

**The Cinematic Scientific Tragedy of the 1950s and 60s**

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## Introduction

Set the scene. A saucer shaped spaceship flies towards a distant planet. Dr. Edward Morbius (Walter Pidgeon), a member of the lost colony of Altair IV, warns them away, but they land anyway. The affable doctor, his robot named Robby, and his charming daughter, shows the military astronauts his advanced machinery and tells them of a phantom force that killed everyone else. Instead of leaving like the good doctor asks, the astronauts stay and all hell breaks loose. Men are killed and important parts of the ship are damaged. Nothing seems to stop the phantom force as they discover it to be an amalgamation of all the most dangerous predators on Earth. It is large in size, has the head of a lion, and walks as a biped, with the claws of a sloth. They meet the doctor again and are told about an alien race that advanced to the point where they wiped themselves out. The phantom force rampages and not even the good doctor's science can stop it. Only his sacrifice can stop the phantom, which he learns he had unconsciously created from parts of his id, and he tells the captain to destroy the planet so no one else can discover the secrets of the alien species that destroyed each other. All the while the captain and the doctor's daughter tease and argue before entering a monogamous relationship.

The film described above is *Forbidden Planet* (Wilcox, 1956). It was one of the most influential and important science-fiction films of the 1950s. *Forbidden Planet* uses its foreign, alien world to discuss ideas of scientific advancement, weapons of mass destruction, and a fear of the unknown. Other prominent films of the period like *Tarantula* (Arnold, 1955) and *Fiend Without a Face* (Crabtree, 1958) exhibit similar themes and ideas. A good natured scientist accidentally creates a monster, with the military playing an important role, and the characters enforcing heteronormative monogamous values. This tends to be the formula of many

science-fiction films of the 1950s, but this is only one type of film. There are just as many, if not more, that do not follow these ideas.

While science is what causes the problems in many films, there are others that still try to show the advancement of science as a good thing. In *Tarantula* the professor initially wanted to help end world hunger with his experiments, and it was an accident that led to the giant spider running loose. Countless other films have similar ideas, but are forgotten in favor of more acclaimed films like *Forbidden Planet*. Films like *Tarantula* were popular with audiences and in drive-in theaters, but unpopular with critics. The goal of this essay is to examine how many science-fiction films had a voice in this era and questioned the progress of science, politics, and social norms during the early Cold War.

Those previously mentioned films and so many other science-fiction films were emblematic of their time. Major scientific, militaristic, and social breakthroughs were happening in the 1940s and 50s. Things like the first object sent to space, automatic weapons, new types of foods, new American communities based around small towns, modern appliances, and the atomic bomb were innovations that played a big role in establishing the culture and appearance of America in the 1950s. After World War II, a Cold War broke out between the United States and the newly formed Soviet Union. Instead of directly fighting, the two superpowers developed more and more nuclear weapons in the forms of rockets and bombs. Communism and capitalism would be further vilified by the USA and USSR respectively and the two nations would never see each other as anything but enemies. In John Dower's book, *Cultures of War*, he explains that the USA and USSR were already at conflict during the final stages of World War II. One of the reasons the USA rushed to drop the bombs on Japan was to intimidate the USSR. Not only did

they do that to end the current war, but also to intimidate their soon to be enemy into not starting one. That tactic worked because open warfare did not break out between the USA and USSR<sup>1</sup>.

People were starting to understand how devastating the atomic bombs were, but they were also fascinated by them. The science-fiction films of this era would present similar conflicting views on that scientific advancement. One film would come out showing an atomic bomb destroying a monster and praising the military for their brave work. Another film would show the atomic bomb as the cause of the giant monster and blame all the deaths on the bomb. Those types of films, which were often considered low quality B movies<sup>2</sup>, showed that there was a mutually optimistic and pessimistic opinion about scientific advancements. Those genre films (monster movies, alien movies, and space movies) of the 1950s were extremely popular, which led to countless films being made. These films were so popular that some were still being made well into the 1960s.

Well known studios were not the only entities producing these genre films. Many of those films were made by independent filmmakers, which meant that they could insert their personal and political feelings into their work much more easily. Authors like Noël Carroll, J.P. Telotte, Ian Roberts, and Susan Sontag recognize this in their writings, but it is not recognized by many others in the field of film analysis. Carroll discusses in his book, *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart*, how horror films broached ideas of social issues like xenophobia. Telotte explores a number of topics in his many essays, but they all focus on ideas presented in 1950s movies and culture. Ian Roberts wrote an analysis that compared the scientist from *Forbidden*

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<sup>1</sup> John Dower, *Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor / Hiroshima / 9-11 / Iraq* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), 301-302.

<sup>2</sup> B movies were films that were considered low-budget and low quality films that would often be shown second on double features (akin to B-sides for recorded music). In modern day usage, the term is used to describe low-budget films that are not arthouse films.

*Planet* to the famed physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer (1904-1967). Sontag explored the formula of monster movies and disaster films of the 1950s and how even when they broke one convention they still tended to follow another.

In Chapter One, “The Scientist Character,” I will explore how these films portrayed scientists and scientific advancement. Scientists are very important figures in science-fiction. They are often the cause of the problem in the film and it is sometimes put upon them to find some kind of solution to the problem. The films that are more supportive of scientists, like *The Horror of Party Beach* (Tenney, 1964), will show the scientists as fatherly, traditionally handsome or older in appearance, and are more like supporting characters. These films where the scientists are blameless and wholly good are more of a minority. More often than not, scientists in these films are somewhat tragic figures. They want to do good things for the world and help people, but their experiments go out of control. *Forbidden Planet* and *Tarantula* are two such films, but others include *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (Fowler, 1957) and *Fiend Without a Face*. They want to find cures to diseases, they want to advance mankind’s understanding, and they want to push boundaries. However, they go too far or don’t understand what exactly they’re dealing with. By analyzing these scientist characters and the films they appear in, this project will reveal the kinds of suspicions and fears people had about science going too far or what the limits of science should be.

Set the scene. London is in ruins. Rivers are dried up, buildings are in disarray, and the streets are empty. One man, Peter Stenning (Edward Judd), walks down the road and into an abandoned newspaper office and begins to dictate the story of what led up to that moment. Several months before, Stenning is at the office working on some stories that he has no passion

for. After the United States and the Soviet Union simultaneously detonated nuclear bombs there had been a number of strange occurrences. A solar eclipse was ten days early, raised temperatures, floods, and cyclones. Stenning's girlfriend leaks some information to him that she got when overhearing a phone call from the government. He reveals to the press that because of the simultaneous detonation the Earth was shifted eleven degrees off its axis. Not long after they learn that the Earth is spinning towards the sun. Water starts to grow scarce and people struggle to maintain their daily lives as the world falls apart around them. As a last ditch effort the United States and Soviet Union attempt to fix things by performing the same simultaneous bomb drop. The film ends ominously as the film does not answer whether the Earth is saved or doomed. The film shows the danger of nuclear bombs, climate change, and helplessness through the eyes of civilians.

In Chapter Two, "The Atomic Menace," our topic of analysis shifts towards the way atomic energy was portrayed in the science-fiction genre films of the 1950s and 60s. Atomic energy took the form of bombs, advanced engines, and other new inventions. In the film described above, *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (Guest, 1961), nuclear testing dooms the world, but also potentially saves it. In *Fiend Without a Face* the military was using atomic energy to power their base and the new radar gear. At the same time Professor Walgate (Kynaston Reeves) is mooching off the energy to power his telekinesis experiments. The local farmers are worried about the atomic energies' effect on their crops and livestock, but the professor's experiments accidentally create invisible brain monsters that suck out other people's brains. In other cases, such as *Godzilla* (Honda, 1954) nuclear bombs wake up a giant monster. The film has themes related to nuclear destruction from war and testing, with the monster Godzilla being a metaphor for the atomic bomb. Other films like *Five* (Oboler, 1951), *On the Beach* (Kramer, 1961), *The*

*Last War* (Matsubayashi, 1961), and *Day the World Ended* (Corman, 1955) are about the fall of civilization and possible human extinction because of nuclear weapons. These films showed that mutually assured destruction was a fear that people had, even in the 1950s. A lack of people, sterilization, slow death, a lack of resources, and mutants were all things that were featured in these films that people worried about happening. These fears were voiced and explored through films and pulp stories. Those mediums balanced the real terrors and the fantastical terrors to create outlets for audiences. Despite that, many of these films demonstrated humanity's ability to persevere and live on even in the face of overwhelming odds.

Set the scene. Two teens are kissing in a car and they notice an asteroid fly by and hit the Earth. The tiny asteroid opens up to reveal a blob-like creature that latches onto an old man. While the teens bring the old man to a doctor the Blob grows and consumes more of the old man's arm. After leaving the doctor's the two teens mess with their friends for a while. When they return to the doctor's office the boy sees the doctor get consumed by a much larger and redder Blob. The teens try to report it to the police, but they don't believe them and send them home. The teens leave again, gather their friends, and try to warn people about the Blob. As the night goes on the Blob consumes more people and grows bigger each time. The teens think they've trapped the Blob, but it escapes as they gather the town to help them. The Blob consumes people inside and grows to gargantuan scale. The teens flee into a diner and the Blob is able to cover it. As all seems hopeless the teens discover that the Blob's weakness is CO2. The teens and the adults band together to get all the CO2 fire extinguishers they can. The Blob is frozen and the final moments of the film show the Blob dropped off at the Arctic and the characters remark they'll be safe, so long as the Arctic stays cold. This film shows how people respond to a foreign menace.



In Chapter Three, “The Space Age,” I will be discussing the topic of outer space, fear of outsiders, and voyages into the unknown. This topic includes not only aliens coming from outer space, but also humanity’s own foray into space. In films like *The Blob* (Yeaworth, 1958), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, (Siegel, 1956) and *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1958, Fowler Jr,) the alien invaders are unambiguously evil and often used as vehicles for political or social commentary. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is commonly read as an allegory for communism or McCarthyism. *The Blob* shows its monster as a big red menace and says that we’ll be okay unless climate change gets rid of the Arctic. While climate change was not a worry at the time of the film, in a modern viewing of the film this commentary is unintentional, but a valid critical extension. Other films like *Project Moonbase* (Talmadge, 1953) or *First Spaceship on Venus* (Maetzig, 1960)<sup>3</sup> show the attempts to travel to space and how people imagined possibilities of space travel and colonization. *First Spaceship on Venus* (and some other films) show a multinational crew as a sign of unity in the world and *Project Moonbase* shows a heavily militarized space program. Finally, films such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Wise, 1951) or *It Came From Outer Space* (Arnold, 1953) show peaceful aliens and how humanity would respond to them. The topic of space is used to show people facing the unknown and overcoming insurmountable hurdles.

