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Any acknowledgement would be greatly appreciated when referencing or distributing material from this eBook.

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”

Volume 5: “Alien Contact”

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SCI-FI FILM FIESTA Volume 8: *BIG BUGS & CRAZY CRITTERS*

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Introduction

Despite the faith we may have in the advancements of human science and in the power of our technology, it seems that Mother Nature somehow manages to find a way to remind us just how insignificant and powerless we are in the face of forces over which we really have little control.

As long ago as the 1950s, enormous advances were being made in the areas of space, computer, transport, military, communications, medical and other technologies. Much of the groundwork for our own modern era was in fact being laid back then. So too were the consequences of such rapid developments, many of which we are still grappling with today.

The possibility of nuclear warfare; human contribution to global warming and climate change; our lives being subjected to constant monitoring, direction and regulation by artificial intelligence and algorithms; pollution and degradation of the natural world. At what point do we pay the price for our desire for convenience and comfort and for our progress and way of life? When do the monsters of our own creation begin to rise up and pay humanity back for its ignorance, arrogance and selfishness?

Not only did people in the 1950s (a time we condescendingly and patronisingly label as being a more naive, conservative and simpler era) have to deal with fears of having their way of life threatened by enemies both from within and without, the sheer pace of change for many individuals must have felt like some kind of looming incomprehensible monster poised to devour the certainties of life. Yes, there was a degree of post-war optimism and rising standards of living but there were also A Bombs to the left! H Bombs to the right! Duck and cover! Damn Commies! Rock 'n Roll Devil's music! Juvenile delinquency and crime! Ah well, at least there was the distraction provided by drive-ins, colour TV, transistor radios, cars with fins and highways, sodas, sundaes and shiny sky-scrapers thrusting ever higher into the sky.

The classic science fiction films from the 1950s in this volume 8 "Big Bugs and Crazy Critters" of the *Sci-Fi Film Fiesta* eBook series, deal with forces of nature going haywire and seeming to strike back at humanity with a veritable menagerie of colossal critters. If humanity is not more careful, it could very well be.....

***The Beginning of the End!
But when all is said and done,
One thing on which you can depend,
It all amounts to a big heap of fun!***



Them! (1954)

*A suspense story
A murder mystery
A horror story
A science fiction story
A first of its kind*

Directed by Gordon Douglas
Produced by David Weisbart
Screenplay: Ted Sherdeman, Russell Hughes
Story by George Worthing Yates
Music: Bronislau Kaper
Cinematography: Sidney Hickox
Editing: Thomas Reilly
Distributed by Warner Bros.

Running time: 94 minutes

Box office: \$2.2 million

Cast

James Whitmore: Police Sgt. Ben Peterson

Edmund Gwenn: Dr. Harold Medford

Joan Weldon: Dr. Patricia 'Pat' Medford

James Arness: Robert Graham

Onslow Stevens: Brig. Gen. Robert O'Brien

Sean McClory: Maj. Kibbee

Chris Drake: Trooper Ed Blackburn

Sandy Descher: The Ellinson Girl

Mary Alan Hokanson: Mrs. Lodge

Don Shelton: Trooper Capt. Fred Edwards

Fess Parker: Alan Crotty

Olin Howland: Jensen

What would cause a little girl to be wandering alone out in the desert? What has happened to have given her sightless eyes that seem to have seen too much? What has stretched the fabric of her psyche to form an unresponsive protective psychological bubble shielding her from horrific memories of real-world horrors too vast for a young innocent mind to grasp?

The answer lies with.....

Something not US

Something dangerous.....

It lies with.....

THEM!

(Some spoilers follow below...)

The Story

Near Alamogordo, New Mexico, Police Sgt Ben Peterson and his partner find a young girl wandering in alone the desert. To Sgt Peterson it “looks like she’s in shock.”

Who Done It?

The two state troopers investigate a trailer situated “12 Miles North Of The Crossroads” that the little girl was staying in with her parents and sibling. The trailer presents a whirlwind scene of destruction and tragedy. From this point on the

police are confronted with “lots of evidence with clues, but (where) nothing adds up.”

