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, 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.

Strange and extraordinary microscopic organisms or giant, mutant monsters may be unleashed, either created by misguided mad scientists or by nuclear havoc. 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 unnerving 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. 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. 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 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)).

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 tableaus (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 novel 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

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. The first feature-length dinosaur-oriented science-fiction film to be released was *The Lost World* (1925). It was also the first feature length film made in the US with the pioneering first major use (primitive) of stop-motion animation with models for its special effects. It helped to establish its genre - 'live' and life-like giant monsters-dinosaurs, later replicated in *Gojira* (1954, Jp.), *Jurassic Park* (1993) and *Godzilla* (1998).

**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. 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 brought to Washington D.C. by a gentle, benevolent, and philanthropic Christ-like alien/emissary named Klaatu (Michael Rennie).

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 metaphorical 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.

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.

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. 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

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. 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 astronauts 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 shrunklen 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.
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
- *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 Delorean vehicle
- 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*; it starred Arnold Schwarzenegger as a 22nd century construction worker named Doug Quaid who visited a memory-implant travel service to transport him to Mars for an adventure trip as an agent; he discovered that he really was a secret agent and that his entire life as Quaid was a set of artificial implanted memories
- *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

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 Planet of the Apes Series (1968-1973) and After:
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.
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 android.

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)).

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.

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:
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))
- **Pink Floyd the Wall (1982)** - an expressionistic musical, the first feature-length music video (or "MTV" film before MTV's popularity surged)
- **Poltergeist (1982)** - a seminal supernatural thriller with a possessed young child

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 *Millenium Falcon* spacecraft, and a vast universe. Aliens could be friendlier 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)**

Later:

- **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.

**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 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, with six Elvis Presley songs on its soundtrack