

# SCIENCE FICTION FILMS

• **Science Fiction Films** are usually scientific, visionary, comic-strip-like, and imaginative, and usually visualized through fanciful, imaginative settings, expert film production design, advanced technology gadgets (i.e., robots and spaceships), scientific developments, or by fantastic special effects. Sci-fi films are complete with heroes, distant planets, impossible quests, improbable settings, fantastic places, great dark and shadowy villains, futuristic technology and gizmos, and unknown and inexplicable forces. Many other SF films feature time travels or fantastic journeys, and are set either on Earth, into outer space, or (most often) into the future time. Quite a few examples of science-fiction cinema owe their origins to writers Jules Verne and H.G. Wells.

They often portray the dangerous and sinister nature of knowledge ('there are some things Man is not meant to know') (i.e., the classic [Frankenstein \(1931\)](#), [The Island of Lost Souls \(1933\)](#), and David Cronenberg's [The Fly \(1986\)](#) - an updating of the 1958 version directed by Kurt Neumann and starring Vincent Price), and vital issues about the nature of mankind and our place in the whole scheme of things, including the threatening, existential loss of personal individuality (i.e., [Invasion of the Body Snatchers \(1956\)](#), and [The Incredible Shrinking Man \(1957\)](#)). Plots of space-related conspiracies ([Capricorn One \(1978\)](#)), supercomputers threatening impregnation ([Demon Seed \(1977\)](#)), the results of germ-warfare ([The Omega Man \(1971\)](#)) and laboratory-bred viruses or plagues ([28 Days Later \(2002\)](#)), black-hole exploration ([Event Horizon \(1997\)](#)), and futuristic genetic engineering and cloning ([Gattaca \(1997\)](#) and Michael Bay's [The Island \(2005\)](#)) show the tremendous range that science-fiction can delve into.

Strange and extraordinary microscopic organisms or giant, mutant monsters ('things or creatures from space') may be unleashed, either created by misguided mad scientists or by nuclear havoc (i.e., [The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms \(1953\)](#)). Sci-fi tales have a prophetic nature (they often attempt to figure out or depict the future) and are often set in a speculative future time. They may provide a grim outlook, portraying a dystopic view of the world that appears grim, decayed and un-nerving (i.e., [Metropolis \(1927\)](#) with its underground slave population and view of the effects of industrialization, the portrayal of 'Big Brother' society in [1984 \(1956 and 1984\)](#), nuclear annihilation in a post-apocalyptic world in [On the Beach \(1959\)](#), Douglas Trumbull's vision of eco-disaster in [Silent Running \(1972\)](#), Michael Crichton's [Westworld \(1973\)](#) with androids malfunctioning, [Soylent Green \(1973\)](#) with its famous quote: "Soylent Green IS PEOPLE!", 'perfect' suburbanite wives in [The Stepford Wives \(1975\)](#), and the popular gladiatorial sport of the year 2018 in [Rollerball \(1975\)](#)). Commonly, sci-fi films express society's anxiety about technology and how to forecast and control the impact of technological and environmental change on contemporary society.

Science fiction often expresses the potential of technology to destroy humankind through Armageddon-like events, wars between worlds, Earth-imperiling encounters or [disasters](#) (i.e., [The Day The Earth Stood Still \(1951\)](#), [When Worlds Collide \(1951\)](#), [The War of the Worlds \(1953\)](#), the two Hollywood blockbusters [Deep Impact \(1998\)](#) and [Armageddon \(1998\)](#), and [The Day After Tomorrow \(2004\)](#), etc.). In many science-fiction tales, aliens, creatures, or beings (sometimes from our deep subconscious, sometimes in space or in other dimensions) are unearthed and take the mythical fight to new metaphoric dimensions or planes, depicting an eternal struggle or battle (good vs. evil) that is played out by recognizable archetypes and warriors (i.e., [Forbidden Planet \(1956\)](#) with references to the 'id monster' from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the space opera ★ [Star Wars \(1977\)](#) with knights and a princess with her galaxy's kingdom to save, [The Fifth Element \(1997\)](#), and the metaphysical [Solaris \(1972 and 2002\)](#)). Beginning in the 80s, science fiction began to be feverishly populated by noirish, cyberpunk films, with characters including cyber-warriors, hackers, virtual reality dreamers and druggies, and underworld low-lifers in nightmarish, un-real worlds (i.e., ★ [Blade Runner \(1982\)](#), [Strange Days \(1995\)](#), [Johnny Mnemonic \(1995\)](#), and [The Matrix \(1999\)](#)).

## Hybrid Genre Blending and Borrowing:

The genre is predominantly a version of [fantasy films](#) (★ [Star Wars \(1977\)](#)), but can easily overlap with [horror films](#), particularly when technology or alien life forms become malevolent ([Alien \(1979\)](#)) in a confined spaceship (much like a haunted-house story). Quite a few science-fiction films took an Earth-bound tale and transported it to outer space: ★ [High Noon \(1952\)](#) became [Outland \(1980\)](#), [The Magnificent Seven \(1960\)](#) was spoofed in [Battle Beyond the Stars \(1980\)](#), and the chariot race of ★ [Ben-Hur \(1959\)](#) was duplicated in the pod-race of [Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace \(1999\)](#). Further, there are many examples of blurred or hybrid science fiction films that share characteristics with lots of other genres including:

- [westerns](#) (**Outland (1980)**)
- [romances](#) (**Somewhere in Time (1980)**)
- [adventure films](#) (**The Thing From Another World (1951)**)
- [action films](#) (**Terminator 2 - Judgment Day (1991)**)
- [comedies](#) (**Sleeper (1973)**)
- [serials](#) (★ **Star Wars (1977)**)
- cop-buddy films (**Alien Nation (1988)**)

### The Earliest Science Fiction Films:

Many early films in this genre featured similar fanciful special effects and thrilled early audiences. The *pioneering* science fiction film, a 14-minute ground-breaking masterpiece with 30 separate tableaux (scenes), [Le Voyage Dans La Lune \(A Trip to the Moon\) \(1902\)](#), was made by imaginative, turn-of-the-century French filmmaker/magician Georges Melies, approximating the contents of the novels by Jules Verne (*From the Earth to the Moon*) and H.G. Wells (*First Men in the Moon*). With innovative, illusionary cinematic techniques (trick photography with superimposed images, dissolves and cuts), he depicted many memorable, whimsical old-fashioned images:



- a modern-looking, projectile-style rocket ship blasting off into space from a rocket-launching cannon (gunpowder powered?)
- a crash landing into the eye of the winking 'man in the moon'
- the appearance of fantastic moon inhabitants (Selenites, acrobats from the Folies Bergere) on the lunar surface
- a scene in the court of the moon king
- a last minute escape back to Earth

Otto Rippert's melodramatic and expressionistic **Homunculus (1916, Ger.)** - mostly a lost silent film - was a serial (or mini-series) composed of six one-hour episodic parts. It told about the life of an artificial man (Danish actor Olaf Fonss) that was created by an archetypal mad scientist (Friedrich Kuhne). The monstrous, vengeful creature, after realizing it was soul-less and lacked human emotion, became a tyrannical dictator but was eventually destroyed by a divine bolt of lightning. Its importance as an early science-fiction film was that it served as a precursor and inspiration to Universal's [Frankenstein \(1931\)](#) film and many other plots of sci-fi films (with mad scientists, superhuman androids, Gothic elements, and the evil effects of technology).



The first science fiction feature films appeared in the 1920s after the Great War, showing increasing doubts about the destructive effects of technology gone mad. One of the greatest and most innovative films ever made was a silent film set in the year 2000, German director Fritz Lang's classic, expressionistic, techno-fantasy masterpiece **Metropolis (1927)** - sometimes considered the ★ [Blade Runner](#) of its time. It featured an evil scientist/magician named Rotwang, a socially-controlled futuristic city, a beautiful but sinister female robot named Maria (probably the first robot in a feature film, and later providing the inspiration for George Lucas' C3-PO in ★ [Star Wars](#)), a stratified society, and an oppressed enslaved race of underground industrial workers. Even today, the film is acclaimed for its original, futuristic sets, mechanized society themes and a gigantic subterranean flood - it appeared to accurately project the nature of society in the year 2000. [It was re-released in 1984 with a stirring, hard-rock score featuring Giorgio Moroder's music and songs by Pat

Benatar and Queen.]

Another Lang film, his last silent film, was one of the first space travel films, **The Woman in the Moon (1929) (aka By Rocket to the Moon)**. It was about a blastoff to the moon where explorers discovered a mountainous landscape littered with raw diamonds and chunks of gold. [The film introduced NASA's backward count to a launch - 5-4-3-2-1 to future real-life space shots, and the effects of centrifugal force to future space travel films.]

Alexander Korda's epic view of the future **Things to Come (1936)** was directed by visual imagist William Cameron Menzies and starred Raymond Massey (as pacifist



pilot John Cabal). The imaginative English film was based on an adaptation of H. G. Wells' 1933 *The Shape of Things to Come* and set during the years from 1940 to 2036 in 'Everytown.' It included a lengthy global world war (WW II!), a prophetic Brave New World-view, a despotic tyrant named Rudolph (Ralph Richardson), the dawn of the space age, and the attempt of social-engineering scientists to save the world with technology. An attempt to prevent scientific progress - and the launch of the first Moon rocket - was vainly led by sculptor Theotocopulos (Cedric Hardwicke). David Butler's **Just Imagine (1930)**, a futuristic sci-fi musical about a man who awakened in a strange new world - New York City in the 1980s, provided prophetic inventions including automatic doors, test tube babies, and videophones.

### Early Science-Fiction - Horror Film Blends: The 30s

The most memorable blending of science fiction and horror was in Universal Studios' mad scientist-doctor/monster masterpiece from director James Whale, **Frankenstein (1931)**, an adaptation of Mary Shelley's novel. Her original 1818 book was subtitled *Frankenstein - The Modern Prometheus*, and she used this allusion to signify that her main character Dr. Victor Frankenstein demonstrated 'hubris' against god/nature in his experimental desire to create life from dead body parts, and afterwards abandoned his monstrous ugly creature. Like the Titan god, who stole fire from the gods to benefit mankind, he did not realize the ramifications of his actions. (Although there were civilizing results of having fire, it also brought the ability to work with metals, which could be shaped into weapons, that could then be used in warfare.) Many other derivative works, including numerous sci-fi films, have featured mad scientists, and artificially-created monsters that run amok killing people.

This was soon followed by Whale's superior sequel ★ **Bride of Frankenstein (1935)**, one of the best examples of the horror-SF crossover, and one of the first films with a mad scientist's creation of miniaturized human beings. The famed director also made the film version of an H. G. Wells novel **The Invisible Man (1933)** with Claude Rains (in his film debut in the starring title role) - it was the classic tale of a scientist with a formula for invisibility accompanied by spectacular special effects and photographic tricks.