Clue 1: Money not taken

Clue 2: Presence of blood

Clue 3: Revolver located

Clue 4: Top of girl's doll's head found sliced off.

Clue 5: “This (side of trailer) wasn't caved in. It was caved out.”

Clue 6: SUGAR

Clue 7: Mysterious print found nearby: “No cat ever lived laid down a print like that.”

Clue 8: The fabric of reality being rent by a strange, unearthly, piercing and pulsating sound that momentarily triggers a reaction from the little girl. The ambulance medic seeks a more earthly and rational explanation for the sound as being the wind which “gets pretty freakish in these parts.”

Gramps Johnson's Store

And so the investigation is carried along with the desert wind to old Gramps Johnson's store. Once again a scene of destruction confronts the two troopers, along with more clues. As they look around, the radio broadcast informs listeners about “strides in the field of medicine” with cholera and sleeping sickness having been wiped out in many areas. Human beings are capable of much good, but as it later becomes apparent they are capable of unleashing great evil upon the world, even unwittingly. And outside Death continues to moan and howl across the desert and through the gashes in the walls of Gramps Johnson's mutilated store.

Clue 1: "Gramps" Johnson is found dead: “Looks like he was dragged and thrown down there.”

Clue 2: The store has also been torn apart from the outside: “This wasn't pushed in; it was pulled out.”

Clue 3: No cash was taken from the register.

Clue 4: A barrel of SUGAR was smashed open. Ironically the tiny ants on the sugar are disturbed by Peterson's fingers.

Clue 5: Gramps' Winchester rifle was fired and is now twisted out of shape.

Peterson leaves Ed Blackburn to guard the store alone as he goes by car to check on the little girl and make a report. Upon hearing the strange, pulsating noise outside, Blackburn cautiously investigates. We are left to imagine the nightmarish horror as Blackburn moves off-screen while off-camera gunshots are fired. The strange pulsating sound speeds up and grows in intensity, and Blackburn's death-scream is carried aloft by the wailing wind.

The Plot Thickens

Further clues emerge when Peterson's superior points out that Gramps was a crack shot and had time to fire all his ammunition at whatever attacked him. Added to this is the coroner's finding as to the cause of Johnson's death detailing a litany of horrific injuries: a broken neck and back, skull fracture, crushed abdomen, and“enough formic acid in him to kill 20 men.”

FEDS & EGG-HEADS

The FBI sends agent Robert Graham to investigate after the bureau is unable to identify the footprint. He, together with myrmecologists from the Department of Agriculture, Dr Harold Medford and Medford's daughter, Dr Pat Medford visit the footprint's site, where Dr Harold Medford conducts an examination of the footprint.

As a way of confirming his suspicions, the senior Dr Medford later tries an experiment (a "jolt") on the Ellinson girl by exposing her to formic acid fumes. She quickly awakens from her catatonic state of "hysteria conversion" and begins screaming and yelling out,

"Them! Them!"

The viewer might well feel that anything that can produce that much terror in one so young must by its very nature be evil and must be eliminated. We have enough examples in the real world and our own time of innocent children having to endure the trauma and horrors of death and destruction from monsters of human-kind's making.

Dr Harold Medford will not at this point reveal his theory as doing so prematurely might "risk a nationwide panic." However, shouldn't people have the right to know about matters that might affect them, instead of being treated like children and wrapped in the security blanket of secrecy?

Ellinson Campsite Encounter

While investigating the Ellinson campsite, Dr Pat Medford is confronted and startled by a giant, eight-foot long scouting ant. The images conjured up in our minds from the clues and the conjecturing up to this point in the film is confirmed by the presence of an impressive-looking Gulliver of the insect world. Pat's screams of terror bring the upholders of the law racing to her rescue brandishing .38 revolvers which with great alacrity they proceed to empty into the six-legged leviathan with little effect. Dr Harold Medford then instructs Peterson and Graham shoot at the ant's antennae thereby blinding it. This they do and Peterson uses his Thompson sub-machine gun to extinguish the ant's life once and for all.