Science-fiction movies thrived in this period and countless films were made about the horrors of science, the mystery of outer space, and the calamity caused by nuclear weapons.

People were afraid of atomic bombs and recognized the dangers far before the Cuban Missile

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<sup>3</sup> The film was an East German/Polish film titled *Silent Star* and released in 1960. The American import and redub was released two years later under the title *First Spaceship on Venus*. There are a number of differences between the two versions, but I will be discussing the American version due to it being the version I have seen.

Crisis in 1962. Rockets and advances in aviation made people interested in the stars above.

Anxiety around scientific progress has been prevalent in the science-fiction horror genre for many generations before the 1950s. Such ideas were present in early stories of the genre like

Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* (1818), as it contained mad scientists, unstoppable monsters, and tampering in God's domain. I will be engaging with authors like Noël Carroll, J.P. Telotte, Ian

Roberts, Susan Sontag, and others as I explore these themes. The science-fiction film of the

1950s knew that the future in store for them would be full of hope and terror. These people had dreams and nightmares of what would happen. It doesn't matter how accurate they would be.

What matters is *how* they speculated about such possibilities, how they expressed optimistic and pessimistic thoughts cinematically, therefore continuing the science-fiction genre's role in both intellectual and escapist works.

## **Chapter One: The Scientist Character**

The most important characters in many science-fiction stories are the scientists. Without them the films' plots would not have a character to literally create the conflict. Whether they are mad or just misguided, monsters often crawl out of a scientist's laboratory. Those modern day Dr. Frankensteins are characterized in similar, often stereotypical ways, and usually fall into archetypes based on their friendliness and reclusiveness. Scientists in these 1950s and 60s science-fiction movies often fall into three categories: the pure friendly scientist, the cruel evil scientist, and the well meaning, but misguided scientist. Another important topic is analyzing the scale of these scientists. Small town doctors and researchers connected to local communities are presented as trustworthy and approachable, but more reclusive, independent scientists in isolated areas are seen as less trustworthy or more dangerous. Instead of a remote castle like Dr. Frankenstein's they either live in small compounds or large manors. Enough room for a creature to run wild in, but not close enough to society that a town is in danger of being attacked.

### **The Good Scientist**

Friendly, affable, and respected scientists are the first and least common. In these cases they are either main characters that take the role of young doctors (John Agar's role in *Tarantula* as Doctor Matt Hastings) or as supporting characters that are older doctors or teachers (Allan Laurel in *The Horror of Party Beach* as Dr. Gavin). They deliver helpful exposition, are suspicious about strange happenings, investigate to find more strange happenings, and often are involved in finding the way to stop the monsters. Dr. Hastings, a local small town doctor, is the one who questions university Professor Gerald Deemer's (Leo G. Carroll) bogus claims regarding a man's

death and challenges his research in later scenes. Since he is played by the relatively young John Agar (he was 34 at the time) he is able to strike up a romance with Prof. Deemer's new young assistant, Stephanie Clayton (Mara Corday). Hastings aids in the investigation after pools of liquid are found where people disappeared and discovers that the pools come from spiders. Later in the film he rushes to save Stephanie and tells the police to call the national guard and to get guns. While he is not the one to kill the giant tarantula, an act done by the military dropping napalm on it, his services were invaluable in saving the day. In another way to make Hastings seem more heroic he is first seen flying a plane into town; much like the heroic military pilots that save the day at the end of the film.

Good scientists in this period, like many of other John Agar characters, tend to be rarer due to being less exciting. Unless they get a more proactive role or get some kind of military association, the characters tend to be duller and more of a side character. In *The Horror of Party Beach*, Dr. Gavin provides some exposition, witnesses the monster's weakness being discovered, helps stop the monsters at the very end, and needs to be saved during that climactic battle where sodium is thrown at radioactive fish people. The older Dr. Gavin is a much more passive character compared to Dr. Hastings and most of the actions are performed by the goofy and racially troubling mammy character Eulabelle (Eulabelle Moore). Even the actual main characters of the film, Gavin's daughter Elaine (Alice Lyon) and assistant Hank (John Scott), do little while the monsters slaughter their way through the unnamed East Coast beach town.

### *The Evil Scientist*

When the scientists are not nice or misguided they drift more into the territory of evil scientists. Not all mad scientists are evil. One could make an argument that Deemer or Morbius were

benevolent mad scientists. The scientist of *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (Fowler, 1957), Dr. Alfred Brandon (Whit Bissell), is respected and friendly, but he is not a good or misguided scientist. Teenage delinquent, Tony Rivers (Michael Landon), goes to visit Dr. Brandon at his girlfriend's urging after he gets into a fight at a haunted house. Brandon works as a psychologist and promises to help him by putting him under hypnotherapy. While in trance Brandon injects Tony with a serum that turns Tony into a werewolf (which he describes as one of man's ancestors) and makes him violent when he hears a bell. In his new form that he changes in and out of, Tony kills several other teenagers and is chased by local authorities. Brandon cares little for the deaths and only cares about the results of his experiment. Brandon has an assistant that objects, but he does nothing to actually stop his superior. When Tony comes to Brandon for help at the end of the film the scientist turns Tony into the werewolf again to get proof of it happening to exhibit as evidence to the scientist community. Brandon cannot enjoy his fame as he and his assistant are killed by Tony.

The film, and the three successors made by American International Pictures, all follow the same themes and ideas: corrupted youth, manipulation by authority, and a loss of humanity. Tony went to get help and was turned into a guinea pig for Brandon's experiments. Because the film was about a teenager and not an adult, it became one of AIP's most successful releases. In addition to showing Tony as hot headed, he is also from a poor household with only his father, who is struggling enough with money that he needs to ask his son for date money. Later on in the film when Tony's actions start to come to light, no one shows any concern for his father and he is rarely seen in the film altogether. Showing a troubled youth from a broken home that gets

manipulated by a figure of authority would have been considered shocking for the time. The popularity of the film led to a string of imitators that are not much different in this regard.<sup>4</sup>

In the companion film, *Blood of Dracula* (Strock, 1957), the main character is a high school student, Nancy (Sandra Harrison), dealing with the death of her mother and father's sudden remarriage and a move in location. Her teacher, Professor Branding (Louise Lewis), offers to help Nancy, but Branding turns her into a vampire via hypnosis. After killing multiple people she begs Branding to end the experiment, but she coldly refuses and hypnotizes her again. Like Brandon, Branding is killed by the monster she created before Nancy is killed. It is important to mention that Branding had learned of this hypnotic ritual by studying in the Carpathian Mountains, which happened to be in part of the Soviet Union at the time. While not easy to see, it could be seen as a way to tie the ritual to Romania, where Dracula is from in the original story, but also to possibly tie her to the Soviet Union. While not part of the Soviet Union, Romania was a socialist country in 1957. Branding's rejection of other sciences, wanting to use the experiment to prove herself correct, and to convince others to stop using nuclear technology (for some reason) could be seen as a socialist/communist trying to change how things work in America. While speculative, could it be read that her corruption of a young girl is another crime to add to her rap sheet and further proof that Branding is a crazy communist?

The article, *Seduced by Small-Town America, 1950s-Style*, by Gary Svehla talks about how Tony is representative of the danger of repressive feeling and not fitting in. He fears authority and lashes out at his peers. His regression into the primitive werewolf and mauling an

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<sup>4</sup> *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* had a budget between \$82,000-\$123,000 (\$767,514-\$1,151,271 adjusted for inflation) and grossed \$2,000,000 (\$18,719,857 adjusted for inflation) in 1957. The American International Picture films to follow in its footsteps were *I Was a Teenage Frankenstein* and *Blood of Dracula* in July, 1957 (four months after *Teenage Werewolf*), followed by the sequel *How to Make a Monster* in July, 1958.

attractive gymnast is meant to show how he is not growing into an adult like his peers. Brandon manipulating him instead of helping him is the catalyst, but his poor upbringing is also a strong cause for his violent actions. Svehla also notes, “Tony soon morphs into foaming-at-the-mouth werewolf, becoming a visual metaphor for every adolescent male’s sexual yearnings. He does not rape her; his hormone-fueled passions cause him to rip out her throat.” This inability to properly express himself and possible ignorance about sex, leads him to murder. He says similar things about Nancy with her radical life changes and the cruelty from those around her being part of her transformation from a rebellious teen into a blood sucking monster.<sup>5</sup> In the essay Svehla discusses how many films of the 1950s, like *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*, *Blood of Dracula*, *The Blob* (which I shall discuss in Chapter 3), and were set in small towns and suburbs to bring horror to a more local and personal level and break the illusion of safety in those areas. In these films monsters did not kill nameless people, they killed friends, parents, and trusted or liked citizens. In addition these films would also prop up the institution of small towns by having the community be the savior by the end of the film.<sup>6</sup>

The films are outwardly suspicious of hypnotism and psychology, but both films still rely on science as a motive. Brandon wants to prove his findings to the scientific community and uses a serum in his experiment. Branding wishes to use her experiment on Nancy to convince the scientific community to cease using nuclear technology. The two wish to overcome the accepted boundaries of science and end up turning themselves into metaphorical monsters as they turn the innocent children into literal monsters. The idea of turning people into monsters, and implying the villains are communists, was also explored in the film *Teenage Zombies* (Warren, 1959)

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<sup>5</sup> Gary Svehla, “Seduced by Small-Town America, 1950s-Style,” *Midnight Marquee* 79 (2013): 204-205.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 200-203.

where the mad Doctor Myra (Katherine Victor) wants to use captured teenagers as test subjects for a plot to turn all of the United States into zombies. Myra is backed by a foreign power from "the East", which elevates her beyond a small town influence. The film expresses its concern about not only mad scientists, but also mad scientists working for the enemy. Due to her having an assistant named Ivan it is easy to infer that "the East" is likely the Soviet Union, the United States's greatest enemy of the time. The film also presents McCarthy-esque suspicions because the town sheriff was allied with the evil scientist and helped her kidnap victims.<sup>7</sup> Along with suspecting that Myra is working with the Soviets, it is likely that the sheriff would either be a communist or communist sympathizer.

