

Jules Verne and the Heroes of Birkenhead.



Part 3.

Who Was Jules Verne?

By John Lamb

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Jules Verne was born on February 8, 1828, in the city of Nantes, France. He was the son of Pierre Verne, a prominent lawyer, and Sophie Allotte de La Fuÿe, a Nantes woman of distant Scottish descent.

As a young boy he would observe the great docks, sailing ships and shipbuilding yards in the Town of Nantes - he was immensely proud of having been raised *in the centre of maritime life of a great commercial city.*

Jules Verne (left) at the age 25.

The young Jules Verne's imagination was fuelled by the daily passing of great sailing ships and while at boarding school he began to write short stories set in many different parts of the world.

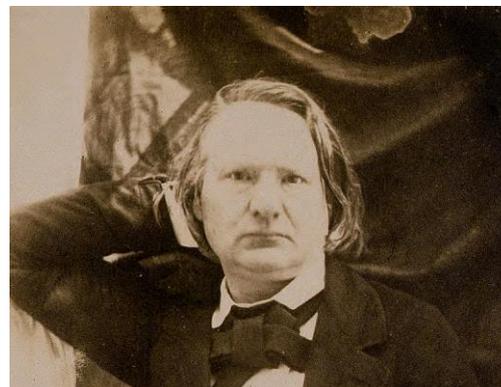


Nantes in the early 19th Century.

Verne's father did not see his son as a writer but as the natural heir to the family law firm and in 1845 he fortuitously sent his son to Paris to study law. Verne not surprisingly was more attracted to the city's theatre scene and the famed literary salons of Paris, sometimes in the company of his newfound friends, the great novelists Alexandre Dumas and Victor Hugo.

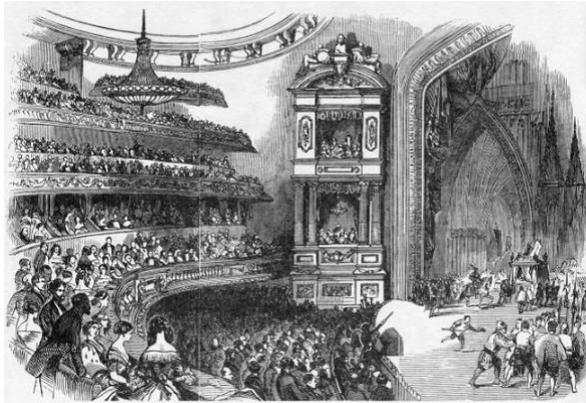


Alexandre Dumas (1802-70)



Victor Hugo (1802-85)

Verne gained his Law degree in 1849 but he later refused his father's offer to open a law practice in Nantes. Instead, he took a lowly paid position at the Theatre-Lyrique in Paris as a writer and producer of plays - a role which undoubtedly helped Jules Verne perfect his later writing style.



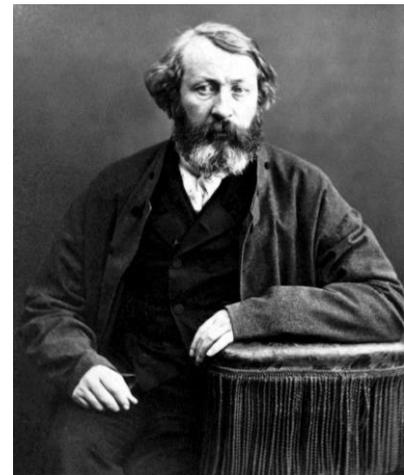
In 1856 Verne met and fell in love with Honorine de Viane, a young widow with two daughters, they married in 1857. In 1861 their only child, Michel Jean Pierre Verne was born.

The Theatre - Lyrique in Paris in 1847.

