

2.6 Chasing The Sea Monster



Our frigate wanted to go back, but the unearthly animal came at us with a speed double our own. We gasped. More stunned than afraid, we stood mute and motionless.

The animal caught up with us, played with us. It made a full circle around the frigate and wrapped us in sheets of electricity that were like luminous dust. At any instant it could have dashed against our ship.

Meanwhile I was surprised to see that our warship was fleeing, not fighting. I commented on this to Commander Farragut. His face, ordinarily so emotionless, showed great astonishment.

“Professor Aronnax,” he answered me, “I don’t know what kind of fearsome creature I’m up against, and I don’t want my frigate running foolish risks in all this darkness. Besides, how should we attack this unknown creature, how should we defend ourselves against it? Let’s wait for daylight and then we’ll play a different role.”

The whole crew stayed on their feet all night long. No one even thought of sleeping. Unable to compete with the monster’s speed, our frigate, the Abraham Lincoln slowed down. For its part, the animal mimicked the frigate, simply rode with the waves, but did not leave the field of battle.

However, near midnight it disappeared, or to use a more appropriate expression, ‘it went out,’ like a huge

Jules Verne was a French writer. He is known as the ‘Father of Science Fiction’. He wrote about rockets, space travel and submarines when such things were unknown. In this passage, from his novel *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, he describes how people on a ship think of the submarine as an animal and try to chase and hunt it.



- frigate : small, speedy ship used in war
- unearthly : strange, not like those found on earth

Think and answer :

- ⌘ What is the name of the narrator?
- ⌘ What is the name of the ship?
- ⌘ At what time is this event taking place?

- luminous : bright, full of light
- fearsome : scary, frightening
- crew : people working on the ship

- cetaceans : marine animals like a whale
- lurking : hiding

✂ **Guess and write the meaning of :**

- astern to port
(Use the picture on page 48.)
- blunderbusses
- duck guns
- harpoon

- whaling gear : equipment used to hunt whales

glowworm. Had it fled from us? We didn't know and were filled with fear and hope at the same time. But at 12:53 a deafening hiss could be heard, resembling the sound made by a water spout expelled with tremendous intensity.

By then Commander Farragut, Ned Land, and I were on the afterdeck, peering eagerly into the darkness.

"Tell me, Ned Land, isn't that the noise cetaceans make when they spurt water from their blowholes?"

"The very noise, sir, but this one's way louder. So there can be no mistake. There's definitely a whale lurking in our waters."

Near two o'clock in the morning, the core of light reappeared, five miles away from the Abraham Lincoln.

We stayed on the alert until daylight, getting ready for action. Whaling gear was set up along the railings. Our chief officer loaded the blunderbusses, which can launch harpoons as far as a mile, and long duck guns with exploding bullets that can wound and kill even the most powerful animals. Ned Land was content to sharpen his harpoon, a dreadful weapon in his hands.

At six o'clock day began to break, and with the dawn's early light, the animal's electric glow disappeared. At seven o'clock a very dense morning mist spread around us. Our best spyglasses were unable to pierce it. The outcome: disappointment and anger.

At eight o'clock the mist rolled away, and the horizon grew wider and clearer. Suddenly, Ned Land's voice could be heard. "There's the thing in question, astern to port!" the harpooner shouted. Every eye looked toward the point indicated.

There, a mile and a half from the frigate, a long blackish body emerged a metre above the waves. Quivering violently, its tail was creating a considerable current.

The crew were waiting impatiently for orders from their leader. The latter, after carefully observing the animal, ordered the engineer to sail full steam towards the animal.

Three cheers greeted this order. The hour of battle had sounded.

A few moments later, the Abraham Lincoln headed straight for the animal. Unconcerned, the latter let us come nearer, it got up a little speed, and kept its distance.

This chase dragged on for about three-quarters of an hour without the frigate getting any closer to the sea animal. At this rate, it was obvious that we would never catch up with it.

The Abraham Lincoln gathered speed but so did the animal. This went on for the next hour. The Abraham Lincoln was now speeding so much that its masts trembled down to their blocks.

What a chase! No, I can't describe the excitement that shook my very being. Ned Land stayed at his post, harpoon in hand. Several times the animal let us approach. Then, just as the harpooner was about to strike, the cetacean would steal off swiftly.

Commander Farragut then decided to use more direct methods.

"Bah!" he said. "So that animal is faster than the Abraham Lincoln. All right, Mate, man the gun in the bow!"

Our forecastle cannon was immediately loaded and levelled. The cannoneer fired a shot, but his shell passed some feet above the cetacean, which stayed half a mile off.

"Over to somebody with better aim!" the Commander shouted. "And \$500.00 to the man who can pierce that infernal beast!"

- sail full steam : sail at full speed.

Guess the meaning of :

- cannoneer
- harpooner

- steal off : move away
- Mate : assistant

- armour : protective metal covering

✂ Guess what order the Commander must have given.

