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Dedications

Dedicated in loving memory of my wonderful parents:-

Konstantinos (Dino) Christopoulos who took me to see my very first science fiction film in the early 1960s, *The Man With The X-Ray Eyes* (1963)

Rosemary Christopoulos who sat with me after school as I watched on TV episodes the first two doctors of the *Doctor Who* series and insisted on asking me interminable questions about who was who and what was going on! Thanks mum and dad!

The SCI-FI FILM FIESTA eBook series is intended as a salute to the pioneering work of science fiction film makers. May future generations have the privilege of enjoying your work and never stop wondering....*What if?*

Dedicated also to *you*, the reader who appreciates these classic gems from the golden age of sci-fi film-making. It is you who help to keep such films alive for future generations to enjoy

Other eBooks in the Sci-Fi Film Fiesta series:

Volume 1: “Here Be Monsters”

Volume 2: “Into Space”

Volume 3: “Other Worlds”

Volume 4: “Journeys Within”

**Sci-Fi Film Fiesta
VOLUME 5:
“Alien Contact”**

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INTRODUCTION

Following our discovery of the presence of an increasing number of exo-planets beyond our solar system, many people are convinced that we'll soon detect planets with conditions that are suitable for life to exist and thrive. From that we'll then be able to determine that some form of life does in fact exist on one or more of these exo-planets. The question then arises as to whether we'll ever be able to detect the existence of what we understand to be 'intelligent' alien life elsewhere in the universe. I firmly believe that during the course of this century we'll know for certain about one or more of these possibilities.

Our assumptions about the existence and very nature of intelligent alien life will no doubt be defined by our limited experience of what constitutes intelligence, what defines something as being alive, and what elements are required for life to occur and for intelligence to develop. Our experience only extends as far as the conditions prevalent on our own planet, what we understand to be the laws of physics and biology and from what we have gleaned from robotic and remote sensing of various bodies in our own solar system. It's like wandering about the backyard of our homes and extrapolating from what we observe there about what the rest of the world must be like.

Instead of leaping to conclusions, making rash assumptions and succumbing to wishful thinking, it would be better to pose a series of questions about the presence of intelligent life elsewhere in the universe and the possibility of our ever being able to establish contact with such entities:

- Are we perhaps completely alone (and unique) in the universe? Rather a bleak prospect and however unlikely, it should be considered a possibility. Hard to imagine though when you look up at the night sky miles from any city or ponder the star-scapes from the Hubble and James Webb telescopes!
- If life is indeed prevalent throughout the universe, is the human species the only one with what could be recognized as possessing intelligence of the level that enables it to communicate and travel beyond the confines of its home planet? Perhaps there were a completely unique set of circumstances that combined to enable a single intelligent life form to come into being – circumstances that failed to combine in just the right way elsewhere? Seems unlikely, but still a possibility.

- **Accepting that intelligent civilizations developed elsewhere in the universe at various times since its formation, do such civilizations exist within our own time frame, or have they blinked out of existence due to acts of self-destruction or from natural causes, or are in fact yet to emerge? If we accept this scenarios, then it may go some way top explaining why we may have been unable to detect any transmissions from such civilizations or any indications that they exist.**
- **It is assumed that an intelligent alien civilization that wished to communicate with other civilizations would employ mathematics as a language believing that its principles are universal and would be understood. It is also assumed that such a civilization would have developed some form of electromagnetic or radio communication. These are quite reasonable assumptions to make. After all, it is all we have to go on. Just imagine there exists a primitive tribe on earth that uses the 'bush telegraph' or smoke signals to communicate information and that their only means of travel is by foot. What would they know of jets, rockets, WI-fi, digital broadcasting, mobile/cell phone technology, bullet trains, EV cars, luxury liners, Zoom and Skype? Is it we human beings within the context of the universe who constitute such a 'primitive' tribe lacking the means and understanding of how exactly to perceive and establish contact with more advanced civilizations throughout the universe?**
- **Assuming we do eventually mangle to establish contact with an advanced intelligent species, then it is worth considering what could happen when a technologically superior civilization comes into contact with one that is less advanced. Our own history on this planet is replete with the tragic consequences resulting from such kinds of contact. Wholesale slaughter, decimation due to introduced diseases, upheaval and destruction of established religion and culture, theft of land. Such have been the sad consequences of these kinds of cultural contacts and clashes.**
- **Knowing that we are no longer alone could have unexpected impacts on the world's economy with industries grinding to a halt, panic runs on banks as customers withdraw their money and stocks plummeting. This all could result in an escalation of violence, social unrest, political instability, the declaration of martial law and suspension of civil liberties. And don't get me started on toilet paper leaping off the supermarket shelves!**