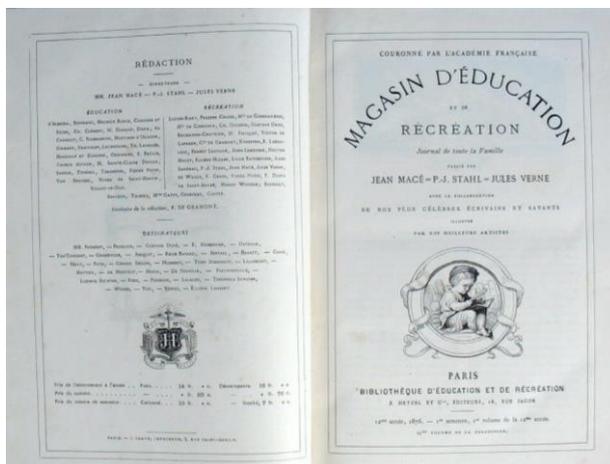
Work in the theatre resulted in limited success and to support himself and his young son, Verne became a stockbroker. Nevertheless, he refused to totally abandon his love of writing and in 1857 he published his first book *Le Salon de 1857*.

In 1862 Verne was introduced to Pierre-Jules Hetzel, a fellow writer who was to become his publisher, mentor and friend. Hetzel was already the preferred publisher for Victor Hugo, George Sand and Emile Zola.

Hetzel also introduced Jules Verne to Felix Nadar, who, in turn brought Verne to the attention of a whole community of scientific friends.



Pierre-Jules Hetzel (1814 - 86)



Hetzel's main goal was to have scientists, authors and illustrators collaborating to produce educational works for the whole family.

The novels of Jules Verne were serialized as weekly installments in Hetzel's *Magasin D'Education et de Recreation*.

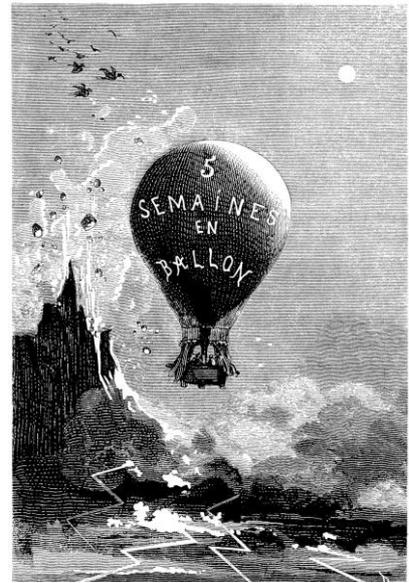
Magasin D'Education et de Recreation.

In 1862 Verne published his first major novel - *Five Weeks in a Balloon*, the storyline followed the adventures of three Englishmen on a balloon journey across Africa.

Verne undertook meticulous geographical research to make up for the fact that he had very little knowledge of ballooning and had never been near the African continent.

He was now well on the way to perfecting a new literary genre of the 'geographical novel' whereby he skilfully blended the latest advances in technology within a geographical and historical adventure.

Five Weeks in a Balloon (1862).



Verne relied heavily upon periodical magazines such as Louis Hachette's *Le Tour du Monde* for his research.

This weekly publication contained articles on world exploration, together with maps, vivid illustrations and descriptions of customs in remote locations. He also drew on the works of other writers such as Edgar Allen Poe, Daniel Defoe and Georges Sand.

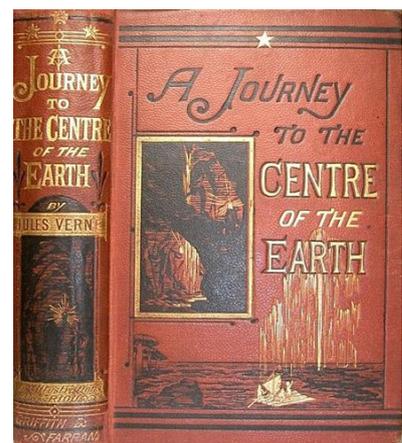
Verne was contracted to turn out two novels a year for Hetzel and the majority of his works are encompassed in the 54 volumes of the *Voyages Extraordinaires*, a series which symbolically begins in Birkenhead, England with the *Adventures of Captain Hatteras* (1865).

Verne's peak writing years were between 1864 and 1874 when he produced several world-famous novels.

In *Journey to The Centre of the Earth* (1864), German Professor Otto Lidenbrock travels towards the Earth's core in the footsteps of the 16th century Icelandic explorer Arne Saknussemm.

The novel marks the first time that dinosaurs were accurately represented in any work of fiction.

