

# **The Sea-Wolf Study Guide**

## **The Sea-Wolf by Jack London**

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# Plot Summary

The *Sea-Wolf* is Jack London's journey deep into the heart of darkness and madness that each person carries within themselves. It is the story of a man whose struggles with good and evil result in his demoralization, disintegration, and death. Set in the Pacific Ocean, the book reveals how raw nature can cause a human being to lose their grip on reality.

The story revolves around Humphrey Van Weyden, an upper middle class youth who seeks "adventures" and "experiences" as seasoning for the writer he hopes to become. His foil is the sea captain Wolf Larsen—a murderer, narcissist, bully, and madman. In the midst of this heavily testosterone-flavored narrative is Maud Brewster, a well-mannered young lady who becomes romantically engaged with Van Weyden and thereby rouses the somnolent beast within Larsen. Van Weyden and Maud overcome the multiple obstacles and threats posed by Wolf Larsen. It is the sea-crazed Dane who succumbs to his own evil nature.

The story is laced with a rich vocabulary of nautical terms and sailor's language—one of the many gifts London brings to these pages. The author is content to lay out the story, plain and simple, and let the reader draw any conclusions, moral or otherwise. To his credit, London avoids the moralizing that sometimes crippled fiction of this era. The "aha" moments flow organically from the story and thus become the reader's and not the author's.

The *Sea-Wolf* puts to rest the notion that Jack London was nothing more than a hyper-masculine writer who loved tales of blood and brutality in the frozen North. He has been seen as a progenitor to the prose of Ernest Hemingway, and there is some truth in that comparison. Unlike Hemingway, however, London in *The Sea-Wolf* portrays complex characters in all their shades of humanity with a focus more on the human heart than on the human body.

Ultimately, all the characters undergo some kind of transmutation through the process of working aboard the ship and struggling for their survival against the sea, against Wolf Larsen and against each other. The Ghost becomes a metaphor for our passage through life with our fellow humans.



# Chapters 1-7

## Summary

Humphrey Van Weyden boards a new ferry in Sausalito, California to go to San Francisco to visit an old friend. In dense fog, the ferry collides with another steamboat, keels over and sinks to the endless shrieks and screams of women passengers. In the ice-cold waters of San Francisco Bay, Van Weyden bobs to the surface in a life preserver and soon passes out from the shock and cold water. When he regains consciousness, he is dragged onto a lifeboat rowed by an old salt who carries him to a commercial seal hunting ship, the Ghost. As Van Weyden is transferred to the other ship, he loses consciousness again.

When he regains consciousness, Van Weyden is being rubbed vigorously by a large, muscular Swede called Yonson. His efforts are curtailed by the sound of a Cockney voice belonging to Thomas Mugridge, otherwise known as "Cooky." Van Weyden notices a stir on the main deck where he finds "the old man," Wolf Larsen, pacing furiously about the body of a large man resting on a hatch cover while a crew member splashes his face with cold sea water. The very strong and muscular captain bursts suddenly into a rage, howling against the body of his deceased first mate. Larsen is angered because the mate returned to the ship after a debauched night of shore leave and died, intoxicated, aboard the ship—leaving the Ghost short a crew member. His rage and strength send shivers down Van Weyden's spine.

Wolf Larsen asks his crew whether anyone has a Bible or prayer book to conduct a burial at sea for the mate. No one can find one, but Larsen summons the cabin boy, 16-year-old George Leach, and tells him he's "promoted" to boat-puller. Leach protests that he was hired as cabin boy, and doesn't want to be a boat-puller. His defiance triggers Wolf Larsen who leaps six feet through the air and lands a punch in the boy's stomach. Leach lies writhing in agony on the deck near the body of the first mate. Meanwhile, Van Weyden offers Larsen \$1,000 in cash to put him ashore in San Francisco. A schooner bound for San Francisco passes the Ghost but Larsen can't signal because he says he's lost his ship's signal book. The crew carry the corpse to the side of the boat and place it upon canvas stretched between smaller lifeboats, feet facing the water. Unceremoniously, the corpse is lifted at one end and it slides "like a dog flung overside" to its watery grave. Larsen immediately begins barking orders at the crew.

Humphrey is assigned to the galley to assist Mugridge in preparing and serving meals. Since Humphrey has been given the lowly rank of cabin boy, the Cockney assumes a condescending attitude and hurls imprecations at him. The cook sends Humphrey off to the cabin with a huge pot of tea in preparation for supper, but he is smacked by a huge storm wave that knocks him off his feet. He suffers a painful knee injury. Mugridge doesn't relent because of his injury, saying "You've 'urt yer pore little leg, pore little mamma's darlin'." Humphrey coddles a deep and abiding hatred for the cook as much as he coddles his painful knee that looks as if the patella has been turned on its side.



Wolf Larsen tells Humphrey to continue with his duties, even if he is lame, because it will help him to get his "sea legs."

When he spends his first night in "hunters" quarters, Humphrey finds that the four seal killers remain stoic in the face of pain. They are always ready for a fight. Van Weyden looks at his purse and finds it missing \$185 in gold and paper. He asks Cooky about it, and the Cockney raises his fists, vehemently denying that he is a thief.

Rather than try to fight Mugridge, Van Weyden flees. Promising not to attack him, the cook convinces him to return. After clearing away the breakfast dishes and washing them, Van Weyden goes above deck to empty the ashes from the oven. However, he throws the ashes on the windward side of the ship and they come flying back to cover Wolf Larsen, another crewman and himself. Larsen kicks him mightily; then, he walks off with the crewman, continuing their conversation nonchalantly. Van Weyden is once more doubled over with pain. When he cleans Larsen's stateroom, Humphrey notices a huge collection of books on everything from astronomy to Charles Darwin. Larsen returns and they get into a religious/philosophical conversation about the soul. Larsen says life is "a mess" of eating, moving, dying that is essentially absurd. Van Weyden tells Larsen he's been robbed. Cooky Larsen answers with the equivalent of "so what?"

Van Weyden becomes friendly with a crewman named Louis, a good-natured Irishman from Nova Scotia. Louis calls Wolf Larsen an inhuman "devil," without a heart, and he calls the seal hunters "wicked boys" with back hearts who can kill with no compunctions. He finds the chummy relationship between Larsen and Cooky "unendurable" because it gives Cooky license to demand that Van Weyden refer to him as "sir." His hands become chaffed and blackened by his galley work. The constant back and forth of his job prevents his knee from healing and makes it even more painful. Van Weyden objects to Larsen's brutal treatment of the crewmen, but Larsen says it's merely part of the struggle for survival outlined by Darwin. Van Weyden asks the captain whether he values life—someone else's life. Larsen replies that the only value life has is whatever value it assigns itself.

