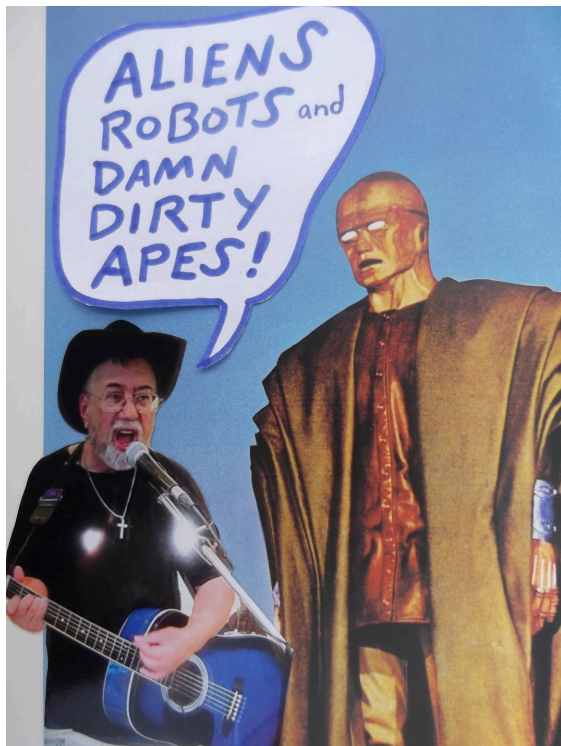


POSTER EXHIBIT: SCIENCE FICTION DOUBLE FEATURE, or, ALIENS, ROBOTS AND DAMN DIRTY APES!

Winter/Spring 2025 at The Screening Room



By special request, I'm putting together an exhibit on Science Fiction films, which is a genre I don't normally collect on. It's a difficult genre to collect, because the most desirable titles, from Science Fiction's Golden Age, are very difficult to find. I would have liked to have things like *EARTH VS. THE FLYING SAUCERS* or *THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN* or *I MARRIED A MONSTER FROM OUTER SPACE*, but no dice. (The best I can do is show you reproductions of the poster art.) But I do have some pieces on hand to display. Science Fiction has been an enduring genre since films began, with George

Melies' *A TRIP TO THE MOON* (1902) being one of the earliest examples, along with *METROPOLIS* (1927). The Science fiction genre can be used to instill a sense of wonder (see Spielbergs' *CLOSE*

ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND), but more often than not, it served as an expression of society's fears, like fear of invasion (THE WAR OF THE WORLDS, INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS) fear of technological advances and a distrust of science (think of the many "Mad Doctor" movies and their crazy experiments which bring about havoc, and the many giant bugs on the loose movies, like TARANTULA and THE DEADLY MANTIS, some of which were the result of mankind playing around with atomic radiation) and fears that the future might not as wonderful as we hoped it would be (many visions of a dystopian future, like FAHRENHEIT 451, SOYLENT GREEN, LOGAN'S RUN, PLANET OF THE APES, etc).

"Live Long and Prosper"

Barry Yuen (January 2025)

"Remember: Future Events like these will affect you – in the future!" -Plan 9 from Outer Space

PLANET OF THE APES (1968)

OK, everyone knows how this one goes. Astronaut Charlton Heston lands on a planet where intelligent, talking apes are the dominant species, and man is at the level of a dumb animal, hunted by the apes for sport or to be gathered for scientific experimentation. After many hardships, Charlton learns that the planet is actually earth in the future, after some sort of atomic disaster. This final reveal is one of the Great Film Endings in any genre, and was scripted by Rod Serling, creator of *The Twilight Zone*. Serling had a special talent for fantasy and surprise endings. You could say that M. Night Shyamalan owes his entire career to Serling. The movie and its situations have been endlessly parodied and referenced in pop culture ever since.

BARBARELLA (1968)

The science fiction genre lends itself to all kinds of liberties in creating other worlds. Compared to the starkness of *2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY* (released the same year), this one runs riot with artificiality and a self-aware, coy attitude. Sexually liberated Jane Fonda encounters all kinds of kink. This movie is camp from beginning to end. The Orgasmatron is my favourite bit. Jane/Barbarella is held captive within the villain's giant organ (double entendre?), which, when played, is designed to produce an orgasm so intense that it's fatal. Some of the limitations of 1960's special effects make this movie feel even *More* artificial. The 60's lounge music on the soundtrack is something you don't normally associate with science fiction, adding to the camp effect, and you gotta love that they gave Barbarella's spaceship shag carpeting.