With the search for extra-terrestrial life and the possibility of contact with an advanced alien species, is it really reasonable for us to assume that an extra-terrestrial civilization would;

- **Share our need for knowledge and understanding of the mysteries of the universe?**
- **Act in a benevolent or altruistic manner towards other species?**
- **Concern itself with our existence?**
- **Possess a higher or more enlightened sense of morality?**
- **Share similar physical, emotional, mental, psychological and other characteristics?**

- Have the ability to communicate in way (form or language) that is in any comprehensible or accessible to us – defying even those of the caliber of the Bletchley Park and Verona code-breakers!

Perhaps the beings from such an alien civilization would possess a cellular or genetic structure more akin to vegetation, reptiles or insects. Would they then view us as being little more than an inferior source of nutrients necessary for their own survival?

It may very well be that “survival” is the prime driving force behind an alien species’ need to seek, reach out and establish contact with other life-forms throughout the universe. We choose to ignore that possibility at our own peril!

Perhaps any civilizations we manage to make contact with may very well wind up questioning our own motives for doing so bearing in mind our track record on just our own planet.

Let’s now see what could happen during a time of alien contact in the form of transmission of messages and visitations to the planet earth.....

The Thing: From Another World (1951)

Excellent!

- Black & White (colorized version created in the early 1980s)
- Running Time: 87 minutes approx...
- Cinematography: Russell Harlan
- Art Direction: Albert S. D'Agostino, John J. Hughes
- Film Editor: Roland Gross
- Original Music: Dimitri Tiomkin
- Story: Written by Charles Lederer based on a short story “Who Goes There?” by John W. Campbell Jr.
- Producer: Howard Hawks
- Director: Christian Nyby (Many people contend that Hawks had more influence in this area than he was given credit for)

Cast & Characters

- Margaret Sheridan as Nikki Nicholson
- Kenneth Tobey as Captain Patrick Hendry
- Robert Cornthwaite as Dr Arthur Carrington
- Douglas Spencer as Ned 'Scotty' Scott
- James Young as Lt. Eddie Dykes
- Dewey Martin as Crew Chief Bob
- Robert Nichols as Lt. Ken 'Mac' MacPherson
- William Self as Corporal Barnes
- Eduard Franz as Dr Stern

- Sally Creighton as Mrs Chapman
- James Arness as 'The Thing'
- Paul Frees as Dr Voorhees
- John Dierkes as Dr Chapman
- George Fenneman as Dr Redding
- David McMahon as General Fogerty

A Taste of the Times (1951)

- The President of the US is Harry S “The Buck Stops Here” Truman.
- Despite peace talks, the Korean War continues.
- The UN condemns the People’s Republic of China as being the aggressor in Korea.
- Seoul falls first to Communist forces and later to US-led UN troops.
- MacArthur threatened the Chinese with an extension of the Korean War if the proposed truce was not accepted. He was soon to be dismissed by Truman.
- Colour television makes its first appearance in the U.S.
- The first transcontinental wireless phone call was made.
- Recording of the song “Rocket 88,” which has been credited as being the first rock ‘n’ roll record.
- UNIVAC (Universal Automatic Computer), the first commercial computer able to handle both numeric and alphabetic data, makes its debut.
- The first nuclear power plant is built by the US Atomic Energy Commission.
- The first H Bomb test was conducted on Eniwetok Atoll.
- Construction of back-yard A-bomb shelters increased.
- Atomic testing began in the Nevada desert.
- Stalin declares that Russia has an atom bomb.
- FBI director J. Edgar Hoover is responsible for a secret nationwide program intended to remove politically suspect employees from their jobs.
- Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were sentenced to death for treason.

AND.....

