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Journey to the Center of the Earth

An Alien Voices Production

Adapted by
JOHN de LANCIE

From a script by
NAT SEGALOFF

Original story by
JULES VERNE



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH—
Radio Play Manuscript)

ISBN: 0-87129-968-2

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Journey the the Center of the Earth

A Radio Play
For a flexible cast
(playing multiple roles, if desired)

VOICES (in order of speaking)

Axel
Driver
Professor
Martha
Grauben
Delivery Man
Stevedore #1
Stevedore #2
Hans
Boy

Journey to the Center of the Earth

Adapted by John de Lancie
From a Script by Nat Segaloff
An Alien Voices Production
Original story by Jules Verne

MUSIC: *Intro under.*

SOUND: *City sounds bleed in during speech.*

AXEL (NARRATION)

It almost seems like yesterday when I think back on those events which changed my life so completely. I was, at that time, a student at the University of Hamburg; living with my uncle, the great professor, Otto Lidenbrock...

EXT. HAMBURG STREET – DAY

1

SOUND: *Horse-drawn coach clops past on a city street; horses whinny; reins slap and jingle.*

DRIVER

Hey! Watch where you're going, you old coot! You're scaring my horses.

PROFESSOR

They're in my way!

DRIVER

(sarcastically)

They're horses, and they have to walk in the street! You're a man, you do not!

PROFESSOR

I'll walk anywhere I want!

DRIVER

Down the middle of the street, Herr Professor?!

PROFESSOR

Yes!!

INT. PROFESSOR'S HOUSE – DAY

2

SOUND: Door opening and closing.

PROFESSOR

(calling out)

Axel!

AXEL

Good evening, Uncle!

PROFESSOR

What's that supposed to mean?

AXEL

(intimidated)

Nothing...just...

SOUND: Martha walking in.

MARTHA

Professor Lidenbrock! You're late for supper.

PROFESSOR

Supper this early, Martha?

MARTHA

Early? It's half-past six!

PROFESSOR

It can't be!

MARTHA

If I'm to run your house on a schedule, you have to hold to it! Your nephew Axel is on time, and he had classes at the university.

PROFESSOR

So did I...and I taught them!

MARTHA

Nevertheless, dinner's ready.

PROFESSOR

No time to eat now. I'm going to my study. Come along, lad.

AXEL

But...

PROFESSOR

Up you go, quickly, m'boy!

SOUND: Footsteps running up the stairs.

MARTHA

(to herself)

Oh, he's impossible!

(Calling up)

I'll send up a tray if you change your stubborn mind.

AXEL

(o.s.)

We will.

PROFESSOR

(o.s.)

We won't!

SOUND: O.S. "Study" door closes.

SOUND: Front door opens again.

GRAUBEN

Good evening, Martha. Have I missed them?

MARTHA

You have indeed, dear Grauben. They've locked themselves in the study. To think...I've cooked all his favorite dishes tonight! It's so inconsiderate!

SOUND: Grauben heads off upstairs.

GRAUBEN
 (calling)
 He's a professor of geology, Martha,
 not manners – unfortunately.

LANDING OUTSIDE OF STUDY DOOR

3

SOUND: Knocking on wooden door.

PROFESSOR
 (o.s.)
 I told you, Martha, we'll have supper
 when we're good and ready. Until then,
 leave us to our work.

GRAUBEN
 It's not you I want to see, it's Axel.

AXEL
 (o.s.)
 Grauben?

GRAUBEN
 Yes?!

SOUND: The door opens.

PROFESSOR
 My dear little Grauben, Axel and I are
 in the middle of a most important
 discussion...

GRAUBEN
 ...but...

PROFESSOR
 ...now run along!

SOUND: The door slams.

AXEL (N)
 My uncle, Otto Lidenbrock, was well on
 the road to being an intolerable
 eccentric. He was professor at the
 university where he lectured on
 (MORE)

minerals and was famous for losing his temper. His house on Konigstrasse was also home to his housekeeper, Martha; myself, his nephew and reluctant laboratory assistant; and his seventeen-year-old goddaughter, Grauben. Ah, Grauben! The most lovely vision a young man could hope to love. A dear, sweet, innocent—

The Professor's voice intrudes on Axel's narrative and draws him back to the dialogue.

INT. PROFESSOR'S STUDY – NIGHT

4

SOUND: Unwrapping of paper.

PROFESSOR

Axel! Pay attention! What is this?

AXEL

(a little bored)

A book?

PROFESSOR

A book? Is that all!!! Why, it's a priceless treasure, my boy! It's at least...seven hundred years old.

AXEL

Seven hundred years?

PROFESSOR

That's right! I found it this afternoon, in an old bookshop. It's the "Heims Kringla" of Snorro Turleson, the famous Icelandic writer of the twelfth century. It is the chronicle of the Norwegian princes who ruled Iceland. Without a doubt one of the most...