2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY (1968)

Stanley Kubrick's art-house science fiction film. He was aiming high with this one, both in terms of quality of production (he would not settle for the lower standards by which most science fiction films of that era were made, and strived to make everything look as real as possible) and in terms of concept. A number of things remain elliptical and mysterious, like the black obelisk and Keir Dullea's ultimate fate, which went against conventional storytelling in the genre, which was normally straightforward and simple. His approach to the story leaned toward the abstract, which makes some audiences say they don't understand it. The psychedelic finale, reminiscent of an acid trip, made the movie popular with the stoner crowd ("The Ultimate Trip" promised the poster), but there was plenty for the intellectual crowd to chew on. Since the human characters come across as rather bland, the character who makes the most impression is HAL, the super computer that turns homicidal. With HAL, Kubrick gave us an early example of fears about A.I., and where technology is heading.

MST: THIS ISLAND EARTH (1955)

Once a revered classic, THIS ISLAND EARTH was given the MST (Mystery Science Theater) treatment and relentlessly made fun of. Some people take offence at this approach, but if you're game, it can be very funny. The story is about scientists being recruited by aliens to help defend their far-away, war-torn planet. There are a number of pulpy aspects to it, and being from the 50's, certainly the movie has dated in a number of ways. There are things about it which a modern audience would find absurd, like the bug-eyed, insect-like monster that for some reason wears pants, or the human-like aliens having very high foreheads, a concept that Dan Ackroyd would take to extremes when he came up with Coneheads.

THE THING (1982)

John Carpenter's remake of the 1951 version of *The Thing* was a flop when first released, not because it's a bad movie, it just didn't find its audience. Everyone went to see *E.T.* instead, so it seems that the public preferred its aliens to be cute and cuddly instead of vicious and nasty. However, the reputation of Carpenter's film has grown by leaps and bounds since then, and it's a huge favourite among fans. When I met John Carpenter, I said to him "I think *THE THING* has surpassed *HALLOWEEN* in terms of popularity" and he agreed with me. Smart man - 😊 Technological advances gave Carpenter the ability to go back to the source material and make the alien a shape-shifting creature that tries -sometimes unsuccessfully- to imitate human beings. The star of the show is Rob Bottin's special effects (all done before CGI existed), showing the various transformations of *The Thing*.

FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH (1967)

A year before *2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY*, this film examined similar ideas, namely, that human evolution was sparked by alien intelligence. It's marred a bit by its low budget and rubbery looking insect creatures, but it contains a number of effective scenes.

CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON (1954)

Originally released in 3-D, this was a major hit, followed by two sequels. After a fossilized hand is found suggesting a link between amphibians and humans, a scientific expedition travels to the Amazon to investigate further, only to encounter a living, breathing specimen. The Creature design was very convincing, and the Creature would enter the pantheon of Universal Pictures' popular

monster characters, like Frankenstein, Dracula, and The Wolf Man. Even though the creature goes on violent rampages, some effort was made to make him seem sympathetic.

BENEATH THE PLANET OF THE APES (1970)

Since PLANET OF THE APES was a huge hit, it only made sense that a sequel would be made. It's a bit repetitious, since James Franciscus substitutes for Charlton Heston and goes through many of the same ordeals, but it adds some new wrinkles to the story, with the inclusion of disfigured telepathic mutants who worship the Atomic Bomb. The ending is the ultimate in pessimism. It was probably the first time I ever saw a movie where not only the main character died, but so did everybody! However, they managed to get 3 more sequels out of this, as well as a reboot around the New Millenium, which has spun-off more sequels.

PLANET OF THE VAMPIRES (1965)

Italian horror movie maker Mario Bava takes a crack at the sci-fi genre. As usual, he was working with a low budget, and the script, which is translated from Italian into English and then dubbed by other actors, has it's awkward moments, but it's all transcended by Bava's visual style. It's probably the only movie made for showings at drive-ins that looks like individual frames from the film should be blown up and hanging in art galleries. The Vampires of the film aren't really vampires at all, but more like the re-awakened dead. However, "vampires" was a kind of shorthand that everybody understood, and the zombie genre as we know it hadn't been invented yet. It has a twist ending that Rod Serling could have come up with, and portions of it were "borrowed" for Ridley Scott's ALIEN.