A Journey to The Centre of the Earth (1864)



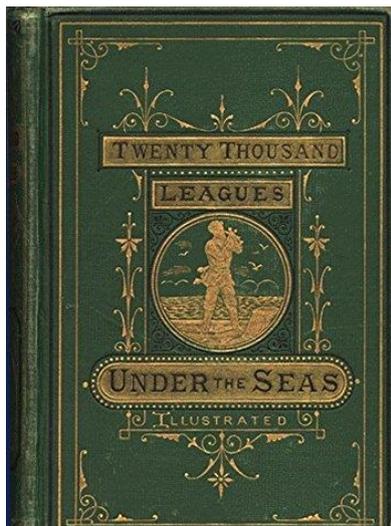


From the Earth to the Moon (1865) tells the story of the Baltimore Gun Club, a group of weapons enthusiasts, who, after the American Civil War are relegated to profound inactivity and reduced to silence by this disastrous peace.

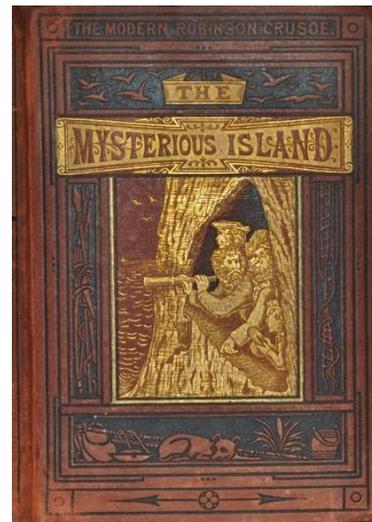
The members build a supergun called the *Columbiad* which fires a projectile containing three people towards the Moon. Verne's sequel *Around the Moon* (1869) eventually brings them all back to Earth again.

***From the Earth to the Moon* (1865)**

In *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1869), Jules Verne first introduces us to the enigmatic Captain Nemo and his legendary submarine – the Birkenhead built *Nautilus*. Nemo and the *Nautilus* would appear again in the novel's sequel *The Mysterious Island* (1874).



***20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1869)**



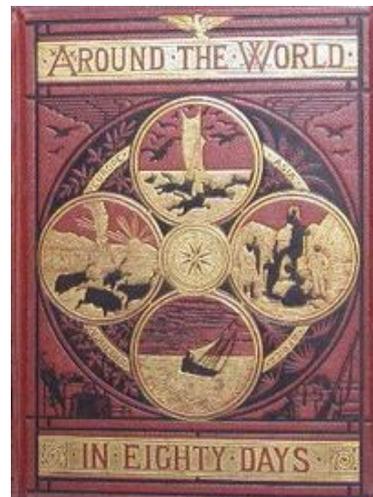
***The Mysterious Island* (1874)**

In 1875 Verne published his most commercially successful work '*Around the World in Eighty Days*'

Verne's story and the character of Phileas Fogg were inspired by the American eccentric George Francis Train who four years earlier had indeed become the first person in history to travel around the world in eighty days.

In 1860 George Francis Train had introduced Europe's first tram system to Birkenhead.

***Around the World in Eighty Days* (1875).**



Other notable works by Verne include;

The Children of Captain Grant (1867),
A Floating City (1871),
Michael Strogoff (1876),
Dick Sand, A Captain at Fifteen (1878),
The Vanished Diamond (1884),
Robur the Conqueror (1886),
The Purchase of the North Pole (1889),
César Cascabel, (1890),
Claudius Bombarnac (1892),
Propeller Island (1895),
Clovis Dardentor (1896),
An Antarctic Mystery (1897),
Master of the World, (1904),
Lighthouse at the End of the World (1905),
and *The Barsac Mission* (1919).



***Dick Sand, A Captain at Fifteen* (1878)**

Jules Verne was awarded the Legion d'honneur in 1870 for services to French Literature and he eventually settled in the town of Amiens in Northern France. His increasing wealth and popularity allowed him to buy a succession of larger and larger pleasure yachts culminating in the *St Michelle III*. A mutual love of yachting would seem to connect together so many of our 'Heroes of Birkenhead'.

In 1886 Verne had to cope with the death of both his mother and his great friend Pierre Jules Hetzel. In March of the same year, Verne had been returning to his home in Amiens, when he was confronted by his irate nephew Gaston who shot him in the leg with a pistol, the wound left Verne with a limp which he would carry for the remainder of his life.

