

= The Incredible Melting Man =

The Incredible Melting Man is a 1977 American science fiction horror film about an astronaut whose body begins to melt after he is exposed to radiation during a space flight to Saturn , driving him to commit murders and consume human flesh to survive . Written and directed by William Sachs (with scenes added and reshot during post @-@ production by the producers without Sachs ' participation) , the film starred Alex Rebar as the main character , alongside Burr DeBenning as a scientist trying to help him and Myron Healey as a United States Air Force general seeking to capture him . While writing and shooting , Sachs was influenced by The Night of the Living Dead . With the changes by the producers , the final film has been described as a remake of First Man into Space (1959) , which in turn was directly influenced by The Quatermass Xperiment - even though Sachs hadn 't seen those films .

The screenplay was originally intended as a parody of horror films , but comedic scenes were edited out during production and new horror scenes added . Sachs claims that the producers decided during shooting that a straight horror film would be more financially successful , and that the film suffered as a result . The Incredible Melting Man was produced by American International Pictures , which also handled the theatrical distribution . The film includes several homages to science fiction and horror films of the 1950s . Makeup artist Rick Baker provided the gory makeup effects for the film . He originally created four distinct stages of makeup design so that the main character would appear to gradually melt , but the stages were ultimately cut from the final film .

The film was commercially successful , but received largely negative reviews , although even critical reviews complimented Baker 's make @-@ up effects . According to the director , many scenes re @-@ shot and changed by the producers are problematic due to their inferior acting . The Incredible Melting Man was featured in the comedy It Came from Hollywood (1982) and inspired the makeup effects for a scene in the science fiction @-@ action film RoboCop (1987) . It was also featured in a season 7 episode of the comedy television series Mystery Science Theater 3000 .

= = Plot = =

During a space flight to Saturn , three astronauts are exposed to a blast of radiation which kills two of them and seriously injures the third , Steve West (Rebar) . He is next shown unconscious in a hospital back on Earth , with bandages covering his face ; his physician , Dr. Loring (Lisle Wilson) , cannot explain what is happening to West or how he survived the blast . After the doctor leaves , West awakens and is horrified to find the flesh on his face and hands melting away . Hysterical , he attacks and kills a nurse (Bonnie Inch) , then escapes the hospital in a panic . Loring and Dr. Theodore " Ted " Nelson (DeBenning) , a scientist and friend of West , discover that the nurse 's corpse is emitting feeble radiation , and realize West 's body has become radioactive . Nelson believes West has gone insane , and concludes he must consume human flesh in order to slow the melting . Nelson calls General Michael Perry (Healey) , a United States Air Force officer familiar with West 's accident , and the general agrees to help Nelson find him .

West attacks and kills a fisherman in a wood , then encounters and frightens a little girl (Julie Drazen) there , but she escapes unharmed . Nelson tracks West by following his radiation trail with a geiger counter , but only finds his detached ear stuck to a tree branch . Perry arrives by plane , and is picked up by Nelson ; shortly thereafter , they visit the crime scene where the fisherman 's body was found . Sheriff Neil Blake (Michael Aldredge) suspects that Nelson knows something , but Nelson tells the sheriff nothing because Perry earlier told him information about West is classified . Later that night , Nelson returns home to his pregnant wife Judy (Ann Sweeny) , who tells him that her elderly mother Helen (Dorothy Love) and Helen 's boyfriend Harold (Edwin Max) are coming over for dinner . On their way , however , Helen and Harold are attacked by West in their car , and he kills them both .

When Blake finds the bodies , he calls Nelson , who comes out to identify them . After Blake angrily demands an explanation , Nelson reluctantly reveals West 's condition . Nelson believes West is somehow getting stronger the more his body decomposes . Back at Nelson 's house , West attacks

and kills Perry , although Judy is not harmed . Nelson and Blake arrive just as West escapes . West then stumbles upon the home of a married couple (played by Jonathan Demme and Janus Blythe) . West kills the man and attacks his wife , but she drives him away after chopping his arm off with a kitchen knife . Blake receives a call about the attack and takes Nelson with him to investigate . They follow West to a giant power plant , and then up several flights of outside stairways .

Blake tries to shoot West with a shotgun , but the blasts do not stop West , who throws the sheriff over the railing into power lines , killing him . West hits Nelson and knocks him over the railing , leaving the doctor hanging on the side . Nelson appeals to West , reminding him that they were friends , and West decides to pull Nelson to safety . Two armed security guards then arrive and , in a panic , fatally shoot Nelson as he tries to protect West . An infuriated West kills the security guards and stumbles away . After collapsing against the side of a building , he slowly melts completely away . The next morning , a janitor finds his gory remains and casually mops them into a garbage can . The film ends with a radio news report about another astronaut team being sent to Saturn .