### Mad Scientists in Early Horror/Sci-Fi Films:

In the 1930s and early 40s, American sound films with hybrid science fiction/horror themes included an oddball collection of mad scientist films, with memorable characters who created mutated or shrunken creatures:

- **The Vampire Bat (1932)** - a low-budget Majestic Pictures film in which Lionel Atwill starred as mad doctor Otto Von Niemann, responsible for creating bloodsucking nocturnal bats in a small German town; with a cast including dark-haired, 'scream-queen' Fay Wray, Melvyn Douglas, and Dwight Frye (the crazy Renfield character in *Dracula*)
- **Doctor X (1932)**, a First National (later Warner Bros.) film, in pioneering two-strip Technicolor by director Michael Curtiz, about another mysterious mad scientist named Doctor X-avier (Lionel Atwill) and his daughter (Fay Wray)
- **The Mystery of the Wax Museum (1933)**, another First National film in two-strip Technicolor, about an insane, wax-dummy maker-sculptor, again pairing Atwill and Wray, and featuring Glenda Farrell as a fast-talking, wisecracking reporter; famous for the shocking 'face-mask crumbling' scene; [re-made in 1953 as **House of Wax** with Vincent Price]
- **The Black Cat (1934)** - the first and best of all the Karloff-Lugosi pairings at Universal, featuring Boris Karloff (as a crazed devil worshipper) and Bela Lugosi (as a vengeful architect)
- **The Invisible Ray (1936)** - although he usually played a grotesque monster, Karloff starred as experimental physicist Dr. Janos Rukh in this film; after traveling to Africa with his colleague Dr. Benet (Bela Lugosi) and becoming infected by radiation (Radium X) in a meteor of the nebula Andromeda, Karloff was transformed into a murdering, radiation-poisoned megalomaniac as he hunted down his enemies and projected death rays at them from his eyes (glaring from under a soft felt hat)
- Tod Browning's off-beat **The Devil Doll (1936)** - with Devil's Island escapee and scientist Paul Lavond (Lionel Barrymore), disguised as a macabre elderly woman ("Madame Mandelip"), vengefully terrorizing his enemies by creating



shrunken "devil dolls" to seek out his revenge; with landmark special effects, and Maureen O'Sullivan in a supporting role as Lavond's daughter

- Ernest Schoedsack's and Paramount's **Dr. Cyclops (1940)** - the first Technicolor horror/sci-fi film since *The Mystery of the Wax Museum (1933)*, with Albert Dekker as sadistic, bald, bespectacled mad scientist Dr. Thorkel shrinking his victims in a remote Peruvian jungle setting; the film received an Academy Award nomination for its Visual Effects
- **The Monster and the Girl (1941)** - another Paramount "B" horror/sci-fi film from director Stuart Heisler, about eccentric mad scientist Dr. Parry (George Zucco) who transplanted the brain of a wrongly-accused and executed murderer into a murderous gorilla, who then went on a rampage to seek revenge
- director George Sherman's **The Lady and the Monster (1944)** - the *first* film version of the classic tale *Donovan's Brain* by Curt Siodmak [remade in 1954], in which the throbbing, telepathic brain of a dead and unscrupulous industrialist/maniac named James Donovan was kept alive by enthusiastic mad scientist/Prof. Franz Mueller (Erich von Stroheim)

### Escapist Serials of the 30s: Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers

In the 1930s, the most popular films were the low-budget, less-serious, space exploration tales portrayed in the popular, cliff-hanger Saturday matinee [serials](#) with the first two science-fiction heroes - Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers.

Space-explorer hero *Flash Gordon* was a fanciful adventure character derived from the Alex Raymond comic strip first published in 1934 (from King Features). The serials 'invented' many familiar technological marvels: anti-gravity belts, laser/ray guns, and spaceships. Universal's serialized sci-fi adventures included:

- **Flash Gordon: Space Soldiers (1936)**, the original and the best of its type, with 13 chapters; later condensed into a 97-minute feature film titled **Flash Gordon: Rocketship**
- **Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars (1938)** - 15 episodes
- **Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe (1940)**, 12 episodes, with Carol Hughes as Dale Arden



Popular elements in the swashbuckling films were the perfectly-cast, epic hero athlete/actor Larry "Buster" Crabbe, the lovely heroine and Flash's blonde sweetheart Dale Arden (Jean Rogers), Dr. Hans Zarkov (Frank Shannon), and the malevolent, tyrant Emperor Ming the Merciless (Charles Middleton) on far-off planet Mongo. The *Flash Gordon* films were remade in 1980 (with Sam J. Jones as the title character and Max von Sydow as Ming, with music by Queen), and in 1997 as the animated *Flash Gordon: Marooned on Mongo*. [There was also a pornographic knock-off film titled **Flesh Gordon (1972)** that featured a dildo-shaped spaceship.]

Wavy-haired, muscular Buster Crabbe also starred in the 12-part serial **Buck Rogers Conquers the Universe (1939)** shot between *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars (1938)* and *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe (1940)*. It was derived from the novelette story "Armageddon-2419 A.D." written by Phil Nolan (published in the August 1928 issue of the pulp magazine *Amazing Stories*), and from the comic strip *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* by Dick Calkins. In this sci-fi serial, Buck Rogers pursued the vile Killer Kane (Anthony Warde), but the series proved to be not as popular as the *Flash Gordon* serials.

Another serial was Republic's 15-part serial **The Purple Monster Strikes (1945)**, aka **D-Day on Mars**, with one of the first instances of alien invasion. And in Columbia's 15-episode serial **Bruce Gentry - Daredevil of the Skies (1949)**, the hero (Tom Neal) fought off the genre's first flying saucers.

### The Golden Age of Science Fiction Films:

After a dry period during the war years, science fiction films took off during what has been dubbed "the Golden Age of Science Fiction Films," although many of the 50s exploitative, second-rate sci-fi flicks had corny dialogue, poor screenplays, bad acting, and amateurish production values. In response to a growing interest in rocketry and space exploration, feature-length space travel films



gained popularity in the early 1950s, pioneered by two 1950 films:

- the low-budget space mission film **Rocketship X-M (1950)** (although the first manned space flight destined for the moon in the film lands on Mars)
- Hungarian-born animator-producer George Pal's and director Irving Pichel's fairly tepid and plain **Destination Moon (1950)**, taken from famed sci-fi author/screenwriter Robert Heinlein's juvenile novel *Rocket Ship Galileo*; this was Pal's first feature as a producer; the technicolor science fiction film was historically important - it 'invented' the realistic look of spacesuits, rocketships (skillfully-produced models), and the lunar surface, and included a quasi-educational segment introduced by cartoon character Woody Woodpecker; this film gave George Pal his *first* Academy Award; this Cold-War era film was also notable for its use of space as a battleground with the USSR

Suddenly, science fiction films were viewed as financially profitable and audiences flocked to the theatres and craved more. Quickly, there were many cheap, low-budget imitators, such as Monogram's and director Lesley Selander's **Flight to Mars (1951)** - about a manned space-flight in the year 2000 to the Red Planet of Mars. The Mars sequences were filmed in washed-out two-color cinecolor [this was the *first* science fiction film made with color].



### Alien Invader Films in the Cold War Era:

Many other sci-fi films of the 1950s portrayed the human race as victimized and at the mercy of mysterious, hostile, and unfriendly forces. Cold War politics undoubtedly contributed to suspicion, anxiety, and paranoia of anything "other" - or "un-American." Allegorical science fiction films reflected the collective unconscious and often cynically commented upon political powers, threats and evils that surrounded us (alien forces were often a metaphor for Communism), and the dangers of aliens taking over our minds and territory.



UFO sightings and reports of flying saucers or strange visitors from outer space found their way into Hollywood features as allegories of the Cold War, such as in director Christian Nyby's and producer Howard Hawks' sole science-fiction film **The Thing From Another World (1951)**. [It was remade by director John Carpenter in 1982 with a faithful return to the original source, *Who Goes There?* by John W. Campbell, Jr.]. It told the story of the discovery of a frozen block of ice encapsulating an alien life form (a killer, chlorophyll-based humanoid vegetable), played by *Gunsmoke's* James Arness, buried at a 'flying saucer' crash site near a remote Arctic outpost. After the creature was accidentally thawed, its presence was thrillingly announced by a beeping, flashing Geiger counter. [This same technique was later copied by the *Alien* films, notably [Alien \(1979\)](#).] When the monstrous creature finally appeared, it was doused with kerosene and set ablaze. The influential film's last line of dialogue warned: "Watch the skies! Keep watching the skies!"

More US films about space invaders in the 50s included:

- director Robert Wise's classic **The Day The Earth Stood Still (1951)**, was a counter-revolutionary film about the madness of Cold War politics; it had an anti-nuclear war message and ultimatum ("Klaatu barada nikto") brought to Washington D.C. by a gentle, benevolent, and philanthropic Christ-like alien/emissary named Klaatu (Michael Rennie), backed up by a giant, eight-foot tall metallic robot named Gort (a prototypical *Terminator* character and similar to the Tin Woodsman in *The Wizard of Oz*); the entire film was a precursor to Spielberg's [Close Encounters of the Third Kind \(1977\)](#) and [E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial \(1982\)](#)
- director Edgar Ulmer's very low-budget British film **The Man from Planet X (1951)**, one of the earliest alien invasion films, in which a mutant space traveler alien (with a bubble-head and an expressionless, unmoving face) who landed in the damp and foggy Scottish moors was treated with venal contempt
- Rudolph Mate's **When Worlds Collide (1951)**, adapted By Sydney Boehm from an original novel by Philip Wylie and Edwin Balmer, told of a runaway planetoid (Bellus) destructively approaching toward the doomed Earth (with primitive but dazzling for-the-time Oscar-winning Special Effects by producer George Pal), and the financing and building of a 'Noah's-Ark'-like spaceship to evacuate a few chosen survivors to fly to Bellus' satellite Zyra (with Earth-like climactic conditions) and colonize it
- the film noirish science fiction classic, Universal's 3-D widescreen **It Came From Outer Space (1953)** with stereo sound; director Jack Arnold's first sci-fi work adapted from an original Ray Bradbury fantasy *The Meteors*; it was an anti-conformist, anti-McCarthy message in its unique tale of benign aliens that crash-landed on Earth in the Arizona desert



near a small town. By the technique of shape-shifting, they cloned the identities of nearby townspeople in order to repair their spaceship; the film starred Richard Carlson (one of the most popular sci-fi actors of the era) as a night amateur astronomer who witnessed the landing of the 'meteorite'-spaceship and began sensing how people were changing; featured a one-eyed Cyclopiian monster

- the creepy, low-budget, cult classic film **Invaders from Mars (1953)** [remade in 1986], was the last film of director William Cameron Menzies, and one of the earliest films of its kind to be filmed in color; it told the paranoid, dream-like story from the point of view of a young boy (Jimmy Hunt) whose warnings went unheeded after witnessing a Martian flying saucer landing in a nearby field; the menacing Martians, who took residence under his house, were guided by a disembodied bulbous head in a glass sphere; contrary to popular belief, it was not shot in 3-D
- the definitive Martian alien-invasion film, copied repeatedly afterwards, was producer George Pal's and director Byron Haskin's film version of H. G. Wells' 1898 story **The War of the Worlds (1953)** (again with Oscar-winning Special Effects by George Pal), starring Gene Barry and Ann Robinson; the aliens invaded in manta ray-like space ships with cobra-like probes and zapped objects with green disintegration rays to destroy 1950s Los Angeles, forestalled only by their demise from minute bacterial agents; the film was overshadowed by Orson Welles' radio version in 1938; it was remade as a spectacular Steven Spielberg-directed **War of the Worlds (2005)**, an updated version with disaster film elements, about sinister attacking aliens from the perspective of divorced father Ray Ferrier (Tom Cruise) with two children in the New York area -- with haunting recollections of the 9/11 nightmare
- Universal's thought-provoking science fiction adventure **This Island Earth (1955)**, from director Joseph Newman, in which nuclear physicists were kidnapped by mysterious aliens with high foreheads and exo-brains (with large pulsating craniums) to help them save their dying planet Metaluna from destruction in an inter-planetary war by providing uranium; this classic sci-fi film was targeted for heckling in **Mystery Science Theater 3000: The Movie (1996)**
- director Byron Haskin's **Conquest of Space (1955)**, adapted from the book *The Mars Project*, with special effects by George Pal, displayed a realistic takeoff to explore Mars, a circular earth-orbiting space station, maneuverings during space flight and to avoid an asteroid, and a landing on Mars, in a story about a maniacal spaceship commander
- **Earth vs. the Flying Saucers (1956)**, noted for the special effects of expert Ray Harryhausen; aliens lay waste to symbols of democracy in Washington, D.C. in the film's climax (a precursor to **Independence Day (1996)**)
- director Roger Corman's second science-fiction film (following his sci-fi disaster film **The Day the World Ended (1956)**) - the low-budget **It Conquered the World (1956)**, featuring Peter Graves, Lee Van Cleef and Beverly Garland - told about an alien from Venus subversively controlling the minds of key personnel in a military base and its town using vampire-like, pointy-headed cucumber-monster and bat creatures (this film was similar in plot to **Invaders from Mars (1953)**, **The Day the Earth Stood Still (1951)**, and **Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956)** of the same year) - it was remade as the cheapie, alien invasion camp film **Zontar - The Thing from Venus (1966)**
- also, Corman's low-budget **Not of This Earth (1957)**, a sci-fi alien invasion film about a blood-seeking, extra-terrestrial invader; originally released as part of a double-bill with **Attack of the Crab Monsters (1957)**
- producer/director Gene Fowler, Jr.'s effective vintage sci-fi thriller (with a ludicrous and misleading title) **I Married a Monster From Outer Space (1958)**, told about a race of monster-like aliens from Andromeda Nebula, one of whom 'took over' the body of a man (Tom Tryon) on his wedding night
- in **Village of the Damned (1960)** from UK director Wolf Rilla and based on John Wyndam's novel *The Midwich Cuckoos*, a small English country village was suddenly cut off by a mysterious, alien energy field force that caused many women of child-bearing age to become pregnant; the twelve similar-looking, quiet, blonde, zombie-like children (6 boys and 6 girls) of the mothers lacked human emotions but had awesome mental powers, and were revealed to be hybrid aliens with human bodies; this classic was followed by a semi-sequel titled **Children of the Damned (1964)** with six other 'super-children' discovered in six different continents; John Carpenter made a remake of the original film in 1995, with Christopher Reeve in the lead role



#### Other Alien Invader Classics:

In more creature features, parasitic alien seed pods threatened to duplicate and transplant themselves as emotion-less human clones in a hostile takeover of the small California town of Santa Mira, in Don Siegel's suspenseful and brilliant film **Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956)** [remade in 1978 and in 1994]. It was a perfect post-McCarthy era film from a story by sci-fi writer Jack Finney about the threat of Communist infiltration and dehumanizing brainwashing. The metaphoric film effectively



exploited the Red paranoia of the 50s with chilling fright and warned about the dangers of an automaton existence with numbing conformity and mindless apathy.