Victory at this impressive skirmish is merely a prelude to a greater battle with the very existence of humanity being at stake. Dr Harold Medford finally reveals his theory that the giant ant was probably mutated by radiation from the first atomic bomb test near Alamogordo 9 years previously. He believes that, "we may be witnesses to a biblical prophecy come true";

"And there shall be destruction and darkness come over creation, and the beasts shall reign over the earth."

(OK, so it's not from the bible. Blah! Blah! Still, it's biblical / Revelations-sounding and adds a bit of a dramatic flourish to what is after all a good screen story. So get over officionado nit-pickers!)

Dangerous Decent

The Medfords, Graham and Peterson, together with Air Force General O'Brien manage to locate the giant ants' nest by helicopter. Dr Medford states his belief that "time is important, more so than (any of them) realize" and he comes up with a plan to destroy the ants in their nest by bombing them during the hottest part of the day, "noon tomorrow." The plan involves using enough heat to drive the ants down into their nest and then drop cyanide gas to kill them.

After an impressive display of bazooka-firing at the ants' nest opening, poison gas bombs are then tossed into the nest. After the obligatory 1950s-style, "this is no place for you or any other woman" followed by the retort, "someone with scientific knowledge has to go" hassle, General Graham, Peterson and Dr. Pat Medford descend into the nest to kill any surviving ants.

Deep inside the nest, we witness an impressive display of the use of flame throwers and the depiction of giant ants tunnelling into the corridor. Equally impressive is Pat's commanding and authoritative tone of voice as she orders the others to "Burn it! I said, burn it! Burn everything!" Who would dare argue? Ogle and patronize all you want Ben and Robert, this lady knows what's what and takes charge-get used to it!

The Beginning Of The End Of.....

It appears that two other queen ants have hatched and along with winged male ants have left to establish new colonies. Dr Harold Medford believes that "we haven't seen the end of THEM. We all had a close view of what may be the beginning of the end of us." The dire nature of the emergency is repeatedly reinforced by Dr Harold Medford when he states that "not a police force in the world can handle the panic" that would result from public disclosure. He believes that the ants' 50 million years' worth of evolution have bestowed on them the kind of industry, social organisation and savagery that "makes man look feeble." Dr Medford can only conclude that "man as the dominant species on earth will be extinct within a year." In order to avoid generating panic, the government soon launches an investigation of any reports of unusual activity, including sightings of "flying saucers."

Meanwhile, a giant queen has managed to hatch her brood in the hold of a freighter, SS Viking, heading to South America. The giant ants attack the ship's crew and only a few survivors manage to escape and are rescued. The freighter is later sunk by US naval power.

Further reports lead the investigators to a rail yard with a smashed boxcar minus its 40 ton cargo of sugar purloined by the six-legged kleptomaniacs with a sweet tooth. Next, they pay a visit to a state psychiatric hospital in Brownsville, Texas and interview a pilot who swears that while flying his small plane he almost collided with three UFOs "shaped like ants." Agent Graham while believing his story, requests that "the government would appreciate it if he were kept here" In other words, to have his civil and legal rights violated by being forced to remain hospitalized until further notice. An act worthy of any Soviet or Chinese Communist government of the time!

Information from an alcoholic in a Los Angeles hospital drunk ward together with the body of a mutilated man is connected to a report of a missing man and his two young sons. This leads the investigators to determine that the man had been flying a model airplane with his sons near the hospital in close proximity to the Los Angeles River and that he was killed by the ants.

*With martial law and a curfew declared for Los Angeles, the hunt is on
to see;*

If the two young boys can be saved!

If the ants' nest can be destroyed before any other ant escapes!

If the world as we know it can be prevented from being destroyed by.....

THEM!

