

# The Misadventures of Robur

A Synopsis/Parody Screenplay with Commentary



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## Preface

### Hello, adventurers!

In the English-speaking world, Jules Verne tends to be an underrated author. This is really too bad, because he wrote some great novels which take people to some pretty interesting places. Even today, Jules Verne is still known as an early pioneer of science fiction... and although some of the science doesn't hold up today, his stories were well-researched by the standards of his time.

Of course, no author is infallible. Some of Jules Verne's stories feel more like travelogues than fiction. Some of his stories contain... er, shall we say, culturally insensitive references. And a few of his stories are interesting to read, but they leave you unsatisfied at the end.

This parody deals with two stories from that latter category: Robur the Conqueror, and its sequel (written nearly 20 years later), Master of the World. Both novels deal with some interesting concepts, but unfortunately, their potential is hampered by an underwhelming lack of direction and purpose. Robur, in particular, is a frustratingly underdeveloped and poorly explained character... which is a real shame, because both stories revolve around him.

But hey... why settle for negative, sweeping generalizations? Let's explore both novels through a parody screenplay! Here are the basic principles behind this parody:

1. **Overview the events of both novels.** We'll go through both books chapter-by-chapter, although some chapters will definitely receive less attention than others. This will provide a high-level understanding of the story's events. Ironically, that means this parody tells you more about the novels than Wikipedia does... because man, these stories are *obscure*. We'll also use direct (or at least paraphrased) quotes when possible. Many of the original narrative points will be expressed through character dialogue.
2. **Poke fun at the stuff which doesn't work.** This includes poorly-explained mysteries, annoying character flaws, and the seemingly bizarre decisions that Robur often makes.
3. **Omit the culturally insensitive stuff.** This wasn't an option when I did my parody of Mark Twain's novels, because the subject matter demanded at least *some* commentary on it. Here, however, I don't feel any such obligation: the "culturally insensitive references" in Robur the Conqueror have no bearing on the plot, so they can be safely omitted by this parody.

Okay, that's enough exposition. Let's see what we can learn about Robur and his misadventures... and hopefully, we'll enjoy some laughs along the way!

# Robur the Conqueror

## Chapter 1: Mysterious Sounds

*(It is nighttime at Niagara Falls, in the year 1886<sup>1</sup>. Without warning, music begins to play inexplicably from the sky.)*

**Englishman:** Why, how mysterious! Where is that music coming from?

**American:** I have no idea... but the song sounds like “Yankee Doodle!”

**Englishman** (*angrily*): No, it’s “Rule Britannia!”

**American:** Enough talking! Let’s settle this with a duel!

*(The American and Englishman perform their duel with pistols. Both of them miss, although one of the bullets hits a nearby cow<sup>2</sup>.)*

**Englishman** (*nervously*): I won’t tell anyone if you don’t.

**American:** Deal! Let’s forget our differences and get some food.

\* \* \* \* \*

*(The American and Englishman enter a nearby tavern, where the patrons are eagerly discussing recent world events.)*

**American:** Hey, everyone... you’ll never guess what just happened!

**Englishman:** The skies began to inexplicably play music! We think the tune was “Rule Britannia!”

**American** (*angrily*): No, it was “Yankee Doodle!”

**Patron 1** (*placatingly*): Gentleman, relax... your argument has no bearing on the plot. The important thing is, this has been happening all over the world: Europe and Asia have also reported hearing music from the sky, and nobody’s sure what’s going on.

**Patron 2:** The Paris observatory is saying that it’s just an acoustic illusion.

**Patron 3** (*testily*): But that doesn’t really answer the question, does it? I mean, illusion or not, we just want to know what’s actually causing it!

**Patron 4:** Well, whatever it is, the world’s observatories are seeing *something*! The Norway observatory thinks that it could be a flying machine.

**Patron 1** (*skeptically*): I don’t know about that. It’s probably just a comet or something.

**Patron 3** (*laughing*): Sure... a comet which plays music!

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<sup>1</sup> Actually, I don’t remember a concrete year from the original book. So I’m just using its publication date.

<sup>2</sup> You probably think that I’m making this up, but no... this ridiculous opening encounter is straight out of the book! Don’t worry: this is the last time in either story that a unit of livestock is injured by a pointless gunfight.

**Patron 2:** Maybe we just *think* we hear music. Has that occurred to anyone? I agree with Patron 4... it's probably just a comet.

**Patron 1** (*indignantly*): Hey, *I* said it was a comet! Patron 4 thought it was a flying machine.

**Patron 4:** No, I said the *Norway observatory* thought it was a flying machine. My opinions are my own!

*(Just when it seems like the argument will never be resolved, a new patron bursts into the tavern.)*

**Patron 5:** Everyone, have you heard the latest news? A mysterious black flag with stars and a golden sun has been spotted on dozens of famous landmarks around the world this week, and all of them are in inaccessible places!

**Patron 1** (*grudgingly*): I guess a comet couldn't place flags on famous landmarks.

**Patron 4:** So, it was a flying machine all along!

**American** (*slyly*): Did the latest news happen to mention whether the song everyone's hearing is "Hail Britannia" or "Yankee Doodle"?

**Patron 5:** Neither... it's "Chopsticks"<sup>3</sup>.

**American:** Dang it!

## Chapter 2: Agreement Impossible

*(A meeting is in progress at the Weldon Institute, a balloonist's club on Walnut Street in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The meeting is overseen by Uncle Prudent, its president, and Phil Evans, its secretary. The members are hotly debating whether their planned dirigible, the "Go-Ahead", should be driven by a propeller on the front or on the rear.)*

**Prudent:** I maintain that the propeller should be at the rear, and anyone who disagrees is an idiot!

**Evans:** Well, I maintain that the propeller should be at the *front*, and anyone who disagrees is a moron!

**Prudent:** You're just bitter because you lost our club's "election target shoot" by less than six fifteen-hundredths of a millimeter!

**Evans:** No, you're just insecure because you *won* our club's "election target shoot" by less than six fifteen-hundredths of a millimeter!

**Prudent:** Your factories are stupid!

**Evans:** Your engineering projects are stupid!

**Prudent:** Wait... what were we arguing about, again?

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<sup>3</sup> Originally published in 1877... but I don't think the original story ever directly stated what the song was, except that it included trumpets.

**Evans:** Um... I can't remember. Let me think a minute... oh yes, the propeller!

**Prudent:** Rear propellers are better!

**Evans:** No, *front* propellers are better<sup>4</sup>!

## Chapter 3: A Visitor is Announced

*(The Weldon Institute meeting from the previous chapter is still in progress.)*

**Prudent:** Fine, then... if we can't agree on where the dirigible's propeller should be placed, then let's enjoy a brief digression into the history of attempted air travel, with a special focus on lighter-than-air vehicles!

*(Evans recites this history. It's presumably well-researched, at least from an 1800's perspective, but it has very little bearing on the actual story<sup>5</sup>.)*

**Evans:** ...but the pinnacle will be our own proposed dirigible, the "Go-Ahead", which shall have a volume of forty thousand cubic meters!

**Club Member 1** (*awed*): That's a lot of gas!

**Club Member 2** (*snickering*): Hee hee! Gas!

**Prudent** (*ignoring Club Member 2*): And *that's* why it deserves the best propeller it can have... a rear propeller!

**Evans** (*angrily*): Now, see here!

*(Just then, the porter of the Weldon Institute approaches the presidential desk and hands Uncle Prudent a card. Prudent reads the card carefully.)*

**Prudent:** My dear colleagues... a stranger has asked to be admitted to our meeting.

**Club Members:** Never!

**Prudent:** He's going to insist that all dirigibles are lame and stupid.

**Club Members:** Well, that's another story... if he's here to mock everything that this club stands for, then send him in at once<sup>6</sup>!

**Evans:** And what's the name of this audacious man?

**Prudent:** Robur.

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<sup>4</sup> And that's pretty much the whole chapter. As for the issue of "front vs. rear" propellers (or "puller" vs. "pusher")... I Googled it, and rather hilariously, people *still* argue about this online! Apparently, it's one of those engineering topics where each side has valid arguments, so we can safely assume that it will never be resolved. Performance aside, a front propeller does have one significant advantage: it can't hit you if you need to bail out of the aircraft. Uh oh... now I'm probably in trouble with the "rear propeller" people. :)

<sup>5</sup> I'm saving you several minutes here.

<sup>6</sup> I swear this is pretty much what happens in the original scene!

**Dramatic Music Cue:** Dum dum *dummmmm*!

**Evans:** Was that supposed to mean something to us?

**Prudent:** Nah, it's probably nothing. C'mon, let's see what this "Robur" has to say!

## Chapter 4: In Which a New Character Appears

*(The mysterious Robur prepares to address the members of the Weldon Institute.)*

**Robur:** Citizens of the United States! My name is Robur. I am worthy of the name! I am forty years old, although I look but thirty, and I have a constitution of iron, a healthy vigor that nothing can shake, a muscular strength that few can equal, and a digestion that would be thought first class even in an ostrich<sup>7</sup>!

**Evans** (*whispering aside to Prudent*): I must say... Robur has a trapezoidal body and an enormous spheroidal head! And I'd wager that his jaw strength is somewhere between a dog and a crocodile<sup>8</sup>!

**Prudent** (*whispering aside to Evans*): Personally, I think he looks more like Vincent Price<sup>9</sup>.

**Robur:** And now, honorable citizens, let me describe my mental faculties. I am an engineer, and my brains are worthy of my brawn! I fear nothing. My iron will has never yielded to anyone. When I decide on something, the entire world cannot keep me from it. When I have an idea, I never share it, and I do not permit any contradiction<sup>10</sup>.

**Prudent:** I think you're talking about yourself too much.

**Robur** (*triumphantly*): It doesn't matter what you think! Now, listen up... because I've come to tell you something that you won't be pleased to hear!

**Evans** (*drily*): Go for it.

**Robur:** Lighter-than-air flight is nothing more than a pipe dream! It's expensive, error-prone, and ineffective. Even nature realizes this! All flying creatures are heavier than air... and yet do you see any of them struggling to stay aloft?

**Club Member 1** (*protesting*): What about penguins?

**Club Member 2:** Penguins can't fly, stupid!

**Club Member 1** (*sullenly*): That explains a lot.

**Robur:** Yes, gentleman, the future belongs to the airplane... *not* the balloon<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> This is an untouched, word-for-word quote from the original book. I couldn't possibly improve on it.

<sup>8</sup> These points are also from the original book. I have to wonder: did these bizarre details actually mean something to the readers of the time?

<sup>9</sup> Okay, *this* point was from me... although Vincent Price *did* play Robur in the 1961 film, Master of the World.

<sup>10</sup> This is also directly from the book. It's not as funny as the earlier stuff, but it's still necessary: it's the best description we'll ever get of Robur's character.

<sup>11</sup> This is basically true... much to the dismay of steampunk fans everywhere. When's the last time you saw a blimp docked at an airport?



**Evans** (*indignantly*): And just what do *you* know about aviation, Robur? Have you made a conquest of the air?

**Robur** (*coolly*): Indeed I have.

**Evans** (*sarcastically*): Well, then hooray for Robur the Conqueror!

**Robur** (*pointing haughtily*): The joke's on *you*, sir... I like that name, so I'm stealing it! And as for your precious dirigible, the "Go-Ahead"... it will amount to nothing!

**Club Member 1**: How dare he insult us!

**Club Member 2**: Yeah, we're men of science!

**Club Member 3**: Let's kill him!

*(The club's members angrily rush at Robur, but he discharges two revolvers over their heads. The mob flinches back. By the time the smoke clears, Robur is nowhere to be seen.)*

**Prudent** (*astonished*): Why, he's vanished!

**Evans** (*musings*): It's almost as though he escaped in some sort of flying machine!

**Prudent**: No, that would be silly... and we're rational men! Now, let's storm outside and find this guy, so that we can beat him up for hurting our feelings<sup>12</sup>!

## Chapter 5: Another Disappearance

*(The angry members of the Weldon Institute storm out of their meeting place, determined to hunt down Robur. Prudent and Evans lead the charge.)*

**Prudent**: Split into groups! Check all the adjoining streets, and all over the neighborhood!

**Club Member 1**: But it's getting late!

**Evans**: Then we should also wake up the householders, just in case!

**Club Member 1** (*confused*): Just in case what?

**Evans**: Just in case Robur is hiding in their house!

**Club Member 2**: Let's do it quickly, before the police have time to intervene<sup>13</sup>!

*(The club members scatter in all directions, determined to find Robur at all costs... for about an hour. Then they begin to lose interest.)*

**Club Member 1**: I'm getting hungry and tired.

**Club Member 2**: Rage-fueled manhunts are hard!

**Club Member 1**: Let's all go home and write angry, poorly-informed letters to the local newspaper!

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<sup>12</sup> I'm honestly not sure who to cheer for right now.

<sup>13</sup> You probably think that I'm exaggerating this part. I'm really not.

**All Club Members** (*enthusiastically*): Yeah!

**Prudent**: Come back here, you fools!

**Evans**: We haven't found Robur yet!

*(The mob ignores them and begins to disperse. Moments later, Prudent and Evans are approached by Frycollin, Prudent's valet<sup>14</sup>. The trio continues to search for Robur. They eventually wander into Fairmont Park.)*

**Frycollin**: Sir, maybe we should head home. I don't like the looks of this place.

**Prudent** (*chiding*): Don't be such a coward, Frycollin!

**Frycollin**: But this park is dark, and scary, and unsupervised!

**Evans** (*scoffing*): Grow up, will you?

**Frycollin**: Also, we're being followed by six burly men with gags and enormous burlap sacks.

**Prudent**: Wait, what?

*(The six men overpower Prudent, Evans, and Frycollin. All three of them are gagged, blindfolded, tied up, and carried away in large sacks. The next day, the Weldon Institute is distraught to learn that its leaders have disappeared without a trace.)*

**Club Member 1**: How will we ever carry on without them!?

**Club Member 2**: Wait... I have an idea!

**Club Member 3**: Tell us!

*(Wordlessly, Club Member 2 walks up to the club's podium. He clears his throat dramatically.)*

**Club Member 2**: I maintain that the propeller should be at the rear, and anyone who disagrees is an idiot!

**Club Member 1** (*picking up from Club Member 2's cue*): Well, I maintain that the propeller should be at the *front*, and anyone who disagrees is a moron!

