

The Fenian Ram: History of the Submarine
(First 10-Pages)

By

Ashley Tull

EXT. AERIAL VIEW - RIVER THAMES - OLD LONDON - DAY

WE FOLLOW the river (circa 1600's) as it SNAKES around several bends.

CUT TO:

INT. RIVER THAMES - UNDERWATER - DAY

Through the dense darkness of the dirty river, an object slowly appears and approaches...

JOHN P. HOLLAND (V.O.)

(Irish accent)

-and through that murky water of the River Thames came Cornelius Van Drebbel's riverboat. Now this is 1620, mind you, so that water was probably smelly from all the excrement that was dumped into it on a daily basis.

... it's an ENCLOSED WOODEN VESSEL -- like two long rowboats sandwiched together, with a wooden periscope protruding out of the top, which cuts along the water's surface. This primitive submarine is being pushed along by six sealed oars on either side of it with paddles on the ends, swiveling horizontally on the forward-motion and vertically on the backward thrust.

JOHN P. HOLLAND (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Van Drebbel took 15 people on that famous trip under the water for three hours. I'm guessing it was no more than one hour in actuality, while his crew of six rowed the twelve oars needed to move such a vessel.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL - PATERSON - NEW YORK - DAY

A cluster of trees surround the school.

SUPER: "ST. JOHN'S CATHOLIC SCHOOL, PATERSON, NEW YORK, 1877"

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Van Drebbel wasn't originally from England. He was a Dutchman who had been a sailor in the English Navy.

INT. HISTORY CLASS - SCHOOL - DAY

The boys only class, ages 9-14, are writing down the lesson. The teacher, JOHN P. HOLLAND, stands with his back to a diagram of Van Drebbel's submarine on a chalkboard.

JOHN P. HOLLAND

He was hoping to have had more of those riverboats constructed for the Navy's fleet, but after King James I took a trip inside the boat, the king couldn't see what possible use they'd be in a time of war and rejected Van Drebbel's proposal. But all was not lost, for Van Drebbel scrapped the riverboat, took his periscope design and invented the microscope with it. Ingenious!

The boys chuckle. A fellow teacher, grinning, is sitting at the back, observing the class. One boy raises his hand.

JOHN P. HOLLAND (CONT'D)

Yes, Anthony.

PUPIL ANTHONY

Van Drebbel's boat should've had weapons.

JOHN P. HOLLAND

Precisely! But having said that, what kind of a weapon do you use underwater? I know, tie the horn of a rhinoceros to the bow and you've got yourself a ram just like they had on those ancient Greek ships.

The boys giggle. John checks the time on his pocket watch.

JOHN P. HOLLAND (CONT'D)

We have five minutes left. Pencils down everyone. Before you go I just thought I'd show you a little something that's not class-related. I want to see what you think of it.

John holds up a large detailed SKETCH of a rickety-looking flying machine.

JOHN P. HOLLAND (CONT'D)

Would anyone like to guess what this is?

PUPIL #2

It's a dragonfly.

JOHN P. HOLLAND

No, but nice try.

PUPIL #3

It's a kite.

JOHN P. HOLLAND
No. It's not a kite.

PUPIL #4
It's Jesus coming back to earth.

JOHN P. HOLLAND
Wouldn't that be a nice thought?
Did he come back to fetch his sandals
I wonder?

The boys chuckle louder

JOHN P. HOLLAND (CONT'D)
I don't think you're going to get
it, so I'll just go ahead and tell
you anyway. It's a flying machine.

The class look at John like he's lost his mind.

PUPIL #3
A flying machine?

JOHN P. HOLLAND
Yes. I really do think that one-day
man will be able to fly up into the
sky like a bird.

The boys begin to snicker. John frowns.

FELLOW TEACHER
Is that an invention of yours, John?

JOHN P. HOLLAND
Uh, yes it is. I intend to put a
patent on it. I really do believe
that flying machines are the way for
future transportation.

PUPIL #4
(with a smirk)
Me, too... and ships will take us to
the moon.

The boys are rollicking with laughter. The school bell RINGS.

JOHN P. HOLLAND
Alright, class dismissed.

The boys hurriedly start leaving.

JOHN P. HOLLAND (CONT'D)
(to himself)
This discussion is adjourned... uh,
due to lack of interest it seems.

