

Reçu le: 25/02 / 2025 Accepté le: 20/01 / 2026 Publié le: 31/01 / 2026



Inner Worlds, Outer Stories: The Hollow Earth as a Trope in Science Fiction

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العوالم الداخلية، القصص الخارجية: الأرض المجوفة كمجاز في الخيال العلمي

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ABSTRACT:

The Hollow Earth Theory, a pseudoscientific concept proposing that the Earth is hollow and contains hidden realms, has inspired countless works of science fiction since its emergence in mythology and early scientific speculation. This article explores the evolution of the Hollow Earth as a narrative trope, focusing on its role in classic and modern science fiction. From Jules Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864) to contemporary films like *Godzilla vs. Kong* and video games like *Subnautica* (2018), the trope has served as a vehicle for exploring themes of discovery, cultural anxieties, and the human fascination with the unknown. By examining its mythological roots, its literary and cinematic adaptations, and its significance in speculative storytelling, this study highlights the Hollow Earth trope's ability to bridge science, fantasy, and cultural imagination. Ultimately, the article argues that it serves as both a metaphor for humanity's curiosity and a mirror reflecting societal fears and desires.

Keywords: Hollow Earth, science fiction, graphic novel, Jules Verne, narrative tropes.

ملخص البحث

ألهمت نظرية الأرض المجوفة، وهي مفهوم زائف يقترح أن الأرض مجوفة وتحتوي على عوالم خفية، عددًا لا يحصى من أعمال الخيال العلمي منذ ظهورها في الأساطير والتكهنات العلمية المبكرة. تستكشف هذه المقالة تطور نظرية الأرض المجوفة باعتبارها مجازًا سرديًا، مع التركيز على دورها في الخيال العلمي الكلاسيكي والحديث. من رحلة جولز فيرن إلى مركز الأرض (1864) إلى الأفلام المعاصرة مثل جود زيلا ضد كونغ وألعاب الفيديو مثل سابنوتيك (2018)، كانت نظرية الأرض المجوفة بمثابة وسيلة لاستكشاف موضوعات الاكتشاف والقلق الثقافي والافتتان البشري بالمجهول والبحث عن الآخر. من خلال فحص جذورها الأسطورية، وتعديلاتها الأدبية والسينمائية، وأهميتها في السرد، تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على قدرة نظرية الأرض المجوفة على ربط العلم والخيال والخيال الثقافي. في النهاية، تزعم المقالة أن نظرية الأرض المجوفة تعد بمثابة استعارة لفضول البشرية لاستكشاف عوالم أخرى ومرآة تعكس المخاوف والرغبات المجتمعية.

الكلمات المفتاحية : الأرض المجوفة ,الخيال العلمي , جولز فيرن , المجاز السردى , الرواية الغرافيكية

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of the Hollow Earth, suggesting that the Earth is hollow and contains hidden realms beneath its surface, has captured the imagination for centuries. Rooted in ancient myths and pseudoscientific theories, the idea has become a prominent trope in speculative fiction, particularly science fiction. Its origins can be traced to early scientific speculation, such as that of Edmund Halley, who proposed a hollow Earth model in the 17th century (Halley, 1692), and John Cleves Symmes, Jr., who championed the idea of polar openings leading to inner worlds in the 19th century (Symmes, 1826). These ideas, while unscientific, found fertile ground in the realm of fiction, where they evolved into a powerful narrative device used to explore the unknown, the fantastical, and the subconscious fears and desires of humankind.

In science fiction, the Hollow Earth trope serves as a metaphor for the human quest for exploration and discovery, as well as an image for imaginative world-building. From Jules Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864) to Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Pellucidar* series (1914), the Hollow Earth concept has provided a rich setting for stories of adventure, lost civilizations, and scientific curiosity. Verne's novel, for instance, depicts an underground world where science and fantasy intermingle, symbolizing humanity's unquenchable thirst for discovery (Verne, 1864). While early depictions were primarily grounded in the spirit of scientific discovery, later adaptations in films, video games, and graphic novels have reimagined the Hollow Earth as both a literal and symbolic space, representing a variety of cultural and psychological concerns (Glover, 2017).