**Club Member 2**: You're just bitter because...

*(The debate rages on.)*

## Chapter 6: The President and Secretary Suspend Hostilities

*(Prudent and Evans find themselves in a darkened room. They can't see anything, and they can't hear anything except the distant hum of a motor. Evans manages to slip out of the ropes which were binding his hands. Next, he removes his gag and blindfold.)*

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<sup>14</sup> In the original book, most of the culturally insensitive remarks were centered around Frycollin. In this parody, he is simply a cowardly valet.

**Evans** (*muttering to himself*): It must be pitch dark in here... I still can't see anything.

**Prudent** (*through his gag*): Mmgh mghgh mgmmghg!!

**Evans**: Hang in there, Prudent... I'll free you!

(*Evans brandishes his pocketknife<sup>15</sup>, and he quickly cuts Prudent free of the ropes. Prudent immediately removes his own blindfold and gag.*)

**Evans**: Listen here, Prudent. I know we don't see eye to eye on much...

**Prudent** (*jumping to his feet*): I agree! Let's settle this, once and for all!

**Evans**: Whoa! I was about to say that we should set aside our differences, and cooperate to get out of here!

**Prudent**: Oh... right. That's what I meant, too.

**Evans**: I guess we should free your valet next.

**Prudent**: Nah, let's leave him gagged for a little longer. If he can open his mouth, he'll just whine and moan about everything, and I really can't stand that<sup>16</sup>.

**Frycollin** (*indignantly through his gag*): Mmmgh mhgm gmhmg, ggmmh!!

**Prudent**: Whoops. I guess he heard that. Sorry, Frycollin! We were just talking about you! Here, we'll set you free.

(*Prudent and Evans free Frycollin, who immediately commences complaining.*)

**Frycollin**: Sir, it's so dark and oppressive in here! And my job is so unfulfilling!

**Prudent**: Not now, Frycollin... we need to find a way out of here! Robur is clearly behind this outrage.

**Evans** (*curiously*): How do you figure that?

**Prudent**: Isn't it obvious? Robur foresaw what would happen at the club, so he placed 6 of his goons at our front door. When we left Walnut Street, those fellows must've followed us... and as soon as we were alone, they pounced!

**Evans**: Are you sure? I mean, we don't even know that Robur has goons! And if Robur knew exactly what would happen at our club, then why'd he bother coming in?

**Prudent** (*shrugging*): Beats me. But I hate Robur's guts, so I really want this to be his fault!

**Frycollin** (*eagerly*): Wait... both of you! Is that a shaft of light? It must be dawn!

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<sup>15</sup> Which their abductors apparently didn't bother to confiscate.

<sup>16</sup> The original book doesn't make this obvious right away, but Prudent and Evans are just the worst. I figured that you deserve a fair warning, so that you don't get too invested in their characters.

*(Prudent and Evans regard a faint shaft of light that's streaming down from a narrow window near the room's ceiling. Evans checks his watch, and frowns thoughtfully.)*

**Evans:** That's strange... the sun shouldn't be up for at least an hour.

**Prudent:** Huh... the only way that could happen is if we'd somehow been transported to a different latitude or time zone. But that surely can't be the case!

*(Without warning, the room's door is opened from outside, and Robur appears at its threshold.)*

**Robur** (*grandly*): Honorable balloonists, you are now free to come and go as you like.

**Evans** (*cautiously*): Free?

**Robur:** Yes... within the limits of the Albatross.

*(Prudent, Evans, and Frycollin impulsively rush out of the room. To their profound shock, they find themselves on the deck of a revolutionary airship. Four thousand feet below, an uncertain country is spread out before them.)*

**Prudent:** Impossible!

**Evans:** Incredible!

**Frycollin:** Would this be a good time to mention that I'm terrified of heights?

## Chapter 7: On Board the Albatross

*(Prudent, Evans, and Frycollin stand stupefied on the deck of the Albatross, their gazes darting around in astonishment as Robur looks on with passive amusement. The Albatross is shaped like a clipper ship, except that instead of sails, it uses 74 vertical propellers to stay in the air. For movement, it also has a large propeller on both the rear and front... much to the satisfaction of Prudent and Evans, respectively<sup>17</sup>.)*

**Prudent** (*incredulous*): What in the world keeps this contraption in the air?

**Frycollin** (*pointing upward*): I think it's the 74 vertical propellers, sir.

**Prudent** (*impatient*): Yes, I can see that! But what powers the propellers!?

**Robur** (*serenely*): Simple electricity, Prudent... the agent which will eventually be the soul of the industrial world<sup>18</sup>.

**Evans** (*skeptical*): But why propellers? If you're such a big fan of heavier-than-air flight, then why not build a machine which perfectly imitates a bird's wings?

---

<sup>17</sup> It's worth noting that this chapter opens with another digression on the history of attempted flight. As before, I assume it was well-researched... but in a parody, it's simply not necessary.

<sup>18</sup> This point has proven increasingly true over time... after a fashion. As of 2025, fossil fuels still play a crucial role in humanity's industry (including most planes).

**Robur** (*shrugging*): Because it isn't necessary to copy nature precisely. Locomotives aren't copied from the hare, nor are ships copied from the fish. These simple propellers already give the Albatross more than enough lift<sup>19</sup>.

**Evans:** Even so... it would take a massive crew to maintain a machine of this complexity!

**Robur** (*smugly*): Just eight men, good sir: myself, my first mate Tom Turner, an engineer and two assistants, two steersman and a cook.

(*Experimentally, Prudent raps the deck of the Albatross with his knuckle.*)

**Prudent:** What's this airship made out of, anyway? It doesn't seem to be metal.

**Robur:** Paper.

**Frycollin:** Paper!? Why, the whole ship will fall apart the first time it rains!

**Robur:** Hardly. These paper sheets have been soaked in dextrin and starch, and then squeezed in a hydraulic press. They are lightweight, and yet harder than steel!

**Frycollin:** But we shall all burn up the first time someone strikes a match!

**Robur:** The process also renders the paper incombustible<sup>20</sup>.

**Frycollin** (*panicking*): But "inflammable" and "flammable" mean the same thing!

**Robur** (*slightly annoyed*): I said "incombustible", not "inflammable".

**Frycollin:** Oh... okay. I guess that means we're safe. For now.

**Robur** (*grandly*): So, gentlemen... what do you think of heavier-than-air flight *now*?

**Evans:** The Albatross is stupid!

**Prudent:** We hate your guts!

**Robur** (*surprised*): But what about the aeronautical wonder of sailing thousands of feet above the earth, at speeds exceeding the fastest -

**Frycollin:** I'm scared for my life!

**Robur** (*coolly*): Hm... perhaps I should choose my guests more carefully in the future.

**Prudent** (*indignantly*): You abducted us!

**Robur** (*shrugging*): Okay, you've got me there.

---

<sup>19</sup> This point has proven true, as well. Even today, our best engineers would find it challenging to build a machine which perfectly imitates the intricacies of a bird's wing... and yet we've enjoyed flying vehicles for more than a century.

<sup>20</sup> I did some quick research, but I had trouble verifying whether these remarkable traits are accurate. Regardless, there must be *some* reason why modern aircraft aren't made of this stuff.

## Chapter 8: The Balloonists Refuse to Be Convinced

*(Onboard the Albatross, Prudent and Evans angrily attempt to question Robur.)*

**Prudent:** And just where do you think you're taking us!?

**Robur** *(smiling vaguely)*: Through the air.

**Evans:** Well, how long will this voyage last?

**Robur:** Until it ends.

**Prudent** *(challengingly)*: And if this voyage does not suit us?

**Robur:** It will have to. Now, please enjoy the aerial view of Quebec City! I'll give you some space, so that you can cool down. With time, I hope you will come to admire this wonderful airship... and compliment its inventor, of course<sup>21</sup>.

*(Robur turns to leave.)*

**Prudent** *(fuming)*: "Cool down", he says... what if we're feeling hangry!?

**Robur** *(over his shoulder)*: Then get some breakfast from the dining room, you clueless balloonists!

*(Prudent and Evans enjoy a hearty breakfast. Frycollin eats a little, but he spends most of the meal reminding everyone that he's terrified of heights. Finally, they return to the deck.)*

**Evans:** Wait... is that Montreal?

**Prudent:** Why, yes it is! I recognize the bridge over the St. Lawrence river.

**Evans:** But we only left Quebec City two hours ago!

**Prudent** *(confused)*: You mean we spent two hours eating breakfast?

**Evans** *(impatiently)*: Never mind that! Don't you realize what this means? The Albatross must be travelling at 75 miles per hour!

**Prudent:** Remarkable!

*(Robur abruptly appears behind them.)*

**Robur:** Do I detect the sound of a compliment?

**Evans** *(quickly)*: No... the Albatross is stupid!

**Prudent:** And we still hate your guts!

**Frycollin:** Wait, though... Robur, doesn't your ship normally travel when it's dark?

**Robur:** Yes. And during the day, I'd fly above the clouds. You see, I took many precautions to avoid being detected.

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<sup>21</sup> In the original book, Robur only thinks this... he doesn't say it out loud. But it's funnier if he says it out loud.

**Frycollin** (*confused*): So... why are we openly flying the Albatross above Canada in broad daylight now?

**Robur**: Because I no longer wish to keep my secret hidden.

**Frycollin**: But... why the change? Does it have something to do with abducting us?

**Evans**: And why bother travelling at night, if you're already blaring trumpet music from the skies and planting little flags everywhere? Doesn't that draw just as much attention as flying during the day?

**Robur** (*shrugging*): Oh, I'm never going to explain any of that. To be honest, a lot of my actions are pretty arbitrary<sup>22</sup>. But enough of that! Watch, as I demonstrate my machine's incredible ability to rise and fall through the air!

*(At Robur's command, the vertical propellers change speed, and the Albatross swiftly rises to 8,700 feet. Just as easily, he has the ship sink back down to 4000 feet.)*

**Robur**: Pretty cool, eh? And with my ship's horizontal speed, I could traverse the world in just 8 days! What do you say to *that*?

**Evans** (*coolly*): I think that if you'd built this contraption two decades earlier, you could've challenged Phileas Fogg to a race<sup>23</sup>.

**Prudent**: Gentlemen, we've strayed from the matter at hand! *(He turns to Robur challengingly.)* What gave you the right to attack us in Fairmont Park, and then abduct us with this infernal machine!?

**Robur**: Well, what gave you the right to pursue me with murderous rage after your club meeting?

**Prudent**: I asked first!

**Robur**: Very well... I abducted you by the right of the strongest. Call me a cynic if you must, but it's true.

**Evans**: And how long do you intend to exercise that right!?

**Robur** (*pointing downward*): Everybody look! It's Niagara Falls<sup>24</sup>!

**Prudent**: Hey, yeah! Does it ever look great from up here!

*(Everyone spends several minutes admiring the view.)*

**Evans**: Wait a minute! You never answered my question!

**Robur** (*grinning*): Get used to it.

## Chapter 9: Across the Prairie

*(The next morning, Uncle Prudent and Phil Evans emerge from their cabins.)*

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<sup>22</sup> You've been warned.

<sup>23</sup> Just a little "Around the World in Eighty Days" joke. :)

<sup>24</sup> This is basically how Robur answers the question in the original story, too.

**Prudent:** Sleep well, Evans?

**Evans:** Oh, yes... no Atlantic liner could have offered better comfort! But the Albatross is still stupid.

**Prudent** (*nodding affirmatively*): And we still hate Robur's guts.

(*Evans glances over the ship's railing.*)

**Evans:** Oh, look! We're flying past Chicago right now.

**Prudent:** So we are!

(*They continue to watch the landscape as it rolls past them.*)

**Evans:** Where do you suppose Robur is today?

**Prudent:** Beats me. Hey, I think we're flying over Iowa!

**Evans:** I believe you're right!

(*They continue to watch the landscape as it rolls past them.*)

**Evans:** And now we're in Nebraska.

**Prudent:** Yep.

(*They continue to watch the landscape as it rolls past them.*)

**Prudent:** Is it me, or was this chapter completely uneventful?

**Evans:** It isn't you.

## Chapter 10: Westward - But Whither?

(*The next morning, Uncle Prudent and Phil Evans emerge from their cabins.*)

**Evans:** Say there, Turner... will we see Robur today?

**Turner:** I don't know. (*Turner returns to his cabin.*)

**Prudent:** I'm starting to get the impression that we aren't high-priority guests around here.

**Evans** (*annoyed*): Yes, me too. Say, is that Yellowstone National Park?

**Prudent:** Indeed it is!

(*They continue to watch the landscape as it rolls past them.*)

**Prudent:** Hey, look! It's a train!

**Evans:** And it looks like we've been spotted! Let's try yelling to the people below!

**Prudent** (*yelling at the top of his voice*): Help us! We've been kidnapped!



**Evans** (*while doing a facepalm*): They can't hear us. They're too busy cheering at the Albatross<sup>25</sup>.

*(They continue to watch the landscape as it rolls past them.)*

**Evans**: Well, there's Salt Lake City.

**Prudent**: Uh huh.

*(They continue to watch the landscape as it rolls past them.)*

**Prudent**: Evans... I'm bored.

**Evans**: Me too.

*(Just then, Robur appears on deck.)*

**Prudent**: Oh, thank goodness! Surely *now* something will happen!

**Evans**: Yes... let's make the most of this opportunity!

**Robur**: Good evening, gentlemen. Are you ready to have a meaningful conversation?

**Evans** (*reflexively*): The Albatross is stupid!

**Prudent**: And we hate your guts!

**Robur**: Well, whatever.

**Evans**: And another thing! We're sick and tired of watching the landscape roll past us!

**Robur**: Oh, you're bored of watching the land? Then I have excellent news for you... we're about to cross the Pacific Ocean! Good evening.

*(Robur leaves.)*

**Prudent** (*shaking his head ruefully*): He got us good, Evans.

## Chapter 11: The Wide Pacific

*(The next morning, Uncle Prudent and Phil Evans emerge from their cabins. After a brief interval, Frycollin also emerges from his cabin.)*

**Prudent**: Good morning, Frycollin! I see that you're still in this story.

**Frycollin**: Yep! And I think I'm finally getting used to heights. Let's see where we are this morning...

*(Frycollin glances over the railing and sees the Pacific Ocean spread out beneath him. He jumps back in alarm, as a look of panic spreads across his face.)*

**Frycollin**: The ocean!? But I'm terrified of water! Oh no!!

*(Francois Tapage, the ship's cook, approaches him.)*

---

<sup>25</sup> This happens in the original story. It's actually pretty funny, especially if you don't like Evans and Prudent.