Another example of a strange foreigner being used as a mad evil scientist, Bela Lugosi as Dr. Eric Vornoff in *Bride of the Monster* (1955, Wood), fits the bill of stereotypical mad scientists. Director Ed Wood was influenced heavily by serial films where Lugosi played other mad scientist characters. Vornoff is vaguely European and another scientist in the film comes from the same country. Vornoff was exiled for his outlandish atomic research, but the other doctor comes to bring him back because they see value in his work. His work in question is to create a race of atomic mutant supermen. The other doctor wishes to use the knowledge to make their nation rule the world. Vornoff turns him down because he wishes to rule the world himself. Once again, the mad scientist is coded as European, possibly of Soviet origin. Giving a scientist villain an accent of some kind and implying that they were from Europe would encourage audiences to think that the evil scientists were associated with the Soviet Union. The Cold War

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph McCarthy (1908-1957) was a United States Senator who was vocal in the United States's fight against communism. McCarthyism was a belief/practice that used a broad definition of "un-American" activities to accuse people of being secret communists and a danger to the United States. This resulted in many people in the film industry in particular getting blacklisted from employment by the major studios.



was still in its early years, but the anti-communist sentiment was already thriving in the United States at the time.

In the book *The Philosophy of Horror* by Noël Carroll, he talks about how the horror genre could be read as xenophobic and cites 50s science-fiction films as an example. In particular he talks about how they are used as allegory for communism. While none of those films I mentioned before actually involved aliens, the sentiment is still the same. These doctors are others. They are outcasts from society, coded as foreign, and have aspirations of changing the world for the betterment of mankind or to fulfill an egomaniacal desire. In a quote from Carroll he talks about that very thing,

It might be argued that the horror genre is essentially xenophobic: monsters, given their inherently hostile attitude toward humanity, represent a predatory Other, and mobilize, in a way that interactively reinforces, negative imagery of those political/social entities which threaten the established social order at the level of nation, class, race, or gender.<sup>8</sup>

The mad scientist makes the monster and it starts to cause chaos, but only because of the timely intervention of the heroes, the day is saved before any major harm can be done. Going back to *Tarantula* as an example. The film ends with the giant spider just outside the city limits. The spider kills Deemer, some farmers, and a few drunk bums. Their deaths are mourned for maybe a moment, but their concern is for the establishment. Carroll cites, “Just as Karl Marx called capitalists vampires and werewolves, utilizing horror iconography for progressive purposes, so the creators of horror fiction can apply the imagery of fear and disgust against the forces of political or social repression.”<sup>9</sup> However, these films suggest otherwise. *I Was a Teenage*

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<sup>8</sup> Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 196.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

*Werewolf* and *Blood of Dracula* say that the hoodlums, the offbeat intellectuals, and the people going against the capitalist, suburban, conformist lifestyle are the ones who are-- or will create-- monsters.

### *The Misguided Scientist*

Compared to films where the scientists are dealing with aliens or are complicit in the creation of monsters, there are very few clean conscience scientist characters in man made monster movies. Aside from the aforementioned Prof. Deemer from *Tarantula*, characters like Dr. Edward Morbius from *Forbidden Planet* and Professor R. E. Walgate from *Fiend Without a Face* are prime examples of well intentioned scientists that caused the monster attack. In “Oppenheimer's Heir: Morbius and Atomic Technology in Forbidden Planet” Ian Roberts discusses how Dr. Morbius was comparable to real life physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer. Oppenheimer was an extremely well educated and cultured, but emotionally troubled man that aided in the creation of the atomic bomb. Oppenheimer was troubled by his creation and once said, “I am become Death, the Shatterer of Worlds”<sup>10</sup> in response to his work in creating the bomb. His work in remote parts of the deserts, cultured education, and remorseful attitude were used as partial inspirations for all sorts of scientist characters, not just Morbius. Morbius is one of the closest due to the character being a philologist (studier of words and languages) and Oppenheimer himself was fluent in many languages (including Sanskrit). Morbius’s own home resembles the ranch Oppenheimer lived and worked in. The steel shutters Morbius used to protect his home resemble a bomb shelter and the landscape resembles that of New Mexico (where Oppenheimer lived).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ian F. Roberts, “Oppenheimer's Heir: Morbius and Atomic Technology in Forbidden Planet,” *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 38, no. 4 (2010): 174.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

Dr. Morbius is a peaceful man. One of the reasons he went on the expedition to Altair IV was to avoid any wars or conflict back on Earth. There are no weapons in his home and he programmed Robby to short circuit if he was ever ordered to harm a sentient being. While a normal philologist, he discovered ancient alien technology from an extinct race known as the Krell. After using a device to artificially boost his natural intelligence he was able to understand their technology more easily. He was able to create wonders that no one on Earth was able to replicate even in the 23rd century. When the crew of the Earth spaceship try to convince him to bring the technology back to Earth, he refuses adamantly. Morbius thinks that the technology is too dangerous for other people. He has seen it kill someone and the race that created it was all destroyed. He arrogantly, but rightly, considers himself to be the authority on the technology. He does not do it out of malicious intent. He even offers to give some of the technology when he feels Earth is ready in the future.

J.P. Telotte's essay, "Science Fiction in Double Focus: Forbidden Planet," talks about the double nature of elements in the film. By that he means that each element of the story could be looked at from a different perspective and create a more complete image of what the subject stands for. One particular example is how Morbius created both Robby the Robot (himself a double of the role of robots in fiction), a sophisticated machine that physically cannot harm sapient life and serves his creator, and the Id Monster, a primal psychic monster fueled by hate and driven by his creator's impulse to destroy 'dangerous' outside sources.<sup>12</sup> By seeing Morbius's two great creations it allows the audience to see a true picture of who Morbius is; smart and principled, but aggressive and reclusive. The language Telotte uses in calling them Morbius's

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<sup>12</sup> J.P. Telotte, *Science Fiction in Double Focus: Forbidden Planet, Film Criticism* 13, no. 3 (1989): 26, 28-29, 30-32.

doubles is even used in the film when characters refer to the Id Monster as Morbius's "other self" or "double."

What wiped out the Krell was not war, atomic destruction, or some invader from space, but a creature they accidentally created. As the last stage of evolution they developed a new machine which used their own thoughts to create anything. Then the subconscious feelings, which the characters call monsters from the id, destroyed the Krell by materializing into monsters that destroyed their entire civilization in a night. After Morbius started to uncover the Krell technology he used the same machine. His monster from the id destroyed the other colonists because deep down he hated them for wanting to return to Earth. After he and his family were the only ones remaining on the planet the monster seemed to vanish, but Morbius remarked that it felt close. At the time Morbius was unaware of the monster's origin. When the new ship from Earth came Morbius warned them out of fear of the monster attacking, but they landed before he could explain. As they threatened his comfortable existence on the planet the monster resurfaced. When he found out that his daughter was kissing the spacemen the monster appears and ruins a piece of important equipment. Later as a heated argument unfolded between himself, the captain, and the ship's scientist the monster killed one of the crew members. His violent desires hidden within his id resurfaced again. He denies it at first, but he quickly realizes. When he does, he feels nothing, but guilt. In the end he sacrifices himself to stop his monster and helps start the planet's self-destruction to stop the Krell technology from being discovered again. Morbius was a flawed man, but at his core he was a good man.

Another example is how the Krell's technology is treated. It is awe inspiring, greater than anything humanity has ever known, and one of the main draws of the film. On the other hand it is uncontrollable, unfathomable, and leads to great destruction. Telotte compares this to America's

opinion on advancing technologies by saying, “economic prosperity and the great consumer access to modern technology it facilitated were invariably tempered by cold war fears, especially the looming potential for a technological self-destruction, a nuclear holocaust.”<sup>13</sup> He believes that the destruction of Altair IV was an intentional way of showing the power of a lost species and then denying people the ability to have it. “An emphasis on what we might produce, what power we might wield, what shape we might give to our future,” he describes in a later paragraph.<sup>14</sup> Other examples of this double effect would be the Krell brain booster (which doubles the intelligence, but has fatal effects)<sup>15</sup> and the booze Robby supplied to the cook (no risk of hangover and good tasting, but the large quantity and no restraint makes the cook pass out drunk when a man is killed).<sup>16</sup> One of Telotte’s closing points is that while the film has its bleak depictions of good and bad, it still ends with the bad double, the Id, dying and the good double, Robby, living on.<sup>17</sup>

Going back to *Tarantula* Professor Deemer is another conflicted and misguided scientist. Deemer was, like Morbius, reclusive and a bit standoffish, but he is otherwise a good scientist. His goal was to create a serum that could speed up the growth of animals to be used as food. He did not want to do testing on people, but it was his co-workers that rushed into it. He grows more paranoid, irritable, and short tempered as the film went on, but that was only because he was being negatively affected by the growth serum that was forcibly used on him. While Deemer and Morbius are very similar the two still share many differences. Morbius is allowed to die in a noble sacrifice and recognizes the bad his research has done. Deemer is given no redemption and

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 27

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 30

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 29

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 33

is unceremoniously killed by the spider as the main character rescues his girlfriend. Morbius's studies are seen as fantastical and he makes many thematic references (he likens tone of the machines to a gorgon because if looked at directly it could kill). Deemer's work is presented as more grounded and realistic with much focus being on the procedures of his work. The idea of scientists working to increase food supplies is another common one in these kinds of films. In *Killer Shrews* (Kellogg, 1959) Dr. Marlowe Cragis (Baruch Lumet) wants to end world hunger and, like Deemer, was unwise about his choice of test subjects. However unlike Deemer, Cragis is a much kinder scientist. He's quick to explain what is going on and he calls for the Captain to not only bring supplies, but to also get his daughter off the island that is now full of dog sized shrews.