## Analysis

Van Weyden gets jarred out of his fantasy about sea cruises when he encounters the wrath of Cooky, and even more so when he witnesses the sea burial of a rowdy crewman who killed himself with alcohol poisoning. He also becomes a kidnap victim as Wolf Larsen comes up with a ruse to avoid taking Van Weyden to shore, as he requests. In the galley, Van Weyden works his hands to a bloody mess while enduring the abuse of Cooky. His boss forces him to fork over the \$185 in his pockets for safekeeping, then steals his money. At the same time, Van Weyden discovers himself in conversations with the captain on such subjects as evolution and astronomy. Larsen espouses a nihilistic philosophy of life that seems to suit his psychopathic personality. Larsen is a killer with a philosophical bent and a brutal taskmaster who reads poetry. He is an enigma.



## Discussion Question 1

Does Van Weyden suffer from a loss of memory because of a concussion caused by the collision of the Martinez with another ship?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Wolf Larsen seem to show a special interest and fondness for Humphrey Van Weyden?

## Discussion Question 3

Does Van Weyden believe Larsen's statement about losing his signaling book?

## Vocabulary

Incessantly, exaltation, cholera, Leviathan, buoyancy, primordial, sidereal, effeminate, vouchsafe, servility, amidships, vernacular, blasphemy, palaver, protean, metamorphose, ominous, windward, steerage, trepidation, stoical, founder, submissively, halyard, altercation, axiomatic, parsimonious, bowsprit, effervescence.



# Chapters 8-15

## Summary

Wolf Larsen and Van Weyden become engaged in a philosophical conversation after Humphrey reads him the poem, "Caliban Upon Setepos" by Robert Browning. Larsen calls for a card game known as Nap, which he plays with the seal hunters and Thomas Mugridge, the Cockney cook. Mugridge has been polishing his apple with Larsen and has fallen under the delusion that he's become close to this feral creature. Cooky bets all of his money—including \$185 belonging to Van Weyden—and loses it all to Larsen. Humphrey asks Larsen whether he has any compunctions about taking all of Cooky's money, and the captain answers no. Larsen then barks orders at Cooky to prepare dinner for himself, the hunters, and Van Weyden. Cooky is to wait on them and clean the dishes afterwards—which adds insult to injury. Mugridge shows his pain by shuffling listlessly back and forth, then fuming and blustering with rage.

For three days Van Weyden enjoys his status as royalty at Wolf Larsen's table, as they continue their drinking and discussions. Van Weyden dares to venture a description and analysis of Larsen's character—the kind of rough-edged scalpel approach that Larsen himself often uses on crewmen. With a roar, Larsen leaps upon Van Weyden, seizes his biceps in one hand, and squeezes so hard that Humphrey faints. It takes weeks for the arm to become functional again. Later, Larsen sees Van Weyden peeling potatoes in the galley. He approaches and takes a potato in one hand. He squeezes the raw potato until it oozes through his fingers. In anger, Mugridge seeks revenge on Van Weyden for the three days he had to serve him. They exchange some heated words. Cooky sharpens his galley knife in preparation for an attack on Van Weyden, but cabin boy George Leach shows up. Leach is one of the men told by Larsen to dump sea water on the drunken cook. Seeing Leach, Cooky lunges with the knife and cuts a swath down his right arm. As the blood pours forth, Leach tells Cooky that he will exact revenge for the slashing. Van Weyden finds a small dagger and carries it whenever he's near Cooky.

As cabin boy, Van Weyden is sorting through Wolf Larsen's cabin and putting things in order when the captain summons him to look at the device he has made to enable night navigation when there is only a star or two visible at sea. Larsen is coming off a three-day migraine attack and seems restored to good spirits. Van Weyden studies Wolf Larsen closely, admiringly. Van Weyden asks him why, with his manifold gifts, he has never risen above captain of a sealing ship. Larsen replies that his life is like the parable of the seed that is thrown into a hot, arid place. Instead of germinating, the seed withers and dies. Larsen guesses that the so-called great men of history merely knew how to take advantage of opportunities. He tells Van Weyden that his brother, Death Larsen, is captain of a steamship called the Macedonia and that they may encounter him along the coast of Japan.



Discontent among the men aboard the Ghost—a "veritable hell-ship," as Van Weyden calls it—grows. They begin to separate into two groups and threaten a bloody shootout. Wolf Larsen promises the crew that he will kill all the survivors of such a conflagration. He's counting on his crew to perform their duties. He promises that there will be a wonderful celebration at the end of their voyage if the men stay cool. Mugridge ("Cooky") remains subservient to Van Weyden, although Humphrey suspects he's just waiting for the right moment to jump him and seek revenge for grievances, real or imagined. Wolf Larsen, in a strangely philosophical frame of mind, reads a portion of Ecclesiastes to Van Weyden: "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead. For the living know that they shall die, but the dead know not anything." Larsen tells Van Weyden that his struggle with Cooky over the kitchen knife proves his will to live, but he also points out that Humphrey is afraid of Cooky and of himself, the Sea Wolf. Their conversation continues well into the night; Van Weyden describes Larsen as a "monster."

Tensions between Larsen and the crew cause fights among the men. Larsen summons Van Weyden and Johnson to his cabin. When Larsen asks Johnson if he knows why he was summoned, he replies that it's because the captain "has it in for me" and doesn't like him because he's "too much of a man." Johnson is discontented because he purchased a pair of oilskins from the ship's supply chest and found them to be of inferior quality. Larsen asks Van Weyden what he thinks of Johnson. He replies that he is a better man than Larsen. Johnson has dreams, ideals, nobility, and manhood. "I am going to show you how fares nobility," Larsen says. He then leaps nine feet from his chair and lands with a ferocious assault upon Johnson. Crippled with pain, Johnson drags himself above deck and encounters crewman Leach, who tends to his injuries and comforts him. When Larsen emerges, Leach curses him and calls him "you coward, you murderer, you pig." Leach launches into a diabolical tirade against Larsen and begins foaming at the mouth. Van Weyden and the crew watch open-mouthed at the youth's audacity, but Larsen does not retaliate. Cooky makes fun of Leach and his anger. Leach then assaults the Cockney with a vengeance. More fights break out among other men. It becomes apparent to Humphrey that these fights are fueled by anger against Larsen.

Cooky awakens in pain from a beating by Wolf Larsen. As the ship lurches, he tries to steady himself by grabbing an iron railing. His hand slips and goes across the superheated griddle. He collapses into a whimpering heap of self-pity. Larsen shows up and, nevertheless, commands him back to work. Cooky moans and groans, protesting his miserable fate for about an hour, then finally relents. Larsen is bedridden for two days with a migraine. His own suffering apparently gives him no compassion for others in pain. Van Weyden muses on the fact that the men aboard the Ghost are hyper-masculine, as if they had never been exposed to the civilizing influence of women. He feels grateful for his mother and sisters, who put his life into sweet and caring disarray. The crewmen are "a company of celibates, grinding harshly against one another and growing daily more calloused from the grinding." Wolf Larsen decides to do an inspection of the men's quarters. As he approaches, many of the men slither into their bunk beds and pretend they're asleep. As he rips the covers off Johnson, Leach is





offended and roars at Larsen. They get into a shouting match that soon turns violent. Van Weyden can hear the sounds of combat in the darkness.

