

HUM 2283-002: Film Genre—Science Fiction

Oklahoma City Community College
Fall 2009 Semester



from Metropolis (1927)

Instructor Information:

Professor: Jon Inglett

Office: 2E4-AH

Office Hours: M (online: 8-10 am); T (1-4; 8-9 pm); Th (1-4; 8-9 pm); F (by appt.)

Office Phone: 682 -1611 ext. 7217

Email: jinglett@occc.edu

Website: <http://www.occc.edu/jinglett>

Textbook:

The Rough Guide To Sci-Fi Movies by John Scalzi ISBN: 1-84353-520-3

Course Description:

In Film Genre, students will examine the themes and techniques of films in one of the primary genre. Students will view and study movies from a specific genre: comedy, science fiction, horror, independent, western, *film noir*, combat, animation, musical or crime/gangster. Students will write and speak critically about the recurring patterns, conventions, and film techniques that predominate in a genre. Furthermore, students will be able to express their ideas concerning the cultural values represented or challenged by the particular genre.

Course Competencies:

1. Demonstrate knowledge and comprehension of the history of science fiction film as presented in its historical context.
2. Demonstrate knowledge and comprehension of major science fiction films and directors.
3. Apply core concepts, principles, and theories to science fiction films
4. Explain how science fiction films participate in cultural, historical, economic, and social dimensions of culture
5. Write and communicate effectively about the features of the sub-genres of science fiction films.

Assignments and Grading Criteria (800 points total):

7 Unit Quizzes (175 points)

5 Essays (500 points)

Class Discussions (100 points)

Attendance (25 points)

Scale: | A = 100% - 90% | B = 89% - 80% | C = 79% - 70% | D = 69% - 60% | F = 59%

Assessment of Student Learning:

Oklahoma City Community College is committed to providing quality educational experiences to all students and to striving for continuous improvement in its programs and services. Student assessment is vital to the educational process and can be of significant value to you and to the students who follow you.

To ensure that adequate assessment information is available to allow OCCC to continuously improve programs and services, you may be asked to participate in personal interviews, to take program and/or general education assessments which could be tests, oral presentations, writing assignments, or other activities; or to complete surveys during designated times, which may include class periods. These opportunities are your chance to help OCCC improve the courses, programs, and services which could affect you and will certainly impact students in the future.

Global Education:

Because we live in a global society and what we do in the United States affects the world, and what is done in other parts of the world impacts us, students will connect the selected readings or chapters or assignments in this course to real-life, global concerns. They will respond to issues from a variety of cultures and they will recognize the conflicts/issues are related to the issues in their own lives.

Accommodation Statement:

Oklahoma City Community College complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students with disabilities who seek academic accommodations must make their request by: Contacting the Office of Student Support Services located on the first floor of the main building near entry 12, or call 682-7520.

Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism:

Plagiarism consists of submitting work that is not entirely your own, copying/pasting from a website or other document without properly citing and quoting from the work, or submitting work that you have written in another course. Any form of cheating or academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade for the entire course and a written report to be filed in the office of the Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs.

Late Work:

All work should be turned in on time unless unusual circumstances exist and can be confirmed. If work should be turned in late for any reason, twenty percent may be subtracted from the assignment. After one week, assignments will not be accepted. No work may be submitted after the last day of class.

Official Withdrawal:

A student may officially withdraw from a credit class through the twelfth week of a 16-week course, or the sixth week of an 8-week course. A refund of full or partial fees will be due only in accordance with

the College refund policy. The letter grade “W” will be shown on the official transcript for any student-initiated withdrawal after the schedule adjustment period.

Participation and Attendance:

Since this course requires interactive discussions to promote learning opportunities and growth, all students are expected to participate fully within this course. If you miss assignments or class periods due to traveling, computer problems, an illness, or any unexpected event, it is your responsibility to turn in your work early or notify me through e-mail, voice mail, phone, or in person about your issue. If you miss more than 2 class periods, your grade may automatically be lowered by 10%. If you miss more than 4 class periods, you may be failed from the course. Walking into class late is considered missing part of a class period.