On 24th March 1905, Jules Verne, died of complications due to diabetes at his home on Boulevard Longueville in Amiens – he was 77 years old.

Verne was buried at the Cimetiere de la Madelaine in Amiens. The engraving on his striking memorial bears the inscription *Vers l'Immortalite et l'Eternelle Jeunesse* (Towards Eternity and Eternal youth).

The memorial, designed by sculptor Albert Roze depicts a resurgent Jules Verne rising from the grave, indeed he rises with such vigour that he has broken the top right-hand corner of the grave slab.

The grave of Jules Verne at Amiens.



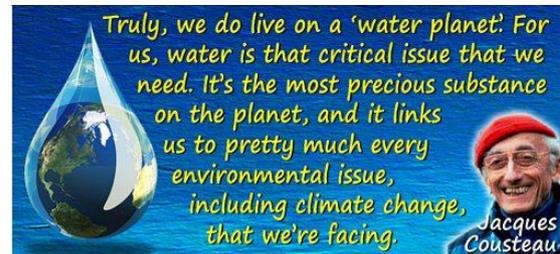
Perhaps this is the grave of a man who knew that one day he would make a comeback.

Jules Verne's Influence on Science and Exploration.

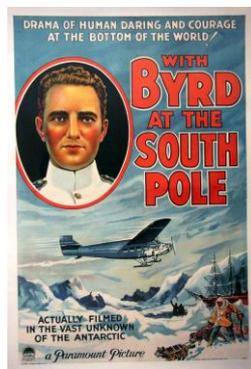
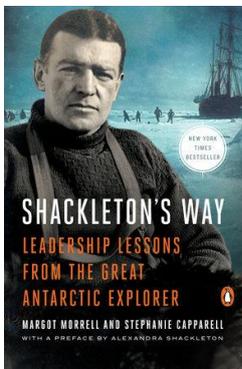
Jules Verne's impact on scientific progress and exploration is unequalled in the field of world literature.

Jacques Cousteau, the great marine explorer, conservationist, and inventor of the aqualung, referred to '*20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*' as his 'shipboard bible'.

Cousteau in turn inspired a whole new generation of marine conservationists.



Jacques Cousteau (1910-97)



The intrepid Polar explorers, Sir Earnest Shackleton (1874-1922) and Richard E. Byrd (1888-1957) were inspired by *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1869) and *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras* (1864) respectively.

Byrd stated, "It was Jules Verne who launched me on this trip." – a trip that, in the novel at least, started in Birkenhead.

Igor Sikorsky, the inventor of the helicopter gave Verne's character *Robur the Conqueror* (1886) and his giant flying machine the '*Albatross*' as his chief inspiration.

Igor Sikorsky (1889-1972)



Birkenhead Coat of Arms



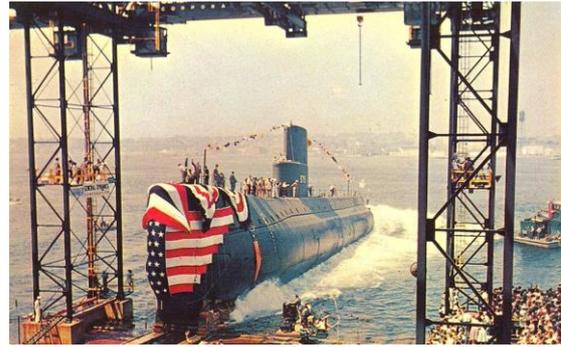
The American astronomer Edwin Hubble cited Verne as the major reason that he too gave up his law career to follow his passion for science.

Edwin Hubble (1889-1953)

In 1954 the World's first nuclear powered submarine was commissioned by the United States Government and named the *USS Nautilus*.

In 1958 the *USS Nautilus* completed the first voyage beneath the North Pole and the Arctic Ice Cap.

The USS Nautilus



The voyage recreated the equivalent fictional journey beneath the Antarctic Ice Cap undertaken by Captain Nemo's Birkenhead built *Nautilus* in Jules Verne's novel *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*.

Rocket engineers, Robert Goddard, Hermann Oberth, and Wernher von Braun were all influenced by Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865) and their contribution to the ultimately successful 1969 Apollo 11 moon landing meant they had all helped fulfill Jules Verne's prophesy;

Anything one man can imagine, other men can make real.