## Analysis

Wolf Larsen becomes the predatory animal for which he's named, tracking and attacking his crewmen at will. Larsen even intimidates the large, lumbering Johnson—a Scandinavian slow to anger. His ferocious physical attacks on Johnson, Mugridge (Cooky) and others create a climate of fear and hostility that divides the men against each other. Some, like Cooky, nurse their wounds and harbor a burning resentment. Others, like Leach, take immediate offense and tell Larsen to his face that he is a beast, a perverted man who gains pleasure from abusing those who are subordinate to him. Van Weyden, while despising Larsen as much as the crewmen, is puzzled that he is able to maintain a somewhat civilized relationship with this feral creature by discussing books and ideas. Wolf Larsen suffers from the violence by getting disabling migraine headaches.

The dualities of Larsen's nature may indeed be attributable to some form of brain cancer or lesion, as Larsen later speculates. If that's the case, Larsen is to be pitied as much as his crewmen for a medical condition little understood and almost never treated at the time of this novel. If one were to juxtapose today's labor laws—especially Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations—with the kind of treatment administered by Larsen, the situation would seem ludicrous. Another way to view Larsen's behavior is to see it as a kind of warm-up for the slaughter of innocent sea creatures that is their business. A man of some learning and a thinking man, such as Larsen, may need to work himself into a state of bloodthirstiness to be able to kill and butcher dozens of seals. His physical violence may also be a means of arousing anger in the men so they, too, feel the need to kill in retaliation for their mistreatment.

## Discussion Question 1

How would you characterize the relationship between Wolf Larsen and Thomas (Cooky) Mugridge?

## Discussion Question 2

How does Van Weyden first react when immersed in the hyper-masculine environment aboard the Ghost?

## Discussion Question 3

What kind of relationship does Wolf Larsen have with his brother, Death Larsen?



## Vocabulary

Anachronism, virility, vivisectionist, vagaries, blithering maudlin, altruistic, quizzical, writhe, ostentation, yokel, swab, plaint, inveterate, largesse, fo'c'sle, spritsails, quatrain, complacent, refute, consequent, invective, drub, grovel, superfluous, binnacle, helmsman, assailant, pugnacious.



# Chapter 16-21

## Summary

Wolf Larsen promotes Van Weyden to the rank of mate, which proves as amusing to him as to the other sailors who are aware that he is still a landlubber. But, with the continued blessings of Larsen who instructs the crew to call him "Mister Van Weyden," he picks up skills in navigation and executing orders from the captain. Larsen calls him "Hump" informally when other crewmen aren't about. He assures him that by the end of the voyage Van Weyden will be able to hire aboard any schooner as mate. Humphrey is mostly grateful that in his new position he doesn't have to wash dishes any more. But, he comes to see this period as a mere interlude between longer bouts of misery. He understands why the crew members believe the Ghost to be "a hell-ship of the worst description." The men quarrel, grumble, and are always nursing some kind of injury—physical or mental—meted out by Larsen. The only exception is Leach, whose beastly fighting spirit equips him to survive the abuse of the captain. For Wolf Larsen's part, he tells Van Weyden that he enjoys putting Leach on the homicidal edge because it adds zest to life. Larsen tells Cooky that he'll kill him before the expedition is finished. He predicts that Johnson will throw himself overboard because of his constant harassment.

The Ghost sails up the coast of Japan to the sealing grounds, where the crew proceeds to capture, kill, and skin seals in what Van Weyden calls "wanton slaughter, and all for woman's sake." He finds the process repulsive, and the men take to calling him "sissy." Van Weyden hopes to do something to demonstrate to Larsen that he is as strong and manly a figure as the captain. He gets a chance when the ship sails into a violent storm. Sheets begin to stretch and tear; wooden spars begin to snap. As the Ghost roars through the storm with the wind directly astern, its bow plows into huge breakers, and it is unsafe to be on the deck, where most of the men are. Larsen takes the wheel in his own hands and sends Van Weyden to the bow of the ship. They catch sight of another vessel being battered by the storm, limping in the ferocious wind as three crewmen desperately try to bail her out. Larsen brings the Ghost about and faces directly into the wind in an attempt to rescue the other ship. But, the pounding on his ship is too great and the risk too severe, so he turns again to put the wind at the stern.

Cooky, tossed about the galley as he tries to get food prepared for the men, smashes into an iron railing, then caroms off the stove. His hands get seared on the hot griddle surface. After hours of dangerous, exhausting work, the men succeed in bringing down the sails to save the ship from breaching. Once the ship is a bit steadier, the men rush to their evening meal and eat hungrily. Afterwards, Wolf Larsen orders them to their bunks because there is nothing more that can be done except to ride out the storm. After the storm passes, Van Weyden and Larsen search through anatomy and surgery books to learn how to set Cooky's three fractured ribs. As the Ghost heads further north following the seal herds, the men encounter thick sea fogs that impede seal hunting as the smaller seal boats are set down in the ocean only to be quickly retrieved because of



the fog. When some of the men refuse to launch because of the weather, Larsen himself goes out to shoot seals and is quite successful.

One of the boats with Johnson and Leach aboard gets lost in the fog for three days, then is sighted by the crew. Van Weyden is on the verge of shooting the captain because he is convinced that he put his two enemies in the boat in hopes they would drown. At word of their rescue, he puts his gun away and breathes a huge sigh of relief. In the boat with the four men is a young woman. Van Weyden escorts Maude Brewster to her quarters, and is entranced by her soft, willowy eyes and her very feminine demeanor. Before he can ask her any questions, though, she stretches out on her bunk and falls fast asleep, overcome with exhaustion. Larsen says the young woman is a survivor of the City of Tokio steamer headed for Yokohama that "opened up like a sieve" in the storm. No one yet knows her name. Larsen tells Van Weyden he will promise not to harm Johnson and Lynch any more if he (Humphrey) will promise not to kill him (Larsen). The men rescued with Maud Brewster are put to work as crewmen on the Ghost as it heads again toward the seal herds—and not Yokohama.

Maud Brewster sleeps the rest of the day and through the night. The next day she rises and joins the company of the men. Wolf Larsen is charming in his own cynical way and he apologizes that his ship won't be back to port for three or four months although Van Weyden had given her assurances that Yokohama is only a day's sail away. Larsen also strongly insinuates that Maud must adjust to the rough-and-ready way of the crew since they won't ever become more refined. Larsen asks her if she's ever earned any money of her own, and she replies that she earns her way as a writer. Larsen tells her that he will pay her salary for the time she's aboard his ship. Then Van Weyden realizes that he's written a review of one of her books, and she remembers him—as well as his positive review. Captain Larsen is put off by their insider chit-chat and walks away.

Larsen informs Cooky that he will seek his revenge and orders some of the crew to grab him, which proves difficult as the Cockney scrambles up the rigging and eludes his captors until they form a human ladder and pull him off the structure. Larsen loops a rope under his arms and throws him overboard, where he lets out 40 or 50 feet of rope, dragging the terrified Mugridge behind the ship. Suddenly, a black fin appears near Cooky, and a general alarm of "shark" rings out. The men reel him in but the shark advances faster. When he's near the boat and the shark prepares to attack, Larsen gives a mighty tug to the rope and lifts Cooky on deck where they discover that the shark has bitten off one of his feet. Larsen asks the shocked Miss Brewster to fetch him a tourniquet to stanch the bleeding.