- profound : deep

Calm of eye, cool of feature, an old gray-bearded gunner—I can see him to this day—approached the cannon, put it in position, and took aim for a good while. There was a mighty explosion, mingled with cheers from the crew.

The shell reached its target; it hit the animal, but bounced off its rounded surface and vanished into the sea two miles out.

“Oh drat!” said the old gunner in his anger. “That monster must be covered with six-inch armour plate!”

The hunt was on again. Hour after hour went by without the animal showing the least sign of weariness. However, it must be said that we, too, struggled on tirelessly.

At 10:50 in the evening, that electric light reappeared three miles away from the frigate, just as clear and intense as the night before.

The monster seemed motionless. Was it asleep perhaps, weary from its workday, just riding with the waves? This was our chance, and Commander Farragut decided to take full advantage of it. He gave his orders.

The frigate approached without making a sound, stopped two cable lengths from the animal. A profound silence reigned over the deck. We were not 100 feet from the blazing core of light, whose glow grew stronger and dazzled the eyes.



Just then, leaning over the forecastle railing, I saw Ned Land below me, brandishing his dreadful harpoon. Barely twenty feet separated him from the motionless animal.

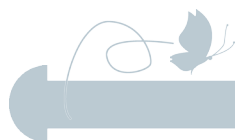
All at once his arm shot forward and the harpoon was launched. I heard the weapon make a ringing sound as if it had hit some hard substance.

The electric light suddenly went out, and two enormous waterspouts crashed onto the deck of the frigate, racing like a torrent from one end of the ship to the other, toppling crewmen, breaking spare masts and yardarms from their lashings.

A hideous collision occurred, and thrown over the rail with no time to catch hold of it, I was hurled into the sea.

– Adapted from ‘20,000 Leagues under the Sea’ by Jules Verne

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ENGLISH WORKSHOP

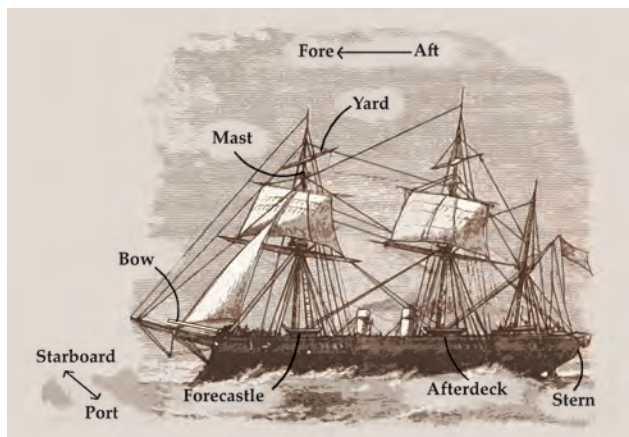
1. From the passage, find all the words and phrases used to describe the ‘monster’.
2. Form groups of 4. Find all the references to time given in the passage. Then make a chart to show the events described in the passage along with the time when they occur. Example:
 - All night long: The crew stayed on their feet.
 - Near midnight:
 - At 12.53:
 -
 -
 -(Use as many lines as you need.)
3. How long does the whole event described in this passage take? **Work it out** by reading the passage.

Guess the meaning of :

- enormous
- hideous

Read aloud the text on this page with proper intonation and emotion.

4. **Observe** the picture and the labels carefully. Then match the words and the meanings given in the following table.



Words	Meaning
1. yard	(a) a floor, flat area built on a ship
2. mast	(b) the forward part of the main body of a ship
3. bow	(c) the forward part of a deck
4. deck	(d) tall, upright pole on a ship
5. forecandle	(e) a pole slung across a ship's mast. A sail hangs from a yard.
6. starboard	(f) the rearmost (back) part of a ship
7. stern	(g) the part which is always at the front while the ship is sailing.
8. afterdeck	(h) the right-hand side of a ship as one faces forward
9. fore	(i) an open deck near the back

5. Form groups of 4-5. Read the following sentences aloud. Using your imagination and with the help of group discussion, write other situations in which the sentences can be used.
- The outcome: disappointment and anger.
 - The hour of battle had sounded
 - What a chase!
 - This was our chance,
6. Find the different units of measurement mentioned in the passage and get more information about them from the internet.
7. Language Study : **Transitive and intransitive verbs** : We can classify verbs into two types – transitive and intransitive. Some verbs need an object/objects. When a verb has an object, it is a **transitive** verb. For example, 'The boy kicked the football'. Here the verb 'kick' has 'the football' as its object. 'Give', 'cook', 'buy' are transitive verbs.

Some verbs do not need any objects. When a verb does not have an object, it is an **intransitive** verb. For example, 'We laughed loudly'. The verb 'laugh' in this sentence does not have an object. 'Laugh', 'walk', 'cry' are intransitive verbs.

Some verbs can be transitive or intransitive. For example, 'Birds fly'. (intransitive) 'Children fly kites'. (transitive)