= = Production = =

= = = Writing = = =

The Incredible Melting Man was written and directed by filmmaker William Sachs . The idea for the film came to him when his mother , working in the office of a spray paint company , showed him " gooey stuff " which was used as a basis for spray paint and jokingly suggested that he should do a film featuring that material . During writing , Sachs was influenced by The Night of the Living Dead and wanted to give the film a 1950s horror film feeling . The final film , with its structure changed by the producers in post @-@ production , has been described by some sources ? including the film magazine Cinefantastique and the 1995 book Cult Science Fiction Films ? as a remake of First Man into Space (1959) , another film about an astronaut who becomes a monster after an accident in space . Science fiction film historian Gene Wright suggested that the final film was heavily influenced by The Quatermass Xperiment (1955) , a British horror film about an astronaut who begins mutating into an alien organism after a spaceflight . Sachs , however , had not seen those films and his original screenplay had a very different structure . He wrote The Incredible Melting Man originally as a parody of horror films . According to Michael Adams , a film reviewer who interviewed Sachs , this is why the film mixes horror with comedic moments , such as when Steve West 's detached ear gets stuck on a tree , and when a janitor sweeps West 's melted body into a garbage can at the end of the film . Adams claims that this explains several comedic lines of dialogue otherwise inconsistent with the rest of the film , including one moment when homeless men notice the melting West and say to each other , " You think we 've got trouble , look at that dude " . In Sachs ' original version , the film opened with the wide @-@ angle shot of the nurse running through the hallway (which wouldn 't have been in slow motion , unlike the final film , where the producers played it back slowed down) . Only later would viewers have gradually learned the background of the melting man . All the scenes showing the astronauts in space and the lead character in the hospital were re @-@ shot during post @-@ production without influence by the director , and Sachs criticized both the acting in those scenes and how they restructure the film . There are logical problems in the final film due to the re @-@ shot scenes ; it is never fully explained how West 's spacecraft returned to Earth from Saturn when West himself was so seriously injured and the other two members of his crew were both killed .

Welch D. Everman , author of Cult Science Fiction Films , pointed to several homages in the movie to science fiction and horror films of the 1950s . The title itself is a reference to the Jack Arnold film The Incredible Shrinking Man (1957) , and the final scene when a radio report advertises another trip to Saturn , thus hinting that another accident could occur , was a common device in 1950s horror films . One difference , noted by Everman , is that in the 1950s films , government cover @-@ ups and secret agendas were often ascribed to the good of the general public , whereas The Incredible Melting Man , like many late 1970s films of its genre , suggested otherwise . Variety

described the script , in addition to its horror elements , as " a human story attempting to leave a moral message as to whether society or the horrible creature it is chasing is really the most destructive " .

= = = Casting = = =

Alex Rebar starred as Steve West in one of only a handful of film appearances throughout his acting career . Burr DeBenning played Dr. Ted Nelson , and General Michael Perry was portrayed by Myron Healey , who was , Everman notes , often cast as a villain in 1950s science fiction films . Film director Jonathan Demme played the small role of Matt Winters , one of West 's victims . Rainbeaux Smith , best known for her appearances in B movies and exploitation films , appeared in The Incredible Melting Man as a model who finds one of West 's victims while trying to avoid a photographer seeking to take explicit photos of her .

= = = Filming = = =

Producer Max Rosenberg , best known for his horror and supernatural films , provided the financing for The Incredible Melting Man . Samuel W. Gelfman was the film 's producer , and American International Pictures served as both the production company and the distributor . According to Sachs , the producers decided during shooting that a straight horror film would be more financially successful than a parody , so many of the comedic scenes were edited out and new horror scenes were shot and added to the film . Sachs said he felt the film was taken away from him , and that it suffered as a result because the producers tried to make it both a comedy and horror film , thus failing at both . Sachs said of the decision , " How can a serious horror movie end with the monster being shoveled into a garbage can ? "

Makeup artist Baker provided the special makeup effects for The Incredible Melting Man , which included the gradual melting of Steve West . Rebar wore facial appliances that simulated melting flesh , and his hands and feet were fitted with liquid substances that dropped off as he walked , creating the appearance that West 's body was falling apart . During one scene , a murdered fisherman 's severed head falls down a waterfall and smashes on the rocks below . To create the effect , Baker used a gelatin head with a wax skull and fake blood inside , which burst out upon impact .