- Charles F. Blair, Jr. makes the first solo flight across North Pole, the setting for.....

“The Thing! From Another World”

“The Thing” would have to be one of my most favorite science fiction films of all time. It has a way of grabbing you and never letting you go. We’ll see why a bit later, but first let’s take a look at the story line of this fabulous film.....

Scientists at a distant Arctic research station discover a crashed spacecraft buried in the ice. They also discover the frozen pilot (The Thing!) after Captain Patrick Hendry accidentally destroys the vessel with thermite bombs.

After they take the creature back to the research station, he is inadvertently thawed out! The alien terrifies the soldier guarding him and is shot. He then escapes out into the blizzard where it is attacked by a sled dog which rips off the creature's arm.

Dr Carrington suggests that "The Thing" is not an animal but is instead more akin to a vegetable, something like a carrot. Unlike a carrot, though, it subsists on blood! Carrington embarks on a misguided attempt to spawn the creature's offspring using blood. Meanwhile the creature embarks on a murderous rampage throughout the base in its quest for blood.

The female scientist, Nikki suggests that the best and obvious way to destroy a vegetable is to cook it. Methods for hopefully stopping 'The Thing' once and for all are then put into action.

Can this small band of humans in their frozen isolated outpost devise a way of stopping this menace to humanity from another world?

Points of Interest

The dialogue contains conversations that overlap and even run simultaneously. There is a lot of banter between the military characters, including the news reporter Scotty who obviously have a history and are at ease with each other. The result is a natural sounding dialogue between a bunch of guys instead of actors working from a script. These are indeed flesh-and-blood characters.

A hint of the geo-political context of the film is best conveyed when a likely explanation for the reported aircraft crash is that it "could be the Russians. They're all over the Pole like flies."

For the times, we are presented with a refreshingly, well-rounded female character (Nikki) who is nobody's fool and who knows how to negotiate her way through a largely male-dominated domain. Steering her coffee pot she comfortably takes part in the male discussion of their dilemma and offers the most sensible course of action against their vegetable opponent. Her conversation is engaging and her personality and sense of humor both shine through.

"*The Thing*" relies a lot on what the audience doesn't see. Graphic detail is replaced by glimpses and suggestion that lets your mind join the dots and fill in the details using the worst of what your imagination can conjure up. Take the appearances by 'The Thing' character which are deliberately kept short and fleeting and appear indistinct such as the view we have of him as he appears in a doorway with the light behind him. It's what we see from the corner of our eye and what we imagine that often most frightens and shocks us. All of this adds up to a wonderful blend of science fiction and horror.

What else we don't see in its entirety is the alien craft. We know that it causes a magnetic deviation; it maneuvers unlike any natural phenomenon; it has a mass of 20,000 tons of steel; it emits radiation, suggesting some kind of atomic power; it has a tail fin

and is constructed of “probably some new alloy.” Interestingly its magnitude- size and shape- is conveyed by the spacing of the men around the craft’s circumference. Added to this visual clue we have during a poignant pause in proceedings while the camera pans the scene and the enormity of the fact that “we finally got one!” sinks in. We don’t need to fully see the space craft since we can well imagine it based on the suggestive clues that have been presented to us.

The overall mood and tension of *The Thing* is established right at the outset with the opening title, credits and of course the chilling and aggressive music score by Dimitri Tiomkin, interwoven with the eerie and haunting sounds produced by the Theremin. It seems to warn the audience that they are gradually approaching something sinister and dangerous or that “something wicked this way comes.”

“The Thing” character played by James Arness (who later starred in *Gun Smoke*) is more reminiscent of a character from horror fiction, namely, Frankenstein’s monster. Like Dracula, Frankenstein’s monster has become an iconic part of our culture and is synonymous with terror and everything inhuman. “The Thing” character is that and more and this product of our cultural nightmares confirms its true nature as the film progresses.

The film does contain some good action sequences, notably the ‘fire scene.’ With all the kerosene and flames engulfing the set, I couldn’t shake that feeling of something about to go wrong! It was very realistic and I was surprised that no-one ended up being injured.

