



**SILVERSCREEN**  
PRIMARY  
EDUCATION

## The History of Science Fiction Cinema

*By Adam Pepper*

**Session 3:**  
**1950s**

*Mutant, Mayhem &  
Cold War Conundrums*



Welcome to Session 3 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 3:**

In this session, we will continue with our study of those early monster movies, inspired by the atomic testing and nuclear bomb usage in WW2. From 1954's 'Godzilla' we will see how new creativity behind the camera allowed for more fantastical settings and creatures to be realised as the 50s drew on.

We will also examine how the UFO craze following the Roswell Incident of 1947 fed into the world of sci-fi films, bringing some of the most iconic and memorable alien invasion movies ever made to our screens.

Finally, as the Cold War and the Communist threat rears its tension-filled head across the globe, we will see how film-makers began to find sci-fi stories to tell which truly made us question who the person standing beside us might truly be...

### **Useful information for Session 3:**

#### **Ed Wood**

Edward Davis Wood Jr. (October 10, 1924 – December 10, 1978) was an American filmmaker, actor, screenwriter, and pulp novel author.

In the 1950s, Wood directed several low-budget science fiction, crime and horror films that later became cult classics, notably *Glen or Glenda* (1953), *Jail Bait* (1954), *Bride of the Monster* (1955), *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1957) and *Night of the Ghouls* (1959). In the 1960s and 1970s, he moved towards sexploitation and pornographic films such as *The Sinister Urge* (1960), *Orgy of the Dead* (1965) and *Necromania* (1971), and wrote over 80 lurid pulp crime and sex novels.

Notable for their campy aesthetics, technical errors, unsophisticated special effects, use of poorly-matched stock footage, eccentric casts, idiosyncratic stories and non sequitur dialogue, Wood's films remained largely obscure until he was posthumously awarded a Golden Turkey Award for Worst Director of All Time in 1980, renewing public interest in his life and work.

Following the publication of Rudolph Grey's 1992 oral biography *Nightmare of Ecstasy: The Life and Art of Edward D. Wood Jr.*, a biopic of his life, *Ed Wood* (1994), was directed by Tim Burton.

#### **Joseph McCarthy**

Joseph Raymond McCarthy (November 14, 1908 – May 2, 1957) was an American politician who served as a Republican U.S. Senator from the state of Wisconsin from 1947 until his death in 1957. Beginning in 1950, McCarthy became the most visible public face of a period in the United States in which Cold War tensions fuelled fears of widespread communist subversion. He alleged that numerous communists and Soviet spies and sympathizers had infiltrated the United States federal government, universities, film industry, and elsewhere. Ultimately, he was censured for refusing to cooperate with, and abusing members of, the committee established to investigate whether or not he should be censured. The term "McCarthyism", coined in 1950 in reference to McCarthy's practices, was

soon applied to similar anti-communist activities. Today, the term is used more broadly to mean demagogic, reckless, and unsubstantiated accusations, as well as public attacks on the character or patriotism of political opponents.



## Mercury Seven

The Mercury Seven were the group of seven astronauts selected to fly spacecraft for Project Mercury. They are also referred to as the Original Seven and Astronaut Group 1. Their names were publicly announced by NASA on April 9, 1959; these seven original American astronauts were Scott Carpenter, Gordon Cooper, John Glenn, Gus Grissom, Wally Schirra, Alan Shepard, and Deke Slayton. The Mercury Seven created a new profession in the United States, and established the image of the American astronaut for decades to come.

All of the Mercury Seven eventually flew in space. They piloted the six spaceflights of the Mercury program that had an astronaut on board from May 1961 to May 1963, and members of the group flew on all of the NASA human spaceflight programs of the 20th century – Mercury, Gemini, Apollo, and the Space Shuttle.

Shepard became the first American to enter space in 1961, and later walked on the Moon on Apollo 14 in 1971. Grissom flew the first crewed Gemini mission in 1965, but died in 1967 in the Apollo 1 fire; the others all survived past retirement from service.

## Films to look out for:

- The Day The Earth Stood Still (1951)*
- The Thing From Another World (1951)*
- It Came From Outer Space (1953)*
- The War Of The Worlds (1953)*
- The Creature From The Black Lagoon (1954)*
- Tarantula (1955)*
- The Blob (1958)*
- Plan 9 From Outer Space (1959)*
- The Day The Earth Caught Fire (1961)*
- The Right Stuff (1983)*
- Guilty By Suspicion (1991)*
- Ed Wood (1994)*

## Forthcoming Sessions:

- **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**