**Tapage:** Relax, Frycollin. You're in no immediate danger.

**Frycollin:** No *immediate* danger? So, there *will* be danger later?

**Tapage** (*reflectively*): Well, I suppose eventually this ship will break down or smash. I mean, everything ends sooner or later, right? It's honestly just a question of when.

**Prudent** (*sternly*): This isn't helping, Tapage!

**Tapage** (*defensively*): I didn't say it would happen today! And even if we *do* crash, isn't it better to crash in the ocean than on land?

**Frycollin:** I'm scared to death of water! Arrggggghhh!

*(Frycollin flees back to his cabin and slams the door.)*

**Evans** (*looking accusingly at Tapage*): Thanks a lot, Tapage! That was the first time Frycollin had shown his face since chapter 8!

*(Suddenly, Robur shows up on deck.)*

**Robur:** Never mind Frycollin... we've just sighted a whale! Evans, Prudent... would you have more respect for the Albatross if I used it to capture a whale?

**Prudent:** No.

**Robur:** I'm doing it anyway!

**Evans** (*nudging Prudent*): Just play along. Maybe we'll spot a whaling ship nearby, and then we can jump into the sea and escape with them!

**Prudent:** Okay Robur... show us what the Albatross can do!

*(The Albatross sights a whale, and begins to bear down on it.)*

**Prudent:** I don't see any nearby whaling ships.

**Evans** (*shrugging*): Yeah... now that I've had time to reflect, that was definitely a long shot.

*(A furious battle ensues between the Albatross and the whale. In the end, the whale is fatally wounded.)*

**Robur:** Whew, he was a tough one! Well, let's move on.

**Prudent:** Wait a moment! I thought you said you were going to capture the whale.

**Robur:** Listen... if I have to keep track of everything I say or do over the course of a chapter, then nothing will ever get said or done!

**Evans:** And you're not even going to harvest anything from the whale's corpse?

**Robur:** Hey, relax! It's only 1886, so we can still wantonly squander the earth's resources without being yelled at. Besides, the earth isn't exactly running out of whales... and it never will<sup>26</sup>!

**Prudent:** If you think that sorry excuse will make us overlook what you did -

**Robur** (*pointing downward*): Everybody look! It's the peninsula of Alaska!

**Prudent:** Hey, yeah! Does it ever look great from up here!

*(Everyone spends several minutes admiring the view. Robur quietly slips away.)*

**Prudent:** He dodged us again, didn't he?

**Evans:** Yep.

\* \* \* \* \*

*(What with one thing and another, the Albatross eventually makes its way to Northern Japan. There, a dense fog settles in from all sides. Robur uses the opportunity to praise the Albatross.)*

**Robur:** Gentleman... a fog like this would delay a sailing ship or a steamship. They must reduce their speed, and expect a collision at any instant! But the "Albatross" has nothing to fear.

**Prudent** (*snidely*): Oh, I suppose this ship is collision-proof too?

**Robur** (*shrugging*): What are we going to collide with?

**Prudent:** Mountains!

**Evans** (*chiming in*): Improbably tall buildings!

**Prudent** (*grinning*): Another stupid flying machine like the Albatross, piloted by another stupid inventor!

**Robur** (*shaking his head*): You guys are the worst. Well, enjoy Tokyo... the fog is starting to clear, and we're flying over it right now.

*(Robur leaves, and Prudent and Evans exchange high fives.)*

**Prudent:** We totally got the best of him that time!

**Evans:** You know, it just occurred to me... we've been pointlessly antagonizing Robur and whining about our circumstances for several chapters now, and it really hasn't helped us. Instead of that, what if we tried to get on Robur's good side and figure out what he wants from us, so that we have a better chance of being freed<sup>27</sup>?

**Prudent:** No, I prefer our current strategy. Perhaps a random chance will allow us to escape without experiencing any character growth whatsoever!

**Evans:** Yeah, you're probably right. Just thought I'd ask.

---

<sup>26</sup> The whale killing was just as pointless in the original book. Different times, I guess.

<sup>27</sup> I spent most of the original book asking myself this very question.

## Chapter 12: Through the Himalayas

*(As the Albatross passes near China's imperial palace, its passengers observe hundreds of kites being flown in the air. The kites are constructed in such a way that their passage through their air produces a beautiful sound.)*

**Robur:** Isn't this a grand spectacle? Let's bring the Albatross closer, so that we can hear it better!

*(As soon as the Albatross draws close, a number of alarmed cries are heard. Guns and mortars from the imperial palace are fired at the Albatross. The kites are withdrawn.)*

**Robur** *(annoyed)*: Well, *this* certainly isn't the result I was hoping for. Let's move on!

*(The Albatross swiftly flies away.)*

**Prudent:** What do you suppose the people down there were so upset about?

**Evans** *(dismissively)*: They probably just think we're a supernatural apparition, or an invading warlord, or something.

*(From the ground, we see one of the lead kite-fliers shaking his fist angrily at the departing Albatross.)*

**Man:** How *dare* you upstage our kites!

\* \* \* \* \*

*(Eventually, the Albatross passes into Tibet. The Himalayas loom in the distance.)*

**Evans:** Do you suppose that Robur will go around the Himalayas to reach India?

**Prudent:** Unless he goes by Burma to the east, or Nepal to the west.

*(Robur suddenly pops out from behind a corner.)*

**Robur:** Actually, we're going *through* the Himalayas! Now brace yourselves, for you're about to see the mountains as no one has ever seen them before!

*(The Albatross glides its way through the breathtaking Himalayas. Everywhere they look is a perfect vista of dramatic wooded valleys, stark stone ridges, and astonishingly pristine mountain tops. The clear air perfectly transmits this spectacle to its spellbound audience. In the distance, the bold note of an eagle's cry pierces the crystalized silence. For hours, not a single soul onboard the Albatross utters a word, as the airship smoothly takes them on a flawless course into India.)*

**Robur:** Well, Gentleman... we've arrived in India. Now, surely you -

**Evans:** The Albatross is stupid!

**Prudent:** We hate your guts!

**Robur** *(disgusted)*: Seriously?

## Chapter 13: Over the Caspian

*(The Albatross has been flying near Cashmere. Now, it has stopped just 30 feet above a nearby river to replenish its water supply. A pipe is sent down into the river to draw water up into the Albatross.)*

**Prudent** (*eyeing Evans*): You know Evans, we're only about 30 feet above the river. Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

**Evans**: That we could jump overboard into the river, and thus gain our freedom?

**Prudent**: Yes, exactly!

**Evans**: But what about Frycollin?

**Prudent** (*reassuringly*): Don't worry yourself on that score, Evans... I can easily hire a new valet once we're safely back in Philadelphia<sup>28</sup>.

**Evans**: Well, then... what are we waiting for?

*(Prudent and Evans attempt to throw themselves overboard. However, Robur has anticipated their move. Before they can crawl over the railing, they are seized and dragged back on the deck.)*

**Robur**: Nice try, gentleman. But it's not so easy to leave the company of Robur the Conqueror, as you have so well named him.

**Prudent** (*fuming*): What do you want from us!?

**Robur** (*gesturing to the Albatross around them*): To convince you of how admirable a machine this is, of course!

**Evans**: Well, guess what? We refuse to be convinced! We still think the Albatross is stupid!

**Prudent**: And even if we *were* convinced, we wouldn't admit it, because we hate your guts!

**Robur** (*coldly*): Then you're both fools. And you'll be passengers of the Albatross for much longer than a more reasonable person would need to<sup>29</sup>.

*(Robur stonily marches away.)*

**Prudent** (*smugly*): I guess we showed him who the *real* idiot is!

\* \* \* \* \*

*(The Albatross continues its voyage. Eventually, it stops in the middle of the Caspian Sea for some fishing. Frycollin finally emerges from his cabin.)*

---

<sup>28</sup> This dialogue is only slightly more callous than their conversation from the original book, where they didn't consider Frycollin at all.

<sup>29</sup> This exact conversation never happens in the book... but in my honest opinion, it really needed to. It's incredible how many obstinate words these men throw at each other without ever actually getting to the heart of the matter.

**Frycollin:** Okay, I think I'm finally ready to face the world again. What the... are we *still* over the Pacific Ocean?

**Prudent** (*patiently*): No, Frycollin... we passed over the Himalayas, India, and beyond. This is the Caspian Sea.

**Frycollin** (*defensively*): Well, it looks a lot like the Pacific Ocean!

**Evans** (*chuckling*): I suppose it does. Seas are like that.

**Prudent:** In any event, it seems obvious now that Robur will never voluntarily let us leave.

**Frycollin:** Honestly sir, I think he'd eventually let you go if you just admitted that the Albatross was a superior flying machine.

**Prudent:** Precisely! As I just said... Robur will never voluntarily let us leave. Thus, we must do all we can to escape on our own.

**Evans:** A pity... I'd never tell Robur this, but the Albatross is a splendid craft.

**Frycollin** (*protesting*): But if you truly believe that, then why are you -

**Prudent** (*ignoring him*): And yet as long as the Albatross exists, she's a danger to us and ours. We should destroy her<sup>30</sup>!

**Evans:** Indeed! Let's watch for a good opportunity.

**Frycollin** (*overwhelmed*): Argh, all this "cloak and dagger" talk has aggravated my phobias! I am scared to death of *everything*! Wahhhhhh<sup>31</sup>!

*(Frycollin gives way to a complete panic attack. Robur shows up, looking annoyed.)*

**Robur:** Doesn't your valet ever stop whining?

**Evans** (*scowling*): It seems to me, sir, that he has a right to complain.

**Robur:** Yes, and I have a right to look after my ears. Put that valet at the end of a line<sup>32</sup>!

*(Frycollin is tied into a tub, which is lowered 100 feet below the Albatross on rope.)*

**Robur:** There, now he can scream away to his heart's content without damaging my ears.

**Prudent** (*fuming*): You're abusing your power, Robur! I protest!

**Robur:** Protest away!

---

<sup>30</sup> This is the first time Prudent and Evans suggest destroying the Albatross... and to be candid, it's a pretty dramatic escalation. Granted, Robur is guilty of abducting them... but he's basically just a frustrated engineer who's trying to make a point. He hasn't threatened them with death or physical harm, and we haven't seen anything to suggest that he's a danger to the rest of humanity. In contrast, if Prudent and Evans destroy the Albatross, it could easily kill its entire crew of eight men! It just gets worse the more you think about it.

<sup>31</sup> Hey, don't look at me. The original book didn't even give Frycollin a reason to be especially freaked out during this sequence.

<sup>32</sup> Oh great... now Robur's being a jerk, too. Who are we supposed to root for at this point, anyway?

**Prudent:** I will be avenged, Mr. Robur!

**Robur:** Avenge when you like, Mr. Prudent.

**Prudent:** I will have my revenge on you and yours!

**Robur:** Maybe *you'd* like to go for a ride, too!

*(They are approached by Tom Turner, the first mate.)*

**Turner:** Um... I hate to intrude on these delicate negotiations, but shouldn't we do something to avoid that approaching storm?

*(Everyone's eyes dart forward. Sure enough, the Albatross is barreling toward a violent thunderstorm.)*

**Robur** *(alarmed)*: Evasive maneuvers!

*(The Albatross immediately commences a wide turn, but it's unable to completely avoid the stormfront. A sudden downdraft catches the ship, and it plunges alarmingly close to the sea. Robur manages to pull out of the dive mere seconds before the Albatross impacts against the water, and the ship reluctantly starts to regain altitude. Several tense minutes later, they escape the storm.)*

**Robur** *(laughing shakily)*: Well... that was a close call, eh Prudent?

**Prudent** *(icily)*: Ask my valet.

**Robur** *(startled)*: Your valet? Oh, shoot!

*(The rope with Frycollin's tub is swiftly drawn up: it's filled with water, having been dragged through the sea for several moments during the Albatross' plunge. Frycollin is unceremoniously dumped onto the deck. He gives his head a vigorous shake and spits out a minnow.)*

**Prudent** *(concerned)*: Are you okay, Frycollin?

**Frycollin:** You know, it's funny... after living through all that, I don't think I'm afraid of heights or water anymore!

**Robur** *(quickly)*: There, you see? He's cured! You're welcome!

*(Prudent and Evans glare at Robur.)*

**Robur:** I just remembered... I have something to do<sup>33</sup>.

*(He quickly leaves the deck.)*

---

<sup>33</sup> Robur is much more cool-headed about things in the book, but I wanted him to sweat a little more. After all, he messed up bigtime.

## Chapter 14: The Aeronef<sup>34</sup> at Full Speed

*(The Albatross flies across Europe at top speed, which according to the book exceeds that of the swallow, at 120 miles per hour<sup>35</sup>. It eventually passes Moscow and St. Petersburg. Meanwhile, Frycollin spends most of his time in the kitchen. He assists the cook, Tapage, who continues to reassure him that everything eventually dies or falls apart. As the Albatross begins to approach France, Prudent suddenly has an idea.)*

**Prudent:** Evans! I suddenly had an idea!

**Evans:** The stage directions already established that, Prudent. Now, what were you thinking?

**Prudent:** Our escape might be easier if we had outside help! What if we dropped a message overboard which explained what happened to us?

**Evans:** Prudent, that's brilliant! But how can we possibly ensure that the message will be found?

**Prudent** (*grinning*): We can put the message in my snuff-box<sup>36</sup>! It's a high-quality aluminum box, so it should survive the fall... and better yet, whoever finds it will take it to the police station<sup>37</sup>. The note can explain our predicament and give the address of our club, the Weldon Institute! Surely, our club members will rise to the occasion and come to our rescue!

**Evans** (*skeptically*): That might work... but what if the person who finds your snuff box just decides to keep it?

**Prudent** (*indignant*): Never! I'm absolutely certain that it will be found by an honest gentleman!

**Evans** (*nodding*): Okay, then... let's do this!

*(The note is written and placed within the snuff-box, which is carefully closed and sealed. Prudent and Evans stay out all night, waiting for the right opportunity to toss it overboard.)*

**Prudent** (*fretting*): Doesn't this infernal ship ever slow down near a large city? At this rate, we'll be out of Europe before we get a chance to throw our message!

