

Journey to the Center of the Earth Study Guide

Journey to the Center of the Earth by Jules Verne

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Plot Summary

“Journey to the Center of the Earth” is a classic science fiction novel by Jules Verne. A German mineralogist Otto Lidenbrock, his nephew Axel, and their guide Hans descend into the subterranean world beneath the earth’s crust. When the novel begins, Otto is a well-respected, but uncelebrated, middle-aged professor in Hamburg, Germany. He is caring for Axel and a female ward named Grauben. Otto comes to discover the Saknussem manuscript in an old quarto volume of Icelandic history from centuries before. Its purpose is to disclose the location of a way to reach the center of the earth. Immediately, Otto decides to take up the challenge, with Axel being involuntarily included on the expedition. Grauben encourages Axel to go on the journey. She thinks that the expedition will help him to mature and become a man. Then, when he returns, she can marry him. Axel reluctantly joins his uncle on a journey to Iceland.

In Iceland, Otto and Axel hire a local duck hunter named Hans to serve as a guide and provide manpower for the expedition. Following the manuscript directions, the three-man team climbs Snafell, an extinct volcano, ropes down inside, and then proceeds to follow a network of tunnels and caverns. The walls are lined with thousands of fossils, and the floors are covered in the bones and debris of ancient animals. Eventually, the three emerge into a massive underground cavern-like space, thousands of feet high. Its width is unknown. Here, they discover a great sea, distant mountains, ancient forests, roaming mastodons, blind fish, ocean-going dinosaurs, and the perfectly-preserved, naturally-mummified remains of a prehistoric man. The team has reached the center of the earth which Saknussem claimed could be found in his manuscript.

When Axel, Otto, and Hans attempt to blast their way through yet another passageway with explosives in order to continue their discoveries, a great chasm opens up. They are swept into an active volcano and ejected off the coast of Italy. The three return to Hamburg triumphantly, where some do and some don’t believe the stories that Otto tells. He becomes even more widely respected and celebrated. Otto donates the Saknussem manuscript to the city archives. Hans later returns home to Iceland, for he is homesick. Grauben tells Axel he is now a hero, and she marries him. At the close of the novel, the two decide to continue to live and study with Otto.



Chapters 1 – 9

Summary

Chapter 1 – On May 24, 1863, fifty year-old Johannaem mineralogy professor Otto Lidenbrock rushes home from work early, to the surprise of his nephew, Axel, and housekeeper, Martha, who are at home at No. 19 Konigstrasse, Hamburg, Germany. Otto calls Axel into his study impatiently. Otto is a passionate man who is extremely knowledgeable and well-respected for his work, but has few social graces. He is wealthy for a professor, owns his own home, and cares for his goddaughter, seventeen year-old Grauben. He also serves as curator of the Museum of Mineralogy, owned by M. Struve, the Russian ambassador. Axel explains that he often serves as an assistant to Otto's experiments. Axel loves to assist, and says that the blood of a geologist flows in his veins. As such, he darts into Otto's study to see what is going on.

Chapter 2 – Otto's study is like a museum itself, full of various rock and mineral specimens, books, and papers. When Axel goes in, Otto is in his favorite Utrecht velvet chair, marveling over a book he has discovered in the Jew, Hevelin's, shop. It is a quarto volume, a book made from two large pieces of paper folded into four sections to make eight pages. It is an Icelandic manuscript more than seven hundred years old, is written by famous twelfth-century Icelandic author Snorre Turleson, and is the history of the early Norwegian princes who reigned in Iceland. Otto doesn't understand why his uncle is so excited about the little book. But during this time, an old piece of parchment falls from the book, which when spread out by Otto, is a handwritten page of Runic-like characters. Otto is fascinated, and imagines the language must be ancient Icelandic. While minerals are Otto's specialty, his knowledge extends to all subjects imaginable. Martha announces soup is ready, and Otto yells at her to get out. While eating with Axel, Martha says she worries that Otto has not come out to eat. She thinks it is a bad omen. As Axel finishes eating, Otto summons him to the study once more.

Chapter 3 – Otto explains to Axel that he believes the ancient handwriting to be Runic, and that there is a secret in it, for translated, the ancient Icelandic spells out a cryptogram. The handwriting of the parchment and the manuscript are not by the same hand, Otto reveals. He is able to ascertain, through the parchment's use of a double-m, that the parchment is at least two hundred years older than the manuscript, and the manuscript is signed by the writer of the parchment on the back cover. The writer of the parchment is Arne Saknussemm, a famous sixteenth-century alchemist and savant, and the symbols used in the writing, though Runic, spell out Latin words. Axel observes a portrait of Grauben on the wall. Grauben is away visiting relatives, and it makes Axel unhappy, for he and Grauben are betrothed, though Otto does not know this, for he has no time for social customs or sentimental things. Only then does he find out from Axel that he loves Grauben –and Otto shrugs it off, uncaring, and turns back to the task at hand. Unable to crack the code, Otto rushes from the house.



Chapter 4 – Martha is startled that Otto has rushed from the house without eating supper. Axel wishes to go and visit Grauben, but remains at Otto's, for he has a feeling of unease and impending catastrophe. He, too, has been transfixed by the parchment, and begins to go over it once more. Frustrated, Axel prepares to throw both the manuscript and parchment into the fireplace, but stops when Otto returns.

Chapter 5 – Otto works all night on breaking the code of the parchment, while Axel falls asleep on the study couch. In the morning, he and Martha discover that Otto has locked up the house. Martha cannot get out to shop for food for the day. As Axel seeks to question Otto about the key to unlock the door, Otto reveals he has found the key to decoding the parchment. It reveals how Arne Saknussemm has reached the center of the earth, by descending the crater of Jokul of Snafell which is softly touched by the shadow of Scartaris before the Kalends of July. Otto then decides it is time to eat, and then it will be time to pack.

Chapter 6 – Axel realizes he is going to be dragged to Iceland, and is not too happy about it, for Grauben will still be in Germany. To deter his uncle from traveling, Axel knows he will need to use rational arguments. Otto, meanwhile, swears Axel to secrecy about their discovery, for it will mean fame and fortune for them. Axel questions if the parchment is a hoax. Otto replies that they will soon find out. Axel questions the names of places mentioned in the document, and Otto has Axel retrieve Handersen's map of Iceland, through which Otto reveals that all eruptive mountains –volcanoes –are identified as Jokuls. Snafell is an extinct Jokul crater off the coast of Iceland on a peninsula. Snafell has numerous craters, and the appropriate crater is indicated by the shadow of the Scartaris mountain peak, which will touch that crater at the end of June. Axel argues that real science does not support such a theory. Otto amusedly dismisses science as being more a hindrance than a help. Axel argues that the center of the earth is full of molten rock, and the heat will be unfathomable. Otto contends that science is forever in transition, with older theories being disproven by newer theories. After all, Otto explains, no one truly knows what is going on at the center of the earth because no one has ever been there to see it firsthand. Otto contends that volcanoes are caused not by molten materials pushing their way to the earth's surface, but by minerals like potassium and sodium in the earth's surface which ignite when they meet with air and water when cracks appear in the earth's surface. As such, the center of the earth is not fiery. Axel is won over by this reasoning, and Otto swears Axel to secrecy once more.

Chapter 7 – Axel is now thrilled and excited to be going on the trip, but he wonders whether he has been won over by real science, or simply by Otto's enthusiasm. He then heads out to meet Grauben as she heads home, coming to doubt Otto's ideas and plans. Grauben is thrilled that Axel has come to meet her, but she sees something is bothering him. Axel explains the impending trip, and Grauben would love to come along, but as a girl, feels she would be nothing more than a burden. When they return to the house, Otto is rushing about in preparation for leaving the day after tomorrow, at dawn. The next day, Grauben is convinced that Otto and Axel will be successful. She believes that Axel's journey will have him return a man. All day, scientific instruments and supplies arrive at the house. The next morning, Grauben gives Axel a teary goodbye, and says that even though he is leaving his betrothed, he will return to find his wife.



Chapter 8 – By train, Otto and Axel leave Hamburg for the shores of the Great Belt. Otto carries numerous papers with him, personally, including a letter from Otto's good friend, the Danish consulate M. Christensen, which will gain introductions in Copenhagen for the governor of Iceland. Aboard the steamship *Ellenore*, Otto and Axel travel to Denmark. There, in Copenhagen's Breda Gate district, they stay at the Phoenix Hotel. They meet and befriend M. Thomson, curator of the Museum of Northern Antiquities, and good friend of Christensen. From there, they book passage on a small Danish schooner, the *Valkyria*, to Iceland. The boat is captained by M. Bjorne. While waiting to depart, Otto and Axel travel about the city. Axel is thrilled to see everything, but Otto is unimpressed. At last, he finds a church, the Vor-Frelser's Kirk, to climb the steeple to prepare themselves for the height of mountains. From the top, they have a beautiful view. They climb up the church tower each day while they await passage on the *Valkyria*.

Chapter 9 – Thomson gives Otto letters of introduction to Iceland governor Baron Trampe, Bishop's suffragan Pictursson, and Reykjavik mayor Finsen. On June 2, the *Valkyria* sets sail. As they pass the castle of Elisnore, Axel thinks of Hamlet, and whether or not Hamlet would join on their mad quest. A few days later, the *Valkyria* passes Scotland, the Shetland Islands, and the Faroe Islands. A few days after that, the ship draws in on Iceland. Otto has been in his cabin nearly the entire voyage, often seasick, and emerges only as the ship docks in Reykjavik. As they disembark, Otto points out the mountain of Snafell in the far distance. In Reykjavik, Otto and Axel are warmly welcomed by the governor and the mayor. The suffragan, Pictursson, is away on episcopal duties. Axel decides to view the town while Otto heads to the library to see if he can dig up anything else written by Sakknussem. Otto insists that his interest in Iceland is what is below ground, not what is above ground. The town is small and gloomy. Most of the population dedicates itself to drying fish. Otto and Axel are hosted at the home of Icelandic professor Fridrikson, who teaches natural sciences.

Analysis

Jules Verne's classic science fiction novel "Journey to the Center of the Earth" follows the journey and exploration of a prehistoric underworld beneath the earth's crust by professor Otto Lidenbrock, his nephew, Axel, and their Icelandic guide, Hans. When the novel begins, Otto is a respected, but uncelebrated professor of mineralogy in Hamburg, Germany. There, he cares for his nephew, Axel, and his ward, Grauben. Otto's decision to undertake an expedition to the center of the earth based on Sakknussem's manuscript is met by skepticism and reluctance by Axel, but Grauben demands Axel go on the journey to become a man. The journey that is undertaken in the novel will become a major theme from the very first leg of the trip to the eventual return to Hamburg at the end of the novel. The journey will prove to be both literal and symbolic for Axel, for symbolic journeys are never just about the destination, but the process in getting there.