This article examines the Hollow Earth as a recurring trope in science fiction, exploring its evolution, thematic significance, and cultural impact. By tracing the trajectory of this trope from its pseudoscientific origins to its contemporary adaptations, this article argues that the concept serves not only as a literary and cinematic device for adventure but also as a reflection of societal anxieties and desires. It will explore key themes such as the interplay between myth and science, the representation of the unknown and the "other," and the role of subterranean worlds in science fiction as metaphors for human's inner exploration. By situating the Hollow Earth trope within the broader context of science fiction, this study aims to deepen our understanding of how speculative fiction reflects and shapes our perceptions of reality, science, and the unknown.

2. Historical Context and Mythological Roots

The idea of a hollow Earth is not a modern invention but rather draws on ancient myths and speculative theories that reflect humanity's fascination with the unknown and the unexplored. Across various cultures, subterranean realms have been depicted as spaces of mystery, danger, and hidden knowledge. These mythological traditions laid the groundwork for the more scientific versions of the Hollow Earth concept that emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries.

2.1. Ancient Myths and Legends

The idea of underground worlds appears in various ancient myths, where they are often depicted as mystical realms hidden beneath the Earth's surface. In Hindu mythology, for example, there is the concept of *Patala*, a series of subterranean realms that are inhabited by serpent-like creatures and demigods. These realms were thought to be both dangerous and wondrous, embodying the mysteries of the earth itself (Lal, 2004). According to Lal (2004), "Patala was regarded not only as a place of

fear and darkness but also as a space of hidden wisdom and power, a thematic precursor to the idea of a subterranean world with untold secrets.” This underworld is similar to other mythological traditions, where subterranean realms are not simply places of darkness, but also spaces where mysteries of the earth, mind, and universe could be revealed.

Similarly, in Norse mythology, the idea of *Svartalfheim*, the realm of the dark elves, suggests a hidden world beneath the surface of Midgard, where mysterious beings live in the shadows (Byock, 1999). These ancient mythological worlds share the common theme of hidden realms beneath the Earth’s surface, a concept that resonates in later scientific and fictional interpretations. In Greek mythology, the concept of an underworld, ruled by Hades, is another example of subterranean realms. While not literally hollow, the underworld represents a separate, mysterious space that is often associated with death, the afterlife, and knowledge of the unknown (Harrison, 1903).

These early myths set the stage for later ideas of hidden, inner worlds that would surface in scientific and speculative fiction. As Harrison (1903) observes, “The Greek underworld, though primarily a space of death, is also a place where knowledge and transformation occur, particularly in the journeys of heroes like Odysseus, who must face this unknown realm to achieve greater understanding of life.” The role of such mythological worlds as spaces of danger, transformation, and hidden knowledge is mirrored in the Hollow Earth trope, where the journey into the depths often symbolizes both literal and psychological exploration.

2.2.Pseudoscientific Origins: The Emergence of the Hollow Earth Theory

The Hollow Earth theory found its early roots in scientific speculation, particularly in the works of 17th and 18th-century scholars. One of the earliest proponents of a hollow Earth was Edmund Halley, the famous astronomer who proposed in 1692 that the Earth might be hollow and contain multiple concentric shells. Halley’s theory was partly based on the observation of the Earth’s magnetic field, which he hypothesized could be caused by the interaction of different layers within the Earth (Halley, 1692). Halley argued, “The magnetic anomalies that we observe cannot be explained solely by a solid Earth; rather, they suggest the existence of multiple concentric layers.” (1692) His theory captured the imagination of a public eager to explore the mysteries of the planet’s inner workings. While Halley’s theory was later disproven, it represented an early attempt to merge scientific curiosity with imaginative ideas about the Earth’s structure.