## Analysis

The raw, masculine energy of the Ghost is graced with the femininity and civilizing influence of Maud Brewster. Her presence enchants everyone, none more than Wolf Larsen who goes to great lengths to display correct behavior and manners. Humphrey Van Weyden is also struck by the young shipwreck survivor but must wait to make her acquaintance because of her extreme fatigue. When they do make conscious contact



with each other, it is over the literary life that each pursues. This provides a framework for their relationship that Wolf Larsen, with all of his favors and graces, cannot offer. Humphrey and Maud are instantly attracted to each other and join forces as friends to survive their long journey on the seal hunting schooner.

Van Weyden's sudden promotion by Captain Larsen to the rank of mate is puzzling to the crew, but it's a certain sign that Larsen likes Humphrey. The aborted shark attack on Cooky is intended to win over the reader's heart and it does place him in a position of the innocent victim of circumstances. Because of the attack on Cooky's foot and the subsequent maiming, he is left with two legs of unequal length and he will forever hobble around severely disabled. The attack wins for Cooky a reprieve of Larsen's abuse and threats. Perhaps, Larsen is human after all.

## Discussion Question 1

What causes Wolf Larsen to go out in a service boat and hunt seals in a storm?

## Discussion Question 2

How does Van Weyden's approach to Maud Brewster differ from that of Captain Larsen?

## Discussion Question 3

How and why does Wolf Larsen seek revenge on Cooky?

## Vocabulary

Veriest, eponymous, provocation, ignominiously, promontory, funereal, listlessly, dispatch, foreboding, precarious, vigilance, over tower, cognizant, giddy, wrathful, translucent, pandemonium, trice, hardtack, typhoon, ulster, brusquely, poop, windward, unperturbed, irrepressible, nimble, amidships



## Chapters 22-28

### Summary

Maud Brewster approaches Humphrey Van Weyden to ask about rumors that Wolf Larsen has had two of the crew murdered—Leach and Johnson. Van Weyden confirms that report and tells her she is now dealing with a man-monster, who would just as soon chop off her head as discuss world history. He tells her that her conceptions of honesty, humanity, and manhood simply do not apply to the world aboard the Ghost and that she must do everything to stay in Larsen's good graces to prevent a horrible outcome. As they talk, Wolf Larsen begins to approach them and Humphrey reiterates his message of appeasement to her. Larsen tells Van Weyden to check on Cooky who, he says, is "complaining and restless." Van Weyden finds the cook sound asleep, and sees Larsen and Maud Brewster in animated conversation. They approach the area where he's standing, and Maude casts Humphrey a sideways glance. Then, she lets her eyes slowly focus again on Larsen. Instead of his usual cold gray eyes, Larsen now carries two glowing golden orbs focused on the twenty-seven-year-old woman. She laughs softly and bids farewell to Sea Wolf. Then, she throws herself into Van Weyden's arms, telling him with a shiver "I'm so afraid." Humphrey admits that Maud Brewster approaches Humphrey Van Weyden to ask about rumors that Wolf Larsen has had two of the crew murdered—Leach and Johnson. Van Weyden confirms that report and tells her she is now dealing with a man-monster, who would just as soon chop off her head as discuss world history. He tells her that her conceptions of honesty, humanity, and manhood simply do not apply to the world aboard the Ghost and that she must do everything to stay in Larsen's good graces to prevent a horrible outcome. As they talk, Wolf Larsen begins to approach them and Humphrey reiterates his message of appeasement to her. Larsen tells Van Weyden to check on Cooky who, he says, is "complaining and restless." Van Weyden finds the cook sound asleep, and sees Larsen and Maud Brewster in animated conversation. They approach the area where he's standing, and Maude casts Humphrey a sideways glance. Then, she lets her eyes slowly focus again on Larsen. Instead of his usual cold gray eyes, Larsen now carries two glowing golden orbs focused on the twenty-seven-year-old woman. She laughs softly and bids farewell to Sea Wolf. Then, she throws herself into Van Weyden's arms, telling him with a shiver "I'm so afraid." Humphrey admits that he is afraid of Larsen, too. But, he assures her all will be well. Holding her tenderly, he realizes he's in love with Maud but wonders whether his "bookish" nature would allow him the full range of passion for her.

Wolf Larsen announces to the crew at lunch that seal hunters are to take their meals in steerage—a slap in the face for "displaying a gallantry" toward Maud Brewster that offended him. It is an insult since seal hunters on most schooners are considered officers, welcome at the officer's mess. The crew becomes excited when they spot a puff of smoke on the horizon, sign of an oncoming steam cruiser that Wolf Larsen declares to be the pirate/seal ship Macedonia, captained by his brother Death Larsen. Captain Larsen tells Maud and Humphrey they are "sentimentalists" unaware of the



savage nature of life. He grimly tells about his brother stealing his purse. The next morning the Ghost sails on a calm sea, surrounded by fog banks, but without the Macedonia anywhere in sight. The Ghost, moving at half-speed, picks up its pace as Larsen orders the sails trimmed, and the schooner approaches what appear to be service boats from the Macedonia. One of the smaller boats with a crew of three draws up to the Ghost's stern and a huge, muscled Scandinavian comes aboard as a "guest" of Wolf Larsen. It's not long before the sounds of a violent struggle between the two men fill the ship. Van Weyden tries to convince Maud to move to another part of the ship for her safety, but she is determined to remain in place. Soon the service boats from both the Macedonia and the Ghost become embroiled in bitter fighting; bullets zing through the air from all directions. Men aboard the Ghost and the Macedonia fight furiously, as the Macedonia stems at full speed toward Larsen's ship. A huge hole appears in the mainsail after the Macedonia fires its cannon. Wolf Larsen maneuvers the Ghost in and out of the fog banks so it remains invisible to the other ship. Larsen tells Van Weyden to plan a party for the seal hunters from the Macedonia taken prisoner in the latest conflict. He tells Van Weyden that after a party with plenty of liquor, the captives will become his crew members and not return to the Macedonia.

During a fierce drinking episode that produces its own madness, Van Weyden, Maud, and Larsen engage in another bit of sophistry in holding a philosophical discussion about the nature of free will. Van Weyden hears and sees Wolf Larsen in a struggle with Maud for her affections. He springs to action, battles with the captain, then pulls a knife and stabs him in the shoulder. After the fight, Larsen tells Van Weyden he is gravely ill and asks him to help him return to his bunk. Humphrey asks Maud whether she trusts him to take her on a voyage of 600 miles, saying "There is nothing left for us but the open boat." They quietly load provisions into one of the lifeboats, lower it over the side and cast off into the darkness. Humphrey takes the first watch, steering the boat through the night in moderate winds toward Japan. Maud sleeps in the bow under piles of blankets. When she awakens, she is immediately concerned about Van Weyden's obvious state of hypothermia. She vows to learn

The rough seas continue, and their boat takes on a lot of water when its bow plunges into a whitecap wave. Van Weyden takes a large tarpaulin and nails it to the open bow, thus causing runoff whenever the bow is submerged again. He successfully bails out the bilge, and the boat is once again seaworthy. After four days of battering by wind and sea, they finally experience a day of sunshine, and their spirits are lifted. Van Weyden reckons that the storm has blown them 150 miles off-course. Humphrey realizes how much he loves Maud but is reticent to tell her. Another storm arises and begins pushing their boat toward an island with a huge rock promontory. Since neither can swim, they look for a beach or other spot to land. They steer into a small cove nestled between rock formations and pull the boat up the beach. They decide to call their new home Endeavor Island.



