What is SCIENCE FICTION?

Science fiction is a genre of fiction dealing with imaginary but more or less plausible (or at least non-supernatural) content such as future settings, futuristic science and technology, space travel, aliens, and paranormal abilities. Exploring the consequences of scientific innovations is one purpose of science fiction, making it a "literature of ideas".

Science fiction is largely based on writing rationally about alternative possible worlds or futures. It is similar to, but differs from fantasy in that, within the context of the story, its imaginary elements are largely possible within scientifically established or scientifically postulated laws of nature (though some elements in a story might still be pure imaginative speculation).

The settings for science fiction are often contrary to known reality, but most science fiction relies on a considerable degree of suspension of disbelief, which is facilitated in the reader's mind by potential scientific explanations or solutions to various fictional elements. Science fiction elements include:

- A time setting in the future, in alternative timelines, or in a historical past that contradicts known facts of history or the archaeological record.
- A spatial setting or scenes in outer space (e.g., spaceflight), on other worlds, or on subterranean earth.
- Characters that include aliens, mutants, androids, or humanoid robots.
- Technology that is futuristic (e.g., ray guns, teleportation machines, humanoid computers).
- Scientific principles that are new or that contradict known laws of nature, for example time travel, wormholes, or faster-than-light travel.
- New and different political or social systems (e.g. dystopia, post-scarcity, or a post-apocalyptic situation where organized society has collapsed).
- Paranormal abilities such as mind control, telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation.

The history of science fiction films parallels that of the motion picture industry as a whole, although it took several decades before the genre was taken seriously. Since the 1960s, major science fiction films have succeeded in pulling in large audience shares, and films of this genre have become a regular staple of the film industry. Science fiction films have led the way in special effects technology, and have also been used as a vehicle for social commentary.

Silent Film Era

Science fiction films appeared very early in the silent film era. The initial attempts were short films of typically 1 to 2 minutes in duration, shot in black and white, but sometimes with colour tinting. These usually had a technological theme and were often intended to

be humorous. One such short was *Le Voyage dans la Lune*, created by Georges Méliès in 1902. Often considered to be the first science fiction film, it drew upon Jules Verne and

Silent Film Era Contd.

H. G. Wells in its depiction a spacecraft being launched to the moon in a large cannon.[1] Its groundbreaking special effects pioneered the way for future science-fiction films, and it became largely popular after its release. Science fiction literature would continue to influence early films. Other notable films: Metropolis, Frankenstein, 20000 Leagues Under the Sea.

1930s – 1940s

Movies during the 1930s were largely impacted by the advent of sound and dialogue, and by the effects of the Great Depression that began in 1929. Audiences began to pursue films with more escapist themes, leading to a decline in serious speculative films. After the failure of the big-budget 1930 American film *Just Imagine*, studios were reluctant to finance the expensive futuristic sets necessary for this type of film. Although the 1936 British film *Things to Come*, written by H. G. Wells, projected the world 100 years into the future and forecasted the advent of World War II, it too was a box-office flop, and films with serious speculation and visual spectacle of the future would largely disappear until the 1950s.

Instead, the decade saw the rise of film serials: low-budget, quickly-produced shorts depicting futuristic, heroic adventures, action, melodramatic plots, and gadgetry. Echoes of this style can still be seen in science fiction and action films today, as well as in the various James Bond films. Some of the most popular of the era were the various *Flash Gordon* films, the exploits of Buck Rogers, and others, such as the quasi-science fiction *Dick Tracy*. They continued to use science fiction elements like space travel, high-tech gadgets, plots for world domination, and mad scientists.

Post-War & 1950s

Two events at the end of World War II had major impacts on the science fiction genre. The development of the atomic bomb increased interest in science, as well as anxiety about the possible apocalyptic effects of a nuclear war. The period also saw the beginning of the Cold War, and widespread Communist paranoia in the United States. These led to a major increase in the number of sci-fi films being created throughout the 1950s, and creating a Golden Age of Science Fiction that matched the one taking place in literature.