Pupil Anthony approaches John.

PUPIL ANTHONY

Sir, your flying machine is a great idea but I think people are going to want submarines more.

JOHN P. HOLLAND

A "submarine" you say? What exactly is a submarine?

PUPIL ANTHONY

It's a boat that goes under the water like Van Drebbel's, only it's made of metal. If you had one of those, then you could go anywhere under the sea, even to the lost City of Atlantis. Here.

Anthony hands John a BOOK, entitled "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea by Jules Verne." John takes a long, hard look at the cover.

JOHN P. HOLLAND (O.S.)

... 20,000 leagues under the sea. That sounds like a long way down.

PUPIL ANTHONY

It's about Captain Nemo who had a submarine that could go anywhere underwater no matter how deep. I finished reading it this morning. You can borrow it if you want.

JOHN P. HOLLAND

I can? Well, thank you, Anthony. I'll certainly give it a good going over when I get a chance.

Anthony leaves. The fellow teacher strolls up.

FELLOW TEACHER

Still looking to make your mark on the world, John?

JOHN P. HOLLAND

Yes, unlike you Americans who live by the creed of: "Live for today, for tomorrow we shall die." Sam, whether you like it or not, I'm a European and as a European we plan for the future. I plan to build a flying machine to revolutionize the future of mankind.

FELLOW TEACHER

Well, I hope it works for you. Hey, the day's nearly over. Wanna come get a pint after?

JOHN P. HOLLAND

As tempting as that sounds, I've already had the misfortune to have consumed a large amount of coffee today due to staying up all night, thinking about how to construct this machine. So as a European I must spend the remainder of my day a'pee'in'. Having said that, I could always cut out the middle man and pour the beer straight into the latrine... Nah! Can't waste good liquor.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - PATERSON - DAY

SUPER: "TWO WEEKS LATER"

John, engrossed in the pages of the Jules Verne novel, passes by several shops. Two men, MICHAEL and ALFRED, sneak up behind John and join him, clasping hold of his arms.

MICHAEL

(Irish accent)

John, we had a feeling you'd be heading this way.

ALFRED

(Irish accent)

Oh, are we happy to see you.

JOHN P. HOLLAND

You two misfits are happy to see anyone when you have a hankering for drink. I suppose the job hunting came to a dead end as usual.

MICHAEL

It's tough times. Every day we bust our butts looking for work.

They abruptly stop.

JOHN P. HOLLAND

Alright, the two of you drop your pants and let me see your busted butts.

MICHAEL

Do what?

ALFRED

Have you lost your mind?

JOHN P. HOLLAND

No! C'mon, drop your pants right here! I wanna see how busted up those butts really are.

ALFRED

Never mock the afflicted.

JOHN P. HOLLAND

If your butts are busted, then it's because you've cut off the circulation from sitting around, idling away your time doing nothing!

MICHAEL

John, we're your brothers! Have you no compassion for our plight? You make it seem like we're afraid of hard work or something.

JOHN P. HOLLAND

But that's just it, you both are! I would have more respect for you and Alfred if you prostituted yourselves, because then I could see that you were at least making an effort to make ends meet. I'm the one supporting our family, and I'll be damned if I'll keep on doing it on my own!

ALFRED

Does that mean you won't be buying us a drink then?

JOHN P. HOLLAND

I'm tellin' ya, I could beat you both over the head with this book!

ALFRED

What are you reading there?

JOHN P. HOLLAND

20,000 Leagues Under the Sea.

MICHAEL

It sounds like daft book for kids. You want me to toss it for you?

JOHN P. HOLLAND

Touch this book, and my foot will be the only thing that busts your butts.

Michael and Alfred both grimace.

JOHN P. HOLLAND (CONT'D)
I'm on the verge of a creating
something of unbelievable proportions.

MICHAEL
Like what?

JOHN P. HOLLAND
This book tells of a man who made a
submarine.

ALFRED
A what?

JOHN P. HOLLAND
An underwater boat called the
Nautilus. Well, guess what? I'm
gonna quit my job and make a
submarine.

MICHAEL
Good luck with that.

ALFRED
There goes our meal ticket.

MICHAEL
I thought you were going to make a
flying machine.

