

INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS

Invasion of the Body Snatchers is a thrilling, disturbing classic science fiction/alien film from veteran producer Walter Wanger. It was originally based upon a **three-part serial story** written by Jack Finney that appeared in Colliers Magazine in late 1954, and then in 1955 was rendered into an expanded novel, **The Body Snatchers**. The screenplay, written by Daniel Mainwaring, was aided, with uncredited scriptwriting and dialogue direction by Sam Peckinpah. The psychological sci-fi film was re-made three times.

A quintessential, **black and white B-picture**, it was precisely executed and packed with action by director Don Siegel, plus a scary musical score from Carmen Dragon. The subtle, low-budget film (at about **\$420,000**) is very effective in eliciting horror with slow-building tension, even though there are no monsters (just indestructible plant-like pods), minimal special effects, no violence in the take-over of humans, and no deaths. The film had a few preliminary titles: Sleep No More, Better Off Dead, and They Came From Another World before the final choice was made.

The **theme** of the cautionary, politicized film was open to varying interpretations, including paranoia toward the spread of a harmful ideology such as socialistic Communism, or the sweeping mass hysteria of McCarthyism in the 1950s and blacklisting of Hollywood, the spread of an unknown malignancy or virulent germ, or the numbing of our individuality and emotional psyches through conformity and group-think. Yet its main theme was the alien dehumanization and take-over of an entire community by large seed pods (found in basements, automobile trunks, a greenhouse, and on a pool table) that replicated and replaced human beings. And it told of the heroic struggle of one helpless but determined man of conscience, a small-town doctor (McCarthy), to vainly combat and quell the deadly, indestructible threat.

This relentlessly haunting film received no Academy Award nominations. It was originally released at 80 minutes, and then reissued at 76 minutes in 1979. The prologue and its unconvincing matching epilogue were not in the original shooting of the film and were later tacked on. Allied Artists wanted to soften the paranoia of the original and provide a more hopeful ending with the framing device. Executives at the studio also forced Wanger to release the film in SuperScope - an anamorphic widescreen process that altered the original 1.33:1 ratio that the cinematographer had used.

Director Joe Dante, an ardent aficionado of 1950's science fiction and monster films would, among other genre films, reference *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* frequently.

Filmsite LLC. (n.d.). *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956). Retrieved from filmsite:

[https://www.filmsite.org/inva.html#:~:text=The%20theme%20of%20the%20cautionary,malignancy%20or%20virulent%20germ%20\(read](https://www.filmsite.org/inva.html#:~:text=The%20theme%20of%20the%20cautionary,malignancy%20or%20virulent%20germ%20(read)

GODZILLA

Godzilla is viewed by many as the beginning of both the **kaiju** genre (movies featuring giant creatures) and the start of **tokusatsu** (live-action work that uses a lot of special effects) in film. It's not just the impact of the franchise by itself that matters, but its massive influence on other works is key in understanding why it's so beloved 60+ years later.

Although there are key aspects that have stayed consistent about the character, its usage has not. Beyond fans having particular favorites among different eras of Japan, there is a distinction between the character and its portrayal. And I don't just mean that when it comes to the difference between Haruo Nakajima's costumed portrayal of the big monster and CGI.

It's only appropriate that a conversation about this starts with the original film that debuted in 1954, *Godzilla*. In stark contrast to the slapstick and goofy nature of the many movies that followed it, *Godzilla* (1954) is a bleak metaphor for the **threat of nuclear weapons** from Japan's perspective, which was all too familiar at the time.

The monster *Godzilla* does not portray a hero or defender of the earth as he would later, but instead acts as a violent force of nature. It even ends on a somber note, with the monster dead, but the main characters worried that another of his kind will appear again if nuclear testing continues. This ending message is transparent in its symbolism.

This **symbolism** can similarly be seen with 2016's *Shin Godzilla*. Although other *Godzilla* films in-between would feature serious themes, none come as close to the original as *Shin Godzilla*.

Inspired by then recent disasters in Japan, the film is a realistic look into the politics of dealing with disasters. It's incredibly dry, especially by the standards of previous *Godzilla* films, and yet when the titular monster appears it feels like a horror movie.

Chuan, S. (2020, December 20). From 1954 to King of the Monsters: The Themes of *Godzilla*. Retrieved from OTAQUEST: <https://www.otaquest.com/themes-of-godzilla/>

THAT THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD

The Thing From Another World also showed that a monster didn't have to be a mutated animal, or an alien with a ray-gun. While still humanoid in appearance, the Thing being made of plant material, having seed pods that could be hatched using mammalian blood was a fresh idea at the time. Genre fans can probably see the germ of the idea for stories like Day of the Triffids or Little Shop of Horrors.

Probably the most interesting theme of the film however is the fact that the military is working for the good of mankind and the scientists appear reckless and thoughtless. I say this as a child of the 70s and 80s, who's films taught me that the military and the government were evil, and scientists were trying to save us. Seeing this film turned everything topsy-turvy! Besides the quote above, Dr Carrington makes another more chilling exclamation that "knowledge is more important than life," when Hendry plots to kill the Thing.