Jules Verne



Robert Goddard
(1882-1945)



Hermann Oberth
(1894-1989)



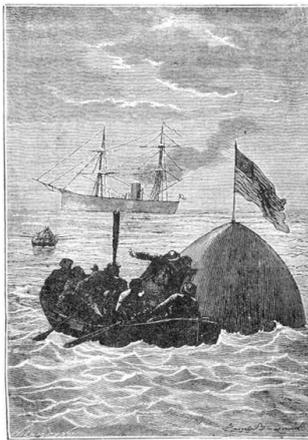
Werner Von Braun
(1912-77)

Neil Armstrong the commander of Apollo 11 would pay this tribute to Jules Verne on the day before the return to Earth.

A hundred years ago Jules Verne wrote a book about a voyage to the Moon, his spaceship the Columbia took off from Florida and landed in the Pacific Ocean after completing a trip to the Moon.

It seems appropriate to us to share with you some of the reflections of the crew as the modern-day Columbia completes its rendezvous with the planet Earth in the same Pacific Ocean tomorrow.

Neil Armstrong – speaking from the Columbia Command Module July 23rd 1969.



(Left) The splashdown in *Around the Moon* (1869) by Jules Verne.

(Right) The splashdown of Apollo 11 (July 1969)

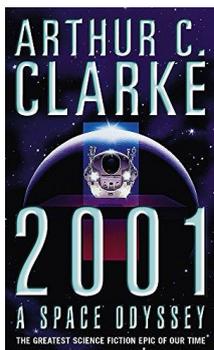
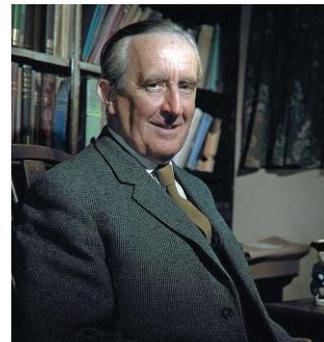


Jules Verne's Influence on World Literature.

Jules Verne has been a major influence on the Surrealist movement, Eugène Ionesco was particularly influenced by the *Adventures of Captain Hatteras* (1865).

J.R.R. Tolkien's *Hobbit* (1937) and *Lord of the Rings* (1937-49) were partly inspired by the works of Jules Verne, particularly his *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864).

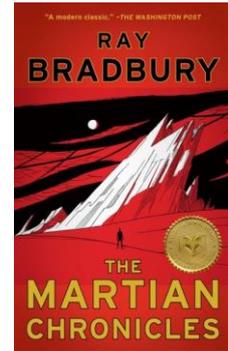
J.R.R. Tolkien (1892-1973)



The science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke wrote of Verne *I feel strongly connected to him, and his works of science fiction had a major influence on my own career.*

Arthur C Clarke *2001 A Space Odyssey.*

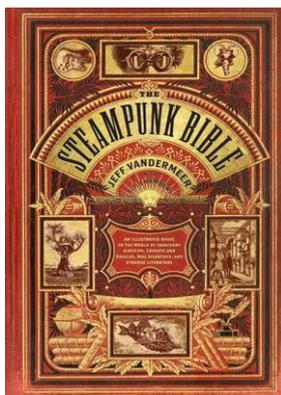
Jules Verne has also been a major influence upon the science fiction writer Ray Bradbury who stated, *we are all, in one way or another, the children of Jules Verne.*



Ray Bradbury *The Martian Chronicles* (1950)

Other writers greatly influenced by Verne include Raymond Roussel, Jean Cocteau and Jean Paul Sartre.

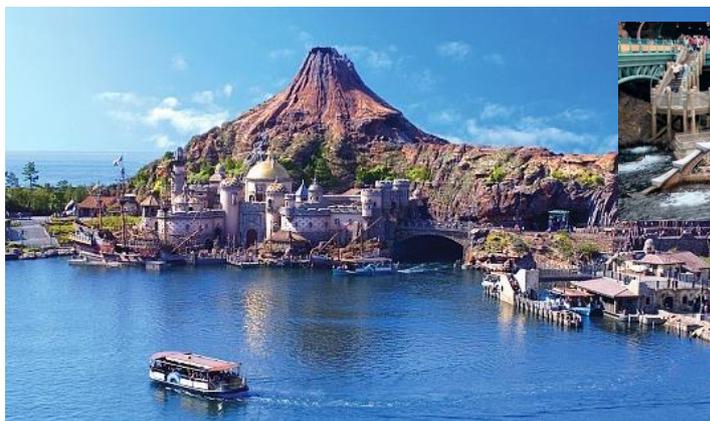
Jules Verne’s Influence on Popular Culture.