1960s

After the rush of science fiction films in the 1950s, there were relatively few in the 1960s, but these few transformed science fiction cinema.
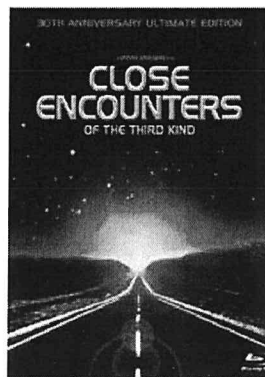
One of the most significant films of the 1960s was *2001: A Space Odyssey*, directed by Stanley Kubrick and written by Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke. 2001 is regarded as the seminal entry in the science-fiction genre as it influenced several later entries. Steven Spielberg, one of the genre's most well-known figures aptly called 2001, 'the big bang of science-fiction.' *2001* was the first science fiction art film and had a philosophical scope that earlier films had not attempted. Many critics called it an incomprehensible mess when it first appeared. Today, it is widely revered by critics as one of the greatest films of all time.

2001: A Space Odyssey

1970s

The era of manned trips to the Moon saw a resurgence of interest in the science fiction film in the 1970s. *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, both released in 1977, contained a mystical element reminiscent of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The space discoveries of the 1970s created a growing sense of marvel about the universe that was reflected in these films. However, the early 1970s also saw the continued theme of paranoia, with humanity under threat from ecological or technological adversaries of its own creation. Notable films of this period included *Silent Running* (ecology), the sequels to *Planet of the Apes* (man vs. evolution), *Westworld* (man vs. robot) and *THX 1138* (man vs. the state), and Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (man vs. brainwashing).

1980s

Following the huge success of *Star Wars*, science fiction became bankable and each major studio rushed into production their available projects. As a direct result, *Star Trek* was reborn as a film franchise that continued through the 1980s and 1990s. Ridley Scott's *Alien* was significant in establishing a visual styling of the future that became dominant in science fiction film through its sequels and Scott's *Blade Runner*; far from presenting a sleek, ordered universe, these films presented the future as dark, dirty and chaotic.

Thanks to the *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* franchises, escapism became the dominant form of science fiction film through the 1980s. The big budget adaptations of Frank Herbert's *Dune* and Arthur C. Clarke's sequel to *2001*, *2010*, were box office duds that dissuaded producers from investing in science fiction literary properties. The strongest contributors to the genre during the second half of the decade were James Cameron and Paul Verhoeven with *The Terminator* and *RoboCop* entries.

Steven Spielberg's *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* became one of the most successful films of the 1980s. An influential film release was *Scanners* (1981), a film that would be imitated several times over the next two decades.

1980's Contd.

From 1980, the distinction between science fiction, fantasy, and superhero films blurred, thanks in large part to the influence of *Star Wars*. From 1980 on, every year saw at least one major science fiction or fantasy film, which critics disparaged and were ignored on Oscar night, except in the technical categories. Disney's 1982 film *Tron* had a unique visual style, being one of the first major studio films to use extensive computer graphics.

1990s

The emergence of the world wide web and the cyberpunk genre during the 1990s spawned several Internet-themed films. Both *The Lawnmower Man* (1992) and *Virtuosity* (1995) dealt with threats to the network from a human-computer interface. *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995) and *Total Recall* (1990) had the memories of their main actors modified by a similar interface, and *The Matrix* (1999) created a machine-run virtual prison for humanity. The internet also provided a ready medium for film fandom, who could more directly support (or criticize) such media franchise film series as *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*.

2000 and on!

Oddly, in the first decade of the 21st Century, SF films seemed to turn away from space travel, and fantasy predominated. Except for *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* films, the only films set off Earth that appeared in the first half of the 2000s were *Serenity* and the poorly received *Mission to Mars* and *Red Planet*. On the other hand, fantasy and superhero films abounded, as did earthbound SF such as the *Matrix Reloaded* and *Matrix Revolutions*.

Science fiction has returned to being a tool for political commentary in recent times with films like *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* and *Minority Report* with the former questioning the increasing materialism of today's world and the latter questioning the political situations surrounding the world post 9/11. Unique entries into the genre were also released around this time with the first science fiction romance *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*.