

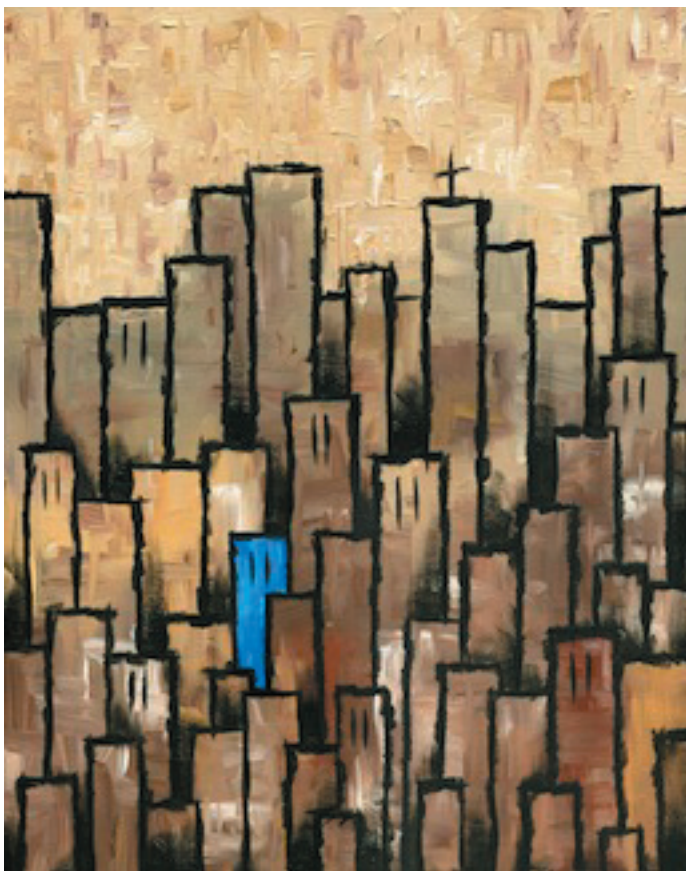
**Chris Garcia's**

# **DRINK TANK**



**The Day The Earth Stood Still**

**Delivering The Message**



So, I moved.

Well, I'm in the middle of moving, but I'm no longer living in my old place. It's been a few weeks of rough, including several days of sleeping in my car. I have to admit, it was my own dumb fault, I could have accepted two free weeks in a motel that my Landlord offered, but after that, I'd be on my own, and that was rough. because like the last time I tried to move, I was declined by far more places than I was accepted by.

That's the real problem. I was declined by 8 of the 9 apartments I put in for. That's 88 percent of them turning me down. There was also a place that said I should save the 40 bucks for the credit check and not put in my application because unless my credit score was in the 800s, I wouldn't be getting the apartment. It was nice to save that money. The worst part was that I have no idea why 7 of the 8 others didn't take me. One specifically said that I didn't meet the management company's minimum for Credit Score. It's not that bad, 623, but still, places don't want me as a tenant. I managed to get this place because they take the first person who applies who meets the minimums for the specific apartment, which I apparently did, so good on me.

So, I'm living in the city of my birth, only a block or so away from my Elementary School. If you'd like to send me physical mail, it's **2392 Sutter Ave. #8, Santa Clara, CA 95050**. Let that serve as my official CoA for y'all six people who read this rag!

OK, so what else is happenin'? I'm out of the place with the mould, which is good, and I've found all the stuff that I was missing from my old place, including a couple of Netflix I thought I'd sent back. These things happen.

It's also National Script Writing Month, which I'm doing a comic for. It's called One Last Big Score and it's about a group of college film students who pull off small-time heists of liquor stores to fund their films and who are about to graduate and decide to go for One Last Big Score before they leave school. It's a fun concept, but I've got a lot to learn about the whole comic writing thing.