Points Of Interest

The film "Them!" reflected Cold War era fears and concerns about the effects of nuclear technology on our planet and human civilisation. In this case, the effects are manifested in the form of creatures being exposed to radiation and growing to unnatural sizes. The film was the first of the "big bug" movies whose lineage includes "Tarantula," "Earth vs. The Spider," "Beginning of the End" through to "Alien" and "Starship Troopers."

The film's opening title was printed in a vivid red and blue against a black and white background which leaps out at the audience and gives the opening of the film a strong dramatic impact.

When the film began production it was originally intended to be in 3-D and Warner Colour. During pre-production when it was time to shoot the 3-D test, the 3-D camera rig malfunctioned and no footage could be filmed. It was consequently decided that the colour and 3-D aspects of the production were to be scrapped. The film was to be shot in black and white and widescreen, but even the widescreen format was scrapped. The opening titles and the flamethrower shots aimed directly at the camera are the only remaining camera set-ups for 3-D in the film.

Among the many features that make this film work include:

- **Build up of suspense:** You would have noticed that it is not until quite well into the film that the giant ants make their appearance. A great deal of mystery and suspense is generated before the ants appear on screen. We hear the ants high pitched, pulsating sounds and see their carnage long before we actually see THEM!
- **The impressive performance of Sandy Descher** playing the role of the little girl traumatized and terrified out of her wits.
- **The humorous scenes involving Dr. Medford** played by Edmund Gwenn. For instance, trying to communicate with his daughter's helicopter using radio headphones and fumbling the "over" protocol. Edmund Gwenn is perfectly cast as the kindly, eccentric and absent-minded professor.

- The mechanical giant ants, even without the benefit of CGI technology, looked quite impressive and menacing and were quite a special effects achievement for the time. They were constructed and operated by concealed technicians under the supervision of Ralph Ayers. The giant ants were purple-green in colour. At least we didn't just have magnified shots of real ants doing ant things and being passed off as monsters.

You may have noticed that there are similarities between "Them!" and movies such as James Cameron's, " Aliens" (1986.) which featured an orphaned girl "Newt" wandering around a base in shock; an almost hostile and windy setting; passageways with danger lurking around the next turn; alien creatures armed with deadly acid; egg- laying queens and hatchery chambers and lots of flame-throwers! I guess modern Sci-Fi blockbusters owe a great deal to such a well-acted, frightening, and engaging 1950s progenitor film as "Them!"



Tarantula (1955)

Jack Arnold's well-crafted science fiction classic

Directed by Jack Arnold

Produced by William Alland

Screenplay by Robert M. Fresco, Martin Berkeley

Story by Jack Arnold

Based inspired by "No Food for Thought" (teleplay, Science Fiction Theatre series, May 14, 1955) by Robert M. Fresco

Music by Herman Stein, Henry Mancini

Cinematography: George Robinson

Edited by William Morgan

Distributed by Universal Studios

Running time: 81 minutes

Box office: \$1.1 million (US)

Cast

Leo G. Carroll as Prof Gerald Deemer

John Agar as Dr Matt Hastings

Mara Corday as Stephanie Clayton

Nestor Paiva as Sheriff Jack Andrews

Ross Elliott as Joe Burch

Edwin Rand as Lt. John Nolan

Raymond Bailey as Townsend

Hank Patterson as Josh

Bert Holland as Barney Russell

Steve Darrell as Andy Andersen

1955: A Taste Of The Times

Scientific & Technological Advances

- The space race is on for real between Cold War rivals USA & USSR
- First pocket transistor radios become available
- The Salk polio vaccine receives full approval by the Food and Drug Administration.
- The first nuclear-generated electrical power is sold commercially, partially powering the town of Arco, Idaho.
- American cytogeneticist Joe Hin Tjio discovers the correct number of human chromosomes, forty-six.
- Narinder Kapany (England) develops fibre optics.
- Owen Chamberlain and Emilio Segrè discover the antiproton, a form of antimatter.
- Severo Ochoa at NYU synthesizes DNA- and RNA-like molecules.
- TV remote control becomes public
- Microwave oven invented
- Felker and Harris program TRADIC, the first fully transistorized computer. It contained nearly 800 transistors instead of vacuum tubes. Transistors enabled the machine to operate on fewer than 100 watts, or one-twentieth the power required by comparable vacuum tube computers.
- UHF television is developed

(Spoilers Follow....)

