

MAR09-2008-007815

Abstract for an Invited Paper
for the MAR09 Meeting of
the American Physical Society

Hollywood Science: Good for Hollywood, Bad for Science?

SIDNEY PERKOWITZ, Emory University

Like it or not, most science depicted in feature films is in the form of science fiction. This isn't likely to change any time soon, if only because science fiction films are huge moneymakers for Hollywood. But beyond that, these films are a powerful cultural force. They reach millions as they depict scientific ideas from DNA and cloning to space science, whether correctly or incorrectly; reflect contemporary issues of science and society like climate change, nuclear power and biowarfare; inspire young people to become scientists; and provide defining images – or stereotypes – of scientists for the majority of people who've never met a real one. Certainly, most scientists feel that screen depictions of science and scientists are badly distorted. Many are, but not always. In this talk, based on my book *Hollywood Science* [1], I'll show examples of good and bad screen treatments of science, scientists, and their impact on society. I'll also discuss efforts to improve how science is treated in film and ways to use even bad movie science to convey real science.

[1] Sidney Perkowitz, *Hollywood Science: Movies, Science, and the End of the World* (Columbia University Press, New York, 2007). ISBN: 978-0231142809