JOHN P. HOLLAND
I was, but I don't like the odds of
having to jump out of it if it doesn't
work right, and besides, I'm a real
chicken when it comes to heights.
I'll see you later, lads.

John walks off.

ALFRED
So a submarine it is then?

JOHN P. HOLLAND
Aye. And do you know the best thing
about a submarine?

MICHAEL/ALFRED
What?

JOHN P. HOLLAND
You can't hear people on the outside
asking you to buy them a beer.

John hurries away, chuckling, leaving his brothers grumbling.

CUT TO:

EXT. U.S. NAVY BUILDING - NEW YORK CITY - DAY

The building is adorned with a large Stars and Stripes flag.

SUPER: "UNITED STATES NAVAL HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK"

INT. WAITING ROOM - U.S. NAVY BUILDING - DAY

John sits across from SAMMY RAWLINS, mid-sixties, quirky-looking, runny-nose, wearing dirty clothes and a shabby sailor's hat with CSS Virginia on it.

JOHN P. HOLLAND

Good day to you, sir. My name's John Holland.

SAMMY RAWLINS

(Southern drawl)

Howdy. Sammy... Sammy Rawlins.

JOHN P. HOLLAND

Are you a Civil War veteran then, Sammy?

SAMMY RAWLINS

That I am and proud of it, too.

JOHN P. HOLLAND

So what brought you all the way here?

SAMMY RAWLINS

I served aboard one'a them ironclad riverboats down at the Battle of Hampton Roads, you know, the ones that sat low in the water.

JOHN P. HOLLAND

Looking at that hat that's proudly worn upon your noggin, we must talking about the CSS Virginia then.

SAMMY RAWLINS

We would. You familiar with that boat?

JOHN P. HOLLAND

I vaguely remember reading something about the Battle of the Ironclads when I lived in Ireland.

SAMMY RAWLINS

All the way over there?! Why, if I'd known the news woulda got that far, I woulda fought damn harder than I did.

JOHN P. HOLLAND
Go on about your journey here.

SAMMY RAWLINS
Well, I got wind that the US Navy
are starting to make their ships
outta metal now, so I figured there
was still work for me as a sailor
what with me being in a war'n'all.

JOHN P. HOLLAND
But the War's over, Sammy.

SAMMY RAWLINS
I know, but I still have a hankerin'
to blow somethin' up.

JOHN P. HOLLAND
You might wanna start with blowing
your nose.

John hands Sammy a handkerchief.

SAMMY RAWLINS
Much obliged to ya.

A NAVY OFFICIAL exits a door and approaches.

NAVY OFFICIAL
Mr. Rawlins? Sammy Rawlins?

Sammy stands up.

SAMMY RAWLINS
That'd be me.

NAVY OFFICIAL
Secretary George Kirby regrets to
inform you that he has to leave to
attend an urgent matter and asks
could you come back tomorrow?

SAMMY RAWLINS
Tomorrow...?
(frowning)
Oh... I... suppose I could.

NAVY OFFICIAL
And you must be Mr. Holland.

JOHN P. HOLLAND
In the flesh and at your service,
sir.

NAVY OFFICIAL

The United States Navy has thoroughly examined your proposal for a submarine boat, and we regretably decline from pursuing it any further.

JOHN P. HOLLAND

What?! But a submarine could be just the vessel to have in your navy that could tip the balance of power in a time of crisis. Ask Sammy here, he'll tell ya. He operated a submarine boat in the last war.

NAVY OFFICIAL

(to Sammy)

Is that true?

SAMMY RAWLINS

Uh, I was a sailor aboard an ironclad riverboat if that's what he means.

NAVY OFFICIAL

Did the boat submerge below the waterline and rise up again?

SAMMY RAWLINS

Uh, no, but we were low enough in the water to grab some fish out of it with our bare hands. I bit the head clean off one of 'em.

JOHN P. HOLLAND

There you have it! They were so low in the water they could practically piss out of the portholes.

NAVY OFFICIAL

I'm sorry but the Navy is simply not interested in your invention at this time.

JOHN P. HOLLAND

Was there any reason given at all as to why not?

The official hands John back his DETAILED DIAGRAM that is stamped: "UNWORKABLE."

NAVY OFFICIAL (O.S.)

I'm very sorry, Mr Holland.

JOHN P. HOLLAND (O.S.)

Unworkable?!