*(As if responding to Prudent's wish, the Albatross briefly halts over Paris and reduces its altitude to a mere 300 feet above the ground. Prudent eagerly seizes the moment and tosses the snuff-box overboard.)*

**Prudent** (*gleefully*): It's done, Evans! And we couldn't have asked for a better opportunity!

**Evans** (*confused*): But why did Robur stop so low over a heavily populated city?

*(From the other side of the deck, Robur's voice rings out.)*

---

<sup>34</sup> An "aeronef" is a flying machine. The word has fallen out of use in modern day: even my spellchecker doesn't recognize it. I don't know if it's still used in the original French language, because no matter how I phrased my question, Google just offered to translate the word from French to English. Thanks, AI!

<sup>35</sup> (Insert "Monty Python" joke here.)

<sup>36</sup> Snuff was more socially acceptable in 1886. Different times, remember?

<sup>37</sup> I guess the police station used to serve as the neighborhood's "lost and found".



**Robur:** Throw on the lights, Mr. Turner... it's showboating time!

*(The twin lamps of the Albatross are switched on, and two brilliant sheaves of light begin panning around the squares and gardens of Paris. Upbeat music blares down from the Albatross. It appears to be an instrumental version of "I Like to Move It"<sup>38</sup>. At ground level, the Parisians roar approvingly and begin stomping to the beat.)*

**Robur** *(talking over a loudspeaker)*: Citizens of Paris, this is the Albatross... a miraculous new airship designed and built by yours truly, Robur! Please tell everyone how awesome we are! This is Robur, signing off!

*(Robur signals with his hand, and the lamps abruptly cut off amid the crowd's wild applause. Under the cover of darkness, the Albatross rapidly ascends and then disappears into the night. Immensely pleased, Robur sets a new course for the Tunisian coast. He notices Prudent and Evans on the deck and approaches them, still flushed with excitement from his public appearance.)*

**Robur:** Well, gentleman... those Parisians certainly know how to show appreciation where it's due, eh?

*(Evans opens his mouth to speak, but Robur laughingly cuts him off.)*

**Robur:** I know, I know... the Albatross is stupid and you hate my guts. Well, guess what? Tonight, I don't care! Have a productive evening, gentleman!

*(Robur walks away humming to himself.)*

**Evans** *(ominously)*: Oh, we already have, Robur... we already have.

**Prudent** *(confused)*: We have?

**Evans** *(rolling his eyes)*: The message, dummy!

**Prudent:** Oh, right!

\* \* \* \* \*

*(Meanwhile, an honest gentleman finds the snuff-box and brings it directly to the police station. The police open the box, and find a note inside which reads "Mr. Prudent and Evans, president and secretary of the Weldon Institute, Philadelphia, have been carried off in the airship Albatross belonging to Robur the engineer. Please inform our friends and acquaintances"<sup>39</sup>.)*

## Chapter 15: A Skirmish in Dahomey

*(The Albatross passes through Cape Carthage and the Sahara. Vultures are seen below, circling ominously. Frycollin emerges from his cabin.)*

---

<sup>38</sup> Everything up to (and excluding) that last sentence actually happened in the book. But now we're going to have a little more fun with it.

<sup>39</sup> If I was in a really silly mood, I would've had the note say "I'm out of snuff. Please send more." But I'm trying to stay pretty close to the book where I can.

**Frycollin:** Ah, what a beautiful morning! Since I'm no longer afraid of the air or the sea, there's nothing that can -

*(Frycollin suddenly spots the vultures.)*

**Frycollin** *(panicking)*: Arrggghhh, vultures! I'm scared to death of carrion birds! Keep them away! Keep them away!

*(Frycollin dashes back into his cabin as Robur is walking by.)*

**Robur** *(nonchalantly)*: That, gentlemen, is what we refer to as a "one-note character".

**Tapage** *(sympathetically)*: Poor man. If we come across a locust swarm, I'll send him a nice platter. They taste as good as prawns<sup>40</sup>.

\* \* \* \* \*

*(The Albatross continues its voyage, eventually coming to the city of Timbuktu. Robur attempts to strike up another conversation with Prudent and Evans.)*

**Robur:** Gentleman, we're now flying over Timbuktu. It's an important city, but you wouldn't be welcome there... they're distrustful of outsiders.

**Evans:** We'd gladly take our chances with Timbuktu, if it meant escaping the Albatross!

**Robur** *(calmly)*: As your host, I wouldn't let you risk your safety that way.

**Prudent:** Well, I say we settle this right now, with a pair of revolvers!

**Robur:** Wow... that escalated quickly. But as I just explained, I prefer to keep you alive. You're free to think as you like, and even petition others for help... not that anyone could help you.

**Prudent** *(triumphantly)*: We're way ahead of you, Mr. Robur!

**Robur:** I beg your pardon?

**Prudent:** In Paris, we dropped a letter overboard which explains everything<sup>41</sup>!

**Robur** *(turning purple with rage)*: How dare you! I should drop *you* overboard to follow your letter!

**Evans** *(confused)*: I don't get it, Robur... you just said that our safety is important, and that we're free to petition for help! And anyway, what's the big deal if the outside world knows we're onboard the Albatross? You're openly showboating your ship around the world, and everyone knows that we disappeared from Philadelphia on the same day you picked a fight with our club... where you openly boasted that you'd made a conquest of the air. Sooner or later, won't people put two and two together, anyway<sup>42</sup>?

---

<sup>40</sup> Sure, this is a bizarre, random-sounding line... but it's still based directly on the book.

<sup>41</sup> Somehow, I question the wisdom of boasting about this to Robur.

<sup>42</sup> Evans doesn't say any of this in the book. But Robur's seemingly random behavior is an ongoing source of annoyance to me.

*(Robur quivers with fury for several moments, and it briefly seems that anything could happen. However, Robur finally settles on yelling at his prisoners.)*

**Robur:** Dirigibles are stupid! And I hate your guts!

*(Robur stalks away to his cabin.)*

**Prudent** *(looking stricken)*: Hey... that was really hurtful!

**Evans:** Yeah, man... just because we dish it out doesn't mean that we can take it!

*(The Albatross resumes its course and passes over the kingdom of Dahomey. As they pass through this territory, absolutely nothing of consequence happens. The voyage is very smooth and uneventful. The Albatross does not encounter a ritual human sacrifice, which they interrupt by shooting the executioners, thus allowing the prisoners to escape. Instead, everyone is friends<sup>43</sup>.)*

## Chapter 16: Over the Atlantic

*(The Albatross is cruising over the Atlantic. Prudent and Evans are on the deck, having a discussion.)*

**Prudent:** You know, it occurs to me that Robur would probably have a base of operations somewhere. How else could he keep this ship stocked with provisions and materials? And what's the deal with Robur, anyway? What's his background and perspective? What drives him?

**Evans** *(shrugging)*: We'd probably know by now if we hadn't spent the last 10 chapters verbally abusing him at every opportunity.

**Prudent:** Yeah, you're right. Who cares about Robur's secrets, anyway? Say, would you look at that! Those waves are glowing!

*(A strange succession of luminous waves widens out over the surface of the ocean. Thick black clouds start to build. As the men watch with growing concern, Robur approaches them.)*

**Evans:** What are those glowing waves, Robur? Are they caused by phosphorescent fish?

**Robur:** No, by electrical tension in the atmosphere. A dangerous storm is brewing<sup>44</sup>.

**Prudent** *(concerned)*: Shouldn't we turn the ship around?

**Robur:** Nah. We'll be fine.

*(Suddenly, waterspouts begin to appear in the storm, and the Albatross is drawn into one of them. The ship is trapped in the vortex, and it begins to spin rapidly.)*

---

<sup>43</sup> I don't know what else to say here.

<sup>44</sup> It's unclear what natural phenomenon is being described here (at least to me). There's obviously a storm involved, but I'm not aware of any natural occurrence where electrical tension can produce glowing waves of water. Many Jules Verne stories include fanciful descriptions of electric phenomena... perhaps they were based on second-hand accounts of natural mechanisms which were poorly understood at the time. For some cool information on bizarre electrical phenomena that we've confirmed in modern day, check out Wikipedia's article on "Upper-atmospheric lightning".

**Robur** (*shouting over the storm*): Mr. Turner... give this storm a volley!

(*Tom Turner confidently nods, slips a cartridge into a mounted swivel gun on the desk, and fires. The waterspouts collapse instantly, and then the entire storm vanishes.*)

**Evans** (*staring in disbelief*): What the heck just happened!?

**Robur** (*shrugging*): I killed the storm with my gun. No big deal.

**Prudent**: Would you care to explain how your “storm destroying gun” works?

**Robur**: No. We shall never speak of this again<sup>45</sup>.

\* \* \* \* \*

(*Later on, Prudent and Evans hold a private conference in one of their cabins.*)

**Prudent**: It's quite certain that escaping the Albatross is impossible<sup>46</sup>.

**Evans**: Indeed! And if we remain on this dangerous voyage, we're sure to be lost in the end... so let's *guarantee* our own deaths and everyone else's, by blowing up the ship!

**Prudent**: Makes sense to me! We'll wait for an opportunity to raid the powder magazine... and then, we strike! Death is a small price to pay, if it means destroying Robur and his infernal machine!

**Evans**: Here, here<sup>47</sup>!

(*Meanwhile, the Albatross continues forward. It reaches Cape Horn after a long and uneventful voyage*<sup>48</sup>.)

## Chapter 17: The Shipwrecked Crew

(*The Albatross journeys toward the southern seas, and the temperature steadily drops with each passing day. Frycollin continues to spend nearly all his time in the kitchen as the cook's assistant. One day, the first mate Tom Turner spots a shipwreck.*)

**Turner**: Shipwreck on the port side, sir!

**Robur**: Well, then we must come to their rescue!

(*The Albatross changes course for the shipwreck, where it encounters five survivors in a lifeboat.*)

**Robur**: Have no fear, men! We will gladly provide you with water and food!

---

<sup>45</sup> The “storm destroying gun” is even more inexplicable to me than the glowing waves. I have to wonder: is there some popular scientific belief from the late 1800's which would clarify all this? In any event, Jules Verne clearly felt that the incident was self-explanatory... because it's not explained, and in the original book, none of the characters feel that the storm's abrupt disappearance is worthy of comment or follow-up questions.

<sup>46</sup> They've only tried to escape once so far... so, how did they suddenly decide that escape is impossible? Is this conclusion based on a recent event in the voyage? If so, it's never explained.

<sup>47</sup> As previously noted, Prudent and Evans are just the worst.

<sup>48</sup> And this time, I actually mean it: nothing happens on the way to Cape Horn.

*(Buckets of water and baskets of food are lowered down to the lifeboat on ropes.)*

**Survivor:** You've saved our lives, sir! But we are hopelessly lost!

**Robur:** Then we shall tow you to safety!

*(The Albatross extends a towline to the lifeboat. The lifeboat is safely towed to the Chonos Islands, where the grateful men drift back to civilization. Robur notices, to his satisfaction, that Prudent and Evans witnessed the entire event.)*

**Robur:** Surely gentleman, you must admit that this benevolent rescue on behalf of -

**Evans:** The Albatross is stupid!

**Prudent:** We hate your guts!

**Robur** *(incredulous)*: Good grief! What would it take to impress you two!?

**Prudent:** Build a balloon!

**Evans:** Yeah, we like balloons!

*(Robur shakes his head disbelievingly and walks away, muttering under his breath.)*

**Robur:** Obstinate, ignorant, pigheaded reckless balloonists...

*(The moment Robur is out of earshot, Prudent speaks up again.)*

**Prudent:** I can hardly wait to blow up the Albatross... I'd like to see it save any lives after *that*!

## Chapter 18: Over the Volcano

*(The Albatross begins steering away from Cape Horn. To Robur's dismay, however, it appears that a vast hurricane is bearing down on them<sup>49</sup>.)*

**Evans** *(shouting over the sound of the escalating winds)*: It feels like this hurricane came out of nowhere! Why'd you bring the Albatross down here, anyway?

**Robur:** It's extremely unclear! But the important thing is, we must attempt to escape the hurricane!

**Prudent:** Can't you just shoot the hurricane with your magic "storm destroying gun"?

**Robur** *(annoyed)*: I already told you... we will never speak of that again! It was a one-time thing!

**Evans** *(looking anxiously at the gathering storm)*: Then I sure hope your Albatross can withstand a hurricane!

**Prudent** *(whispering to Evans)*: But don't we want the Albatross to be destroyed?

---

<sup>49</sup> I was initially confused by this, because I thought that hurricanes were more of a "tropical zone thing"... and the previous chapter indicated that the temperature had grown cold. However, some quick research confirms that although Cape Horn's temperature averages between 2 and 10 degrees Celsius, it also has a vicious reputation for spawning hurricane-force storms. So, this point definitely goes to Jules Verne!

**Evans** (*indignantly*): By our hand, Prudent! Not by some stupid random hurricane!

*(The Albatross enters into a grim battle of attrition with the hurricane. The fierce winds batter the Albatross, damaging many of its vertical propellers, but it manages to stay in the air. At one point, the ship passes over the South Pole.)*

**Robur**: Well, at least one good thing has come of this... the Albatross is the first vehicle to reach the South Pole!

**Turner**: Actually sir, Captain Nemo already did that with the Nautilus in 1866.

**Robur**: Dang it<sup>50</sup>!

*(The ship continues to be carried against its will toward the rim of an active volcano. It looks like the Albatross will be swept into the volcano's fiery plume... but at the last moment, the hurricane's winds blow the plume down into the volcano's crater, and the Albatross passes harmlessly over the volcanic rim<sup>51</sup>. Finally, after an epic struggle between man and nature, the Albatross escapes the hurricane. At this point, however, even the front and rear propellers have been damaged, and the aircraft can barely limp forward.)*

**Robur** (*relieved*): Ah... there's an island ahead!

**Turner**: Where do you suppose we are?

**Robur**: At this point, it barely even matters! Drop an anchor on the island... we'll hold position here and begin repairs tomorrow.

**Turner**: Yes, sir! We'll be anchored to the island in moments.

**Prudent** (*grinning diabolically*): Evans... opportunity knocks!

## Chapter 19: Anchored at Last

*(The Albatross hovers 50 feet above the island, anchored to the beach by a sturdy rope which prevents it from drifting. The island looks habitable, but there are no obvious signs of civilization. Some navigational calculations have revealed that they're on Pitt Island, which belongs to the Chatham Islands. Robur has finished assessing the Albatross' damage.)*

**Robur**: Most of the vertical propellers should be okay, but we can't travel anywhere until we fix either the rear or front propeller. Let's focus on the front propeller today.

