



# SUPPORTING CAST

## Steampunk Heroes: Professor Pierre Arronax and Conseil

by CJ Beiting

This article is presented as a follow up to John Nowak's Pyramid article of October 16, 1998: ["Nautilus but Nice: Gaming with Captain Nemo and the Nautilus"](#) (also reprinted in [Transactions of the Royal Martian Geographical Society 3](#)) and is intended for players of *GURPS Steampunk* or other Victorian-era RPGs.

Note that some additions have been made to the character descriptions that were not provided in Jules Verne's original text, but that seemed logical. Purists should feel free to disregard material which they do not like.

### Professor Pierre Arronax

*104.5 points*

Born 1827.

Age 40; 5'9"; 195 lbs; a slightly overweight middle-aged French scholar with curly dark hair. He is clean-shaven.

**ST:** 10 **DX:** 10 **IQ:** 13 [30] **HT:** 10

**Speed:** 5.0 **Move:** 5 **Dodge:** 5

**Advantages:** Reputation (author of *Mysteries of the Great Submarine Depths*, European scholarly community) (+1) [3]; Status+2 [10]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10]

**Disadvantages:** Addiction (tobacco) [-5]; Code of Honor (Gentleman's) [-10]; Dependant, competent, almost all the time (Conseil) [0]; Overweight [-5]; Phobia (sharks) [-5]; Weak Will-1 [-8]

**Quirks:** Not interested in money; Mildly egalitarian and interested in social justice; Non-practicing Catholic

**Skills:** Administration-12 [1], Animal Handling-12 [2], Appreciate Beauty-12 [3], Area Knowledge (Paris)-12 [1/2], Bard-12 [1], Diagnosis-16 [8]; First Aid-17 [2]; Geology-12 [2]; Guns (Rifle)-11 [1/2]; Naturalist (Marine Animals)-17 [12]; Paleontology-16 [10]; Phrenology-12 [1]; Physician-16 [10]; Prospecting-12 [1]; Research-13 [2]; Riding (Horse)-10 [1], Savoir-Faire-16 [2]; Science!-12 [14]; Surgery-14 [10]; Surveying-12 [1]; Survival (Plains)-11 [.5]; Swimming-10 [0]; Teamster-8 [--], Writing-14 [4]; Zoology-14 [6]

**Languages:** French (native)-15 [3], Latin-13 [4], English-8 [-], German-9 [-]

This is a depiction of Professor Pierre Arronax circa 1867. The events of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* will take place from 1867 to 1868, and he will publish them in serialized form in a magazine in 1869, and in final book form in 1871.

Professor Pierre Arronax is a famous French polymath born in 1827. After attending lycée and university, he went on to take a medical degree and practice medicine privately for several years.

Medical practice did not satisfy his scientific interests, and he later took a position with the Paris Museum as a naturalist. He has some fame as a marine biologist, and his two-volume monograph, *The Mysteries of the Great Submarine Depths* is one of the authoritative works on the subject, guaranteeing Prof. Arronax an international reputation amongst scholars. He has some skill as a paleontologist, and makes frequent trips all over the world to collect samples for his researches and for the collection at the Paris Museum.

Prof. Arronax is an educated and cultured man, the epitome of the broadly trained Victorian scientist. He has no more than conventionally religious, and is a non-practicing Roman Catholic in that particularly French way. He is unmarried, and has little interest in the opposite sex. Finally, he is a man of divided sentiments; he clearly empathizes with the plight of the poor in the world, and clearly believes in social equality, but at the same time he accepts the social hierarchy of Victorian-era France, and keeps a 30-year old manservant whom he refers to as "boy."

The above template represents Arronax before his experiences aboard the *Nautilus* with Captain Nemo. After them, add skills in Hard Hat Diving-12 [1] and Guns (Air Rifle)-8 [0] and raise his Naturalist (Marine animals) skill to 18 [+2]. He can also be assumed to have an Area Knowledge (Oceans) of 12 [1/2]. He will be famous (Reputation +3, everybody, [15]) as the author of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, a worldwide bestseller detailing his exploits with Captain Nemo. This will add 19.5 points to his character cost, for a grand total of 124 points.

## Conseil

**80.5 points**

Born 1837

Age 30; 5'9"; 150 lbs; a nondescript gentleman's gentleman (i.e., no description given)

**ST:** 11 [10] **DX:** 10 **IQ:** 10 **HT:** 12 [20]

**Speed:** 5.5 **Move:** 5 **Dodge:** 5

**Advantages:** Ally (Arronax, almost all the time) [30]; Imperturbable [10]; Manual Dexterity-1 [3]  
**Disadvantages:** Addiction (tobacco) [-5]; Duty (non-hazardous, almost all the time) [-10]; Humble [-1]; Odious Personal Habit (always refers to Arronax in the third person) [-5]; Sense of Duty (Arronax) [-5]; Status-1 [-5] **Quirks:** Punctual; Zealous; Can identify dead animals but not living ones. **Skills:** Animal Handling-12 [8]; Area Knowledge (Paris)-12 [4]; Cooking-12 [4]; Knife-10 [1]; Naturalist-12 [8]; Riding (Horse)-9 [1]; Savoir-Faire (Servant)-12 [4]; Survival: Plains-9 [1]; Swimming-12 [4]; Teamster-10 [1.5] **Languages:** Flemish (native)-11 [1], French-11 [4]

