we find:

" . . . Why upon your first voyage as a passenger, did you yourself feel such a mystical vibration, when first told that you and your ship were now out of sight of land? Why did the old Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity, and own brother of Jove? Surely all this is not without meaning. And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all."

Why does Ishmael go to sea?

" . . . Chief among these motives was the overwhelming idea of the great whale himself. Such a portentous and mysterious monster roused all my curiosity. Then the wild and distant seas where he rolled his island bulk; the undeliverable, nameless perils of the whale; these, with all the attending marvels of a thousand Patagonian sights and sounds, helped to sway me to my wish . . . by reason of these things, then, the whaling voyage was welcome; the great flood-gates of the wonder-world swung open, and in the wild conceits that swayed me to my purpose, two and two there floated into my inmost soul, endless

processions of the whale, and, mid most of them all, one grand hooded phantom, like a snow hill in the air."

In *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, Jules Verne starts thus:

"The year 1866 was marked by a strange event, an unexplainable occurrence which is undoubtedly still fresh in everyone's memory. . . . Several ships had recently met at sea 'an enormous thing,' a long slender object which was sometimes phosphorescent and which was infinitely larger and faster than a whale."

Verne continues:

"The facts concerning this apparition . . . agreed closely with one another as to the structure of the object or creature in question, the incredible speed of its movements, the surprising power of its locomotion and the strange life with which it seemed endowed. If it was a member of the whale family, it was larger than any so far classified by scientists. . . . But it did exist—there was no denying this fact any longer—and considering the natural inclination of the human brain toward objects of wonder, one can understand the excitement produced throughout the world by this supernatural apparition."

So two books begin. Both set somewhat the same tone, both strike chords that might recur within the framework of the book to follow. Yet swiftly we perceive rank differences. We soon know that while Uncle Jules is mostly gently mad, cousin Herman is beyond the pale.

We set sail with Ishmael who, unknowing, is in the clutches of wild Ahab, seeking some universal truth shaped to a monster all frightful white named Moby Dick.

We set sail almost simultaneously with Professor Aronnax and Ned Land and Conseil on the *Abraham Lincoln* in search of this other mystery which "in every big city . . . became the fashion: it was sung in cafés, derided in newspapers and discussed on the stage. Scandal sheets had a marvelous opportunity to print all kinds of wild stories. Even ordinary newspapers—always short of copy—printed articles about every huge, imaginary monster one could think of, from the white whale, the terrible 'Moby Dick' of the far north, to the legendary Norse kraken. . . ."

So we suspect that Uncle Jules has touched minds somewhere down the line with Cousin Herman.

But without any real exchange or superblending of madness.

Mr. Verne will go his own way with his "educated" ven-



geance, leaving Melville with his Shakespearean terrors and laments.

We do not meet Moby Dick face to face, we only have Ahab's leg torn off in retrospect, until very late in Melville.

But Verne, in Chapter VI of *Twenty Thousand Leagues*, hoves his "monster" to view and swallows our Jonahs whole and entire.

Thus ending the tale as Melville might end it?

No, thus starting to show us the vast differences between the odd American-type French writer and the truly driven New England author-sailor soon to be despairing customs inspector.

Let us compare some few quotes from each writer.

Here are some from *Moby Dick*:

"His three boats stove around him, and oars and men both whirling in the eddies; one captain, seizing the line-knife from his broken prow, had dashed at the Whale. . . . That Captain was Ahab. . . . And then it was, that suddenly sweeping his sickle-shaped lower jaw beneath him, Moby Dick had reaped away Ahab's leg, as a mower a blade of grass in the field. No turbaned Turk, no hired Venetian or Malay, could have smote him with more seeming malice . . . ever since that almost fatal encounter, Ahab had cherished a wild vindictiveness against the whale, all the more fell for that in his frantic morbidness he at last came to identify with him, not only all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations. The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung. . . . All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it."

Also, Ahab, speaking to Starbuck:

"Hark ye yet again,—the little lower layer. All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features