## Analysis

Maud and Humphrey become a couple, drawing on each others' strengths to endure the cruelty of Wolf Larsen. As soon as he realizes that he's in love with Maud, he experiences a pang of jealousy when he sees her talking to Larsen. He is reassured, though, when she falls into his arms and asks him to protect her against the Sea Wolf. In an unsurprising twist, Wolf Larsen takes out his rage connected to Maud by punishing his crewmen for offering "gallantry" to her. His insecurity is reflected in a decision to make the crew dine in steerage, instead of the officers' mess. This pathology is temporarily suspended when the crew spot a steamer—the Macedonia, captained by Larsen's brother. Before the Macedonia reaches the Ghost, some of her crewmen drift alongside the schooner in a service boat—escapes from Death Larsen. Wolf Larsen sends his own crew into service boats to fend off the new arrivals, and fighting breaks out. The Ghost is all but crippled when the Macedonia fires a huge cannonball through its mainsail. Three men from the Macedonia boats come aboard and are taken prisoner by Wolf Larsen, who intends to add them to his seal hunting crew.

This could be read as karmic payback to Larsen for his inhumane treatment of the men, although it also redounds to the crew. It seems that everywhere he goes, Wolf Larsen cannot avoid spreading violence and ill feelings. Through his expert skills as a sailor, Larsen leads his ship in and out of fog banks until it reaches a large stretch of clear, blue skies. Seizing the moment, Larsen orders Van Weyden to arrange a celebration. During the drunken affair in which Larsen tries to put the make on Maud, she and Van Weyden decide to make their move and escape the Ghost. They drop themselves down to the black sea in the black night and quietly steal away. Literally and symbolically, their survival as individuals and as a couple are at stake in their four-day harrowing journey until they reach land—an unnamed and uninhabited island where they tackle their challenges just as young newlyweds would their first year of marriage. Their collaboration on construction of a simple beachfront shack and the daily process of finding, cooking, and eating draws them closer together.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Wolf Larsen deal with his own jealousy regarding crewmen who talk with Maud?

## Discussion Question 2

How are both Humphrey and Maud changed during their three-day journey to Endeavor Island?





## Discussion Question 3

What fear is aroused in Wolf Larsen and among the crew when the white smoke of a steamer is sighted on the horizon?

## Vocabulary

Ignominy, dissimulate, perilous, specter, lithesome, fragility, perturbation, incredulous, banishment, notorious, patronize, taut, propinquity, counteract, abeam, globule, saturnalia, animated, voluble, overmastering, humiliation, audible, sublimate, adroit, gunwale, whitecap, paradox, protean, capsize, equilibrium.



## Chapter 29-39

### Summary

Van Weyden curses himself for not bringing along matches so they could sip some good coffee from the private stash of Wolf Larsen. Maud ventures the opinion that the island is a seal rookery that has not been discovered by hunters. When Humphrey tells Maud he intends to use the boat to explore other features of the island, Maud convinces him to bring her along. He becomes almost delirious when he figures out a way to make a fire using the gunpowder from a shotgun shell. He empties a cartridge onto a rock, places light tinder and a piece of paper nearby, and strikes the powder with a rock. The powder flares, igniting the tinder which he stokes into a good-sized fire. He boils water and Maud makes coffee. Van Weyden tells Maud they need to construct a shelter and plan for ways to feed themselves when their supply of food runs out. They float along the edge of the cove until they run across the old wreckage of another ship, high up on the beach, imbedded in the sand.

They work for two weeks to build a rough hut for themselves; but, they have nothing to use for a roof. Van Weyden mentions that an acquaintance once used walrus skins to build a shack. Humphrey says he'll need to club some seals for meat and their skins because his supply of ammunition is low. Maud remarks that it seems very brutal to kill another animal—especially in that way. The next day they paddle along the shore, looking for seals. They find a pod of seals on the beach and Van Weyden goes ashore—club in hand. He approaches a large bull in company with his cows. The bull lurches at him and gives chase. Humphrey tried to fend him off with the club, which the seal simply bites in half. They push off in the boat and the seal swims along beside them. Eventually, the seal swims under their craft, grabs the keel in his mouth and shakes the boat violently. When the seal releases and swims away, Maud teases that Humphrey should direct his attention to "lonely and inoffensive" seals rather than harems.

They row to shore and pull the boat up. Humphrey uses a long club to herd the young males up and away from the beach and the harems. When he has them isolated, he kills the number needed for skins to make the roof of their hut. They load the skins in their boat and shove off toward their own cove. Without any windows, they both realize the structure is "a dark and evil-appearing thing." With Maud's help Van Weyden constructs the seal skin roof. On the third night, after the hut is complete, they have a small celebration. Maud tells Humphrey she strongly feels "something is going to happen," but she's unsure whether it's good or bad. The next morning, Humphrey goes outside the hut and sees the miserable wreck of the Ghost on the beach not 50 feet away. He approaches cautiously. He can find no signs of life on the ship. He returns to the hut to get his shotgun. Once again he approaches and sees Wolf Larsen standing on the deck. They wait two days before attempting another visit to the Ghost. Humphrey sets out with two pistols. When he reaches the ship, he quietly stalks Larsen in his stocking feet. Noiselessly, he enters the cabin in search of food and clothing. He hears



Larsen moving, slips to the side and observes the Sea Wolf stumbling about in a state of profound blindness.

Humphrey goes back to the hut to recruit Maud for the task of repairing the sails of the Ghost to get her in sailing condition. They struggle with the sea-soaked sail until they wrestle it to the beach to dry. Larsen hears them hammering and cutting and shouts out a greeting. Then, he asks what they're doing. Humphrey replies that they are repairing the mast.

Larsen reminds him that the Ghost is his private property and forbids him, but Humphrey tells Larsen he is no longer able to enforce his will on others and asks whether he wants to escape from the island. "No, I intend dying here," Larsen answers. "Well, we don't," Humphrey replies as he and Maud return to their repair work. For days, they search the island for missing portions of the mast. Humphrey and Maud locate the parts, lash them together, and hoist them into place. Van Weyden realizes he's done something wrong so they disassemble everything and start over. Wolf Larsen shows up to follow the action with his ears. Finally, they complete the mast and attach it then return to their hut for a good night's sleep. Van Weyden casts a glance at the Ghost and realizes that the mast and all its rigging have been slashed with a pair of shears. They climb aboard and see the havoc and destruction that Larsen has created. The shears are gone. They hear Larsen coming and fall stone silent, playing a cat-and-mouse game with him on the deck until they return to their boat and leave the cove. Despite their setback, Humphrey is encouraged and inspired by his love for Maud.