That Otto should be interested in such a journey is also noteworthy, because he is a mineralogist, and his primary field of study is the earth itself. To discover what lies at the



center of the earth is a tremendous, motivating factor for Otto, for Otto is an extreme empiricist. He does not believe the center of the earth could possibly be one of molten rock, because no one has ever been there before to personally see it. Here, the themes of both empiricism and the fallibility of science make their appearances, and both will become incredibly important themes as the novel goes on. Otto, though himself a scientist, is quick to note that theories, rather than always explaining things, often prevent new things from being discovered, as evidenced by Axel's refusal to go to the center of the earth because he thinks it is impossible.

The reader should take note of the scene where Otto and Axel sail past the castle of Elisnore, which serves as the setting for Shakespeare's play, "Hamlet". Axel wonders if Hamlet would join them on their mad quest. Hamlet, who was "but mad north, northwest", probably would have agreed to join them on their journey, for Hamlet was only pretending to be crazy in order to discover a deeper truth, and was thus not crazy at all. What appears crazy on the surface by way of the journey to the center of the earth will not be crazy after all, for Axel's consideration about whether or not Hamlet would join them on such a mad quest is quite ironic.

The reader should also pay attention to the travels of Otto and Axel. Otto, a respected member of the academic community, is treated like a dignitary, for he represents not only academia and his school, but his nation at large. As such, he doesn't mere arrive in a country and carry on his business, but is given formal letters of introduction in order to network and receive a formal and welcoming reception by the leaders and dignitaries of other countries. Even Denmark itself, merely a stop on the journey, is given to such honors on behalf of Otto and Axel.

Discussion Question 1

What reasons does Axel give for not wanting to go on the journey? Are any of these reasons sound, according to Otto? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Otto want to travel to the center of the earth? How does Otto react to this idea? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Otto, himself a scientist, so dismissive of scientific theories? What evidence does he provide for the position he takes on theory?

Vocabulary

Culinary, dismay, assiduity, subjectively, savant, deplorable, superabundance, impetuous, quarto volume, ignoramus, avidity, polyglot, bodes, cryptogram, presentiment, portmanteau, imprecations, irascible, Lilliputian.



Chapters 10 – 19

Summary

Chapter 10 – At Fridrikson's home, Otto confesses he is unhappy to have seen so few books in the library. Fridrikson explains that Iceland has more than eight thousand books and texts, most of which are currently being borrowed by Icelanders, nearly all of whom not only can read, but love to study things in depth. The Icelanders freely exchange the books among each other, rather than let them grow dusty in a library where no one can get to them. The first priority of Icelanders, Fridrikson says, is education. Otto asks if there are any writings by Saknussem among the ancient books, and Fridrikson reveals that none of his works are to be found in Iceland, for Saknussem was persecuted for heresy, and all his works inside Iceland were burned in 1573. Without thinking, Otto says it now makes sense why Saknussem would conceal a secret on an old parchment in an old book. Fridrikson asks about what Otto means, and Otto quickly says he is merely posing a supposition. Fridrikson says there is still much to learn about Iceland's mineralogy. He points out Snafell, the crater of which has rarely been visited, the volcano having been extinct for more than five hundred years. Otto announces he will begin his studies at Snafell. Fridrikson says he will not be able to accompany them, for he has other things to attend to. He recommends Otto and Axel take on the guide services of a man whom he will introduce them to the next day.

Chapter 11 – The next morning, Otto and Axel meet a large man named Hans Bjilke who speaks Danish, and who works as an eider-duck hunter. The eider-down of the duck is responsible for Iceland's wealth, prized for its softness. Hans will escort Otto and Axel to Stapi, a small village at the foot of Snafell, and then will remain with them on their expedition for the pay of twelve shillings a week –about three rix-dollars in Icelandic currency, to be paid at Hans's insistence after the conclusion of the first part of the journey. Departure is set for June 16th. Otto later explains to Axel that Hans has no idea about the part he will play, for he will go with them into the center of the earth. With two days until departure, Otto and Axel check over their equipment – an Eigel's centigrade thermometer, a manometer to indicate air pressure at levels higher than the sea, a chronometer, two compasses, and two Rhumkorff lamps, which generate electric light by safe combustion of bio chromate of potash. They also check over their digging supplies, rope ladder, and other assorted supplies, including a medicine chest. Otto is given a gift of a far more accurate map of Iceland than Handersen's, one composed by Olaf Nikolas Olsen, and published by the Iceland Literary Society. At six a.m. on June 16th, Otto, Axel, and Hans depart Reykjavik. As they leave, Ottor recites a line from Virgil, about taking whatever roads fortune offers.

Chapter 12 – Axel is a little nervous and a little excited as he, Otto, and Hans set out. They keep to the coast on horseback. Axel finds it hard to believe that a country so sparsely populated, and many of its people living in roughshod farmhouses, can be so cultivated. They pass rocks, yellow-green pastures, sheep, cows, and horses. Near the small hamlet of Gardar, they must wait for the tide and a raft to cross a fjord.



Chapter 13 – In June and July in Iceland, the sun never sets. Even though it is the evening, the sun is still shining, brightly. Otto, Axel, and Hans spend the night in a farmer's earthen home, which proves to be warm and comfortable despite its appearance. They set out at five the next morning. Past Gardar, the ground becomes boggy, and progress becomes slow. As they travel, they pass a leper, which is hereditary in Iceland. Lepers are forbidden to marry and have children in Iceland. Soon, the trio reaches the seashore village of Budir, where some of Hans's family live, and offer shelter. Otto pays Hans his fee. After another four hours of journeying, they reach the village of Stapi, at the foot of Snafell. There, the horses stop before the house of the local priest of their own will.

Chapter 14 – Stapi is a village of some thirty huts, made largely of lava and basalt. All around, the hardened lava from Snafell can be seen, as well as a nearby fjord. Axel finds it all to be beautiful and a natural wonder like the Giant's Causeway in Ireland. Axel also knows this is the end of their above-ground journey, and feels more comfortable that Hans will be remaining with them. They stay with the rector, who scrape to get by on horrible wages from the government. Hans hires three local Icelanders to help out on the expedition. Axel begins to worry about descending into the volcano, fearing that it might not be extinct after all, though it has not erupted since 1229. And if Saknussem's underground world exists, Axel wonders what might await them. Otto, too, has been considering the possibility that the volcano is not extinct. He concludes it is, because smoke rises from the volcano, and ceases when an eruption is pending because there is so much pressure, the smoke builds up and escapes by cracks in the ground, rather than just through the crater. This does little to comfort Axel.

Chapter 15 – Snafell is 5,000 feet high, and has two peaks, and a double cone. As Axel climbs Snafell with his uncle, Hans, and the three Icelanders, he contemplates all the strange and wonderful rocks and minerals he is seeing, and contemplates the geologic history of Iceland. He considers that the island is relatively new among the features of the earth, having only comparatively recently emerged from the sea, from one volcano to another, spilling out lava and building up the island. At 3,200 feet up, the expedition comes into the part of the mountain covered by snow, and cold weather sets in. Near the top of Snafell, Hans then sees a water-funnel-like storm of sand, pumice, and dust, headed straight for them, and urges everyone to hurry up and finish the climb. They are saved from the storm.

Chapter 16 – Supper is consumed and everyone beds down for the night. In the morning, Axel stands on the southern peak of Snafell, and takes in the beautiful view of the mountain, the sea, and the land below. Greenland can even be seen. Hans explains that they are currently on the peak of Scartaris, and then the group heads down into the crater at Otto's insistence. At the bottom of the crater are three chimney-like openings, from which smoke rises. There, Otto discovers a granite boulder engraved with Saknussem's name. It is proof for the parchment. Now all they need is a day of sunlight and the shadow of Scartaris, to determine which route had been taken by Saknussem. Finally, on June 28th, the sun comes out, and the shadow of Scartaris falls on the middle chimney. At 1:19 in the afternoon, the journey to the center of the earth commences.



Chapter 17 – The chimney is a large hole, one hundred feet in diameter. Axel worries about descending. They will go down by using ropes and carrying their supplies on their backs. As they descend, Axel worries the rope will not bear the weight of three men, so does his best to put most of his weight against the wall of the chimney as he descends. For ten and-a-half hours, they descend, pausing to rest on ledges and outcroppings, and to eat, before putting down the next rope, and continuing on. They travel down 2,800 feet. At the bottom of the chimney, a passageway can be seen, but the group beds down for the night. As Axel goes to sleep he thinks he can see the star of B Ursa Minor in the sky far, far above.

Chapter 18 – Awaking at eight the next morning, Otto contends it is the quietest night he has ever spent. The quiet worries Axel. Otto goes on to reveal that they haven't even descended into the earth yet, but are merely at sea level –confirmed by the barometer. When it ceases to work, the manometer will be employed. Otto explains that the group will continue to descend into the earth slowly, so the pressure does not harm them. They eat a quick breakfast, and move into the passage. Otto leads the way with a Ruhmkorff lantern, which gives off amazing light. As Axel enters the passage, he looks up to the Icelandic sky, noting it will be the last time he ever sees it. However, Axel's concerns give way to fascination at the varied kinds of old lava that he sees all around the passageway, along with globe-like crystals. As they descend farther, Axel notices that the temperature does not increase. Interestingly enough, the air is still breathable, and not difficult at all on their lungs. According to Axel's notes and observations, they are now some ten-thousand feet below the sea. They are now six thousand feet farther down than man has ever been before.

Chapter 19 – The descent is resumed the next day at six a.m. They come to a place where the path parts in two. Otto tells Hans and Axel they will all go in the eastern of the two passages. As they travel, the temperatures rise, but never enough to become taxing. Axel can only think of the volcano going active again, but Otto is undeterred. The following day, when travel is resumed, Axel notices the passage is now ascending rather than descending. This makes Axel hope the path will lead back up to the surface, so he may return to Germany and to Grauben. It is then that Axel notices the earth around them has changed to the layers of rock of the Silurian period, when the first plants and first animals appeared on earth. A short distance ahead, Axel realizes he is walking on the dust and debris of plants and shells from this period. He can see their fossils in the walls of the passage. Axel considers the possibility that they have either chosen the wrong tunnel or Saksussemm never made it that far. Otto decides to follow the passage through to the end, just to see what is there. But the problem, Axel reveals, is that they are running out of water. Otto then decides they must ration it.