**Turner**: Yes, sir! And what should be done with those two gentlemen and their servant?

**Robur** (*thoughtfully*): Do you think they'd complain if they became colonists of X Island?

**Turner**: I think they'd complain no matter what you did, even if you offered them a mansion filled with cash and precious gems.

---

<sup>50</sup> I'm assuming that these stories all exist in the same "Jules Verneiverse".

<sup>51</sup> You know what? I'm not even going to worry about the science on this one. It *might* work!

**Robur** (*chuckling*): That's true. But as you know, X Island is my secret base of operations. It contains a massive shipyard, warehouses, and infrastructure for the fifty inhabitants who live there.

**Turner**: It's strange of you to blurt that out unprompted, sir, but yes. Everything you just said is true.

**Robur** (*reflectively*): Perhaps Prudent and Evans will finally come around, once they see the scale of our enterprise and vision!

\* \* \* \* \*

*(Meanwhile, Prudent and Evans hold a secret meeting in one of their cabins.)*

**Prudent**: This is it, Evans... the night we blow the Albatross out of the sky! While the crewmen were distracted with the repairs, I pinched some powder and cartridge from the magazine... we've got about two pounds of dynamite to work with! We'll set the bomb in the corner of this cabin, so that it tears the hull's framework apart.

**Evans**: What about the fuse?

**Prudent**: I've cobbled together a slow-burning fuse. If we light it at midnight, then it will explode at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning... and then, bye bye Albatross!

**Evans** (*curiously*): Why not use a 30-second fuse, and blow it up immediately?

**Prudent**: I have absolutely no idea! You'd think that it wouldn't make any difference to us, since we're just planning to go up in smoke anyway, but for some reason I'm really keen on this "delayed fuse" idea.

**Evans** (*reflectively*): You know, this will kill Frycollin, too... do we have the right to dispose of his life?

**Prudent** (*firmly*): We'll be sacrificing our own lives as well!

**Evans**: And that makes it okay?

**Prudent** (*sheepishly*): To be honest, I kind of forgot that Frycollin was still in this story. But no matter! At least we'll have our revenge on Robur!

**Evans**: Okay, you've convinced me! Let's do this!

\* \* \* \* \*

*(Outside, Robur calls for a stop to the repair work.)*

**Robur**: It looks like this is going to take longer than expected, everyone... let's get some rest, and finish up the front propeller tomorrow.

*(The crew heads to their cabins, exhausted. Moments after midnight, Prudent and Evans emerge from their cabin.)*

**Prudent**: The fuse is lit, Evans... now we only need to wait!

**Evans**: But look, Prudent! We're still anchored to the island.

**Prudent** (*confused*): That's odd! I thought we'd be heading out to sea by now. Robur must not have finished the repairs yet.

**Evans** (*excitedly*): Don't you see what this means, Prudent? We can escape down the anchor rope and seek refuge on the island. We can *survive*!

**Prudent** (*brightly*): Oh, cool! I guess escaping the Albatross isn't impossible after all! Now I wish my original plan had tried just a little harder to keep us alive... it looks so silly that we're only surviving because I happened to use a slow-burning fuse. Speaking of which... let's get out of here!

**Evans**: Shouldn't we get Frycollin first?

**Prudent**: Oh, right! Him. Yeah, I guess we'd better do that.

*(They enter Frycollin's cabin, but he isn't there. They commence a brief, tense search of the Albatross. Along the way, they encounter the lookout, whom they tie up, gag, and blindfold.)*

**Prudent**: Ha ha, how do *you* like it?

**Evans** (*grimly*): Well, we're definitely committed now. Where in blazes could Frycollin possibly be!?

**Prudent**: The kitchen! Frycollin always hangs around the kitchen!

*(They dash to the kitchen, but Frycollin isn't there, either<sup>52</sup>.)*

**Prudent**: Okay, I give up. Let's get out of here before the bomb goes off.

**Evans**: But isn't the fuse supposed to burn for hours?

**Prudent**: I *said*, I give up. If Frycollin didn't want to explode, then he should've made sure that we could find him when we armed a bomb without telling him!

**Evans**: In that case, I'll race you! Last one down the anchor rope is a rotten protagonist<sup>53</sup>!

*(Prudent and Evans clamber down the rope. To their surprise, Frycollin is already down there on the beach.)*

**Evans**: Frycollin!? What are *you* doing here?

**Frycollin**: Um... escaping?

**Prudent** (*incensed*): So... you decided to just abandon us on the Albatross, eh?

**Frycollin**: Oh... so you didn't do the same thing to me? Because you seemed awfully surprised to see me down here.

*(Awkward silence.)*

**Prudent**: I think it's best if we never discuss what just happened here.

---

<sup>52</sup> Which is really too bad, because now there's no payoff for all the time Frycollin spent there.

<sup>53</sup> I'm really not exaggerating that much. As I've repeatedly pointed out, Prudent and Evans are just the *worst*.



*(Suddenly, one of the Albatross' lamps shines down on the escapees.)*

**Prudent:** Curses, we've been spotted! What do we do?

**Evans** *(shouting up challengingly at the Albatross)*: Engineer Robur, will you give us your word of honor to leave us free on this island?

**Robur** *(shouting down from the Albatross)*: Never!

*(A shot is fired, and the bullet grazes Evans' shoulder.)*

**Prudent:** If that's your answer, Robur... then it's time to sever ties!

*(Prudent dramatically brandishes his pocketknife and cuts the anchor rope. The Albatross, still at the mercy of the breeze without its front or rear propeller, is swiftly carried away from the island.)*

**Robur** *(bellowing distantly)*: I'll get you for this!!

**Evans** *(wincing from his shoulder wound)*: That was a pretty good pun, Prudent.

**Prudent** *(beaming)*: Thank you! I'd say it cut right to the heart to the matter.

**Evans:** And now you've ruined it.

**Prudent:** Well, one thing's for sure... that's the last we'll see of Robur, no matter how you slice it!

**Frycollin:** Please stop.

## Chapter 20: The Wreck of the Albatross

*(Back onboard the Albatross, Robur is seething with rage as his ship is carried away from the island by a simple breeze.)*

**Turner:** I don't understand, Robur... if you were so intent on bringing our captives safely to X Island, then why did you try to shoot Evans just now?

**Robur** *(bellowing)*: Because he's *really* ticked me off!

**Turner:** I guess that makes sense. But why is this so upsetting to you?

**Robur:** Don't you see? They'll return to civilization and blab my secret to the world! I hadn't been as worried about the document they'd thrown overboard in Europe, because there were so many chances that it would be lost in the fall, but *now*<sup>54</sup>...

**Turner:** You know, that doesn't add up. First of all, you were angry about the document, too... remember? You threatened to throw them overboard. And second, what difference does it make? You're already openly showboating the Albatross around the world. Prudent and Evans don't know anything about the ship's internal workings, so how much could they say about the Albatross that the world doesn't already know?

---

<sup>54</sup> Robur's reasoning here is taken straight from the book. Turner's subsequent reply is not.

**Robur** (*impatiently*): Listen... I'm not always consistent within the same *chapter*. I'm *definitely* not going to be consistent across an entire book!

**Turner**: Okay, fine... but the prisoners haven't actually escaped us yet. They're still marooned on an island! All we have to do is finish repairing the front propeller, and then we can return to the island and pick them up.

**Robur**: You know, you're absolutely right! Before the day is out, they'll likely be our prisoners again. And then I'll see that they never escape from X Island<sup>55</sup>!

\* \* \* \* \*

*(Reinvigorated by the chance to recapture their prisoners, the crew works tirelessly. Two hours pass, and the front propeller has been repaired. However, Tom Turner is suddenly surprised by a peculiar odor.)*

**Turner**: Say... does anyone else smell a slow-burning fuse tethered to two pounds of dynamite? Or is that just me?

*(Before anyone can react, the bomb detonates! The cabins fly to splinters, the electricity fails, and the Albatross starts plummeting vertically toward the sea. Robur, with extraordinary coolness, engages the front propeller, which acts to slow their descent<sup>56</sup>.)*

**Robur**: There! I've slowed our descent enough so that we won't asphyxiate from our rapid plunge through the air!

**Turner**: I don't think that could actually happen, sir! Even at terminal velocity, the air would still -

**Robur** (*disgusted*): These could be our final moments, and you want to spend them debating the fine points of 19<sup>th</sup> century science?

*(80 seconds after the explosion, all that remains of the Albatross plunges into the waves<sup>57</sup>.)*

## Chapter 21: The Institute Again

*(Back in Philadelphia, the Weldon Institute continues their debate. Nothing has been accomplished in the months since Prudent and Evans were abducted.)*

**Club Member 1**: I maintain that the propeller should be at the rear, and anyone who disagrees is an idiot!

---

<sup>55</sup> I'm more confused than ever about Robur's intentions. At this point, is he actually planning to permanently imprison Prudent, Evans, and Frycollin? Wasn't this originally supposed to be about proving the superiority of the Albatross? Did I misunderstand that, or has Robur simply lost sight of his original plan? I truly don't know.

<sup>56</sup> In short, the Albatross is now behaving like an unpowered helicopter, with its front propeller pointed in the air to slow its fall. Of course, without the characteristic "tail" of a helicopter to stabilize things, this might just cause the Albatross to spin uncontrollably... but since this book was published in 1886, we can pretend that this doesn't happen.

<sup>57</sup> Of course, in the preface, I already told you that both books revolve around Robur... which kind of spoils the surprise that he's still alive. Sorry!

**Club Member 2:** Wait a moment... I thought I was supposed to be the “rear propeller” guy!

**Club Member 1:** Honestly, Club Member 2... try to be a little more flexible. Anyway, it’s my turn to be the “rear propeller” guy!

**Club Member 2:** No, it’s *my* turn!

**Club Member 3** (*eagerly*): Ooh, the plot thickens! Now we’ve got ourselves a debate!

*(Just then, the porter of the Weldon Institute approaches the presidential desk and hands a telegram to Club Member 1. Club Member 1 reads the telegram carefully.)*

**Club Member 1:** Well, what do you know! It’s a message from Prudent and Evans! It says that Robur kidnapped them in the Albatross, a flying machine of his own!

**Club Member 3:** Hey... we’re a balloonist’s club, right? What if we built a dirigible and came to their rescue?

**Club Member 2:** A brilliant suggestion! And what better dirigible to use than the “Go-Ahead”? Its plans are nearly complete... we just need to decide where the propellor should go. I’d recommend placing it on the front.

**Club Member 1** (*angrily*): No, it should be placed at the rear<sup>58</sup>!

*(Just then, Prudent, Evans, and Frycollin enter the club.)*

**Prudent:** Hi everyone... we’re back!

**Club Member 2:** Wow! What happened to you?

**Evans:** We escaped Robur, made friends with some local islanders, and then hitched a ride back to America on a passing ship.

**Frycollin:** And I’m no longer afraid of heights or water<sup>59</sup>!

**Prudent:** Now, down to business! It’s been months since we disappeared... I assume by now, we’re well into production of the “Go-Ahead”?

**Club Member 1:** Nope! We’ve spent the entire time arguing about where to put the propeller.

**Evans** (*disgusted*): Are you kidding me!? Where did you guys learn to be such a pathetic bunch of whining, obstinate losers?

*(Awkward silence.)*

**Prudent:** Well, it can’t be helped... let’s get this show on the road! I propose that we begin construction of the “Go-Ahead” today... with a propeller on both the rear *and* front!

---

<sup>58</sup> Yeah... after all that, the “message in a snuff-box” subplot never comes to anything. And in the original book, they never even seriously propose a rescue attempt! Sorry.

<sup>59</sup> Frycollin doesn’t actually say this, but it’s basically his last appearance in the book. Let’s give him some confirmed character growth before he vanishes from the narrative!

**Club Member 2:** Like on the Albatross?

**Prudent** (*angrily*): No! It's nothing like the Albatross!

**Club Member 1:** Well... can you at least tell us about your adventures from the last few months?

**Evans:** I'm afraid not. If we told you half the things that happened during our journey, at some point we'd have to admit that the Albatross was the superior aircraft.

**Prudent** (*laughing*): And we're sure as heck not going to do *that*! So c'mon, men... let's build a balloon<sup>60</sup>!

**Club Members:** Yayyyy!

## Chapter 22: The Go-Ahead is Launched

*(Several months later, a huge crowd is gathered in Fairmont Park to watch the official launch of the "Go-Ahead". The enormous dirigible's first passengers will be Prudent and Evans.)*

**Pilot:** Ready, sir?

**Prudent and Evans** (*laughing*): Let's "go ahead"!

*(The pilot chuckles dryly and takes off. The dirigible climbs into the air and performs a series of maneuvers, amid cheers and applause from the large audience below.)*

**Prudent:** Ahh, the perfect day for the perfect balloon! Nothing can spoil this, Evans!

*(Suddenly, an airship is observed rapidly approaching the Go-Ahead. The audience squints and begins murmuring nervously.)*

**Spectator 1:** What on earth is *that*?

**Spectator 2:** It's a bird!

**Spectator 3:** It's a balloon!

**Spectator 4:** No... it's an aircraft shaped like a clipper ship, suspended by 74 electrically powered vertical propellers and driven by a rear and front propeller!

**Prudent** (*nervously*): Well... perhaps Robur is just dropping by to say hello, and apologize for abducting us!

**Evans** (*resignedly*): We're doomed.

## Chapter 23: The Grand Collapse

*(The Albatross begins to circle the Go-Ahead ominously. For the sake of this parody, we're going to assume that both ships are equipped with some sort of loudspeaker, so that the crew of both ships can yell things at each other.)*

---

<sup>60</sup> Yeah... after all that, Prudent and Evans never mention their adventures to anyone, because it would make their precious balloon club look bad. At the risk of sounding repetitive, they are just the worst.

**Prudent** (*incredulous*): How in the world did you survive our bomb!?

**Robur** (*gloatingly*): Aren't you forgetting my ship's lightweight construction? Once it crashed into the ocean, it bobbed to the surface! We waited patiently on the wreckage, and eventually we were picked up by a passing ship.

