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Off on a Comet

Jules Verne · *1877 · translated by Ellen E. Frewer (as revised in the Horne edition, 1911)*

"Nothing, sir, can induce me to surrender my claim." A captain and a count exchange cards over a right of land, and are about to settle it with sword or pistol, when the ground itself will not stay. The hosted English is Ellen E. Frewer, as revised in the Horne edition of 1911, Project Gutenberg #1353, complete.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What becomes of a quarrel over a claim when the very ground is carried off on a comet, and how should a school read a voyage of leftover people through the solar system?

"Nothing, sir, can induce me to surrender my claim."
Chapter I, A Challenge

Captain Hector Servadac and the count who faces him are interrupted, not by a second, but by a catastrophe that takes a piece of the earth with them into space. The book is a scientific romance of a little remnant of people, of maps that no longer serve, and of courage far from home. Teach the wonder and the cooperation, for a wide band (catalogue 6–12). This is Frewer's English as revised in the Horne 1911 edition. Quote the challenge as printed, including the chapter title "A Challenge."

KEY CHARACTERS

Captain Hector Servadac
The officer of the opening challenge, whose name stands in the war-office register, and who is carried off with a piece of the earth

The count of the first chapter
The other party to the claim, who exchanges cards with the captain

Ben Zoof
Servadac's orderly, of the gourbi and of the voyage

A CLAIM, AND A CHANGING GROUND

> *"Nothing, sir, can induce me to surrender my claim."*
> Chapter I, A Challenge

Grades 6–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01
A Challenge
CHAPTER I

A rapid altercation over seniority and a prior right ends in the formal interchange of cards. On one is inscribed Captain Hector Servadac. Sword and pistol are named. The ground will soon decide more than either man can.

- The first spoken line is exact: "Nothing, sir, can induce me to surrender my claim."
- Chapter I is titled "A Challenge."
- The comedy of the duel is already in view; so is a right of land that will not last in its old form
- Quote the typographic quotation marks as the file gives them, or the spoken words as a substring

> *"Nothing, sir, can induce me to surrender my claim."*
> Chapter I, A Challenge

02
Captain Servadac and His Orderly
CHAPTER II, AND THE EARLY CHAPTERS

The register of the Minister of War gives Servadac's birth at St. Trelody, his service, and his years at St. Cyr. Ben Zoof, his orderly, belongs to this life. A gourbi on the African shore is their post.

- Keep "SERVADAC (Hector)" and "St. Trelody" as the register prints them, and "Ben Zoof" as the orderly's name
- The early comedy of the garrison is the human start, before the sky changes
- The book will take a mixed company, not only two duelists, into the voyage
- For 6–12; an adventure with a comic opening

03
Off the Earth
THE CATASTROPHE, AND THE MIDDLE OF THE BOOK

The ground is torn away and carried on a comet's path. Maps, seasons, and the weight of a body all change. The little company must learn where they are, and how to live.

- Teach the wonder of the voyage as Verne wrote it; the science is of 1877
- Cooperation among people who were about to fight is part of the moral of the middle book
- Do not invent a modern spacecraft; this is a piece of the earth on a comet
- The quarrel over a claim looks different when the claim itself has left the coast

04
A Way Home?
THE LATER CHAPTERS, AND THE CLOSE

The question of the close is whether, and how, the remnant may return. Teach the ending as the book gives it, not as a later film's.

- Do not invent a last-page rescue the chapters do not write
- Courage and ingenuity, and the limits of both, are the later matter
- A class may talk about what is worth quarreling over, and what is worth keeping together
- Quote this Frewer/Horne wording only

05
The Hosted Translation
PG #1353, FREWER / HORNE 1911

The hosted English is Ellen E. Frewer, as revised in the Horne edition, 1911, complete. The French title is often given as Hector Servadac; this file is Off on a Comet.

- Do not substitute a later translation's wording
- For a wide grade band (6–12)
- It may be read with From the Earth to the Moon and In Search of the Castaways as Verne's range of voyages, each in its own hosted English
- Chapter I is a challenge; the book is larger than a duel

A Quarrel Interrupted · A Voyage off the Earth · Cooperation · Courage Far from Home · Wonder · What Is Worth Claiming

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 6–12

1. The book opens on a challenge: "Nothing, sir, can induce me to surrender my claim." Chapter I is titled "A Challenge." Cards are exchanged; sword and pistol are named.
2. This is Ellen E. Frewer's English, as revised in the Horne edition, 1911, PG #1353, complete. Quote this wording.
3. Captain Hector Servadac and a mixed company are carried off on a comet with a piece of the earth. Teach the wonder and the cooperation, for a wide band (6–12). The science is of 1877.
4. The quarrel over a claim looks different when the ground itself has left the coast.
5. Do not invent a last-page rescue or a modern spacecraft the book does not give.

Quotations are verbatim from the translated by Ellen E. Frewer (as revised in the Horne edition, 1911), Project Gutenberg #1353, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/off-on-a-comet/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.