Analysis

The theme of journey continues to underscore the plot of the novel, as Otto, Axel, and Hans undertake the second leg of the journey, to the extinct volcano of Snafell. As they travel across Iceland toward the peninsula on which the volcano awaits, Axel takes care to note all of the things he discovers and learns about the land and its people, from their



customs to their rugged independence, to the fact that the sun never sets in Iceland during the months of June and July. The reader should also note, as a portending event, the fact that the horses draw up to the house of the local priest of their own free will at the foot of the volcano. The animals are naturally drawn toward God, just as Axel will in turn be drawn to God in coming chapters, thus beginning the theme of the relationship between faith and empiricism.

At the same time, the theme of man against nature also comes roaring to the fore through Axel's observations of how the Icelandic people manage to survive off the rocks of Iceland, living at the edge of the wilderness, and in daily conflict with nature –such as having to deal with the fluctuating tides of fjords and a barren landscape. The theme of man against nature also becomes quite apparent as the first real natural challenge is faced by way of a storm that threatens to crash right into Axel, Otto, and Hans as they are nearing the summit of Snafell. Only by quickly finishing their ascent and seeking shelter on the other side of the outer rim are they able to avoid being killed by the storm. As they descend into the volcano, they are forced to deal with drops hundreds of feet in length, a natural obstacle that they, as men, manage to overcome by climbing down on ropes.

At the foot of the inside of the volcano, a natural passageway is discovered. Here, Otto announces that the journey has truly begun, and symbolically for Axel, it truly has. All along, Axel has been dragging his feet like a petulant child, complaining about everything and always fearing the worst. As Axel travels along, his fears temporarily subside, giving way to fascination at the geologic formations of the tunnel, and giving way to the re-emergence of the theme of scientific fallibility. Prevailing scientific theories contend the earth should be getting warmer and warmer the deeper the company descends. In reality, this is not the case at all. This is a reminder of the importance of Otto's statement that scientific theories are more apt to hamper people.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways does the theme of man versus nature become apparent in this section of the novel? How does man deal with the effects of nature? Is man or nature successful? Why?

Discussion Question 2

What has Axel's attitude been like so far on the journey? Do you think he can be blamed for this? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

What scientific theories so far have been demonstrated to be false? How were they proved to be false? How does Axel react to their being proved false?



Vocabulary

Indolent, placid, interlocutor, edification, augur, repast, terrestrial, subterranean, phenomena, destitute, alluvial, conglomeration, hypothesis, stupefaction, obviate, equilibrium, myriad, substructures, incontestable.



Chapters 20 – 29

Summary

Chapter 20 – Axel realizes there are enough provisions for only three more days as they continue on in their journey. The earth around them reveals Devonian fish and reptile fossils and debris. As they travel on, they discover they have moved into a massive coal vein. They enter a massive cavern, where all the ages of the coal period of history can be seen. Axel notes that all the coal in the world will be exhausted by excessive consumption within three centuries if not recognized by the industrial world. At last, they arrive at a dead end –and must turn around and go back to the other tunnel. However, they have only one day's worth of water, left.

Chapter 21 – It will take Axel, Otto, and Hans five days to return to the crossroads passage. On Tuesday, July 7th, they return, exhausted, to the passage. There, Otto gives Axel the last of his water, having saved it expressly for Axel. Axel feels better, and prays that God will give them the strength to return to Snafell. Otto, however, wishes to press on in the western tunnel. He tells Axel he can leave with Hans, but Otto will be going on or die trying. Otto insists there will be water in the western tunnel, for the nature of the rock there –granite –favors abundant springs. Axel consents to going along, as does Hans.

Chapter 22 – In the western tunnel, Axel can already see how primitive the rock is, and how early in earth's history it must have formed. He discovers beautiful rocks in many different colors and formations as they travel. They continue on, and finally, around eight in the evening, collapse, exhausted once more. To Axel, the tunnel seems as if it will become his tomb. At some point, Axel is surprised to see Hans lift up a lantern, and continue on down the passage, alone.

Chapter 23 – An hour later, Hans returns with news of water. Two thousand feet down the passageway, Axel can hear an underground river. Hans hacks away at the wall with a pickaxe, until water shoots through. The water is at boiling point, but no one is worried, for the water will cool in due time. They also decide to let the water keep running through, for it is crystal clear and will not only show them where to go as it descends down the passage naturally, but will offer refreshment along the way.

Chapter 24 – The next morning, Otto, Axel, and Hans all wake, refreshed. They continue their descent. On Friday, July 10th, the group believes they are now thirty leagues southeast of Reykjavik, and two and-a-half leagues deep in the earth. They descend through a fault in the rock –a fissure caused by unequal cooling of the earth's surface. On July 17th, they are fifty leagues from Snafell, and seven leagues down. By Axel's calculations, they are now under the open sea. On Saturday, July 18th, the group reaches a monstrous cavern. There, Hans is paid more wages, and the group decides to spend a day of rest.



Chapter 25 – On Sunday, July 19th, Otto, Axel, and Hans rest. Otto goes over notes and calculations. He believes they are now at a depth of sixteen leagues, or 48-miles down. The temperature is steady and not blistering as predicted, confirming the theories of Humphry Davy and disproving the modern theories of science. However, Axel realizes at the rate at which they are traveling, it will take them five and-a-half years to reach the center of the earth. Otto is undeterred, for all the theories have been proven wrong, and Saksussemm's journey is a precedent to their own. Axel considers how Saksussemm would have known he had reached the center of the earth in the sixteenth century, without proper instruments to determine where he was, but does not argue this point with his uncle.

Chapter 26 – Axel admits to the reader that, until then, things have not gone very badly at all. As they continue their journey, they come to a series of steep descents. The further they go, the quieter Hans becomes. Two weeks pass, and Hans says nothing at all. Axel reasons that there is little to talk about on their trip. Somewhere along the way, Axel realizes he is alone and that he has somehow lost his companions. He travels back to find them, but he cannot find them anywhere. He decides to retrace his steps by following the stream of water that has been guiding them, but the granite at Axel's feet is dry.

Chapter 27 – Axel fears he will die alone, of cold or hunger. He tries to calm himself by thinking of home, of Grauben, but he cannot do so. He hopes that his uncle is searching for him. Axel begins to pray, asking God to deliver him. He wonders if God will refuse his prayers for having forgotten about God for so long. Axel then realizes he needs only to ascend to be alright. As Axel climbs, he stumbles, falls, and drops his lamp. The lamp's light begins to diminish, and the terror of darkness comes over Axel. He attempts to feel his way around for several hours, but to no avail. He ultimately passes out from exhaustion and fear.

Chapter 28 - When Axel comes to, he can hear voices nearby. He realizes his uncle is calling for him, telling him not to worry, that he and Hans will find Axel. Axels summons up the strength to reply. They measure how long it takes for their voices to travel by echo, and determine they are four miles or so apart. Axel then continues on his journey in descent to find his uncle and Hans, but falls, hits his head on a rock, and passes out.

Chapter 29 – When Axel awakes, he is wrapped up in blankets and in the company of Otto and Hans. Otto is thankful and excited that Axel is still alive, and hugs him. Even Hans says hello to Axel. Otto tells Axel he is very weak, and he must rest. It is eleven p.m. on August 9th. The next day, Axel feels much better. He learns his fall brought down an avalanche of rock, and Axel had tumbled into the arms of his uncle. While Axel is largely uninjured, he feels his brain has been injured, for he can see the light of day. He gets up, dresses quickly, and heads out of the cavern in which he has been sleeping, and into the light of the underground world.



Analysis

The theme of journey becomes truly symbolic in this section of the novel, especially for Axel. For the first half of the novel, Axel has been behaving like a child, looking for the slightest pretense at which to cancel the whole expedition and go back. He has been fearful to the point of cowardice and paranoia. He has been argumentative, anxious, and whiney. In his darkest moments lost in the tunnels, Axel turns to God, and so begins his climb out of darkness to the light. With God as his foundation, Axel summons courage and manages to find his uncle and Hans once more. From the darkened cave in which he has slept –symbolic of childhood and home –Axel emerges into the subterranean world, and into manhood. Likewise, he has emerged from the darkness of life into the light and grace of God. It is something Axel personally experiences, making it empiric, and bringing forward the theme of faith and empiricism.

As the journey unfolds, there are some interesting points the reader should note. First, there is an abundance of fossil material and animal debris and bones that literally litter the floor and walls of the tunnel. This is a scientist's dream world, for in the world above, museums, universities, collectors, and scientific organizations are in stark competition for obtaining such specimens. The reader should note the concern that even people living in the nineteenth century had for energy resources and the environment. While moving through seams of coal, Axel considers how, if left unchecked, the current rate of coal consumption would mean the liquidation of coal supplies within three centuries. As things exist in the contemporary world, coal has not run out, though oil is now the energy resource threatened by over consumption. Alternative sources of fuel, as well as renewable energy sources, are currently being sought, bringing together an interesting old and new energy conscientiousness that modern generations often ignore or miss when studying the recent past.

The fallibility of science is once again brought to the fore the deeper the expedition manages to go. The earth is not heating up as rapidly as imagined in scientific theories. It is only heating up because there is an entire world beyond the tunnels and caverns in which Axel, Otto, and Hans have been journeying. The theme of man pitted against nature also comes back to the fore, as Axel manages to survive being lost and alone in the darkened stretches of the natural tunnel beneath the earth. The theme of man against nature can also be seen in the very fact that Axel, Otto, and Hans have managed to avoid dying by reaching the great underground world at the end of the network of tunnels and caverns through which they have traveled.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Axel pray to God? Why are Axel's prayers to God so important? What does praying to God do for Axel?



Discussion Question 2

Describe how Axel's journey in the dark tunnels while lost leads to his transition from boy to man. Make note of how Axel behaved before and after his being lost.

Discussion Question 3

While Axel's time in the journey through the tunnels changes him, it also changes Otto and Hans to some degree. How? Why?

Vocabulary

Interminable, exuberant, profound, stupor, incredulity, torrent, expedient, zealous, perilous, sangfroid, labyrinth, colloquy.



Chapters 30 - 39

Summary

Chapter 30 – Axel walks out of the cavern and onto a beach in bright light, where he can see a vast ocean. Otto has named it the Sea of Lidenbrock. The light itself is a naturally-occurring electric lighting that lights everything the way the Aurora Borealis lights up the night sky. Axel also considers the light itself may have simply been trapped in the cave, and continued to exist in the hollow by the air itself retaining its natural luminance.

