One of the most popular aspects of Comic-Con is science fiction. Many of the fans who flock to theColumbus event to see iconic actor Billy Dee Williams will do so because of his iconic role as Lando Calrissian in “The Empire Strikes Back” and “The Return of the Jedi.” Wi lliams is one of a select group of African-American actors who have broken color barriers by appearing in science-fiction movies. The following is a look at some of the other Black actors who have also ventured into a galaxy far, far away.

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Billy Dee Williams will appear at the Wizard World Mid-Ohio Comic-Con Oct. 22-23 at the Colu mbus Convention Center
,
400 N. High St.
in downtown
Columbus
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Comic-Con is one of the largest comic book and pop-culture conventions in the world. The event tours various cities each year, drawing thousands of passionate fans of comic books, video games and all types of entertainment.

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Nichelle Nichols. Nichols was, of course, the original pioneer as an African American in science fiction. Her role as Nyota Uhura, communications chief of the USS Enterprise in the 1960s “Star Trek” series, was groundbreaking not only for Black actors but for women as well. She later reprised the role in the first six “Star Trek” movies in the ‘70s and ‘80s.

A person of African descent portraying a character in a popular science-fiction television program was such a milestone at the time that “Star Trek” even caught the attention of Dr. Martin Luther King. Nichols related in an interview with Tavis Smiley that she once ran into Dr. King in airport and informed him that she was thinking of leaving “Star Trek” to pursue other opportunities as an actress, singer and dancer. Dr. King told Nichols that he was not only a fan of the show but encouraged her to stay on because it was important for the world to see a Black woman in such a dignified and unconventional role.

Nichols paved the way for African-American actors such as Whoopi Goldberg, Levar Burton and Avery Brooks to star in spinoff series “Star Trek: The Next Generation” and “Deep Space Nine” in the 1980s and ‘90s.

Zoe Saldana. In 2009, Zoe Saldana recreated the role of Uhura in the big-screen remake of “Star Trek.” In what would be a major accomplishment for any actress, Saldana later that same year starred in one of the most successful sci-fi movies of all time, “Avatar.” Saldana provided the voice and movements for Neytiri, a blue alien and love interest of star Sam Worthington.

Laurence Fishburne. By portraying the wise character Morpheus in 1999’s “The Matrix,” Fishburne originated one of the most memorable sci-fi roles by any actor of any race. Jada Pinkett-Smith and Nona Gaye appeared in the second and third installments of the trilogy, 2003’s “The Matrix Reloaded” and “The Matrix Revolutions.”

Tina Turner. Fresh off her comeback with the “Private Dancer” album and the Grammy-winning single “What’s Love Got to Do With It,” Turner took to the big screen in 1985 for “Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome.” Turner starred opposite Mel Gibson in the third installment in the “Mad Max” series. Turner plays Aunty Entity, the ruthless commander of a post-apocalyptic community called Bartertown.

Turner also sang the theme song to the movie, “We Don’t Need Another Hero (Thunderdome),” which earned a 1986 Golden Globe nomination for Best Original Song and a Grammy nomination for Best Female Pop Vocal Performance. The video, in which she appears in a chain mail gown as the character Aunt Entity, also scored a nomination for Best Female Video at the MTV Video Music Awards.

Samuel L. Jackson. Billy Dee Williams opened the door for Jackson to portray Jedi Master Mace Windu in the second “Star Wars” trilogy.
Jackson
said he didn’t know what character he was going to be playing until after he was fitted for his costume, but was happy to play any role just to be part of the “Star Wars” universe.

Like Williams before him, Jackson brought a much-needed dose of diversity to the blockbuster “Star Wars” franchise.

For more information about Williams' appearance at Mid-Ohio Comic-Con, visit Wizardworld.comic/comic-con/mid-ohio-2011