



SILVERSCREEN
PRIMARY
EDUCATION

The History of Science Fiction Cinema

By Adam Pepper

Session 2:
1930s & 1940s
'B' Movies, Monsters &
The Atomic Age



Welcome to Session 2 of this 'History of Science Fiction Cinema'!

Over 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 2:

In this week's session, we will pick up exactly where we left off last week and head from the 1920s into the 1930s and 1940s.

We even take in a key radio moment in this week's session, as a nation is almost driven to suicide in fear of the impending alien invasion!

As improvements in film cameras and special effects begin to be refined and advanced, so too do the imaginations of the raft of creative film-makers who we will see work from this week.

And, while, there efforts are hampered and delayed by the Second World War, we begin to see SFX being used to create monsters of all shapes and sizes.

Add to this the impact of Oppenheimer's Trinity Test of 1945, and suddenly, film writers and film-makers have a new Atomic element to add into their sci-fi projects.

But space hasn't been forgotten, and an event in the US in 1947 will give us another giant shot of sci-fi adrenaline to take us even further.

Useful information for Session 2:

HG Wells

Herbert George Wells (21 September 1866 – 13 August 1946) was an English writer. Prolific in many genres, he wrote more than fifty novels and dozens of short stories. His non-fiction output included works of social commentary, politics, history, popular science, satire, biography, and autobiography. Wells' science fiction novels are so well regarded that he has been called the "father of science fiction".

In addition to his fame as a writer, he was prominent in his lifetime as a forward-looking, even prophetic social critic who devoted his literary talents to the development of a progressive vision on a global scale. As a futurist, he wrote a number of utopian works and foresaw the advent of aircraft, tanks, space travel, nuclear weapons, satellite television and something resembling the World Wide Web. His science fiction imagined time travel, alien invasion, invisibility and biological engineering before these subjects were common in the genre. Brian Aldiss referred to Wells as the "Shakespeare of science fiction", while Charles Fort called him a "wild talent".

Wells rendered his works convincing by instilling commonplace detail alongside a single extraordinary assumption per work – dubbed "Wells's Law" – leading Joseph Conrad to hail him in 1898 with "O Realist of the Fantastic!" His most notable science fiction works include *The Time Machine* (1895), which was his first novel, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), *The Invisible Man* (1897), *The War of the Worlds* (1898), the military science fiction *The War in the Air* (1907), and the dystopian *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1910). Novels of social realism such as *Kipps* (1905) and *The*

History of Mr Polly (1910), which describe lower-middle-class English life, led to the suggestion that he was a worthy successor to Charles Dickens.

Orson Welles:

George Orson Welles (May 6, 1915 – October 10, 1985) was an American actor and filmmaker who is remembered for his innovative work in film, radio, and theatre. He is considered to be among the greatest and most influential filmmakers of all time. At age 21, Welles was directing high-profile stage productions for the Federal Theatre Project in New York City—starting with a celebrated 1936 adaptation of *Macbeth* with an African-American cast, and ending with the controversial labour opera *The Cradle Will Rock* in 1937. He and John Houseman then founded the Mercury Theatre, an independent repertory theatre company that presented a series of productions on Broadway through 1941, including a modern, politically charged *Caesar* (1937). In 1938, his radio anthology series *The Mercury Theatre on the Air* gave Welles the platform to find international fame as the director and narrator of a radio adaptation of H. G. Wells's novel *The War of the Worlds*, which caused some listeners to believe that a Martian invasion was in fact occurring. Although reports of panic were mostly false and overstated, they rocketed 23-year-old Welles to notoriety.

Ishiro Honda

Ishirō Honda (, 7 May 1911 – 28 February 1993) was a Japanese filmmaker who directed 46 feature films in a career spanning five decades. He is acknowledged as the most internationally successful Japanese filmmaker prior to Hayao Miyazaki and one of the founders of modern disaster film, with his films having a significant influence on the film industry. Despite directing many drama, war, documentary, and comedy films, Honda is best remembered for directing and co-creating the *kaiju* genre with special effects director Eiji Tsuburaya.

Honda entered the Japanese film industry in 1934, working as the third assistant director on Sotoji Kimura's *The Elderly Commoner's Life Study*. After 15 years of working on numerous films as an assistant director, he made his directorial debut with the short documentary film *Ise-Shima* (1949). Honda's first feature film, *The Blue Pearl* (1952), was a critical success in Japan at the time and would lead him to direct three subsequent drama films.

In 1954, Honda directed and co-wrote *Godzilla*, which became a box office success in Japan and was nominated for two Japanese Movie Association awards. Because of the film's commercial success in Japan, it spawned a multimedia franchise, recognized by *Guinness World Records* as the longest-running film franchise in history, that established the *kaiju* and *tokusatsu* genres. It helped Honda gain international recognition and led him to direct numerous *tokusatsu* films that are still studied and watched today.

Films to look out for:

Just Imagine (1930)

Things To Come (1936)

Frankenstein (1931)

The Invisible Man (1933)

King Kong (1933)

Flash Gordon serials (from 1936)

Dr. Cyclops (1940)

Godzilla (1954)

Forthcoming Sessions:

- 1950s – Mutants, Mayhem & Cold War Conundrums
- 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'!
- 1990s Part 2 – Welcome To Earth! Bullet Time & Special Editions
- 2000s – Worlds of Wonder