Above are clouds and a great expanse of sky. Axel cannot find a word to describe the cavernous room that contains it all. The height of the place is at least 2000 fathoms, or 12,000 feet in height. Otto then brings Axel along the beach. Water flows freely from the rock into the sea, as does the stream Hans started. They come upon a forest of mushrooms, some forty to fifty feet in height. There are also massive plants of various kinds, which Otto identifies as belonging to the second epoch of time. Axel is stunned, and attributes the existence of the place to the providence of God. Otto then points out the ground beneath their feet, littered with the bones of dead creatures, such as mastodons. Axel wonders how no evidence of animal life has ever been found in the second epoch rock layers, and Otto explains that the earth's crust is elastic, and that some of the sedimentary strata was engulfed in abysses, never to be found by man above. Axel worries that there may still be other life forms about, but his uncle is not bothered by the idea. They return to their grotto-like cavern.

Chapter 31 – Axel goes swimming in the sea, deciding to refer to it as the Mediterranean. He and Otto learn that the pull of the sun and moon affect the tide even in the center of the earth. Otto also points out how the needles on their compasses point north-east, or up, with magnetic north being within the earth, not at the polar magnetic region. Otto says that science is full of mistakes, but mistakes lead to the discovery of the truth. Otto goes on to explain that he refuses to return to the surface of the earth, but is determined to continue on to the center, headed across the sea before them to find new outlets. He estimates the sea to be somewhere between 100 and 120 miles in length. Hans has been fashioning a raft for just this purpose, out of driftwood and fossilized (petrified) wood. Axel questions whether wood as hard as stone will sink or float, but Otto demonstrates, by throwing a piece of petrified wood into the water, which floats. Some petrified wood, Otto explains, does indeed float. The raft is finished the next evening, complete with a sail and rudder..

Chapter 32 – As the trio sets out to sea on the morning of August 13th, they begin to name the places they have been. They decide to name their point of launching Port Grauben, at Axel's request. Axel is given the task of journaling the voyage. They see algae on the water, and catch an early, blind form of the sturgeon by fishing. Within a few hours, they begin reeling in fish that have long been extinct, such as those of the family Pterichthys, all blind. Axel considers the history of the world, stretching back countless years before man, and countless years before life of any kind existed before Biblical creation. The vastness of the ocean cause Axel to hallucinate, and nearly falls



overboard before being shaken by Hans, and questioned by Otto about what is wrong. Otto says they will soon reach land by his calculations.

Chapter 33 – Axel is tired of seeing nothing but sea. Even Otto now grows impatient, wondering aloud if they have exceeded the journey of Saknussemm, or if not, if they are still following his course. On August 16, there is still no sight of land. Otto takes a sounding to see the depth of the ocean on which they now travel, but it is so deep, it exceeds their ability to read it. When they pull up the sounding equipment, they discover it has been bitten by a monstrous beast. Two days later, they sight monstrous sea creatures, one of which tosses the raft, though it settles down safely. They see a ichthyosaurus and a plesiosaurus, which begin to circle the raft, and even Otto and Hans are now full of fear. However, the two creatures do not attack the raft, but each other. Axel and the others watch with great fascination. The fight continues underwater, and the plesiosaurus floats to the surface, dead.

Chapter 34 – On Thursday, August 20th, a distant thunderous sound can be heard. Hans later sees a jet of water rising up, so the raft is steered in a more westerly direction to avoid it. They believe it may be the action of a massive creature. As it turns out, the jet of water is merely a geyser, and comes out of a small island which Axel and Otto explore. The water is scalding hot as it erupts out, which leads Axel to consider that it must have a burning hot point of origin, somewhere. Axel estimates that, at the distance they have traveled, they are now under England, 1,800 miles from Iceland.

Chapter 35 – The voyage continues away from the island geyser, now called Axel Island. A bad storm comes on, during which time Axel clings to the mast of the raft for his life. He explains that his notes for this point in time are scarce, due to the storm.

Chapter 36 – The storm rages on without letting up, and the temperatures increase. The mast and sail are ripped away in the storm, and Axel, Otto, and Hans lash their supplies down on the raft, and lash themselves down as well. Fireballs appear in the sky, with one coming to land on the very raft itself. The sound of breakers can then be heard.

Chapter 37 – The raft strikes land, grounding on rocks. Hans carries Axel to the shore, where Otto waits. Hans then returns to the wrecked raft to carry back supplies. They take shelter in some of the rocks, and sleep through the night. The next day, the storm has ended, and the weather is beautiful. Axel misses Grauben terribly, and thinks about his wedding day to come, for he imagines that if the storm had not blown them off course, they would be beneath Germany. Otto, glad to be alive, is also reinvigorated to press on to continue with the journey. Axel worries about getting back, but Otto tells him they will easily get back the way they came, or they will find a new way out. They have enough provisions to last them for four months. Based on Otto's calculations, they are beneath the Mediterranean Sea. Strangely, the compass points south instead of where they believe north to be. Otto then realizes they are back on the shore where they started.

Chapter 38 – Otto is furious. Axel tries to calm him, saying there is a limit to what man should attempt, and that they are not equipped for such a sea voyage. Otto is



undeterred. They will leave again in the morning, and will explore the part of the coast on which they now find themselves in the meantime. Axel wonders how an entire subterranean ocean can exist, and theorizes that from time to time, fissures to the oceans above temporarily open and then shut, allowing in enough water to maintain the subterranean sea, but seal off to prevent complete flooding. As Axel and Otto continue, they find more and more remains of prehistoric creatures in the strata of the earth. Suddenly, Otto becomes truly excited, for he discovers a human skull. He exclaims that he wishes Milne-Edwards and Quatrefages were there to see it.

Chapter 39 – Axel explains that in March 1863, near the French quarries of Moulin-Quignon, a human jawbone and primitive tools were discovered, the first kind ever brought to light. The scholars Milne-Edwards and Quatrefages authenticated the jawbone to the fourth epoch, and many in the scientific community supported these findings –including Otto Lidenbrock. Numerous other human remains were then found across Europe, as well as evidence of human habitation even before the fourth epoch. As Axel continues on with his uncle, he comes across what appears to be a naturally-mummified human body of the fourth epoch. They lift up the corpse to look at it, and are amazed by it. Otto begins speaking aloud, imagining he is giving a lecture on his discovery. Axel is impressed, and wonders if the remains of the people and creatures in the subterranean world were brought there by natural movements of the earth, opening up strata for them to fall, or if they actually lived and died underground.

Analysis

As the novel continues, the theme of man against nature truly comes to the fore. Setting out across the underground sea by raft, Otto, Axel, and Hans are beaten back by a storm, and washed back to shore where their raft is run aground and nearly wrecked. Taking shelter, Axel later considers the idea that there may indeed be a limit to what man can do against nature. Otto, however, is undeterred, determined to press on. One failed ocean crossing does not mean that a crossing should not be attempted at all. They have managed to beat back every challenge nature has thrown at them until the storm, but to Otto, this is not defeat. It is merely the cause for regrouping for trying out the next leg of the journey.

What appears to be a setback actually paves the way for further discoveries, as Otto explores inland while the raft is repaired and supplies are gathered up. Here, he makes the most startling discoveries as of yet. Among the jumbles and piles of bones of animals that lived long ago, Otto discovers a fully intact, perfectly-preserved, naturally mummified human corpse. Science has long been seeking such a human specimen, but has never before found one. Otto realizes his place will be secured in history with the discovery of this human being, and is so excited and amazed by the discovery that he imagines himself in a lecture hall, and begins giving a speech to an imaginary audience, which really consists of only Axel.

Interestingly enough, the theme of the fallibility of science also returns during the sea voyage undertaken by Otto, Axel, and Hans. While Axel doubts that they are truly at the



center of the earth, he does know that they are pretty far down. Otto contends they are at the center of the earth, however, and continues to believe that the theory of the center of the earth being molten rock is nonsense. Stepping foot on the island from which scalding water emerges, Axel –who knows his uncle is brilliant, but not always right –recognizes that his uncle’s science is quite fallible here. The scalding, hot water must be coming from somewhere far below, which can only mean there is an even hotter place from where it is emerging. Despite science being fallible, Otto strikes a positive note about science, saying that genuine mistakes lead to genuine knowledge – provided theories are not dogmatically clung to or taken as gospel. All questions must be asked and answered, and here, the dual theme of faith and empiricism again comes to the fore.

Discussion Question 1

What is the one natural force that Otto, Axel, and Hans do not overcome? Why? How do Axel and Otto respond to the setback?

Discussion Question 2

What is the greatest discovery so far made by Otto? How important is this discovery to him? Why?

Discussion Question 3

What explanations are given by Axel for the possibility of light existing inside a sealed, cavernous space? Are any of these explanations correct? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

Declivities, menagerie, undulation, locomotion, mortised, nomenclature, primeval, saurian, monotony, voracious, maelstrom, carapace, preternatural, brevity, victualing, reconnoiter, loquacious, imprecations.



Chapters 40 – 46

Summary

Chapter 40 – Otto and Axel continue to explore, seeing mountains and great forests in the distance. They come into one such ancient forest, full of trees from the tertiary period, long-dead and browned. Suddenly, they are stunned to see living mastodons roaming beneath the forest trees. They continue on, and find an even larger, elephant-like species moving about. They then find a rust-stained tool, not of their own making or bringing. They realize that someone has been there before them. Searching along the shore, they come to discover, in the rock of a cave, the initials of Arne Saknussemm.

Chapter 41 – Axel, as well as Otto, is amazed by the discovery of Saknussemm's initials. Otto adds his own and decides to name the area Cape Saknussemm in honor of Saknussemm. Axel is so thrilled to have discovered proof of Saknussemm's presence that he suddenly takes up the feverish desire to continue on, knowing that others have been there before him. Everything now seems possible to Axel because someone else has done it before. Axel contends that Providence has set them in the right direction by way of the storm. Without it, they would never have discovered Saknussemm's path. Otto, too, believes Providence has had a hand in things. They return to Hans, and bring the raft along the coast to Cape Saknussemm. They then enter the cave into which Saknussemm has carved his initials for the next leg of their journey. However, their trips come to a quick stop, as a massive boulder blocks the tunnel. Axel contends the stone must have fallen some years after Saknussemm's own trip. Axel is determined to find a way through. They decide to blow it up.