While Dr. Arthur Carrington (Robert Cornthwaite) from *The Thing from Another World* (1951, Nyby) does not create the monster he is still misguided in his interest in the monster. Carrington is unquestionably aligned with the Americans, however his appearance sets him apart from the other characters. He has a pointed beard and wears a hat that looks quite similar to a Russian *kubanka*. His character is also set apart in how he responds to the alien. Most of the characters in the film are afraid of the alien, recognize the danger, and want to kill it, but Carrington is convinced of the alien's virtue. He constantly talks about how the alien needs to be protected, how it's much smarter than everyone, and how important it is. He even saves a severed hand and starts to grow a new alien due to it being plant-based. At the end of the film he makes a final attempt to convince the alien to not advance into a trap, but the alien throws him aside. He does this even after learning the alien damaged the generator in the North Pole research base. When the other characters remind him that the alien had killed animals and people he said it was

just defending itself. Carrington represents this blind optimism and naiveté about science. The military was right and he was wrong. His optimism is commendable, but he is shown to be wrong at every moment and he is looked at as a fool. It is a unique instance where an optimistic character thrives in a realist world. Carrington was smart, but terribly misguided in his efforts.

Much like Morbius, Cragis, and Deemer Professor Walgate from *Fiend Without a Face* was a kind scientist that was terribly misguided. He did not intend to make a monster, but accidents and questionable experiments led to numerous innocents dying. In *Fiend Without a Face*, the U.S. military is testing new radar technology with a nuclear powered reactor. Walgate leeches some of the nuclear power off the military and uses it to power his telekinesis experiments. He succeeds and eventually creates a living projection of his thoughts. This living projection is invisible, but when revealed later in the film it is a brain with antenna and a spinal column. Walgate tries to study this new creature and thinks it is harmless, but it actually grew malevolent over time. As the nuclear tests increased the creature grew smarter and eventually broke itself out. The creature starts sucking the brains out of the local villagers and military personnel to multiply in large numbers. Walgate denies the existence of the creatures, but as the situation grows dire he reveals the truth to the other characters. Not long after the fiends begin their siege on Walgate's house and he tells the main character, Major Jeff Cummings (Marshall Thompson), how to possibly kill all the monsters by giving them too much nuclear energy.

Walgate's story is not too different from the other scientists, but his story features a heightened importance of nuclear energy. Other monsters were created by vague scientific formulas or by more unusual means, but the reliance on nuclear power to create monsters is a topic that comes up a lot in monster movies. Sometimes scientists are not directly involved and

just a bomb is enough, but the message is still there. The work of scientists created monsters. As I shall describe in the next chapter, *Fiend Without a Face* uniquely tries to deflect blame away from the military in this situation. The film puts all the blame on Walgate for the monster's appearance and havoc. Walgate is not even a malicious character. He is friendly and when he can no longer deny the monsters he accepts responsibility.

Walgate, Morbius, and Carrington all fall into an interesting gray area regarding the morality of their studies. In Carroll's work he brings up the novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelly and talks about how the monster was only as evil as it was treated.

One thing that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is about is illustrating the notion that a person is not innately evil but rather is driven to what we now call anti-social behavior as a result of the way he or she is treated by society. The creature keeps making this point throughout the novel, and nothing in the writing indicates that he hasn't got a point.<sup>18</sup> I believe the films of the 1950s defy this viewpoint. Walgate tries to treat his creations kindly and thinks they may be benevolent, but he quickly realizes they are malevolent when they go devouring other people's brains and try to get more radiation to grow stronger. Morbius is treated well and he deifies the Krell, but their destruction and Morbius's slaughters are caused by their internal subconscious desires. It is only when he is inconvenienced that his monster emerges and thus it is not really a monster driven by wrongdoings and more a monster driven by annoyance or frustration. Carrington firmly believes that, despite everything he hears and witnesses, the alien is good. One could even argue that the alien was just responding in kind. When it wakes up a man starts to shoot at it and it is attacked by dogs. The rest of the movie it is stalking around attacking and killing people in the dark while the men try to hunt the alien down. While *Frankenstein's* monster states that it only does the things it did because it was treated so poorly, a sentiment

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<sup>18</sup> Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*, 197



Carroll sees no issue with as mentioned earlier, the film of *The Thing from Another World* only sees the monster as dangerous and evil.<sup>19</sup> Carrington is seen as a crazy, naive, fool for wanting to protect the alien, when all the men want to do is kill it. The difference is, a point which shall be expanded on in Chapter Three, the alien from *The Thing from Another World* has no lines other than grunts. The alien has no hope of redemption because the film offers it no chance to redeem itself. It meets violence with violence and compassion with violence.

A common motive amongst all the scientists mentioned is a desire to make a change. Morbius wished to create a new life away from Earth and explore the unknown. Deemer and Cragis wished to end world hunger and speed up growth. Even the cruel Brandon and Vornoff were motivated by a desire to improve the Human race. While they are not doing world changing experiments, Hastings and Gavin are trying to find out why people are dying in questionable ways. Despite that, they are still scientists and audiences of the time would still make connections between scientists doing new things and people working on atomic bombs. Scientists in monster movies are proactive on and off screen in their efforts to change the world. Whether they are seen as tragic or heroic it does not change that they were the ones who took the risks and tried to move humanity into new eras. However, the morally ambiguous scientists made audiences question the role of scientists and why they would even create such things. As I have outlined in this chapter, scientists in this wave of films studied food, space, and mutated or alien bodies. While in the real world the scientists had just as many varied roles, but the common people saw scientists as people who pushed the natural boundaries and, like Oppenheimer, studied the atomic bomb.

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<sup>19</sup> Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*, 197.

## Chapter Two: The Atomic Menace

One of the most defining moments of the 20th century was the use of the atomic bomb in World War II on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The destruction caused by the bombs changed the way people looked at the military, science, and the fragile state of the world. The almost unfathomable power of atomic energy inspired hope and fear in people. The portrayal of such energy was either portrayed as a very good thing or a very bad thing. The perception of good or bad is often used to set the tone of the film. Films that are pro-atomic energy tend to sound pro-military as well. On the other hand films that are anti-atomic energy, whether they be campy monster movies like *Them!* or are bleak dramas like *Five*, atomic energy is seen as a threat to life as we know it. While many of these films did contain political messages of some kind they were still, at their core, made to get audiences in seats. Monster movies were very popular and using atomic energy to create one is a simple plot device. While *Godzilla* did not win awards like other contemporary Japanese films it spawned one of the most famous movie franchises filled with sequels, spin offs, and created countless other marketable monsters.<sup>20</sup>

### *The Mighty Military*

In the last chapter I discussed how science-fiction films of the 1950s and 1960s had varied and often nuanced portrayals of scientists. While that is true, often when the military and atomic energy is involved scientists start to be relegated to more ineffective or somewhat villainous roles. As mentioned in the previous chapter *Fiend Without a Face* shows Dr. Walgate

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<sup>20</sup> Barak Kushner, "Gojira as Japan's First Postwar Media Event," in *In Godzilla's Footsteps: Japanese Pop Culture Icons on the Global Stage*, ed. William M. Tsutsui and Michiko Ito (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 41-42.

accidentally creating the monsters by siphoning nuclear power off of a nuclear reactor from a nearby military base in Canada. While Walgate is seen as a misguided figure, the military does its best in the film to look as squeaky clean as possible. The military men are the ones who are actually investigating the deaths, they bring guns to kill the monsters, and are the ones to stop the monsters at the end. Before the deaths are revealed to be caused by monsters, there is a lot of suspicion regarding the nuclear reactor. Not far from the military base is a rural town of farmers. The characters in that town frequently voice their concerns regarding the military's radar experiments and the nearby radiation. One farmer keeps a log of how his cattle are disturbed when the jets pass over. Before people learn that invisible brains are sucking out other people's brains they just think that the radiation is what is killing the people. After all they just suddenly drop dead and are radioactive. These people's concerns are dismissed by the military and are shown to be panicky or incompetent. The portly local deputy can only look on in terror as the monsters invade Walgate's home and he is killed by one of the brains.

In another military focused film, *The Atomic Submarine* (Bennet, 1959), atomic energy is shown to greatly benefit mankind. Atomic submarines are said to be used to traverse the Arctic and their use has increased trade. When they start to get destroyed by some mysterious force, a new and advanced atomic sub is deployed to discover the cause and stop it. The film itself is a typical alien invasion film, but it has the distinction of being very pro-military, pro-nuclear power, and anti-pacifistic. A young scientist, who would not be out of place as the lead in another, more pro-scientific film or genre, is criticized for his pacifistic, anti-war beliefs and speaking against his pro-military father.

As mentioned earlier, *Them* is another film that focuses on nuclear energy being used to create the monster. This time an atomic bomb is dropped, which mutates a colony of ants into ones of gargantuan size. *Them* is one of the films known to have a giant monster caused by an atomic bomb. In these films the creature is either woken up or grown into a much larger size because of a bomb. Films like *Them* and *The Amazing Colossal Man* (Gordon, 1957), feature things growing larger in size, while films like *Godzilla* show the giant monster as already existing, but awoken by a nuclear bomb. An important thing to note is that these films are decidedly anti-nuclear in terms of politics, but they are grouped together because of their portrayal of the military in response to these awakened menaces.

One of the most well known films to have this ideal of a good military and police force, but a poor showing of scientists is *Them*. Similarly to *Atomic Submarine* the scientist characters are treated very differently than the more authoritative military and police characters. Instead of a pacifist, *Them* has a woman as the scientist character. Her role in the film is to be leered at and is the butt of many jokes until she sheds her femininity and dons military fatigues. Author Patrick Sharp discusses this in his essay, “Darwin's soldiers: Gender, evolution and warfare in *Them!* and *Forbidden Planet.*” He explains how women are often pushed aside in the studies of science by noted scientists like Isaac Newton and Charles Darwin.<sup>21</sup> This view was kept for women scientists in films like *Them* with Dr. Pat Medford (Joan Weldon) being riddled with sexist jokes and comments about her legs. As I mentioned before, she is only taken seriously when she starts to wear military fatigues, but that is only after she is attacked by the ants and saved by the men. Despite her attempt to fit into the military world of men, she still needs to argue and rationalize

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<sup>21</sup> Patrick Sharp, *Darwin's Soldiers: Gender, Evolution and Warfare in Them! and Forbidden Planet*, *Science Fiction Film & Television* 1, no. 2 (2008): 216-217.

her presence to them. Sharp also gives the idea that the film has a strongly anti-matriarchal view with how the film presents the mutated ant colonies (run by queen ants like in normal colonies) as savage and wrong.

