



Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea · Episode 27 / 46 · B1–B2 · 00

The Red Sea

The Red Sea

OVERVIEW

Summary

The Red Sea — chapter 27 of Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, told in clear English for language learners.

Transcript

The Red Sea

Chapter Twenty-Seven — The Red Sea

On January 29th the island of Ceylon dropped out of sight. The Nautilus sped on at twenty miles an hour, past the Maldive and Laccadive islands. We had now travelled more than 16,000 miles from where our voyage began in the seas of Japan.

The next day there was no land in sight. We were heading for the Sea of Oman, near the Persian Gulf. Where was Captain Nemo taking us? I could not say. Ned Land came to me, worried.

"The Persian Gulf has no way out," he said. "If we go in, we must soon come out again."

"Then we will come out," I told him. "And if the Nautilus wants to visit the Red Sea, we can enter through the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb."

"But the Red Sea is closed too," said Ned. "There is no canal cut through the land at Suez yet. And the Red Sea is not the way back to Europe."

"I never said we were going back to Europe," I answered. I thought we might sail down past Arabia and Egypt, then round the Cape of Good Hope into the Atlantic. Ned was growing tired of the voyage. I was not. So few men ever get to see what we were seeing.

For four days the Nautilus searched the Sea of Oman, as if unsure which way to go. We saw the town of Muscat for a moment, its white houses bright against black rocks. Then the boat sank under the waves again.

On February 5th we reached the Gulf of Aden. The next day I saw the town of Aden on its high rock, like a small Gibraltar. I felt sure Captain Nemo would turn back now. He did not.

On February 7th we entered the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb. The name means "The Gate of Tears." The Nautilus crossed it in about an hour, hidden under the water so the many steamers would not see us. By noon we were in the Red Sea.

The Nautilus slowed down. Sometimes it stayed on the surface, sometimes it dived to avoid a ship. So I could watch both the top and the bottom of this strange sea. Near the African shore, through the windows, I saw beautiful coral and rocks covered with green weed. I spent many happy hours at the saloon window.

On February 9th we reached the widest part of the Red Sea. At noon Captain Nemo came up to the platform, where I stood. He kindly offered me a cigar.

"Well, sir, does the Red Sea please you? Have you seen its wonders, its fish, its coral?"

"Yes, Captain," I said. "The Nautilus is perfect for such a study. It is a clever boat."

"Clever and strong," he replied. "It fears neither the terrible storms of the Red Sea, nor its currents, nor its sandbanks. Long ago this sea had a bad name. The old writers said ships were lost here in great numbers, and no one dared to sail at night."

"Those writers never sailed on the Nautilus," I said, and he smiled.

"You are right. Your boat is a hundred years ahead of its time. What a pity that the secret of it may die with its maker!" He said nothing to that.

I asked him where the name "Red Sea" came from.

"I think the name comes from the colour of its water," he said. "I once saw the Bay of Tor turn completely red, like a sea of blood, because of a tiny red seaweed. And no, this is not my first time in the Red Sea."

I asked if he had ever found traces of the ancient story of Moses and the Egyptians. He said no. The place where the people crossed is now full of sand, too shallow even for the Nautilus. It lies a little above the land of Suez.

"One day," I said, "when the Suez Canal is built, new towns will rise there and men may dig up ancient Egyptian arms."

"Very likely," said Captain Nemo. "That canal is useless to a boat like mine, but useful to the whole world. Now your countryman, M. Lesseps, has done what the ancients dared not do. All honour to him!"

"Yes, honour to the great man," I said, surprised by his warm words.

"I cannot take you through the Suez Canal," he went on. "But you will see the harbour of Port Said in two days, when we are in the Mediterranean."

"The Mediterranean!" I cried. "How can we be there in two days, without sailing all the way round Africa?"

"Who told you we would sail round Africa?" said Captain Nemo quietly. "We will pass beneath the land, not around it. Long ago Nature made a passage under this narrow neck of land, just as man has now made one on top. I call it the Arabian Tunnel. It runs beneath Suez and opens into the Gulf of Pelusium."

"But this land is only soft sand!"

"On top. But fifty-five yards down there is solid rock."

"How did you find this passage?" I asked, more and more amazed.

"By chance, and by thinking. I noticed that the same kinds of fish live in both the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. So I caught many fish near Suez, put a copper ring on each tail, and let them go. Months later I caught some of my ringed fish off the coast of Syria. That proved the two seas were joined. Then I searched with the Nautilus, found the tunnel, and went through it. And soon, sir, you will pass through my Arabian Tunnel too!"

Audio, timed transcript, and companions online:

<https://alexlearns.com/english/twenty-thousand-leagues/chapter-27/>

© 2026 AlexLearns.com — free language podcasts for curious people.