Chapter 42 – At six in the morning on Thursday, August 27th, Axel lights the fuse to explode the boulder. He rushes to the raft where his uncle and Hans await. The explosion occurs, but ultimately, unintentionally, opens up a great chasm which begins to suck the water, and the raft, in. The raft is carried along as though it is on a turbulent river, which Axel compares to those of America. Axel believes they are traveling ninety miles an hour. He realizes that most of their supplies have been lost in the chaos. Axel wonders how they will survive when they finally reach the end of their journey, and hunkers down as the last lamp they have goes out.

Chapter 43 – Otto announces, in realization, that they are no longer traveling downward, but upward. They have reached a well, which is now filling up, and the water is carrying them up. Axel imagines being crushed if there is no outlet at the top; Otto calmly tells Axel to relax, for they may still be saved. Otto says they should eat, but Axel reveals their provisions have nearly all been lost. As they rise, they discover the temperature is also increasing, which Axel fears means they will burn to death if they are not crushed or drowned. Otto decides that the three of them will eat what food they have left, for either they are to enjoy one last meal, or they will need their strength when they get to the top. Axel eats, and wonders what will become of him. He thinks of



Konigstrasse and Grauben. Suddenly, the temperature increases dramatically. The rock walls are burning hot, as is the water.

Chapter 44 – Axel notices the compass is spinning wildly, and Otto explains that they are likely now in the column of an active volcano. Otto is calm, contending that their only chance of survival now is to be a part of an eruption. Heat and pressure increase, and fiery materials can be seen on either side of the gallery in which Axel, Otto, and Hans are ascending. There is a temporary calm, which soon gives way to the eruption. The last thing Axel remembers is seeing Hans's face engulfed by flames.

Chapter 45 – When Axel comes to, he is surrounded by Otto and Hans. They have all survived the eruption. They descend the volcano and meet a small, dirty, half-naked child. The child explains they are on the island of Stromboli, off the coast of Italy in the Mediterranean, more than 3,000 miles from Iceland. Otto cannot account for the spinning of the compass, and Axel urges him to simply attempt no explanation. Otto finds this incredible. When the trio arrive in Port San Vincenzo, Hans receives his thirteenth week of pay, and smiling, shakes hands with Axel and Otto.

Chapter 46 – On September 9th, the trio returns to Hamburg, Germany. Martha is amazed to see them, and Grauben and Axel are thrilled to see each other. Grauben hopes Axel will never leave her again, calling him a hero. While many doubt the journey to the center of the earth, the appearance of Hans, as well as reports from Iceland, do convince many others that Axel, Otto, and Hans, did indeed make the journey. Otto becomes a famous man, and lectures on the journey –omitting the compass. Otto also gives Saknussemm's parchment manuscript to the city's archives for safekeeping. The scientific community is abuzz with new theories and ideas based on the journey, but Axel holds true to the idea that the center of the earth is full of fiery material. Sometime later, Hans returns to Iceland, for he is homesick. Axel writes an account of the trip called "Voyage to the Center of the Earth", which sells well and is reprinted in many different languages. The only thing that still bothers Axel, and Otto, is the compass – which has now changed directions to point south. Both men then realize the fireball that landed on the raft in the storm magnetized all the iron on board, ruining the compass. It is merely a prank of electricity. Axel and Grauben later marry and continue to live with Otto, now a world-renowned and world-famous scientist and explorer.

Analysis

In the final chapters of the novel, the themes of journey, man versus nature, and the fallibility of science all come back to the fore. The journey itself has long been completed symbolically, as not only has Axel become a man, but as Otto has come to deeply care about his nephew, and the two have grown closer together as a result. The journey is now completed literally, as Axel, Otto, and Hans all journey home after months away. Not only does Grauben recognize Axel as a man, but she goes so far as to call him a hero –and marries him soon after. As a result of the growth of emotional character of Otto, Axel and Grauben decide they will continue to live with him at the end of the novel.



The theme of man versus nature also ends on a very positive note for man. While Otto, Axel, and Hans have been unable to overcome the challenge of a violent storm, they are not undone by nature. Indeed, they go on to survive an even more violent act of nature –by being ejected from a live volcano, and living. It is the ultimate test of nature, and the ultimate success of man to have survived. As such, credence is loaned to the prevailing nineteenth-century conventional wisdom which was that man could overcome nature in any situation if enough effort and care was applied –along with the resilient human spirit. True, man could be overcome by nature –even killed by nature –but this did not have to be the law of the world.

The fallibility of science as a theme also comes to a close with the end of the novel. Many scientific theories of the day have been disproven according to the expedition set out upon by Axel, Otto, and Hans. For example, the fact that much of the inside of the earth, or the greatest extent of its center, is said to be full of molten hot rock, is demonstrated to be false (though not according to Axel). Likewise, contemporary readers will know that the science upon which the novel itself was based –science generally accepted and believed at the time of the novel’s writing in the 1860s –has been borne out to be false. Among those is the belief that primeval and primitive species were to be found at the deepest recesses of the ocean and the sea, and that there could be an underground world of the kind Verne described, at all. Moreover, the scientific idea that the earth’s center is not composed of molten rock has also been disproved.

Discussion Question 1

How does Grauben respond when Axel returns from his journey? What does she do, and what does she call him? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Of all the things discovered by Axel and Otto throughout the novel, which seems to be the most important to Otto and to Axel? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Axel hold to the idea that the center of the earth is full of molten material? Why does Otto refuse to accept this theory? Who, with the knowledge of contemporary science, proves to be correct?

Vocabulary

Effaced, fortuitous, gneiss, derangement, antipodes, contemptuous, exquisite, verdure, entreaties.



Characters

Axel

Axel Lidenbrock is the main character and narrator of the novel “Journey to the Center of the Earth” by Jules Verne. Axel’s exactly age is never given, but it seems that he is somewhere in his late teens or early twenties. An orphan, he lives with his Uncle Otto. He seeks to follow in his uncle’s footsteps in the study of mineralogy.

Axel is in love with Grauben, the ward of Otto. He hopes to marry her as soon as possible. When Otto discovers the Sahnussemm manuscript in an old book, Axel is made privy to this information. He is made a part of Otto’s expedition to the center of the earth, too.

Axel does not want to go on the trip. He wants to stay behind with Grauben and marry her. Grauben insists on Axel going, however. She believes that the journey will make him a man. Without a choice in the matter, Axel and his uncle set out for Denmark, where they book passage to Iceland.

In Iceland, Axel and Otto seek out Snafell, a dormant volcanic mountain in which Sahnussemm claims have to have descended to the center of the earth. An Icelandic duck hunter named Hans comes to serve as their guide and their muscle during the journey. Throughout the first half of the novel, Axel is a naysayer and skeptic. He is very fearful. At every step of the way, he is hoping for a reason to turn back and go home. Otto drives the three-man group on, descending into the dark tunnels of the cave. Axel eventually becomes lost in the tunnel. Without light, food, or water, he believes he will die. He turns to God in prayer, asking for deliverance. He gains the courage to press on to find his uncle and Hans, ultimately stumbling and falling into his uncle’s arms. Axel then leaves the cavern into which he has fallen, heading into the light of the subterranean world. This journey through darkness and into the light is symbolic of Axel finding God and becoming a man. From this point on Axel will still worry, but he will not be prone to fear-induced paranoia. Instead, he comes to push himself forward on the expedition with feverish anticipation and desire for discovery.

Axel is amazed to see all of the different kinds of rocks, minerals, fossils, and bones that can be found in the subterranean world. Axel is further stunned when he and Otto come across herds of mastodons roaming beneath the shade of ancient forests. When Axel and Otto discover the continued route of Sahnussemm in the subterranean world, they are dismayed to see that the tunnel through which Sahnussemm traveled is blocked. Axel, seized with the desire to continue exploring, urges that the blockage be blown up. This, in turn, leads to Axel, Otto, and Hans being sucked into an active volcano through the chasm that has been opened up. They are ejected through the volcano when it erupts. Miraculously, they survive and surface in Italy. When Axel returns to Hamburg, his uncle is celebrated, and Axel is called a hero by Grauben. Axel had left his home as



a boy. He returns as a man. Grauben hopes he will never leave her again, and the two end up getting married. They decide to stay on with Otto in Hamburg.

Otto Lidenbrock

Otto Lidenbrock is a professor of mineralogy at Johannaem in Hamburg, Germany. At fifty, he is well-respected and considered a savant, for he is knowledgeable in many areas beside mineralogy. When Otto comes across the Saknussem manuscript in an old book he purchases from a shop in town, he is determined to follow the clues Saknussem left behind. The clues lead to a world within the world—a world at the center of the earth. Though Otto is a scientist and an extreme empiricist, he is critical of science. He believes that theories prevent man from making further discoveries. His nephew Axel contends that science generally supports the theory that the center of the earth is burning hot. Otto dismisses the theory because no one has been to the center of the earth to see it. Extremely rational and intelligent, Otto is often oblivious to sentimental things that go on around him. As such, he learns relatively late and cares little that Axel and Grauben have fallen in love.

Otto volunteers Axel to come along on his expedition, swearing him to secrecy. He and Axel travel to Denmark and then to Iceland to reach the summit of the volcanic mountain Snafell, from which they will descend into the subterranean world with their hired guide, Hans. It is during this journey that Otto becomes a more three-dimensional character, demonstrating great care and concern for Axel. He comes to view Axel as more than an assistant in research and a member of the expedition. He realizes that he is a human being and family member. Indeed, he even goes so far as to hug Axel during the expedition.

However, Otto's feverish desire to explore never slows. He always wants to see what else there is to discover, like Alexander the Great. Otto's greatest discovery in the subterranean world comes not from proving the existence of an underworld, but from finding a naturally-preserved human body. He imagines himself lecturing about the body upon his return home. When Otto and his company do return home, it is to great fanfare. While many believe Otto's stories of a subterranean world, others do not. Nevertheless, Otto becomes even more respected and celebrated. He donates the Saknussem manuscript to the town archives and continues to work and study. After Axel and Grauben marry, they continue living with Otto.

Hans Bjilke

Hans Bjilke is an Icelandic eider-duck down hunter, who lives between Snafell and Reykjavik. Hans makes his living by collecting eider down to sell, for eider down is prized for its softness. Hans is a strong, silent person given to few displays of emotion. He believes in fate.

Hans is hired by Otto to accompany the expedition to the center of the earth. Without Hans, the expedition would not have been possible. At various stages, his strength,



resolve, and resourcefulness come in handy. For example, he rescues Axel from the beached raft during the storm in the subterranean world, risking his own life in the process. When the expedition is out of water and the three stand to die because of dehydration, Hans hacks through the tunnel walls with a pickaxe to reach an underground river of water. When the expedition ends, Hans returns with Otto and Axel to Hamburg and stays on for a while, celebrated for his part in the expedition. He is walking proof that the expedition happened, for no one can say otherwise why an Icelandic hunter has traveled with a German scientist and his nephew from Italy to Hamburg. Ultimately, Hans becomes homesick. He goes home to Iceland. In a rare display of emotion for Hans, he shakes hands with Otto and Axel before he leaves. He even smiles.

