

# CALL IT SCI-FI or SF, GENRE

By: Alex Diaz-Granados and Albert Pena

From Jules Verne to Ray Bradbury; from Georges Méliès to George Lucas—science fiction literature and films have evolved as favorites of audiences seeking entertainment. Writers such as Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, and Joe Haldeman have produced hundreds of fascinating volumes dealing with worlds far beyond our

own, inhabited by strange and exotic creatures. Cinematology, behind the efforts of greats such as Kubrick, Lucas, and Spielberg, has also developed into a primary source of stimulation for viewers' imaginations.

In this issue, we will look at science fiction in film and in print. We have tried to include most of its most important highlights from its early beginnings to the "Star Trek" and "Star Wars" of our time.

## SF Movies Span 80 Years

By: Albert Pena

Who invented the science fiction film? The question is almost as ambiguous as asking who discovered America because the answer depends on what one considers "science fiction."

Science fiction is a very introspective label. It is not difficult to classify a film such as *The Black Hole* or *Outland* as science fiction, but what of the classic *Frankenstein*. No doubt it is based on scientific speculation, yet it is commonly recognized as a horror movie. Films such as *The Time Machine* and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* must also be considered

one of this genre even though many people consider them fantasy. Certainly the three categories overlap, but for all practical purposes in cinematology science fiction

who invented the science fiction film to be reckoned with. The honor is often credited to Georges Méliès, a French director, for his production of *A Trip to the Moon* and *Conquest of the Pole* in 1902 and 1912, respectively. However, the first work of science fiction that can truly be called a film is Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. Featuring a story line which tells of a sprawling city of the future, run by underground inhabitants, and special effects beyond its time, this 1925 film is by far the most striking of the silents.

Lang's epic establishes a fantastic-film identity that helps pave the way for the thirties and for a film acknowledged by most fans and critics as the finest

especially because it is the product of two geniuses, producer Alexander Korda and author H.G. Wells. The 1936 film is reminiscent of another *Metropolis*-like classic of six years before—*Just Imagine*. This motion picture also tries to give audiences a glimpse of a future world. A tinge of horror overtones is delivered on the screens of the 1930's with the productions of *Frankenstein*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and *The Invisible Man*.

The 1940's witness the emergence of a brand new type of science fiction production, namely, the serial. Two serials stand out above the rest. They are *Flash Gordon* and *Buck Rogers*. Clever special effects and plots highly representative of the struggle between good and evil are the basis for their success.

In the 1950's the screen is cluttered by the cheap, easy-to-make, "junk sci-fi" which features the likes of *Godzilla* and *Rodan*, but the decade is able to salvage some true science fiction: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *The Day the Earth Stood Still*,

both of which deal with extraterrestrial visitors; *When Worlds Collide*, a guess at how far man's supertechnology will take him; and the classic forbidden *Planet*. *Forbidden Planet's* complex plot involves in a life and death struggle between human arrivals on a strange planet, Morbious, an old inhabitant, and a mysterious planetary force. The force is discovered to be Morbious' animalistic Id personified by power drawn from ages-old machinery of a now-extinct race of beings. The film is considered a classic and sets the stage for the sixties.

The result of the union of master director Stanley Kubrick and science fiction great Arthur C. Clarke is the 1968 film, the most popular science fiction film barring *Star Wars*, 2001: A Space Odyssey. Kubrick's scene-to-scene flow and the fact that the film exemplifies the philosophy of the restless time both assault the mind and ear with stimulating images that can be considered an intense involving art form. Shadowed by this epic are three films dealing

with man's grim future. *Planet of the Apes* and *The Omega Man* are both doses of future shock, while Dr. Strangelove is engaged in black humor.

The product of science fiction's first five decades of diligent work is the series of unique, brand new "SF" that flourishes through the late seventies and early eighties. Box office smashes such as *Close Encounters*, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, *The China Syndrome*, and the manifestation of Dan O'Bannon's screen play, the unnerving thriller *Alien*, arrive in a cluster. Yet George Lucas steals the show. His production of *Star Wars* and its sequel *The Empire Strikes Back* break almost every attendance record known to the movie-making industry. In addition to Lucas' sequel, Steven Spielberg's *Extraterrestrial* enjoys startling success.

In light of science fiction's progress and its recent resurgence, it can only be expected to thrive on the imagination and ingenuity of the writers and producers of the future.





fantasy. Certainly the three categories overlap, but for all practical purposes in cinematology, science fiction is defined as science-based events that have not occurred but conceivably could, given the technology of the period in which a film is set.

That established, there is still the original question of

thirties and for a film acknowledged by most fans and critics as the finest science fiction film ever made - *Things to Come*. In the film, world war erupts and continues for decades its brutality shown in the microcosmic city of "Everytown." *Things to Come* is atypical from every standpoint, but

