



Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea · Episode 37 / 46 · B1–B2 · 00

Reaching the South Pole

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OVERVIEW

Summary

Reaching the South Pole — chapter 37 of Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, told in clear English for language learners.

Transcript

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Chapter Thirty-Seven — Reaching the South Pole

I rushed up to the platform. Yes! Open sea, with only a few pieces of ice floating here and there. Birds filled the air, and fish swam below in water that was blue and green. The thermometer showed 3 degrees above zero. It felt like spring, hidden as we were behind the great iceberg to the north.

"Are we at the pole?" I asked the Captain, my heart beating fast.

"I do not know," he said. "At noon I will take our position."

The sky was gray with fog. "But will the sun show itself?" I asked.

"Even a little will be enough," he said.

About ten miles south we saw a small island. Behind it lay a much bigger stretch of land, maybe a whole continent. This matched an old idea: that a great mass of land lies at the far south, because icebergs form only near a coast.

The Nautilus stopped near the shore. A boat took Captain Nemo, two crewmen with tools, Conseil, and me. It was ten in the morning. Ned Land had stayed behind. Perhaps he did not want to admit we had reached the pole. We rowed to the sand.

"Sir," I said to the Captain, "the honor of stepping first on this land is yours."

"Yes," he said, "for no human being has ever set foot here." He jumped lightly onto the sand. His heart was full. He climbed a rock, crossed his arms, and stood still, looking out over this new southern world. After five minutes he turned to us. "Come when you like."

The land was red stone and old lava. It had once been a volcano. In some cracks a little smoke rose, smelling of sulfur. Only a few small plants grew on the black rocks. But the air was full of life. Thousands of birds flew and cried all around us. There were penguins, clumsy on land but quick in the water. Great albatrosses passed above, their wings wide as a room.

Half a mile on, the ground was full of birds' nests. The birds were not afraid and let themselves be caught. Captain Nemo had many taken for food. But the fog did not lift. At eleven the sun still had not shown. Without it, we could not tell if we were at the pole. I found the Captain watching the sky, cross and worried. But even he could not command the sun. Noon came, and no sun appeared. Then the fog turned to snow.

"Until tomorrow," said the Captain, and we went back to the ship.

The snow fell all day and night. The next day, the 20th of March, it stopped. The cold was 2 degrees below zero, and the fog was lifting. Conseil and I went to shore again. And now, among the birds, we saw many sea animals looking at us with soft eyes.

"Sir," said Conseil, "what are these creatures?"

"They are seals and walruses."

They had never seen a man and did not run away. In a wide bay we found more of them than I could count. There were seals in family groups, mothers feeding their babies. On land they moved in little jumps, but in the water they swam beautifully. Further on we heard loud roaring. It was a crowd of walruses, playing and calling to one another.

By noon we were back at our landing place. Captain Nemo stood on a rock, his tools ready, watching the northern sky where the sun made a low curve. Again noon came, and again the sun did not appear. Tomorrow, the 21st of March, was the equinox. After that the sun would sink for six months and the long polar night would begin. If we could not see the sun tomorrow, we would lose our only chance.

"You are right," said the Captain. "But if I see the sun at noon tomorrow, my reading will be easy. I will use only my chronometer. If the sun is cut exactly in half by the horizon at twelve o'clock, then we are at the South Pole."

The next day, the 21st of March, the weather grew clearer. Captain Nemo, two men, and I climbed a sharp peak. On the way I saw many whales playing in the calm water. This quiet sea was a safe home for them, far from the hunters.

The climb was hard, over sharp lava. From the top we looked out on a vast white land and sea. To the north the sun hung low, like a ball of fire cut by the edge of the world. Captain Nemo watched it sink. I held the chronometer. My heart beat fast. If the sun's half-disc slipped below the line exactly at twelve, we stood at the pole itself.

"Twelve!" I cried.

"The South Pole!" said Captain Nemo in a grave voice. He handed me the glass, and I saw the sun cut into two equal halves by the horizon. Then, with his hand on my shoulder, he said:

"I, Captain Nemo, on this 21st day of March, 1868, have reached the South Pole. I take this land as my own."

"In whose name, Captain?"

"In my own, sir!"

Then he raised a black flag with a gold letter "N" on it. Turning to the sinking sun, he cried:

"Goodbye, sun! Rest beneath this open sea, and let a night of six months cover my new land!"

Audio, timed transcript, and companions online:

<https://alexlearns.com/english/twenty-thousand-leagues/chapter-37/>

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