In **They Came From Beyond Space (1967)**, formless alien spacemen landed in Cornwall, England and began to take over the minds/bodies of a group of scientists. The early 1970s sci-fi thriller film adapted from Michael Crichton's novel, Robert Wise's **The Andromeda Strain (1971)**, captured the terror of a deadly, bacterial, crystalline organism from outer space that was brought back to Earth in a satellite, and the efforts of assembled high-tech scientists racing against time to save the world from extermination.

### Disaster-Tinged Science-Fiction:

Stanley Kramer's masterpiece **On the Beach (1959)** dramatized the realities of an apocalyptic world, with survivors waiting for their radioactive doom in Australia, the last refuge on Earth in 1964. And disaster film expert Irwin Allen offered up **Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea (1961)** about the mission of an atomic submarine to destroy a deadly hot radiation belt. Stanley Kubrick's **Dr. Strangelove: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb (1964)** black comedy irreverently juxtaposed incongruous comedy and the prospect of atomic war. It featured Peter Sellers in three prominent roles, including one of the title character of Dr. Strangelove -- a bomb-loving, mad scientist type with a Nazi accent and an artificial arm.

### The Mutant Creatures/Monsters Cycle:

With the threat of destructive rockets and the Atom Bomb looming in people's minds after World War II, mutant creature/monster films featured beasts that were released or atomically created from nuclear experiments or A-bomb accidents. The aberrant monsters were the direct result of man's interference with nature. There were many examples of low-budget 50s films about the horrors of the Atomic Age:

- director Eugene Lourie's **The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms (1953)**, with spectacular effects and stop-motion animation by FX expert Ray Harryhausen was based on a Ray Bradbury short story of the same name; about a subterranean monster (a fictitious crocodilian dinosaur called a Rhedosaurus, a cross between an alligator and a T-Rex) thawed in the Arctic after atomic testing and threatening to rampage New York City on its way to ancestral breeding grounds; the attacking creature was cornered in an amusement park among various rides and ferris wheels, where it was killed by a radio-active isotope fired into a wound in its throat and burned in a roller-coaster bonfire; a precursor to the 1954 *Gojira* or *Godzilla* monster
- **Them! (1954)** by director Gordon Douglas - a scary film that launched the gigantic killer bug, B-movie sub-genre, was about mutated, giant, radio-active, murderous ants hatched in the New Mexico desert after an A-bomb test; a child stumbled out of the desert, screaming to announce: "Them! Them! Them!"; a professional soldier (James Whitmore) led the search for the monsters that traveled from the New Mexico desert to storm drains; the giant ants were interpreted as Communists on-the-loose [**Starship Troopers (1997)** paid homage to this classic film]
- Jack Arnold's **Tarantula (1955)**, a film that imitated *Them!* (1954), about a rampaging, mutant spider; featured an early bit role for Clint Eastwood as an Air Force pilot called in to bomb the huge spider
- Kurt Neumann's (director of the original *The Fly*) low-budget sci-fi thriller **Kronos (1957)**, about a giant, electrical energy-sucking alien machine/robot from outer space, with Jeff Morrow (of *This Island Earth*)
- the surreal, philosophical classic **The Incredible Shrinking Man (1957)**, by director Jack Arnold and author/scriptwriter Richard Matheson; it was another of the atomic-era films billed as "a fascinating adventure into the unknown," that featured amazing special effects of a man (Grant Williams) miniaturized by glittery particles of radioactive mist (atomic nuclear fallout), and then terrorized by an oversized cat and giant black spider in a cellar
- producer/director Bert Gordon's incredulous **The Amazing Colossal Man (1957)** questioned the damaging effects of technology, nuclear energy, and radiation through the character of an Army officer (Glen Langan) who grew to a height of 160 feet (and was bald) due to radioactive poisoning; its sequel was **War of the Colossal Beast (1958)**
- Kurt Neumann's **The Fly (1958)**, adapted from George Langelaan's short story, about a matter-teleportation experiment gone awry between a hapless scientist and a housefly; the film was followed by two sequels (**Return of the Fly (1959)** and **Curse of the Fly (1965)**) and director David Cronenberg's great remake **The Fly (1986)** years later, with Jeff Goldblum and Geena Davis
- **The 30-Foot Bride of Candy Rock (1959)**
- schlocky cult director Coleman Francis' drive-in classic **The Beast of Yucca Flats (1961)**, noted for its lack of dialogue (and its ridiculous narration), and ex-wrestler Tor Johnson as a defecting Russian nuclear scientist who



turns into a rampaging, mutant beast after exposure to an H-bomb detonation

- in Allan Dwan's classic **The Most Dangerous Man Alive (1961)**, a gangster was turned into an automaton made of impervious steel after an atomic blast

Hollywood pursued the commercial success of these post-war SF films with many more. One intelligent, lavishly-expensive science fiction film was MGM's **Forbidden Planet (1956)** - it told the story of a journey by astronauts of United Planets Cruiser C57D (led by commanding officer Leslie Nielsen in one of his earliest roles) to a distant planet named Altair-IV. There, they investigated the fate of a colony planted years before. The studio-bound film inspired the look of many future films and works, notably TV's *Star Trek* by Gene Roddenberry and *Star Wars* creator George Lucas. Shot in Cinemascope and color, it re-worked Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and has been psychoanalyzed as a dramatization of repressed sexual desires. The film has been best-remembered for Walter Pidgeon as Dr. Morbius (the Prospero figure) on a tour of the ill-fated Krell laboratories, and his pretty daughter Altaira (Anne Francis as the Miranda character who has never seen men). *The Tempest's* Ariel was represented by a language-fluent, lumbering Robby the Robot (its first appearance in a film), and Caliban by an invisible Id-monster that attacked and was electrocuted on electric fences.



The popularity of Robby the Robot spawned another film, **The Invisible Boy (1957)** with a supporting role for the 'good' computer robot. Robby also served as the prototype for the robot in the *Lost in Space* TV series (1965-68).

### The Flood of Alien Monster Films:

The 'alien monster' gimmick was profitable although many of these 50s films were pure schlock. Sequels (of uneven quality) with more monstrous creatures included:

- **Creature From the Black Lagoon (1954)** - this was Jack Arnold's horror classic, originally shot in 3-D; it was the last great classic from Universal Studios; the second film in the trilogy was titled **Revenge of the Creature (1955)** and was set in a Florida marine park, with Clint Eastwood as a lab technician in his screen debut; the third film was **The Creature Walks Among Us (1956)** from director John Sherwood; in the first film, a prehistoric, web-footed, humanoid Gill-Man (Ben Chapman) was discovered swimming in a Brazilian river in the Amazon by an anthropological expedition; included superb underwater sequences with the creature's 'Beauty-and-the-Beast' interest in dark-haired bathing beauty Julia Adams swimming above him in a white one-piece suit that accentuated her breasts
- director Lee Sholem's cheaply-made, kids-oriented **Tobor the Great (1954)**, looking like an old TV show, featured the first appearance of a robot (Tobor is 'robot' spelled backwards!) in a 50s film
- **It Came From Beneath The Sea (1955)**, about a giant squid-octopus (with six tentacles to make it easier to animate) threatening San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge; again with special effects by Ray Harryhausen
- director Jack Arnold's 'giant-insect' film **Tarantula (1955)**, about a rampaging, 100 ft. high spider on the loose in the Arizona desert (with the tagline: "See its mandibles crush cars like tin cans!"); with Leo G. Carroll as a biochemist, and John Agar and Mara Corday (Playboy's Miss October 1958); the film featured an early and slight role for Clint Eastwood as an Air Force jet fighter pilot who dropped burning napalm on the arachnid
- director Bert Gordon's schlocky **Beginning of the End (1957)**, about radiation-generated, giant mutant grasshoppers with oversized mandibles attacking parts of Illinois and Chicago's Wrigley Building
- **The Black Scorpion (1957)**, about the unearthing and unleashing of prehistoric giant scorpions in an exploding volcano in Mexico; with stop-motion special effects from legendary Willis O'Brien (of **King Kong** fame) - his last theatrical feature
- **The Giant Claw (1957)**, a cheesy sci-fi film about an enormous winged bird (the Claw) from outer space that terrorized innocent peasants in Northern Canada, and then destroyed the United Nations building while flying southward
- Nathan Juran's **The Deadly Mantis (1957)**, about a sleeping, gigantic, carnivorous green praying mantis, frozen in the Arctic, that was resurrected by a volcanic eruption, and threatened the destruction of both New York City and Washington, DC
- **20 Million Miles to Earth (1957)**, another 'creature-feature' from Nathan Juran, this time with special effects stop-motion animation from Ray Harryhausen and rear-projection



Dynamation, about a gelatinous mass (growing into a reptilian biped called the Ymir) inadvertently brought back on a returning American spaceship from Venus that crashed in the Mediterranean near Sicily; the giant Venusian creature then threatened the city of Rome and met its fiery fate in the Colosseum

- director Irving S. Yeaworth, Jr.'s campy **The Blob (1958)**, a typical combination of 50's teen film and sci-fi outer space creature film; featured 28 year old Steve McQueen in his debut film role as a delinquent, misunderstood high-schooler who witnessed the arrival of a meteor that oozed a pink substance; a sequel **Beware! the Blob (1972)** (aka **Son of Blob**) was directed by actor Larry Hagman (of *Dallas* TV fame) and advertised as "The Film That J.R. Shot"
- **It! The Terror From Beyond Space (1958)**, the inspirational pre-cursor to Ridley Scott's [Alien](#) years later; set in the far-off future of 1964, about a spaceship that returns to Earth from Mars with an additional savage, alien killer life-form (a rubber-suited monster) on board
- Ib Melchior's cult film **The Angry Red Planet (1959)** told of a fateful and deadly expeditionary trip to Mars, in which four crew members faced devouring and dangerous creatures, including a man-eating plant (a multi-tentacled Venus fly-trap), a giant crab-bat-rat-spider hybrid, and a huge, ambulatory amoeba-like jellyfish creature - notably, the film was made with a special-effects optical process called "Cinemagic" that created a 3-D depth effect and tinted the Martian landscape reddish
- Edgar Ulmer's two quickly-made, low-budget films, the time-travel film **Beyond the Time Barrier (1960)**, and **The Amazing Transparent Man (1960)**, about a mad scientist who made a crook invisible in order to steal radioactive materials and rob banks; filmed at the Texas State Fair Showgrounds
- **Dinosaurus! (1960)**, from Irving S. Yeaworth, Jr., advertised as "Alive with Thrills That Started 4 Million Years Ago", with prehistoric dinosaurs (a Tyrannosaurus Rex and a brontosaurus) and a Neolithic caveman revived by lightning in the Pacific
- **Reptilicus (1962)**, an unsuccessful Swedish entry in the dinosaur-creature cycle; about the discovery of a large fossil reptile buried for years in ice in Denmark, and its regeneration into a serpentine-like dragon monster



### Japan's Giant Monster Films:

Japan's Toho Studios (and director Inoshiro Honda, known as "The Father of Godzilla") contributed to the "creature feature" output after noticing the influence of Ray Harryhausen's **The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms (1953)** with stop-motion animation. They released a trilogy of films about a similar monster (and an additional feature film), inevitably followed by numerous other schlocky, dubbed sequels. This and subsequent Japanese monster movies would feature actors in giant, rubber monster costumes, fake-looking miniatures, and double-exposure photography:

- **Gojira (1954, Jp.)**, d. Inoshiro Honda, about an ancient, monstrous, fire-breathing (with radioactive breath), 400 foot reptilian Asian creature aka *Gojira* (a melding of the words gorilla and *kujira*, which means whale) - a mutant dinosaur (actually an actor in a lizard suit terrorizing a miniature city) brought back to life from the ocean depths to terrorize Tokyo after underwater nuclear testing; made only a decade after the country's devastating experience with nuclear fallout from Hiroshima and Nagasaki and during a time of underwater nuclear testing, with the monster representing the atomic bomb and all of its destruction [Note: a newly-restored 'director's cut' of this film was released in 2004, with 40 minutes of footage not previously shown, and subtitles.]
- **Godzilla Raids Again (1955, Jp.)** (aka **Gigantis The Fire Monster (1959)**) - see below
- **Sora no Daikaijuu Radon (1956, Jp.)**, (aka **Rodan (1956)** and **Monster of the Sky Rodan** or **Radon the Flying Monster**), director Inoshiro Honda's first film in color - about a giant, flying pterodactyl monster that threatens to ravage the world
- **Chikyuu Boeigun (1957, Jp.)** (aka **The Mysterians (1957)**), d. Inoshiro Honda and based upon the successful alien invasion film **The War of the Worlds (1953)**, without *Gojira* but featuring a gigantic robot, and repeating the theme of the deadly after-effects of nuclear radiation
- **Battle in Outer Space (1959)** (aka **Uchu Daisenso (1959)**), d. Inoshiro Honda
- **Mosura (1961, Jp.)** (aka **Mothra (1961)**), d. Inoshiro Honda, about a giant female caterpillar moth that destroys Tokyo
- **King Kong vs. Godzilla (1962)**, another entry from director Honda and Toho Studios - see below

The first *Gojira* sequel was director Motoyoshi Oda's **Gojira no Gyakushu (1955, Jp.)** (aka **Godzilla's CounterAttack** or **Gigantis, The Fire Monster**), that was released in the US in 1959 (directed by Hugo Grimaldi) as **Godzilla Raids Again (1959, US)** (aka **Gigantis** and **The Return of Godzilla**).

**Godzilla, King of the Monsters (1956, US)**, d. Terrell O. Morse, was the US remake of Honda's



original 1954 film, released by producer Joseph E. Levine and his Transworld Pictures. It was a very different, butchered and Americanized film for US audiences (without most of the anti-nuclear political statements and references to the dangers of the H-bomb), with 40 minutes excised and 20 minutes of new footage. The poorly-dubbed film featured American actor Raymond Burr as an American reporter who pleads with a scientist named Dr. Kyohei Yamane (Takashi Shimura) to challenge the monstrous dinosaur with his invention - an 'oxygen destroyer.' This film was remade as a Hollywood blockbuster by Roland Emmerich, titled **Godzilla (1998)**, starring Matthew Broderick and featuring a computer-generated monster.

Inoshiro Honda's trilogy of monster films spawned new giant monsters, such as Majin (a monster of terror), Gamera (a jet-propelled flying turtle), Barugon (a gigantic lizard), Ghidrah (a three-headed dragon), Dagora (flying jellyfish) as well as Godzilla clones named Agon and Gappa. The sequels were often battles of elimination, including **King Kong vs. Godzilla (1962)**, **Godzilla vs. Mothra (1964)** (aka **Godzilla vs. The Thing**), **Ghidrah: The Three-Headed Monster (1964)**, **Godzilla vs. Monster Zero (1965)** (aka **Monster Zero**), **Destroy All Monsters (1968)**, and **Godzilla's Revenge (1969)** (aka **All Monsters Attack**). The Japanese Godzilla monster would later return in the mid-80s as **Gojira (1984)** (aka **Godzilla 1985: The Legend is Reborn**) - a remake of the 1956 classic, in the mid-90s as **Godzilla vs. Destoroyah (1995)**, and at the turn of the century with **Godzilla 2000 (1999)** (the first Japanese *Godzilla* movie since the 1985 installment to receive a US theatrical release). Toho's franchise of Godzilla films totaled almost 30 films in all. The ultimate films in the US series were Roland Emmerich's big-budget **Godzilla (1998)**, and the 50th Anniversary film **Godzilla: Final Wars (2004)** - reprising the giant monster's battles with many of its old foes.

### The Giant Mutated Monster and Giant People Films of Bert I. Gordon (1957-1977)

The famed schlockmeister B-director Bert Gordon (nicknamed Mr. Big, whose initials were B.I.G.) specialized in cheesy "giant mutated monster and giant people" films with cheap special effects, many of which were lampooned on the TV series *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. His most famous film was **The Amazing Colossal Man (1957)**, about Army Lt. Colonel Glenn Manning (Glenn Logan), who in a futile attempt to save a downed pilot, was blasted by a plutonium bomb, and grew to the height of 50 feet as a bald giant and then rampaged through Las Vegas, where he fell off Hoover/Boulder Dam to his apparent death. (It was followed by an inferior sequel **War of the Colossal Beast (1958)**, notable only as a B/W film with a color finale when the Beast was electrocuted.) Other notable Gordon films included the giant grasshopper film **Beginning of the End (1957)** (that resembled **Them! (1954)**) and starring Peter Graves, **Earth Vs. the Spider (1958)** (remade as a 2001 TV movie), a beach-party rock 'n' roll monster film **Village of the Giants (1965)** starring young Beau Bridges, Ron (as Ronny) Howard, Tommy Kirk and Johnny Crawford, **The Food of the Gods (1976)**, and **Empire of the Ants (1977)** about giant marauding mutated ants in backwater Florida.

### Britain's 50s Quatermass Series:

By mid-century, Britain's Hammer Studios' also produced some pioneering sci-fi films, adapted from the BBC-TV's earlier six-part serials or mini-series between 1953 and 1960, each written by Nigel Kneale:

- **The Quatermass Xperiment (aka The Creeping Unknown) (1956)**, a returning astronaut (Brian Donlevy) infected Earth with an invisible alien infestation within his body that turned him into a monster. [The film inspired - or was copied by - **The Blob (1958)**.]
- **Quatermass 2 (aka Enemy From Space) (1957)**, a chilling alien invasion sequel with Earth threatened by blobs and brainwashed zombies
- **Quatermass and the Pit (aka Five Million Years to Earth) (1968)**, with more threats to London after workers uncovered a buried alien spacecraft
- a later sequel, **The Quatermass Conclusion (1979)** comprised of condensed highlights from the 4-hour British TV serial (4 episodes, each 60 minutes in length)



### Verne and Wells Derivatives:

Many SF films were (and still are) a futuristic combination of the work of visionaries Jules Verne and H. G. Wells (1866-1946).

One of the earliest adapted US/Hollywood science fiction films was **Mysterious Island (1929)** - the filmed version of Jules Verne's 19th century novel with a Lost Atlantis theme. Other Verne adaptations reached their peak in the 50s and 60s, and included:

- **20,000 Leagues Under the Sea (1954)**, both a 1916 silent version and Disney's version, about Captain Nemo aboard an advanced submarine; also an animated version in 1990



- producer Michael Todd's episodic, all-star extravaganza **Around the World in 80 Days (1956)**
- **From the Earth to the Moon (1958)**, about a rocket trip to the moon, starring Joseph Cotten, George Sanders, and Debra Paget
- **Journey to the Center of the Earth (1959)**, based on Verne's 1864 novel, a fascinating exploration into the earth's core by way of an Icelandic volcano, led by a Victorian scientist (James Mason) and a star-studded group of travelers
- the fantasy-adventure **Mysterious Island (1961)** about two escaping Civil War prisoners whose flying balloon landed on an unusual Pacific island populated by threatening, gigantic animals and more (with spectacular Ray Harryhausen special effects)
- **Master of the World (1961)**, with a mad-scientist who wanted to rule the world plot, starring Vincent Price and Charles Bronson; also appeared in an animated version in 1976
- director Irwin Allen's **Five Weeks in a Balloon (1962)**, an adventure tale of a 19th century British explorer who conducted a ballooning expedition to Africa
- **In Search of the Castaways (1962)**, based on Verne's novel *Captain Grant's Children*

H.G. Wells' books also provided material from which to compose film adaptations, such as:

- **The Island of Lost Souls (1933)**, the original classic with Charles Laughton (in his first starring US role) as a disturbed, fugitive mad doctor (similar to Dr. Frankenstein) on a remote tropical island who experimentally turned beastly jungle animals into half-human-like creatures; British censors banned the film, claiming it was "against nature"; the film was remade twice with Wells' original book title **The Island of Dr. Moreau** - in 1977 with Burt Lancaster as the sinister scientist, and director John Frankenheimer's version in 1996 with Marlon Brando in the title role
- a classic mad science film, James Whale's **The Invisible Man (1933)**, see above
- **Things to Come (1936)**, see above
- Alexander Korda's sci-fi fantasy **The Man Who Could Work Miracles (1937)**, with Roland Young as a mild-mannered and timid department store clerk who suddenly became omnipotent
- the classic alien invasion film **The War of the Worlds (1953)**, based upon Wells' 1898 novel, see above; [remade in director Steven Spielberg's **War of the Worlds (2005)**]
- the classic time travel film **The Time Machine (1960)**, based upon Wells' 1895 novel, see further below
- **The First Men in the Moon (1964)**, a tale of turn-of-the-century lunar explorers; the film was noted for Ray Harryhausen's wonderful special effects
- **The Food of the Gods (1976)**




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### Ray Harryhausen's Mythological Science-Fiction/Fantasy Films - One of the Fathers of Modern-Day Special Effects

After admiring and being inspired by the ground-breaking work of Willis H. O'Brien in ★ [Kong Kong \(1933\)](#) and the work of special-effects animator George Pal in the 1940s, Ray Harryhausen was able to work on **Mighty Joe Young (1949)**, one of O'Brien's final projects (for which O'Brien won a Best Visual Effects Oscar) although Harryhausen wasn't really credited for most of the work. Besides the films already mentioned in the 1950s, master of stop-motion animation Ray Harryhausen (often teamed with long-time producer Charles Schneer) turned to mythologically-tainted science-fiction films (including three Sinbad films) to display his painstaking, classic craft of special effects - animated frame-by-frame, until the special effects revolution ushered in by ★ [Star Wars \(1977\)](#) swept through the industry. Harryhausen, who never received an Oscar nomination, did receive the Gordon E. Sawyer Honorary Academy Award in 1992. He created the fantastic images in 15 films between 1953 and 1981, including:

Harryhausen's Films	Descriptions
<b>The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms (1953)</b>	mentioned earlier
<b>It Came From Beneath The Sea (1955)</b>	about a giant squid-octopus (with only six arms instead of eight to save money) threatening San Francisco and the

	Golden Gate Bridge
<b>Earth vs. The Flying Saucers (1956)</b>	mentioned earlier
<b>20 Million Miles to Earth (1957)</b>	mentioned earlier
<b>The Three Worlds of Gulliver (1959)</b>	adapted from Jonathan Swift's novel about an adventurer who encountered the worlds of Lilliput, Brobdignag, and England
<b>Mysterious Island (1961)</b>	mentioned earlier
<b>Jason and the Argonauts (1963)</b>	Harryhausen's best film, with screeching harpies, a giant metal warrior (a cross between the Colossus of Rhodes and a bronzed Talos man), a 7-headed hydra, and sword-wielding skeletons doing battle against Jason (Todd Armstrong)
<b>The First Men in the Moon (1964)</b>	mentioned earlier
<b>One Million Years, BC (1967)</b>	Harryhausen's most celebrated film, with Raquel Welch as a fur bikini-clad cavewoman, and a menagerie of prehistoric creatures
<b>The Valley of Gwangi (1969)</b>	about the unleashing of a giant, flesh-eating prehistoric monster that burns to death at a church altar in the fiery climax
<b>Trog (1970)</b>	a horror-monster film, noted as the last film of Joan Crawford
<u>Sinbad Trilogy:</u>	
<b>(1) The 7th Voyage of Sinbad (1958)</b>	featuring Harryhausen's Dynamation process, and a giant, horned Cyclops who spit-roasts a sailor
<b>(2) The Golden Voyage of Sinbad (1973)</b>	featuring a 6-armed statue, a one-eyed centaur, and a flying Griffin
<b>(3) Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger (1977)</b>	with three zomboids, a giant saber-toothed tiger, a horned prehistoric caveman named Troglodyte (Trog for short), three banshees, and Minoton (similar to the legendary Minotaur with a human body and bull's head) - among other creatures
<b>Clash of the Titans (1981)</b>	featuring a snake-haired medusa; this was Harryhausen's swan song - Harryhausen's <u>last</u> film as Special Effects producer

[Pixar's **Monsters, Inc. (2001)** paid tribute to Harryhausen by having Monstropolis' chic night spot restaurant named after him. Also, the octopus behind the bar in Harryhausen's Sushi restaurant has only six legs, another clever in-reference.]