The film associates this savagery with their matriarchal structure: male ants exist merely to service their queen and fight her battles. By contrast, the film shows that human society is rigorously controlled by men. Through defeating the ants and destroying their queens, the male soldiers of humanity reassert the evolutionary dominance of patriarchy<sup>22</sup>

In the film women are expected to be weaker than men and men are expected to be tougher and more daring. The little girl who survives the attack from the ants is rendered mute and is paralyzed by her experience, but when two boys are saved by the ants they speak perfectly fine and follow the orders of the men perfectly fine. “The young boys do not belong on the battlefield and have to be saved and returned to the domestic sphere with their mother, but their relative competence reveals the film’s insistence that males are naturally better equipped for warfare.”<sup>23</sup> The film suggests that women, regardless of age, struggle to stand up to and cope with horrors, and men, regardless of age, are better at handling those kinds of dangerous, frightening, and high stress situations. As mentioned before Pat is only reluctantly accepted when she sheds her femininity and dons military fatigues.

The negative portrayal of science and glorification of the military is also seen in films like *The Amazing Colossal Man*. Glenn Manning (Glenn Langan) is gradually mutated by a plutonium bomb, instead of dying, and turns into a giant that reaches sixty feet tall. The film shows nuclear weapons as ineffective and all the attempts to reverse Glenn’s condition to be

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 220.

fruitless. The serum meant to cure Glenn fails and the comically large serigne is used to kill the doctor. The film's approach to science is doubtful and questionable at best. Putting aside the fact that a man is growing exponentially, the film attempts to claim that his heart is not growing alongside him. The questionable portrayal of science and nuclear weapons is matched by the military's excellent portrayal in the film. Glenn, a Lieutenant Colonel, in the air force was shown to be a selfless and good man before his mutation, the military does everything it can to help contain Glenn, and in the end the military is the thing that presumably kills Glenn (until he returns in a sequel one year later). By the end of the film the scientists have failed in every way possible and the military had to deal with the mess they caused.

### *Reframing the Atomic Menace*

Unlike other, more positive portrayals of nuclear technology and the military, *Godzilla* is firmly anti-military and anti-weapon of mass destruction. *Godzilla* is intended to be a metaphor for the devastation caused by the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. One character even alludes to this by saying how she barely escaped Nagasaki and now has to run from Godzilla. Additionally the monster, Godzilla, is also a metaphor for atomic testing in the pacific islands. This is shown with Godzilla first being seen rampaging through islands and attacking boats in that area.<sup>24</sup> World War II stock footage is used in the film and images of the destroyed cities when showing the aftermath of Godzilla's rampage. The film shows the horror of the nuclear devastation and cements itself as strongly anti-nuclear and very humanist. The thoughts and ideas of the human characters are very important to the film. Much of the runtime is set not

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<sup>24</sup> A number of fishing boats passed through that area in real life and many of the passengers succumbed to radiation poisoning. This is similar to how Godzilla attacked boats in the Pacific area at the start of the film.

only getting to know the characters, but also in board room meetings, following reporters, and debating ethics. The monster and the looming presence of the bomb attracted audiences, but the human element is why the film has stood the test of time.

*Godzilla* is also a film that defies the idea of the scientists being inferior to the officers of the military. Dr. Yamane (Takashi Shimura) and Dr. Serizawa (Akihiko Hirata) are unquestionably good scientists who want to help people and have different perspectives about Godzilla's rampage across Japan. What makes the two good scientists unique is their ways of looking at the monster and the way they look at weapons of mass destruction. Yamane, a paleontologist, believes that Godzilla should not be destroyed and should be studied due to unique origin and apparent immunity to conventional weapons. When characters talk about killing Godzilla he grows angry and is despondent during many scenes when the military enacts their schemes to destroy Godzilla. He sees the potential good Godzilla could bring to the world by studying him as a way to find a way to defend against radiation.

Serizawa is a chemist who devoted himself to the study of oxygen. One day he accidentally created a powerful device, which he called the Oxygen Destroyer, which atomizes oxygen and destroys living tissue. Anything exposed is reduced to skeletons in moments and he claims it could potentially wipe out all life in Tokyo Bay. Due to his discovery he grows dispondent with his friends and worries about what would happen if the weapon was mass produced for war. His attitude is not much different from Openheimer's statement, which I had mentioned earlier, about how he had, "become Death, the Shatterer of Worlds"<sup>25</sup> and other characters who had similar epiphanies like Dr. Morbius. It is only after seeing the devastation Godzilla causes and the impassioned pleas of his fiance and her friend that he agrees to use the

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<sup>25</sup> Roberts, *Oppenheimer's Heir*, 174.

Oxygen Destroyer. He saved the day in the end, but he destroyed his notes and took his own life to preserve the secrets of the weapon. Those actions present the idea that weapons of mass destruction are only useful when stopping other cataclysmic events. That is often the argument made for why the Americans did use two atomic bombs on Japan. This idea has been discussed earlier in this essay and it is debatable whether the dropping of the bomb was needed to stop the war or just to deter conflict with the Soviet Union. Regardless, Serizawa's actions also present the idea that information on those weapons should have died with their creators in order to prevent their mass use. Serizawa, a veteran of World War II, knew exactly what would happen if his Oxygen Destroyer was mass produced. It would create another situation like the Cold War and the nuclear arms race.

While many of the previously mentioned films are decidedly pro-nuclear power and pro-bombs, there are just as many films that are anti-nuclear power and anti-bomb. While none of the previously mentioned films like *Them!* say that nuclear power is good, they still portray these messages from a pro-military view. Their messages would be something like "If only the military had better control over these things" or are still touting the importance of military science advancements. Many films have a very bleak look at how nuclear and other scientific advancements would affect the future. Many of these films predicted a sudden and devastating end of mankind and civilization. To many people nuclear weapons would be the cause of said destruction. While it was initially covered up, it was eventually revealed how well documented how severely Hiroshima and Nagasaki were destroyed. As mentioned in the introduction, the USA had used ending the war to justify using the bomb on Japan twice; when in actuality it was partially used to deter the USSR from starting another war with the USA.



The film *Five* is remarkably bleak with only five survivors after atomic war wipes out almost all life on the planet Earth. One of the characters attempts to hunt every day, but he never comes back with any food. The characters live in a remote area that was untouched by the bomb, which allows them to grow plants and while the cities have supplies and goods they present a danger of radiation. The characters eke out their meager existence in the remains of the world and try their best to be optimistic about the future. One of the survivors is an African American man named Charles (Charles Lampkin), who wanted to become a teacher, but he took a job in a bank because it was more secure. Others include an old man, an office worker, a thrill seeker, and a pregnant wife of an architect. These characters are not scientists, soldiers, or any other important position, they are everymen. On top of struggling to find food, power, and building a new home they struggle with racism, sexual desire, and conflicting ideas about how to survive. A more pulpy version of the story is the film *Day the World Ended*. That film has a navy captain and his daughter take in a gold prospector, a geologist, a man in the process of mutating, a gangster, and a stripper. The film has just as much melodrama as *Five*, but has a lot more of an upbeat tone. The characters spend a lot more time just goofing around to go swimming, dance to music, or getting into fist fights.

In addition to the complete destruction of cities and massive human casualties, these films also addressed the destructive after effects of nuclear fallout. Radiation poisoning, radioactive burns, cancer, and possible mutations are all just as big concerns as immediately being killed or starving to death. *Five* touches on this topic by showing Eric (James Anderson) suffering from late stage radioactive poisoning and Rosanne's (Susan Douglas Rubeš) baby dying could be of exposure to radiation. *Day the World Ended* also plays this very straight by having the monster be a person mutated into that monstrous form because of radiation. The film explores the idea

that mutations are the next state of evolution. Radek (Paul Dubov) grows immune to the radiation and he spends a lot of time in the wastelands where the other characters cannot go. He tells stories about how new small communities are being formed by the new mutants and how he needs to hide from stronger mutants that do not like him. Jim Maddison (Paul Birch) also tells about how when he witnessed the early mutations from a bomb test and how several animals began to grow new features to resist the radiation and grow stronger. To the writers of the film it made sense to them that animals and people would evolve to survive in this new irradiated environment. These two films show the bleak realities of a nuclear holocaust, but still managed to draw audiences in by being a melodrama in the case of *Five* and a pulpy monster movie in the case of *Day the World Ended*.

Of all the films to discuss atomic weapon use, one of the most flippant films to do so is *King Dinosaur* (Gordon, 1955). After dealing with the large native wildlife and getting comfortable on the new planet they discovered, two of the characters go to investigate an island. On this island they are cornered by dinosaurs (lizards with added spines and trick photography) and the other characters need to come save them. In addition to guns and another boat they bring what is essentially an atom bomb. After fleeing the island the bomb's timer goes off and kills the dinosaurs. As they watch the explosion from a distance, one of the characters remarks, "We did it. We brought civilization to planet Nova!" To the characters in the film, and Gordon possibly, nuclear technology is a symbol of civilization. The power to destroy with ease, the power to control that which opposes you, and the power to use nuclear energy for everything from an engine to a bomb is a sign of humanity's advancement and greatness. One of the characters looks on sadly, or at least with some negative emotion, but the men of the film look proud of themselves for causing the explosion. Their mission to planet Nova was to prepare it for

colonization and to them, they succeeded when they set off the bomb. At the end of the film they announce they're going to leave the planet now that they're done. The film ends on stock footage of the mushroom cloud and triumphant music is playing. Nothing like a good planet for colonization like radiated land and fresh genocide.