The Professor's dialogue trails off as Axel's narration takes over.

AXEL (N)

As my uncle handed me the book, a piece of parchment slipped out and fell to the floor. The Professor's eyes widened with fire.

PROFESSOR

What's this? What's this...

SOUND: Parchment carefully being unfolded.

Hmm...Very interesting. These look to be Runic letters, written in a different hand than the book...

AXEL

So?

PROFESSOR

It's a cryptogram! A code! I'm sure of it! But my eyes...

SOUND: A little shuffle parchment.

AXEL

Give it to me, Uncle. I'll make it out. Let's see. Ar...ne...Arne Sak...

PROFESSOR

Arne Saknussem?

AXEL

Yes, I think that's right.

PROFESSOR

Good lord, Arne Saknussem – could it be!

AXEL

Who's he?

PROFESSOR

A sixteenth-century Icelandic alchemist who wrote in the language

(MORE)

of scholars – Latin, which will be our first clue. Take a pen and paper and we'll figure this out.

SOUND: Pen scratching on paper, rustling paper.

MUSIC: Time passing.

AXEL (N)

For the next couple of hours we tossed the letters, reading them back and forth, up and down, up and down, and back and forth – but to no avail. After a while, I began to lose interest... and...drifted off...

SOUND: Paper being snatched.

PROFESSOR

Let's see what you've got.

(Reading)

"I love you very much, my dear Grauben..." What is this?

AXEL

(defensive)

It's a...

PROFESSOR

Are you in love with Grauben?

AXEL

(cough; stammering)

Well, I...

PROFESSOR

Speak up! Are you in love with my goddaughter or are you not?

AXEL

I...yes, I am...sir!

PROFESSOR

Fine! Good! Yes, well...good. Now, that that is settled, let's apply ourselves, again, to the document.

MUSIC: Passage of time, building-

INT. PROFESSOR'S STUDY – LATER

5

AXEL (N)

We worked for another two hours...my
head ached and my stomach growled.

SOUND: Door knocking.

MARTHA

(o.s.)

Professor?

(No response)

SOUND: Door knocking again.

PROFESSOR

(calling out)

What!

MARTHA

Are you or are you not going to eat
supper tonight?

PROFESSOR
(calling out)

No!

AXEL
(calling out)

Yes!

MARTHA

I'll leave a tray for Axel outside the
door. Good night.

PROFESSOR

Good night!

SOUND: Martha's footsteps trailing off.

This is the most confounding document
I've ever seen. In all my years of
study...

AXEL

I have it!

PROFESSOR
(not hearing)
...and research, I've never...
(Beat)
What? What did you say?

AXEL
I said I've got it. I've got the key.

PROFESSOR
(screaming)
Well, what is it?

AXEL
Only if you let me eat.

PROFESSOR
(flustered)
Well...Ah...Oh, all right!

SOUND: Door opening and tray being brought in. Axel takes a bite of the sandwich.

Come on...come on then!

AXEL
(chewing)
Oh, that's good!

PROFESSOR
(impatient)
Yes, yes. Well...!

SOUND: Parchment.

AXEL
Here, read your cryptogram again.

PROFESSOR
I have a hundred times and it's meaningless!

AXEL
Only if you start at the beginning. But if you read it backwards...

PROFESSOR
I've done that!

AXEL
In a mirror?

PROFESSOR
(startling laugh)
What?! The very idea—

SOUND: Shuffling of feet. Close to the mike.

(tentatively)
“Behold, if you...descend into the crater of Sneffels Yokul, into which the shadow of the mountain Scartaris falls before the kalends of July, you shall reach the center of the earth. I have done this. Arne Saknussemm.”

AXEL
(still chewing)
You see!

PROFESSOR
Dear God in heaven! What time is it?

AXEL
Ah...

SOUND: Opens door.

PROFESSOR
(calling off)
Martha, where the devil is my dinner?
(To Axel)
Axel, pack your bags.

AXEL
(mouthful)
Why?!

PROFESSOR
What do you mean, “why?” We're going on an expedition. We're going to the center of the earth!

MUSIC: Transitional, bed.

PROFESSOR'S HOUSE – DOWNSTAIRS.

6

AXEL (N)

The next morning the house was alive
with delivery men.

SOUND: General hubbub continuing through the scene.

MARTHA

Watch my floors!

SOUND: Crate scraping on wooden floor.

DELIVERY MAN

Not to worry, ma'am.

MARTHA

Not you, maybe, but I worry.

PROFESSOR

(calling off)

Come along, Axel. Bring those boxes
down. Martha, are those the Ruhmkorff
coils?

MARTHA

If you say they are.

GRAUBEN

What are they, Professor? They look
like giant fireflies!

PROFESSOR

And they operate on much the same
principle: a portable electrical light,
run by a rechargeable battery.

GRAUBEN

Are you going to carry all this on your
backs?

PROFESSOR

As much as practical. For the rest,
we'll hire a guide.