

Chapter 1 : A RUNAWAY REEF

The year 1866 was marked by a bizarre development, an unexplained and downright inexplicable phenomenon that surely no one has forgotten. Without getting into those rumors that upset civilians in the seaports and deranged the public mind even far inland, it must be said that professional seamen were especially alarmed. Traders, shipowners, captains of vessels, skippers, and master mariners from Europe and America, naval officers from every country, and at their heels the various national governments on these two continents, were all extremely disturbed by the business.

In essence, over a period of time several ships had encountered "an enormous thing" at sea, a long spindle-shaped object, sometimes giving off a phosphorescent glow,

infinitely bigger than any whale.

The relevant apparition, as logbooks, agreed to the structure of the creature in unprecedented its startling location the unique view seemed to be a cetacean, it existed before whale previous science. No Cuvier nor Professor Dum Quatrefages, with the existence of sight unseen -- by their own so Striking an average taken at different those timid estimates object a length

exact position when two waterspouts shot out of this inexplicable object and sprang hissing into the air some 150 feet. So, unless this reef was subject to the intermittent eruptions of a geyser, the Governor Higginson had fair and honest dealings with some aquatic mammal, until then unknown, that could spurt from its blowholes waterspouts mixed with air and steam.

Similar events were likewise observed in Pacific seas, on July 23 of the same year, by the Christopher Columbus from the West India & Pacific Steam Navigation Co. Consequently, this extraordinary cetacean could transfer itself from one locality to another with startling swiftness, since within an interval of just three days, the Governor Higginson and the Christopher Columbus had observed it at two positions on the charts separated

by a distance of two nautical leagues. Fifteen days later, the Compagnie des Indes, returning from Shannon from the west, was running on opposite part of the Atlantic, the United States, respectively situated, that the monster was in latitude 42 degrees north longitude 60 degrees west, the meridian of the Cape of Good Hope, their simultaneous observations, they were about the same, the mammal's mouth was more than 35 feet long, was because both were of the Helvetia species, dimensions, measured 100 feet long. Now then, the fact that those rorqual whales, in the waterway between the Azores Islands, have

you saw the reappearance of every gigantic imaginary creature, from "Moby Dick," that dreadful white whale from the High Arctic regions, to the stupendous kraken whose tentacles could entwine a 500-ton craft and drag it into the ocean depths. They even reprinted reports from ancient times: the views of Aristotle and Pliny accepting the existence of such monsters, then the Norwegian stories of Bishop Pontoppidan, the narratives of Paul Egede, and finally the reports of Captain Harrington -- whose good faith is above suspicion--in which he claims he saw, while aboard the Castilian in 1857, one of those enormous serpents that, until then, had frequented only the seas of France's old extremist newspaper, The Constitutionalist.

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Chapter 2 : THE PROS AND CONS

During the period in which these developments were occurring, I had returned from a scientific undertaking organized to explore the Nebraska badlands in the United States. In my capacity as Assistant Professor at the Paris Museum of Natural History, I had been attached to this expedition by the French government. After spending six months in Nebraska, I arrived in New York laden with valuable collections near the end of March. My departure for France was set for early May. In the meantime, then, I was busy classifying my mineralogical, botanical, and zoological treasures when that incident took place with the Scotia.

I was perfectly abreast of this question, which was the big news of the day, and how could I not have been? I had read and reread

every American newspaper with a view to getting farther along. The fact that I was puzzled me. For I had never been able to form any view on one extreme or the other. Something was much was doubting Thorpe's place his finger wound.

When I arrived the question was a The hypothesis an elusive reality people not q minds, was co And indeed, un engine in its move about w speed?

Also discredited floating hull enormous wr

increasingly powerful aggressive weapons, it was possible that, unknown to the rest of the world, some nation could have been testing such a fearsome machine. The Chassepot rifle led to the torpedo, and the torpedo has led to this underwater battering ram, which in turn will lead to the world putting its foot down. At least I hope it will.

But this hypothesis of a war machine collapsed in the face of formal denials from the various governments. Since the public interest was at stake and transoceanic travel was suffering, the sincerity of these governments could not be doubted. Besides, how could the assembly of this underwater boat have escaped public notice? Keeping a secret under such circumstances would be difficult enough for an individual, and ^{Page 5} certainly impossible for a nation whose

every move was under surveillance by the world. So, after inquiries in England, France, Spain, Italy, Turkey, the United States, and the underwater Ministry of War were rejected.

After I arrived in London, several people were consulting me, and the matter was in question.

I had published a two-volume quarto, entitled "The Great Ocean," which received in some quarters a book had established a specialist in the field of natural history were in demand. I deny the reality of the confined mystery comment." But straight out. A honorable

beneath the surface of the water? What is the constitution of these animals? It's almost beyond conjecture.

"However, the solution to this problem submitted to me can take the form of a choice between two alternatives.

"Either we know every variety of creature populating our planet, or we do not.

"If we do not know every one of them, if nature still keeps ichthyological secrets from us, nothing is more admissible than to accept the existence of fish or cetaceans of new species or even new genera, animals with a basically 'cast-iron' constitution that inhabit strata beyond the reach of our soundings, and which some development or other, an urge or a whim if you prefer, can bring to the upper level of the ocean for long intervals.

"If, on the other hand, we do know

every living species for the animals those marine cataloged, and would be in the existence of a "The common unicorn, often sixty feet. Increased fivefold or even this cetacean proportion to enlarging its and you have looking for. proportions of officers of instrument near Scotia, and the steamer's hull. "In essence, the with a sort of lance, as certainly expressed it. It as hard as steel teeth have been

'rams,' whose mass and motor power it would possess simultaneously.

"This inexplicable phenomenon is thus explained away--unless it's something else entirely, which, despite everything that has been sighted, studied, explored and experienced, is still possible!"

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