In the early 19th century, the American explorer John Cleves Symmes, Jr. further popularized the Hollow Earth theory by suggesting that there were openings at the poles leading to vast, unexplored inner worlds. Symmes’s theory was detailed in his 1826 pamphlet, *A New Theory of the Earth*, where he argued that the Earth was hollow and that these inner spaces could be accessed by venturing into the polar regions. He believed that the poles contained openings through which one could access this inner world, a view that was taken seriously by some of his contemporaries. Symmes even attempted to secure funding for an expedition to the poles, though such a venture never materialized. According to Symmes (1826), “The poles are not the ends of the Earth, but the gateways to another world, an unknown region of vast possibilities.” Symmes’s theory ignited popular interest in the idea of a hollow Earth, especially within the growing genre of speculative fiction.

2.3.From Scientific Theory to Fiction

As scientific understanding of the Earth advanced, the Hollow Earth theory increasingly took on a fictional and imaginative form, particularly in the genre of science fiction and adventure literature. The Hollow Earth trope was notably popularized by Jules Verne’s novel *Journey to the*

Centre of the Earth (1864), which introduced a subterranean world filled with fantastical creatures, underground oceans, and strange ecosystems. Verne's novel is one of the first examples of the Hollow Earth theory being used as a literary device to explore the unknown, blending scientific curiosity with elements of fantasy and adventure (Verne, 1864). Verne himself said, "I wished to show that the mysteries of the Earth were as great and as exciting as those of the stars above." (p 59) Verne's work introduces elements of scientific ideas with fantasy, turning the Hollow Earth into a space for both exploration and imagination. This blending of science and fantasy would become a hallmark of future works in the genre of science fiction.

Another early work that incorporated the Hollow Earth trope was Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Pellucidar* series, which began with *At the Earth's Core* (1914). Burroughs expanded on the Hollow Earth concept by creating a detailed, self-contained world beneath the Earth's surface, populated by prehistoric creatures and primitive societies. In Burroughs's vision, the Earth's interior is a vast, prehistoric world populated by primitive societies and fantastic creatures. Burroughs's use of the Hollow Earth as a setting for adventure and escape exemplifies the shift from scientific curiosity to pure fantasy within the trope. (Burroughs, 1914).

2.4. The Legacy of the Hollow Earth in Science Fiction

The Hollow Earth trope has had a lasting impact on science fiction, influencing a wide range of works that explore hidden realms and unknown spaces. Over time, the trope has evolved from a scientific curiosity into a narrative device that blends adventure, fantasy, and psychological exploration. The Hollow Earth continues to appear in contemporary works of fiction, from films like *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (2008) to modern adaptations in television series such as *Doctor Who* and *Stargate SG-1*. Whether portrayed as a space for adventure, discovery, or existential exploration, the Hollow Earth continues to offer a narrative space where the boundaries between science, myth, and imagination can be blurred. It began to represent the psychological journey into the unknown, the space where humanity confronts its deepest fears, desires, and unanswered questions.

Today, the Hollow Earth trope continues to appear in both its scientific and fantastical forms, reflecting an enduring fascination with the mysteries that lie beneath the surface, both of the Earth and of the human experience itself.

3. The Hollow Earth in Classic Science Fiction

The Hollow Earth trope has had a profound impact on the development of classic science fiction, serving as both a symbol of adventure and a platform for exploring humanity's deepest desires and fears. Its appearance in early science fiction works was instrumental in shaping the genre's exploration of the unknown, the boundaries of human knowledge, and the quest for discovery. The trope also provided writers with a unique narrative space in which the scientific and the fantastical could intersect. This section will explore how the Hollow Earth trope was used by some of the most influential figures in early science fiction, such as Jules Verne, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and H.G. Wells; and how it helped define the genre's themes of exploration, discovery, and the search for the unknown.

3.1. Jules Verne and *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864)

Jules Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* is perhaps the most iconic early example of the Hollow Earth concept in science fiction. First published in 1864, Verne's novel combines adventure and scientific inquiry, offering readers a journey into the Earth's interior that is grounded in the

scientific knowledge of the time while also incorporating elements of fantasy. The protagonist, Professor Lidenbrock, along with his nephew Axel, descends into a volcano in Iceland, following a trail left by an ancient manuscript that leads them toward the Earth's core. The story unfolds as a scientific expedition, with Verne using contemporary geological theories to support the possibility of such an extraordinary journey, mixing these with imaginative landscapes and creatures encountered deep within the Earth.