Baker created four distinct stages of make @-@ up design so West would appear to gradually melt as time passed . However , after the film went through two separate stages of editing , these make @-@ up stages were ultimately eliminated from the final cut , and the character looks generally the same throughout the film . Richard Meyers , author of The World of Fantasy Films , said actor Rebar was impatient and uncooperative with the extensive make @-@ up sessions required for the effects , and thus did not wear all of the facial appliances Baker designed . This , Meyers said , may have been an additional factor in the lack of make @-@ up effect stages in the final film . The way that Sachs shot the film , it did not include any scenes with West before he sustained the radiation poisoning that caused his body to melt . Such scenes were , however , re @-@ shot later by the producers without Sachs ' participation .

Harry Woolman worked on the special effects along with Baker , and Willy Curtis worked as the film 's cinematographer . Some scenes included photography errors , including one in which light shines through a kitchen window from outside even though it is supposed to be nighttime . Michel Levesque provided art direction , and the musical score was composed by London Philharmonic Orchestra conductor Arlon Ober .

During post @-@ production , as the producers decided to change the film into a more serious horror film , they filmed numerous scenes for that purpose without the participation of the director . Among those scenes is the entire prologue of the astronauts in space and West waking up in a hospital (which are the only scenes in which Rebar 's face is seen without make @-@ up) . Additionally , the film was extensively re @-@ edited by the producers . Sachs criticized the acting in those re @-@ shot scenes , as well as the change of tone they bring into the film along with the re

@-@ editing by the producers .

= = Release = =

= = = Distribution = = =

The distribution of *The Incredible Melting Man* was handled by American International Pictures , with the involvement of film producer and distributor Irwin Yablans , who specialized primarily in B movies and low @-@ budget horror films . A trailer released for the film attempted to build tension by not revealing the monster right away . Instead , it showed portions of the scene immediately before the nurse is murdered , in which she runs down a hallway screaming and then crashes through a glass window trying to escape from West , who is only shown towards the end of the trailer . In some advertisements , the monster from the film was described as " the first NEW horror creature " . As a promotional gimmick , candles were made and sold to advertise the film .

One poster for the film included the statement : " Rick Baker , the new master of special effects , who brought you the magic of *The Exorcist* and gave you the wonder of *King Kong* , now brings you his greatest creation , *The Incredible Melting Man* " . Although Baker assisted with the effects in *The Exorcist* (1973) , Dick Smith was the make @-@ up artist who primarily worked on that film , not Baker . *Exorcist* director William Friedkin was so angry about the poster that , upon seeing it on an associate 's wall , he tore it down and ripped it to pieces . Baker , who did not know about the poster in advance , was horrified by the publicity campaign and publicly apologized for it , claiming : " Dick wanted some help so I first went out to do some work on the dummy whose head turns around 360 degrees . I really didn 't do anything creative , I just did labor " .

= = = Reception = = =

The Incredible Melting Man is a singular theatrical experience that truly lives up to its crazed , pulpy title . Originally intended as an homage to the great ? atomic age ? horrors of the Fifties , William Sachs ' s clever satire was recut by its original distributor to cash in on the horror craze .

The Incredible Melting Man received largely negative reviews , and has ranked among the Bottom 100 list of films on the Internet Movie Database , although there have also been very favorable reviews . The *New York Post* attested to Sachs ' " simple mastery of the medium " . Tom Buckley of The *New York Times* described it as poorly written and directed , calling it one of many poor summer films released " to fill the need of drive @-@ in operators for something cheap to put on the screen for the kids in the cars to ignore or laugh at " . The *Globe and Mail* writer Robert Martin praised Baker 's make @-@ up effects and said director Sachs did an efficient job building tension . However , Martin strongly criticized the script and the acting , claiming " logic and character are jettisoned in favor of suspense and horror " , and said the film 's positive elements were not strong enough to outweigh the negatives . John Foyston of The *Oregonian* strongly condemned the film as gratuitously gory with thin , motiveless characters . He declared it worse than the horror film *Manos : The Hands of Fate* (1966) , which is widely considered one of the worst films ever made . Rick Worland , a film professor at the Meadows School of the Arts who wrote a book about horror films , said there was " little to recommend " about *The Incredible Melting Man* besides Baker 's make @-@ up effects . Richard Meyers , a novelist who also wrote about science @-@ fiction films , called the film muddled and dull : " Although the movie didn 't have to be a sage examination of outer space diseases , it should at least have been exciting " . Meyers complimented Baker 's visual effects , but said his work was undermined by poor filming and actor Rebar 's impatience with the make @-@ up effects .

