



## BEFORE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Have you read or heard stories about desert islands and pirates? Did they have anything in common? What makes them so fascinating?

2. What do you know about the American Civil War? What were the origins of the war and what did the opposing sides stand for? What part did Abraham Lincoln play in the conflict?

3. “Deus ex machina” is a plot mechanism applied to get the characters out of seemingly unsolvable trouble by an unlikely occurrence. It might be a sudden death of the main villain or a wealthy relative. Can you remember stories where the author applied the mechanism to move the plot forward? Was it believable?

## Chapter I

- Are we going up again?
- Not at all; we are going down!
- Mr. Smith, we are falling!
- Throw over all the ballast!
- The last bag is empty!
- Does the balloon rise again?
- No!
- I hear the waves, the sea is under us!
- Five hundred feet!

These words rang through the air above **the Pacific**, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon of the 23<sup>d</sup> of March, 1865.

The hurricane lasted from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> of March. It covered a space of 1,800 miles, it destroyed cities in America and Europe and Asia. Hundreds of shipwrecks, thousands of people in the sea!

But something was in the sky. A balloon rushed through space with a velocity of **ninety miles an hour**. Below the balloon, there was a basket with five men.

The storm was terrible. The passengers were unable to determine the course. They did not know where they were. They did not see anything. The thick fog was under the balloon. Around them everything was obscure. No light, no sound.

The balloon rose to a height of 4,500 feet. The passengers discovered that the sea was **beneath** them. The dangers above were less formidable than below.



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The night passed. At **dawn**, the clouds rose high into the heavens. **In a few hours**, the whirlwind disappeared. The balloon was again sinking slowly.

There was no land, not even an island, **beneath** them. It was a terrible situation. These men were unfortunate. The gas continued to escape. They fell fast. At 1 o'clock they were 600 feet above the sea. The gas poured out. Soon the voyagers, balloon, and basket will disappear **beneath** the waves.

These men were strong. They were silent. They were ready to struggle. It was 2 o'clock, and the balloon was only 400 feet above the waves. Then they heard a voice:

— **Is everything thrown out?**

— No, we have 10,000 francs in gold.

A heavy bag fell into the sea.

— Does the balloon rise?

— A little, but it will soon fall again.

— Now the basket!

The basket fell into the sea. They wanted to lighten the apparatus. The five passengers clambered into the net around the hoop. The balloon went up. But soon it began to **descend**.

At 4 o'clock, their dog began to bark.

— Top saw something! Land! Land!

— They saw a land. But it was very far. Was it an island or a continent? Where were they? How to reach that land? At 4 o'clock the balloon grazed the surface of the sea.

Then the balloon jumped into the air. It rose 1,500 feet, and soon, however, it fell upon the sand. The passengers has-



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tened to the ground. The basket contained five passengers and a dog. Four men were upon the shore. The fifth one was in the water. His friends cried:

— Perhaps he will swim here. Save him! Let us save him!

### Glossary:

**the Pacific** — ТИХИЙ ОКЕАН

**ninety miles an hour** — ДЕВЯНОСТО МИЛЬ В ЧАС

**beneath** — ПОД

**dawn** — РАССВЕТ

**in a few hours** — ЧЕРЕЗ НЕСКОЛЬКО ЧАСОВ

**Is everything thrown out?** — ВСЁ ЛИ ВЫБРОШЕНО?

**descend** — ОПУСКАТЬСЯ

## Chapter II

Who were those men? They were prisoners, and they succeeded to escape. Their voyage lasted five days. How did it start?

In February, 1865, the enemies, the Southerners, captured many officers. One of the most famous of them was Cyrus Smith, an engineer, and a scientist. He was thin, bony, and lean. He was about forty-five years old, with moustache. His muscles were very firm. He was educated, and practical,



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his temperament was **superb**. Cyrus Smith was also very brave.

**The Southerners** caught another man — Gideon Spilett, a well-known reporter. He was energetic, prompt, full of ideas. He was a soldier and an artist. Gideon Spilett was tall. He was forty years old or more. His eyes were clear and lively.