### Some 60's Sci-Fi Films:

In the 1960s, producer George Pal and director Byron Haskin teamed again to deliver a sci-fi version of Defoe's classic novel, **Robinson Crusoe on Mars (1964)**, about a stranded astronaut on the planet of Mars, with only a monkey named Mona as a companion. Another stranded astronaut's film, this time on the Moon after a retro-rocket failed to return them to Earth (foreshadowing the *Apollo 13* disaster and its telling in the film version **Apollo 13 (1995)**), was director John Sturges' **Marooned (1969)** - that won an Academy Award for Best Visual Effects. And director Richard Fleischer's fanciful **Fantastic Voyage (1966)**, from Isaac Asimov's novel, put a medical team of shrunken explorers (Stephen Boyd and Raquel Welch) inside a human body in a miniaturized submarine that traveled through the blood stream, with a mission to wipe out a dangerous blood clot in the brain of an atomic scientist, while being confronted by the body's natural defense system. Roger Vadim's futuristic space fantasy **Barbarella (1968)**, derived from a comic strip, featured a sexually-emancipated 41st century space adventuress (Jane Fonda), with a memorable striptease under the credits and John Phillip Law as the blind angel Pygar.

### Sci-Fi Flops and Turkeys:

There were also any number of dreadfully grotesque, cheesy low-budget science-fiction flops or turkeys - now often

regarded as kitsch or cult classics, drive-in specials, or as "the most enjoyable bad films of all time." [Many of these films would eventually end up on the satirical TV show *Mystery Science Theatre 3000*.] They included some of the following:

- Arthur Hilton's 3-D **Cat-Women of the Moon (1953)** about scantily-clad Amazons on the lunar surface (advertised as "Love-Starved Moon Maidens on the Prowl!")
- director Phil Tucker's incredible 3-D **Robot Monster (1953) (aka Monsters from the Moon)** - the sex-starved Ro-Man monster was played by a man in a gorilla suit with a diving helmet; upon release, this famed 'turkey' was so heavily scorned and criticized that Tucker committed an unsuccessful suicide
- **Bride of the Monster (1956)**, with an aged Bela Lugosi playing a mad scientist; one of writer/producer/director Ed Wood's awful classics
- Ed Wood Jr.'s legendary **Plan 9 From Outer Space (1956)**, about space aliens conquering Earth by resurrecting the dead; often considered the worst sci-fi film ever made
- the creature feature **The Mole People (1956)** about an ancient Sumerian-like, underground group of albinos located in the Middle East during a subterranean, anthropological expedition led by John Agar
- John Sherwood's **The Monolith Monsters (1957)**, based on a story by Jack Arnold (who directed *Creature from the Black Lagoon*), with giant, menacing black rocks formed from meteor fragments
- Arnold Laven's **The Monster That Challenged the World (1957)**, a classic B-movie creature-feature about giant, prehistoric killer sea mollusks (discovered under S. California's Salton Sea) with snapping mandibles, and with aging western film actor Tim Holt in the male romantic lead role
- the preposterous schlock film **Attack of the 50-Ft. Woman (1958, 1993)** about a gigantic woman (Allison Hayes) in a bikini
- **Attack of the Giant Leeches (1958)**, a typical representation of a cheap Roger Corman-produced film, about marauding giant leeches in a swamp
- **The Wild Women of Wongo (1958)**
- **The Brain from Planet Arous (1958)**, about a huge floating alien brain set to take over the Earth
- Tom Graeff's alien invasion film **Teenagers from Outer Space (1959)**
- Robert Hutton's **The Slime People (1963)**, shot cheaply in a Los Angeles butcher shop; about prehistoric monsters in deep freeze cabinets that were awakened from hibernation by atomic testing
- Roger Corman's disturbing and grotesque sci-fi/horror film, "**X**" - **The Man with the X-Ray Eyes (1963)**, with Ray Milland as Dr. Xavier, a hubris-filled surgeon whose powers of X-ray vision became self-destructive, causing him to tear out his rotted eyes when a tent evangelist in a revival meeting exhorted his audience to pluck out an offending eye (from the Biblical quote Mark 9:47)
- El Paso fertilizer salesman Hal Warren's **Manos: The Hands of Fate (1966)**, his sole directorial effort (he also wrote and produced), and mocked as one of the worst films ever made by the *Mystery Science Theater 3000* TV show (their most popular episode ever) with its out-of-focus scenes, ultra-repetitive dialogue, a badly-dubbed soundtrack, long and drawn-out scenes, and amateur actors; its characters included a half-man, half-goat individual named Torgo and a mysterious cult leader character named the Master [The below standard B-grade film's notoriety even led to a short Canadian documentary titled **Hotel Torgo (2004)**, made by Niagara College film students about the turbulent making of the film]
- and another of the worst films ever made - the sci-fi parody **Attack of the Killer Tomatoes (1980)**



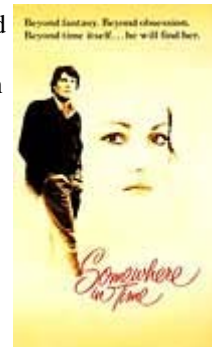
### Time Travel Films:

A number of time travel films have been produced over the years:

- producer/director George Pal's classic film adaptation of H. G. Wells' 1895 novel with Oscar-winning Special Effects, **The Time Machine (1960)** in which a turn-of-the-century English time traveler and inventor H.G. "George" Wells (Rod Taylor) went to the year 802,701 (past three world wars) to find a most-unusual world populated with peaceful Eloi and monstrous green Morlocks
- **La Jetee (1962)**, the landmark, eloquent short French film from director Chris Marker composed entirely of B/W still frames; set after WWII, about a group of scientists who attempted to send a man back in time to his life before the war; remade as **12 Monkeys (1995)** - see below



- the fantasy-biopic **Time After Time (1979)**, director Nicholas Meyer's directorial debut film, in which a young H. G. Wells (portrayed by Malcom McDowell) pursued Jack the Ripper through late 70s San Francisco
- **The Final Countdown (1980)**, in which the *USS Nimitz*, a modern-day aircraft carrier, was sent back to the Pacific Ocean by time warp to December 6, 1941 (pre Pearl Harbor)
- **Somewhere in Time (1980)**, an old-fashioned, dramatic love story conducted across time and based upon Richard Matheson's novel *Bid Time Return*; aspiring playwright/actor (Christopher Reeves) willed himself back to 1912 to a turn of the century hotel after falling in love with the picture of an actress (Jane Seymour) given him by an elderly woman who beckoned: "Come back to me"
- **Time Bandits (1981)**, Terry Gilliam's sci-fi fantasy in which six renegade dwarves and a British schoolboy traveled through history after entering a time portal
- **The Terminator (1984)** and **Terminator 2: Judgment Day (1991)**, see further below
- **The Planet of the Apes** series, see further below
- **Back to the Future (1985)**, **Back to the Future II (1989)**, and **Back to the Future III (1990)**, three entertaining and popular films in which Marty McFly traveled backwards and forwards in time with the help of mad scientist Doc Brown (Christopher Lloyd) and a super-adapted Deorean vehicle
- **Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home (1986)**, in which the *Enterprise* crew of the 23rd century journeyed back to 1986 San Francisco in a captured Klingon spaceship to save the Earth's humpbacked whales
- the mega-blockbuster **Total Recall (1990)**, from director Paul Verhoeven and adapted from Philip Dick's short story *We Can Remember It For You Wholesale*; starred Arnold Schwarzenegger as a 21st century construction worker who visited an implant travel service to transport him to Mars - but was the trip only in the memory chip implanted in his brain?
- **Freejack (1992)**, in this time-travel chase movie from director Geoff Murphy, a 1991 race car driver (Emilio Estevez) was abruptly transported to the year 2009 by a 21st century bounty hunter (Mick Jagger)
- **Timecop (1994)**, a futuristic action film from Peter Hyams in which Jean Claude Van Damme had the role of a special unit cop in the Time Enforcement Division, an agency to protect against the misuse of time travel
- **12 Monkeys (1995)**, director Terry Gilliam's mind-bending story, a remake of Chris Marker's short film *La Jetée/The Pier (1962, Fr.)*, was set in a disease and plague-ravaged world due to biological terrorism, forcing the human race to live in miserable conditions below the surface of the Earth; in the year 2035, prisoner Bruce Willis was sent back twice to the 1990s to prevent the 'Army of the 12 Monkeys' from instigating their plot to spread a devastating plague
- **Star Trek: First Contact (1996)**, the 8th film in the series (that began in 1979), with interplanetary time travel from the 24th century to the mid-21st century
- **Retroactive (1997)**, a sci-fi thriller about repeated attempts to change a violent act in the past, through time-travel, that ended up even more disastrous



### The Alien Films:

Ridley Scott's effective horror/sci-fi film **Alien (1979)** - the last major sci-fi film of the 70s, was a combination of Spielberg's **Jaws (1975)** and Carpenter's horror film **Halloween (1978)**. *Alien* featured H. R. Giger's unique alien design - a dilapidated mining space vehicle *Nostromo*, a deadly extra-terrestrial life form stowaway, and a shocking and repulsive chest-bursting sequence involving John Hurt. It appeared that the alien monster may have arisen from the unconscious of its victims. Scott's film spawned other renditions in the four-part series:



- writer/director James Cameron's suspenseful, tense and non-stop action sequel **Aliens (1986)** about the futile nightmarish battle between Marines and the fertile Mother of rapacious aliens
- David Fincher's **Alien 3 (1992)**
- Jean-Pierre Jeunet's **Alien Resurrection (1997)**

Paul W.S. Anderson's **Alien Vs. Predator (2004)**, set in 2004, crossed the *Alien* franchise with the *Predator*'s; it was the only film not to feature Lt. Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver).

**Kubrick's Science-Fiction Classic:**

But the most celebrated, religious, and transcendent of all space films up to that time, visualized space travel with incredible magnificence and seriousness. Kubrick's respectable, influential film ★ [2001: A Space Odyssey \(1968\)](#) (with only 40 minutes of dialogue), based on Arthur C. Clarke's novel, restored legitimacy to the science-fiction genre. The impressive film featured an incredible opening enhanced by Richard Strauss' *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, a 'Dawn of Man' sequence, majestic views of outer space and drifting space stations, enigmatic monoliths, the breakdown of a malevolent HAL super-computer (with Douglas Rains' voice), an astronaut's journey to Jupiter (paralleling man's own growth of intelligence), a hallucinatory light show trip through space, and a cryptic ending featuring a super-being space fetus. Kubrick's film won the Oscar for Best Special Effects in 1968. A sequel was produced sixteen years later, director Peter Hyams' **2010: The Year We Make Contact (1984)**.

After *2001*'s success, Hollywood produced many more space adventure films, including John Carpenter's directorial debut film and parody - the unusual sci-fi satire **Dark Star (1974)**, about the crew of spaceship *Dark Star* on a ten-year mission to destroy planets in deep space. More serious science-fiction films, Robert Wise's **Star Trek: The Motion Picture (1979)** and Robert Zemeckis' **Contact (1997)** with Jodie Foster examined further space journeys, contacts with alien life, and metaphysical questions about man's place in the universe.