Grauben

Grauben is a beautiful, blonde-haired and blue-eyed seventeen year-old girl who is the ward of Otto Lidenbrock and the betrothed of Axel. She loves Axel dearly, but she urges him to go on Otto's expedition to Iceland so that he may come back a man. She thinks that there is still too much boyishness in Axel. When Axel returns, Grauben calls him a hero. Soon after his return, she marries him.

Arne Saknussemm

Arne Saknussemm is a sixteenth-century Icelandic alchemist and savant who is well-respected and highly regarded by Otto Lidenbrock. Having discovered a secret passage to a subterranean world beneath Iceland, and later persecuted for heresy by Iceland's church, Saknussemm encodes his underworld discovery in Runic symbols on a parchment which is later found by Otto in an old book about the early history of the Norwegian princes of Iceland. In 1573, all of Saknussemm's writings which are still in Iceland are declared heretical. They are burned. The manuscript describing directions to the subterranean world survives outside of Iceland.

Martha

Martha is the elderly housekeeper at the home of Otto Lidenbrock, Axel, and Grauben, at No. 19 Konigstrasse, Hamburg. An amazing cook, she is incredibly patient and kind. She is thrilled to hear about the journey when Otto and Axel return safely

Thomson

Thomson is the curator of the Museum of Northern Antiquities in Copenhagen, Denmark, and a good friend of Christiensen, the Danish ambassador to Germany, who himself is a good friend of Otto. It is through Thomson that Otto gains letters of introduction to the governor of Iceland, mayor of Reykjavik, and suffragan of the bishop, making journeying to Iceland possible and appropriate for a man of Otto's status



Fridrikson

Fridrikson is a professor of natural sciences in Iceland who hosts Otto and Axel at his home during their stay in Reykjavik. It is Fridrikson who reveals the persecution of Saknussem and how all of his works in Iceland were burned in 1573. Fridrikson also arranges an introduction between Otto and Hans, so that Hans might guide their expedition.

Trampe

Trampe is the governor of Iceland. He formally and warmly welcomes Otto and Axel to Iceland, being introduced to Otto and Axel by way of letters of introduction written by his friend, Danish friend, Thomson.

Finsen

Finsen is the mayor of Reykjavik. He formally and warmly welcomes Otto and Axel to Reykjavik after being introduced to Otto and Axel by way of letters of introduction from his Danish friend, Thomson.



Symbols and Symbolism

Quarto Book

A quarto book about the history of the early Norwegian princes of Iceland is discovered by Otto in Hevelin's shop. A quarto book is composed of two large pieces of paper folded into four sections to make eight pages. Otto is thrilled with the book, for it is a new bit of knowledge he can add to his repertoire. He is stunned to discover that embedded within the pages of the quarto is a manuscript from Saknussemm. The manuscript details directions to the center of the earth.

Saknussemm Manuscript

The Saknussemm manuscript is discovered by Otto in a quarto book about the history of the early Norwegian princes of Iceland. The manuscript, written on parchment in Latin using Runic characters by Icelandic scholar Arne Saknussemm, details directions to an underground network of tunnels, leading to a subterranean world. The Saknussemm manuscript escapes burning in Iceland in 1573 and leads Otto and Axel to the subterranean world in 1863. After Otto returns from the expedition, he donates the manuscript to the city archives for safekeeping.

The Valkyria

The Valkyria is a small schooner that brings Otto and Axel from Denmark to Iceland to begin their expedition. The Valkyria's trip is smooth and easy, skirting Scotland and the Faroe Islands on the way to Iceland. During the voyage on the Valyrie, Otto is seasick most of the time, keeping to his cabin. The schooner ultimately docks in the harbor of Reykjavik, Iceland.

Water

Water is an important provision to Otto, Axel, and Hans on their expedition into the subterranean world. It runs short while the three are exploring the dead-end tunnel. The water runs out while they are exploring the other tunnel. Hans manages to save the day by hacking his way through the rock to reach a nearby underground stream of hot, but clear, water. Otto, Axel, and Hans are later amazed to discover a vast ocean of saltwater stretching out before them in the subterranean world. Here, the water becomes the one insurmountable thing faced by the expedition, as a storm on the water blows them back to shore and prevents them from crossing.



Rhumkorff Lamps

Two Rhumkorff lamps are utilized by Otto, Axel, and Hans in their exploration of the subterranean world. Rhumkorff lamps are lanterns which generate electric light by means of by safe combustion of biochromate of potash. These serve to be incredibly useful to the expedition in the dark tunnels approaching the subterranean world. One lamp is accidentally ruined when Axel falls and drops it while separated from Otto and Hans in the tunnels. The second lamp goes out during the storm, while Axel, Otto, and Hans are hunkered down on their raft.

Fossils

Fossils of extinct plants and creatures are rare, prized, and highly in demand by museums, universities, collectors, and scientific organizations in the novel. In the tunnels and subterranean world, thousands of fossils can be found. They are so plentiful that they line the walls of the tunnels themselves. Axel is fascinated.

Bones

Bones of extinct creatures are highly in demand by museums, universities, collectors, and scientific organizations in the novel. In the tunnels and subterranean world, bones and animal debris are so plentiful that they litter the floors of the tunnels and exist in mounds and jumbled piles on the landscape of the subterranean world. This amazes both Axel and Otto and confirms Otto's theory that great chasms in the earth's crust open up, causing fossils and bones to be lost to the depths below, never to be found by man.

Human Corpse

A perfectly-preserved, naturally mummified human corpse is found by Otto and Axel among the piles and jumbles of bones and animal debris. It is Otto's greatest discovery. He is so thrilled by it that he pretends he is giving a lecture about the corpse back in Hamburg. This proves not only the ancient prehistory of man, but also the first fully-formed human skeleton ever found. Even more, the body itself –the skin, tissue, flesh, and hair –are all intact.

Saknussem engraving

Saknussem engravings are found in two places during the expedition by Otto and Axel. These engravings include Skanussem's name and indicate his direction of exploration, confirming that he truly did explore the vast underground world. One engraving is found at the entrance to Snafell, and the other is found in a tunnel blocked



by a boulder. Ultimately, the tunnel leads Axel, Otto, and Hans to be ejected from a volcano.

Raft

A raft is constructed by Hans of petrified wood and driftwood. It is used by Axel, Otto, and Hans in an attempt to traverse the subterranean ocean. The raft and its occupants are caught in a terrible storm. The raft runs aground back where the journey began, the sail and mast being taken away by the wind. When explosives are used to unblock a passageway just offshore, Axel, Otto, and Hans seek shelter on the raft, but are sucked into the chasm which opens up as a result. They are then carried upward on the raft and ejected through a volcano.

Settings

Iceland

Iceland is an island nation in the North Atlantic. It is where Axel and Otto travel to in order to find the underground world written about by native Icelandic scholar Arne Saknusssem. Iceland is the home of Hans and Fridrikson. It is governed by Trampe. It is a nation of ruggedly-independent people, who value education and pride themselves on hard work. Many of Iceland's customs and laws are related throughout the early part of the novel, through the eyes of Axel. For example, Axel learns that Iceland's desire to end leprosy has led to laws banning people with leprosy to marry and have children.

Subterranean World

The subterranean world exists far beneath the earth's surface. It is based on a popular scientific theory of the day which contended that primitive, less-evolved creatures could be found in both the deepest recesses of the ocean and the earth. This proves to be true as Axel, Otto, and Hans discover not only thousands of fossilized remains and bones of various creatures, but actually come into contact with primitive plants, animals, and fish. For example, they find a herd of mastodons grazing beneath an ancient forest. The fish in the sea have no eyes. They discover a plesiosaurus doing battle with an ichthyosaurus in the open water and discover the naturally-mummified corpse of a modern man from hundreds of thousands of years ago. They discover gigantic early plants and forty to fifty-foot tall mushrooms. They learn that the underground world has its own, vast ocean, naturally-occurring electric light source, and atmosphere, complete with clouds and storms.

Tunnels and Caverns

Axel, Otto, and Hans descend deeper and deeper into the earth beneath Snafell and Iceland by using numerous tunnels and periodic caverns. By their very nature, tunnels are intended to ease journeys. They are designed to lead from one place to another. The final tunnel and the final cavern serve to be highly symbolic for Axel. He becomes lost in the dark of the tunnel, separated from Otto and Hans. In the darkness, he prays to God for deliverance and summons the courage to continue on, ultimately falling and finding Otto and Hans in the final cavern of the tunnel network. The cavern itself leads to the underground world, from the darkened tunnels to the light of the subterranean landscape. The journey through the tunnels and caverns symbolizes Axel's journey from boyhood to manhood. His departure from the darkness of the cave into the light of the world symbolizes finding God as he leaves his boyhood behind.



Snafell

Snafell is a 5,000-foot high extinct volcano. It has two peaks and a double cone. The crater has three chimney-like structures, through which descent into the volcano can be gained when the shadow from one of Snafell's two peaks, Scartaris, touches it at the end of June in sunlight. Snafell is also host to a granite rock which bears the name of Saknussem, indicating the man's presence there centuries before.

Hamburg

Hamburg is a major city in Germany. It has a strong academic community. Hamburg is the home of Otto, Grauben, Axel, and Martha. It is the location of Johannaem University where Otto works. It is in Hamburg that Hevelin's shop is found, and it is in Hevelin's shop that Otto finds the Saknussem manuscript tucked away in the pages of an old quarto. Hamburg thus becomes the launching point of the journey that Axel and Otto undertake, and it becomes their point of return at the conclusion of their journey. It is in Hamburg that Otto lectures about his trip and his discoveries. It is also in Hamburg that Axel and Grauben are married and settle down.



Themes and Motifs

Journey and Discovery

Journey and discovery form an important theme in the novel “Journey to the Center of the Earth” by Jules Verne. At the time that Verne was writing, great scientific discoveries were being made. New theories were being advanced or challenged –with many of them being noted in the novel. For example, the theory that the center of the earth is not actually composed of magma is challenged by the very idea of a journey to the center of the earth (though, as it is later revealed, the journey does not actually reach the center of the earth, leaving the theory up in the air). The nineteenth century, as a whole, saw not only new scientific discoveries and theories, but remarkable journeys as well – journeys intended to discover new places, peoples, and things, from the Earth’s North and South Poles to the American West to the scattered islands of the Pacific. By reaching out to the corners of the globe and by digging down into the earth, people hoped to increase human knowledge, advance science, and increase national pride and power, as well as personal fame. As a scholar with an insatiable desire to know more, Otto Lidenbrock was motivated by these ideas to begin his journey.