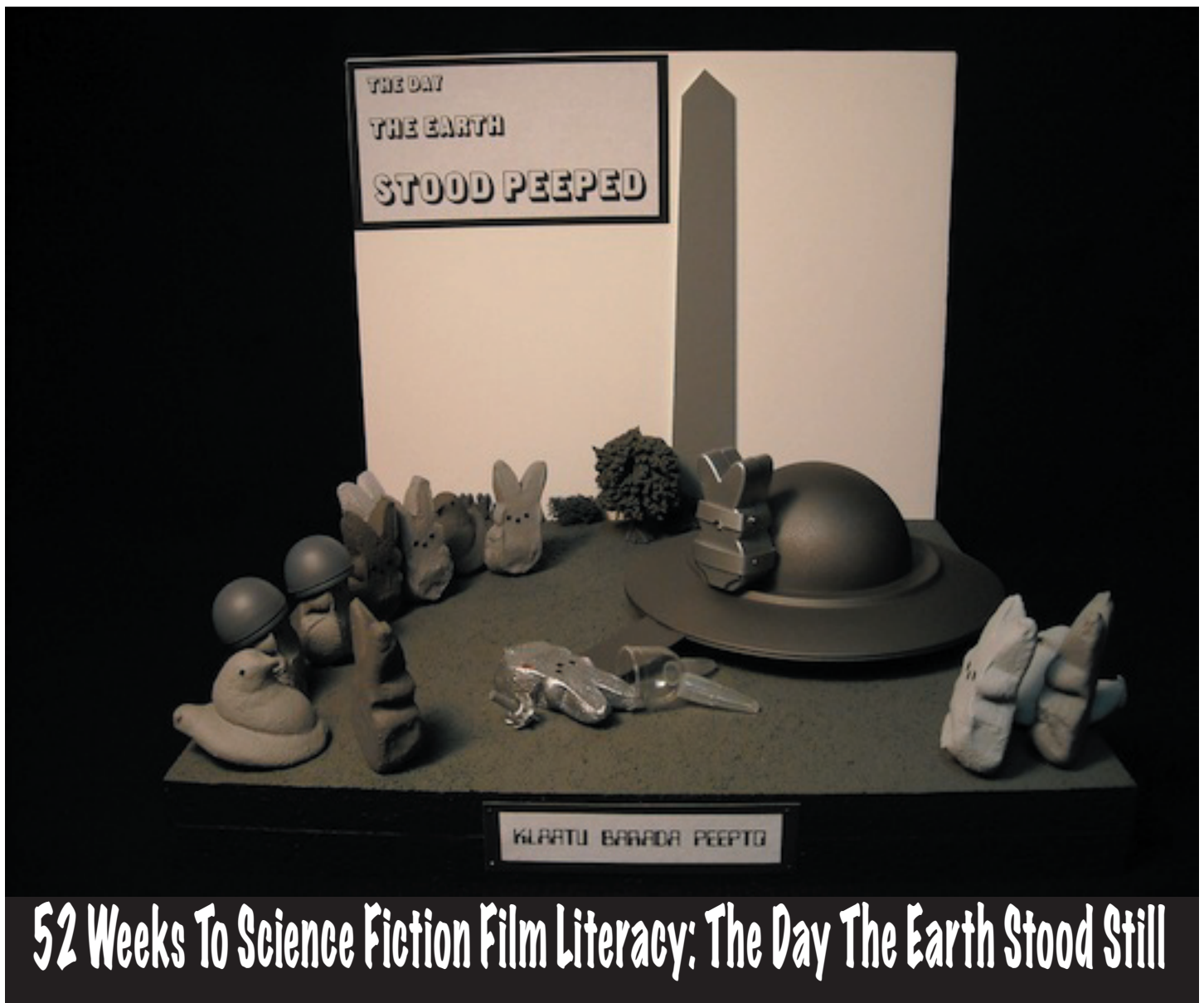
We did the SF Outreach Project at WonderCon a couple of weekends ago and it was a blast. We gave away tons of books, had a great time chatting with young folks and watching the costumes come and go. It was great to get to work with James, and Helen Montgomery, Spike, Tom Becker, Johanna, Miko, Dave Gallaher, Dave Clark, JohnO and ChrisO, Leann and various others. It was just so much fun! I'm hoping we can do it again next year at WonderCon, though I know that they're trying to do it with C2E2 in Chicago next year since it's close to WorldCon.

Also, I got some very good news about two things, which I'll be talking about more in the coming issues.

So, what's this issue then? The film, as the Mo Starkey cover would indicate, is *The Day The Earth Stood Still!* It's a classic and one of the greatest SF films. This is the first of the 52 Weeks to Science Fiction Film Literacy entries without Dr. Frank Wu, though it does bring us Mr. Warren Buff and Cynthia Corral to go along with my bit and the art from Brad W. Foster!!! Can't argue how awesome it is to have so many great folks making art for me!

Next issue will be *Gojira/Godzilla.*, or it might be *Handicapping the Hugos*. Depends on how things go! I've got a couple of obvious calls for the Hugos (James Bacon for Best Fan Writer, Best Graphic Story to The Foglios) and the issue should be a fun one!