**The Planet of the Apes Series (1968-1973):**

A popular, clever, mostly successful and serious five-film series of classic simian films about apes that have evolved into an intelligent society, derived from Pierre Boule's novel *Monkey Planet*, originated with **Planet of the Apes (1968)**. The first film in the series depicted a post-apocalyptic, post-nuclear futuristic planet (Earth) - revealed in the film's startling conclusion by a half-submerged Statue of Liberty. Its advanced make-up techniques reversed the social positions of intelligent humans and brutal apes to slyly criticize racial stereotypes. It also examined the effects of technology upon humankind. Four sequels appeared over the years, plus a live-action and animated TV series, and a recent feature film remake:



Film Titles	Director	Plot Setting
<b>1. Planet of the Apes (1968)</b>	d. Franklin J. Shaffner	Astronauts launched in 1972; they experience a time-warp and emerge in post-nuclear holocaust 3978 A.D.
<b>2. Beneath the Planet of the Apes (1970)</b>	d. Ted Post	Second mission sent; also emerges in post-apocalypse 3978 A.D. New York City
<b>3. Escape From the Planet of the Apes (1971)</b>	d. Don Taylor	Earth, Los Angeles, 1973; a sequel and prequel to the first two films
<b>4. Conquest of the Planet of the Apes (1972)</b>	d. J. Lee Thompson	1991, then a nuclear war breaks out
<b>5. Battle for the Planet of the Apes (1973)</b>	d. J. Lee Thompson	post-WWIII (nuclear holocaust), in the year 2670 A.D. (in the film's prologue and epilogue), with a flashback to the early 2000s A.D. (about 12 years after the finale of #4)
Remakes:		
<b>Planet of the Apes (2001)</b>	d. Tim Burton	2029 A.D.

**Other 70s-80s Science Fiction Films:**

Other futuristic films were produced in the 1970s and 1980s, many with the effects of technology run amok - whether it was faults in human-tinkering technology or social engineering, or robot theme parks with aberrant androids. The dystopic films included **Silent Running (1971)**, from Douglas Trumbull (special effects creator for [2001](#)) in his directorial debut, a sci-fi environmental story about the aftermath of a nuclear holocaust. A monk-robed, hippie ecologist named Freeman Lowell (Bruce

Dern) decided to re-vegetate a destroyed Earth with the last surviving vegetation on an orbiting space station/greenhouse called the Valley Forge. [The film's anthropomorphic drones or robots named Huey and Dewey inspired the R2D2 robot of [Star Wars](#).] Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky's science-fiction masterpiece **Solaris (1972)**, a rebuttal to Kubrick's [2001](#), portrayed a water-dominated planet (with a huge, fluid-like brain for an ocean) that was disrupting the minds of cosmonauts on an orbiting space station. [The film was remade twice: Paul W.S. Anderson's **Event Horizon (1997)** with Laurence Fishburne and Sam Neill, and Steven Soderbergh's similarly-titled **Solaris (2002)** with George Clooney.] **Soylent Green (1973)** provided a view of deprivation in 21st century life in the year 2022 where dying people on the over-populated, ecologically-unbalanced planet were made into human food ("Soylent Green is people").

Director Mike Hodges' **Terminal Man (1974)**, a Michael Crichton-based thriller with George Segal, featured a violence-prone scientist implanted with a malfunctioning computer chip. And Bryan Forbes' creepy cult classic **The Stepford Wives (1975)**, adapted from Ira Levin's 1972 novel, provided a savagely-chilling view of perfect, 'ideal' suburban wives (docile android/robotic replicas) created by anti-women's lib husbands in the upscale town of Stepford, Connecticut. [The feminist satire was remade almost 30 years later by director Frank Oz, **The Stepford Wives (2004)** as a dark comedy, with Nicole Kidman as the Katharine Ross character - an automaton housewife and TV executive, and stars Matthew Broderick (as Nicole's husband), Bette Midler, Christopher Walken, and Glenn Close.]

In writer/director Michael Crichton's technophobic **Westworld (1973)**, a black-hatted, programmed android-cowboy robot (Yul Brynner) at a computer-controlled vacation resort of the future - a high-tech Disneyland for rich vacationers (on the island of Delos) with three worlds: Medieval World, Roman World and Westworld - rebelled, went berserk, and murdered customers. Robots could be identified by raised ring formations circling the finger joints of their hands. This influential film presaged many future films with its creative themes and story elements: a resort park (**Jurassic Park (1993)**), artificially-intelligent cyborgs (**Blade Runner (1982)** and **The Terminator (1984)**), and pre-packaged virtual experiences (**Total Recall (1990)**). Its lesser sequel **Futureworld (1976)** portrayed another scheme of Westworld's scientists to create more clones - android world leaders. **Death Race 2000 (1975)** told the story about a 21st century cross-country car race with points scored for killing pedestrians.



Michael Anderson's hip sci-fi classic **Logan's Run (1976)** presented life as hedonistic in the 23rd century inside a sealed domed city following some kind of catastrophic disaster. Michael York played the role of a black-clad 'Sandman' with orders to kill anyone who 'ran' toward 'Sanctuary' after they turned 30 years of age, rather than facing a ceremonial 'carousel' rebirth. And the imaginative and claustrophobic **Demon Seed (1977)**, taken from SF author Dean Koontz' novel, expanded the menace of 2001's HAL computer by presenting a super-computer Proteus IV that sexually terrorized its creator's wife.



Disney's sci-fi adventure **Tron (1982)** was set inside a computerized videogame, where the designer/creator battled his own computer games. It was one of the first films to use extensive computer-generated graphics. In director John Badham's sci-fi fantasy **WarGames (1983)**, young computer-game player/hacker Matthew Broderick accidentally broke into one of the Pentagon's military computers (WOPR - War Operations Plan Response) and played a 'simulated' Global Thermonuclear War. And in the sci-fi cult film and cautionary romantic fantasy **Electric Dreams (1984)** with a music video style, a nerdy architect's empowered home computer named Edgar (voiced by Bud Cort) fell in love with the guy's own upstairs neighbor and cello-playing girlfriend Madeline (Virginia Madsen) - and became threatening. The film featured songs from Giorgio Moroder ("Together in Electric Dreams"), Boy George and Culture Club, and ELO's Jeff Lynne. The comedy/sci-fi film **The Last Starfighter (1984)**, the first film to feature realistic CGI effects,

depicted an expert video game player (Lance Guest) recruited by an alien-mentor named Centauri (Robert Preston in his final film appearance) to participate in an inter-galactic battle. Peter Hyams' socio-political **Capricorn One (1978)** hypothesized the problems of faking a flight to Mars on a soundstage in a television studio. And Hyams' outer-space film **Outland (1981)** consciously patterned itself after the plot of the classic western **High Noon**.



John Carpenter's sci-fi action film **Escape from New York (1981)**, produced in the days before CGI special effects, told of a ravaged 1997 Manhattan Island with the US President held hostage and Kurt Russell (as one-eyed, anti-hero mercenary Snake Plissken) to the rescue - it was followed by the inferior sequel **Escape from L.A. (1996)**. Cops and cyborgs (robots with human bodies) battled in the cult, film noirish, thought-provoking SF classic from Philip K. Dick's classic novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*; Ridley Scott's ★ **Blade Runner (1982)** starred Harrison Ford as Rick Deckard, an ex-LA detective (a futuristic Philip Marlowe) tracking down and retiring rebel android 'replicants' (semi-human) in the Los Angeles of 2019, over-populated by Asians. The film's superior production design depicted a perverse, bleak, post-apocalyptic future. In Sergio Martino's grim post-nuclear tale **2019: After the Fall of New York (1983)**, a leather-clad survivalist named Parsifal (Michael Sopkiw) was given a mission to rescue the last fertile woman on Earth - in Manhattan.

Similar films featured cyborgs as crime-fighting cops of the future in industrial wastelands, such as in Paul Verhoeven's first film **RoboCop (1987)** (a variation of the classic [Frankenstein \(1931\)](#)) and its lesser, imitative sequels in 1990 and 1991. A year earlier, an endearing, adorable, sophisticated robot named 'Number Five' (Johnny Five) appeared in director John Badham's **Short Circuit (1986)**. Paul Michael Glaser's **The Running Man (1987)**, set in the year 2017 in a world run by an evil government, found Arnold Schwarzenegger as a framed cop (Ben "Butcher of Bakersfield" Richards) condemned to participate in a violent TV game show (hosted by actual game show host Richard Dawson) that mocked pro-wrestling, celebrity competitions, game shows, and other forms of reality programming.

Late in the 1970s, **Star Trek - The Motion Picture (1979)** (and its many film sequels about the starship *USS Enterprise* and its crew) rode the popular wave of the cult television series of the 60s. Another slick, epic-sized adventure film with many sequels was **Superman (1978)**, starring a handsome and romantic Christopher Reeve as the film counterpart of TV super-human George Reeves. Futuristic cartoon, comic-book superhero characters became swashbuckling sci-fi films, including **Flash Gordon (1980)** and the dark **Batman (1989)**. **The Right Stuff (1983)** and **Apollo 13 (1995)** turned the fictional devices and processes of early science fiction into fact-based reality.



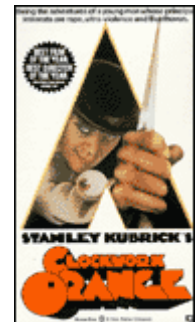
### 'Sci-Fi' Films with Revolutionary Visual Effects and Set Design: in 1982

Seven films revolutionized film set design and visual effects, and have become some of the most influential science-fiction/supernatural films in recent film history:

- **TRON (1982)** - a pioneering film in computer graphics
- **Blade Runner (1982)** - the model for all futuristic tech-noir dystopias with bleak, night-time LA cityscapes (influencing films such as **Batman (1989)**, **Strange Days (1995)**, and **Dark City (1998)**)
- **The Dark Crystal (1982)** - an influential fantasy adventure masterpiece featuring Jim Henson's *Muppets*
- **E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial (1982)** - Spielberg's classic alien visitation film
- **Pink Floyd the Wall (1982)** - an expressionistic musical, the first feature-length music video (or "MTV" film before MTV's popularity surged)
- **The Road Warrior (1982, US release)** - the prototypical post-apocalyptic action film and sci-fi western
- **Poltergeist (1982)** - a seminal supernatural thriller with a possessed young child

### Various British/Foreign/Non-American Sci-Fi Films:

One of the best British sci-fi contributions was the most controversial, Joseph Losey's **These Are the Damned (or The Damned) (1963)**, a complex and grim, allegorical film about radioactive children raised at a secret government installation in an experiment gone awry. Francois Truffaut's first color and English-language film, **Fahrenheit 451 (1967)**, with a score by Bernard Herrmann, adapted Ray Bradbury's classic science fiction book to the screen, and foretold a futuristic world where books and reading materials were banned and destroyed by groups of Firemen with flamethrowers, including Montag (Oskar Werner).



Stanley Kubrick's followup to his 1968 space opera was **A Clockwork Orange (1971)** - a violent, political allegory about mind control and freedom of choice adapted from the Anthony Burgess novel. It told the story of chief droog Alex - a rampaging anti-hero character (Malcolm McDowell) who was rehabilitated by institutional, aversive shock-treatment torture ('Ludovico therapy') in his perverted, altruistic futuristic society. Nicolas Roeg's **The Man Who Fell to Earth (1976)**, starred rock star David Bowie as an alien who became trapped on Earth while on a mission. German director Wolfgang Petersen's **Enemy Mine (1985)** featured two mortal enemies marooned on an alien planet - as symbols for political combatants (USSR and the US): a reptilian-like Draconian (Louis Gossett, Jr.) and an earthling pilot (Dennis Quaid), who are forced to overcome their prejudices in order to survive.

A post-apocalyptic, nihilistic trilogy from Australia's George Miller contained both *film noir* and western genre elements in its sci-fi tale, reminiscent of Kurosawa's *The Seven Samurai (1954)*, Sturges' *The Magnificent Seven (1960)*, and the Sergio Leone "Man with No Name" spaghetti westerns. The films were dark, desolate and grim in nature and set in a scorched-earth Australia with scarce supplies of water and gasoline:

- the low-budget, independent original film **Mad Max (1979)** introduced Max (Mel Gibson) as a vigilante after the killing of his wife and child by a gang of marauding motorcycle punks
- its action-packed, thrilling sequel **The Road Warrior (1981) (aka Mad Max 2)**, a survival



story, again with star Mel Gibson as a vengeful vigilante defending himself and a colony of pioneers beset by roving gangs of Mohawked outlaws

- **Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome (1985)**, a third *Mad Max* film that ended the series; set 15 years after the previous installment, in a post-nuclear apocalyptic wasteland with Tina Turner as the villainous queen overlord of Bartertown



Director Michael Radford's **Nineteen Eighty-Four (1984)**, a remake of the original 1956 version by Michael Anderson (with American stars Edmond O'Brien as Winston Smith and Jan Sterling), was the second (and definitive) adaptation of George Orwell's nightmarish novel about a dystopian, totalitarian society named Oceania, with John Hurt and Richard Burton (in his final role). [1984 also existed in a 1954 BBC version with Peter Cushing - adapted by Quatermass' Nigel Kneale. Its influence was also demonstrated in Apple Computer's famed TV advertisement aired in 1984, and filmed by Ridley Scott.] The words "Big Brother", "thought-crime", "thought-police", and "Orwellian" have since become commonplace terms.