Verne's depiction of the Hollow Earth is one that walks a fine line between the scientific and the fantastical. As the explorers venture deeper into the Earth, they discover subterranean seas, giant mushrooms, and prehistoric creatures, such as the now-extinct reptiles that once roamed the surface of the Earth. The novel is steeped in the optimism of the 19th century scientific age, where new frontiers were being explored and the Earth's mysteries were still ripe for discovery. However, Verne's work is also a story about human curiosity and the consequences of pushing the boundaries of knowledge. As Verne (1864) writes, "We may brave human laws, but we cannot resist natural laws." This statement highlights the tension between scientific exploration and the unpredictable forces of nature, a recurring theme in much of his works.

Verne's work also reflects the cultural anxieties of the time, particularly the fear of the unknown that accompanied the rapid pace of scientific and industrial advancements. As the characters descend further into the Earth, the terrain becomes increasingly hostile and alien, with the journey mirroring humanity's struggle to understand and control nature. The Hollow Earth, in Verne's hands, serves as a metaphor for the limits of human understanding, suggesting that, despite all our advancements, there are forces far beyond our comprehension.

3.2.H.G. Wells and Subterranean Civilizations in *The First Men in the Moon* (1901)

H.G. Wells offered a more scientifically grounded yet still imaginative take on the concept of underground worlds. In his 1901 novel *The First Men in the Moon*, he explores the idea of subterranean civilizations, though this time it is the Moon that becomes the setting for a hidden, alien world. Wells's exploration of subterranean realms adds a significant layer to the evolving understanding of hidden civilizations in classic science fiction.

In *The First Men in the Moon* (1901), two protagonists, the inventor Mr. Cavor and his companion, the narrator, travel to the Moon in a spacecraft. Upon their arrival, they discover a vast subterranean civilization living beneath the Moon's surface. This civilization, the Selenites, is a highly advanced society. The Selenites live in an organized, almost mechanized underground world, divided into castes and governed by a strict hierarchy. While Wells's subterranean Moon is different from the Earth based Hollow Earth trope, it draws on similar thematic concepts; hidden societies, advanced or degenerate civilizations, and the exploration of unknown realms. As Wells (1901) writes, "The near I struggled, the more awfully remote it seemed. I was numb, I stumbled, I bruised and cut myself and did not bleed." (p, 130) This passage highlights the sense of discovery and the unexpected dangers of encountering unknown societies, central themes in many early science fiction works.

Wells's treatment of the subterranean world presents a sharp contrast to Verne's more scientific and optimistic take on underground exploration. While the former's work celebrated the triumph of human knowledge in exploring uncharted realms, the latter's portrayal of the Selenites emphasises the dangers of unknown civilizations and the unforeseen consequences of such discoveries. In many ways, Wells's subterranean Moon represents a philosophical departure from the Earth centred Hollow Earth narrative. Wells's subterranean Moon is a site for confronting a radically different form of life,

one that challenges human perceptions of civilization and progress. He uses the Moon's subterranean civilization as a metaphor for the potential dangers of unchecked scientific progress, a theme that resonates throughout much of Wells's body of work. As he writes in *The First Men in the Moon*, "And all these things that are chasing us now, beastly men of leather - insect men, that come out of a nightmare! After all, they're right! What business have we here smashing them and disturbing their world! ... What are we to do? Where are we to go?" (p, 100)

This passage reflects the dark side of the scientific and industrial revolutions that were rapidly changing society at the time. Wells's use of subterranean civilizations mirrors the fears of invasion and colonization that were prevalent during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

3.3. Edgar Rice Burroughs and *At the Earth's Core* (1914)

Following the pioneering works of Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, Edgar Rice Burroughs's *At the Earth's Core* (1914) took the trope in a more fantastical direction, combining adventure with elements of pulp fiction. In his work, Burroughs creates a fully realized inner world, *Pellucidar* (1915), which is located deep beneath the Earth's surface. This world is populated by prehistoric creatures, primitive humans, and vast subterranean oceans. Burroughs's *Pellucidar* is a wild, untamed realm, governed by its own set of fantastical rules and inhabited by strange, often dangerous creatures. The plot of *At the Earth's Core* follows two adventurers, David Innes and Abner Perry, who travel to the Earth's centre in a mechanical vehicle, discovering *Pellucidar* and encountering various prehistoric creatures and human tribes. Burroughs story is filled with action and adventure, with the protagonists having to fight off wild animals and savage tribes as they navigate this hidden world.