***A tarantula injected with a special nutrient formula...
escapes from a scientist's laboratory...
and grows into a 100-foot monster...
that rampages through the Arizona countryside!!!!***

A scene of barren desolation punctuated only by the mournful Arizona desert wind and the aerial winged seekers of death circling overhead above a staggering figure of unnatural deformity. This figure in its final death throes has seemingly been coughed up by the desert in disgust. The scene of tragedy is somewhat rendered comical as the figure is about to meet its "Maker" (whoever that may be) in the middle of the desert clad only in pyjamas!

This mysteriously deformed man turns out to be biological research scientist Eric Jacobs whose dead body is soon found in the desert. Dr Matt Hastings, a family doctor from the town of Desert Rock, is called in to examine the body. Jacobs worked with Prof Gerald Deemer who has been conducting mysterious experiments at an isolated mansion near the town.

Dr. Matt Hastings is baffled by the cause of Eric's death. Jacob's distorted features suggest that he was suffering from acromegaly, a disorder of the pituitary gland that normally takes years to develop but in Jacob's case seems to have progressed in a matter of only a few days. Hastings can't understand why he has deteriorated so rapidly. Dr Hastings requests that he be given permission to perform an autopsy to

learn why Jacobs' face is so distorted. This is refused on the grounds that Dr Gerald Deemer already signed the death certificate and there is no indication that Jacobs' death was the result of foul play. Professor Deemer also insists that Jacobs was suffering from acromegaly and refuses to authorize an autopsy.

Prof Deemer's comments give us an insight into his thinking and are made more poignant as events unfold. At one point he observes that "these things (aches, pains and bodily wear and tear) happen as you get older." He also declares that as a physician one can feel helpless knowing what is wrong while not being able to do anything about it.

Matt Hastings is puzzled with the mysterious disease and decides to investigate acromegaly further.

Acromegaly

Taken from Ancient Greek *ἄκρος* akros "extreme" or "extremities" and *μεγάλος* megalos "large") acromegaly is a condition that most commonly affects adults in middle age and can result in severe disfigurement, complicating conditions, and premature death if left unchecked. Its slow progression makes the disease hard to diagnose in the early stages and it is frequently missed for years until changes in external features, especially of the face, become noticeable. Acromegaly is often associated with gigantism.

Deemer has been conducting experiments on animals using an atomic isotope to create a super food nutrient with the aim of feeding the world's increasing population. He has injected this nutrient (type 3Y) into lab animals, which have grown at astonishing rates. Using simple but quite effective special effects we see an enormous guinea pig after only 13 days treatment and a caged tarantula many times its normal size after 22 days treatment. Notice how its size and rapid rate of growth is emphasized by the visual juxtaposition with its normal-sized counterpart.

Science: providing a potential solution for an impending problem, in this case a future of food shortages for humanity due to human population growth outstripping food production. The solution: to create a viable replacement for food and prevent future global starvation. But what about unforeseen consequences?

While science strives to find solutions to problems, it can inadvertently create even greater unforeseen problems. (Such concerns form part of the fears surrounding modern day scientific developments such as genetically modified food and crops.) Hastings learns that the experiments proved to be successful in that some animals were able to thrive and grow exclusively on the nutrient without any food. However, other animals have died after receiving injections of the nutrient, and as we have seen and are about to see, other animals have kept growing to gargantuan proportions with drastic implications for human beings.

Hastings also learns that the cause of Jacobs' death was his impatience to see if the latest batch of the nutrient would sustain humans. It was his act of injecting himself with the nutrient which resulted in his advanced acromegaly and his subsequent rapid death. Deemer does not reveal that Jacobs also injected his research assistant, Paul Lund, with the same nutrient.

