

20,000 Leagues Under the Sea: A Disney Film Legacy

by Jennifer Schuitema, PassPorter Guest Contributor

One feature that makes a Disney park a "theme park" rather than an amusement park is story.

The attractions aren't just rollercoasters, dark rides, or water rides; each Disney attraction tells a story. From my daughter's first trip to Walt Disney World at the age of four until now at age eleven, I've always tried to provide her with the background for these stories. When she was younger that context was delivered through books and movies about the characters that appear in attractions, as well as listening to the soundtrack of the Disney parks.

Now that she is older, I try to give her more of a historical perspective on the parks. We've watched YouTube videos of extinct rides that inspired a new generation of Imagineers and some of the original Disneyland and Wonderful World of Color episodes. In these episodes hosted by Walt Disney, he tells the stories of creating Disneyland and its rides and attractions. We've also watched a few of the live-action feature films that inspired early attractions.

□ Recently, my husband, daughter, and I sat down to watch Disney's 1954 live-action feature 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea. It's the movie that inspired the Magic Kingdom attraction "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea: A Submarine Voyage." The ride was closed in late 1994 and on its footprint now sits "Under The Sea −Journey of the Little Mermaid" and the "Seven Dwarfs Mine Train."

□ The movie is based on Jules Verne's 1870 science fiction novel Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas: An Underwater Tour of the World. The movie was released in Technicolor and starred Kirk Douglas as Ned Land and James Mason as Captain Nemo. We watched the movie streaming in HD through Amazon Instant Video. The quality of the picture was quite good, and it didn't feel as dated as some sixty-year-old movies might.

The premise of the movie is that Captain Nemo and his crew have built a submarine, the Nautilus, and travel the seas using a mysterious power source. He and his crew have exiled themselves from civilization and take revenge on war and trade ships for an atrocity that was committed against them in their former life. The story was captivating and held my daughter's attention for the two hour run time. We paused the movie occasionally to clarify a few of the themes, particularly Captain Nemo's

disdain for civilization.

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□I really enjoyed the sets, scenery, and costumes. They were done in what we'd now call the steampunk style. It was a breath of fresh air to watch a movie that wasn't riddled with CGI. In the episode of Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color, "Disneyland Goes to the World's Fair," Walt Disney explains that his work with three-dimensional characters began when the script for 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea called for a giant squid to attack the Nautilus. The giant squid featured in the movie was a precursor for all the audio-animatronics that would soon populate Disneyland and later Walt Disney World.

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□There was one underwater scene that involved men handling sea turtles. Though, I am sure the turtles were unharmed during the filming, it was uncomfortable to watch. It was a moment I wished was CGI. Other than that scene, I truly enjoyed the movie and felt it was worthwhile showing it to my family.

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□Today there are still nods to 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea throughout Disney properties. A hidden carving of the Nautilus is found in the rockwork of the queue for "Under The Sea−Journey of the Little Mermaid." One of the ride vehicles from the Magic Kingdom attraction can be found on the sea bottom of the Castaway Cay snorkeling lagoon. Nemo, the title character of the Pixar film, is said to be named for Captain Nemo. Tokyo DisneySea's Mysterious Island hosts a "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea" dark ride, and Disneyland Paris hosts the walk-through attraction "Les Mystères du Nautilus." And of course, though it never bore the name "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea," the Disneyland version of the ride can still be experienced today as "Finding Nemo Submarine Voyage." (Editor's Note: The organ found in the ballroom scene of The Haunted Mansion [at Disneyland is confirmed](#) to be the organ played by Captain Nemo in the film!)

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□To pay tribute to the former ride, the Imagineers added water they had saved for 18 years from the 20,000 Leagues lagoon to the new Ariel's Grotto during a 2012 special ceremony celebrating the New Fantasyland. The video of the ceremony can be found on the Disney Parks Blog. It's a pleasure to see the Walt Disney Company honoring and acknowledging the past as they move on to new adventures. I try to do the same by enjoying what remains of the past at Walt Disney World, at the same time looking forward to what the future holds.

About The Author: Jennifer Schuitema is a florist living in Grand Rapids, MI with her husband and daughter. She's enjoyed spending the past decade raising a Disney fan. She looks forward to visiting Walt Disney World each year with her mom and daughter, and occasionally with her husband.

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