Pellucidar is a metaphorical space of escape and rediscovery, where humanity can reconnect with a more primal, instinctual version of itself. The Hollow Earth in Burroughs's work is a place of adventure and exploration, but it also reflects deeper themes of human nature and society. Probably, *At the Earth's Core* mirrors the early 20th century fascination with lost civilizations, and the concept of a hidden, untouched world that challenges the modern, industrialized existence.

3.4. Thematic Implications of the Hollow Earth in Classic Science Fiction

The Hollow Earth trope, as seen in the works of Verne, Wells, and Burroughs, serves a variety of thematic purposes, reflecting both the optimism and anxiety of the periods in which these works were written. For Verne, the Hollow Earth represents the scientific spirit of the 19th century, which was a period of discovery and intellectual curiosity about the natural world. Verne's exploration of subterranean worlds mirrors the optimism of the time. However, Wells's engagement with subterranean civilizations reflects both the hope and fear of exploration and discovery that permeated much of early science fiction. His works often explore the potential dangers of encountering unknown civilizations. Unlike Verne's optimistic portrayal of subterranean worlds, Wells presents subterranean civilizations as cautionary tales, warning of the unintended consequences of humanity's ambition.

On the other hand, Burroughs's *Pellucidar* reflects the sense of escapism and adventure that characterized early 20th century pulp fiction. In Burroughs's work, the Hollow Earth trope provides a means for the protagonists to escape the constraints of modern civilization and rediscover a more heroic, unspoiled version of humanity. The subterranean world is not only a space for adventure but also a mirror to the anxieties of industrialized world, where the tension between civilization and nature is a central theme. In Verne's world, the Hollow Earth serves as a metaphor for the limits of scientific exploration. Yet, Wells's subterranean worlds serve also as complex metaphors for the

limits of human knowledge, the dangers of scientific discovery, and the existential threats posed by encountering radically different civilizations.

In all cases, the Hollow Earth functions as a space that questions the boundaries of human knowledge, offering a platform for the exploration of not just the Earth's physical depths, but also the psychological and philosophical depths of the human experience

4. Modern Interpretations of the Hollow Earth Trope

While the Hollow Earth theory and its associated tropes originated in the 19th and early 20th centuries, it has continued to captivate the imagination of modern science fiction writers and filmmakers. The trope has evolved significantly, reflecting changes in scientific knowledge, cultural anxieties, and exploration of new ideas. In contemporary interpretations, the Hollow Earth is not only a physical space to be discovered, but also a complex metaphor for psychological, sociopolitical, and existential themes. We will explore how the Hollow Earth has been reimaged in modern science fiction literature and in digital media as a symbol for a variety of contemporary issues.

4.1. The Hollow Earth in Contemporary Literature

In modern science fiction literature, the Hollow Earth has often been recast as a metaphor for hidden aspects of human nature, unexplored regions of the Earth, or even as a symbolic site of refuge from an increasingly dystopian world. Contemporary authors such as Neil Gaiman, H.P. Lovecraft, and Michael Moorcock have explored these themes in various works that draw upon the Hollow Earth tradition but also subvert or reinterpret it to reflect modern sensibilities.

For instance, Neil Gaiman's short story *Shoggoth's Old Peculiar* (1998) combines Lovecraftian elements with a modern take on the Hollow Earth concept. In Gaiman's narrative, the Hollow Earth is not an uncharted land filled with prehistoric creatures or ancient civilizations but rather an environment of cosmic horror and incomprehensible forces. The story reflects the contemporary tendency to blend the Hollow Earth with existential themes, the unknown, and the fear of encounters with entities beyond human understanding. Gaiman's Hollow Earth is not a place of discovery or adventure but one of dread and galactic insignificance.