Jules Verne has also been called the ‘Godfather of Steampunk’ a genre of science fiction that has a predominantly Victorian setting and features steam-powered machinery rather than more advanced electronics and robotics.

Unashamedly Jules Verne – The Steampunk Bible

Dedicated to Jules Verne in 1994 - The Steampunk Rail Station at Arts et Metiers, Paris.

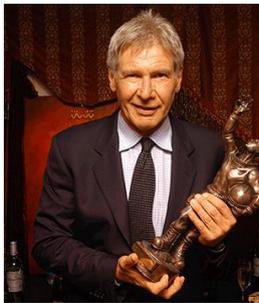


The *Mysterious Island* Volcano and the *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* attractions at Disney Japan.

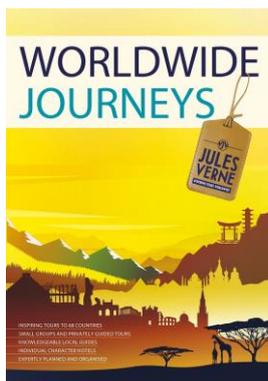
Captain Nemo's *Nautilus* and Verne's *Columbiad* Supergun at Disneyland Paris.



The Jules Verne Trophy for the fastest circumnavigation of the world by yacht.



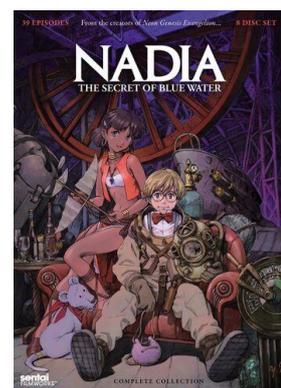
The Jules Verne Awards – Harrison Ford, George Lucas, James Cameron, William Shatner and Patrick Stewart.



Jules Verne Tours



Rue Jules Verne in Paris



Nadia - Japanese Anime

Jules Verne in Film.

Most people know Jules Verne through the film adaptations of his novels, and he has been a major influence on film writers and directors for the last 120 years.



A Trip to the Moon by Georges Melies
(1902)



Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea
by Walt Disney (1954)



Around the World in Eighty Days by
United Artists (1956)



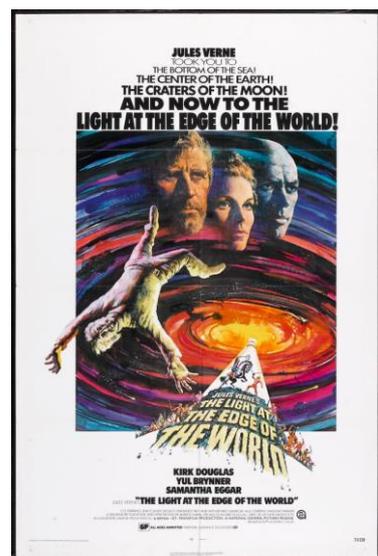
Journey to the Center of the Earth
by 20th Century Fox (1959)



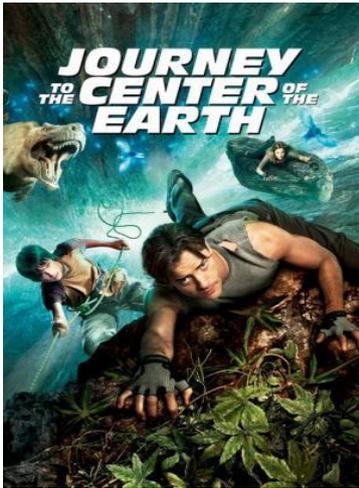
Mysterious Island
by Columbia Pictures
(1961)