Conseil (no first name or description given) was born in 1837 and is Professor Arronax's manservant, traveling companion, and research assistant. As such, he has a slightly wider range of skills than the typical Victorian "gentleman's gentleman." He is Flemish, and is described by Arronax as being: "phlegmatic in temperament, punctual on principle, zealous from habit, rarely disturbed or even surprised, adroit with his hands, and apt at any service required." Conseil is completely devoted and subservient to Arronax, and despite his name, never butts in or gives advice (*conseil* being French for "advice"). His loyalty is complete, and he willingly risks his life for Professor Arronax on several occasions.

Conseil has two odd habits. In the first place, he always refers to Arronax in the third person, and as "Master," even to Arronax's face (e.g., "whatever pleases Master"), a habit which the nominally egalitarian-minded Arronax finds annoying. Secondly, while Conseil has a very exact knowledge of biology, and can instantly classify any specimen according to the Linnaean system of taxonomy, he is completely unable to identify living animals by sight. Nevertheless, he is a valuable assistant to Professor Arronax, who returns his deep devotion with warm affection in return.

Note that Arronax and Conseil are both very well-traveled, and have been "from China to the Congo" in the pursuit of Arronax's scientific researches. The game master can assume any extra

Area Knowledges for the pair that he likes, and a case can be made for extra Contacts and Survival skills as needed.

## Using Arronax and Conseil in a Campaign

The most important question for the GM to decide before using Arronax and Conseil as characters in a campaign is whether or not the events in *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* actually happened in his campaign universe. This article proceeds from the premise that they are true, and that the subsequent account of them was written by Professor Arronax and not by Jules Verne, giving Arronax international fame of two possible types. In the first place, the sinking of several ships beginning in 1866 *does* cause an international uproar, and when the theory that a giant sea monster was responsible was formed, people "sang of it in the cafes, ridiculed it in the newspapers, [and] dramatized it on the stage." All of this happens even before the truth of Captain Nemo became known, so Arronax's subsequent fame can be assumed.

Alternatively, the GM can assume that the events of the novel happened and Arronax told his tale, but was not believed, and is considered the laughingstock of the world (Bad Reputation) for foisting a monstrous "fish story" upon the public. This will allow for less-disrupted history of the Nineteenth Century, as only a few crackpots (i.e., the player characters) will believe him.

In any case, Prof. Arronax makes a good Patron for a variety of genres, and will be considered as such in the paragraphs below. Game masters should note that Arronax will make a good Patron in gaming terms insofar as he is somewhat indecisive and weak-willed, and as such will not hog all the action in a game. Heroes in his employ will have to make a lot of decisions on their own, and will have to convince Arronax to adopt them. Once Arronax is convinced, Conseil will do "whatever pleases Master." Do not play Arronax in such a way as to be overbearing or domineering; such is completely contrary to his character.

One small problem for GM is the fact that neither Professor Arronax nor Conseil speak English, although Arronax can read it. Like most Frenchmen, Arronax prefers to communicate solely in his native tongue, and will have to hire an interpreter if he is in an English-speaking area. Game masters who are worried about communication problems should raise his English skill to 10, and play him with a very thick French accent.

With these points in mind, the GM can use Arronax and Conseil in any of the following **GURPS** Victorian-era genres.

### GURPS Steampunk

This is the default setting for the events of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, which should come as no surprise given the fact that statistics for Captain Nemo and the *Nautilus* are included therein (see p. STM51 and p.STM80 respectively). The GM will have to decide to what extent he wants to integrate the events of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* into his steampunk universe: will they be unique, or will Prof. Arronax be merely one of a league of extraordinary gentlemen from Victorian fiction who have undertaken great things? He would serve as a valuable Ally or Contact for players who are trying to build their own submersible vehicle, or as an expert on marine life, real or monstrous. Much could be made of Captain Nemo's post-*20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* efforts against European imperialism, particularly British imperialism. Perhaps Professor Arronax, as the world's foremost authority on Captain Nemo, would be charged by the European Powers that Be to assemble a team and locate Captain Nemo in order to bring him to justice . . .

### GURPS Old West

Although this crossover seems incongruous, it is in reality one of the most natural. Professor Arronax and Conseil begin the novel *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* by hunting fossils in

Nebraska, and it is not at all unlikely that they will return to the Old West later in the 1870s for further fossil-hunting expeditions. They will be in need of guides, bodyguards, and translators . . . perfect roles for players. While hunting for fossils, they could get caught up in the great dinosaur fossil hunting wars of Edward Cope and Othniel Marsh (see p.STM9; Ken Hite gives a more in-depth treatment of the Cope/Marsh rivalry in p.STI34 or "[Use Archaeology to Uncover Hidden Adventure Ideas](#)"), which ran from the late 1870's to 1889. Alternatively, Arronax and Conseil could be presented as a pair of "gentlemen in distress" in need of rescuing from villains by a group of Old West heroes, with a surprise in store for the players after they discover the identity of the men they have rescued! After his book is published, Professor Arronax's fame will spread even to the American West, but the average cowboy or ranch hand who has heard of him is more likely to associate him with the high seas than the Wild West.