I feel that one of the most important elements of “The Thing” is its constant tensions, conflicts, clashes and unresolvable or almost irreconcilable elements. The following examples will serve to illustrate this;

The main conflict between the soldiers and the scientists: Initially this conflict is established when the scientists’ innate quest for knowledge by examining the creature is stymied by the military’s need to wait for instructions before proceeding. The military men, however, seem to be quite human, friendly, sentimental, and funny and are very concerned with the importance of survival. The scientists, particularly in the form of the cold and fanatical Doctor Carrington, are portrayed as being less concerned for doing what is best for the human race. Instead knowledge is considered to be more important than lives or even survival. They tend to concern themselves with facts, whereas the soldiers decide and act based on their own and humanity’s survival. Carrington expects obedience from his fellow scientists whereas Captain Hendry and his men tend to cooperate, with the captain relying on his men’s expertise and Hendry providing the necessary leadership and guidance at a time of peril.

Struggle for survival against hostile forces: Set in an isolated arctic lab and surrounded by ice and snow with the hostile forces of nature beating at the door, this vulnerable community must rely on solidarity and unity of purpose to win its death struggle with the hostile threat from another world also beating at its door. Note the cold breath coming from the characters when the heating is cut off. We truly know from that just how cold it is and how much peril they are in not only from the creature, but also from the hostile environment.

Individual and human rights vs. imperatives of national security: Scotty is faced with the prospect of breaking the biggest news story of all time but his potential scoop is thwarted by the military's need to "wait for authority." However, what is the value of determinations made by those in authority? After all, we learn in the film that the 1949 Department of Defense bulletin proclaimed the air force had discontinued further investigations into the existence of UFOs due to the lack of evidence! Really? Times have certainly changed with the recent US government and military admission of the existence of UAPs!

Assumptions & Preconceptions: Can we assume that an extra-terrestrial civilization would share our thirst and love for knowledge? Can we assume that it would act in a benevolent manner towards us or even care about our existence? Can we assume that it would have a higher or more enlightened sense of morality than us? Can we assume that it would share similar physical, emotional and other characteristics? OR Would such a civilization have beings whose cellular structure is closer to vegetation and who may view us as being little more than an inferior source of nutrients necessary for its survival?

Because the creature is a stranger to our world and has "no hair" and lies within the block of ice with open eyes that "look like they can see," should it be assumed that it is evil and dangerous? After all, when it first thawed out it was shot at and had its arm ripped off! Should we then assume that like Frankenstein's monster it deserves our sympathy? It must be kept in mind that despite being "some form of super carrot," this stranger in an unknown land was able to construct a space craft with an unknown form of propulsion! On that basis, it could be assumed that the creature represents a civilization with which we should "return the call." Perhaps science holds the answer....or does it?

Science-saviour of humanity or its destroyer? Scientific inquiry determined that the creature's arm contained no animal tissue, blood or nerve endings. From this it is inferred that the creature itself cannot die in the way we understand it, that it has no emotions and feels no pain. For Carrington this can only mean that the creature is "superior" and is therefore "wiser than we are." His desire to communicate with the creature and to continue to scientifically investigate it (without telling the "others") has disastrous consequences, including the serious wounding of his colleague and the hanging up of two other dead colleagues from beams by the creature. For Carrington, there are "no enemies in science, only phenomena to study" and "knowledge is more important than life." What he fails to grasp is that such attitudes or blind faith in science can blind us to the serious consequences to humanity that can result. As was cynically pointed out in the film, this was the case with the "splitting of the atom."

And so, dear reader, the message from this exceptional film, "The Thing: From Another World," is that it is up to each of us to work together with a unity of purpose and to make sure that we continue to.....

"Watch the skies!"

and

“Keep looking!”

The Day The Earth Stood Still (1951)

An intelligent and thoughtful Film

Cast

- Michael Rennie as Klaatu
- Patricia Neal as Helen Benson
- Billy Gray as Bobby Benson
- Hugh Marlowe as Tom Stevens
- Sam Jaffe as Professor Jacob Barnhardt
- Frances Bavier as Mrs. Barley
- Lock Martin as Gort
- Frank Conroy as Mr. Harley
- Tyler McVey as Brady

Essentially, “The Day The Earth Stood Still” is about a man from space who comes to Earth to warn its inhabitants about the consequences that will befall them should they threaten peace in the universe by extending their nuclear arms technology beyond the confines of planet earth. After spending time with humans, it becomes apparent to him that drastic action must be taken to get humanity to pay attention to his message. He decides, therefore, to stop all machinery on Earth for half an hour as a demonstration of his power.