OK< let's get this thing rolling, shall we?



## 52 Weeks To Science Fiction Film Literacy: The Day The Earth Stood Still

There are three films of the 1950s that are most frequently analyzed in the world of science fiction. The first of them is *The Day The Earth Stood Still*, Robert Wise's absolute masterpiece. Wise is probably the most interesting filmmaker who ever lived, was an incredibly nice guy who encouraged me to make movies, who enjoyed peanut butter out of the jar and who was the last person alive who saw the complete *Magnificent Ambersons*. I met him a couple of times, once at Cinequest, and we talked about films. His works include *The Sound of Music*, *West Side Story*, *Run Silent, Run Deep*, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* and the hugely underrated *The Set-Up*. He was also an editor, he edited *Citizen Kane* for example, and an effects dude.

Sadly, the one we didn't talk about was *The Day The Earth Stood Still*.

*The Day The Earth Stood Still* is an important part of the path to science fiction film literacy not only because it is one of the finest pieces of science fiction ever to be put to film, but because it took a newish stab at style. It is fairly safe to say that it is the direct forefather of *Cloverleaf*. It is a science fiction film that was shot somewhat in the style of a 1950s documentary. It's sparse, that is to say simple, and it doesn't use the montage and tackle formula that so many science fiction films were using at the time. Wise wanted to make a realistic science fiction film, and for the time, he managed. *Destination Moon* was realistic at points, and then it goes a lot further and it blows away the reality of it all. You have to remember that this was the time that the first SF B-Movies were hitting the screen. After a 1948 court ruling stated that the major studios couldn't keep out the indies and that led to a flood of B-Flicks. They weren't rampant yet, but they were showing up by 1951. You can see that television was one of the big reasons that there was such a rise in the number and the quality of the

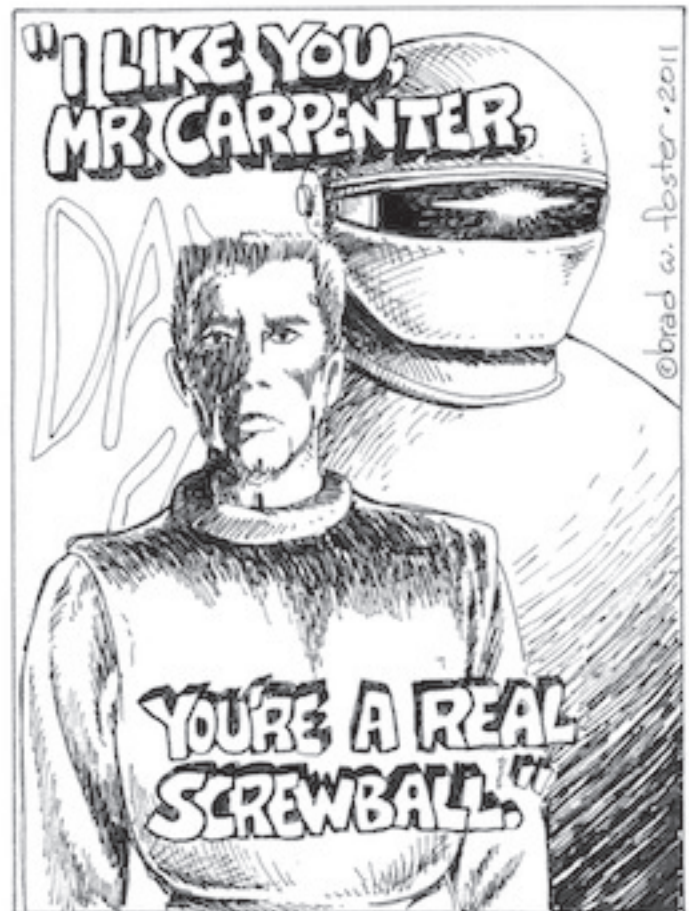
top-rank films. Science Fiction is something that television couldn't hit at the top level. Watch the science fiction television of the 1950s and you'll see what I mean. Film had higher budgets and could give audiences more of what they wanted: bigger thrills and more explosions!