Similarly, Michael Moorcock's *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate* (1976) uses the Hollow Earth as a setting for metaphysical exploration. The protagonist's journey to an inner world embodies both physical and psychological realms, where the trope becomes a space of the boundaries between reality and imagination. This shift in focus reflects modern concerns with the inner workings of the mind, the potential for self-discovery, and the fear of encountering one's own psyche.

4.2. The Hollow Earth in Film and Television

The Hollow Earth trope has also undergone significant reinterpretations in modern cinema and television. Thus, it has often been used as a setting for action adventure stories, and as a site for deeper reflections on humanity's relationship with technology, the environment, and nature. Modern interpretations tend to focus on the Hollow Earth as a space for escaping or confronting the consequences of contemporary life.

For instance, in the 2009 film *Journey to the Centre of the Earth 3D*, directed by Eric Brevig and based loosely on Verne's original novel, the Hollow Earth concept is revived in a thrilling, visually spectacular adventure. While still grounded in adventure and scientific exploration, this film emphasizes the contrast between the natural, untamed world beneath the Earth's surface and the technological, industrialized world above. The film's use of 3D technology and special effects underscores a modern fascination with immersive experiences and the possibility of technologically

mediated exploration. Here, the Hollow Earth is portrayed as a wonder-filled, hidden world that contrasts sharply with the overdeveloped, and environmentally depleted world of the surface.

A more recent depiction of the Hollow Earth is found in *Kong: Skull Island* (2017), where a hidden ecosystem on a remote island serves as a modern reinterpretation of the Hollow Earth concept. In the film, the characters discover an isolated world teeming with dangerous creatures, including the massive gorilla King Kong. The island's subterranean environment is presented as a space of discovery and confrontation, where humanity's relationship with nature, colonialism, and the consequences of interfering with untouched ecosystems are explored. This film presents the Hollow Earth not as a mysterious and largely untouched land, but as a site of exploitation, where humanity seeks to control and tame forces that it does not fully understand. The notion of a Hollow Earth in *Kong: Skull Island* serves as a reflection of modern environmental and ethical concerns, where exploration and discovery are often intertwined with the exploitation of natural resources and the disruption of delicate ecosystems.

Another modern film, *The Core* (2003), directed by Jon Amiel, explores a different interpretation of the Hollow Earth trope. In this film, the concept of a hollow inner Earth is used to explore scientific and technological challenges. The plot centres around a team of scientists who must journey to the Earth's core to restart its failing core dynamics, preventing global catastrophe. This modern version of the Hollow Earth trope reflects current anxieties about technological dependency, environmental crises, and humanity's ability to survive in a rapidly changing world.

4.3. The Hollow Earth as a Symbol of Isolation and Rebellion

In addition to its portrayal as a physical space of exploration and adventure, the Hollow Earth trope in modern interpretations often symbolizes isolation, rebellion, or escape from oppressive societal structures. Works such as China Miéville's *The City & The City* (2009) reflects a similar use of hidden or split worlds as metaphors for societal control, alienation, and the difficulty of breaking free from ingrained perceptions of reality. Miéville's novel, which features two cities existing in the same physical space but perceived as separate entities, plays on the theme of worlds hidden within or on top of each other, a concept that mirrors the Hollow Earth as a metaphor for unacknowledged or inaccessible spaces in the world.

Similarly, the Hollow Earth trope has been explored in post-apocalyptic and dystopian fiction, where it often represents an isolated refuge from the chaos and corruption of surface level civilization. Whether in films like *The Matrix* (1999), where hidden worlds exist beneath the surface of human consciousness, or in the novels of Cormac McCarthy such as *The Road* (2006), where humanity's survival depends on finding hidden places of refuge, the Hollow Earth represents a space removed from the degradation of the surface world.

4.4. The Hollow Earth in Video Games and Graphic Novels

The Hollow Earth trope has found fertile ground in both video games and graphic novels, two mediums that are particularly well-suited to explore imaginative and immersive interpretations of subterranean worlds. In both formats, it is often a setting for adventure and a metaphor for exploration, isolation, and existential questions. Video games, as an interactive medium, provide a unique opportunity to explore the Hollow Earth trope from the perspective of the player. Unlike traditional literature or film, video games allow the audience to actively engage with the world beneath the Earth's surface, often encouraging exploration, survival, and discovery.