Etiquette:

- Be courteous and show respect to others in their opinions and ideas.
- Sexual harassment or any form of discrimination will not be accepted in my class.
- Academically appropriate language is required at all times.
- Use of electronic devices is acceptable in some instances, as long as they do not interfere with student learning. For example, a laptop is acceptable to locate information related to an assignment but is not acceptable for chatting or browsing websites irrelevant to class activities.
- Please place your cellular phones on “Silent” or “Meeting” so that we can have a classroom without interruptions. If a phone call or text message can be defined as an emergency (i.e. an ill parent or child), please text message quietly or step out of the classroom to complete the conversation.

Film Content:

Students should understand that some of the feature films in this course are intended for mature audiences. Although there is little that is gratuitous in the films, certain scenes might include language, violence, adult situations, gore, and drug use.

Essay Assignments

During the semester, you will write 5 papers analyzing a different film we view during a class period. Each paper will lead the reader and you toward a deeper understanding of the historical dimensions, characteristics, genres, and/or issues embedded within science-fiction films. While I will not assign a specific topic for your paper, some ideas below will provide you with topic possibilities. I use one film, *The Matrix*, to explain topic possibilities.

Example #1 Idea: We watched the film *The Matrix*, and I was impressed with all the discussion of philosophy within the film. I plan to research Buddhism and show how the directors apply Buddhist concepts within the film. I also realize that when integrating the features of Buddhism, I need to cite my sources according to MLA format. I also realize that I need to provide some examples of how Buddhist concepts are integrated. One example I am thinking about is the theme: "There is no Spoon."

Example #2 Idea: We watched the film *The Matrix*, and I was impressed with how the film integrates Cyberpunk features from Japanese films, such as *Akira*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Ghost in the Shell II*. I plan to discuss the contribution of Japanese Sci-Fi Anime on *The Matrix* and future American films. I'll speak specifically about the elements of Sci-Fi Anime with examples from the films listed above and describe similar qualities presented in *The Matrix*. Since the paper is at least two pages, I will not have time to discuss any differences between Japanese Sci-Fi Anime Films and American Cyberpunk, but that concept would make another great paper.

Example #3 Idea: We watched the film *The Matrix*, and I have this overwhelming desire to speak intellectually about the film's meaning. My beginning thought is that there is always a high price to be paid when attaining freedom. Though I am not sure I know exactly where to lead this topic, I can certainly ask some questions to clarify my thought process. What freedom does Neo attain or lose by finding out the meaning of the riddle: What is the Matrix? Is the real world any better than the computer-generated world? How does free will, especially the ability to choose, relate to the concept of freedom? As I ask these questions, I should return to the film for examples.

Example #4 Idea: We watched the film *The Matrix*, and I kept wondering about how science fiction objectifies women. For example, while Neo is covered in this long, black cape, Trinity wears a slippery, tight, black suit that depicts her as a sexual object. Also, she is the only woman on the ship. Why is that? I think I will pursue this topic further and write a paper on how women are betrayed in Science-Fiction Films during the 1990s. I may look at two other films as a component of the paper, and that makes more sense to me than going to a website and copying what is already completed.

Example #5 Idea: We watched the film *The Matrix*, and I noticed how its discussion of digital technology completely aligns itself with the increase use of computers, the Internet, and the digital world. In some form, this film represents our Internet culture, but it also questions the value and prefabrication of this culture. My paper will definitely think about the meaning of the film and how it relates to our current position in society. I might even research information on how technology has influenced our cultural habits. Or, if that topic does not work out, I see some interesting questions in this film that are also asked in *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*. It would not make sense for me to cover every question, but I might

write an excellent paper on one question: How do three decades of science fiction filmmaking evaluate its contemporary period?

Example #6 Idea: *The Matrix* is the worst film I have ever watched. I just hate it! But, that is not the point of the assignment, and my teacher wants me to analyze the film without complaining about it. So, how do I analyze a film I hate? Well, maybe I didn't hate the entire film. I did like how Neo could dodge bullets. Maybe I could write about how digital cinematography has changed how we watch films. That sounds like a fun topic now. I could even compare a film with no digital cinematography whatsoever and see the differences between the two. I could even look at my favorite film, *The Wizard of Oz*, and describe the differences. But, wasn't the Wizard of Oz using new technologies too? Did people during that period say, "Adding sound or color to a film changed our viewing experience for the better?" Okay, I guess I do have a good topic to consider.