As discussed in the introduction of this paper, *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* was a film that perfectly captured the feeling of a nuclear threat film. The film is not about a bomb ending all life on the earth like *Five* or a monster movie like *Them*. Like *Godzilla*, *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* is a film about the human condition. People were terrified of atomic bombs and the threat of mutually assured destruction from war. There was not a war in the film, but just the repeated testing of nuclear weapons was enough to seal the world's doom. Like *The Blob*, which shall be discussed in Chapter Three, the film approaches the topic of nuclear devastation while also becoming topical in its ideas that resemble climate change discussion. The world was experiencing stronger storms, rising sea levels, droughts, and rising temperatures, which are all current worries in 2021. In the same way *Godzilla* is a symbol of nuclear devastation, the sun is a symbol of mutually assured destruction.

The core of the film, like *Godzilla*, is the human characters. The characters are not scientists, military men, or politicians. They are working class people who report the changes happening to the world and they are powerless to change the fate of the world. They worry about the Earth moving towards the sun, but they worry about romance, family, pay, and their duties as journalists just as much. There is no triumphant moment when the main character saves the day and the world is set right as he kisses the girl. The characters listen helplessly as they hope that everything will just work out and place their faith in those that can make a difference, like the aforementioned politicians, scientists, and military figures.

*On the Beach* and *The Last War* both have similar plots and structure to *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*. *On the Beach* especially follows in the bleak tone as it embraces the idea of humanities' doom even more. Radioactive fallout is making everywhere on Earth unlivable and people are lining up to commit suicide instead of continuing to live in the doomed world. In both films many people become self indulgent as the world nears its eve. In *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* water parties (that look more like orgies) happen in the streets and in *On the Beach* Grand Prix racers intentionally crash their cars to die in races. Susan Sontag says in her essay, "Imagination of Disaster," that films like *The Day the World Caught Fire* resonated with audiences because of their disaster elements. The end of civilization meant an end of responsibility. Cities are empty, the common people cannot do anything to stop the threat, and if they could survive all they had was the goal to start all over.<sup>26</sup>

And thus survival is the goal of the characters in so many of these films about nuclear devastation. The rebirth of humanity, a new Adam and Eve, is seen overtly in films like *Five, Day the World Ended*, *King Dinosaur*, and *Godzilla*. However in many of these films the romance plot takes such an importance. The idea that these characters who have endured that harrowing experience and shall now enter a relationship to have children is seen as a good thing. *On the Beach's* ending is tragic not only because of the end of humanity, but also because of how the two romantic leads are unable to have their Adam and Eve moment.

The portrayal of nuclear weapons in cinema of the 1950s and 1960s is as varied as arguments about the ethics of using them. The military glorifies their use when it helps them and condemns it when it works against them. The ordinary people, the people these films are marketed to, are fearful of them and are powerless to stop them. If the military cannot step in and

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<sup>26</sup> Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966.), 45.

save the day in the end or some scientist cannot find a last minute solution then the world is doomed. The monsters drew audiences in, but the thing that makes the films stand the test of time is the human element. The struggles of work, romance, and the family drama is what people are concerned about. When bombs start falling and monsters start rising the concerns are either heightened or forgotten in place of the new highest priority, the survival of humankind.

### Chapter Three: The Space Age

In 1949 the RTV-G-4 Bumper, a research rocket launched by the United States, was the first object sent in space. For almost all of human history people have wondered about the stars and wanted to reach them. Due to the difficulties most people were relegated to dreaming about the vastness of space. In the early 1900s these took the form of pulp novels and comic books, but with the advent of film that also became a vehicle for common people to explore space. More so than any generation before, the 1950s was focused on space. Interest in the topic and competition with the Soviet Union spurred the United States to the lengths it did to put people into space. Much like the topic of nuclear weapons the military's involvement on the topic varies from film to film. Those differences show how there were different ideas on how space travel should be approached and how aliens would greet humanity. Whether it was going up in space or seeing unknown entities coming from outer space, audiences ate up science-fiction films about space.

#### *Alien Invaders*

People were already worrying about atomic bombs falling from the sky, but according to many sci-fi films they also needed to worry about alien invaders coming from space. These aliens would sometimes take humanoid forms or would take monstrous forms from out of someone's wildest dreams. While aliens are sometimes peaceful and want to warn the Earthlings about the dangers of nuclear technology and war, they are more often dangerous and looking to take over the Earth or devour human beings. These alien invaders, like the monsters created by nuclear energy, were often allegories. One of the most notable of those films is *The Blob*.

*The Blob* touches on themes of small town community, invasive threats, and generational ideologies. The film follows Steve McQueen as a teenager named Steve<sup>27</sup> and his friends discover an alien blob that devours people while the adults scoff at the idea for most of the film. As the blob consumes people it grows larger and redder until it can swallow an entire building. As I mentioned in the introduction of this essay, the film has developed a climate change message with the cold being the only thing that can stop the blob. When they drop the blob in the arctic at the end of the film they remark that they'll be safe as long as the arctic stays cold. While that could be read from the film from a modern perspective, a more timely interpretation of the film is that the blob is representative of the red scare. The blob is a menace that falls from the sky, terrorizes a small American town, is large, and very red. In the 1950s there was an overwhelming fear of communism and people like Joseph McCarthy and the Department of Unamerican Activities exploited those fears. People called communism the red menace and the blob is an actual red menace.

The reason I used *The Blob* to describe the chapter of the space age is because it shows the fear of what's from above, has political commentary of contemporary concerns, shows the voice of popular independent films, and reinforces American value. The film shows a comfy small town where everyone knows each other, doors are unlocked, and kids get in trouble on the regular while pulling harmless pranks on the police. The film even addresses the generational differences between the kids and the adults because one of the police officers treats his job as a small town officer like he's still fighting in the war. In a film like *Them*, he would have been the

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<sup>27</sup> Steve McQueen was 28 at the time of release, more than a decade older than the age his character is supposed to be.

hero, but the film is more about the community. Svehla understands this and elaborates in his essay “Seduced by Small Town America,”

The community pulls together to stay alive. What starts as a low-rent version of *Rebel Without a Cause* soon becomes something else altogether, a testimony to young rebels and mainstream society working together to defeat the common threat. And in the last frame the monster is carried away by airplane, the “cancer” isolated symbolically from the quaint Pennsylvania burgh, restoring order and safety because opposing personalities came together to fight a common cause, both rebellious youth and entrenched old-timers alike.<sup>28</sup>

The film that double featured with *The Blob*, titled *I Married a Monster From Outer Space*, was also a low-budget picture that was laced with commentary. The film was in black and white and was more of a social drama than a monster movie. It has more in common with *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* than *The Blob* (the film it double featured with). A newlywed’s husband starts acting weird and it turns out that all the married men of the town were replaced by aliens who needed to breed with Earth women. The film’s focus on an invasive alien force that tries to take over the community is very similar to *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*’s pod people and has the same sympathetic idea, but evil execution. Their purpose is survival, but in order to do so, humanity suffers. Both films also have the commentary of integration and people attempting to pass in modern society. While *Body Snatchers* has fears of McCarthyism and communism, *Married a Monster* has fears of interracial marriage and miscegenation. One of the few characters to see through the alien’s ruse is a scientist. At the time scientists and psychologists were still making reasons to say that those things were bad for American society.

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<sup>28</sup> Svehla, *Seduced by Small-Town America*, 203.



While *I Married a Monster From Outer Space* does have overlapping themes with *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the latter is much more popular than the former. One of the reasons is the subgenre and the way the film was advertised. *I Married a Monster From Outer Space* is more of a romantic and social melodrama, while *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is more of a traditional thriller and horror. J.P. Telotte addresses in his essay, “Pondering the “Pulp Paradox,”” that when a film was more pulpy it tended to reach more audiences and become more popular. Paramount, the company that made *I Married a Monster From Outer Space* and distributed *The Blob*, tried to make big, respectable science-fiction pictures and not cheap B-movies. While they were successful for a time, these films would be overshadowed by films like *The Blob* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.<sup>29</sup>

Not all films of this era had negative portrayals of aliens or space travel. One of the most famous films of the period, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, is all about a peaceful alien making contact with Earth and getting misunderstood. Klaatu’s (Michael Rennie) first moments have him offering a device to study life on other planets, but it is assumed to be a weapon and is accidentally destroyed. These misconceptions about the nature of the aliens are not just in the film, but also in the poster of the film. The poster shows the robot Gort carrying a woman in a red dress away and shooting its eye laser, crowds of people (mostly women) running in terror, tanks shooting at Gort, Klaatu holding what looks to be a dagger, and a large black hand gripping the Earth. The poster shows this machine terrorizing helpless people and the military is nobly trying to stop it. Other films have very similar posters that do little to change the poses of the women

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<sup>29</sup> Telotte, *Pondering the “Pulp Paradox”*: *Pal, Paramount, and the SF Pulps*, *Science Fiction Studies* 47, no. 1. (2020): 42-44.

and robots. These films make peaceful, or at least protective, machines into aggressive and lustful monsters that need to be stopped lest they take our women.<sup>30</sup>

*The Day the Earth Stood Still* is one of the most popular films of the era that portrayed a peaceful alien. The way the film goes about showing Klaatu's desire for peace by making him look like an unassuming man and using Michael Rennie's talent to deliver exquisite dialogue. Other films attempt to do this, but with mixed results. *It Came From Outer Space* was another film that used peaceful aliens that are only on Earth to make repairs. In order to help make repairs the aliens must shapeshift as people they capture. The film can be read as an anti-McCarthyism film due to how the aliens are treated. They are seen as suspicious and people think they're going to be dangerous, but they are minding their own business and just trying to get off of the planet. The final lines of the film are, "It wasn't the right time for us to meet. But there will be other nights, other stars for us to watch. They'll be back," which implies that aliens of the film are peaceful and in a perfect world would have made contact peacefully with the Earthlings.

As discussed in Chapter One, Professor Carrington from *The Thing From Another World* had a very optimistic opinion on the alien in the film. Now I shall spend the time to properly analyze the film's treatment of the alien invader who finds himself unfrozen in a block of ice. As mentioned before, the way the monster is treated makes it seem like he is only responding in kind to the mistreatments he receives. He wakes up from a nap in a block of ice and a strange small creature starts shooting him. Then as he runs away these other small hairy creatures attack him as well. The suspicion and aggressive distrust is placed not only on the individual alien, but

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<sup>30</sup> Telotte, "Sex and Machines: The 'Buzz' of 1950s Science Fiction Films," *Science Fiction Film & Television* 8, no. 3 (2015): 374-377.

on the mere idea of more extraterrestrial visitors. The famous final words of the film are an ominous warning to “Keep watching the skies.” The film does not entertain the notion that the alien was some kind of renegade and that the ship that crashed could have been containing a prisoner of some kind. Instead the characters, save Carrington, choose to believe that any other extraterrestrial visitors will be violent, dangerous, and a threat to social order.