The actual journey in the novel appears in both a figurative and a literal form, with both being essential to the plot. The literal journey is the physical journey itself, as Axel and Otto depart Hamburg for Copenhagen, from which they travel to Iceland. Iceland, though considered a part of Europe, is still a fascinating place for Jules Verne, who fills in passages of the early journey with notes, asides, and facts about the Icelandic people –from their love of learning to their rugged independent nature, to their laws –such as forbidding lepers to marry and reproduce. The physical journey brings Axel and Otto, along with Hans, into the mouth of a dormant volcano, and down into the earth itself. Like Alexander the Great, nothing holds Otto back. Each step forward is an advancement in science, in knowledge, and in national and personal prestige. He always wants to push on to see what else there is to discover. In the world of the deep underground, the trio discovers a vast subterranean world full of plants, fish, and animals, all which are thought to have been extinct.

The discovery of primitive creatures in the novel references a popular scientific theory of the day, wherein it was believed that primitive creatures long thought to have become extinct could still be found in recessed places of the world, such as in the greatest depths of the ocean and the deepest caves and tunnels. The closer to the present-day surface of the earth the creature was –fossilized or alive –would explain its degree of evolutionary process. This is true in the novel; for deep in the earth, mastodons and eyeless fish are discovered by Axel, Otto, and Hans. As it came to be in real life, the theory of primitive creatures was later disproved by exploration of the deepest parts of the ocean.

The figurative idea of journey is a metaphor. The characters embark on a physical journey that will ultimately affect their life journeys. Such a journey begins when



Grauben gives her blessings to Axel for the expedition. She encourages him to go so that he will become a man. As a man, he will marry her upon his return. Grauben, at seventeen years of age desires to marry a man, not the boy which she sees in Axel before the journey. Axel grudgingly goes, often thinking about Grauben and looking forward to returning and marrying her.

Throughout much of the journey, Axel drags his feet, hoping the expedition will be called off. He likewise often gives into fear and worry, as well as fits of hopelessness –not very manly actions. However, while descending in the tunnels, Axel becomes lost in the dark, and he prays to God. Axel summons the courage to continue on and find his uncle and Hans, which he inadvertently does by tripping, falling, and knocking himself out. When he comes to, he is in a cave with Otto and Axel. When he leaves the cave for the light of the underground world, he is no longer a boy, but a man. After this, Axel becomes much more inclined to explore and discover, even pushing along the journey in some places. While he still worries and fears as normal men do, he is no longer given to frightened outbursts.

Otto and Hans also undergo metaphorical journeys, though their journeys are not as dramatic as Axel's. When the novel begins, Axel is self-absorbed and demanding. He treats Axel as a mere student rather than family. As things get rough for Axel in the novel, Otto emerges as a surrogate father, who comforts, cares for, and even hugs Axel, growing closer to him throughout the novel. Hans, always quiet and given to fate, comes to like and admire both Axel and Otto to the point of saving their lives numerous times (such as when the raft washes ashore in the storm). At the end of the novel, he even smiles and shakes hands with them.

Faith and Empiricism

Faith and empiricism form an important theme in the novel "Journey to the Center of the Earth" by Jules Verne. Empiricism is a form of thought, both philosophical and scientific, which demands hard, physical evidence or personal, experiential knowledge of a subject, topic, issue, or object to know something about it. Faith itself takes two forms: religious faith and instinctive faith –both of which are positions of belief, sometimes without hard evidence. Often in history and in the contemporary world, faith and empiricism (like religion and science) have been opposed to one another, but they are not necessarily mutually exclusive things. In the novel, faith and empiricism work hand in hand, while empiricism challenges convention and science alone (also see the theme "Fallibility of Science").

Religious faith in the novel appears only halfway through, as times get difficult, and Axel turns to God for deliverance and guidance. Axel admits to having drifted from God in recent years, and he wonders if this is enough to cause God to refuse to hear his prayers. In each instance that Axel prays to God, however, Axel is saved in some way, shape, or form –such as when he prays to God that he will have the strength for the return journey. Additionally, religious faith serves to be the foundation of Axel becoming a man. Lost and disoriented in the darkened tunnels, Axel can only pray to God for



salvation, after which he gains courage, hears the voices of his uncle and Hans, and then falls down to where they are. From there, in the darkness of the cave, Axel comes into the light of the underground world –a symbolic movement not only for finding the light (God) in the darkness (the evil and struggles of the world), but symbolic of the passage from boyhood (the cave) to manhood (the experience of the world). At various points in the novel, even the great scientist, Otto, who is obsessed with empirical evidence, believes that God has had a hand in their journey, delivering them to the necessary places through the use of incidents like the storm.

Instinctive faith also appears frequently throughout the novel, most notably in the form of Otto. When Otto first discovers Saksussemm's ancient manuscript, he is at once convinced there is a secret contained within –without any real knowledge to back him up. Axel plays the skeptic, thinking the entire thing may be a hoax. Yet, Otto's instinctive faith is so strong that he not only cracks the code, but sets out to see what Saksussemm has very vaguely written about –without having any hard evidence to support the idea other than the story. Even science in general opposes the idea that an underground world can exist and that anything can be at the center of the earth. Otto bucks scientific convention for instinctive faith, willing to journey and discover the truth for himself –which in turn gives way to an extreme form of empiricism. For example, Otto questions how scientists can truly know the center of the earth is composed of liquid hot magma, if they themselves have never actually been there to see it – a lack of firsthand experiential knowledge or rock-hard evidence. Otto questions how Axel can be so skeptical as well, for he has never been to the center of the earth, either. Otto goes on to explain that successive scientific theories often overturn previous theories. Many times scientific theories hold people back from daring to explore, discover, and learn new things. Otto's primary specialty as a scientist is telling. He is a mineralogist whose work is with rocks. This fact is symbolic of his demand for "rock hard evidence."

During the course of the novel, faith and empiricism never present a challenge to each other. Instead, they work in tandem and are mutually supportive of one another. Otto's faith that there is an underground world is ultimately borne out by empirical evidence to that extent. His belief –without any empirical evidence to the contrary originally –that great chasms open up in the earth, causing evidence to disappear, which are then unable to be found by man in the world above –is borne out by the collection of animal and human skeletons that have fallen from above, inland from Cap Saksussemm. Axel, though having grown distant from God in the past, never for a second doubts the existence of God, His intervention in the world, or the account of Biblical creation, as Axel is able to see, through the layers of rock around him, the history of the world back to creation. There is never any doubt in Axel's mind that God set creation in the world in motion and science is a way of understanding that world.

Fallibility of Science

The fallibility of science forms an important theme in the novel "Journey to the Center of the Earth" by Jules Verne. While Verne exhibits great respect for science in his writing, going so far as to make Otto a scientist and Axel an aspiring scientist, Verne is also



quick to remind readers that science is not necessarily correct in its beliefs. In many instances, science may be flat-out wrong. Indeed, contemporary scientific knowledge has put to rest many of the popular scientific theories of Verne's day, which in turn formed important components of the novel.

When the novel begins, Otto proposes a journey to the center of the earth based on the Saknussem manuscript he discovers in an old book. Axel is immediately a critic of any such proposal, for he argues that the center of the earth is not accessible. It is full of scalding, molten rock. The temperatures at which the earth warms beneath the crust will make even reaching the center of the earth impossible. Otto counters that no one has ever been to the center of the earth to verify this and that the idea the earth's core is composed of magma is merely a theory. He criticizes the reliance of people –and scientists –on scientific theory, saying that it often hampers people. New discoveries are not made in the face of faith-like defenses and unquestioning acceptance of longstanding and generally-accepted scientific theories. The only way to verify or disprove such theories is through personal experiential knowledge and physical evidence –empiricism (see the theme “Faith and Empiricism”). Otto challenges the status quo not only because of the Saknussem manuscript, but he also has faith that the prevailing scientific theories are wrong.

As Otto and Axel journey in the underground world, they make many discoveries. For example, they prove two scientific theories of their day, now known to be false. One such belief is that more primitive lifeforms from earlier ages may still be found alive in the deepest parts of the ocean or in the deepest recesses of the earth. In the subterranean world, they discover blind fish and see plesiosaurs and mastodons, as well as early variations of modern-day plants. Subsequent real-life dredging and exploration of the deepest parts of the ocean revealed that the theory was completely false, though it had long been highly regarded and generally accepted.

Another theory of Jules Verne's day confirmed by Otto and Axel in the novel is the theory of luminescent, electric quality of air or man made light in the subterranean world. It is now known that air cannot produce or sustain sunlight.

Ironically, when Axel and Otto return to Hamburg, Germany, the tables are turned on them. Having, through experience and hard evidence, come to prove and disprove various theories –including confirming the idea of a subterranean world –many people, including many in the scientific community –refuse to believe such science, considering it to be either impossible or fantasy. Here, the progenitors of now disproved scientific theories still cling to the old ideas not out of faith, but either pride, envy, or simple unwillingness to look at the new evidence. As such, they demonstrate the fallibility of science even in that respect.

Prehistoric World

The prehistoric world serves as an important motif in the novel “Journey to the Center of the Earth” by Jules Verne. At the time of Verne's writing in 1864, the scientific world was



making great discoveries, from filling in places on the maps to learning about the past. A huge source of interest to both the scientific community and the public at large was that of the ancient world, in the time before man walked the earth. The discovery of prehistoric human remains, tools, and other artifacts, as well as the discovery of fossils and bones of prehistoric animals proved to be of vast curiosity and intensified study. They found their way into scientific theories of the day. These discoveries and their associated theories served as inspirational foundations in Verne's novel.

One of the reigning scientific theories of the day included the idea that primitive, less-evolved living versions of contemporary creatures could be found in the deepest recesses of the ocean and the earth. This was, in large part, predicated on the fossil record –that more primitive fossilized versions of creatures could be found back through successive ages the deeper down scientists dug. So, too, was the thought for living creatures. It was only natural for Verne to construct a primitive world in a deep recess of the earth for modern man to explore. As such, Verne brought to life a fictionalized version of a kind of world that many at the time believed existed. Verne's novel is not a great stretch of the imagination when considering the science of his times.