One of the most notable examples in video games is *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (2008), a game that directly adapts Jules Verne's classic novel. In the game, players descend into the Earth's core, encountering subterranean ecosystems, prehistoric creatures, and ancient civilizations. The game mirrors the adventure and exploration themes found in Verne's work but allows players to interact with the world, adding an element of agency and involvement in the discovery process.

Another influential game that touches on the trope, albeit in a more metaphorical sense, is *Subnautica* (2018). Set on an alien planet covered mostly by water, the game focuses on deep sea exploration, which can be seen as a reimagining of the Hollow Earth in an aquatic context. Here, Players explore vast underwater caverns and discover alien ecosystems, wrecked ships, and hidden alien structures beneath the ocean's surface. The game taps into the trope of the vast, mysterious underworld, but in this case, the environment is oceanic rather than subterranean.

Similarly, Graphic novels, with a combination of visual storytelling and narrative depth, are another medium in which the trope is explored. The unique combination of art and text in graphic novels allows for a powerful expression of the Hollow Earth concept. One of the most prominent examples of the Hollow Earth trope in graphic novel series is *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (1999-2019) by Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill. The graphic novel series, which brings characters from classic literature, features a hidden world beneath the Earth's surface. In the first volume, the team of adventurers uncovers secret underground civilizations and vast spaces. The Hollow Earth here is also a metaphor for forgotten knowledge and the hidden histories of the world. Moore and O'Neill's work uses the trope to critique colonialism, Victorian-era ideals, and the ways in which history is often buried or obscured.

Another relevant graphic novel is *Cave Carson Has a Cybernetic Eye* (2016) by Jon Rivera and Gerard way. The series follows Cave Carson, a former adventurer with a cybernetic eye, as he ventures into the depths of the Earth to uncover secrets and confront ancient mysteries. The story draws heavily from the Hollow Earth tradition, featuring subterranean cities, bizarre creatures, and a sense of wonder and danger associated with exploring unknown worlds. It mixes science fiction and pulp adventure with philosophical questions about exploration and discovery, using the trope as a backdrop for its protagonist's journey.

5. The Hollow Earth as a Narrative Trope

The Hollow Earth trope has evolved into a powerful and useful narrative device in science fiction, functioning not only as a literal and figurative setting but also as a tool for exploring themes of discovery, conflict, and human nature. In stories that feature the Hollow Earth, the trope provides a rich space for narrative tension and thematic exploration. It invites readers, viewers, and players to embark on a journey into uncharted territories, both physically and metaphorically.

5.1. The Structure of the Hollow Earth Narrative

At its core, the Hollow Earth narrative is built around the structure of an exploration story. The protagonists, often driven by curiosity, scientific inquiry, or adventure, venture into the unknown depths of the Earth, uncovering hidden realms that challenge their understanding of the world. The journey into the Hollow Earth typically involves a descent or figurative way, as the explorers descend into unknown psychological, moral, or societal realms. This descent is a narrative strategy that symbolizes a move away from the surface level, everyday world into a space that is deeply other, unfamiliar, and dangerous.

In earlier works like Verne's and Wells's ones, the narrative unfolds through the characters' descent into the Earth, which mirrors their intellectual and emotional journey into the unknown. The structure of the narrative is linear, with a clear progression from the surface to the centre of the Earth, where they encounter the fantastical. The trope provides a plot framework that invites the audience to join the characters in a journey of discovery and wonder. The motif becomes a vehicle for narrative exploration, where scientific curiosity intersects with the threat of the unknown and the possibility of ideological conflict.

In contemporary works such as graphic novels, the structure of the trope is similarly used to build a narrative of discovery and hidden history. The protagonists discover a world beneath the Earth's surface. In this case, the narrative is driven by both the exploration of this unknown world and the characters' understanding of its significance in relation to their own world.