**Evans**: Weren't they curious about your airship?

**Robur**: No, because the Albatross is shaped like a clipper ship... so it just looked like an ordinary wreck! We told the sailors that it was destroyed in a collision, and they didn't ask any further questions.

**Prudent**: And they didn't think it was weird that your "clipper ship" had dozens of propellers sticking out of it?

**Robur**: No, for some reason they did not. Anyway, they took us to Australia, where I used funds that I'd salvaged from the wreck to purchase a steamship. And from there, we sailed to X Island, my secret base of operations!

**Evans**: And you just... built a completely new Albatross?

**Robur** (*laughing condescendingly*): That was the easiest part! After all, I built the first one, didn't I? And now, gentleman... you crossed a line when you destroyed the original Albatross. If you truly insist that your feeble balloons are superior, then you'll have to prove it... or die trying!

**Prudent** (*panicking*): We can't outrun the Albatross... pilot, take us higher!

*(The Go-Ahead continues to climb higher and higher, but the Albatross follows them effortlessly, driving increasingly smaller circles around the dirigible as it closes in.)*

**Evans** (*moaning*): This is so humiliating!

**Prudent**: Keep climbing!

**Evans** (*nervously*): Perhaps we should try something else, Prudent... this strategy isn't working!

**Prudent** (*obstinately*): Nonsense! We've gotten this far by refusing to change... perhaps our willful ignorance will see us through this latest calamity, as well!

*(With a startlingly loud BANG, the Go-Ahead's balloon bursts from the reduced atmospheric pressure. The Go-Ahead immediately begins to drop from the sky, its half-inflated balloon barely slowing their fall<sup>61</sup>.)*

**Prudent**: Or not. C'mon, Evans... help me think of some really cutting last words to yell at Robur!

*(To the shock of Prudent and Evans, the Albatross descends with them, matching their speed.)*

**Prudent** (*defiantly*): Are you here to watch us die, Robur!?

---

<sup>61</sup> I actually laughed when I got to this part in the book. Take *that*, Prudent and Evans!

**Robur** (*laughing*): You know, that was my first instinct! But you've done such a spectacular job of embarrassing yourselves today that it's actually more fun if I rescue you!

**Evans** (*angrily*): We refuse to be rescued by the likes of you!

**Robur** (*grinning*): Too bad! I'm doing it anyway.

*(Six men from the Albatross leap onboard the falling Go-Ahead and drag Prudent, Evans, and the pilot onto the Albatross by force. The Albatross slows its descent, so that it smoothly stops a mere 6 feet from the ground. In contrast, the Go-Ahead's deflated remains are impaled on a group of shabby-looking trees, as the balloon's remaining air escapes with a pathetic, strangled-sounding trumpeting noise before it finally falls silent.)*

**Robur** (*grandly*): Gentleman... I believe this is your stop!

*(The huge crowd that came to watch the Go-Ahead's flight begins booing and jeering as Prudent, Evans, and the pilot sheepishly dismount the Albatross. The pilot lands neatly and joins the crowd, but Prudent and Evans both land clumsily, which causes their trousers to split<sup>62</sup>.)*

**Prudent** (*muttering*): Well... at least the crowd is on our side. See how they're jeering the Albatross!

**Crowd**: Down with balloons! Down with Prudent and Evans! The Albatross *rules*!

**Evans** (*muttering*): They're jeering *us*, you idiot!

**Prudent**: Oh.

**Robur** (*grandly*): Citizens of the United States: I had hoped to share this vision of technology with you, but I see now that I was premature. Humanity is still too contradictory and divided to use my secrets responsibly. I go then, and I take my secret with me. But it will not be lost to humanity! It *will* belong to you some day, when you are wise enough not to abuse it. For now, farewell!

*(The Albatross rapidly ascends in the air and flies toward the east, amid a tempest of cheers<sup>63</sup>. However, everyone's attention is suddenly drawn by a large crate that's floating down from the sky. Its descent is being slowed by a large, colorful balloon, and the crate's sides feature large, stamped letters which read "Courtesy of Robur". The crate comes to a gentle rest on the ground. The crowd, along with Prudent and Evans, regard it curiously.)*

**Evans** (*warily*): What's this? Some kind of parting gift? Nothing will change the fact that the Albatross is stupid!

**Prudent**: Yeah, and we hate Robur's guts!

*(Without warning, the crate's sides fall open.)*

**Evans** (*wrinkling his nose in disgust*): Is this a joke!? What's everyone supposed to do with a huge pile of rotten vegetables?

---

<sup>62</sup> This doesn't happen in the book. But I thought it was pretty funny. :)

<sup>63</sup> The actual book concludes here, after a few narrative affirmations that Robur will return some day. Now, prepare for some "bonus content"!

*(The huge crowd stares at the large vegetable pile, and then their gaze falls on Prudent and Evans. The crowd grins ominously.)*

**Evans:** Uh oh.

**Prudent** (*panicking*): Run, Evans, *run!!*

**THE END**

# Master of the World

## Chapter 1: What Happened in the Mountains

*(It is the summer of 1903. In North Carolina, deep amid the Blue Ridge Mountains is a crest called the Great Eyrie. It rises grim, rocky, and inaccessible above the rest of the mountain. Birds avoid it. No one has ever braved its peak. The nearby town of Morganton and the village of Pleasant Garden dwell peacefully in its shadow... until one night, when the mountain begins to act up. Smoke floats down from its peak, and the country folk nearby feel strange, unexplained tremors in the earth. At night, a mysterious glow appears at its summit. The next day, Morganton is visited by Wilker, a well-known balloonist.)*

**Wilker:** Howdy! I propose that I take my balloon in the air and hover over the Great Eyrie, so that we can determine whether it's become volcanic.

**Smith:** I am Elias Smith, the mayor of Morganton... and I wholeheartedly endorse your idea!

*(Wilker swiftly prepares his balloon, and it climbs dramatically into the sky, amid cheers from the townsfolk. However, the wind blows it the wrong way, and he never gets anywhere near the Great Eyrie.)*

**Wilker:** Well, so much for that idea! I tried it once and the wind blew me the wrong way, so nobody else should even bother to try it again. Have fun with your "sort of" volcano, everyone<sup>64</sup>!

*(An even worse blaze is observed on the mountaintop the next day, and both Morganton and Pleasant Garden are on the verge of panic. However, the blaze is not repeated, and after several days, life seems to return to normal... with one exception. At about five o'clock in the morning, a strange noise sweeps across the air: it sounds like whirring, accompanied by the beating of mighty wings. It's almost as if some monster of the skies has risen from the Great Eyrie, and then sped away to the east<sup>65</sup>.)*

## Chapter 2: I Reach Morganton

*(John Strock, the chief inspector of the federal police in Washington, has been summoned by the head of the federal police, Mr. Ward. Strock enters his office.)*

**Ward:** Good morning, Strock! Are you still fond of riddles and mysterious events?

**Strock:** You bet!

**Ward:** Good! Please read the previous chapter's contents for me, and see what you think.

*(Strock reads chapter 1. He raises an eyebrow at the "Wilker throwaway joke", but he says nothing. Finally, he returns his attention to the current chapter.)*

---

<sup>64</sup> Wilker won't be seen again, so feel free to forget him.

<sup>65</sup> Based on how the rest of the story unfolds, I think Jules Verne was hoping that we'd forget about this revealing tease after the first few chapters.



**Strock:** It sounds like there's a mystery brewing within the Great Eyrie.

**Ward:** Indeed... and a potentially dangerous one! We need to know what's going on inside that crater, and fast! If we can confirm that the mountain is volcanic, then we'll order an evacuation. But either way, this issue must be put to rest.

**Strock:** Gladly, sir!

**Ward:** And be discreet, Strock... the nearby towns are already worried about this. We don't want to cause a panic! Meet with Elias Smith, the mayor of Morganton, and make your plans from there.

**Strock:** I'll leave for Morganton at once, sir!

\* \* \* \* \*

*(The next day, Strock arrives in Morganton and meets with Elias Smith.)*

**Smith:** Mr. Ward told me you were coming. Let me be clear, Strock... I want to know what's inside that mountain as much as you do! But I don't think it could be a volcano. This region's geology is all wrong for that!

**Strock:** There's only way to know for sure, Mr. Smith.

**Smith:** Indeed! We'll start our campaign tomorrow.

**Strock:** "We?"

**Smith:** I'm coming with you... and we'll bring two experienced guides who know the mountain.

**Strock:** That sounds great! I can hardly wait to see what happens next<sup>66</sup>!

## Chapter 3: The Great Eyrie

*(The next morning, Strock, Smith, and their two guides, Harry Horn and James Bruck, attempt to climb the mountain and reach the Great Eyrie. They finally reach its base, and circle around its entire perimeter.)*

**Horn:** Sorry, guys. There's no way to reach the top.

**Bruck:** I guess we'll have to give up and go home.

**Smith:** Blast! I guess we'll never know what the Great Eyrie looks like!

**Strock:** Well, it's back to Washington for me<sup>67</sup>!

## Chapter 4: A Meeting of the Automobile Club

*(Not long after Strock's boring failure to climb the Great Eyrie, unusual reports begin to circulate around Pennsylvania. An extraordinary vehicle has been spotted on various roads, driving at incredible speeds and vanishing without a trace. Speculations abound across the country. One*

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<sup>66</sup> Wait for it...

<sup>67</sup> ...and there it is. Sorry for the letdown, but that's what actually happens.

*particularly memorable incident occurs during a race held by the Automobile Club of Wisconsin: the race takes place on a two hundred mile stretch of highway, which has been closed to the public for the occasion.)*

**Spectator 1:** I wonder if that weird car will show up today! Nobody knows where it comes from, or who's driving it!

**Spectator 2:** I've heard that it drives so fast, it produces tremendous air currents which scatter and kill birds<sup>68</sup>!

**Spectator 3:** I've heard that the car barely leaves a tire tread behind! Perhaps its tremendous speed reduces its weight to nearly zero!

**Spectator 2:** That idea will be scientifically debunked in the future.

**Spectator 3** (*indignant*): Well, excuse me for living in 1903!

*(Without warning, the mystery car blasts through the racetrack, leaving all the competing cars in the dust. It happens so quickly that the spectators can barely see it, but the car appears to be shaped like a lengthened spindle, perhaps not over thirty feet long. It disappears without a trace.)*

**Spectator 2:** So... did the mystery car win the race, or...?

**Spectator 1:** Hey... the car didn't leave any gasoline fumes! Perhaps it's powered by electricity!

**Spectator 2:** Yeah... if only there was some previous story about a revolutionary, electric-powered vehicle that made a sensational appearance across the entire world, only to disappear without a trace! Then we could *really* make some meaningful speculations!

**Spectator 3:** Nah! Let's just say it's the devil's car, and not think about this any further.

**All Spectators:** Okay!

## Chapter 5: Along the Shores of New England

*(John Strock returns to Washington, where he reports to his superior, Mr. Ward.)*

**Strock:** Sorry I failed to uncover the secret of the Great Eyrie, sir!

**Ward:** It's okay, Strock. From your report, it seems that the mysterious events around the mountain have ceased, at least for now.

**Strock:** If we're determined to know what's going on in there, Mr. Ward, then it's only a question of expense. Send me back with dynamite and pickaxes, and we'll soon see what's behind those unclimbable walls!

**Ward** (*chuckling*): I appreciate your enthusiasm, Strock, but we have more pressing matters to investigate right now. This "phantom automobile" is terrorizing our roads... it's a danger to everyone, and yet we have no way to pursue it, or predict where it appears next.

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<sup>68</sup> From this statement, I assume that Pennsylvania has a lot of low-flying birds.

**Strock:** But nobody's seen that car for days! It's completely disappeared ever since the incident at the race.

**Ward** (*vaguely*): Maybe... or maybe not. Tell me what you think of this report! It came just yesterday from Boston.

*(Ward hands Strock a report. Strock skims through it. The report speaks of a mysterious moving body that's been observed on the coasts of Maine, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. It's known to briefly appear some two or three miles offshore, flash back and forth for a while, and then dart out of sight. It moves with incredible speed, and it deliberately avoids other ships.)*

**Ward:** Any thoughts, Strock?

**Strock** (*musings*): A mysterious marine object which moves at lightning speed... and it started appearing immediately after the mysterious car dropped out of sight.

**Ward:** Precisely! This can't be a coincidence, Strock. It wouldn't surprise me to learn that the marine object is actually a boat. And if that's the case, then perhaps the car and the boat are one and the same.

**Strock:** So, we're dealing with some kind of lightning-fast... "car boat"?

**Ward** (*solemnly*): Just so<sup>69</sup>.

## Chapter 6: The First Letter

*(Strock returns to his home on Long Street. His elderly housekeeper hands him a letter.)*

**Housekeeper:** A letter for you, sir!

**Strock:** Thank you, housekeeper.

**Housekeeper:** I have a name, you know.

**Strock:** That's more than likely, but unfortunately the book didn't provide it<sup>70</sup>.

*(Strock begins reading the letter.)*

**Strock:** That's strange! It's addressed from the Great Eyrie... would you listen to this! It says, "Dear Inspector, you have recently attempted to enter the Great Eyrie. Know this: no one who enters the Great Eyrie ever returns. Do not try again, for it would have grave consequences for you. Heed this warning." And it's signed "M.O.W."... what could those initials mean?

**Housekeeper** (*musings*): "Money Obsessed Wombat"?

**Strock:** I was thinking more along the lines of "Moldy Old Watermelon".

**Housekeeper:** What's the name of this story, again?

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<sup>69</sup> Sorry for all these "setup chapters"... this is what the real book feels like, too. We'll have more opportunities for jokes as the plot moves forward.

<sup>70</sup> At least, as far as I can tell. Sorry, nameless housekeeper woman!

**Strock:** “Master of the World”. But I don’t see how that has any bearing on this discussion.

## Chapter 7: A Third Machine

*(Strock and his elderly housekeeper continue discussing the warning letter.)*

**Housekeeper:** You know... if someone’s warning you to stay away, then the Great Eyrie must be more significant than you thought!

**Strock:** Meh. The letter’s probably just some kind of stupid joke.

**Housekeeper** *(skeptically)*: Really? You think that someone observed your attempt to enter the Great Eyrie, took the trouble to learn your address, and then wrote you a threatening letter... just to amuse themselves?

