



Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea · Episode 36 / 46 · B1–B2 · 00

Under the Iceberg

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OVERVIEW

Summary

Under the Iceberg — chapter 36 of Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, told in clear English for language learners.

Transcript

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Chapter Thirty-Six — Under the Iceberg

The Nautilus kept going south, fast and steady. Was Captain Nemo trying to reach the pole? Every ship that tried before had failed. And the season was late. In the far south, the 13th of March is like the 13th of September in the north. Winter was coming.

On the 14th of March, at 55 degrees south, I saw the first floating ice. They were small pieces, twenty to twenty-five feet long. Ned Land had fished in the Arctic seas in the north, so he knew ice well. But Conseil and I saw it for the first time. Along the southern sky stretched a bright white band. Sailors call it "ice blink." It always shows when a great mass of ice is near.

Soon bigger blocks appeared. Some had green lines running through them. Some shone like huge purple jewels. Some looked like white marble cities. The further south we went, the more of these floating islands we saw.

At 60 degrees south, every open path had closed. But Captain Nemo found a narrow gap and slipped through, though it shut behind him. He guided the ship through the ice with amazing skill. The air was very cold, a few degrees below zero, but we wore warm furs and the ship was heated inside. On the 15th of March we passed New Shetland and South Orkney. Once many seals lived there. But hunters had killed them all, and now these places were silent and empty.

On the morning of the 16th of March the Nautilus crossed the Antarctic Circle. Ice closed the sky on every side. The shapes were amazing. Here the ice looked like a city full of towers. There it looked like a fallen town. The sun and the fog kept changing everything. We heard loud cracks and crashes as great blocks of ice fell. Often I saw no way out and thought we were trapped. But Captain Nemo always found a thin path of blue water.

Then the ice-fields blocked our road for good. Captain Nemo did not stop. He drove the Nautilus straight at the ice. The ship went in like a wedge and split it with loud cracks. Ice flew high in the air and fell around us like hail. Strong winds and thick fog beat against us. The cold stayed at 5 degrees below zero, and ice covered the whole ship. Only a ship with no sails, moving by electric power, could go so far.

At last, on the 18th of March, the Nautilus was truly stuck. Ahead lay one long wall of frozen mountains joined together.

"An iceberg!" said Ned.

Every sailor before us had been stopped by ice like this. The sun showed for a moment, and Captain Nemo took a reading: 67 degrees, 39 minutes south. Water had vanished. New ice was already forming fast around the ship, closing us in. We could not go forward. We could not go back. I thought we were truly trapped.

The Captain came to me. "Well, sir, what do you think?"

"I think we are caught, Captain."

"You always see only trouble," he said. "I tell you the Nautilus can free itself. And it can go still further."

"Further south?"

"Yes. It shall go to the pole."

"To the pole!" I could not believe it.

"Yes," he said coldly. "To the Antarctic pole, where no man has ever stood."

I laughed a little. "Then let us go! Let us smash the iceberg, or fly over it!"

"Not over it," said the Captain quietly. "Under it."

Under it! Now I understood his amazing plan. The ice we could see was only a small part of the whole. For every one foot above the water, there were three feet below. But down deep the water was open and free of ice. The Nautilus could dive below the iceberg and pass under it. The only danger was air. We would be under the ice for days with no way to reach the surface. But the ship had big air tanks. We filled them full.

At about four in the afternoon, men with picks broke the fresh ice around the ship. Then the Nautilus sank. Through the window we watched the deep Southern Ocean. At 900 feet down we were below the bottom of the iceberg. The ship went deeper still. The water there was even a little warmer than at the top. We turned straight toward the pole and raced along under the ice all night.

The next morning, the 19th of March, the Nautilus slowed and began to rise. My heart beat fast. Were we free? No. A dull shock told me we had struck the ice above us. It was still thick. Again and again the ship tried, and each time it hit the frozen ceiling. Slowly, mile by mile, the ice grew thinner. By three in the morning only fifty feet of ice lay above us. At last, at six in the morning, the saloon door opened and Captain Nemo appeared.

"The sea is open!" was all he said.

Audio, timed transcript, and companions online:

<https://alexlearns.com/english/twenty-thousand-leagues/chapter-36/>

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