***Will this demonstration succeed in bringing humanity to its senses?
Will the earth need to be destroyed to ensure the peace and well-being of
the rest of the universe?***

Context

The kind of distrust, fear and hostility that was portrayed in the film is better understood when seen in the context of the times. For instance;

- The dictator Joseph Stalin was still in power in Russia.
- The Soviets were not far from testing their own hydrogen bomb.
- In 1949 China had been taken over by the Communists after a civil war.
- The Korean War was at its height.

There is no mistake about the anti-war sentiments being expressed (and expressed they are) through the character Klaatu's very words when he states that, "the threat of aggression by any group, anywhere can no longer be tolerated. There must be security for all or no one is secure." He speaks from the stance of someone who comes from a place which has put together "an organization for the mutual protection of all planets and for the complete elimination of aggression." This state of affairs is enforced by the creation of "a race of robots" whose "function is to patrol the planets in spaceships.... and preserve the peace....The penalty for provoking their action is too terrible to risk. The result is we live in peace, without arms or armies, secure in the knowledge that we are free from aggression and war, free to pursue more profitable enterprises." At the cemetery Carpenter informs Bobby that where he comes from they don't have any wars. Bobby responds by saying, "that would be a great idea!"

As was pointed out above, the 1950s were a time of fear, suspicion and distrust and the film clearly reflects this. In "The Day The Earth Stood Still," it is suggested by one character that the saucer is really from (where else?) Russia. The TV / radio presenter further expresses this atmosphere of fear through his assurance that "...so far that there is no reasonable cause for alarm. Rumors of invading armies and mass destruction are based on hysteria and are absolutely false. I repeat, they are absolutely false." And what happens soon after the saucer lands? It is surrounded by heavily armed soldiers and the spaceman is then shot by one of them soon after he emerges from the ship, despite declaring, "We have come to visit you in peace and good will." What kind of world has greeted the visitor!? The kind of world that would destroy "... a gift (that we could have used to study) life on other planets."

The pervading sense of fear and insecurity of the times is felt as Klaatu or Carpenter wanders the city and we can hear the urgent and panicked news bulletins coming from the houses he passes. When Klaatu enters a boarding house with a room for rent the occupants of the boarding house don't notice him as they are focused on the TV bulletin where a warning is being given concerning the alien from space being on the loose. We notice that when Klaatu enters, his outline appears in darkness. The others turn to look at him in fear, and their relief is evident when the lights are turned on revealing just a man looking for a room.

The "strange unreasoning attitudes" of the people are further fueled by the media. For example, in one broadcast listeners are told that the spaceman is a "monster" and a "menace from another world" who must be "tracked down like a wild animal."

During a later outside radio broadcast, Carpenter is the only one being interviewed who is capable of accurately commenting on what people should be concerned about, namely "substituting fear for reason." Not surprisingly he is cut off mid-sentence since what he has to say is not what the media wants to hear. Fear and sensationalism and not reason or thoughtfulness sells. Yes, it was a time where according to Carpenter "everyone seems so...." and accurately labeled by Helen "jittery."

Interestingly enough, the film portrays a time that is unimaginable today in terms of attitudes towards personal safety and the safety of loved ones. At one point, Klaatu (alias Carpenter) suggests that Mrs. Benson's young son, Bobby "might show me around the

city.” What mother of today would allow her son to roam around the city with a virtual stranger? We also see a young child who was questioned by the soldiers pursuing Klaatu playing on the streets after dark. Not many parents would feel comfortable with that these days!

At Arlington National Cemetery, Bobby explains to Klaatu, “that’s my father. He was killed at Anzio.” Unfortunately, many boys of his age would’ve been able to say something similar. Too many fathers were away in the army and were killed in war when their sons and daughters were still only babies. We can better understand why this boy takes such a liking to this stranger who is almost like the father he never really had.

