

Alien invasion in film essays examples

[Literature](#), [Fiction](#)



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The Changing Identity of the Invaders in Science Fiction

INTRODUCTION

There are very few people in the United States who do not know what the quote “ May the Force be with you” means, even if they are not fans of the Star Wars franchise. The same could be said for “ beam me up,” “ resistance is futile,” and “ boldly go where no one has gone before.” Science fiction, its characters, phrases, and worlds presented, have become part of the social paradigm. Granted, science fiction is a genre that does not appeal to everyone, but to those who favor the genre they are often committed and loyal. Science fiction can fall under a number of different sub-categories. There are stories that focus on the future and what it will be like for humanity. There are stories that deal with time travel, visiting the past and changing the future. Finally, the most prevalent element in science fiction is the existence of aliens. How that relationship between the different species that occur in space, can be humorous and lighthearted, for example the Cantina scene in “ Star Wars: Episode I a New Hope” or terrifyingly dark and

frightening as seen in, James Cameron's, " Aliens." That said, over the years of science fiction we have seen the relationship between humanity and extraterrestrials change and not necessarily for the best. At least if one is considering the long term implications of the stories presented. There are 3 movies made in differing eras that perfectly reflect the changes in how society sees aliens; " The War of the Worlds," " Close Encounters of the Third Kind," and " Avatar."

HISTORY

Science fiction falls under the umbrella of myths, legends, and fairytales; a fantastical impression, viewpoints, and fantasy about realities that do not exist. What truly sets science fiction apart from other form of fantasy fiction is the science and technology. Where folklore and traditional fantasy rely on divinity and magic to explain grand and awe inspiring events, in science fiction replaces divinity with scientific principles and magic with technological advantage. Sometimes science fiction is used to offer the potential means to a utopian universe, like Star Trek, or a reflection of a dystopian warning, where science and technology have not improved society, but limited it (Weldes 77). When it comes to aliens there is any number of perspectives, ideas of what they may look like, why they may come here, and finally, how they intend to interact with the human beings, be it in outer space or on Earth's soil. The alien and human question has been asked continuously throughout science fiction, with differing opinions. It is quite obvious that the perspective of aliens has evolved and changed throughout the decades and we see that reflected in the science fiction cinema it spawns.

DISCUSSION

Aliens can come in all shapes and sizes throughout science fiction. They can be the stereotypical little green men to cannibalistic interstellar monsters and from heartless, emotionless beings to child-like life forms, like “E. T: The Extraterrestrial.” However, science fiction is not just a creative form of storytelling; it can reflect the ideas and concerns of whatever era the films were released. We see religious ideologies questioned, ethical principles deeply explored, and political perspectives can influence science fiction and the kind of future it may represent. However, in order to see the manifestations of those changing ideas and relationships it is necessary to look at films that best represent these changing views; “War of the Worlds,” “Close Encounters of the Third Kind,” and “Avatar” are prime examples of their different eras and the societal perspective that inspired them.

War of the Worlds (1953)

H. G Wells published the multiple-part story, “The War of the Worlds,” in 1898. However, it did not gain true popularity until, more than 30 years later, when actor Orson Wells went on the radio waves in 1938, reading from Wells story as if it were an official news report. Wells’ radio “prank” had Americans genuinely believing that Earth was being invaded by an alien force and causing mass destruction and death. Wells and his crew were strongly admonished for creating such a panic; Wells explained that he never thought anyone would take it seriously. However invasion was on American minds regularly. There are a number of scholars who support the idea that much of the fear in Americans was not caused by aliens from outer space, but from across the ocean. Many associated the sentiments of the 1953 “

The War of the Worlds" interpretation could just as easily be presenting a story of invasion from Russia; which was a serious concern on the minds of Americans at the time (Weldes 78-79).

It would not be until 1953, when Byron Haskin, directed the first big-screen interpretation of the story. These aliens were not seen throughout the bulk of the movie. They simply arrive in an armada of, almost insect-like, armored tank, glider-craft. The one green headlight looks like an unblinking eye.

Through crushing and powerful laser weapons that could bring down skyscrapers people kept running, hoping to survive. They even considered the firing of an atomic bomb. The aliens clearly possess greater technology, more advanced weaponry, and humanity does not seem to stand a chance. The main characters keep running from place to place trying to stay alive. Then the miraculous happens. Something suddenly begins to slow the great machines progression and they begin falling out of the sky and haphazardly crashing to the ground. When the door of the craft opens a large, long-fingered, alien hand turns grey and dies. These aliens had been defeated by the smallest of invaders, germs. The same germs that are commonplace and harmless to humanity are lethal to this superior invading force. The idea that humanity is the “good guy,” the victim, and meant to prevail is a common fiber in much of early modern science fiction. It gives the impression that it was not necessary to see the aliens and confront them directly, because there is no enemy that humanity cannot defeat. This idyllic human resilience and “never give up:” mentality became a common thread in a large number of tales written on the subject of aliens (Haskin).

Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977)

Science fiction often evolves in ways that are reflective of what is relevant in the human consciousness at the time. However, as America entered into the 1960s and 1970s the U. S. became divided on opinions of wars, drafts, and exactly what kind of country we want to be. Many people of the era sought to change the way that humanity treats the Earth, the plants and animals in it, and, of course, each other. Of course, many historians no doubt blame this mentality on hippies and marijuana spouting, "peace, and love." However, it was not just hippies from Woodstock and opposition to the Vietnam War that wanted to present a different interpretation of the world, but creative artists, as well.

