**IB Film 2**

**W54.1: History of Fantasy**

Check out a top 10 list of the best fantasy films.

See if you can recognize some of the films we have already covered during this course.

**Watch This:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93RlS_Vi0C8>

Fantasy and science fiction films share many qualities, but this lesson will focus mostly on films that do not include science as the main component.

*Star Wars* (1977) includes elements of space travel, but is usually categorized as fantasy, action, and adventure.

Fantasy films usually feature some aspect of the unknown.

This could include the manipulation of time and the discovery of new worlds. The films might include mutant or shape-shifting creatures.

The Earliest Years

The French magician Georges Méliès was one of the first filmmakers to create true fantasy films.

He developed and used in-camera effects in conjunction with elaborate sets to create strange and fascinating worlds for the early movie-going audiences.

Méliès' *Le voyage dans a lune* (1902) was a tour de force of special effects and action including rocket ships, moon men, dancing girls, and a chase scene.

Sub-plot

The life and work of Georges Méliès was an integral part of the story in the 2011 fantasy film *Hugo*directed by Martin Scorsese.

1914

Animator Winsor McCay was creating dinosaurs for the screen 80 years or so before Steven Spielberg.

*Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914) was an animated short film featuring Gertie, a brontosaurus based on the famous skeleton in the American Natural History Museum.

1930's

In the 1930s, two major fantasy films were produced.

One was *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and the other was *King Kong* (1933).

1940's and 1950's

Fantasy films of the 40's and 50's included *It's a Wonderful Life*(1946), *La belle et la bete* (Beauty and the Beast) (1946), and *Angels in the Outfield* (1951).

1960’s

The 1960's featured many fantasy films that drew on mythological themes.

*The Thief of Baghdad* came out in 1960.

*Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) featured the special effects work of Ray Harryhausen.

*Mary Poppins* (1964) was a light fantasy musical.

For a complete change of pace, there was *Planet of the Apes* (1968).

1970s

In 1974, the Monty Python comedy troupe came out with *Monty Python and the Holy Grail.*

In 1975 director Louis Malle released *Black Moon*, a surrealist fantasy about a young girl who mixes dreams and reality.

1980’s

The 1980s saw a major run of popular fantasy films ranging from Jim Henson's *The Dark Crystal* (1982) to David Cronenberg's *Videodrome*(1983) to Rob Reiner's *The Princess Bride* (1987).

1990’s

In the 1990s there was the darkly comic *Delicatessen* (1991) from France and the beautiful *What Dreams May Come* (1998).

The New Millennium

Leaps in the development of CGI and other special effects made it possible to create such detailed fantasies as -

* *Shrek* (2001) directed by Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson.
* Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* (2010)
* and the entire *Harry Potter* series.

Texas-born Catherine Hardwicke has directed a number of noted fantasy films including *Twilight*(2008) and *Red Riding Hood* (2011).

Hardwicke got her start in the business as a production designer before going on to direct the gritty coming-of-age drama *Thirteen* (2003).

**del Toro Fantasy Films**

There are many conventional fantasy elements, and Guillermo del Toro is familiar with all of them.

Some of those major elements are -

* strange locales where time stands still or places that have been forgotten by mankind;
* literal or metaphoric journeys or invasion by some alien entity;
* stock characters including mutant creatures, heroes on a quest, young maidens, evil witches, and warlocks.

As mentioned in the previous lesson, young Guillermo del Toro was a huge fan of horror, fantasy, and science fiction films. So, he instinctively understands how to incorporate the aforementioned genre conventions.

Influences

Guillermo del Toro's favorite directors include -

* Alfred Hitchcock
* James Whale (*Frankenstein*)
* Mario Bava (*Planet of the Vampires*)
* George A. Romero (*Night of the Living Dead*)

Del Toro was also influenced by the movies produced for Britain's Hammer Films including classics like

* *The Curse of the Werewolf*(1961)
* *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957).

As a boy, del Toro began making his own horror movies using his Super 8 camera, toys, and ketchup.

He later studied advanced makeup with the legendary special effects artist Dick Smith (*The Exorcist*).

Cronos

*Cronos* (1993), del Toro's first feature, is an elegant fantasy about immortality, love, vampirism, and religion.

The immortality device is right out of classic horror films.  A golden beetle-like machine that attaches itself directly to the skin and injects a serum that keeps people alive.

Like many of the Hammer Films, del Toro manages to also inject a sense of humor, particularly through the character portrayed by one of del Toro's favorite actors, Ron Perlman.

The Devil's Backbone

In this film, del Toro incorporates many of his favorite themes - insects, children, and religion. *The Devil's Backbone* (2001) is the story of ghosts and orphaned children.

Del Toro explains why children can be an important component of horror -

*"It is one of the most ancient conventions in the genre that, for a horror tale to work, it needs the eyes of an innocent; in fact it needs pure eyes.*

*I hate the word innocence, it's so relative.*

*But purity is not; I believe that children are pure and yet I don't believe that they are innocent.*

*Purity is like an amplifier of horror and I have lived the most horrifying chapters of my life being a child, so those are the chapters I can relate to the best."*

Hellboy

In this adaptation of the graphic novel, *Hellboy* (2004), del Toro establishes a unique hero - Hellboy played by Ron Perlman - as a seven-foot-tall demon who works for a mysterious government agency.

Hellboy is a mythical creature with a modern sensibility and sense of humor.

Hellboy is conflicted, a kind of experiment in nature versus nurture and manages to become more than the sum of his parts.

This is a theme seen in countless monster movies - the creature struggles against their baser instincts.

Think *Frankenstein*, *The Wolf Man*, and many, many vampire movies.

Pan's Labyrinth

Del Toro's masterpiece, *Pan's Labyrinth*(2006) is a beautiful fantasy that exposes the dark horror lurking beneath happy-go-lucky fairy tales.

Set in Spain, circa 1944, the film presents two worlds - the brutal reality of war and the strange and compelling world of fauns and other mutant creatures only a young girl can see.

The labyrinth itself is the strange alien world in which the audience follows the heroine - a place forgotten by most of mankind.

Hellboy II

In this sequel, del Toro has Hellboy battling mythological creatures like elves and trolls, includes a journey into a 'Troll's Market', and a final battle against a Golden Army of magical machines (beautiful and bug-like, much like the beetle in Cronos).

There is even a prophecy, another element commonly found in fantasy films (*Harry Potter* for example).

In His Own Words

Guillermo del Toro is clearly a director who lives and breathes fantasy into his films.

The last word in this lesson goes to him -

*"The day that I don't feel compelled to tell a story is the day I'll stop making movies.*

*I don't do them for money, I don't do them for comfort.*

*I don't do them because they are easy, God knows they are hard to make.*

*I do them because I feel I still have in me a lot of things to tell that won't be told by someone else in the same way.*

*If I didn't feel like that, I wouldn't make them.*

*My hope is that by the end of my life, however many I end up doing, they will all be one hell of a big movie—although it might be a very strange big movie."*