Patricia Neal’s single mother character is probably representative of many war widows of the time who were faced with very difficult choices and very few options. She is faced with living at a boarding house and supporting herself and her son on her own. She works as a secretary in an office in an era when women were expected give up their war time jobs to returning servicemen, get married and become stay-at-home mothers. To make matters worse, she could have wound up with a selfish, opportunistic and weak fiancé (Tom Stevens) who wants to get married quickly as a career-advancing selling point and who doesn’t “care about the rest of the world.”

Whether intended or not, one can’t help but see Klaatu as a kind of Christ-like savior figure who holds out to us the promise of our own salvation. He has come here (from up above!) -“I traveled 250 million miles”- to deliver a message of peace. His attempts are rejected by the world’s leaders who are too caught up with their own petty political squabbles (“Our world at the moment is full of tensions and suspicions.”) Klaatu then determines to understand humanity by living among people and adopting the name “Carpenter.” That he is a gifted stranger with acute powers of observation and insight there can be no doubt. Klaatu even has what seems to us advanced healing powers as reported by one physician who stated that Klaatu had cured his bullet wound with a salve he’d brought with him. Klaatu is eventually betrayed by a Judas-like informer (Stevens) who is intent on being “the biggest man in the country” and is killed by the military, only to be resurrected for a time. Sounds roughly familiar?

There appears to be a rather “old testament” dark and vengeful side to the character Klaatu and what he represents. We have a sense of a “salvation OR ELSE!” message being given if humanity doesn’t come to its senses. The kind of power we are dealing with here is evident as Klaatu and Helen are being hemmed in by the military and he states, “I’m afraid of what he (Gort) would do if anything should happen to me. There’s no limit to what he could do. He could destroy the Earth.” The sense of menace to our very survival is so strong that, not only Helen, but we, the audience would “remember those words,” “Klaatu Barada Nikto,” and we wouldn’t hesitate to repeat them back to Gort if anything were to happen to Klaatu!

The message is quite clear: We act foolishly at our own peril and we if we choose to ignore the message of peace, we will fall to an unimaginable and implacable force that will show us no mercy. This force is revealed to the audience in the form of a large indestructible robot equipped with a powerful laser-like beam able to dissolve tanks, cannons or the entire earth. We will be rewarded if we do good and punished if we do

wrong. In short, “your choice is simple: Join us and live in peace or pursue your present course and face obliteration.”

At the Lincoln Memorial, Carpenter is very impressed with the words from the Gettysburg Address on the monument, “That this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the Earth.” For Carpenter, “those are great words. He must have been a great man. ... That’s the kind of man that I’d like to talk to.”

Which leads us to Professor Jacob Barnhardt and those characters like him who represent those respected individuals and groups who pursue the ideals of knowledge and truth and whose minds are open to unimaginable possibilities. By producing such people, past and present, it is as if humanity has demonstrated its innate capacity to strive for and attain something better, whether it be truth, peace or freedom, despite its capacity for self-destruction.

Points Of Interest

Although it worked quite well with “Earth vs The Flying Saucers,” this is one classic science-fiction I would not want to see colorized. It is almost film noir-like in its use of light and shade and camera-work, all of which would be spoiled by any tampering with aspects of its visual presentation.

Bernhard Herrmann’s haunting soundtrack with the use of theremin (actually two theremin instruments and other electronic instruments), combined with images of Gort’s passive and menacing silent presence adds to the film’s chilling and spine-tingling mood and atmosphere.

The flying saucer looked impressive as it landed, along with the way it splits down the center to open.

What an excellent choice in having Michael Rennie play the part of Klaatu! He portrayed the stranger in a strange world role remarkably well. He conveyed the air of high-moral, all-knowing and benevolent visitor, tinged with an undercurrent of darker possibilities very effectively.

The method used of cutting all electricity was “a brilliant idea.” Its selective application fit the criteria of being “dramatic but not destructive.” Get a pen and paper and jot down all the ways your life would be affected during say the course of a day if all electricity was suddenly cut off. Now extend that list to the effects on your local community, then your country and then the entire world. Our means of power and strength is also our weakness.

The best way to appreciate the 1951 version of “The Day The earth Stood Still,” is to watch the 2008 remake starring Keanu Reeves. After enduring this version featuring Keanu Reeves’ wooden performance punctuated by some fairly impressive special effects, you’ll soon see why the original version stands head and shoulders above that effort. The 1951 film holds up very well even in the 21st. Century. It shows that sometimes you can do more with less...