For two days they sail around in their small boat looking for the masts. They find them together with the shears on the third. They attach the main mast to their boat and row back in a dead calm. The next day is one of "heartbreaking and dangerous toil" as Humphrey rows strenuously to pull the huge weight of the mast. By evening his hands are raw and unable to grasp the oars any more. As the sky darkens, a wind rises and they spend a miserable, cold night at sea. In the morning, they see their island some 15 miles away. When they finally reach shore, they are exhausted. They crawl up to the hut and sleep until the next afternoon. Then, they return to continue repairing the Ghost. Larsen is about, walking the deck. He says nothing more about leaving his ship alone or the valuable shears that Humphrey has reclaimed. That night they sleep on the ship to prevent Larsen from causing any more damage to the sails or rigging. Larsen staggers around in his blindness. He falls down a staircase and lands on the deck, seemingly unconscious. They grab a pillow for his head and cover him with blankets, assuming him to be unconscious. Then Larsen grabs Humphrey in his vise-like grip and pulls him down to the deck as if to suffocate him. Maud runs off and returns with a seal cub, which she plants on his head, releasing Van Weyden. They lower Larsen into steerage and handcuff his arms and legs. Then, they move their possessions aboard the Ghost and resume their previous life aboard the vessel, as cold autumn rains begin.

Wolf Larsen's condition deteriorates rapidly. He loses sensation and hearing on one side of his body. He assures Humphrey that he is not feigning and that he is not planning another attack. Larsen says his headaches are linked to his paralysis. He suspects that he has brain cancer. Humphrey and Maud remove his shackles but can't



be comfortable around Larsen. Van Weyden works for two days straight repairing the mast. Larsen has another stroke and loses speech. Maud helps Humphrey raise the new mast over the deck. Then, they slowly lower it. But, the shaft isn't aligned with the square hole in the deck and the below-deck chock in the hull. After a couple of tries, they finally move the mast into its proper place and it snaps securely. They see a plume of smoke rising from the steerage and Humphrey runs to Larsen's cabin in thick, suffocating smoke. He reaches Larsen in his bunk. He realizes that Maud has followed him. He yells at her to go back up on deck. He notices the source of the fire is the bunk over Larsen's head which he'd accidentally set ablaze. The mattress, smoldering for a long time, bursts into flames and disintegrates on the deck where Humphrey stamps out the remaining embers.

Larsen communicates with Humphrey and Maud by scribbling notes. With a new mast, repaired sails and new rigging, they finally shove off in the Ghost, the dying Wolf Larsen in his cabin below. They encounter a storm the first night but the following morning they awaken rejoicing for their newly found freedom. Humphrey carries Larsen's body to the edge of the ship, mutters a short prayer and shoves it into the sea. They confirm their love for each other as a United States cutter appears on the horizon. Humphrey begs for just one more kiss before the cutter arrives.

## Analysis

Like an evil doppelganger, Wolf Larsen even haunts Humphrey and Maud on their secluded island when he washes up on the beach alone in the wreckage of the Ghost—aged, ill, and confused. Maud and Humphrey are at first fearful and apprehensive. Then, they are compassionate and, finally, forgiving of the old man just before he dies. It is through their acceptance of Larsen as a flawed human being that they are able finally to relate to him and let his spirit go when he dies. Through acceptance and release they are able to put the horrible experiences with Larsen behind them and enter into the depths of their relationship with clear consciences. Although both had harbored murderous impulses toward Larsen, they treat him humanely until he dies of natural causes. This seems to symbolize man's perpetual struggle with evil. Humphrey and Maud discover that they must do the kindest thing for Larsen, not just for his sake but for their own deliverance. He finally dies on the refurbished Ghost and is buried at sea, an appropriate place for a lifelong sailor.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Van Weyden's relationship to Wolf Larsen change when they encounter each other on the same shipwrecked island?

## Discussion Question 2

What is Larsen's final act of violence regarding Van Weyden?



## Discussion Question 3

What primarily drives Maud Brewster and Humphrey Van Weyden—love for each other or love of freedom?

## Vocabulary

Vexation, crestfallen, perpendicular, rookery, headlands, pittance, harem, preeminent, unpremeditated, garrulously, haggard, impotent, pantry, usurp, inexpedient, ostensible, fulcrum, philanthropist, expostulate, windlass, glutton, tremulous, consternation, thwart, inexplicable, dissolution, feign.



# Characters

## Wolf Larsen

Wolf Larsen, the lead character, is an enigmatic sailor who seems as much a beast as a human being. He is literate and well-read, yet able to jump upon a man and kill him in an instant. Larsen is a sadistic ship's captain who ironically has the capacity for empathy. Larsen's wild mood swings and recurrent migraine headaches are signs of his personality disorder.

## Humphrey Van Weyden

Humphrey is a straight-laced passenger aboard Wolf Larsen's ship, *The Ghost*, who stands in contrast to the rabid captain and his motley crew. Humphrey is viewed by the crew as something of a pantywaist, but his powers of observation and calculation sharpen as he contends with Larsen.

## Maud Brewster

Maud Brewster is a passenger aboard the *Ghost* who is rescued from the sinking of a ferry in San Francisco Bay. She is New England prim and proper, and she falls in love with Humphrey Van Weyden. They escape the *Ghost* together on a service boat and land on *Endeavor*, where they prepare for their return to civilization.

## Cooky

Thomas Mugridge ("Cooky") is a salty-mouthed Cockney who can be charming and endearing but also scheming and secretive. He seems to be in a power struggle with Humphrey for the goodwill of Wolf Larsen.

## Johnson

Johnson is a big bear of a Swede who is a veteran sailor. He earns Wolf Larsen's enmity by telling him he's not afraid of him; his reward is to be murdered by the captain for insubordination and disrespect for authority. The crewmen are bereaved and angered at Johnson's death because he is popular and well-liked.

## Oofy-Oofy

Oofy-Oofy is described as a Kanakan, or Polynesian, by the author. He is a large and powerful man who as a crew member aboard the *Ghost* is called upon for tasks



requiring great strength. He speaks little English. Oofty-Oofty is a minor character who has no important role in the unfolding of the narrative.

## George Leach

George Leach is an Englishman who serves as cabin boy to Wolf Larsen. Leach figures out who Larsen is and continually insults and challenges him with speech such as: "May God damn your soul to hell, Wolf Larsen, only hell's too good for you, you coward, you murderer, you pig." Larsen finally takes revenge on Leach and on Johnson for giving him trouble by murdering them both.

## Latimer

Latimer is described as a "lean, Yankee-looking fellow with shrewd, narrow-slitted eyes" who gets into a howling argument with Kerfoot, another crewman, over the question of when seal pups can swim. Latimer maintains the pups can swim as soon as they're both. Kerfoot, who is a hunter, disagrees.