Cyrus Smith had a black servant. Smith freed his slaves, but this servant did not want to leave his master. He was a man of thirty years, vigorous, agile, adroit, intelligent, quick and honest. His name was Neb.

All these people were in Richmond, and it was very difficult to escape. **The Southerners** wanted to pass over the lines of the besiegers in a balloon. So the balloon was ready. The departure of the balloon was on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March. On the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup>, there was a great storm. The weather was terrible.

Cyrus Smith met a man whom he did not know. It was Pencroff, a sailor. He was about thirty- five years old. He was strong. Pencroff came to Richmond on business. He had with him Herbert Brown, a boy. This boy was fifteen years old, he was the son of Pencroff's captain, and an orphan. Pencroff loved the boy.

So, Pencroff wanted to get out. He addressed Mr. Smith:

— Mr. Smith?

The engineer looked at the man.

— Mr. Smith, do you want to escape?



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— How? — answered the engineer, quickly. — Who are you?

Pencroff told him about himself.

— Well, — replied Smith. — And how will you escape?

— By this balloon!

The sailor explained his project, which was very simple. The storm was terrible, it is true; but a skilful engineer, Smith, knew how to manage a balloon. He saw many storms in his life.

Cyrus Smith listened to the sailor and stayed silent. This was the opportunity! The project was very dangerous, but it was real. During the night, they will reach the balloon, and get into the basket!

— I am not alone, — said Smith.

— How many people more? — demanded the sailor.

— Two; my friend Spilett, and my man Neb.

— Three, — replied Pencroff; — and, with Herbert and myself, five. Can the balloon carry us?

— Yes. We will go! — said the engineer.

— Tonight, at ten o'clock, — replied Smith.

Evening arrived. Fog passed over the earth. The weather was cold. The streets of the city were empty. No one cared to guard the balloon in a weather like this.

At half past 9, Cyrus Smith and his **companions** came together at the basket. Four of them took their places in the basket, while Pencroff unfastened the bundles of ballast. Then the sailor joined his **companions**. At that moment,



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a dog jumped into the basket. It was Top, the dog of the engineer.

Then the storm started. It was not until five days later that they saw the sea below them.

So of these five men, four **found themselves**, four days later, on a desert coast. And their leader, Cyrus Smith, disappeared.

### Glossary:

**superb** — превосходный

**the Southerners** — южане

**companion** — товарищ

**find themselves** — оказаться

### Chapter III

The engineer's dog disappeared, too. The faithful animal tried to rescue its master.

It was nearly 6 o'clock. The night was very dark. The men went northward along the shore.

Where are they? They walked upon a sandy soil. They were searching all the corners.

After a walk of twenty minutes, the four men were suddenly stopped by a precipice. They saw a sharp point upon which the sea broke.





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— We must turn back, — said the sailor.

They cried, but without response. They waited, and tried once more. And again there was no answer. Then they turned back. However, Pencroff observed that the shore was bold there, and the birds were less numerous on this shore. They were walking towards the south. Soon they were on the shore again.

— We are on an island, — exclaimed Pencroff.

The words of the sailor were true. The castaways were upon an island not more than two miles long. It was necessary to wait until the next day to search for the engineer.

Then they searched for wood or dry branches. Sand and stones were all they found. One can understand the grief of Neb and his **companions**, who loved their brave comrade. The engineer escaped. Did he die? The hours were long and dreadful, the cold was intense. But the castaways did not sleep. They moved back and forth upon that arid island. They listened, they shouted, they tried to find their friend.

Once they heard an echo; and Herbert said:

— There is land to the west.

The sailor nodded. The land must be there!

The night passed. At 5 o'clock in the morning the heavens began to brighten, though the **horizon** remained obscure. The fog soon rose. At half past 6, the sky was clear. Then the sea appeared. Yes, the land was there! The island and the main land were separated by a channel half a mile wide. Into this current Neb jumped. Pencroff called to him.



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The reporter prepared to follow, but the sailor ran to him, and exclaimed:

— Do you want to cross this channel?

