



SILVERSCREEN
PRIMARY
EDUCATION

The History of Science Fiction Cinema

By Adam Pepper

Session 1:
3500 BC to 1940
'Look to the skies'



Welcome to Session 1 of this 'History of Science Fiction Cinema'!

Over the next ten weeks, we will journey through space and time to uncover the secrets behind some of the greatest science fiction stories, movies, directors and characters as we try to uncover what science fiction really is, and where it blurs with our reality today.

Session 1:

In this first session, we will explore humankind's fascination with the stars, and with the progress of science, as it ultimately leads to some of the most creative minds of the 19th and 20th centuries picking up this brand new invention that is the film camera, to tell stories from the universes around us.

With a focus on history, literature and those first forays into film-making, session 1 will explain where these first stories and films came from; What had the film-makers seen? What had they learned? What did they know? What new technology did they want to utilize to help them tell their stories? And what did the audiences make of these otherworldly adventures?

Useful information for Session 1:

Georges Melies

Marie-Georges-Jean Méliès (8 December 1861 – 21 January 1938) was a French illusionist, actor, and film director. He led many technical and narrative developments in the early days of cinema.

Méliès was well known for the use of special effects, popularizing such techniques as substitution splices, multiple exposures, time-lapse photography, dissolves, and hand-painted colour. He was also one of the early filmmakers to use storyboards. His films include *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) and *The Impossible Voyage* (1904), both involving strange, surreal journeys somewhat in the style of Jules Verne, and are considered among the most important early science fiction films, though their approach is closer to fantasy.

Méliès directed over 500 films from 1896 to 1913, ranging in length from 1 minute to 40 minutes. In subject matter, these films are often similar to the magic theatre shows that Méliès had been doing, containing "tricks" and impossible events, such as objects disappearing or changing size. These early special effects films were essentially devoid of plot. The special effects were used only to show what was possible, rather than enhance the overall narrative. Méliès' early films were mostly composed of single in-camera effects, used for the entirety of the film. For example, after experimenting with multiple exposure, Méliès created his film *The One-Man Band* in which he played seven different characters simultaneously.

Auguste & Louis Lumiere

The Lumière brothers, Auguste Marie Louis Nicolas Lumière (19 October 1862 – 10 April 1954) and Louis Jean Lumière (5 October 1864 – 6 June 1948), were French manufacturers of photography equipment, best known for their *Cinématographe* motion picture system and the short films they produced between 1895 and 1905, which places them among the earliest filmmakers.

Their screening of a single film on 22 March 1895 for around 200 members of the Society for the Development of the National Industry in Paris was probably the first presentation of projected film. Their first commercial public

screening on 28 December 1895 for around 40 paying visitors and invited relations has traditionally been regarded as the birth of cinema.

They patented several significant processes leading up to their film camera, most notably film perforations (originally implemented by Émile Reynaud) as a means of advancing the film through the camera and projector. The original *cinématographe* had been patented by Léon Guillaume Bouly on 12 February 1892. The *cinématographe* — a three-in-one device that could record, develop, and project motion pictures — was further developed by the Lumières. The brothers patented their own version on 13 February 1895.

The date of the recording of their first film is in dispute. In an interview with Georges Sadoul given in 1948, Louis claimed that he shot the film in August 1894 – before the arrival of the kinetoscope in France. This is questioned by historians, who consider that a functional Lumière camera did not exist before the beginning of 1895.

The Lumière brothers saw film as a novelty and had withdrawn from the film business by 1905.

Fritz Lang

Friedrich Christian Anton Lang (December 5, 1890 – August 2, 1976), better known as Fritz Lang, was an Austrian film director, screenwriter, and producer who worked in Germany and later the United States. One of the best-known *émigrés* from Germany's school of Expressionism, he was dubbed the "Master of Darkness" by the British Film Institute. He has been cited as one of the most influential filmmakers of all time.

Lang's most celebrated films include the ground-breaking futuristic science-fiction film *Metropolis* (1927) and the influential *M* (1931), a film noir precursor. His 1929 film *Woman in the Moon* showcased the use of a multi-stage rocket, and also pioneered the concept of a rocket launch pad (a rocket standing upright against a tall building before launch having been slowly rolled into place) and the rocket-launch countdown clock. His other major films include *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* (1922), *Die Nibelungen* (1924), and after moving to Hollywood in 1934, *Fury* (1936), *You Only Live Once* (1937), *Hangmen Also Die!* (1943), *The Woman in the Window* (1944), *Scarlet Street* (1945) and *The Big Heat* (1953). He became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 1939.

Films to look out for:

A Trip To The Moon (1902)

20,000 Leagues Under The Sea (1916)

Metropolis (1927)

Just Imagine (1930)

Frankenstein (1931)

King Kong (1933)

The Invisible Man (1933)

Flash Gordon (TV Series) (1936)

Forthcoming Sessions:

- **1940s & 1950s – ‘B’ Movies, The Atomic Age and Cold War Conundrums**
- **1950s – Monsters & Mayhem**
- **1960s – The Space Race, Kirk, Kubrick and some damn, dirty apes!**
- **1970s – Star Wars, body snatching and Russian sci-fi**
- **1980s Part 1 – Star Trek, Spielberg and phoning home!**
- **1980s Part 2 – Cameron, C. Clarke, Herbert and Xenomorphs!**
- **1990s Part 1 – Dinosaurs, double Armageddons, meteorites and ‘get your ass to Mars’!**
- **Plus much, much more!**