The portrayal of science in films often gets mixed reviews. What’s your favorite science-themed film and why does it appeal to you?

From Jurassic Park to Contagion, a film’s scientific accuracy is often a hot-button topic. Here, four scientists share their top picks and, unlike movie critics, almost come to a consensus on an all-time favorite.

—EDITED BY NICOLE KRESGE

Simon W.-L. Chan
HHMI-GBMF INVESTIGATOR
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS

“I like the movie Gattaca. Although it came out in 1997, it seems prescient now that we are sequencing many human genomes. It’s an entertaining way to introduce ethical issues about personal genetic information. Plus, it was directed by a fellow Kiwi.”

Eugene W. Myers
JFRC GROUP LEADER
JANELIA FARM RESEARCH CAMPUS

“I’m a sci-fi junkie—I’ll watch the worst stuff as long as it’s even remotely plausible. But there are many great films too, so it’s hard to pick a favorite. Blade Runner. Alien. Star Wars. Jurassic Park. Brazil. It’s mostly about the visuals and the mood created—the special effects, the technology, and the feeling of being transported to another world. But the film that intrigued me the most was Gattaca. While it was a dud in terms of special effects and acting (sorry Ethan and Uma), it hit incredibly close to home. Not only was the movie’s thesis plausible, but I think it’s just around the corner. I wonder if the audience realized it!”

Lora V. Hooper
HHMI INVESTIGATOR
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SOUTHWESTERN MEDICAL CENTER AT DALLAS

“One of my favorite science-themed films is the 1997 movie Contact. Jodie Foster did an excellent job portraying a heroic radio scientist on a lonely search for extraterrestrial intelligence. This is a rare example of a film in which the lead character is a sympathetically portrayed female scientist, and for that reason this remains one of my favorites.”

Konrad Hochedlinger
HHMI EARLY CAREER SCIENTIST
MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL HOSPITAL

“I would pick Gattaca as my favorite science [fiction] movie because it is based on a real scientific discovery—preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD)—which is widely used to screen embryos for potential genetic defects. Given that this method is abused by some people to screen embryos for a desired gender, the possibility of misusing PGD to select for other traits unrelated to disease raises interesting ethical, legal, and societal questions. That made me think a lot while I watched this movie.”