

ASU plans 'Science Flicks'

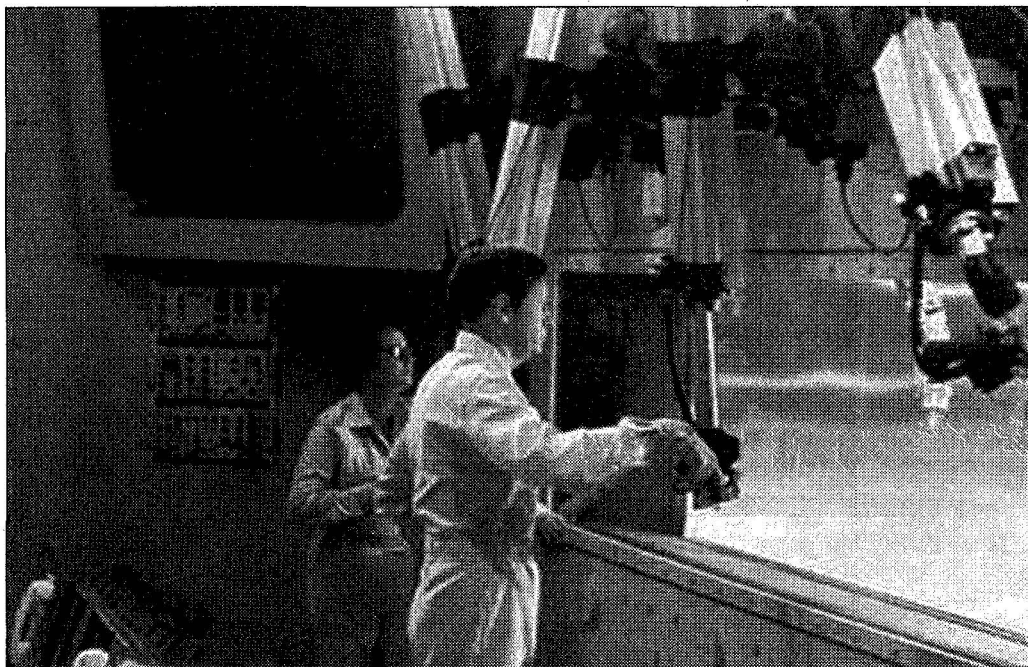
**BY ALDEMARO ROMERO
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SPECIAL FOR THE SUN

Do science fiction movies actually portray science fact?

This is the question that will be under discussion this next year as Arkansas State University unveils its "Science Flicks" film series this fall. The series will present a different Hollywood film each month that portrays scientists and the work they perform, followed by discussion of the validity of the portrayal with a panel of scientists.

The tentative list of movies selected for this first year of the series will be "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea," "The China Syndrome," "Coma," "Twister," "Contact," "Jurassic Park," "The Andromeda Strain," "The Thing" and "Real Genius." These films were chosen to give a broad view of the dif-

PLEASE SEE **FLICKS, A9**



Universal Pictures, MCA-Universal Home Video

A scene from the movie "The Andromeda Strain" shows the scientific method with great accuracy. In this picture scientists use a telemanipulator to handle dangerous organisms.

FLICKS: Films often raise political, ethical questions

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ferent areas of science, as well as to give a historical context to how science was portrayed over the last half century.

The format of each showing will consist of a brief introduction to the film, the actual presentation and then a panel discussion. For "The China Syndrome," the panel will include experts on nuclear physics, while for "Coma" it will include physicians and ethics experts. The panel for "The Andromeda Strain" will include microbiologists.

Besides the fact-or-fiction question, each film also raises other questions and issues that are important to science and society. For example, the changing political landscape greatly affects how Hollywood's conception of science and scientific endeavors. In "The Thing," produced in 1951 during the early days of McCarthyism, one can see how space aliens were viewed as dangerous invaders; by 1997, when "Contact" was made, aliens were seen as

much more complicated elements in our culture, mostly benign, but still viewed with suspicion by politicians.

Other movies such as "Coma" raise a number of ethical issues regarding medical practices while "The Andromeda Strain" is a good portrait of the scientific method in a plot that clearly reflects the tensions of the Cold War of the 1970s. The only comedy of the bunch, "Real Genius," portrays student research in laser physics while also presenting the tensions between basic scientific research and its use in the military-industrial complex. "Twister," which centers on the all-too-familiar Midwest event of tornadoes, portrays the competitive nature of scientific discovery.

Some films are a demonstration of the insights of visionaries: "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea," based on a book published in 1870, is a clear example of how Jules Verne predicted a number of technological advances many decades before they became a reality. "The Chi-

na Syndrome," about an accident in a nuclear plant, was released only 12 days before an actual accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant in Pennsylvania. "Jurassic Park" deals with many issues related to genetic engineering that have become familiar today.

This movie series will take place once a month at ASU at 6 p.m. each night. For listings go to: http://biology.astate.edu/science_flicks.htm. The first movie to be shown will be "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea" and will take place on Aug. 23. This series is open not only to ASU students but also to the general public.

For more information, including the film schedule, contact the ASU Department of Biological Sciences at biology@astate.edu.

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