— Yes, I do, — replied Spilett.

— Well, listen to me. Neb can rescue his master without us. But if we throw ourselves into the channel, this strong current will carry us away. Wait, just wait a little.

Meantime, Neb was swimming against the current. Finally, he crossed the half mile which separated the isle from the mainland.

Neb landed at the base of a high rocky wall, and clambered its side, and then disappeared behind a rock. Neb's **companions** ate shellfish, which they found upon the sands. It was a poor meal, but they didn't have anything else.

The opposite coast formed an immense **bay**. Towards the north, the **bay** widened, with a shore more rounded. It was extending from the southwest to the northeast, and ended in a narrow cape. Between these two points, the distance was about eight miles. Half a mile from the shore the island lay upon the sea. Its width was about a quarter of a mile. Before the Island, the shore began with a beach with black rocks. Beyond this rose a perpendicular granite wall, at least 300 feet high and terminated by a ragged edge. This extended for about three miles.

Upon the upper level of the coast nothing was visible. Finally, distant towards the northwest about seven miles, shone a white **summit**. It was the snowy cap of a mountain.



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Was this land an island or a part of a continent? Gideon Spilett, Pencroff, and Herbert looked upon the land.

— Well, — demanded Herbert, — what do you think of it, Pencroff?

— We will soon see, — replied the sailor, — In three hours we can reach that shore, and we will see what we can do to find Mr. Smith.

Pencroff was right. Three hours later, at low tide, Spilett and his two **companions** waded through the water. Herbert swam like a fish; and all arrived without difficulty at the other shore.

### Glossary:

**companion** — товарищ

**horizon** — горизонт

**bay** — залив

**summit** — вершина

## Chapter IV

The reporter walked further along the coast. Herbert wanted to go with him.

— Stay, my boy, — said the sailor. — We must pitch our camp for the night, and try to find something to eat. Our friends will need food when they come back. We are tired, cold, and hungry. We need shelter, fire, and food. We will



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find wood in the forest, and we can get bird eggs. And we must find a house.

— We can look for a cave in these rocks, — said Herbert.

They walked along the base of the rocky wall. Then they turned to the south. Pencroff noticed a narrow inlet in the coast. Now it was important to pitch the camp near the water.

The rock rose 300 feet, smooth and massive. It was a sturdy wall of the hardest granite.

Herbert noticed some rocks. On them lay hosts of bivalves.

— They are **lithodomes**, — said Herbert.

— Can we eat them? — said Pencroff.

— Certainly.

Pencroff and Herbert made a good meal of them, they tasted like oysters. Now they must find fresh water. Two hundred feet further on Pencroff and Herbert reached the inlet. A little river was flowing through it.

— Here is water, — said Pencroff, — and there is wood. Herbert, now we need the house. The river water was clear. Pencroff and Herbert went down into sandy corridors.

This is what we want, — said Pencroff. — These Chimneys will be our house.

— Herbert and Pencroff left the Chimneys, and walked up the left bank of the river. Soon they reached the elbow which the river made to the left. From this point they saw a forest.

— Good, — said the sailor, — these trees will help us to make a fire.



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It was easy to gather the firewood: many dry branches lay at their feet. But how can they carry them to the Chimneys?

— We have the river, — suggested Herbert.

— Exactly, said Pencroff. — The river will be our road and our carrier, too. They looked at the ocean. The sea was a watery desert.

— Something tells me, — said Herbert, — that Mr. Smith is a very energetic man. So he saved himself. Don't you think so, Pencroff?

The sailor shook his head sadly.

— Yes, — said he, — our engineer saved himself.

Pencroff and Herbert walked towards the west. They looked at the snowcapped mountain, which rose six or seven miles away. They saw a forest. Then from the edge of this forest to the coast stretched a plateau.

### Glossary:

**lithodomes** — ЛИТОДОМЫ

## Chapter V

Pencroff made the real house from the Chimneys. The Chimneys were divided into three or four **chambers**. They were dry, and they could stand up in them. The floor was covered with sand.