## Kelly

Kelly is a hot-headed Irish-American longshoreman who is on his first voyage at sea. When the men get into a scuffle, Kelly pulls a knife on Oofty-Oofty, but Leach calms them down.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## The Ghost

The Ghost is a commercial sealing schooner that the narrator, Humphrey Van Weyden, boards after the sinking of the Martinez. It could be understood as a symbol for survival—of the entire crew as they struggle against the environment and of individuals as they compete with each other and try to survive the harsh Captain Larsen.

## Pacific Ocean

The Pacific is the setting for the entire novel. It is against this mercurial, powerful, and eternal ocean that all the events in *Sea Wolf* unfold.

## The Macedonia

The Macedonia is a steamship captained by “Death” Larsen, brother of Wolf Larsen. The two brothers have a friendly sort of sibling rivalry that carries over from childhood to their maritime careers. On occasion, this rivalry turns violent and life-threatening.

## Endeavor Island

Endeavor Island is the fanciful name given by Humphrey Van Weyden and Maud Brewster to the small, uninhabited island upon which they are shipwrecked after escaping Wolf Larsen and the Ghost.

## San Francisco

The city by the bay is where Humphrey Van Weyden is taken after he is rescued from the sinking of the Martinez. San Francisco, with its rolling fogs and flirtatious sunshine, is a symbol of salvation and wreckage because of the numbers of sailors and would-be gold miners who come to her shores and are shipwrecked on the beaches of booze, women, and gambling.

## Romsdal Fiord

Romsdal Fiord is the Norwegian fiord near which Wolf Larsen, a Dane, was born.





## Sea Anchor

Humphrey Can Weyden makes a sea anchor when he and Maud are sailing toward Japan in a small lifeboat. The sea anchor consists of one sail, rigged to an unfurled shape and dragged in the sea ahead of the boat to keep its bow facing into the wind, so it can ride over huge sea swells.

## Shears

Wolf Larsen's shears, which are very necessary for the repair of the Ghost's sails, disappear one night after Maud and Humphrey have spent an entire day working to repair them. Larsen, it seems, hid the shears to prevent them from completing their repairs and leaving the island.

## Beach hut

Humphrey and Maud build a hut on the beach where they are shipwrecked on Endeavor Island. Having found enough wood to construct the hut, they put a thatched roof on it. Then, they decide to use sealskin for a more durable canopy. Just as they finish the work, they realize that the Ghost, the ship from which they fled, has foundered and is on the beach near their hut. Once they realize that the Ghost's sole inhabitant, Wolf Larsen, is blind and nearly crippled, they move aboard the Ghost and outfit her for a return voyage.



# Settings

## The Martinez

The Martinez is a new ferry steamer that plies the route between Sausalito and San Francisco, California. The ferry sinks after a collision with another vessel while Humphrey Van Weyden is a passenger. Besides his own terror and trauma from the sinking as well as the frigid waters of San Francisco Bay, Van Weyden remembers the sound of the women's screaming voices as some passengers survive, and some drown.

## The Ghost

The Ghost is the three-masted schooner that, under the direction of Capt. Wolf Larsen, rescues Van Weyden from the waters of San Francisco Bay. Van Weyden awakens from a state of shock to hear Larsen's voice telling crewman Johnson to stop rubbing him back to consciousness. The Ghost, a commercial sealing ship, is Van Weyden's home for the next few months. There he experiences both the brutality and intellect of the man called Wolf and concludes that Larsen is some kind of monster. Van Weyden also witnesses the bitterness of the crew toward their captain and the open hostility that seems to push the men ever closer to mutiny.

## Endeavor Island

Endeavor Island is the name that Van Weyden and Maud Brewster give to the stretch of sand in the Pacific Ocean near Japan where they find refuge after escaping the Ghost in a service boat. On Endeavor Island they must cope not only with the necessities of survival such as finding food and building a shelter, but also with the shocking reappearance of Wolf Larsen—in the shipwreck formerly known as the Ghost when it runs aground. The action on Endeavor Island shifts between the Ghost and the hut that Humphrey and Maud have built as they seek some kind of peaceful coexistence with the monster who has become a broken old man.



# Themes and Motifs

## Duality of Human Nature

Wolf Larsen is, by anyone's standards, a monster of the first order as described by Jack London. What makes him interesting is his dualistic nature that can shed a tear over a piece of poetry and also kill a man in cold blood. His character, because of its polarities and the way they operate, sometimes seems implausible. Jack London himself reveals that he wrote the character of Wolf Larsen as a kind of literary experiment, inspired by the relatively new field of psychology. Wolf Larsen is complex yet not subtle, a kind of Jeekyll-and-Hyde who is both fascinating and fearsome. But his nature is essentially nothing other than the character of all people who carry potential for good or evil. In Wolf Larsen, these difference are presented in extreme, shocking contrast. The author uses his character to show how our greatest strengths coexist with our greatest weaknesses; indeed, sometimes a trait can be both at the same time in a single person. Wolf Larsen, despite his keen intellect, evidently lacks the capacity for introspection; he seems unaware of his huge personality shifts. In today's terms, this duality might be labeled bipolar illness. The reader is shown examples of Larsen's crippling migraine headaches as well as his depressions. At times, Larsen seems convivial and outgoing. At other times the darkness of a savage festers in his heart. Is he anyone who should be trusted? Is he really any different than the rest of us?

## Alternative Reality of the Sea

Sea Wolf is, in the broad sense, a testament to and explication of the world of men at sea—a world of savagery, revenge, intrigue and wanton slaughter. Without doubt, Wolf Larsen could not get away with the kind of abuse and violence he displays toward the crew in any land-based enterprise. Captain Larsen rules the crewmen through cunning, threats and occasional extreme violence. Without an army or police force, Larsen is forced to rely on his wits to maintain a shipboard society with its own rules, rewards and punishments. Some of the romance men have felt about the sea and ships probably arises from the mistaken notion of absolute freedom. But, discipline and hard work are required to keep any kind of ship afloat and on course. The only judge and court for this society is Wolf Larsen himself, who demands respect and loyalty from his crew. Those who profess and practice loyalty, such as Van Weyden, are rewarded with promotions and other rewards. Those who are vocal discontents, such as Johnson, are punished with indifference or actual violence.

## Nature of Evil

If nothing else, Sea Wolf demonstrates the axiom "those to whom evil is done, do evil themselves." Wolf Larsen seems blind to the connection between his own behavior and the way others treat him. His moral blind spot makes it possible for him to continue



doing evil—including aggravated assault, kidnapping, attempted murder and murder—because he fears others will do him evil so he must do it to them first. The reader gets a lesson in payback by reading about relations between Captain Larsen and his crewmen. Evil, it seems, runs in families just as much as alcoholism or domestic violence. Unfortunately, Larsen is unable to face the reality of his actions and their consequences so he experiences no growth. Humphrey and Maud, however, learn from their exposure to evil that they need to actively work against it and for their own salvation.