Example #7 Idea: *The Matrix* is obviously influenced by *Alice in Wonderland*, and *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* refers to Pinocchio and the Blue Fairy. Why do these two films use symbolism from children's stories? How many other science fiction films focus on similar fairy tales as a foundation of the film? I plan to look into this topic at greater length because I love fairy tales. Though a different topic altogether, I also see relationships between this film and the *Book of Revelations*. I cannot wait to write this paper.

Example #8 Idea: *The Matrix* contains an enormous amount of symbolism, and perhaps these symbols enhance the viewer's interests. I want to look at some symbols, such as the blue pill, used in the film and identify their meanings. But, I know my professor doesn't want me to list a bunch of symbols. He wants the symbols to connect in some form. I think I can probably locate three or so symbols in the film and make an overall connection to them, but I need to think further about this topic.

Other Requirements:

- Avoid plot summary but do use multiple examples to support each claim or main idea in a paragraph
- Write your name, name of course, date, and name of professor in the top left-hand corner of the first page.
- Give your paper a title and center it.
- You are not required to use outside sources, but if you find an interesting quote either from the textbook or from another source, you must include in-text citation and a works cited page. (I am interested, by the way, in what you have to say rather than what a website reveals.)
- Write at least 2.5-3 pages, 12-point font, double spaced.

Course Calendar

August 27

Overview of Course

Unit 1: The Silent Era (1900-1920)

Reading Selections: p. 3-14; 143-145

September 3

Quiz: Unit 1: The Silent Era

Film: *Metropolis*

September 10

Unit 2: The Utopian/Dystopian Vision, Sci-Fi Horror, and the Other (1920-1940)

Reading Selections: p. 27-34; 104-105; 132-134; Fritz Lang (161-162); Buster Crabbe (152); Willis O'Brien (165); James Whale (174)

September 17

Quiz: Unit 2: The Utopian/Dystopian Vision, Sci-Fi Horror, and the Other

Film: *Things to Come* (1936)

September 24

Film Analysis #1 Due (on *Things to Come* or *Metropolis*)

Unit 3: The Golden Age of Science Fiction (1950s)

Reading Selections: p. 34-37; 78-79; 81-82; 88-90; 95-97; 130-132; 145-146; George Pal (165-166)

October 1

Quiz: Unit 3: The Golden Age of Science Fiction

Film: *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951)

October 8

Film Analysis #2 Due (on *The Day the Earth Stood Still*)

Unit 4: Paranoia, JFK, the Cold War, Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Holocaust (1960s)

Reading Selections: p.38-40; 107-109; 140-143; Charlton Heston (158-159); Stanley Kubrick (161); Star Trek (285-286)

October 22

Quiz: Unit 4: Paranoia, JFK, the Cold War, Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Holocaust

Film: *Planet of the Apes* (1968)

October 29

Film Analysis #3 Due (on *Planet of the Apes*)

Unit 5: Democratic Landscape, Myth, and Ideology (1970s)

Reading Selections: p.40-44; 51-52; 56-57; 73-75; 118-124; 124-127; George Lucas (162-163); Steven Spielberg (168-169); Sigourney Weaver (173-174)

November 5

Quiz: Unit 5: Democratic Landscape, Myth, and Ideology (1970s)

Film: *Star Wars: A New Hope*

November 12

Film Analysis #4 (on *Star Wars: A New Hope*)

Unit 6: Post-Atomic Holocaust, Virtual Reality, and the Postmodern Landscape (1980s)

Reading Selections: p. 64-69; 82-85; 87-88; 100-101; 109-110

November 19

Quiz: Post-Atomic Holocaust, Virtual Reality, and the Postmodern Landscape

Film: *Blade Runner* (1982)

December 3

Film Analysis #5 (on *Blade Runner*)

Unit 7: Cyberpunk and the Digital Age (1990s and Beyond)

Reading Selections: p.45-48; 75-76; 90-92; 102-103; 127-129; 136-137

December 10

Quiz: Cyberpunk and the Digital Age

Film: *The Matrix*

December 17

Film Analysis #6 (on *The Matrix*)

Film: *Ghost in the Shell*