THE STEPFORD WIVES (1975)

A science fiction premise wrapped up like a horror story. When Joanna moves with her family to the town of Stepford, she finds that all the women there behave like “perfect housewives” obsessed with cleaning and cooking and being subservient to their husbands. Dark hints emerge that Joanna will be “processed” in a way that will make her just like them. A slow build-up to a pretty horrifying finish.

THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN (1957)

A trend in 1950’s science fiction was to take things from nature and make them gigantic, like a colony of ants (THEM), a spider (TARANTULA), a praying mantis (THE DEADLY MANTIS), leeches (ATTACK OF THE GIANT LEECHES), scorpions (THE BLACK SCORPION) and even human beings (THE AMAZING COLOSSAL MAN; ATTACK OF THE 50 FOOT WOMAN). This movie went in the opposite direction and told the story of a man who keeps shrinking in size after being exposed to a radioactive cloud. He becomes endangered by otherwise ordinary things that are now gigantic compared to himself – a pet cat, water flooding a basement floor, and, most horrifically, a spider which now seems ten times his own size.

STAR WARS (1977)

Does anyone need me to explain this movie to them? It’s spawned numerous sequels and created a world of fandom all it’s own, pretty much changing the genre forever. This is a rare Italian poster from the original release.

THE FLY (1958)

A textbook example of the science fiction story as cautionary tale about the perils of experimentation. An experiment in teleportation of atoms causes a scientist to have his head and one arm switched with that of a common housefly. The story is told from the point of view of his wife, who is kept in the dark for much of the story, so the revelation comes as a shock to her and to the audience. One could interpret it as the standard “There are certain things that man should not tamper with,” but Vincent Price puts it in a different way, comparing the scientist to an explorer who was treading in unknown territory. He willingly took the risk, but making one mistake cost him his life. The implication being that others will follow and refine the process, to the benefit of all, which is a somewhat more positive way to look at the situation.. The film was so successful that 2 sequels followed (RETURN OF THE FLY and CURSE OF THE FLY) as well as David Cronenberg’s grotesque re-imagining of the story in 1986, which was also a huge hit.

ALIEN (1979)

ALIEN, when it first came out, felt like an utterly unique film. Of course, there had been plenty of science fiction movies before, some of them with monsters, but those were usually aimed at an audience of kids, with dialogue being very much on the same level as comic books, and the monsters were usually not entirely convincing (you had to use your suspension of disbelief) or even ridiculous (see THE GREEN SLIME, or the Cucumber Monster of IT CONQUERED THE WORLD, for instance). With ALIEN, director Ridley Scott was going more for a feeling of realism in all departments. Much thought had gone into the conception of the Alien itself, so that it felt biologically accurate as it progressed through various stages of its growth. The spaceship, where most of the action takes place, was designed to look realistic, like it was a workspace that was well-used and lived-in, unlike the usually

all-white, super-clean, anti-septic look that sci-fi movies usually adopted. And there was an attempt to make the characters like real, normal people. Scott's conception was that they would be like "truck drivers in outer space", working class, but in a futuristic setting. And unlike astronauts in any other movie you've seen, these people cursed and used four-letter words. But everyone went to see it because they wanted to see the monster! As a bonus, the film contained one of the greatest shocks ever filmed, occurring at about the half-way point. Scott seemed to have learned a lesson or two from DePalma and CARRIE, because there's a second shock near the end of the film which is very similar. And of course, this movie is significant for making a star out of Sigourney Weaver, who would appear in 3 of the sequels, but made a very nice career for herself outside of the ALIEN movies.

INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS (1978)

The 1978 version was a remake of the original 1956 film, which was a thinly disguised parable about Communist takeover. The notion of people being taken over and becoming emotionless beings with a hive-mentality (everyone serving a common purposes) tapped into then current fears of what a Communist regime would be like. The remake loses that particular sub-text, since Communism wasn't on people's minds much in 1978. An alternate reading of the story is that it's not specifically about Communism, but a condemnation of Conformity. This version does boast better special effects though, along with an impressive cast (Donald Sutherland, Leonard Nimoy, Veronica Cartwright, Jeff Goldblum) and a more shocking ending.

