

1:35	Slower tempo; steady quarter-note pulsations, with crashing braaams on pulses 1 and 3 (from Piaf intro)	[not in film]
1:46	Slightly louder; more voices in chords	
1:58	More brass in braaams; strings play subdivided pulses.	
2:09	More voices added to braaams.	
2:21	Abrupt stop; quiet heartbeat-like pulses heard	

SAVED BY MUSIC

Most of the films selected for this guide have achieved legendary status—not always when they were first released, but often after their innovations and achievements have been re-appraised. Critics have found much to admire: *The Day the Earth Stood Still* “is, unarguably, a masterpiece of cinema and one of the most influential science-fiction films ever made.”⁴⁷⁸ *Forbidden Planet* is “one of the most intelligent and ambitious films of its genre.”⁴⁷⁹ The *Boston Globe* regarded *2001: A Space Odyssey* as “the world’s most extraordinary film.”⁴⁸⁰ *Blade Runner* now stands “among the most visually dense, thematically challenging, and influential science-fiction films ever made.”⁴⁸¹ The list of glowing descriptions goes on, as does the continued viewership for many of the films: most young people today still have seen *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*, *Star Wars*, or *WALL•E* at least once as they were growing up.

Moreover, the majority of the films we have examined appear in various wide-ranging surveys of highly rated movies. In 2011, a joint ABC-People Magazine poll placed *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* in fifth place among “the Greatest Movies of Our Time,” while *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* joined it in the “Best Sci-Fi Film” category.⁴⁸² The BBC’s 2016 survey of 177 film critics put *WALL•E* as number 29 of “The 21st Century’s 100 Greatest Films,” with *Inception* as no. 51.⁴⁸³ More recently, in their 2021 rankings, the British Film Institute counted *Metropolis* (No. 35), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (No. 6), and *Blade Runner* (No. 69) among “The 100 Greatest Films of All Time.”⁴⁸⁴

... And then there is *Mars Attacks!* (1996), which, to say the least, does not always excite those levels of critical acclaim. What it *does* achieve is a multi-dimensional spoof of its many B-movie forerunners. Not least among its satirical aspects is the musical score by Danny Elfman (b. 1953), which pays tribute to the

soundtracks of numerous prior science-fiction films. And, in the climactic moment of *Mars Attacks!*, it is *source* music that saves the day for the planet Earth.

An A-List for a B-Movie Tribute

Bubble gum trading cards would seem to be an unlikely basis for a Hollywood film, but that was indeed the inspiration for *Mars Attacks!* The Topps Chewing Gum Company (manufacturers of Bazooka bubble gum) had entered the trading-card business in 1950 with television-linked cards. They then launched their first baseball cards in 1951, in which purchasers would get a numbered card with a player’s image and statistics along with a piece of gum. Other sports soon followed. Topps also issued card sets based on fantasy or historical themes, such as a 1961 Civil War set with “gruesomely rendered battle scenes” (which were highly successful with young collectors).⁴⁸⁵

The strong sales led to a new fantasy project. The creative team at Topps who chose the topics for each series—Woody Gelman (1915–78) and Len Brown (b. 1941)—were struck by the sensational cover art of various science-fiction-themed comic books and decided to create a fifty-five-card set of Martian invaders. They hired a comic-book artist to draw pencil sketches for each card, and a painter then fleshed them out in full color, while Gelman and Brown wrote narratives to accompany each gory illustration.

They got their first hint of trouble when the president of Topps would not let the corporate name stay on the *Mars Attacks* cards; he had the copyright notice changed to “Bubbles, Inc.”⁴⁸⁶ Gelman recalls what happened next:

We put them out in one territory—New England and upstate New York—and they sold pretty well. When we went a little wider, there were newspaper stories almost immediately, and we started getting bad