The public fascination with scientific discoveries about the prehistoric world can be seen in Verne's subterranean world. Bones and fossils from this time were in high demand from museums, universities, collectors, and scientific organizations. In the novel, Axel and Otto travel through tunnels, the walls of which are covered in thousands upon thousands of fossilized remains of various creatures. Eventually, the tunnel floors themselves become strewn in animal and plant remains in great abundance. The greatest prize for Otto, however, was not the skeletons of animals or the fossilized remains of fish, but the discovery of a full, intact, naturally-preserved human body, a discovery which was desperately sought by science.

With reading being the most versatile form of entertainment of its day, Verne could not let his novel rest with skeletons and fossils. Instead, to whet public appetites and present an idea about what the prehistoric world may have looked like, he resurrects it. Forests of ancient trees and giant mushrooms and plants cover the land, while giant mastodons move beneath them. At sea, primitive fish –creatures without eyes –populate the water, while a massive plesiosaurus does battle with a gigantic ichthyosaurus. Tremendous ocean-borne storms, replete with fireballs, bear down upon Axel, Otto, and Hans. Even their return to the earth's surface comes by way of a volcano, then considered to be relics of the earth's original formation, the experience of which is brought to life through Verne's novel.

Man Against Nature

The theme of man against nature forms an important component in Jules Verne's novel "Journey to the Center of the Earth". At the time of Verne's writing, a spirit of discovery had overtaken Europe, as well as the idea that man was the supreme being on the planet. Presumably, man could conquer anything that stood in his way, from other men to nature itself. These two beliefs often fused in man's pursuit of discovery. However,



men were also quite aware that nature was not something to be taken lightly. Nature could win out in the end against man. Verne's characters contend not only with the nature of the world, but subterranean nature as well, risking their lives on no shortage of occasions in pursuit of discovery.

While the first leg of the journey involves a sailing passage from Denmark to Iceland without incident, the time that Axel, Otto, and Hans spend in Iceland is not without incident. Iceland itself is a nation of people who exist on the edge of the wild, scraping by living off the land as farmers, fisherman, and hunters. They are well-educated, hearty people, who thrive in a difficult environment as they face cold weather, storms, snow, and a difficult landscape. As Axel, Otto, and Hans journey toward Snafell, they are faced with various obstacles, from tidal fjords to scaling a volcanic mountain some five thousand feet high. Near the summit of the volcano, a massive storm of sand, dust, and rock bears down upon them, nearly killing them as they seek shelter in the nick of time on the opposite side of volcano.

The descent into the center of the earth is not without its tremendous difficulties, either. Axel and the others must contend with natural geological features, such as rappelling down a great abyss and surviving for a time in a place with no food or water beyond what they are carrying. As they travel further down through tunnels and caverns, water runs short and thirst sets in. Only Hans manages to save them by hacking through a cavern wall to get to an underground river of water –thus conquering, in this instance, nature. When Axel becomes separated from his uncle and Hans in the pitch black darkness of the tunnel, he believes he may die. He appeals to God and perseveres, managing to survive by falling from a great height, and landing in his uncle's arms. Almost overcome by nature, Axel has survived it.

Even the subterranean world itself has great challenges of nature that Axel, Otto, and Hans must overcome. They must avoid the danger of roaming, prehistoric beasts like mastodons. They must contend with blocked passageways that prevent further discovery. At sea, they must contend with a prehistoric storm which unleashes not only torrents of wind and rain, but thunder, lightning, and fireballs, one of which nearly destroys the raft. They survive being shipwrecked on the shore as the storm still rages by taking shelter in a cave. Ultimately, they even manage to survive being ejected by a volcano, among scaling water, lava, and great rocks. They return victoriously to Hamburg, having made great scientific discoveries and beating back nature itself.

Styles

Point of View

Jules Verne tells his novel “Journey to the Center of the Earth” in the first-person limited-omniscient perspective, from the point of view of main character, Axel. This is done for a number of reasons. The limited-omniscient aspect of the novel allows for suspense, terror, and drama, as the narrator, like the reader, is aware of things only as they occur, or as they happen. The limited-omniscient point of view also allows Verne to insert various phenomena, without giving precise explanations for them. This allows his characters to suggest plausible scientific explanations for them –such as how the subterranean world is lighted by naturally-occurring electricity.

The first-person perspective allows the reader to experience things first-hand on a very intimate level, as if the story is being related by a close friend. The reader is given access to all the fears, concerns, worries, thoughts, and feelings of Axel, which he does not always express vocally to other characters. This allows the reader to personally connect with Axel and experience the things he is experiencing as he experiences them.

Language and Meaning

Jules Verne tells his novel “Journey to the Center of the Earth” in language that was straightforward and common for the 1860s. However, by contemporary standards, the words seem academic and formal. Writing in his time, Verne used language that was easily accessible and casual to the greatest possible extent of people, so they could read and enjoy his work. His use of many scientific ideas and terms, then cutting-edge or generally supported and accepted, are now outdated and disproved. For example, 1860s scientists referred to the ages of the earth geologically, systemically, and historically as epochs. Today, they are known as eras and periods. Many of the theories he references, such as life at the center of the earth, have long since been disproved.

Structure

Jules Verne divides his novel “Journey to the Center of the Earth” in forty-six chronological, linear, numbered chapters. The structure of the novel is standard. This simple and straightforward structure of the novel allows the reader to focus more on the plot which contains, at times, unfamiliar scientific terms and theories. Each chapter deals with a specific set of events or incidents that make up the entire progress of the novel. For example, Chapter 11 features final preparations for the expedition with Hans to Snafell, while Chapter 35, a massive underground storm comes on while Axel, Otto, and Hans are attempting to cross the ocean.



Quotes

What a book! What a book!

-- Otto Lidenbrock (Chapter 2 paragraph 4)

Importance: Having discovered an ancient volume in a shop, Otto is delighted to return home to read it. He loves learning, and the book about the early history of Iceland is of great interest to him in this pursuit. It is from the book that the Saknussemann manuscript will emerge and lead to the journey that will take them to the center of the earth.

Ah! Those tiresome theories! How they hamper us, those poor theories!

-- Otto Lidenbrock (Chapter 6 paragraph 46)

Importance: Otto chastises the scientific community for blind faith in scientific theories that have never been personally verified. He notes that science is fallible. He specifically refers to the theory that the earth's core is molten rock and dismisses it because no one has ever been there to verify it.

The most curious part of Iceland is not what is on the surface, but what is below.

-- Otto Lidenbrock (Chapter 9 paragraph 38)

Importance: Here, Otto makes a statement with double-meaning to Axel. Otto wants to find the hidden world beneath the surface of Iceland. Additionally, Otto challenges Axel to look beyond the surface of assumptions and reigning theories, to dig deeper, and see the root of everything.

This was the last stage of our terrestrial journey. Hans had proved himself and intelligent guide, and it was a comfort to think he was not going to leave us here.

-- Axel (Chapter 14 paragraph 6)

Importance: Axel, who is more afraid than anything else of the journey ahead, takes comfort in the fact that Hans will be accompanying them down into the bowels of the earth. Axel has no clue just how prophetic this statement will be, for Hans will come to save their lives on numerous occasions throughout the remainder of the novel.

The real journey now commenced.

-- Axel (Chapter 17 paragraph 1)

Importance: Having descended into the very heart of the dormant volcano, the trio makes preparations to move into a dark passageway. It is at that point that Axel knows the real journey is beginning, for everything up until that point was merely in arriving at their present location –the starting point. Axel's journey will not only be one of physical travel, but of passage from boyhood to manhood by the time he is done with the tunnels.



The very calm has something terrifying about it.
-- Axel (Chapter 18 paragraph 3)

Importance: Axel, ever fearful and worried, is not comforted by the quiet the way that Otto and Hans are vastly enjoying it. To Axel, the quiet is like the calm before a storm. Axel's fears are well-grounded and prove to be an omen in and of themselves.

I must own that up till now things had not gone so very badly with us, and I should have been graceless to complain.
-- Axel (Chapter 26 paragraph 1)

Importance: In a rare moment of self-reflection, Axel reveals that things have not been as terrible as he imagined them to be. However, his words serve as an ill-omen, for he is about to face one of his greatest challenges yet, and his greatest personal challenge of all, as he becomes lost in the tunnels.

I cannot describe my despair. No human tongue could tell what I felt. I was buried alive, with the prospect before me of dying of cold and hunger.
-- Axel (Chapter 27 paragraph 1)

Importance: Here, Axel is lost in the tunnels. Having complained, fretted, and feared incessantly on the journey thus far, Axel now has real reason to despair. He is lost, in the dark, in a vast underground cave. He cannot find his uncle and Hans, and believes he may well die. It is from this nadir that he will seek out God, summon courage, and continue on, beginning the transition from boy to man.

It is in the natural order of things.
-- Otto Lidenbrock (Chapter 31 paragraph 12)

Importance: Axel is amazed by the subterranean sea, the tides, the light, and the world around him. Otto takes a much more reserved approach, telling Otto that it is nothing to be amazed at. Not only did Otto expect to find all these things, but they are all simply natural to the earth.

Science, my boy, is made up of mistakes; but of mistakes which lead to the discovery of truth.
-- Otto Lidenbrock (Chapter 31 paragraph 32)

Importance: Once again citing the fallibility of science, Otto contends that the mistakes science makes are not always bad. These mistakes always lead to greater discoveries and truths, if pursued honestly with the goal of truth. Such a scientific mistake in the novel has been the idea that the center of the earth is actually composed of liquid hot magma or molten material, whereas instead it is a vast network of living and fossilized fragments of earth's history. Otto, Axel, and Hans, are now correcting the mistake and learning many new things.



A fire burned in my breast. I forgot everything, the dangers of the voyage and the perils of the return. What another had done, I would dare, and nothing appeared to me impossible.

-- Axel (Chapter 41 paragraph 3)

Importance: Axel, now a man, realizes that Saksussemm had been in the underground world before them. He is suddenly struck by the fever of exploration, discovery, and progress. He becomes the driving force of the expedition, wanting to continue on to see what else can be found, exceeding even his uncle's eagerness for exploration. Once fearful, Axel is now audacious and undaunted.

The return of Professor Lidenbrock, I need not say, made a sensation in Hamburg.

-- Axel (Chapter 46 paragraph 7)

Importance: After being away for several months without public notice, Otto makes waves when he returns. What causes the most sensation is the tale he has to tell. It is the tale of journeying to the center of the earth. Some believe Otto; others do not. Nevertheless, Otto comes to enjoy a tremendous boost in popularity and respect on the whole. The popularity and respect extend to Axel and Hans. Otto's scientific discoveries benefit the scientific community at large.