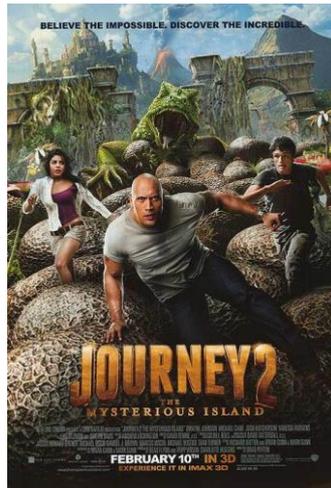
In Search of the Castaways
by Walt Disney
(1962)



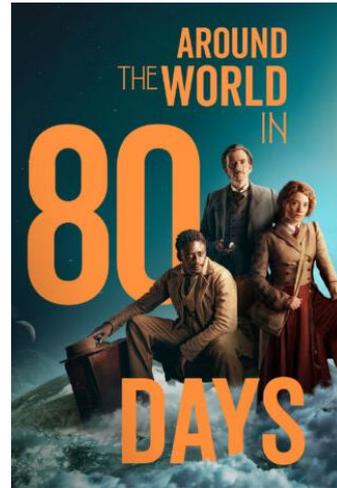
*The Light at the Edge
of the World* by National
General Pictures (1971)



Journey to the Center of the Earth by Warner Bros. (2008)



Journey 2: The Mysterious Island by Warner Bros. (2012)

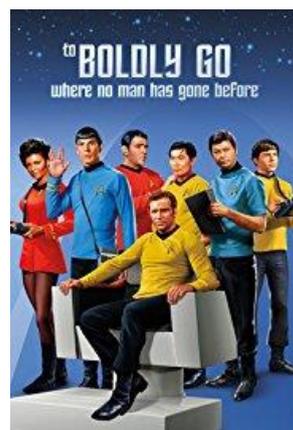


Around the World in 80 Days by BBC Television. (2021)

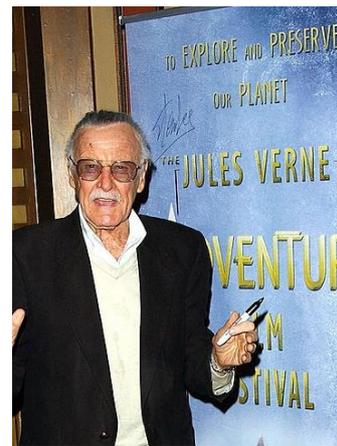
As the 'Father of Science Fiction' Jules Verne has had a profound influence on many film directors, writers and producers.



Walt Disney (1901-66)



Gene Roddenberry (1921-91)



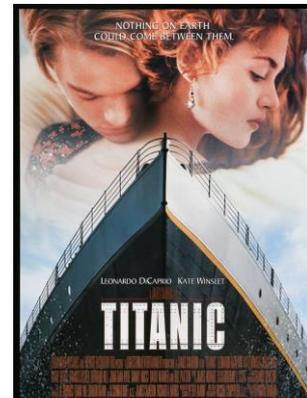
Stan Lee (1922-2018)



George Lucas (b. 1944)



Steven Spielberg (b. 1946)



James Cameron (b. 1954)

Several science fiction films have paid homage to Jules Verne in their storylines or scripts.



In *Back to the Future III* (1990), Doctor Emmet Brown and his wife Clara's two sons are named Jules and Verne in honour of their favourite author.

Jules and Verne

In *TRON: Legacy* (2010) the character of Quorra has a love of human literature – particularly the writings of Jules Verne.

But between you and me, Jules Verne is my favourite. Do you know Jules Verne?

Quorra



In the film *Aquaman* (2018) the star Jason Momoa introduces the film with these words:

Jules Verne once wrote: "Put two ships in the open sea, without wind or tide... they will come together".

***Aquaman* (2018)**

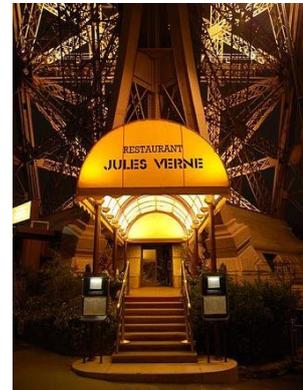
There are two museums dedicated to the memory of Jules Verne, one in his birthplace of Nantes and the other in Amiens. The Restaurant Jules Verne is probably France's most prestigious eating establishment, situated as it is, halfway up the Eiffel Tower.