The Man from Planet X (1951)

A worthy first of its type film

Director: Edgar G. Ulmer
Producer: Jack Pollexfen, Aubrey Wisberg
Written by Aubrey Wisberg, Jack Pollexfen
Music: Charles Koff
Cinematography: John L. Russell
Editing: Fred R. Feitshans Jr.
Distributor: United Artists
Running time: 70 minutes
Budget: \$51,000 approx.

Cast

Robert Clarke (John Lawrence)
Margaret Field (Enid Elliot)
Raymond Bond (Professor Elliot)
William Schallert (Dr. Mears)
Roy Engel (Tommy, the Constable)
Charles Davis (Georgie, man at dock)
Gilbert Fallman (Dr. Robert Blane)
David Ormont (Inspector Porter)
June Jeffery (Wife of missing man)
Franklyn Farnum (Sgt. Ferris, Porter's assistant)

Synopsis

(Some spoilers follow below....)

We learn of a discovery made by an astronomer (Professor Elliot) of an unknown planet hurtling through space toward Earth's general location. Prof. Blane informs an American journalist, Lawrence about this, as well as of reports about sightings by "trained observers" of inexplicable objects in the skies. In order to study this rogue planet, Prof. Elliot has set up an observatory on the foggy moors of a remote Scottish island (Bury), with his daughter (Enid Elliot) and Dr. Mears, a former student with a dubious reputation and past.

It seems that the two planets will not actually collide, but "Planet X," will make a very close approach. Prof. Elliot has calculated that the part of the Earth that will be nearest to Planet X at the point of its closest approach will be small island of Bury, situated off the coast of Scotland.

We learn that there is some history between these characters. Elliot was a meteorologist during the war years, and when Lawrence was serving in the Air Force. Elliot supplied Lawrence's unit with information concerning the likely weather conditions they could expect over their targets. Because Elliot owes the American journalist (John Lawrence) a favor, he has invited him to come to the island for an exclusive story. Enid was a teenager with "gawky legs and buck teeth" at the time, and she seems to have had a crush on John. The other scientist, Dr. Mears has a sullied reputation, and served time in jail. We don't find out any specifics, but John thinks Dr. Mears got off too lightly and that he "should've gotten 20 years" for what he had done.

Soon after the reporter's arrival, he stumbles upon a strange metallic rocket-shaped object out on the moors. The object is made of no material that Elliot has ever seen before and he concludes that it is of extra-terrestrial origin with its light material and "precise measurements." Dr. Mears only sees the wealth he can potentially make from it if he can work out what the object is made of and how to synthesize it commercially. He declares that the "man who controls this formula controls the industry of the world!" Far from "speaking metaphorically" I think.

On the way home from dropping John off at an inn where he is staying, Enid's car blows a tire. While walking back to the keep, she sees a strange glow out on the moors. Enid soon discovers a strange space ship and its pilot, a humanoid with a strange, expressionless, immobile "ghastly caricature of a face." Terrified, Enid runs back to the keep, where she tells her father what she saw.

Professor Elliot goes with his daughter to see for himself, and is struck by a ray that can deprive its targets of independent will, causing them to obey any command given to them by anyone. Enid thankfully is able to order her father to follow her home. Mears concludes that the alien represents a "concrete menace" that is "willful" and "hostile." A bit of rationalizing his motives and intentions on his part?

The next day, John Lawrence accompanies Professor Elliot to the alien ship to investigate further. After a potentially hostile encounter, they assist the alien to adjust his stuck breathing regulator valve. The alien then follows them back to the keep where they can hopefully establish communication with each other.

After some failed attempts, Dr. Mears comes up with the idea of using geometry as a form of communication or "mutual basis for understanding." Of course, after the success of his idea, Dr. Mears reveals that he has less than altruistic motives. He is only interested in obtaining information as to the make-up of the new metal compound. The moment he's left alone with the small alien, Mears resorts to committing an act of violence upon him in order to achieve his selfish goal ("to tear out every secret!") of making a fortune from whatever "secrets" the alien might possess and reveal to Mears.