**Strock** *(smiling)*: But what’s the alternative? Whoever this person is, they’re clearly aware that I already failed to enter the Great Eyrie. If they’re keeping a secret in there, then warning me away is the dumbest thing they could possibly do! They’d *have* to know that a warning would only renew my determination to get inside!

**Housekeeper:** Or maybe they *knew* you’d think that, because they actually *wanted* you to ignore their warning!

**Strock:** Then why send it at all?

**Housekeeper:** Okay, you’ve got me there. What a weird letter!

**Strock:** Yeah, I’m just going to forget about it for a few chapters.

\* \* \* \* \*

*(A few days pass. Strock returns home again, and his housekeeper immediately approaches him.)*

**Housekeeper:** Sir... I think you’re being followed!

**Strock:** Are you sure?

**Housekeeper** *(sarcastically)*: No, the two men follow you whenever you leave the house are just figments of my imagination. Of *course* I’m sure!

**Strock:** Can you point them out to me?

**Housekeeper:** Yeah... I can show you from the upper window!

*(The housekeeper leads Strock to an upper room that overlooks the street. Strock discreetly peeks through the edge of the window shade, to avoid giving himself away. Sure enough, two men are staring directly at the house.)*

**Strock** *(craftily)*: Okay... let’s try something.

*(Strock prepares to leave the house, intent on trapping the two men. As he glances out the front window, however, he notices that they’re already gone.)*

**Strock** (*annoyed*): Oh, blast... another story thread that goes nowhere! Well, I guess I'll just read the newspaper. Perhaps something in there will move things forward.

*(Strock begins reading the newspaper.)*

**Strock**: Aha! Now we've got something... listen to this! A mysterious submarine has appeared in Lake Kirdall, an isolated lake in Kansas that's 44 miles west of Topeka. The lake is surrounded on all sides by mountains, and it has no outlets. And the submarine exhibits the same incredible speed as the car and the boat! Now, *that's* remarkable!

**Housekeeper**: Because a submarine appeared in an isolated mountain lake with no outlets?

**Strock**: Nope.

**Housekeeper**: Because we're now apparently dealing with some sort of lightning-fast "car boat sub"?

**Strock**: Nope.

**Housekeeper**: Okay, I give up. What's so remarkable?

**Strock** (*triumphantly*): Lake Kirdall doesn't exist<sup>71</sup>!

## Chapter 8: At Any Cost

*(The President is meeting with his staff members in the Whitehouse<sup>72</sup>.)*

**President**: You know, this mysterious machine could confer an enormous advantage on our armed forces.

**Vice President**: I agree! Let's place an ad in every newspaper, and offer to purchase the machine from its inventor for millions of dollars. That should get the job done!

**President**: Well said!

*(Some days pass, but there is no response to the advertisement.)*

**President**: Okay, that didn't work at all. Let's advertise a second offer that's more generous, but also more strongly worded.

**Vice President**: Okay!

*(Several days pass, but there is still no response. Also, various European countries are starting to post counteroffers in their own newspapers.)*

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<sup>71</sup> I know this is just fiction... but it seems sloppy to fabricate an entire lake in Kansas for the sake of a single plot point. It's especially surprising coming from the likes of the Jules Verne, who's usually all about the geography. Why couldn't he use Crater Lake (a real mountain lake in Oregon) for exactly the same purpose?

<sup>72</sup> These "Whitehouse" scenes are fabricated for the parody... but the next two chapters are almost entirely narration, and I had to rework their content into dialog somehow!

**President:** It looks like we'll have to pull out all the stops. In exchange for the machine, we'll offer to make this man Vice President!

**Vice President** (*dismayed*): But, sir... *I'm* the Vice President!

**President:** Yeah, but you haven't invented an awesome machine that everybody wants. This guy has!

*(Just then, a courier bursts into the room.)*

**Courier:** Mr. President... the inventor has responded at last!

**Vice President** (*relieved*): Whew!

**President:** Excellent news! And what does our mysterious inventor have to say for himself<sup>73</sup>?

## Chapter 9: The Second Letter

*(The President eagerly reads the letter sent by the mysterious inventor.)*

**President:** Hm! It's addressed from "On Board the Terror".

**Vice President:** He named his vehicle the "Terror"? Well, surely *this* fellow will be peaceful and mild-tempered!

**President:** Indeed! The letter reads as follows: "Dear Potential Victims, I spit on your offer. If I really wanted your worthless money, I would reach out and take it. This machine will remain mine forever, and I'll do whatever I please with it. You can accomplish nothing against me, and I can accomplish anything against you. Affectionately Yours, The Master of the World<sup>74</sup>."

**Vice President:** On second thought, he seems a tad adversarial.

**President** (*angrily*): So *that's* how this "Master of the World" wants to play things, eh? Well, we'll publish his response in the newspapers tomorrow... along with a response of my own!

## Chapter 10: Outside the Law

*(Strock excitedly bursts into the office of his superior, Mr. Ward.)*

**Strock:** Mr. Ward! There's some connection between the mysterious inventor and the Great Eyrie!

**Ward** (*curiously*): Really? How do you figure that?

*(Strock eagerly presents the letter he'd received from the Great Eyrie in chapter 6.)*

**Strock:** See? I received this letter earlier from the Great Eyrie, and it's signed "M.O.W." That must stand for "Master of the World", the same man who wrote that insulting reply to the President's offer<sup>75</sup>!

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<sup>73</sup> Cliff hanger. :)

<sup>74</sup> Perhaps you think that I'm exaggerating the tone of this letter. I'm not.

<sup>75</sup> Of course, we've known this all along because of the book's title, but now Strock has caught up with us.

**Ward:** You might have something there, Strock... but one thing bothers me.

**Strock:** If the Great Eyrie is really this fellow's base of operations, then why would he draw attention to it with a warning letter?

**Ward:** That *is* pretty strange... but it's not what I had in mind.

**Strock:** Why would he bother using sneaky initials in my warning letter, and then disclose his full name in a subsequent letter?

**Ward:** No, that's not it either.

**Strock** (*impatiently*): What then?

**Ward:** Why would he sign his name on both letters in the first place? As you've already pointed out, he's basically handed you an extremely obvious clue that he's using the Great Eyrie!

**Strock:** Uh... well, maybe this "Master of the World" guy didn't think of that.

**Ward** (*shrugging*): It's as good an explanation as any, I suppose. In any event, the President is really steamed about all this. He's issued a proclamation that the "Master of the World" has placed himself outside the law, so any measures taken to capture and destroy either him or his machine will be approved and rewarded.

**Strock:** Wow, *any* measures? So, I can torch my neighbor's house if I think the "Master of the World" is hiding in his attic, and I'll be rewarded for it?

**Ward:** Um... okay, I see how you might *infer* that from the President's strong wording, but I'm pretty sure that's not what he had in mind.

**Strock** (*laughing*): I'm just messing with you, sir. I mean, we already know that the "Master of the World" is holed up in the Great Eyrie! So let's round up a platoon of men and a trunk full of dynamite, and pay that mountain a little visit!

**Ward:** No. For some reason, I feel strongly about keeping you on standby, until a random opportunity gives you the chance to capture this man outside his base of operations.

**Strock:** But... the Great Eyrie...

**Ward:** If we push for a final confrontation now, this story won't even last 12 chapters. We have to stretch things out a *little*, don't we?

**Strock** (*sighing*): Yes, sir.

\* \* \* \* \*

(*Roughly two weeks later, Strock is summoned to Ward's office.*)

**Ward:** Okay, Strock... the so-called "Terror" has been spotted near Toledo. Head there immediately! You'll get your final orders when you arrive.

**Strock:** Should I bring a couple of men with me for backup?

**Ward:** I think you'll find that they won't make any difference. But sure, go for it!

## Chapter 11: The Campaign

*(Strock arrives in Toledo with two handpicked men, John Hart and Nab Walker<sup>76</sup>. They are met by Arthur Wells, the police agent who'd spotted the Terror and alerted Mr. Ward.)*

**Wells:** Greetings, Mr. Strock! I've commissioned a carriage with two horses for us. We need to drive to Black Rock Creek, about 20 miles from here.

**Strock:** That's a creek on the coast of Lake Erie, which eventually empties into Lake Ontario by means of Niagara Falls, right?

**Wells** (*shrugging*): Sure, if you want to get all expository about it.

*(During the carriage ride, Wells brings Strock up to speed.)*

**Wells:** Less than two days ago, I was riding through a nearby wood on a completely different mission. I happened to glance across the lake, and I spotted a submarine! I hid behind a tree and watched as it pulled up to Black Rock Creek. Two crewmen climbed out of the submarine's deck and stepped ashore. I rode back to town immediately and sent the telegraph to Mr. Ward.

**Strock:** And since then?

**Wells:** I returned to Black Rock Creek just last night. The submarine was still there, and I observed the same two crewmen. I suspect that some accident happened, and they came to this isolated location to repair their vessel.

**Strock:** Very well! Then let's hope they're still there tonight!

*(The carriage is driven deep into the woods surrounding Black Rock Creek. At a nearby clearing, the horses are unharnessed and left with the coachman. Strock and Wells begin approaching the creek on foot.)*

**Wells:** We'll have to be careful, Strock. I've only seen two crewmen, but there could be more within the submarine.

**Strock:** We'll wait for the crewmen to go ashore again, and then position ourselves to cut off their escape. Once they're subdued, we'll deal with the submarine and anyone who's still inside it. Between the two of us, this should be a cakewalk.

**Hart/Walker** (*indignantly*): Hey! There's *four* of us!

**Strock** (*sheepishly*): Oh... uh, even better! Sorry, I'd already forgotten about you two.

*(After several tense minutes, they finally reach Black Rock Creek.)*

**Strock** (*excitedly*): This is it, Wells! This is the moment I finally do something to advance the plot!

**Wells:** Er... it looks like the submarine isn't here.

---

<sup>76</sup> Neither "sidekick" has any significant dialog or plot impact, so you can basically forget them now.



**Strock** (*frustrated*): Aw, c'mon!

## Chapter 12: Black Rock Creek

*(Strock and his companions sit glumly at Black Rock Creek, trying to figure out their next move.)*

**Strock** (*bitterly*): Well, that's just great. We came all the way out here for nothing! What a complete and total waste of time!

*(Suddenly, they spot a submarine in the distance. It's approaching the shore.)*

**Strock**: Or not. Everybody hide!

*(Once again, two crewmen disembark from the submarine and come ashore. They head into the woods.)*

**Strock**: Why... I recognize one of those crewmen! He was watching my house back in Washington. This submarine *must* be the Terror!

**Wells** (*excitedly*): Are we going to attack them, then?

**Strock**: No, we must watch them.

**Wells**: But I thought -

**Strock** (*insistently*): Watch them!

*(The two crewmen eventually return, each with an armful of wood, which they bring to the Terror.)*

**Crewman 1**: Here you go, captain!

**Crewman 2**: One more load should do it, and then we can leave!

**Captain** (*muffled, from inside the Terror*): Well done, men! But be quick about it. We can't stay here much longer.

*(The two crewmen head back into the woods.)*

**Wells** (*impatient*): Now can we ambush them?

**Strock**: No, let's just watch them.

**Wells**: Okay, if you really don't want to attack these guys for some reason, then maybe we could board their submarine. Why don't we try that?

**Strock**: What part of "watch them" don't you understand?

**Wells** (*incredulous*): You *do* realize that the Terror's going to leave as soon the crewmen get back, right?

**Strock**: Let's wait and see<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> I'm oversimplifying here, but I wanted to capture how it *felt* to read this chapter in the original book. I spent most of it thinking, "Just *do* something, already!"

*(Suddenly, a shout is heard in the woods. Moments later, the horses from Wells' carriage come galloping along the bank.)*

**Strock:** What are our horses doing here!?

**Wells** *(slapping his forehead)*: That idiot coachman must've lost track of them... now those crewmen will know there's people nearby!

*(Sure enough, the two crewmen come running out of the woods moments later, making a beeline for the Terror.)*

**Strock** *(shouting urgently)*: Get those crewmen! Don't let them escape!

**Wells** *(sarcastically)*: It's a good thing we were so proactive about this, or I'd be pretty frustrated right now!

*(Strock and his companions chase the crewmen. As the crewmen approach the shore, they fire their revolvers behind them. One of the shots hits John Hart in the leg. Fortunately, it fails to affect the story's outcome even slightly. Strock's companions return fire, but they don't hit either of the crewmen. The captain pops out of the Terror's deck and begins shooting, as well. One of the captain's shots grazes Wells, and the two fleeing crewmen board the submarine. Desperately, Strock seizes one end of the cable that anchors the Terror to the shore.)*

**Strock** *(determined)*: I'll catch this submarine if it's the last thing I ever do!

*(Just then, the anchor is torn loose from the shore. One of its hooks catches on Strock's belt and begins pulling him into the lake, as the Terror takes off across the water.)*

**Strock** *(frantically)*: I knew I should've worn suspenders today!

*(Strock's companions watch helplessly as Strock is towed into the lake by the fleeing submarine. Both figures are quickly lost in the night's inky blackness. Wells shakes his head gloomily.)*

**Wells:** We lose more chief inspectors that way.

## Chapter 13: On Board the Terror

*(Strock regains consciousness. To his shock, he realizes that he's in a cabin onboard the Terror: the Terror's crew must've dragged him onboard instead of letting him drown. Strock climbs the ladder leading out of his cabin, and finds himself on the Terror's deck. Water surrounds the vessel on all sides. The two crewmen are on deck, but the captain isn't present. Strock approaches them.)*

**Strock:** Where's the captain?

**Crewman 1:** ...

**Strock:** You know, my friends probably think I'd dead right now. Is there any way I can let them know that I'm still alive?

**Crewman 1:** ...

**Strock** (*annoyed*): Fine, be that way. You there! Crewman 2! Where are you taking me? Why'd you save my life when I was being pulled underwater?