Steven Spielberg changed the way people perceived aliens and arrival of aliens on Earth in his 1977 film "Close Encounters of the Third Kind." This film takes the tales of alien abduction, invasion, and first contact and transforms them into something benevolent and beneficial. They speak to those that they are interested in through musical tones instead of speech or language. When the aliens arrive at the pinnacle of a high mountain, they do so before a large chunk of the American military. The military optioned not to fire on the craft or life forms; this is what many may call a leap of faith. It is not like the military to give the benefit of the doubt. However, unlike previous films the uses of weapons were discouraged in exchange for a welcome. When the ship arrives, it is an enormous multi-tiered craft, parts of which resembled the pipes of an immense organ. Through tones and melodies communication is possible, however, rudimentary. When the craft opens, it releases dozens of people, thought dead or missing, from decades back. Then the aliens themselves are revealed. They are primarily small,

pale, and child-like. They are not aggressive and they intend no ill-will. This presentation of aliens is different from many of the films that preceded them. The idea that aliens were non-threatening, not wanting to invade and take over, was a new idea. The legacy of “Close Encounters of the Third Kind” set a new precedent in science fiction. The idea that a scientifically superior and technologically advanced species could come here without the intention of causing harm is not often considered. The human perspective teaches, rather arrogantly, that any and all species in the universe wants what humanity has; of course there is no guaranteed data that that is the case (Spielberg).

Avatar (2009)

Movie magic has only continued to improve and evolve into the creative ability to create the realistic non-human environments. Television and films have presented aliens worlds both beautiful and terrifying. However, as mentioned, it is part of the human psyche to assume that everyone, including aliens, wants what the Earth has; particularly when it comes to natural resources, water, fuel, or minerals. “Independence Day,” in the 1990s, presented, similar scenario to “The War of the Worlds,” except it was a mass explosion and a computer virus that brought the enemy down once again, we see humanity face a superior force and still prevails. However, today the mentality of many human beings has changed when it comes to the planet that we call home. Today through environmental sciences and studies we know that the resources and environment that all life on this planet relies upon is not limitless. Humanity continues to deplete Earth’s resources every day and many surmise that it is only a matter of time before

those resources are exhausted. That said James Cameron's "Avatar," in 2009, turned the tables on humanity and alien invasions.

"Avatar" places us in an entirely alien world, full of its own plants, animals, and intelligent, tribal beings that call it home. However, this native species is at risk of losing their environments as an invading force moves in to mine the world of its natural resources. Except this time the invading force is not a frightening alien species, but humanity itself. No longer a victim of invasion we have become the invaders we were once societally afraid of. It is not hard to catch the metaphorical message being given with the themes of the film. This changes everything. Now that humanity is the one with the scientific superiority and technological advancements, we use it to take what we wish and subjugate the life on those that are weaker. We must see the battle for a world fought from the other side of the lines. We are no longer fighting the good fight defending what is ours, but for the right to dominate those who are weaker. We have come full circle in our own science fiction mythology, from victim, to idealist, and then to aggressor (Cameron).

Humanity often perceives itself; its ideals, religions, philosophies and ideologies are ethically and morally superior to any other we may meet along the way. Therefore regardless of what level of technology, scientific understandings, and nature of the alien culture, humanity is still the "right" side. However, in a film, like "Avatar," we are no longer the hero, on the "right" side, or hold any sort of moral high ground. We are the invaders, the victimizers, and a force to fear. The message being sent when discussing science fiction aliens is that they frighten us, but when given the opportunity it is best to become like them. This is hardly the hope of all science fiction

writers and professionals.

In the grand scheme of things, the future is just as full of deviance and political games as it has been in the past. Presently, we have no real idea how interactions with an alien race would actually go, since as yet there is no definite proof that real aliens have ever visited Earth, at least officially. Could they be benevolent and beneficial or vicious and destructive? All these different films and different outcomes, it becomes apparent that we really do not know what to expect. Will the aliens, simply, arrive one day and arbitrarily start destroying homes, building, and cities without ever seeing the face of our destroyer, as in “The War of the Worlds.” More importantly, will humanity survive and be so fortunate to defeat an entire species with the common germs? Will the aliens be gentle and child-like with no ill-will and be guided by curiosity more than anything else. Despite such great technology, they remain gentle, warm, and compassionate. They mean no harm to humanity as in “The Close Encounters of the Third Kind,” and may even hope to contribute to our society. However, science fiction warns us that we may become exactly what we fear, as in “Avatar.” Where we disregard our own worries and fears and spread them in someplace new and bring that terror to another race as humanity attacks from afar. Such stories are meant to provoke thought and encourage the ethical and moral truths of nature and will to survive; it makes society question just how far we are willing to go.

CONCLUSION

Despite whether or not one is a fan of the science fiction genre, the works of science fiction continue to be popular, continue to encourage greater

exploration of imagined worlds, and offers the opportunity to escape to a far off place or just a different time and place right here on Earth. That said, no doubt, science fiction will continue to evolve alongside humanity well into the future, offering warnings, hopes, and encouraging thought-provoking conversations about the future needs and goals of humanity. It will, no doubt, be necessary for humanity to work hard and not become the very aggressive, calculated, negative, and invasive force that we have feared in our own science fiction cinema for decades.

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