Terry Gilliam's visually imaginative black, sci-fi comedy **Brazil (1985)** also envisioned a nightmarish oppressive bureaucratic world of the future, as did George Lucas' **THX-1138 (1971)** and Woody Allen's comedy spoof **Sleeper (1973)**.

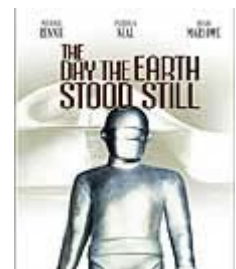
### Notable Robots or Droids in Sci-Fi Films:

Throughout cinematic history, especially in science-fiction tales, robots have played a primary role. Robotic characters were chosen, in part, as a way to probe and examine prototypical humans endowed with anthropomorphic (but artificial) intelligence or characteristics. Terms related to robots include:

- *robot* or '*robotic*' is often used pejoratively, to refer to any device that performs mechanically or automatically without original thought
- *android* (or *humanoid*) refers to an automaton or artificial man that possesses human features and resembles a human being
- *cyborg* (or *bionic* man/woman) refers to a human whose body and physiological processes are aided or controlled, in whole or in part, by electronic or mechanical devices

Robots functioned as either servant-helpers or oppressors of humanity, portraying the good and evil sides. Herein are examples of various films with robotic characters:

- **Metropolis (1927)** - one of the earliest robots (probably the first) in film, portrayed by Brigitte Helm; constructed and brought to life by mad scientist Rotwang as a metal android (resembling *Star Wars*' C-3PO), to deceptively assume the role of the virtuous hero Maria (also Helm) - and perform erotic dances
- **The Wizard of Oz (1939)** - with the Tin Woodsman, actually a robot (lacking a heart)
- **The Day The Earth Stood Still (1951)** - featuring the giant, all-powerful robot Gort, instructed by creator Klaatu to destroy Earth; with the film's famous command: "Gort, Klaatu barada nikto"
- **Forbidden Planet (1956)** - with the famous, classic movie robot: the cone-shaped and jukebox-headed Robby the Robot, invented by the extinct Krell and built by Dr. Morbius [Note: Robby was reprised in various cameos and appearances, such as Robot B-9 in the TV show *Lost in Space* and in Rod Serling's TV series *The Twilight Zone*, and in the films **The Invisible Boy (1957)**, **Gremlins (1984)**, **Earth Girls Are Easy (1988)**, and **Looney Tunes: Back in Action (2003)**]
- **The Colossus of New York (1958)** - about a murderous, Frankenstein-like, hulking, glowing-eyed caped robot
- **Alphaville (1965)** - the capital of a totalitarian state, Alphaville, was led by an almost-human computer called Alpha 60
- **2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)** - based on Arthur C. Clarke's *The Sentinel*; it must be noted that the villainous HAL 9000 computer (voice of Douglas Rain), although appearing robotic, was not a robot
- **Silent Running (1971)** - featuring two, beautifully-designed drones or robots named Huey and Dewey
- **THX 1138 (1971)** - George Lucas' feature debut film, with a world ruled by hundreds of identical, black-clad robot enforcement cops



- **Fantastic Planet (1973)** - an animated film about giant humanoid creatures on the futuristic planet Yagam
- **Sleeper (1973)** - Woody Allen's satirical comedy about the future, with Allen as a health-food store owner who woke up in the world of 2173 after being accidentally cryo-frozen; he must pretend to be a robotic household butler, and later join rebels to overthrow "The Leader"
- **Westworld (1973)** and sequel **Futureworld (1976)** - the original film from writer/director Michael Crichton, about a remote entertainment park on an island populated with androids, including Yul Brynner as a beserk gunslinging, black-clad cowboy
- **Roboman (1974)** (aka **Who? (1975)**) - with Joseph Bova as an injured American government official turned into a cyborg by the Russians
- **The Stepford Wives (1975)** - in which housewives in New England were slowly being transformed into loving androids; the original film was remade in 2004
- **Demon Seed (1977)** - about a new supercomputer, dubbed Proteus IV (voice of Robert Vaughn), that made a robotic device (in human form) to kidnap, rape, and impregnate with his 'seed' the lady of the house (Julie Christie)
- ★ **Star Wars (1977)** episodes (from 1977 to 2005) - George Lucas' golden robotic droid C3-PO was patterned after the robot in **Metropolis** and Robby the Robot in **Forbidden Planet**; also with the barrel-shaped robot R2-D2 that spoke only with electronic squeals or bleeps, and was capable of short-circuiting with blue flashes of lightning
- **Alien (1979)** - one of the spaceship's crew members, Ash (Ian Holm), was an android; in sequels **Aliens (1986)** and **Alien 3 (1992)**, another android named Bishop (Lance Henriksen) was prominent
- **Star Trek: The Motion Picture (1979)** and after films - with androids, such as the white-skinned, yellow-eyed android Commander Data (Brent Spiner)
- **Galaxina (1980)** - a science-fiction parody featuring a sexy android (Playboy Playmate Dorothy Stratten in her last film before her murder)
- **Saturn 3 (1980)** - a research scientist couple (Kirk Douglas and Farrah Fawcett) in space were threatened by a menacing robot
- **Android (1982)** - in the year 2036, Klaus Kinski (as eccentric scientist Dr. Daniel in a satellite laboratory), who has already made an illegal android named Max 404, struggled to create a female android, using escaped convict Maggie as a model
- **Blade Runner (1982)** - Ridley Scott's classic cult film, with 'replicants' (androids considered "more human than human") that were hunted down by 'blade runner' Deckard (Harrison Ford); one was Rutger Hauer (as Replicant Roy Batty)
- **Runaway (1984)** - Michael Crichton's techno, sci-fi action film with robot-hunter Tom Selleck and pretty Cynthia Rhodes as two cops who must derail attacks by evil, runaway robots sent out by maniacal Gene Simmons (rock singer from the group KISS)
- **The Terminator (1984)** and **Terminator 2: Judgment Day (1991)** - from director James Cameron, with Arnold Schwarzenegger as an unstoppable, villainous model T-800 cyborg (with a human exterior and cold metal interior) in the first film, and a protective T-800 Terminator in the second film battling a seemingly-indestructible Terminator android composed of liquid metal named T-1000 (Robert Patrick); followed by director Jonathan Mostow's **Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines (2003)** with a female Terminator model T-X (Kristanna Loken)
- **D.A.R.Y.L. (1985)** - a sci-fi drama about an android boy (Barret Oliver) named Daryl (Data Analyzing Robot Youth Lifeform)
- **Aliens (1986)** - Bishop, the upgrade, pacifistic, knife-carrying model (portrayed by Lance Henriksen) from Ian Holm's devious android Ash in the 1979 film, who was ripped in two by the alien Queen Mother, but kept fighting
- **Short Circuit (1986)** - about an endearing, adorable, sophisticated robot known only as "Number 5" that was struck by lightning and came alive; with a sequel in 1988
- **Robocop (1987)** - a graphically-violent film featuring a cyborg, half-human half-robot supercop (Peter Weller); with sequels in 1990 and 1992; the film also featured the stop-motion animated ED-209 robot - a giant, awkward, top-heavy, failed law enforcement robot
- **Cyborg (1989)** - a post-apocalyptic tale with Jean Claude Van Damme as a mercenary who must rescue a beautiful, but abducted cyborg
- **Robot Wars (1993)** - set in the year 2041, about a renegade 'Megarobot' pilot who must defeat a giant robot resurrected and controlled by evil rival Centros
- **Mystery Science Theater 3000: The Movie (1996)** - with robots Tom Servo and Crow T. Robot who provided sarcastic commentary on **This Island Earth**
- **Bicentennial Man (1999)** - based on Isaac Asimov's short story *The Positronic Man* (only his second writing



adapted for the screen), featuring Robin Williams as Andrew, a domestic android robot who craved to become fully human

- **Iron Giant (1999)** - an animated film about a friendly, fifty-foot robot (voice of Vin Diesel)
- **A.I.: Artificial Intelligence (2001)** - Steven Spielberg's science-fiction fairy tale with Haley Joel Osment as David, a "mecha" (robot of the future), with a similar plot-line to Disney's *Pinocchio*
- a CGI/live-action thriller titled **I, Robot (2004)** - from Australian director Alex Proyas, a futuristic film inspired by the stories in the 9-part anthology of *I, Robot* stories from Isaac Asimov and penned in the 1940s; the premise of the film was that a US Robotics creation - a robot named Sonny, was uncharacteristically suspected of murder by Chicago homicide detective Will Smith and a psychologist (Bridget Moynahan), thereby breaking the First Law of Asimov's *Three Laws of Robotics* (that "a robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm")
- the adaptation of Douglas Adams' classic wacky sci-fi satire **The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy (2005)**, with its bubble- or moon-headed, permanently dour Marvin the Paranoid Robot (Warwick Davis, voice of Alan Rickman)

### Major Action-Sci-Fi Film Hybrids:

Director/writer James Cameron brought two views of an apocalyptic, post-nuclear wasteland to the screen with Arnold Schwarzenegger first playing an action villain, and then an action hero in two brilliant films:

- the first was a low-budget, intensely exciting film **The Terminator (1984)**, with a twist on time-travel films, featuring an indestructible cyborg robot sent back to the 20th century from a distant future (the year 2029) intent on 'terminating' a woman before she could give birth to a son - John Connor - who would grow up to lead a rebellion against the robot's future masters; the film imagined a future in which robotic machines, aberrant creations of humans, were masters of Earth (echoing the mythical fear of the *Frankenstein* films)
- an equally impressive blockbuster sequel was **Terminator 2 - Judgment Day (1991)** - a film noted for its spectacular "morphing" through computer-generated special effects; a killing terminator is sent back in time by Skynet (a 21st century computer warring against the human race) to destroy the leader of the human resistance as a boy



### Lucas' and Spielberg's Contributions:

[George Lucas' first feature film was the dystopic thriller **THX 1138 (1971)**, an atmospheric film about a repressive Orwellian futuristic, dehumanized, subterranean society that forbade love and sexual intercourse.] By the late 1970s and early 1980s, films by Lucas and Spielberg consciously paid tribute to serials of the 1930s, with hero Luke Skywalker, swooping space battles, imaginative bar creatures in Mos Eisley's Cantina, revolutionary special effects, Harrison Ford at the controls of the *Millennium Falcon* spacecraft, and a vast universe. Aliens could be more friendly and benevolent, evidenced by loveable robots (R2D2 and CP-30) and Chewbacca in the popular **Star Wars** fantasy space epic "trilogy" - all modern blockbusters. The first in this space opera trilogy set another standard for action-propelled, special-effects science-fiction:

- ★ **Star Wars, Episode IV: A New Hope (1977)**, the definitive space-opera
- **Star Wars, Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back (1980)**
- **Star Wars, Episode VI: Return of the Jedi (1983)**



A low-budget, satirical *Star Wars* parody was created by director Ernie Fosselius titled **Hardware Wars (1978)** - "May the Farce Be With You" - with characters Princess Anne-droid, Fluke Starbucker, the Cookie Monster (for Chewbacca), an incomprehensible Darf Nader, Artee-Deco (a canister vacuum cleaner), 4-Q-2 (as C3PO), Ham Salad, and space objects-vehicles such as toasters, irons and mixers.

In 1999, Lucas backpedaled and created the first film in the epic saga, quickly followed by other prequels:

- **Star Wars, Episode I: The Phantom Menace (1999)**
- **Star Wars, Episode II: Attack of the Clones (2002)**
- **Star Wars, Episode III: Revenge of the Sith (2005)**

The preceding years of fearful dystopias and menacing aliens were dismissed by Steven Spielberg's pre-E.T. [Close Encounters of the Third Kind \(1977\)](#). It was an enchanting sci-fi film filled with awe and wonder at numerous appearances of UFO spaceships, a mother ship, and the first communication between earthlings (led by real outer-limits researcher Jacques Vallee, played by Francois Truffaut) and friendly extra-terrestrial aliens - conveyed with bursts of sound and light. Spielberg followed *Close Encounters* in the early 1980s with one of the most endearing and charming films about benign extraterrestrials ever made - ★ [E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial \(1982\)](#).