**Crewman 2:** ...

**Strock** (*sarcastically*): Okay, then! It was nice talking to you!

*(After hours of aimless waiting, Strock sees the captain appear on deck.)*

**Strock:** Hey, you must be the captain! Your crew is a little on the quiet side... tell me, is this really the Terror?

**Captain:** ...

**Strock** (*frustrated*): Well, what are you planning to do with me?

**Captain:** ...

**Strock** (*angrily*): Say something, you obstinate pigs!!

**Captain:** ...

**Strock** (*disgusted*): What a bunch of cretins<sup>78</sup>.

## Chapter 14: Niagara

*(Strock continues to stand on the deck of the Terror, as it makes its way toward the far end of Lake Erie and Niagara Falls.)*

**Strock:** So, why'd you send me that threatening letter? And why were you spying on me in Washington?

**Captain:** ...

**Strock:** Well, why'd you save me from drowning at all, if you're just going to pretend that I don't exist?

**Captain:** ...

**Strock:** You know, continually refusing to speak isn't mysterious. It's just annoying.

**Captain:** ...

**Strock** (*sarcastically*): Well, that's easy for *you* to say!

*(Strock observes two torpedo destroyers across the water. They're approaching quickly.)*

**Strock:** See those two destroyers? My companions probably contacted them as soon as the Terror pulled away from the creek. I'm guessing they have orders to destroy you on sight.

---

<sup>78</sup> I'm not making this up: nobody will say two words to Strock! It's especially frustrating because we're three quarters of the way through the book, and we're getting impatient for some answers!

*(Sure enough, both destroyers begin firing at the Terror. All of their shots go wide. The captain effortlessly jets past them, and then enters the Niagara River<sup>79</sup>.)*

**Strock:** You know this river ends at Niagara Falls, right? Do you have a plan for getting past that, or were you just planning to drive off the edge?

*(The Terror approaches Niagara Falls. Just before it drives off the edge, it deploys wings and begins to fly<sup>80</sup>.)*

**Strock:** Wow... so the Terror was actually a “car boat sub plane” this whole time! Who knew? Well, obviously *you* did... but that doesn't help anyone else, because you never say anything.

**Captain:** ...

**Strock:** And just for the record, I heard you talking to your men at the creek, so I *know* you can speak when you really want to.

**Captain:** ...

**Strock:** Okay, I'm running out of one-sided quips. I think we'll just have to ignore the book and make you talk for the rest of the story, or else this parody won't be any fun at all.

**Captain** (*disgusted*): Spoilsport.

## Chapter 15: The Eagle's Nest

*(Strock and the captain are on the deck of the Terror, as it continues its flight.)*

**Captain:** Here! Have some food.

**Strock** (*shrugging*): Okay. It's probably drugged, but I *am* pretty hungry at this point.

*(Strock eats the food and instantly passes out.)*

**Captain:** There! That should prevent him from learning that our secret base is inside the Great Eyrie!

*(Strock wakes up next to the Terror, at the bottom of a crater. The rocky walls stretch high above him, where they end in a large, open rim.)*

**Strock:** Hey... are we inside the Great Eyrie?

**Captain** (*annoyed*): Dang it! Well, anyway... now that you know where my secret base is, you can see why I had to send a letter warning you away.

**Strock** (*confused*): To pique my interest in finding this place?

**Captain** (*dismayed*): What? No! To ensure that you'd stop trying to come here.

**Strock:** Yeah, about that... it didn't work.

---

<sup>79</sup> There's also a brief interval where they dive underwater, but it doesn't amount to anything.

<sup>80</sup> Of course, we already knew that the Terror could fly, because of the tease at the end of chapter 1.

**Captain** (*confused*): Huh? But in that case, why didn't you try to raid my base with a platoon of men and a trunk full of dynamite?

**Strock**: Honestly, I've been asking myself the same question since chapter 10... but I guess that's water under the bridge. So, who are you?

**Captain/Robur** (*proudly*): I am Robur the Conqueror... Master of the World!

**Strock**: Aha! Now we're getting somewhere.

**Robur**: Yes, Inspector Strock. It's high time that you received some answers...

**Strock**: Excellent!

**Robur**: ... and by "answers", I mean "a recap of the previous book"!

**Strock**: What!? No!

## Chapter 16: Robur, the Conqueror

*(Robur proceeds to recite a summary of the previous book. It's a pretty decent summary, but we've already read that story, so we find ourselves impatiently skimming to see if anything meaningful will happen in the current scene<sup>81</sup>.)*

**Robur**: ...and so I used my beloved Albatross to save those two obstinate losers from their own stupidity, and deposited them safely in Fairmont Park. But before I left, I gave an inspirational speech to the crowd! I reassured them that my technology would be made available to mankind one day, when they were wise enough to use it.

**Strock**: Fascinating! So, uh... what happened?

**Robur**: Pardon?

**Strock**: Well... at the end of that story, you were the benevolent captain of the Albatross, a magnificent flying clipper ship that could travel anywhere and perform rescues at sea. You had a devoted crew and a confident hope for the future! But now you're piloting the Terror, a 3-man strike craft that's honestly better suited for hit-and-run terrorism than anything else, and you're thumbing your nose at humanity. So... what happened?

**Robur**: Over time, my prideful attitude has been aggravated to the point of madness!

**Strock** (*disgusted*): Seriously? That's *it*!? Between books, you regressed into a lunatic inventor with delusions of grandeur?

**Robur** (*challengingly*): Delusions, are they? Well, I have big plans for the world, Strock! Big, vaguely defined plans which will probably never come to fruition because there's only two chapters left!

---

<sup>81</sup> And remember: in the original book, Robur barely says two words to Strock. This parody dumps a lot of the introspection and narration into the dialogue to make things *more* interesting!

**Strock:** Whatever. By the way, what's the deal with the Terror? Why couldn't you be "Master of the World" with the Albatross?

**Robur:** I wanted to build an even better machine which could conquer all of the elements at once... air, sea, and land!

**Strock:** But why do you need a machine that can travel on land, if it can already reach any land-based location from the air?

**Robur:** Shut up, that's why! Anyway, I built the Terror's individual parts in my secret base on X Island, and then I used the Albatross to transport them here for assembly.

**Strock:** That's another thing... why build the Terror in the Great Eyrie? Why not test it somewhere uninhabited, where you wouldn't draw so much needless attention to your activities?

**Robur** (*smugly*): Now that we've established I'm pushing the boundaries of madness, I don't need to provide a satisfying answer to that.

**Strock:** You know, I almost liked you better when you didn't talk. And what happened to the Albatross?

**Robur:** It was destroyed in the center of the Great Eyrie. You can still see some twisted wreckage in the center of this chamber.

**Strock:** Uh huh... and did you destroy the Albatross on purpose, or was it by accident?

**Robur:** I refuse to answer that question.

**Strock:** By accident, then. At least now we know what caused the mysterious glow on the mountaintop.

**Robur:** Yep. Is there anything else you needed to know?

**Strock:** Yeah... what's your actual plan for the Terror? Subjugation? Blackmail? Open warfare? Revenge? Pizza delivery?

**Robur** (*whipping out a pencil and notepad*): Wait, wait a moment... those are good ideas. Could you repeat them for me, a little more slowly?

**Strock** (*disgusted*): Okay, we're done here. And let me just say, in all sincerity, that I've never been more disappointed in a Jules Verne character.

**Robur** (*confused*): Who's "Jules Verne"?

**Strock:** Never mind.

## Chapter 17: In the Name of the Law

(*Robur turns to his two crewmen.*)

**Robur:** Okay, men... time to abandon the Great Eyrie! Let's torch this place, and make sure we leave nothing behind.

**Strock** (*sarcastically*): Gee, I'm sure glad we spent some meaningful time in your base of operations before you destroyed it. It really made all the waiting and buildup feel worthwhile.

**Robur** (*ignoring him*): And put Inspector Strock in the Terror. We're going for a little ride.

*(Any remaining equipment in the Great Eyrie is burned, and Strock is locked in one of the Terror's cabins. The Terror takes off, and several hours pass. Finally, Strock's cabin is unlocked. He leaves the cabin, and finds himself surrounded by the open ocean. The two crewmen are on deck, but the captain is in the engine room.)*

**Strock**: I don't get it, guys. You spy on my house, but then you disappear before you learn anything. You save me from drowning, but then you basically ignore me. You drug my food so I can't see you land in the Great Eyrie, but then you let me see inside the Great Eyrie after I wake up! And then you abandon the whole site anyway! Then you lock me in my cabin during takeoff, but you suddenly decide to let me out in the middle of the flight. Why!? What's driving these abrupt, seemingly random decisions?

**Crewman 1**: ...

**Strock** (*disgustedly*): Why do I even bother?

\* \* \* \* \*

*(Many hours pass without any further conversation or discoveries.)*

**Crewman 2**: There's a storm coming. Get below deck, so that we can submerge.

**Strock**: That's the most significant thing you've ever said... which isn't saying much. Pun intended.

*(Strock returns to his cabin, and the Terror submerges shortly afterward. Strock decides to take a nap. Eventually, he wakes up: the Terror is back on the surface. Strock returns to the deck, where Robur has joined his two crewmen. Strock immediately sees a huge storm approaching.)*

**Strock**: Oh... another storm?

**Robur**: Or possibly the same one. It's not really clear.

**Strock**: Well, no big deal. We can just submerge again, right?

**Robur**: That's where you're wrong! For some reason, I'm going to fly the Terror straight into the heart of those thunderclouds!

**Strock** (*astonished*): What!? Why!?

**Robur**: Because I am Robur, Master of the World!

**Strock** (*disgusted*): You can yell that all you want, but you can't make the thunderstorm respect your idea.

**Robur**: We'll just see about that! Full speed ahead!

*(The Terror plunges into the thunderstorm.)*

**Strock** (*urgently*): Robur, this is madness! In the name of the law, I -

*(The Terror is struck by a thunderbolt and shatters. After plunging hundreds of feet into the ocean, Strock manages to grab a piece of debris and float on the rough waves. Robur and his men are nowhere to be seen.)*

**Strock**: Well, *that* was pointless<sup>82</sup>.

## Chapter 18: The Old Housekeeper's Last Comment

*(Strock regains consciousness in a steamship's cabin.)*

**Sailor 1**: Ah good, you're awake!

**Sailor 2**: How did you end up in the middle of the Caribbean Sea, clutching a piece of debris?

**Sailor 1** (*grinning*): It must've been one crazy party, eh?

**Strock** (*shaking his head ruefully*): You don't know the half of it. Here's what happened...

*(Strock spends the next few hours telling his tale to the sailors.)*

**Sailor 2**: So basically... Robur would've failed even if you'd stayed home and done nothing?

**Strock** (*defensively*): Okay, maybe it *seems* that way. But at least I was there to confirm that Robur's gone for good!

**Sailor 1**: Did you actually see him die?

**Strock**: Well... no.

**Sailor 2**: So Robur could've survived! I mean, for all we know, he's already planning a new machine that's even worse!

**Sailor 1** (*hopefully*): Well... let's not be hasty! I mean, Robur destroyed his own base, right? It could take him years to come back from that!

**Strock** (*reluctantly*): Uh... actually, Robur has a much better base somewhere in the Pacific Ocean. He calls it "X Island". Nobody knows how to find it, but that's where the Albatross and the Terror's original parts were actually built. And as far as we know, it's still fully staffed and operational.

**Sailor 2** (*laughing*): Then yeah... sorry man, but you've accomplished nothing! Robur's totally coming back for round 3. If I were you, I'd sleep lightly<sup>83</sup>.

**Strock** (*sourly*): *Thank* you for making my entire adventure seem ridiculous.

\* \* \* \* \*

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<sup>82</sup> No, really! That's what happens!

<sup>83</sup> In the actual book, people are more inclined to believe that Robur perished... although I must stress that it's still inconclusive. But for the parody, it seemed better to follow through on the "nothing was accomplished" vibe of the last few chapters.



(Strock returns to Washington, and relates his story to Mr. Ward.)

**Ward** (*laughing*): Yeah, I guess you didn't really get a chance to make a meaningful contribution to this investigation. But no matter! You survived the Terror's destruction, and you've returned as a "sort of" hero.

**Strock**: Thanks, I guess. So, what's my next assignment?

**Ward**: Uh... we'll get back to you on that. The thing is, you'd been declared dead, so there's a bunch of paperwork to figure out before you can officially resume police work. Nobody wants to be investigated by a dead cop; it's just weird<sup>84</sup>.

**Strock**: But I'm not actually -

**Ward**: Don't worry, we'll get it straightened out! But in the meantime, why don't you take the day off?

**Strock**: Honestly sir, that's fine with me. After everything I've been through, I could use a holiday.

\* \* \* \* \*

(Strock returns home, and relates his story to his housekeeper.)

**Housekeeper**: Wow, so that's how it all ends. Although in a sense, I guess it hasn't actually ended, since we don't have any closure on Robur.

**Strock** (*shrugging*): I guess we'll just have to see what the future brings.

**Housekeeper** (*reflectively*): You know... Robur can be abrupt, arbitrary, optimistic, angry, merciful, ruthless, excitable, dour, charismatic, and reticent... but I'll say this much about him...

**Strock**: What's that?

**Housekeeper**: ...he is a *thoroughly* confusing man!

**Strock** (*laughing*): He certainly is!

THE END

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<sup>84</sup> This complication doesn't exist in the original story, but it kind of makes sense: as far as anyone knew, Strock was dragged into Lake Erie and drowned at the end of chapter 12.

## Conclusion

### Thanks for reading!

And there you have it... a parody of two extremely obscure Jules Verne novels.

I guess what bothers me most about these stories is the missed opportunities. For example, imagine some of these possibilities:

- Either Prudent or Evans eventually come around to Robur's way of thinking, so that we have an evolving, complex, three-way conflict (instead of a repeating cycle where the same two men heap verbal abuse on Robur and his airship, chapter after chapter).
- The balloon club actually acts on Prudent's note and attempts a rescue with a small fleet of dirigibles, resulting in an action-packed scene where the Albatross outmaneuvers them all (instead of having the note lead to nothing).
- A main character actually spends time on X Island, where some meaningful plot developments occur (instead of leaving X Island "offstage" as a complete enigma).
- Strock leads a daring commando raid on the Great Eyrie, based on the obvious clues that he already has (instead of waiting around for a chance to capture Robur outside his base.)
- Robur actually *does* something with the Terror (instead of flying it directly into a thunderhead for no good reason).

That's the thing with both novels: they have a lot of potential and interesting concepts (although I really can't recommend the first one, because of the culturally insensitive stuff). And although I've taken the "easy way out" by creating a parody which makes fun of them, I really believe they could be adapted into a pretty solid science fiction story.

Oh wait... somebody already did that in the 1961 film, Master of the World. Unfortunately, copies of the movie are difficult (and expensive) to obtain, so this probably won't help you.

Well, no matter! I hope you enjoyed this parody, and I thank you for reading it!