After Hasting leaves, the now deformed Lund appears, attacks Deemer and runs amok destroying part of the lab. As a result of this rampage, the lab catches fire and the glass of the tarantula's cage is shattered by Lund who then injects the unconscious Deemer with the nutrient.

During the struggle, the tarantula escapes the lab unnoticed. Lund then staggers, collapses and dies. Deemer soon regains consciousness, grabs a fire extinguisher, and puts out the fire.

Deemer, intending to continue his work without questions or objections being raised, buries Lund's body without informing the authorities. As he is concealing all traces of the grave, the research monkey suddenly jumps from the side of the screen onto the Professor's back in a tried and true shock tactic often used by director Jack Arnold. We will again see the little monkey perched on Deemer's back, neck and shoulders in the film. It almost stands as symbol of the much larger monkey that Deemer will have on his back as a result of his course of action.

Enter Stephanie "Steve" Clayton!

Stephanie "Steve" Clayton arrives in town to work with Dr Jacobs. She has signed on to assist in the lab as part of her master's degree program. After being told that she will have to wait a couple of hours for the only taxi driver in town to return and drive her out to the lab, she winds up accepting a ride from Dr Hastings, who also happens to be headed there.

After Hastings and Steve arrive at Deemer's house, the Professor pretends that the lab fire was an accident due to an equipment malfunction. He goes on to explain how he is making the nutrient using the power of the atom to bind the solution. His aim is to produce a non-organic food concentrate to meet the demands of an ever increasing world population from 2 billion people to a projected 3 billion in 1975.

Deemer's figures for the year 2000 show how thinking about future population trends greatly underestimated population growth. Present day food shortages are often a function of unequal distribution combined with natural and man-made causes (political corruption and mismanagement, war etc.) What we produce, where we produce and the way we produce our food will need to be reconsidered in the very near future, particularly in the face of global climate change. Science and the genetic manipulation of food resources will loom large in the global consideration of food production. One problem for humanity has been (as stated by Matt), "how many of us look that far into the future?"

Shape Of Things To Come

Events are foreshadowed as the camera zooms in on Deemer's deformed hand, added to the fact that we know what had happened to Jacobs and Lund and Steve's observation that there are "so many things to take into account" *before there can be tests on humans*. (An important consideration these days in terms of finding a successful vaccine for Covid-19!)

Steve and Matt get to know each other better as Matt takes her around the town and out to take in the desert scenery. For Matt the desert is a focus of nature whereby everything that swam or crawled "left its imprint." As for matters deemed to be

creepy, “the unknown always is.” As if right on cue, a pile of rocks come crashing down on to the spot where they were sitting.

By the pricking of my thumbs something unknown, big and creepy this way comes!

The creepiness is added to by director Arnold’s visual shock tactic when the Sherriff’s hand suddenly darts from the side of the screen and touches Matt’s shoulder as he looks around. Add to that, is the later shot of a giant black silhouette of the tarantula and the point of view shot as the spider bears down on the terror-stricken horses and rancher.

It turns out that the something unknown is devouring the local ranchers’ horses, leaving only their skeletal remains, “like peeling a banana.” Not even footprints or blood have been left behind. Not only that, but two human beings appear to have been added to the mysterious something’s menu in what at first sight appears to have been a car accident.

The only clue as to what happened consists of large pools of what seems to be some kind of venom next to the stripped skeletons and near the car accident. After what seems to be a disturbing practice of handling and seeming to taste the unknown substance, Hastings takes some of the material in for a test at the Arizona Agricultural Institute.

The lab analysis determines that the mysterious substance is insect venom and more specifically, venom from a tarantula but in an enormous quantity.

Roll The Film

At the Institute Matt and the audience are treated to an educational film in which we learn that tarantulas;

- Main enemy is the spider wasp
- Move fast
- Can back down a rattlesnake
- Are flesh eaters
- Predigest their food
- Can live for 25 years
- Like all God’s creatures, “has a function in their own world.”