The style was very smart, simple and clean and right. You can contrast it with *Destination Moon* and see that the style of the Pal production was far heavier than the hand that Robert Wise and co. used in *The Day The Earth Stood Still*. It's a sly hand that they use and it's brilliant. While you could say that *2001* and *Close Encounters* came out of the *Destination Moon* tradition, it's clear that films like *Starman*, *Gattaca*, *Solaris* and *Cloverfield* all belong to the *Day The Earth Stood Still* school. There is a lot of conversation, a lot of talking, not a lot of action until it's really needed. It draws you in with thought, with powerful acting... well, except from that kid who keeps saying 'Gee, Mr. Carpenter.' and the like. This is a film not so much of subtlety, but of appropriate response to the material. It knows where it needs to be outwardly scientific, and it knows when it simply needs to be a drama about a man with a purpose bigger than himself.

One thing that was so brilliant was the way that the casting so so dead on. Lock Martin, who played Gort the Robot, was a giant guy who was an usher at the Grauman's Chinese Theatre as I understand it. He's impressive, though honestly it's the outfit that makes the impression. Again, it's simple, not a robot with a running saw or guns poking out all over. It's a sleek-looking robot that allows you to hang all of your fears upon it. What can it do? They don't really tell you for a while. They do show that he can fire beams that can destroy guns from his eyeslit, but you have the feeling that this is only a part of his power. He is a blank slate on which we can write our own terrors. Those are always the best monsters. I think I've said that before in this series... and I'll say it again!

Klaatu, played by Michael Rennie, was perfectly cast. He's tall, thin, at once completely unremarkable and with perhaps a slight camera tilt, totally foreign. Rennie has a sense of peace around him in his performance. He is sly, exudes intelligence and a kind of calm that is perhaps the scariest part of it all. Anyone with the amount of power that Klaatu obviously wields should not be so placid. His performance reminds me of Jeff Bridges in *TRON::Legacy*. Flynn is stoic and has the kind of power that no one can imagine. It's obvious that he took much of his performance from Klaatu. The casting was perfect, especially since the other guy they wanted for the role, Spencer Tracy, would not have been able to give the role that sort of serenity. The way they shot Rennie was also amazing, since they used his frame perfectly. When he first shows up at the boarding house, he's shown in shadows. He's every bit as imposing a figure as Gort without the benefit of his human features. It's a brilliant bit of cinematography, one that establishes Klaatu as another kind of being without going overboard.

There's not a lot said about the connection of this film the literary SF world. The producer, Julian Blaustein, was looking for something to do with science fiction to talk about the growing fears of the early Cold War and all the terror that people were feeling about the Nuclear aspects coming to the front. Almost certainly he was also driven by the various saucer flaps that had been happening over the previous few years. Daryl Zanuck, the legendary producer, gave the greenlight to the project in late 1950. The script was largely based on the story *Farewell to the Master* by Harry Bates, but really, it's not altogether there if you ask me. The story goes that Blaustein looked at more than 200 science fiction stories before settling on *Farewell*



to the Master, and I think that shows. The influences on the film weren't from the mainstream of SF either. The sets were consulted on by Frank Lloyd Wright, who supposedly had a strong influence on the spaceship design. The music, written by legendary composer Bernard Herrman, is one of the most influential of all 1950s films. Consider the fact that it used two Theremin along with electric instruments to accompany the other regular instruments. It's a very effective score, one that I used to have on CD.

The key to *The Day The Earth Stood Still* is its directness. It doesn't pussyfoot around, it flat-out tells you what's what. Humans are at a crossroads and we have to choose the path that will lead us away from war and hatred. The power of the story is that Wise very smartly covered nothing any deeper than a single layer. That's not to say that it's a shallow film, not at all, but they direction, the writing and especially the cinematography recognizes that a simple, well-executed path was what this tale required.

Let me say a few things about the re-make. It sucked

The reason it sucked wasn't because it missed the the point of the original film, which is undoubtedly true, but because it didn't have the sure hand of Robert Wise guiding it nor the intelligence of the script of the original. With the exception of Kathy Bates and John Cleese, the acting is uniformly wooden. Changing it to a message of environmental destruction was actually smart, but the way it was shot was just another SF movie. I think I agree with Mo Starkey on one matter: GORT. GORT in the 2008 film is terrifying, actually scary with scary abilities that we see played out for us. It was the one area where I think the filmmakers got it right. If you're going to make a character scary for today's audiences, you need to show more than hint, and here that worked and worked well.

What else can I say about *The Day The Earth Stood Still*? It's on the National Film Registry, Arthur C. Clarke said it was the 6th Best Science Fiction Film ever made, and you can point to at least a dozen filmmakers who were seriously inspired by it over the last sixty years. It's one of the most important films, not just SF films but FILMS, ever made, and one of the most perfectly produced. It is possibly Robert Wise's magnum opus, and that's a guy who made some masterpieces. It's on Netflix as an Instant View and I suggest you get out there and see it.



