



TIMELESS CLASSICS

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A Bold Expedition

In the year 1866, a very strange thing happened. Several ships reported seeing an enormous “thing” in the ocean. Sometimes, the massive object seemed to be glowing. It was much larger and faster than a whale.

The captain of one ship thought it might be a sandbank. He was trying to figure out exactly where it was located. Then suddenly, the object started to shoot jets of water 150 feet into the air!

Three days later, the “thing” was spotted again. This time, it was several hundred miles away. Some people began to think it was a sea monster. They sang about it in cafes and made fun of it in newspapers.

Months later, the thing was no longer a scientific puzzle. It was a danger. A ship called the *Scotia* had been struck by it. Fortunately,

the *Scotia* was divided into compartments. Only one compartment filled with water. When the damage was examined, a hole about two feet wide was found. Something had poked through the ship's thick iron plates! Whatever it was, the thing had to be incredibly strong.

I, Pierre Aronnax, am a professor at the Museum of Natural History in Paris. At this time, I was in America, as part of an expedition. Several people asked me what I thought about this strange thing at sea. Of course, I had already read a lot about the mysterious object. It was puzzling, but after much thought, I wrote an article about it.

I believed the thing might be an enormous sea animal. After all, many creatures of the deep are still unknown to us. I thought it might be a narwhal—a whale with a long, sharp tusk. The common narwhal is about 60 feet long. Its ivory tusk is as hard as steel. If the mysterious thing was a giant narwhal, it could probably pierce the hull of a ship.

My article was widely discussed. Many people believed that I'd solved the mystery.

Then I learned that an American ship had been asked to help. The *Abraham Lincoln* was going to chase down the creature and destroy it. I was asked to join the hunt.

What to do? I longed to return to Paris. I wanted to see my friends, my home, and my precious collections. But once I received the invitation, I forgot all that. I felt it was my destiny to rid the world of this monster. So, I quickly made up my mind to take the journey on the *Abraham Lincoln*.

Then I called out to Conseil, my devoted servant. In French, his name means “advice.” But, in fact, Conseil never gave advice. For 10 years, he’d followed me wherever science led. And he’d never once complained about our long journeys. He’d always been ready to pack his bags for any country, from China to the Congo. And even better—he has good health, and no nerves. In 1866, this young man was 30 years old—and I was 40.

Conseil had only one fault. He would only speak to me in the third person. That odd habit was sometimes provoking.

“Did my master call?” Conseil asked.

“Yes, my boy,” I said. “Make preparations for me and yourself, too. We will leave on another expedition in two hours.”

“As you please, sir,” Conseil said softly.

“We don’t have an instant to lose,” I said. “Put all my coats, shirts, and stockings in my trunk right away. Pack as much as you can for yourself, and be quick.”

Conseil looked concerned. “We are not returning to Paris, then?” he asked.

“Oh! We will be returning to Paris,” I said, “—but not right away.”

“As my master wishes,” Conseil said coolly.

“We’re going after the famous narwhal,” I explained. “Ridding it from the seas is a dangerous mission. But the ship’s captain—Commander Farragut—is a daring man.”

Our luggage was taken to the ship immediately. I hurried on board and asked for Commander Farragut. One of the sailors led me to a good-looking officer, who reached out to shake hands.

“Monsieur Pierre Aronnax?” he asked.

“Yes,” I replied. “Commander Farragut?”

He nodded and said, “Welcome, Professor.