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# Fearless Women in Film

Some of the strongest women we know come to us through the big screen. Here's our rundown of the most courageous characters in movies. [By Jason Teich](#)

## ◀ KATNISS EVERDEEN

In the hellish dystopia of *The Hunger Games* (2012), 16-year-old Katniss Everdeen, played by Jennifer Lawrence in an intense, physical performance, is skilled with a bow and traps game in the forbidden zone to feed her frail sister, Prim. When Prim is chosen for a nationally televised fight to the death, Katniss volunteers to take her place. She defeats one opponent after the next and, in sequels, leads a revolution to overthrow a brutal dictatorship.

## ELLEN RIPLEY

When Sigourney Weaver's iconic character Ellen Ripley makes her deep-space debut in Ridley Scott's classic sci-fi creature feature *Alien* (1979), she's more survivor than hero, as a xenomorph tears the rest of the crew to bits. But when Ripley returns to the heart of darkness in James Cameron's sequel, *Aliens* (1986), she earns her bona fides rescuing terraformers and space Marines alike, en route to becoming cinema's all-time-greatest action heroine.



## ▲ SCARLETT O'HARA

In Victor Fleming's 1939 film adaptation of Margaret Mitchell's hit novel, *Gone With the Wind*, vivacious beauty Scarlett O'Hara, played by Vivien Leigh, is a strong-willed Southern belle who lives at her family's Georgia cotton plantation, Tara. When the Civil War destroys plantation society, Scarlett marries for money and works the fields herself. She's a flawed heroine, but her resourcefulness and resilience hold her family together through tough times.



## RYAN STONE

Rookie NASA mission specialist Ryan Stone, played by Sandra Bullock in Alfonso Cuarón's acclaimed space opera *Gravity* (2013), must fight to survive when her first mission goes haywire. After an errant Russian missile strike kills Ryan's crewmates, she finds herself alone in the deep cold of space with nothing but exploding space stations and fuel-less transports. She has only her own ingenuity and extraordinary instinct to help get her back home.

## ◀ YU SHU LIEN

In Ang Lee's masterpiece *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), Wudang swordswoman and private security head Yu Shu Lien, played by Michelle Yeoh, investigates the theft of a priceless stolen sword and comes face-to-face with two ruthless and skilled adversaries: one, an old enemy; the other, a teen girl. Lien fights for duty, honor and love, but can she stay alive and save both the love of her life and the destructive teenager with whom she so clearly empathizes?





### ► ERIN BROCKOVICH

Brash and brilliant, Erin Brockovich is a force of nature. Julia Roberts's turn as the real-life environmental activist is ferocious and garnered the megastar her only Oscar. In Steven Soderbergh's biopic ***Erin Brockovich* (2000)**, the single mom takes on an energy giant that contaminated the groundwater of a small town, causing widespread illness and death. She almost single-handedly fights an impossible battle on behalf of the downtrodden – and wins.

### ▼ JACKIE BROWN

Blaxploitation star Pam Greer, known for ***Foxy Brown* (1974)**, is back as the title character in Quentin Tarantino's ***Jackie Brown* (1997)**. Street-smart, quick-thinking, fast-talking, Jackie is a survivor who rarely plays on the right side of the law. But this time, she faces execution by a psychopathic arms dealer. If she wants to evade the police and a bullet to the head, she'll need the perfect plan playing all sides against the middle, and the guts to pull it off.



### CLEODEGARIA “CLEO” GUTIÉRREZ

Yalitza Aparicio's Cleo, the hero of Alfonso Cuarón's award-winning ***Roma* (2018)**, is at first glance not heroic at all. She's a maid. She washes, cooks, folds and cleans dog doo. But the true heroism of her soul emerges in the astonishing climax, when her character, Chloe, unable to swim, plunges into a whirling current to rescue her two young wards, solidifying her value and her place in the family once and for all.

### KATHERINE JOHNSON

In Theodore Melfi's 2016 NASA biopic, ***Hidden Figures***, Taraji P. Henson plays the real-life African American pioneer whose calculations were vital to the early space shuttle program. Katherine fights sexism and racism at every turn: her calculations are second-guessed and she must race across the NASA campus to find a “colored” restroom when she needs to pee. Yet thanks to extraordinary talent, she successfully helps oversee the first manned orbit around Earth.



## PRINCESS LEIA

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, Princess Leia, played by the late, great Carrie Fisher, is a revolutionary leader and champion of justice. She survives torture by Darth Vader and helps destroy the Death Star in ***Star Wars* (1977)**. She leads the evacuation of a Rebel base in ***The Empire Strikes Back* (1980)**. In ***Return of the Jedi* (1983)**, she strangles Jabba the Hut and leads the Rebels to victory. How the Resistance can prevail with Leia no longer at the helm is a mystery.

## MARGE GUNDERSON

Brainerd, Minnesota, police chief Marge Gunderson, played by Frances McDormand in an Oscar turn, weaves her way through a web of lies, confronting kidnapers and killers to unravel the truth behind Jerry Lundegaard's kidnapping scheme in the Coen brothers' crime saga ***Fargo* (1996)**. While staving off morning sickness and unwanted sexual advances, our Margie also brings murderer Gaear Grimsrud, of wood-chipping fame, to justice.

## SARAH CONNOR

When we meet Linda Hamilton's Sarah Connor in James Cameron's ***The Terminator* (1984)**, she's a resourceful survivor, at best. Fast-forward to ***Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991)**, and Sarah has been reborn. Living in a mental asylum for the violently insane, she uses her padded cell for weight training. And when her son turns up, she's ready to use her decade of strategizing to protect her child, kill the T-1000 and save the world.

## ▼ HERMIONE GRANGER

A know-it-all witch with heart, she uses fire against a Devil's Snare in ***Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001)**, turns back time to rescue Buckbeak the Hippogriff from death in ***Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004)** and even erases herself from her parents' memory to protect them from Voldemort in ***Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 1* (2010)**. And through it all, Emma Watson's Hermione proves herself a loyal friend and feminist icon.

