



The Spacesuit Film: A History, 1918-1969

Gary Westfahl

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Filmmakers employ various images to suggest the strangeness of outer space, but protective spacesuits most powerfully communicate the dangers of space and the frailty and weakness of humans beyond the cradle of Earth. Many films set in space, however, forgo spacesuits altogether, reluctant to hide famous faces behind bulky helmets and ill-fitting jumpsuits. This critical history comprehensively examines science fiction films that portray space travel realistically by having characters wear spacesuits. Beginning with the pioneering *Himmelskibet* (1918) and *Woman on the Moon* (1929), it discusses other classics in this tradition, including *Destination Moon* (1950), *Riders to the Stars* (1954), and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968); innumerable films which gesture toward realism but betray that goal with melodramatic villains, low comedy, or improbable monsters; the distinctive spacesuit films of Western Europe, Russia and Japan; and America's spectacular real-life spacesuit film, the televised Apollo 11 moon landing (1969).

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