### *Man’s Foray into Space*

One of the concerns in making science-fiction films in this period was realism. Because the 1950s were an era of massive scientific progress people were very curious about space travel. As detailed in the essay, “Pondering the “Pulp Paradox”: Pal, Paramount, and the SF Pulps,” J.P. Telotte describes how when Paramount made science-fiction films like *When Worlds Collide* (Maté, 1951) and *Conquest of Space* (Haskin, 1955) the producers spent a lot of time focusing on trying to make the film scientifically accurate, or as accurate as scientists thought. They would consult actual scientists for designs of spaceships, suits, and physics about space. This didn’t mean they were anything like what space actually was like, but an attempt was made. Despite that attempt of realism there were still radically inaccurate things. *Conquest of Space* showed things like a space wheel orbiting Earth that was used as a staging point for Earth’s mission to Mars.<sup>31</sup> While humanity still has yet to reach Mars, it is unlikely that such an installation shall be set up before humanity first sets foot on Mars. What this showed was that film studios, namely Paramount, were very interested in what scientists had to say and actually had a lot of faith in them when it came to space travel. That view is remarkably optimistic, but there is a cynical capitalist explanation of that interest as well. This was to get not only sci-fi fans, but also general

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<sup>31</sup> Telotte, *Pondering the “Pulp Paradox,”* 34-42.

audiences who were not as interested in space travel. By wowing them with special effects they got audiences into seats, but as mentioned earlier this tended to make their films dry and wordy without much excitement outside of the novelty of space travel.

Noted science-fiction author, Robert A. Heinlein<sup>32</sup> was often consulted or hired as a full time writer. Paramount had hired him to write *Destination Moon*, their first 1950s science-fiction film, and he would later have heavy involvement in the independent film *Project Moonbase*. Due to that involvement the film not only had a very notable attempt at accurate depiction of space travel, but also a strong military focus of space travel. The essay, “The Dark Side of the Moon: Robert A. Heinlein's Project Moonbase,” by Gary Westfahl, has him compare the crash landing on the moon in the film to the real life event when a test plane crashed in the Pacific islands. In both instances surveying was the primary mission, but after crash landings they quickly rebranded the mission as setting up military bases on the new locations.<sup>33</sup> By using his knowledge of the military, Heinlein was able to create a unique view of space travel that was very heavily militarized. In other films they would have scientists involved in the missions in some way either as crew or overseeing the mission from Earth. There are no scientists in the film at all.

The essay also talks about how Heinlein’s personal politics were inserted into the film by showing women as military figures that should be respected, through Colonel Briteis, and as leaders of the United States, through the female president shown at the end of the film. Despite

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Heinlen (1907-1988) was a science-fiction author known for being one of the first sci-fi authors who attempted to use realism, a modern understanding of science in his works, and discuss topics like sex, politics, religion, and the military. Some of his most well known works are *Starship Troopers* (1959) and *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961).

<sup>33</sup> Gary Westfahl, “The Dark Side of the Moon: Robert A. Heinlein's Project Moonbase,” *Extrapolation* 36, no. 2 (1995): 129-130.

that the film still fumbles the message by having the male character do all the work, get promoted after him and Briteis get married (if she is a higher rank than her husband she would be able to boss him around), and casually talks about spanking her. Westfahl argues that it shows a covert female authority by having Briteis request the promotion for Major Moore (Ross Ford) and the female President giving her congratulations and blessing, but I feel there are holes in this argument; namely the way that the characters are portrayed and treated.<sup>34</sup> Colonel Briteis is repeatedly and mockingly called “Bright-Eyes” (a nickname also given to the intelligent human, Taylor, in the 1968 film *Planet of the Apes*), is accused of only getting her missions because of being a woman, and is looking on badly by Moore for ending their relationship to advance her career. The President is only given a few moments on screen and is seen as almost grandmotherly due to her age and way of dressing. This paternal viewpoint of authority figures is not locked to her however as General Greene is called “Pappy” by both of the leads.

*Destination Moon* and *Rocketship-XM* were two of the first films to show space travel in cinema after World War II and both manage to approach the topic of the Cold War. As observed by author Victoria O’Donnell, *Destination Moon* happens to be somewhat more optimistic, but has a slightly more pro-war leaning. *Rocketship-XM* manages to be slightly more pessimistic during the film, but manages to have a more hopeful ending. *Destination Moon* has the goal of space travel to reach the moon and to set up defenses in case war breaks out. Characters even talk about how in time there might be another need for rockets. *Rocketship-XM* has the characters land on Mars and find that it is devastated by nuclear war and all of the characters die, either on Mars or when the rocket crashes back on Earth. The characters mourn their deaths, but remark

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 130-133.

that it was important to prove that they could get to space and warn what happened on Mars.<sup>35</sup>

Both films show that space travel is not only inherently linked to war, but it is inescapable. Ships on the moon mean new ways to wage war and there has already been a nuclear war on Mars that brought them back to the stone age (which invokes Einstein's quote, "I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones").

The Americans were not the only ones to venture into outer space. The East German/Polish film *Silent Star*, retitled *First Spaceship on Venus*, was a science-fiction space exploration film that was released one year before Yuri Gagarin became the first man in space. The film, aside from being a Soviet production that attempted to portray Venus, was notable amongst others for its multinational crew. The crew consisted of an American commander, a Russian cosmonaut/scientist, a French engineer (Polish in the original), a Chinese linguist, an Indian mathematician, a Japanese medical officer, an African communications officer (true nation unspecified), and an American pilot (East German in the original). All of these people were considered at the top of their field, were respected worldwide, and in the case of Professor Sikarna (Kurt Rackelmann) rivals past scientific masters like Einstein.

Of the content cut from the film (ten whole minutes) the most notable is American Professor Harringway Hawling (Oldrich Lukes) arguing with the bureaucracy of the United States government about participating in the mission to Venus. He later defected to East Germany because participation in the mission is more important than the United States to him. In the American dub, this whole subplot is cut from the film. By removing this subplot the film makes America look better, more cooperative, and as unambiguous as the other nations. The

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<sup>35</sup> Victoria O'Donnell, "Science Fiction Films and Cold War Anxiety," in *The Fifties: Transforming the Screen, 1950-1959*, ed. Peter Lev (University of California Press, 2003), 174-175.

other changes are Raimund Brinkman (Günther Simon) the German pilot being renamed and renationalized as Robert an American. The American version, while toning down their negative traits for the original, removes most of the Soviet presence of the film. Brinkman is now the first American man to land on the moon (accurate to history since an American did first set foot on the moon). He also gets the romantic subplot of the film with the only female member of the crew, Japanese medical officer Dr. Sumiko Ogimura (Yoko Tani), is the young handsome lead, and gets the heroic sacrifice at the end of the film to save the crew.

As detailed in the essay “Sounds of The Silent Star” by Philip Hayward and Natalie Lewandowski, the novel the film is based on was strongly pro-communist and anti-capitalist. Hawling abandoning America is one thing, but also the fate of Venus is tied to capitalism. In all versions, Venus is shown to be wiped of life due to some kind of civil war, which ended in mutual nuclear destruction. While the film leaves the cause of the war ambiguous, the novel explicitly says that the war on Venus was caused because of its capitalist society.<sup>36</sup> So not only does the original novel have an anti-nuclear message, but also an anti-capitalist message. This anti-capitalist view is removed from the American version of the film and is left with just an anti-nuclear message.

Another film that shows an attempt at a multinational crew is the much lower budget film, *12 to the Moon* (Bradley, 1960).<sup>37</sup> This film’s multinational crew includes people from all over the world and unlike *First Spaceship on Venus*, it is a cause for conflict. The Russian cosmonaut struts about and praises the USSR’s superiority, the German crewmember has guilt over his

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<sup>36</sup> Philip Hayward and Natalie Lewandowski, *Sounds of The Silent Star: The Context, Score and Thematics of the 1960 Film adaptation of Stanisław Lem's Novel Astronauci*, *Science Fiction Film & Television* 3, no. 2 (2010), 184-186.

<sup>37</sup> *12 to the Moon* came out months before *First Spaceship on Venus*’s original East German release, but it was seen first in America.

father's actions in the holocaust, an Israeli man who hates the Nazis, but respects the German due to ignorance of his family, and a Frenchman who is secretly a communist and betrays the crew at the end of the film. Upon landing on the Moon people die, people go missing, and lunar aliens freeze North America, and plan to later freeze the rest of the world, to stop them from contaminating the Moon. After working together to unthaw the Earth, the aliens reveal that no one was killed in the big freeze and that they're able to come to the Moon whenever they want. A big part of the film is overcoming misunderstandings caused by borders. The German and Israeli crew believe they'll have issues because of the holocaust, but they overcome that and risk everything to save the world. The French crewmember is secretly a communist and thinks that because of that the Russian crewmember will want North America to stay frozen in order for the USSR to take over the world, but he disagrees and knocks the Frenchman out. The aliens think that humanity is incapable of good and will just make the moon a new place of war, but instead upon seeing the length the humans took to save their planet they change their mind. Interestingly, like *First Spaceship on Venus*, the film also portrays an interracial relationship positively (between a Swedish woman and Turkish man) and that love is actually one of the factors that makes the aliens spare the Earth.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, *King Dinosaur* is flippant about the topic of nuclear weaponry, but also about space travel in general. The characters wear space suits for only a few moments before quickly stripping them off after quickly learning that the air is safe. That attention to detail is more than most films would offer. Others would just have the breathable atmosphere be a given. Planet Nova is shown to be very Earth-like with the differences being some animals are bigger than others and dinosaurs are still around. The film also reinforces gender stereotypes such as men doing most of the work, being gun toting badasses, women



needing to keep house, and becoming screaming crying messes when they see a snake. The film portrays space travel like an improperly prepared camping trip. In addition to the film's flippant opinion on nuclear technology, *King Dinosaur* continues to prove itself to be dismissive of meaning and just a film made to sell tickets (and not even a good one at that).