# Styles

## Point of View

The novel is narrated from the point of view of Humphrey Van Weyden, an upper middle class youth who sets out on the Pacific Ocean for "adventure" and material for his writings. Van Weyden is soon stripped of his ivory tower view of the world when confronted with the barely-civilized nature of Wolf Larsen's savagely. Van Weyden's morbid fascination with Wolf Larsen causes him puzzlement about the dualistic nature of Wolf Larsen's personality that finally distills into the same fear and disgust that other members of the crew feel toward him.

## Language and Meaning

The language is standard American English of the period, but traces of Cockney appear in the speech of Cooky.

## Structure

The novel is structured in the classic conflict-crisis-growth-resolution format. The conflict is basically Wolf Larsen against his crew when he tries to manage them through brutality and sudden outbursts of extreme violence. The crisis occurs when both Van Weyden and Maud realize the dangers posed to everyone aboard the Ghost by Larsen's unstable personality and sadistic urges. Growth is evident when the couple takes the extreme risk of abandoning the Ghost one night in a lifeboat to seek the Japanese coast. Resolution arrives when Wolf Larsen dies aboard the shipwrecked Ghost, and Maud and Humphrey relaunch the schooner for a return trip after a sea burial for Larsen.



## Quotes

The Martinez was sinking fast, for the water was very near. Numbers of the passengers were leaping overboard. Others, in the water, were clamoring to be taken aboard again. No one heeded them. A cry arose that we were sinking. I was seized by the consequent panic and went over the side in a surge of bodies.

-- Humphrey Van Weyden (chapter 1)

**Importance:** This quote signals a major turning point in the narrative, as the narrator experiences a shipwreck that leads him eventually to the Ghost, where he encounters Wolf Larsen.

My name is Johnson, not Yonson,' he said, in very good, though slow, English, with no more than a shade of accent to it. There was mild protest in his pale blue eyes, and withal a timid frankness and manliness that quite won me to him., 'Thank you, Mr. Johnson,' I corrected and reached out my hand for his.

-- Humphrey Van Weyden (chapter 2)

**Importance:** This quote illustrates the kind of interactions the narrator has with the crew aboard the Ghost.

Pacing back and forth the length of the hatchway and savagely chewing the end of a cigar was the man whose casual glance had rescued me from the sea, His height was probably five feet , ten inches or ten and a half; but my first impression, or feel of the man, was not of this but of his strength. And yet, while he was of massive build with broad shoulders and deep chest, I could not characterize his strength as massive. It was what might be termed a sinewy, knotty strength of the kind we ascribe to the gorilla order.

-- Humphrey Van Weyden (chapter 3)

**Importance:** Van Weyden's first encounter with Wolf Larsen, as described, is significant because it sets the stage for future interactions.

The Ghost is considered the fastest schooner in both the San Francisco and Victoria fleets. In fact, she was once a private yacht and was built for speed. Her lines and fittings speak for themselves. The Ghost is an 80-ton schooner of a remarkably fine model. Her beam, or width, is 23 feet and her length a little over 90 feet.

-- Humphrey Van Weyden (chapter 6)

**Importance:** Humphrey gives this description of the ship, as related to him by Johnson, to show that it is "a very little world, a mote, a speck" that holds twenty-two men.

Sometimes I think Wolf Larsen mad, or half-mad at least, what of his strange moods and vagaries. At other times I take him for a great man, a genius who has never arrived. And, finally, I am convinced that he is the perfect type of the primitive man, born a thousand years or generations too late and an anachronism in this culminating century



of civilization.

-- Humphrey Van Weyden (chapter 8)

**Importance:** Van Weyden's quote is important for several reasons. First, he is the narrator. Next, his suspicions about Wolf Larsen are well-founded. Finally, his reading of Larsen's character becomes a crucial part of their relationship.

It is piggishness, and it is life. Of what use or sense is an immortality of piggishness? What is the end? What is it all about? You have made no food, yet the food you have eaten or wasted might have saved the lives of a score of wretches who made the food but did not eat it.

-- Wolf Larsen (chapter 5)

**Importance:** This quote reveals the thinking side of Wolf Larsen's nature, and thus is important for its contrast with his violent, brutish side.

He [crewman Leach] haled forth Wolf Larsen's soul naked to the scorn of men. His rage was a madness. 'Pig! Pig! Pig!' he was reiterating at the top of his lungs. 'Why don't you come down and kill me, you murderer? You can do it! I ain't afraid! Come on, you coward! Kill me!

-- Humphrey Van Weyden (chapter 10)

**Importance:** Humphrey relates these words between Wolf Larsen and crewman Leach to show how abrasive Larsen is to the other men and to indicate the desperation that Leach feels being stuck on the ship with the mad captain.

He haled forth Wolf Larsen's soul naked to the scorn of men. His rage was a madness. 'Pig! Pig! Pig!' he was reiterating at the top of his lungs. 'Why don't you come down and kill me, you murderer? You can do it! I ain't afraid! Come on, you coward! Kill me!

-- Crewman Leach (chapter 10)

**Importance:** Humphrey relays the exchange between Wolf Larsen and crewman Leach and the anger it contains. This quote is an indication of the frustration and rage the men feel because of their captain's wild mood swings and violence.

Her eyes were too heavy to suggest more than a hint of the sleepy surprise that perplexed her as she [Maud Brewster] looked up at me, and she half stumbled, half tottered as I led her to her cabin. She leaned heavily against me and I do believe that she had fallen asleep again between the arm-chair and the stateroom.

-- Humphrey Van Weyden (chapter 18)

**Importance:** In this quote from the narrator, the reader feels his tenderness and care-taking instinct toward Ms. Brewster—seeds of love that is to grow between them.

Maude's own terror rushed upon me and in that moment of fear—the most terrible fear a man can experience—I knew that in inexpressible ways she was dear to me. The knowledge that I loved her rushed upon me with the terror, and with both emotions



gripping at my heart and causing my blood at the same time to chill and to leap riotously, I felt myself drawn by a power without me and beyond me.

-- Humphrey Van Weyden (chapter 23)

**Importance:** Humphrey describes Maud's—and his own—terror at the rage of Wolf Larsen when she rebuffs his advances.

Something's gone wrong with my brain,' Wolf Larsen said. 'A cancer, a tumor, or something of that nature—a thing that devours and destroys. It's attacking my nerve centers, eating them up bit-by-bit, cell by cell, from the pain. I cannot see, hearing and feeling are leaving me.

-- Wolf Larsen (chapter 37)

**Importance:** The fearsome Wolf Larsen reveals himself to be full of fear in this quote. His terror is evident as he describes his symptoms—perhaps realizing that he will die alone because he has no family or close friends.

It was like a message from the night of the grave, for this man's body had become his mausoleum. And there, in so strange sepulcher his spirit fluttered and lived. It would flutter and live till the last line of communication was broken, and after that who was to say how much longer it might continue to flutter and live?

-- Humphrey Van Weyden (chapter 38)

**Importance:** Van Weyden's reflections on the disintegration and approaching death of Wolf Larsen reflect his amazement at the superhuman powers of this man-demon, an almost whimsical astonishment that perhaps he could not die.