Joining The Dots

Steve meanwhile, begins to notice disturbing changes in Dr Deemer's appearance and demeanour. His face is gradually becoming distorted and his mood has become more sinister and darker as the acromegaly continues to manifest itself.

Hastings learns that one of the professor's test animals was a tarantula, which was presumed destroyed in the fire. Deemer also confesses to Matt and Stephanie that Paul went on a rampage in the lab and caused the tarantula to escape. Hastings is able to make the connection to the recent disturbing local events.

Armed with this knowledge, Hastings pleads with the sheriff to obtain explosives in order to destroy the creature that has been killing livestock and humans.

As Stephanie is studying in her bedroom at night, the giant tarantula approaches Deemer's house. Once at the house, the tarantula observes Stephanie through her bedroom window and then sets about wrecking the house. A terrified Stephanie attempts to save Deemer, but the tarantula kills him before she can save him.

Matt drives up to the house as it collapses and is just in time to rescue Steve from the Tarantula's onslaught. They both drive off into the desert, notifying the State Police and the Sheriff, who issues orders to evacuate the town.

Efforts on the part of the sheriff and the highway patrol to slow the monstrous creature with machine guns as it follows the desert road toward the town fail completely. Another effort to kill the monster with dynamite also fails with the monster happily traipsing right through the blast

"Dog gonnit, I wish we had some nitro!!!" (sheriff)

With the tarantula bearing down on the town, jets are scrambled from a nearby Air Force base. The fighter planes with Clint Eastwood as jet squadron leader (*"Hey hairy legs, "...you've gotta ask yourself a question: "Do I feel lucky?" Well, do ya, punk?"*) soon approach. They fire rockets and drop bombs on the monster as it reaches Desert Rock. When that has no effect, they unleash napalm, incinerating the tarantula.

Points Of interest

The special effects of Clifford Stine even after 60 years are still quite impressive with the images of the giant spider being effectively and realistically incorporated into the shots by using film footage of a real tarantula being blown up and rear projected. Models were used only for close-ups and the final shots of the creature on fire, Note also the realistic destruction of Demmer's house by the giant spider as well as the excellent make-up job on Jacobs and Deemer.

Apparently a real tarantula named "Tomorrow" was used in the film.

Take note of the realistic depiction of '50s small town America which makes the characters seem all the more real to the viewer.

Leo G. Carroll's style of acting serves to make him a most convincing scientist. His manner and delivery of dialogue suggests something of the absent-minded scientist totally absorbed in his work.

"Tarantula" was produced by William Alland who also produced "Creature From the Black Lagoon" and "It Came From Outer Space", both films featured in this book. It was directed by Jack Arnold who also directed those two films. See also the "Tribute to Jack Arnold" in this book.

The movie was filmed in and around the rock formations of "Dead Man's Point" in Lucerne Valley California, often used as a location for early western films. The town of Desert Rock, Arizona is fictional.

Spot the discrepancies between what is depicted on the poster and what was seen on and known from the film.

Tarantula Fact File

(Aphonopelma chalcodes)

Tarantulas;

- Are the world's largest spiders. They range in size from 4.5 to 11 inches (11.4 to 28 centimetres) in length or about the size of a dinner plate
- Are arachnids and not insects and consist of more than 800 species
- Live mostly in the tropical, subtropical, and desert areas of the world, with the majority found in South America
- Are not threatening to humans. Their venom is milder than a honeybee, and though painful, their bites are not fatal
- Can live (female) 30 years or longer in the wild.
- Are quite docile and rarely bite people.
- Defend themselves by throwing needle-like, barbed hairs at their attackers.
- Ambush small prey at night, by stealthily sneaking up on a potential meal and then pouncing
- Can be fatally injured if they fall or are dropped due to rupture of their exoskeleton
- Have retractable claws on each leg, much like a cat
- Can regenerate lost legs
- Have been around for millions of years and have not changed much in that time
- Do not spin webs but use their silk to make doors or soft walls for their burrow
- Live (many species) in burrows underground
- Are nocturnal hunters that eat insects, beetles and grasshoppers. The Goliath Bird-eating Tarantula species will eat larger prey, such as, lizards, snakes, frogs, bats and small birds. (No humans on the menu-yet!)
- Worst enemy is the Spider-Wasp (also people)
- Are often caught as pets and in some countries are eaten

Who should be more afraid of whom?