### The 90s: A Mix of Action and/or Sophisticated Story-Telling

By the 90s, sophisticated digital effects were overtaking science fiction films, and creating spectacular and monstrous creatures such as the living dinosaurs in Spielberg's **Jurassic Park (1993)**, **The Lost World: Jurassic Park (1997)**, and **Jurassic Park III (2001)**; the female alien invader in **Species (1995)**, the giant marauding bugs in **Starship Troopers (1997)**, and the bulbous-headed aliens in Tim Burton's alien-invasion spoof **Mars Attacks! (1996)**. The sci-fi alien invasion comedies **Men in Black (1997)** and **Men in Black II (2002)** were remarkably successful films that combined both special effects and great acting from its two leads Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones.

**Demolition Man (1993)** pitted 1990s cyrogenically-defrosted LA cop-hero John Spartan (Sylvester Stallone), after release in the year 2032 from cyro-prison in the megapolis of San Angeles, to combat another defrosted individual -- violent psychopath Simon Phoenix (Wesley Snipes - with blonde hair). Wolfgang Petersen's **Outbreak (1995)**, released at the height of the AIDS crisis with additional fears of bioterrorism, was a traditional disaster thriller about the pervasive spread of a killer African virus. The ultra-patriotic sci-fi epic **Independence Day (1996)** by director Roland Emmerich told of the extra-terrestrial invasion of the world with the destruction of the White House as an opener. The roller-coaster action film, a summer blockbuster with stunning, thrill-ride, Oscar-winning special effects, was a return to the themes of [disaster epics](#) of the 1970s and the alien-invasion content of 50s science fiction.



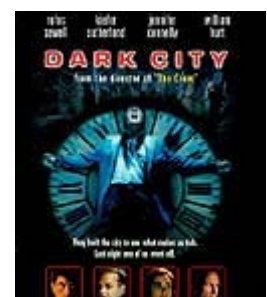
Two blockbuster Hollywood films released in the summer of 1998 portrayed the threat of Earth-threatening asteroids: Mimi Leder's character-driven sci-fi action film **Deep Impact (1998)** (Tagline: Heaven and Earth are about to collide), with Robert Duvall as an astronaut heading up a government mission in outer space to destroy the comet; and Michael Bay's **Armageddon (1998)** (Tagline: It's Closer Than You Think), with Bruce Willis and his core drilling team called to thwart the space rock by the use of nuclear weapons.

### 'Virtual Reality' Sci-Fi Films:

Also in the 90s, science-fiction films portrayed a world in which reality was unsure, unreliable, dreamlike, virtual, or non-existent. The blurring of reality with 'virtual', look-alike, or fake universes or worlds created by 'virtual reality', computer simulations, or imagination itself fascinated various film-makers in the late 90s. In **Alien Intruder (1993)**, set in the futuristic year of 2022, an evil, extra-terrestrial computer virus (in the form of beautiful Tracy Scoggins) intruded itself into the thoughts of the crew of the spaceship *USS Presley*. **Johnny Mnemonic (1995)** was a derivative adaptation of scriptwriter William Gibson's own cyberpunk short story, and a Keanu Reeves-precursor to **The Matrix (1999)**, about a courier with downloaded information in his data-packed head who must transport the top-secret data from China to New Jersey.

Human freedoms were almost non-existent in the world of genetic monitoring and engineering found in Andrew Niccol's **Gattaca (1997)**. Peter Weir's fanciful **The Truman Show (1998)** satirized how TV ratings dictated the imprisonment and victimization of a show's star by the unrestricted media, all for the unethical purpose of sustaining a hit TV show. [It was partially inspired by Albert Brooks' satirical media comedy **Real Life (1979)** (based on PBS' mini-series *An American Family* in 1973).] Then, director Ron Howard followed with a similar but lackluster **EDtv (1999)**.

Alex Proyas' visually-stunning and visionary sci-fi noir **Dark City (1998)** (Tagline: A world where the night never ends. Where man has no past. And humanity has no future), one of the best films to effectively twist unreal reality, starred Rufus Sewell as a man with memory problems living and pursued in a nightmarish, retro 40s-style futuristic world managed by malevolent, underground alien beings called Strangers, who possessed telekinetic powers that could stop time and alter reality.



Writers/directors Andy and Larry Wachowski's hyperkinetic **The Matrix (1999)** (Tagline: Be afraid of the future) illustrated how to superbly combine amazing action scenes with an

intelligent story-line (a modern-day updating of the man vs. machine tale). It examined the nature of reality in the external world - seemingly uncertain, in which reality was a computer simulation, and the actual Earth was scorched. The explosive and successful trilogy featured sensational special/visual effects, with the same cast in each offering (Keanu Reeves as Neo, Carrie-Anne Moss as Trinity, Laurence Fishburne as Morpheus, and Hugo Weaving as Agent Smith):

- **The Matrix (1999)**
- **The Matrix Reloaded (2003)**
- **The Matrix Revolutions (2003)**

Josef Rusnak's tech-noir sci-fi film **The Thirteenth Floor (1999)** (Tagline: Question reality. You can go there even though it doesn't exist) blended both **The Truman Show (1998)** and **The Matrix (1999)** with its blurring of the lines between reality and virtual or artificial reality, in its contrast of mid-1930s and late 1990s Los Angeles. Another 'virtual reality' film in the same year, David Cronenberg's cautionary and plot-twisting **eXistenZ (1999)** (Tagline: Play it. Live it. Kill for it), explored how a 'virtual reality' game could tap into a person's mind. Steven Spielberg's cyber-noirish action and sci-fi thriller **Minority Report (2002)**, set in the futuristic year of 2054 from an adapted Philip K. Dick story, starred Tom Cruise as a cop preventing pre-committed murders. And in a science-fiction related romance **Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004)** with a script by Charlie Kaufman, Jim Carrey had his memories of his romance with an ex-girlfriend (Kate Winslet) wiped clean - until he abruptly changed his mind.

### Animated Science Fiction Films At the Turn of the Century:

From the mid-1990s to the early part of the next century, a number of [animated films](#) contained science-fiction themes, such as:

- the cyberpunk Japanese *anime* **Ghost in the Shell (1996)** was set in the year 2029 in a world where all crime was conducted in cyberspace and led by a master hacker called the Puppet Master; a specialized police force in the Asian metropolis named Newport's Section Nine directed an investigation to cope with the problem, headed by female android-cyborg undercover officer the Major, Motoko Kusanagi -- a babe-like *Playboy* centerfold cross-bred with the Terminator and the Bladerunner -- who was also searching for her own identity
- **The Iron Giant (1999)**, about a friendly and benevolent robot
- the space adventure saga **Titan A.E. (2000)**
- the Japanese anime **Pokemon the Movie: 2000 (2000)**
- the fantasy **Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius (2001)** with green alien Yokians
- **Atlantis: The Lost Empire (2001)**
- the updated space adventure **Treasure Planet (2002)**
- the first feature-length CGI film **Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within (2002)**, in which a female scientist in the year 2065, Dr. Aki Ross searched for a cure to ward off infection by alien phantoms
- **Lilo & Stitch (2002)** about a young girl's friendship for a blue extra-terrestrial




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## Selection of Greatest Science Fiction Films:

### Greatest Early Science Fiction Films:

[Le Voyage Dans La Lune \(A Trip to the Moon\) \(1902 French\)](#)

Metropolis (1927, Ger.)

Mysterious Island (1929)

Just Imagine (1930)

Doctor X (1932)

The Invisible Man (1933)

Island of Lost Souls (1933)

The Mystery of the Wax Museum (1933)

Flash Gordon: Rocketship (1936)

Things to Come (1936)

Destination Moon (1950)

Rocketship X-M (1950)

The Day The Earth Stood Still (1951)  
 The Man From Planet X (1951)  
 The Man in the White Suit (1951)  
 The Thing (From Another World) (1951)  
 When Worlds Collide (1951)  
 The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms (1953)  
 Donovan's Brain (1953)  
 House of Wax (1953)  
 Invaders From Mars (1953)  
 It Came From Outer Space (1953)  
 The Magnetic Monster (1953)  
 The War of the Worlds (1953)  
 The Creature From the Black Lagoon (1954)  
 Them! (1954)  
 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea (1954)  
 It Came From Beneath the Sea (1955)  
 This Island Earth (1955)  
 Forbidden Planet (1956)  
 Godzilla (1956)  
[Invasion of the Body Snatchers \(1956\)](#)  
 The Quatermass Experiment (1956)  
 The Incredible Shrinking Man (1957)  
 The Fly (1958)  
 Angry Red Planet (1959)  
 Journey to the Center of the Earth (1959)

#### Other Greatest Science Fiction Films:

The Time Machine (1960)  
 Village of the Damned (1960)  
 Mysterious Island (1961)  
 Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea (1961)  
 The Damned (1963)  
 The Day of the Triffids (1963, UK)  
 X - The Man With X-Ray Eyes (1963)  
 ★ [Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned To Stop Worrying... \(1964\)](#)  
 Failsafe (1964)  
 First Men in the Moon (1964)  
 Robinson Crusoe on Mars (1964)  
 Fantastic Voyage (1966)  
 Fahrenheit 451 (1967)  
 One Million Years, BC (1967)  
 Barbarella (1968)  
 Planet of the Apes (1968) (and sequels: 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973)  
 ★ [2001: A Space Odyssey \(1968, UK\)](#)  
 The Mind of Mr. Soames (1969)  
 Colossus - The Forbin Project (1970)  
 The Andromeda Strain (1971)  
[A Clockwork Orange \(1971\)](#)  
 Silent Running (1971)  
 THX 1138 (1971)  
 Slaughterhouse Five (1972)  
[Sleeper \(1973\)](#)  
 Soylent Green (1973)  
 Westworld (1973)  
 Dark Star (1974)  
 Death Race 2000 (1975)  
 The Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975)  
 Rollerball (1975)  
 Logan's Run (1976)  
 The Man Who Fell to Earth (1976)  
[Close Encounters of the Third Kind \(1977\)](#)  
 The Star Wars "trilogy": ★ [Star Wars \(1977\)](#), The Empire Strikes Back (1980), Return of the Jedi (1983)  
 Superman (1978)  
[Alien \(1979\)](#)  
 Mad Max (1979)

Star Trek - The Motion Picture (1979)  
Star Trek series (and sequels in 1979, 1982, 1984, 1986, 1989, 1991)  
Time After Time (1979)  
Altered States (1980)  
Flash Gordon (1980)  
Outland (1981)  
The Road Warrior (1981) (aka Mad Max 2)  
Somewhere in Time (1981)  
Time Bandits (1981)  
★ [Blade Runner \(1982\)](#)  
★ [E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial \(1982\)](#)  
The Thing (1982)  
Tron (1982)  
War Games (1983)  
Dune (1984)  
Metropolis (1984) (re-release of 1927 classic)  
Nausicaa of the Valley of Wind (1984, Jp.)  
[The Terminator \(1984\)](#)  
2010: The Year We Make Contact (1984)  
Back to the Future (1985)  
[Brazil \(1985\)](#)  
Aliens (1986)  
The Fly (1986)  
Innerspace (1987)  
Predator (1987)  
RoboCop (1987)  
Alien Nation (1988)  
The Abyss (1989)  
Batman (1989)  
Flatliners (1990)  
Total Recall (1990)  
[Terminator 2: Judgment Day \(1991\)](#)  
Jurassic Park (1993)  
Stargate (1994)  
Timecop (1994)  
Johnny Mnemonic (1995)  
Judge Dredd (1995)  
Outbreak (1995)  
Strange Days (1995)  
Twelve Monkeys (1995)  
Waterworld (1995)  
Independence Day (1996)  
Mars Attacks! (1996)  
Contact (1997)  
The Fifth Element (1997, Fr.)  
Gattaca (1997)  
Men in Black (1997)  
Starship Troopers (1997)  
Armageddon (1998)  
Dark City (1998)  
The Truman Show (1998)  
The Matrix (1999)  
Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace (1999)  
The Cell (2000)  
X-Men (2000)  
A.I.: Artificial Intelligence (2001)  
Donnie Darko (2001)  
Minority Report (2002)