5.2. The Hollow Earth as a Catalyst for Conflict

One of the most significant aspects of the Hollow Earth trope is its ability to introduce complex conflicts within the narrative. The exploration often brings characters into direct confrontation with not only the dangers of the subterranean world but also the ethical, philosophical, and psychological dilemmas that arise from such exploration. The trope serves as a catalyst for conflict, as the hidden world beneath the Earth's surface is often inhabited by strange creatures, ancient civilizations, or supernatural forces that present challenges to the explorers' beliefs, goals, or very survival.

In Wells's *The First Men in the Moon*, for instance, the conflict between the explorers and the subterranean Selenites is a central plot point. The Selenites relationship with the human explorers reveals themes of colonialism, the dangers of imperialist thinking, and the limits of human understanding. The Hollow Earth setting is not merely a backdrop but an arena where the protagonists must confront not only physical dangers but also the existential and ideological consequences of their actions.

In Jules Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, the conflict arises not only from the dangers within the Earth but from the explorers' internal struggles with fear, ambition, and the ethics of exploration. This internal conflict adds depth to the narrative, illustrating the psychological toll of such an extraordinary journey.

In modern video games, the Hollow Earth trope is often used to create intense conflict situations. For example, in *Subnautica* (2018), players explore the ocean depths of an alien planet, where they encounter hostile creatures, abandoned technologies, and dangerous environments. The conflict here is not only about survival but also about uncovering the secrets of the planet's past, including why it has become a place of peril.

5.3. The Hollow Earth as a Metaphor for Human Nature

Beyond its function as a narrative structure and a catalyst for conflict, it often serves as a powerful metaphor for aspects of human nature. The underground world is frequently portrayed as a reflection of the darker hidden aspects of humanity. Thus, characters often encounter manifestations of these darker elements, forcing them to confront their own psychological depths. In H.G. Wells's *The First Men in the Moon* (1901), the explorers' encounter with the Selenites serves as a metaphor for human and the dangers of scientific and technological overreach; their subterranean world becomes a metaphor for the unknown aspects of human potential that we are only beginning to comprehend.

Also, the subterranean world is a physical space and a psychological one, where the boundaries between the known and the unknown blur. The explorers' interactions with the environment reveal

hidden facets of their own personalities, fears, and desires, making the Hollow Earth a metaphor for the complexity of human nature. Likewise, in contemporary graphic novels, the exploration of the subterranean world is often used to reflect human longing for knowledge, power, and connection. The characters' journey is about uncovering their own understanding of what it means to be human in a world filled with extraordinary potential and peril. The Hollow Earth serves as a mirror to human desires, fears, and aspirations. Whether as a place of adventure or a metaphorical realm of psychological exploration, the Hollow Earth trope engages audiences by providing a setting for action and a space for thematic depth. Its adaptability across genres, from literature to video games and graphic novels, demonstrates its power as a tool for storytelling.

6. Conclusion

As explored throughout this article, the Hollow Earth trope serves as a narrative tool that intersects with themes of exploration, cultural anxieties, and the fusion of myth and science. It provides an ideal space for examining the consequences of human curiosity and ambition by revealing the dangers that lie in unexplored territories, and also the internal conflicts that arise when confronting the unknown. Whether through the lens of early works or through contemporary adaptations in graphic novels and video games, the trope consistently invites audiences to reflect on the nature of discovery and the limits of human understanding. It operates as a metaphor for humanity's continuous struggle to reconcile mythological and scientific worldviews. It evokes ancient stories of hidden worlds while also engaging with 19th and 20th century scientific theories, allowing the trope to bridge the gap between the fantastic and the rational. Moreover, the ability of the Hollow Earth to resonate across genres and formats shows its power as a dynamic narrative trope, capable of engaging with a range of human concerns. Thus, the Hollow Earth remains a captivating and an enduring symbol of the human desire to reach beyond the surface, to delve into the mysteries beneath, and to explore what lies hidden, both within the world and within ourselves. As a literal place of adventure or a symbolic space for introspection and conflict, the Hollow Earth continues to offer a rich narrative framework for examining the intersections of science, myth, and the human experience. It invites us to go deeply into the depths of the imagination, challenging us to confront what we think we know and what lies beyond our grasp.

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