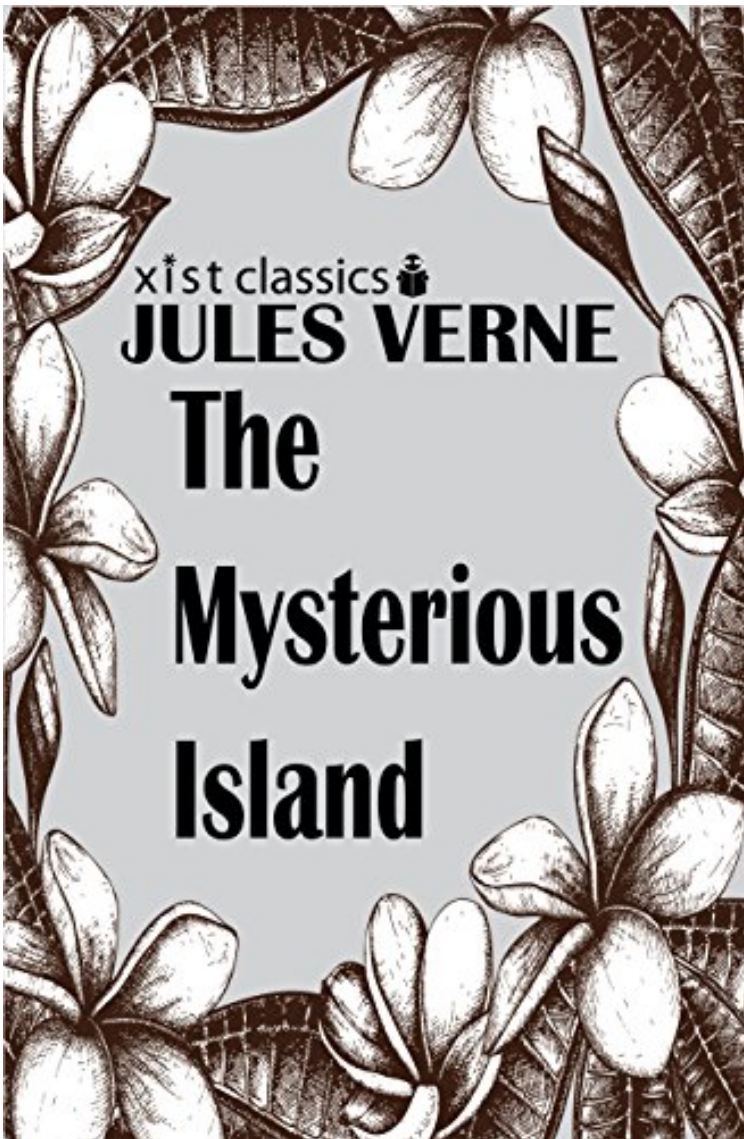


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The Mysterious Island



Par Jules Verne
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurAn exquisite novel about daring experiences. "It seems wisest to assume the worst from the beginning... and let anything better come as a surprise."The adventures of five prisoners of the American Civil War who decide to escape by hijacking a balloon and crash on a mysterious volcanic island. This book has been professionally formatted for e-readers and contains a bonus book club leadership guide and discussion questions. We hope youll share this book with your friends, neighbors and colleagues and cant wait to hear what you have to say about it. For more great book club picks, check out : <http://amzn.to/1A7cKKl> Find all our our books for Kindle here: <http://amzn.to/1PooxLl> Sign up for the Xist Publishing Newsletter here. ExtraitChapter 1IThe Great Storm of 1865.-Shouts in the Air.-A Balloon in a Whirlwind.-The Torn Fabric.-Nothing but Water.-Five Passengers.-The Events in the Gondola.-A Shoreline