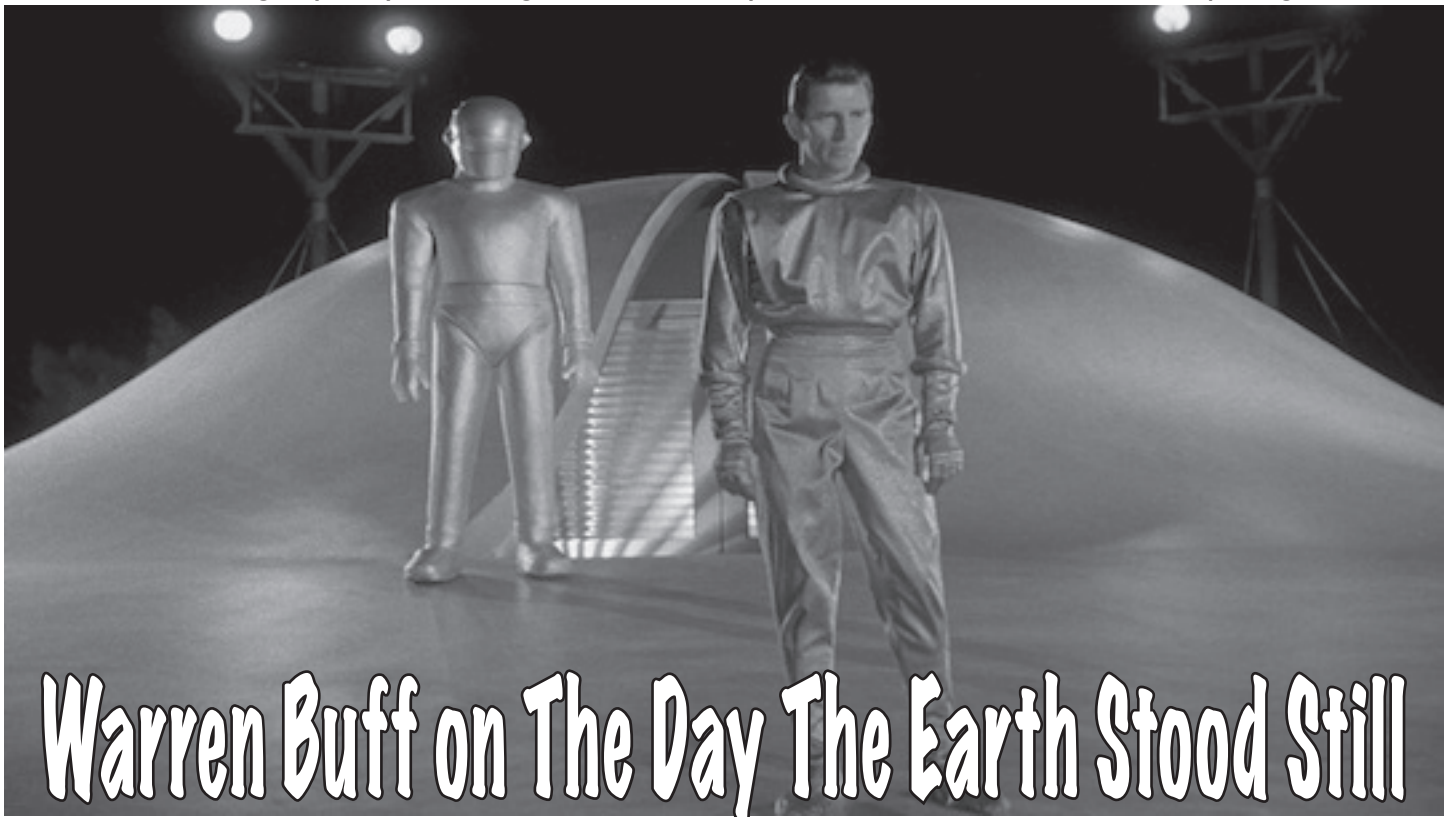
The Day the Earth Stood Still is one of those films I knew I'd seen about a dozen times, but couldn't recall ever having specifically sat down and watched it all in one go. It's always been one I've noticed was on, and flipped channels to, or saw it come on but then dozed off part way through. I knew the whole story, but wasn't certain I'd taken the time to view it in its entirety and evaluate it as a film.

