



SCI-FI  
DAYS OF FEAR  
AND WONDER

Together with



**FIRST EVER BRITISH SCI-FI FEATURE FILM RELEASED:**

***A Message from Mars (1913) now available to watch for free  
on BFI Player and BBC Arts Online***



At the Martian court the Messenger is sent to Earth - scene from *A Message from Mars* (1913)

On Friday 12th December 2014 thanks to a unique collaboration between the BFI and BBC Arts, the BFI National Archive's new restoration of *A Message from Mars* (1913), Britain's first ever sci-fi feature film, will be released online (on BFI Player and BBC Arts Online) with a new score by composer Matthew Herbert, Creative Director of the New Radiophonic Workshop. This is the first time in a century that the film will be seen at its full length and with its restored tinting and toning. The plot bears a marked resemblance to Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, making this an appropriate release for the twelve days of Christmas.

See the film on [www.bfi.org.uk/player](http://www.bfi.org.uk/player) and [www.bbc.co.uk/arts](http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts)

BBC Arts Online have also made a special film report on the story behind the restoration of *A Message from Mars* (1913), going behind the scenes at the BFI National Archive and interviewing the expert curators and technical specialists who spent six months bringing this film back to life for the digital age.

*A Message from Mars* forms part of the BFI's huge UK-wide celebration of Sci-Fi film and television, *Days of Fear and Wonder*, which explores this perennially popular genre from the earliest days of cinema to the latest Hollywood blockbusters.

Heather Stewart, Creative Director, BFI said,

"This is the first in a long line of great British sci-fi films. The genesis of science fiction in British cinema has a distinguished but little known history. Now for the first time in a century audiences across the UK can enjoy the beginnings of British cinema's most popular genre in a stunning new restoration and with a fantastic new soundtrack."

Matthew Herbert, composer said,

"*A Message from Mars* has such a unique visual language, from acting to camera angles, that it has required a different approach to the soundtrack. So many conventions we associate with sound and music in film didn't seem to be relevant. Apart from the sound design, all the musical contributions are made from recordings we made of a piano, the instrument of choice for film accompaniment in 1913. We chose a specific piano from 1913 to give it an authenticity of tone and, partly due to its age, we managed to coax a whole range of exciting textures and timbres from it.

"Manipulation of these sounds was also done by members of the New Radiophonic Workshop, in part to acknowledge the kind of experimentation the original Radiophonic Workshop did with keys on piano strings (like the Doctor Who Tardis sound). It's not been an easy job to create a new soundtrack in under 10 days but the idealistic naivety of the film itself has allowed for a more stripped back, impressionistic approach - a simple sound, for an innocent picture. Don't be fooled though, the message that the rich should show compassion, grace and tolerance for the poor couldn't feel more contemporary or relevant."

*A Message from Mars* is the first full-length science fiction feature in the history of British cinema. As a punishment for stealing someone's ideas a Martian is condemned to go to Earth to change the heart of a selfish man. The Martian will only be permitted to return to Mars if he is successful in his mission.

This fascinating film was based on a highly popular stage play which saw many revivals over 30 years in Britain. It features the first on-screen imaginings of Martians by a British film-maker, as futuristically clad members of the Martian court. Thought transference, instant space travel, mind control and the use of a far-seeing crystal ball all feature in this ground-breaking film.

*A Message from Mars* survived in the collection of the BFI National Archive as two shortened versions with significant imperfections in the third reel and a number of missing scenes. Scans from these copies were combined with a tinted and toned print from the collection of the Museum of Modern Art to bring the film back to its original running time. Restoration specialists at the BFI National Archive, in collaboration with the team at Dragon Digital in Wales, spent over six months painstakingly working to identify the missing scenes from each copy and produce a new master featuring the best available image quality and with the applied colours of the original prints meticulously reproduced.

Film credits:

A Cinematograph version of **A Message from Mars** by Richard Ganthony

Horace Parker	Charles Hawtrey
The Messenger	C. Holman Clark
The Tramp	Hubert Willis
Arthur Dicey	Frank Hector
The God of Mars	R. Crompton
The Wounded Man	B. Stanmore
Minnie	Crissie Bell
Aunt Martha	Kate Tyndall
Mrs. Clarence	Eileen Temple
Bella	Evelyn Beaumont
The Wounded Man's Wife	Toni Reith

Adapted from the play and produced by J. Walter Waller  
(by permission of Messrs. Frank Curzon and Gerald du Maurier)

Music and sound design by Matthew Herbert  
with additional material from the New Radiophonic Workshop

Notes to editors:

### 1. **About the BFI**

The BFI is the lead organisation for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving/restoring the most significant film collection in the world for future generations
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK - investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

The BFI is now a Government arm's-length body and distributor of Lottery funds for film. The BFI serves a public role which covers the cultural, creative and economic aspects of film in the UK. It delivers this role:

- As the UK-wide organisation for film, a charity core funded by Government
- By providing Lottery and Government funds for film across the UK
- By working with partners to advance the position of film in the UK.

Founded in 1933, the BFI is a registered charity governed by Royal Charter.  
The BFI Board of Governors is chaired by Greg Dyke.

### 2. **BBC Arts Online**

BBC Arts online presents the best and broadest selection of British arts and culture. The site streams performances and events, live and on-demand, showcases festivals and offers expert comment and criticism. BBC Arts also provides expanded coverage and context for the big arts stories, programmes and projects from across the BBC, while stimulating debate and audience interaction.

3. **SCI-FI: DAYS OF FEAR AND WONDER** is the BFI's biggest season to date, with over **1000** screenings of classic films and television programmes at over **200** locations across the UK. It includes a three-month programme at BFI Southbank, from **20 October until 31 December 2014**, with special events, guests and screenings right across the UK. With outdoor events at iconic British sites, classic Sci-Fi titles released into UK cinemas and on DVD and Blu-ray, 50+ films available online through BFI Player, a BFI Sci-Fi Compendium and much more, **SCI-FI: DAYS OF FEAR AND WONDER**, presented together with **02**, celebrates cinema's most spectacular and visionary genre, exploring how the fear and wonder at its heart continues to inspire and enthrall in one of the largest and most ambitious Sci-Fi projects ever created.  
[www.bfi.org.uk/sci-fi](http://www.bfi.org.uk/sci-fi) @BFI #BFISciFi
4. **Matthew Herbert** is a prolific and accomplished musician, artist and writer whose range of works extends from numerous albums to Ivor Novello nominated film scores as well as music for Broadway, TV, games and radio. He has performed all round the world from the Sydney Opera House, to the Hollywood Bowl and created installations, plays and opera. He is director of the New Radiophonic Workshop.
5. **BFI Player** - Offering a mix of 7 new channels, or 'collections', the BFI Player features must-see cinema, silent classics, festival exclusives and rare footage from the national film archive, bringing a unique and diverse range of content to the video-on-demand platform. The player includes plenty of free content (approx 60%), in addition to paid for rentals (approx. 40%), and no subscription fee, so *you only pay for what you watch*.

**\*\*\* PICTURE DESK \*\*\***

**A selection of images and clips for journalistic use in can be found at [www.image.net](http://www.image.net) under BFI / Sci-Fi: Days of Fear and Wonder**

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