Seeing scientists in reckless pursuit of the truth without context is one of the more chilling aspects of the film, for an adult. It speaks to the question that many a horror film with 'mad science' does, just because we can do something, should we? This attitude painted by screenwriter Charles Lederer probably stems from the backlash of the atomic bombings from the end of World War II some 6 years prior. This fallout to the roles scientists played in the destruction caused by atomic testing is introduced early in the film when one character asks if someone else knows Dr. Carrington. "The fellow who was at Bikini?" That's Bikini atoll, as in the island that was a nuclear testing site between 1946 and 1958.

Carrington takes it upon himself to see what science can learn, believing that the understanding is greater than himself. He is willing to sacrifice himself for a greater good, whether that ideal is really for the benefit of mankind. As one of the Air Force pilots points out, one of these creatures loose in a populated area could decimate the population of the Earth. But the film doesn't completely shut Carrington down. In his final speech, Scott informs the reporters that "Doctor Carrington...is recovering from wounds received in the battle," giving him a pass on his megalomania, and hoping, potentially, that he has seen the error of his ways, as should the audience.

Jay, J. (2019, October 5). THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD (1951) | SCI-FI SATURDAYS. Retrieved from retrozap: <https://www.retrozap.com/the-thing-from-another-world-1951-sci-fi-saturdays/#:~:text=That%20theme%20is%20the%20isolated,%2C%20and%20of%20course%2C%20Alien>

DIABOLIQUE (1955)

The lyrically mesmerising beauty of this film has to do with our witnessing just how the hare outfoxes the fox. In other words, how the fox outfoxes itself. Just how much the tables are turned on the hunter by its prey; this is the staple technique of this wonderful film. Don't think that I will spoil it for you, for even if one wanted to, Les Diaboliques' plot is far from easy to give away. Besides, when this magnificent film was first released, the director and the production company virtually begged moviegoers not to reveal the ending. I will honour this request.

At its core, Les Diaboliques is a story of avarice, a love triangle and the degree of evil craftiness that fuels each. Yet it is not a simple task to figure out just who is the most heinous character in this tale of moral torment. The psychological suspense of the film forces us to enter into the mind and soul of the characters. Les Diaboliques is not an experience for the lazy. Evil is subtle. The most effective perpetrator is always found quietly plotting and calculating behind the scenes. The writers of Les Diaboliques capture the meaning and import of evil like few films in this genre ever have.

Putting plot elements aside, Les Diaboliques is a three-dimensional study of evil, and how this always involves doing the devil's work and looking good while doing it. Les Diaboliques' linear plot moves along seamlessly, like a taut murder mystery. There can be no doubt that the film's effective screenplay is partly responsible for its critical success.

One of the lasting mysteries of Les Diaboliques is: Just who are "the devils?" Are all three main characters devils, or only M. Delasalle and Horner? Don't look for Clouzot's coherent direction and exquisitely imaginative screenplay to give anything away.

Source: <https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2011/cteq/les-diaboliques/>

By substituting mystery elements with horror-themed subject matter, *House of Wax* offers a fresh and compelling update on the premise for Michael Curtiz' aforementioned *Mystery of the Wax Museum*. One significant change, for example, involves the character of Professor Henry Jarrod (known as Ivan Igor in the original story), the disfigured countenance of whom is revealed quite frequently in this production, adding an obscene quality to many otherwise unremarkable murder sequences. Also worth noting is that Jarrod stalks, preys upon, and disposes of his victims while cloaked in ominously black attire—an aspect that, when accentuated by the eerie musical arrangement of composer David Buttolph, further contributes to the haunting atmosphere embodied within this film.

Though likely captivating to a typical 1950s audience, the 3-D gimmicks featured in *House of Wax* occasionally detract from the flow of Crane Wilbur's narrative. Particularly distracting are the antics of a barker played by Reggie Rymal, whose implicit violation of the fourth wall (i.e. shooting a paddleball in the viewer's direction) is overemphasized to the point of absurdity.

Initially a kind, gentle man with an appreciation for beauty seldom recognized in the modern art world, Professor Jarrod—upon transforming into a hideous creature, both physically and internally—develops an unhealthy obsession with the macabre, even going so far as to employ actual corpses while molding sculptures for his second wax museum. Possibly a commentary on how the greed, callousness, and lack of compassion exhibited by others can corrupt even the most inspired of men, the plight of Professor Jarrod manages to evoke sympathy and generate understanding from those of a sensitive disposition—a trademark of every well-written monster movie narrative.

The quintessential Price offering, *House of Wax* deserves the utmost praise for its ghoulish make-up effects, atmospheric tension, and strong performances from a talented cast (including a young Charles Bronson in the role of Igor, mute assistant to Professor Jarrod). For the above reasons, fans of classic horror and suspense movies in particular should enjoy this film—mild camp factor notwithstanding.

SOURCE: <https://midnitereviews.com/2017/10/house-wax-1953/>