on the Horizon.-The Outcome of the Drama."Are we rising?" "No! Quite the reverse! We're sinking!" "Worse than that, Mr. Cyrus! We're falling!" "For the love of God! Drop some ballast!" "That's the last sack emptied!" "Is the balloon climbing now?" "No!" "I think I hear waves crashing!" "We're over the ocean!" "We can't be more than five hundred feet above it!" Just then a powerful voice rent the air, and the following words rang out: "Everything heavy overboard! . . . everything! And God save us!" Such were the cries echoing over the vast emptiness of the Pacific Ocean on March 23rd, 1865, at about four o'clock in the afternoon. Surely no one will have forgotten the terrible northeasterly gale that was unleashed at the vernal equinox of that year. The barometer fell to 710 millimeters, and the storm went on unabated from the eighteenth to the twenty-sixth of March. Great was the devastation it wrought, in America, Europe, and Asia alike-a vast diagonal swath of destruction eighteen hundred miles wide, from the thirty-fifth parallel north to the fortieth south! Shattered cities, uprooted forests, shorelines ravaged by crashing mountains of water, ships slammed against the shore-by the hundreds, according to the dossiers of the Bureau Veritas-whole regions leveled by cyclones that smashed everything in their path, a human toll that numbered in the thousands, both on land and at sea: such was the scene in the wake of the cyclone, and such were the tokens of its fury. In the ranks of natural disasters, it outstripped even the horrific devastation witnessed at Havana and on the island of Guadeloupe, on October 25th, 1810, and July 26th, 1825, respectively. Now, even as these many catastrophes were unfolding at sea and on land, another drama, no less prodigious, was being played out in the turbulent skies. For a balloon, wafted along atop a whirlwind like a toy ball, and caught up in the rotational movement of the column of air, was traveling through the heavens at a speed of ninety miles an hour,* spinning in circles as if seized by some aerial maelstrom. Beneath the appendix on the underside of the balloon swayed a gondola holding five passengers, scarcely visible in the dense mists and sea spray that suffused the air. Whence came this aerostat, this plaything of the terrible storm? From what point on the globe had it taken flight? It could not have set off in the middle of the cyclone, of course, and the cyclone's first symptoms had appeared on the eighteenth-five days before. The reasonable conclusion would thus be that the balloon had come from far, far away; indeed, given the speed of the wind, it could not have traveled less than two thousand miles in every twenty-four-hour period! But, caught up in the storm as they were, the passengers had no point of reference, and hence no means of gauging the distance they had traveled. Indeed, a very curious phenomenon must then have been at work: the violent winds propelled them at a terrific speed, and yet they themselves had no sense of their own motion. Forward they sped, ever turning circles, as perfectly unaware of their rotation as of their horizontal movement. Their gaze could not penetrate the thick mass of fog below them; and around them all was gray mist, forming a veil so opaque that they could not say whether it was day or night. No glimmer of light, no sound from land, no ocean roar could have reached them through that vast darkness so long as they remained at high altitude. Their rapid descent alone had alerted them to the peril they faced above the waves. But now, relieved of all heavy objects such as ammunition, weapons, and provisions, the balloon had once again risen into the upper levels of the atmosphere, to an altitude of 4,500 feet. Realizing that the sea alone lay beneath the gondola, and believing the dangers awaiting them above to be less formidable than those below, the passengers did not hesitate to jettison even the most vital elements of their equipment; their only thought was to prevent any further loss of the precious gas, the soul of their conveyance, that held them aloft over the abyss. The night passed, full of fears that might have proven fatal for less vigorous souls. Then daylight returned, and with the sunrise the storm began to abate. A newfound calm settled over the atmosphere in the first hours of that twenty-fourth of March. By dawn the clouds had grown more billowy, and had lifted higher into the sky. Over the next several hours, the whirlwind gradually expanded and weakened. The winds, once hurricane-force, were now at the "near-gale" level, meaning that the speed of the atmospheric levels' translatory motion had fallen by half. The balloon was still caught up in a wind that would have caused a prudent sailor to take three reefs in his sail; nevertheless, the perturbation of the atmosphere had greatly decreased. By eleven o'clock, the air had cleared noticeably at the lower altitudes. The atmosphere was bathed in the sort of damp limpidity that is often seen, and even felt, in the wake of a major meteorological phenomenon. It seemed not so much that the cyclone had moved on to the west as that it had simply exhausted itself. Perhaps, once the center had collapsed, its energy had dispersed in sheets of electricity, as sometimes happens with typhoons in the Indian Ocean. At about this same hour, it became evident that the balloon was once again sinking through the lower levels of the atmosphere, slowly and continuously. Worse yet, it seemed to be deflating little by little, the envelope growing longer, distended, no longer spherical but ovoid. By noon, the aerostat hovered no more than two thousand feet above the sea. Its volume was fifty thousand cubic feet,* and it was thanks to this that