As I have outlined in this chapter, the portrayal of space and aliens is as varied as the portrayals of nuclear weapons and scientists. While the films were inaccurate and pulpy, they inspired people to reach for the stars. These films included this messy imagination of optimistic ideas of space travel and nightmarish monsters from space, but they showed that people were thinking of that final frontier. The race to space was a symbol of humanity's inability to work together, but many films had shown optimistic ideas of humanity getting along enough to reach space and new planets together.

## Conclusion:

As detailed in this essay, sci-fi films of the 1950s and 60s had varied beliefs that shaped the stories of these films. One film would say good things about the military, nuclear technology, and said aliens are a threat to the world, like *Atomic Submarine*. Other films took more nuanced approaches and saw potential nuclear war as a bad thing and believed foreign ideas were not only important, but necessary for humanity's survival, like *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. In addition to being so prevalent, many of these films were successes at the box offices. Seeing that these films were popular meant they would be seen by many people and would inspire those people to make films of their own. *The Thing From Another World* was a major inspiration on filmmaker John Carpenter and he has cited other films from the period as personal favorites.

Carpenter made his own remake of the film in 1982 (just titled *The Thing*) and many other popular films from the time would also be remade like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Kaufman, 1978) and *The Blob* (Russell, 1988), with updated themes and ideas to fit their own time periods. The ability to endure for twenty to thirty years showed that while many of the films in the genre were almost completely written off by critics, there was a good chance that an audience member walked out of *Tarantula* and thought, "That film was exciting! John Agar was cool. Professor Deemer had a good idea about that food stuff." Sci-fi stories and sci-fi films fueled people's excitement for space travel and made them think about whatever lay in wait in the stars above. Science-fiction excites, scares, and makes the imagination run wild.

The amount of scholarly discussion of sci-fi films from the 1950s surprised me during my research process. I had expected there to be discussion about some of the more popular films, but I did not expect there to be as much as I found. Early in my research I had vowed to not rely on

the discussion of particularly popular films like *Godzilla*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* due to these films being widely known and discussed, but I found that it was almost impossible to approach the genre without talking about them at least in comparison to other films. Telotte in particular was surprising due to just how much he did write about and I was stunned to see that someone had written about *Project Moonbase*, a film I had first seen on *Mystery Science Theater 3000*<sup>38</sup> (1988-1996, 1997-1999, 2017-2018). Even then however, it was still rare to find scholarly essays that discussed films like *The Blob*, *Fiend Without a Face*, *Atomic Submarine*, and *King Dinosaur*. By writing this essay I hope it will be possible in the future for further analysis to be done on the genre and period of sci-fi films. There is much analysis on other genres that were considered B movies like noirs and melodramas and on directors that were not initially considered skilled or well known like Douglas Sirk. For 1950s and 60s sci-fi films to gain a reanalysis in the same way, it would be incredible to see the discussion.

There are so many more films to be discussed. Many of the films mentioned are under discussion, but these are only films that I have seen and thought I was capable of analyzing. There are many other films I could have discussed, but did not due to overlapping ideas or lacking particular relevance other than simple connections like the military killing the monster or a mad doctor being in the film. The films I chose to discuss are films that are particularly unique or allowed me to make multiple points. While discussion of foreign films was included there is so much more from the nations I mentioned, but also many from ones I did not discuss. Japan

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<sup>38</sup> *Mystery Science Theater 3000* was a television series that ran for many years on many networks. The show followed a human (Joel Hodgson, Mike Nelson, and Jonah Ray each took the role during different periods of the show) and two robot puppets, Tom Servo and Crow T. Robot, as they watched bad movies and made jokes and running commentary during the films.

has a trove of sci-fi and countless other kaiju films that could have been discussed. I am personally a fan of Italian cinema and could have spent more time attempting to research Italian sci-fi and monster movies. A film like *Atom Age Vampire* (Majano, 1960) could have slotted in perfectly when talking about *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*. Expanding the discussion to film serials and early sci-fi television (shows and made-for-TV movies) would help too due to the differing concerns of television and serial formats.

Another way these films can be analyzed in the future is by really talking about how many of these films would go on to inspire other films and careers. Notable examples are how *It! The Terror From Beyond Space* (Cahn, 1958) and *Planet of the Vampires* (Bava, 1965) had inspired *Alien* (Scott, 1979) or how director John Carpenter had been enamored with films like *The Thing From Another World* and *Robot Monster* (Tucker, 1953). I do not even need to look at new films for new topics. Films like *King Dinosaur*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *It Came From Outer Space*, and other space exploration films or alien invader films have themes of colonialism inside of their plots and attitudes. These films and readings could be approached from disciplines outside cinema studies, and useful in historical and psychological studies into how people saw those kinds of ideas in films of the 1950s and 60s.

A point I have made all throughout this essay is that sci-fi films interest and inspire people. They bring hope for the future about strange foreign worlds, benevolent beings from beyond the stars, new technologies, and peaceful futures. However there are still the fears of humanity like total war, monsters from beyond the stars which seek to only consume or destroy, mad men intent on ruling the world, and forces completely outside our comprehension threatening to destroy the world. These films hold an important place in history as they helped create the feeling of the 1950s and 60s in the same way music and literature does. Memories of a

war are healing, the financial state is stable, and people are looking for new excitement. Sci-fi was there for audiences then and it let so many of the most entertaining films come to be. In the modern day there is still the threat of total war, nuclear destruction, foreign invaders taking resources, and new worries like energy and climate concerns that forms the lens through which we now view these films.

By seeing how people of the 1950s and 60s approached similar concerns through film we can see how they imagined they could overcome them or be shattered by them. More often than not the hero would embrace his love interest after the threat was stopped and they would walk off into the uncertain future together. Even in the more pessimistic films of the era like *On The Beach* and *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* still end on hopeful notes even though they imply humanity is doomed. *On The Beach*'s final shot is of a banner that reads "There is still time!" *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* ends by showing two newspapers, one that reads "Earth Saved," the other says "Earth Doomed," but the sound of church bells implies that the world is saved. The 1950s, despite everything, was an optimistic time filled with people that were ready to move forward. Hopefully we as a people could learn from them with all the lessons of the intervening years and try to move forward as well.

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## Filmography

Films are listed according to chapter, and then by date

Color Key: Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 3, Multiple Chapters

A Tier: These titles will get their own sections and constant reference

- The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951, Robert Wise, United States, 20th Century Fox) [Ch. 3]  
*Five* (1951, Arch Oboler, United States, Columbia Pictures) [Ch. 2]  
*The Thing From Another World* (1951, Christian Nyby, United States, RKO Pictures) [Ch. 1, 3]  
*Godzilla* (1954, Ishirō Honda, Japan, Toho) [Ch. 2]  
*Them!* (1954, Gordon Douglas, United States, Warner Bros) [Ch. 2]  
*King Dinosaur* (1955, Bert I. Gordon, United States, Lippert Pictures) [Ch. 2, 3]  
*Tarantula!* (1955, Jack Arnold, United States, Universal-International) [Ch. 1]  
*Forbidden Planet* (1956, Fred M. Wilcox, United States, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) [Ch. 1]  
*I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957, Gene Fowler Jr., United States, American International Pictures) [Ch. 1]  
*The Blob* (1958, Irvin Yeaworth, United States, Independent/Paramount Pictures) [Ch. 3]  
*Fiend Without a Face* (1958, Arthur Crabtree, United Kingdom, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) [Ch. 1, 2]  
*The First Spaceship on Venus* (1960, Kurt Maetzig, East German/Polish, Progress Film) [Ch. 3]  
*The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1961, Val Guest, United Kingdom, British Lion Films) [Ch. 2]

B Tier: These films will be used as reference to compare to A tier films and/or will be addressed more than once in the same section

- It Came From Outer Space* (1953, Jack Arnold, United States, Universal-International) [Ch. 3]  
*Project Moonbase* (1953, Richard Talmadge, United States, Independent/Lippert Pictures) [Ch. 3]  
*Bride of the Monster* (1955, Ed Wood, United States, Independent/Banner Pictures) [Ch. 1]  
*Day the World Ended* (1955, Roger Corman, United States, Independent/American International Pictures) [Ch. 2]  
*The Amazing Colossal Man* (1957, Bert I. Gordon, United States, American International Pictures) [Ch. 2]  
*Blood of Dracula* (1957, United States, American International Pictures) [Ch. 1]  
*I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1958, Gene Fowler Jr, United States, Paramount Pictures) [Ch. 3]



*The Atomic Submarine* (1959, Spencer Gordon Bennet, United States, Independent/Allied Artists) [Ch. 2]

*The Killer Shrews* (1959, Ray Kellogg, United States, Independent/McLendon-Radio Pictures Distributing Company) [Ch. 1]

*On the Beach* (1959, Stanley Kramer, United States, United Artists) [Ch. 2]

*12 To The Moon* (1960, David Bradley, United States, Independent/Columbia Pictures) [Ch. 3]

C Tier: Films that will likely be referenced once to be used as an example or in reference to A or B films

*Destination Moon* (1950, Irving Pichel, United States, Independent/George Pal Productions) [Ch. 3]

*Rocketship X-M* (1950, Kurt Neumann, United States, Lippert Pictures) [Ch. 3]

*When Worlds Collide* (1951, Rudolph Maté, United States of America, Paramount Pictures) [Ch. 3]

*Conquest of Space* (1955, Byron Haskin, United States, Paramount Pictures) [Ch. 3]

*Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956, Don Siegel, United States, Allied Artists Pictures) [Ch. 3]

*Teenage Zombies* (1959, Jerry Warren, United States, Independent/Governor Films) [Ch. 1]

*The Last War* (1961, Shūe Matsubayashi, Japan, Toho) [Ch. 2]

*The Horror of Party Beach* (1964, Del Tenney, United States, Twentieth Century-Fox) [Ch. 1]

*Planet of the Apes* (1968, Franklin J. Schaffner, United States, APJAC Productions) [Ch. 3]