# From Verne to Clarke, Authors forge a trend

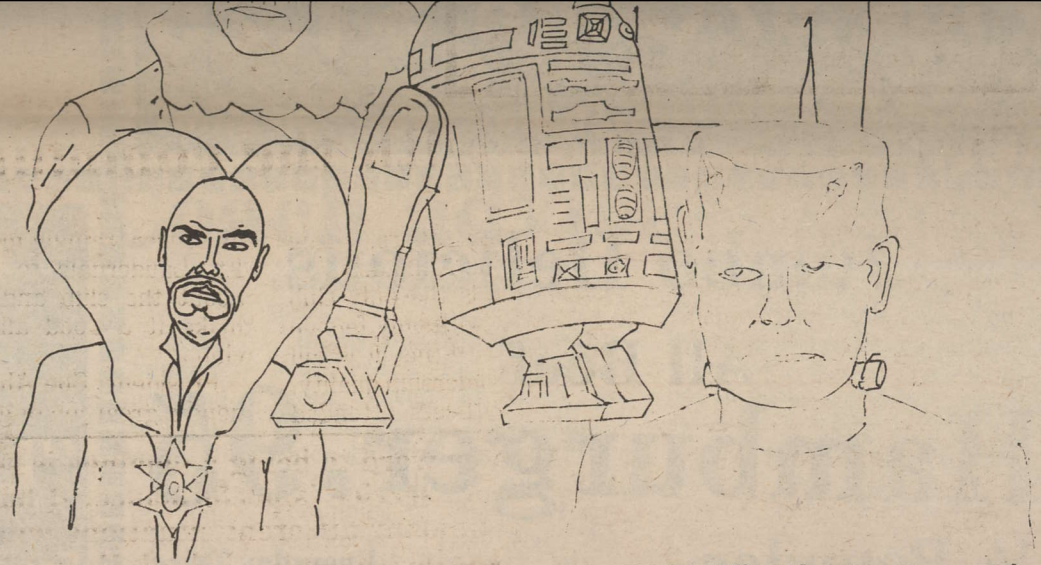
By: Alex Diaz-Granados

Before there was a *Star Wars*, a 2001, or even a *Flash Gordon*-there was the written word. Science Fiction novels and short stories have been around for a long time, even before movies appeared.

Since Cyrano de Bergerac wrote *A Trip to the Moon* in the late 1500's, we have been reading fantastic tales of adventures and exotic personalities from such writers as Ray Bradbury, Jules Verne, and Arthur C. Clarke. Such stories are far more complex than motion pictures because books can be



One of TV's best known villains- a Cylon Centurion



Denizens from Hollywood: (clockwise) Frankenstein, R2-D2, Ming the Merciless, and Klaatu

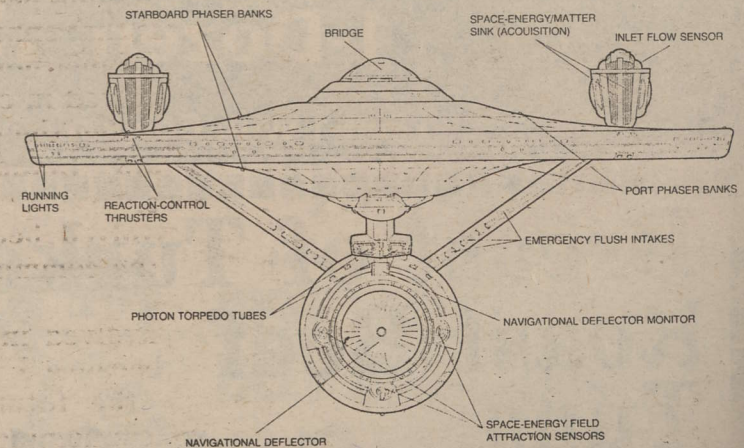
more detailed than their celluloid cousins. A book such as Joe Haldeman's *The Forever War*, with its complicated descriptions of interstellar conflict, would be incredibly difficult to film. Therefore the novel is the ideal media for the imaginative writer, and also allows for more character development than a movie like *Star Wars* would contain.

Science fiction literature is not limited to space adventures and daring -do; its wide variety of related subjects ranges from Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy to Paddy Chayesky's *Altered States*, and even as far as Douglas Adams' recently-completed *Hitchhikers'* trilogy, which shows that science fiction can be funny. And let's not forget movie novelizations, such as *E.T.* by William Kotzwinkle and *Tron*, by Brian Daley author of the Han Solo trilogy.

Since *Star Wars'* release in 1977, several books about

this space-fantasy epic have appeared, the latest being *Jedi Master's Quiz Book*, a book filled with hundreds of trivia questions for the diehard fans. Also recently released, early this year was

Arthur C. Clarke's *2010: Odyssey Two*, a sequel to 2001, a 1968 film. Long in the best-seller list, this novel seems to be a promising one from an established SF master such as Clarke.



The New Enterprise shows her new sleek lines



# IS STILL GROWING

SERPENT'S TALE/

## TV Explores the Final Frontier

By: Albert Pena

Science fiction has had a long and diversified life on television. Early unsophisticated space series such as Captain Video, Tom Corbett-Space Cadet, and Superman, with George Reeves as the Kryptonian man of steel, established a fantasy-filled format for TV science fiction.

However, one of the first sci-fi shows, Science Fiction Theatre, was a series of episodes that took us through many not-so-impossible worlds. And in 1959, Rod Serling's Twilight Zone commenced a prosperous life on the tube. The series' success was due mainly to the fact that Charles Beaumont, Richard Matheson, and Serling himself, contributed their scripting talents. On par with Twilight zone was the consistently high-quality series known as The Twilight Zone, which premiered in 1963.

The premiere science fiction television series was, beyond doubt, Star Trek. Although its popularity was mainly a result of characterization- William Shatner as the strong-willed captain, Leonard Nimoy as the logical Mr. Spock, and DeForest Kelly as the big-hearted physician- not its

sometimes mundane plots. To be sure, it was a good show; it simply was not always deserving of the following it acquired.

After three seasons, Star Trek was cancelled, and not until Battlestar Gallactica did television produce a program with the slightest

resemblance to it in quality. Battlestar Gallactica did not stimulate audiences into forming a Trek-like cult, but its

popularity did show that a well-made science fiction series still has a home on television.



Aliens Arrive: A scene from *E.T.*'s predecessor, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*

### FEATURES

and finding different services for this club to do. One major

Bill Bagg State Park to help preserve the beach from erod