Jules Verne Museum, Nantes.



Jules Verne Museum, Amiens.



**Jules Verne Restaurant.
Eiffel Tower, Paris.**

Verne is commemorated by several statues, not all of them in his home country of France. In Nantes, the young Jules Verne looks out towards his future creation of Captain Nemo.



Nantes, France.



Nantes, France.



Amiens, France.



**Nizhny Novgorod,
Russia.**



Vigo Bay Spain.



Redondela Spain.



Kaluga, Russia.

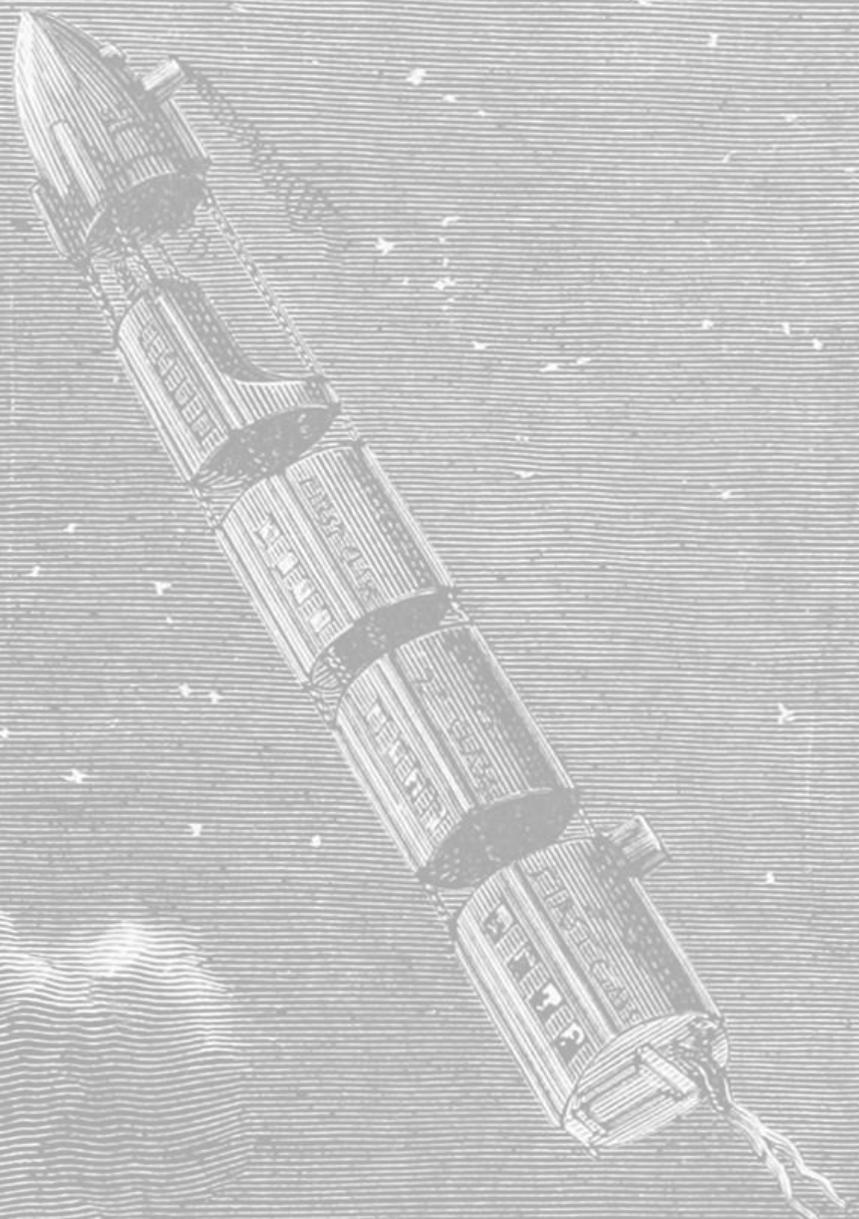
The Vigo Bay statue commemorates Jules Verne naming this area as the source of Captain Nemo's gold in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*.

As yet there is no statue dedicated to Jules Verne in the town of Birkenhead, England, perhaps there should be.

*I dream with my
eyes open*

Jules Verne

Illustrations for Part 3 -Acknowledgements-



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