## GURPS Castle Falkenstein

[NOTE: There are some discrepancies in the original R. Talsorian version of this material: the basic *Castle Falkenstein* rules (p.43) assert "Pierre Arronax" was a nom de plume for Jules Verne, and that he experienced the events of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* himself. However, the Steam Age supplement (p.69) claims that the two men were different, and that Arronax narrated his tale to Verne. This article presumes the latter interpretation.]

In the *Castle Falkenstein* universe, Jules Verne is the Science Minister of France, and as such is likely to be very interested in Arronax and his companions have to say. Furthermore, so would all of the Crowned Heads of Europe; the existence of an Infernal Device like the *Nautilus* would likely fuel an arms race under the sea, in the same way that the Bavarian Aeronavy is fueling an arms race in the air. As the sole technically minded survivor of the *Nautilus*, Professor Arronax would be a valuable property for any power in Europe or the world that had aims on building its own similar Infernal Devices, and he might be the target of espionage or kidnapping attempts by parties ranging from the Steam Lords of Britain to the World Crime League. Doubtless he would need guarding by a suitably equipped party of stalwarts.

The original *Castle Falkenstein* material indicates that Captain Nemo was eventually convinced by Science Minister Verne to operate against those who make war "behind the scenes," such as the World Crime League. Since Nemo swore a vow never to walk on dry land walked by other men, it is likely that the person who did the "convincing" was Professor Arronax himself, acting as a liaison between the two men. The attempt to do this would provide an adventure in and of itself, and Arronax's "fishing" expedition (and future negotiation efforts!) would doubtless need the help of the player characters . . .

It should be noted that in the *Castle Falkenstein* universe, Professor Arronax will not use magick of any kind, since he is a committed Man of Science. It is possible that his classic *Mysteries of the Great Submarine Depths* might include some information on some of the aquatic Faerie races, however.

## GURPS Screampunk

Although this does not seem like an obvious fit, consider the fact that *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* has some horrific elements to it, over and above attacks by cannibals and giant squids on the *Nautilus* (see the US Naval Institute Press edition of the work for a good examination of this theme). The *Nautilus* itself could be seen as an artifact of Forbidden Knowledge, resulting in Hubris and Idolatry; indeed, the entirety of Professor Arronax's trip could be seen as a Misguided Voyage of Discovery (p.SCR14-15). Then there are the other horrific elements. Throughout the journey the members of Captain Nemo's crew behave like sullen, silent automatons; why? Nemo claims that they were all with him voluntarily, but what strange power does he have over them to render them so obedient and so lifeless? Furthermore, in the end of the novel Nemo himself descends into a fit of sullen, withdrawn madness both figurative and literal; what expiation does he make by the sacrifice of himself and the *Nautilus* into the maelstrom at the end of the novel? Could

it be that he was either in opposition to -- or in league with -- some hellish undersea Thing Man Was Not Meant To Know? And when he returns from the deep, will Prof. Arronax and his band of gallant heroes be able to stop him . . . ?

## GURPS Atlantis

Nemo and his crew find the sunken ruins of Atlantis in Chapter 9 of Book II of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. If the GM wants to make Atlantis a part of his Victorian science fiction game (perhaps using the "Lords of the Deep" campaign from Chapter 6 of *GURPS Atlantis*), either the *Nautilus* or a similar vessel build by Professor Arronax is a useful way to get the adventurers there. Perhaps the people of Atlantis are benevolent and advanced, loathing war and exploitation and unwilling to speak to "primitives" who engage in such activities. Perhaps they are hostile and malevolent, desiring to conquer the surface world and unwilling to tolerate any opposition. In either eventuality, Captain Nemo would be a great ally for the surface world, either as a sympathetic go-between to a civilized Atlantis, or as a skilled point man in a war against a hostile Atlantis. Professor Arronax and a hand-picked crew would need to find Nemo and enlist his aid on behalf of France and the Crowned Heads of Europe . . . no easy task considering that Nemo would love to see many of those Crowned Heads destroyed for their imperialist ways.

## GURPS Deadlands

The world of the Weird West provides an interesting home for Professor Arronax. Perhaps he would be investigating it on behalf of the European scientific community, which is at such a distance from the events of the Reckoning. Perhaps he and Conseil and would be interested in cataloging the various kinds of Critters and Abominations and finding out ways to defeat them. Perhaps Arronax is active in the Great Maze, investigating the Maze Dragons and other new aquatic phenomena (Captain Nemo might be there, too, since Ghost Rock is a much more likely fuel for the *Nautilus* than any other Victorian fuel source . . . ). In any of these cases, Arronax will certainly need bodyguards and guides, especially well-armed ones.

Note that long exposure to the horrors of the Weird West is likely to raise Arronax's Weak Will, his combat skills, and possibly even his faith.

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