Beginning of the End (1957)

An enjoyable limited budget "big bug" movie with a better than average cast

1957: A Taste of the Times

Live Theatre & Musicals

The musical "West Side Story," by Leonard Bernstein and Jerome Robbins opens on Broadway

Popular books, plays & publications

- "The Cat in the Hat" by Dr. Seuss (Long before 'Cancel Culture' moved in to ban several the books!)
- "From Russia with Love" by Ian Fleming
- "The Guns of Navarone" by Alistair MacLean
- "Long Day's Journey into Night" by Eugene O'Neill wins the Pulitzer Prize for drama
- Viking Press publishes "On the Road" by Jack Kerouac who typed out the manuscript in 20 days on a single roll of teletype paper

Popular music

- The Banana Boat Song - Harry Belafonte
- Fats Domino - I'm Walkin'
- Elvis Presley - All Shook Up
- Ricky Nelson - Be-bop Baby
- That'll Be the Day - Buddy Holly and the Crickets
- Larry Williams - Short Fat Fanny
- Elvis Presley - Loving You
- Jim Lowe - The Green Door
- Pat Boone - Love Letters In The Sand
- Billy Williams - I'm Gonna Sit Right Down And Write Myself A Letter
- Diamonds - Little Darlin'
- Fats Domino - Blueberry Hill
- Tab Hunter - Young Love
- Fats Domino - Blue Monday
- Jimmy Dorsey - So Rare
- Elvis Presley - Love Me Tender
- Pat Boone - Don't Forbid Me
- Steve Lawrence - Party Doll
- Guy Mitchell - Singing The Blues
- Chuck Berry Rock and Roll Music
- Sonny James - Young Love
- Little Richard - Jenny Jenny
- Elvis Presley - Too Much

- Pat Boone - Bernardine
- Perry Como - Round And Round
- Little Richard - Keep a Knockin'
- Everly Brothers - Bye Bye Love
- Chuck Willis - C.C. Rider
- Debbie Reynolds - Tammy
- Gene Vincent - Lotta Lovin'
- Buddy Knox - Party Doll
- Fats Domino - Valley of Tears
- Elvis Presley - Teddy Bear
- Pat Boone - Remember You're Mine
- Elvis Presley - Jailhouse Rock
- Guy Mitchell - Rock-a-Billy
- Marty Robbins - A White Sport Coat (And A Pink Carnation)
- Larry Williams - Bony Maronie
- Everly Brothers - Wake Up Little Susie
- Rusty Draper - Freight Train
- Sam Cooke - You Send Me
- Jimmie Rodgers - Honeycomb
- Chuck Berry - School Day
- Jerry Lee Lewis - Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On
- Paul Anka - Diana

Directed by Bert I. Gordon

Produced by Bert I. Gordon

Written by Fred Freiberger, Lester Gorn

Music by Albert Glasser

Cinematography Jack A. Marta

Edited by Aaron Stell

Distributed by Republic Pictures, Peter Rodgers Organization

Running time: 76 minutes

Cast

Peter Graves as Dr Ed Wainwright

Peggie Castle as Audrey Aimes

Morris Ankrum as Gen. John Hanson

Than Wyenn as Frank Johnson

Thomas Browne Henry as Colonel Sturgeon

Richard Benedict as Corporal Mathias

James Seay as Captain James Barton

“Beginning of the End” is about an agricultural scientist and entomologist, Dr Ed Wainwright who is conducting research into the growth of gigantic vegetables. Somehow locusts have managed to come into contact with radioactive elements used in Wainwright’s research and as a consequence have grown to enormous size. The locusts are poised to attack the nearby city of Chicago unless some way is found to stop them.

(Spoilers follow.....)

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