STRANGE INVADERS (1983)

Half-satirical, half-serious story of an aliens arriving on earth and taking over a small town, disguising themselves as humans. The funny part is, the aliens don't realize that over time, fashions change, styles of speech change, attitudes change, so they all still dress and talk and behave like it's still 1958. Hey, don't flip your lid, Daddy-O! It's real gone!

GODZILLA (1954)

GODZILLA is intended as an allegory for the destruction of Hiroshima by the atom bomb. In it's original form, the film is rather slow paced, compared to the way films are made today. And the tone in this film is much more serious than the follow-ups that came later, when Godzilla movies were made especially for young kids so they became a lot more campy and silly. (and the Japanese film industry is still making Godzilla films to this day) Like a lot of monster movies of it's day, the monster is shown very sparingly for much of the running time, until the climax, where Godzilla moves inland and lays waste to a city. In keeping with the wartime allegory some emphasis is given to the human tragedy, with orphaned children, and one brief bit where a mother huddles with her children and says "Soon we'll be with your father." So this movie means business. We're not allowed to forget about human lives lost. Although Godzilla is destroyed at the end, the professor character lays the ground for the sequels by saying "As long as atomic testing continues, there will be more Godzillas" so we can take that to mean that the Godzilla in the next movie is Not the Godzilla from this movie, but a second Godzilla that's been born. For the American release, new scenes were shot with Raymond Burr and edited into the film. The last time I saw it, I thought the inserts were pretty obvious.

ROBOT MONSTER (1953)

One of the films that was part of the initial 3-D craze of the 1950's, ROBOT MONSTER also makes the list of "Worst Movies Ever Made." It is so obviously made with very little money, since the makers of the film cobbled together whatever props they could get their hands on. The "Robot Monster" is a guy wearing a gorilla suit with a diving helmet on his head. His "communication system" is a plain wooden table with a bubble-making machine and some antenna. It manages to be entertaining because of it's silliness. The story is that all of mankind has been wiped out by an alien invasion, except for one family. The Robot Monster trundles around the desert looking for them while making threats. Strangely, it has a similar ending to INVADERS FROM MARS, which is a much better film than this one.

I MARRIED A MONSTER FROM OUTER SPACE (1958)

Obviously, the title is designed to hook you right from the start. Yet another alien invasion movie, with echoes of INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS. The men in a small town are being replaced by alien duplicates. When the aliens reveal their true appearance, it's pretty creepy.

INVADERS FROM MARS (1953)

Another seminal sci-fi film depicting an alien invasion, typifying Cold War-era paranoia. As is often the case, the invading aliens brainwash humans into becoming their slaves. The loss of free will is another

tie to the fear of Communism. Filmed in vibrant Technicolour at a time when many of these films were shot in black and white for budgetary reasons, it contains many surreal and expressionistic touches. And...there's a surprise ending! Remade in 1986 by Tobe Hooper, but the results were a lot less effective.

WESTWORLD (1973)

Michael Crichton wrote and directed this movie about an amusement park populated with robots whose purpose is to act out various fantasies for the paying guests. Is it any surprise that said fantasies revolve around sex and violence? In Westworld (one of three separate worlds that make up the resort, along with RomanWorld and MedievalWorld) the guests participate in western-style shoot-outs, which can be played out with no consequences, since it's all an elaborate game. (There also seems to be a recurring trope in science fiction about people having sex with robots, which is supposed to be one of the main attractions of the resort.) And then, the robots revolt. Crichton would re-use this basic plot for JURASSIC PARK. So again, we have this distrust of new technology theme, accompanied by a moral tone of "Pride comes before a fall," as the creators of Westworld were, in effect, playing God. WESTWORLD would later become a TV series, where newer generations discovered it. John Carpenter must have seen this movie before he conceived HALLOWEEN, since, like Michael Myers, Yul Brynner as the killer robot also has a habit of coming back after the audience thinks he's been killed by the main character. It also seems to have influenced THE TERMINATOR as well.

THE MAN FROM PLANET X (1951)

An unusual alien invader film in that it takes place in Scotland, rather than the United States. The alien is possibly benign, until it gets physically abused by a greedy, opportunistic scientist, then it turns nasty and enslaves villagers to help it get its crashed spaceship off the ground. What I love about this

poster is that while one alien is menacing a girl, as usual, you can see a second alien through the window of the spaceship, and he looks so nonchalant and so detached from what's going on, I'm wondering, what is he doing? Making coffee?