The alien later kidnaps Enid and makes preparations for a full-scale invasion of earth by his species from Planet X when their planet moves within range of Earth. Later it is discovered that the alien is from a dying planet and that his civilization purposely caused their planet to deviate from its orbit.

When Lawrence discovers that the alien and the professor's daughter are gone, Tommy, the village constable declares that others from the village are missing as well. Lawrence convinces the constable to accompany him to the site where the spaceship was located, but they discover that it is no longer there and even Mears himself is missing. With communication to the outside world cut off, they eventually manage get word to Scotland Yard using inventive means. It worked since later on an Inspector and sergeant fly in and are briefed on the situation.....

What will now unfold?

Will this be end for all of us?

What decisions will be made?

Will it be necessary to destroy the spaceship and the alien visitor?

Is the Man from Planet X, on earth just to prepare for a planned invasion?

Have the actions of humanity turned an intelligent and normally benevolent stranger, into our bitter enemy, thereby sealing our doom?

Find out the answers to these and other questions, when you meet.....

THE MAN FROM PLANET X

Points Of Interest

“The Man from Planet X” can be viewed as being a parable on the dangers of greed. The consequences of human greed are laid bare through the actions of the unscrupulous Mears, whose lust for personal gain could have spelled the end of civilization.

“The Man from Planet X” has been credited with being the first of the alien invasion films. There was at that time a move away from stories being driven by the problems associated with the brave new frontier of space flight and the efforts of scientists, governments, private industry and astronauts to overcome them. An era was being ushered in with films that featured the arrival on Earth of alien beings who instead of coming in peace may have come here to have a piece of us or to leave us in pieces!

The film was shot for approximately \$50,000, and I do have to say that it does look pretty cheap. When I first saw the painted backdrops of houses, etc., I groaned at the prospect of the quality of this film matching the quality of its backdrops. I’m glad that I was proved wrong!

Even though the space ship looked a bit like a diving bell, I liked the pulsing lights through the port holes. Together with the fog, the effect was of an evil face full of menace that should be avoided at all costs.

“The Man From Planet X” was shot on sets for the 1948 Ingrid Bergman film, “Joan of Arc.” The Scottish moors setting with the thick fog lends the movie an eerie mood or feel of horror. Adding to this mood, are the suggestive elements whereby what is not

seen but only suggested or implied heightens our sense of dread. For instance, when Lawrence and Enid see a flash in the sky they try to determine how far away the “storm” is by counting the seconds it takes for the clap of thunder to reach them. We know it is not a storm because there is no thunder clap. We only saw the flash illuminated on their faces, but we can use our imagination to join the dots. The shape we arrive at is something not of this Earth!

The keep itself which forms part of the setting, was described by Elliot’s daughter as once being a “defense against Viking raiders.” How ironic when considering what transpires in the film. Who can definitively say that the Earth itself might not one day succumb to the predations of other forms of life and civilizations, the existence of which we have no clue?

Whether or not it is difficult to ascertain the alien's true motives, i.e., planning an invasion from the outset or deciding to do so due to Dr. Mears’ actions, the real point of the film is the nature, actions and motivations of human beings. If we treat strangers from other worlds with fear and suspicion by screaming and running away in horror, and then resort to violence and look for ways to exploit them, then God help the universe should human beings spread out and make contact with other civilizations!

We have the capacity to do good such as Elliot and Lawrence’s attempt to help the Alien when he was in distress and trying to establish communication. Such qualities may help us to avoid potential threats to our existence as a species. Unfortunately, it is those self-destructive aspects of human nature, such as those displayed by Mears, that we have to guard against as the consequences for not doing so could be detrimental to our very survival.

Knowledge of the kind that the characters in the film had might “bring more fear in a world already filled with it,” but surely knowledge of the nature of the forces that can threaten our very existence from both within and without is preferable to ignorance....

Red Planet Mars (1952)

A cerebral film of its time containing some overdone elements

1952: Taste Of The Times

By 1952, daily life was beginning to change for many people in the Western world.

- Television, once a staple of science fiction, was in millions of American homes.
- The skylines of cities were beginning to be punctuated with skyscrapers such as New York’s Lever House.

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