A 1985 review in the book *The Motion Picture Guide* said , " The film tries to balance horror against morality but ends up shaky at best " . The review described the special effects as " all right , but not nearly as gruesome as the film pretends they are " . In a review written shortly after the film was released , *Variety* wrote that the film " more often than not succeeds in telling a story and sustaining

audience interest " , and that the script included not only horrors , but also a human story with a moral message about society . However , the review also called the dialogue " trite " , described some scenes as " technically incorrect " , and said the film disappointed by lingering on the ordinary characters rather than the monster . Gene Wright , who wrote a book about science fiction films , said the film " attempts to blend pathos with awesome horror , but can 't resist going for the gut with a surfeit of gore " . Blockbuster Inc . ' s Guide to Movies and Videos gave the film 2 @.@ 5 stars out of 4 , and described it as " unexciting and contrived , though Rick Baker 's gross @-@ out makeup is undeniably effective " . In The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction Movies , Phil Hardy described it as a better @-@ than @-@ average but " spotty " film , and said director William Sachs injected a sense of " grisly humor " into it . However , Hardy said the central concept inspired more laughter than terror , and called the special effects " only routine " .

Some reviews were more positive . Welch D. Everman , author of Cult Science Fiction Films , compared the relationship between West and Nelson to that of Victor Frankenstein and his monster in Mary Shelly 's novel Frankenstein (1818) . Everman wrote , " This is the kind of movie we 've come to expect from AIP ? cheaply made , nasty , and lots of fun " . John W. Bowen of the Belleville Intelligencer said he enjoyed the " camp " style of the film , adding , " It 's both inexplicable and sad this brain @-@ damaged yet fiercely determined little drive @-@ in bottom feeder never garnered more than a tiny cult following over the years " . A 1978 critique in The Review of the News said , " Films like The Incredible Melting Man are not made to be good ; they are made to be scary . For anyone looking to raise goosebumps on their flesh , this one is sufficient to give you your money 's worth " . " Matt Maiellaro , co @-@ creator of the Cartoon Network series Aqua Teen Hunger Force , said the film inspired him to start making films himself , adding , " When I was eight , I watched The Incredible Melting Man and knew that horror movies were going to be big religion in my life " . Z movie director Tim Ritter said he was partially inspired to enter show business by watching a trailer for The Incredible Melting Man at age 9 . Ritter said , " I was too young to see the movie , but the trailer really got into my imagination " .

= = = Home release = = =

The Incredible Melting Man was released on VHS in 1986 by Vestron Video , and was rereleased in 1994 by Orion Pictures Library , although unlike other Orion VHS releases , it was not digitally remastered . In September 2000 , The Incredible Melting Man was once again released on VHS as part of Midnite Movies , a line of B movies and exploitation films released to home video by Metro @-@ Goldwyn @-@ Mayer . Although currently unavailable on DVD in Region 1 , it was released in Region 2 by CMV Laservision on February 2 , 2003 . In addition to the home video and DVD releases , The Incredible Melting Man has been featured in several film festivals , including the 1987 Visions Film Festival at the Enmore Theatre in Sydney , Australia ; the 2007 B @-@ Fest in Chicago ; the 2008 Horrorama Movie Festival in Englewood , Colorado ; and the 2010 Groovy B @-@ Movie Marathon in Durham , North Carolina . Scream Factory released the film on Blu @-@ ray in 2013 .

= = Cultural references = =

The film appeared in It Came from Hollywood , a 1982 comedy film featuring a compilation of clips from more than 100 B movies from the 1930s to the 1970s , which are shown between scripted segments performed by comedians . Baker 's effects from The Incredible Melting Man inspired the make @-@ up effects for a scene in the science fiction @-@ action film RoboCop (1987) . During the scene , Emil Antonowsky (Paul McCrane) attempts to drive RoboCop off the road , but instead accidentally drives into a vat of toxic waste , causing the flesh to melt off his face and hands . These effects were conceived and designed by special make @-@ up effects artist Rob Bottin , who was inspired by Baker 's work on The Incredible Melting Man and dubbed the RoboCop effects " the Melting Man " as an homage to the production .

The Incredible Melting Man was featured a seventh season episode of Mystery Science Theater 3000 . The film appeared in the fourth episode of the seventh season , which was broadcast on

Comedy Central on February 24 , 1996 . Michael J. Nelson , the show 's head writer , spoke disparagingly about the film while describing it to the press : " The plot is ? and I 'm not kidding here ? the plot is , a guy is melting . That 's the plot " .