it had stayed so long afloat; for a balloon with such a capacity can travel both high and far. Now the passengers jettisoned the last few objects weighing down the gondola, the small remaining store of foodstuffs, even the utensils crammed into their pockets, and one of them, hoisting himself onto the ring that encircled the ropes of the net, tried to tie off the aerostat's appendix with a sturdy knot. It was clear that the passengers could not hope to maintain the balloon in the upper reaches of the atmosphere. A great quantity of gas must have escaped from the envelope into the open air! They were finished! For no continent lay beneath them, not even so much as an island. Not a single landing place as far as the eye could see, not a single solid surface in which to cast anchor. Only the vast ocean, whose waves continued to crash with an inconceivable violence! The sea, with no visible end, not even from an altitude that offered a view of forty miles in every direction! Only a liquid plain, relentlessly tossed and whipped by the winds, which appeared from this height as an endless cavalcade of frenzied waves topped by a vast expanse of foaming whitecaps! No land in sight, not a ship to be seen! The descent would have to be halted, no matter what the cost, for if left to fall unchecked the balloon would soon vanish into the billows. It was thus to this urgent task that the passengers of the gondola now turned their efforts; but no matter how they struggled, the balloon only continued to sink, all the while moving at great speed with the direction of the wind, from northeast to southwest. A truly terrible situation now faced the aerostat's wretched passengers! They were clearly no longer in control of their craft. Their exertions had no effect. The envelope of the balloon was deflating before their eyes; the gas was escaping, and they had not the slightest hope of preserving it. The descent was accelerating perceptibly, and, at one hour past noon, the gondola hung only six hundred feet above the ocean. For the leak had proved impossible to stem, and the gas flowed unhindered through a tear in the fabric of the balloon. By ridding the gondola of its contents, the passengers had prolonged their aerial suspension by a few hours. The catastrophe could be delayed, but it could not be prevented; and unless some land appeared before nightfall, the passengers, the gondola, and the balloon would disappear forever beneath the waves. One final maneuver was left to them, and it was to this that they now turned in desperation. It should be plain to see that the aerostat's passengers were men of great mettle, able to look unflinching into the face of death, without a single murmur of complaint. They were determined to fight to the very last, to do whatever they must to slow their fall. The gondola was nothing more than a sort of wicker basket, incapable of flotation; once it had dropped to the surface of the water, it would inevitably sink like a stone. At two o'clock, the aerostat was scarcely four hundred feet above the waves. Just then, a manly voice—the voice of one whose heart was impervious to fear—made itself heard. To this voice responded other voices, no less forceful than the first. "Has everything been thrown out?" "No! There are still ten thousand francs in gold!" And at once a heavy sack fell into the water. "Is the balloon climbing now?" "A little, but it will soon be sinking again!" "What's left to throw overboard?" "Nothing!" "One thing! . . . The gondola!" "Hang on to the net! and off with the gondola!" For this was their one last means of lightening the aerostat. The ropes attaching the gondola to the ring were cut, and when it had fallen away the aerostat climbed two thousand feet higher. The five passengers had clambered into the netting above the ring, and clung to the network of interlaced ropes, staring down at the abyss. The static sensitivity of balloons is well known. To jettison even the lightest object is to provoke an immediate vertical displacement, for the apparatus acts like a balance of mathematical precision as it floats in the air. Thus, when it is unburdened of a relatively large weight, its upward movement will naturally be sudden and considerable. Such was the result in this case. But after stabilizing in the upper altitudes for a brief moment, the aerostat once again began to sink. The gas still leaked from the rip, and the rip was beyond repair. The passengers had done everything within their power. No human intervention could save them now. There was nothing left to do but hope for assistance from God. At four o'clock, the balloon was only five hundred feet above the surface of the water. A resounding bark was heard. There was a dog with the passengers, clinging to the interlaced ropes alongside its master. "Top's seen something!" one of the passengers cried. Then, at once, a loud voice rang out: "Land! Land!" Still carried southwest on the wind, the balloon had traveled some hundreds of miles since dawn, and a slightly elevated coastline now appeared in that direction. But that shore was still thirty miles leeward. It would take no less than an hour to reach it, and only on condition that the balloon not be blown off course. They could not say if it was an island or a continent, for they scarcely knew toward what part of the world the cyclone had carried them! In any case, inhabited or not, hospitable or not, that land was their only hope! But by four o'clock it was all too evident that the balloon could no longer stay aloft. Even now it was skimming the surface of the sea. Several times already the peaks of the enormous waves had lapped at the bottom of the net, further adding to its weight, and the aerostat only half floated in the air, like a bird with

lead shot in its wing. A half-hour later, the land lay only a mile distant; but the balloon, exhausted, limp, distended, creased with great folds, had lost all but a small pocket of gas at the top. It could no longer bear the weight of the passengers who clung to its net; soon they were half submerged in the water, and buffeted by the furious waves. The slack sheath of the balloon now acted as a sort of sail, catching the great gusts and speeding over the water like a ship with a tailwind. Perhaps it would be blown to shore! It was only two cables from land when four terrible cries burst from four breasts at once. Just when it had begun to seem certain that the balloon would never rise again, a huge wave had washed over it, and it had taken an unexpected leap upward. As if suddenly freed of a part of its burden, it climbed to an altitude of fifteen hundred feet; there it encountered a sort of eddying wind, which, rather than carrying it directly toward the coastline, drove it along almost parallel to the shore. Finally, two minutes later, it obliquely approached the land, and at last came to rest on the sands of the shoreline beyond the reach of the waves. Each helping the next, the passengers extricated themselves from the ropes of the net. Freed of their weight, the balloon was caught up by the wind, and, just as an injured bird sometimes briefly comes back to life, it disappeared into the heavens. Five men and a dog had once occupied the balloon's gondola, but only four were thrown onto this beach. The one missing had evidently been carried off by the great wave that had struck the net. Relieved of his weight, the aerostat had made one final climb, only to fall to earth a few moments later. And as these castaways—for such indeed they were—set foot on land, their thoughts turned at once to the missing member of their party. As one man, they cried: "He might be trying to swim ashore! We've got to rescue him! rescue him!"

Revue de presse

The reason Verne is still read by millions today is simply that he was one of the best storytellers who ever lived. Arthur C. Clarke