And when I did, I noticed something I distinctly hadn't before – it's one of those conversation-driven stories that draw you in so well that you have trouble noticing any sort of technical aspect of it. In fact, about the only time I was able to concentrate on technique was during the action sequences – mostly the shots involving Gort. (I have this same problem with Casablanca, only more so, as it has very few shots without some sort of conversation going on. I'd be terrible at writing an article on its cinematography and editing.) I've looked the film up online, and came up with all sorts of trivia that Chris will surely make note of in his article (he's pretty good at that). So I'm going to try to capture something of my experience of watching the movie.

One thing I did notice, and frequently, was just how darned tall Michael Rennie is. He towers over his costars, and this is played in different shots into a feeling of either menace or benevolence. When Klaatu first enters the boarding house, for instance, his silhouette appears huge, playing up the fears of his soon to be room-mates. Yet when he visits with Professor Barnhardt, his size gives him a fatherly air, in spite of the Professor's greater apparent age (though Klaatu, by his own claim, is the elder of the two). Aside from that, though, there's little I noticed about the shots involving Klaatu. It's just that darned easy to get caught up in what he says.

And that's probably a good thing, because what he says is just that darned important. The film doesn't really allow any second-guessing of its message, which Klaatu comes out with in his final lines to the people of Earth – we must rein in our aggressive tendencies if we intend to become a spacefaring civilization. Our moral development must keep pace with our technological progress. It's an incredibly simple message, but one that we needed to hear, and really, still need to hear. Klaatu's insistence on multilateralism is similarly important. I'm not going to beat those points into the ground – the film states them well enough.

It's also noteworthy how much of Klaatu's dialog comes with Bobby. This works fairly well, as Bobby, being a child, is able to ask questions that an adult might not, and gives straight answers to questions an adult might prevaricate on. Klaatu is able to reveal bits of how much he knows (like how nuclear energy can be harnessed for power – a feat not accomplished until after the film was out) and can be easier about his lack of understanding of our culture. Bobby occasionally notices that the questions seem a little odd, but takes Klaatu's assertion that he's been a long way away for a long time without any need of further clarification. The pairing works well



Warren Buff on The Day The Earth Stood Still

for revealing a lot about Klaatu, and the chemistry between the two actors is perfect for their scenes.

So I should address the aspect of science fiction film that gets the most attention – the special effects. Other than the costume for Gort and the set pieces for the flying saucer, the only major special effect the film utilizes is Gort's disintegration ray. While it wouldn't hold up in a modern major Hollywood picture, this is still a pretty smooth effect – one you wouldn't raise an eyebrow at in an independent film. I don't know how it would look in color, but that's no real concern, since the film is in black and white. It's used sparingly, and its use is consistent with what people say about Gort on screen.

The Gort costume, meanwhile, is positively otherworldly. Even the pulp and paperback covers hadn't anticipated something quite like him – the closest I can find with a Google search for Astounding covers is the October 1953 issue with the Kelly Freas robot that would go on to grace the cover of Queen's News of the World. There was a trend towards smoother robots, but seeing the positively statuesque Gort had to be a shock, even to avid SF fans of the day. Robots were almost always blocky things, and while they tended to have curves, they were sharper, rather than the almost unbroken surface of Gort. The only part of Gort that stands in contrast to the rest is his visor. The spaceship itself has a similar quality, appearing to be a smooth solid right up until it opens to reveal the ramp and entrance. On the inside, the entrance to the control room is similarly concealed. The seamlessness of these designs gives the impression of an engineering power that's out of this world.

Finally, I'm going to take this opportunity to counter Frank Wu's assertion back in his article on Things to Come that *The Day the Earth Stood Still* is an anti-science film (though several of the others on the list he gives are very much so). As presented in the film, yes, science can be frightening – Gort is explicitly a threat, as is the specter of nuclear weaponry. But when given the opportunity to unequivocally condemn nuclear power, Klaatu refuses. He makes sure that Billy hears that nuclear power is good for plenty more than just bombs. Klaatu also, ultimately, delivers his message, his ultimatum for peace, to an assembly of Earth's scientists (and philosophers and other thinkers, but he has a scientist doing the organizing). Gort, while terrifying to behold, and capable of harming humanity, is ultimately a tool for peace. And Klaatu repeatedly demonstrates the advanced possibilities of science – extended lifespan, travel between the stars, rapid healing, perfect synthetic diamonds, and even the ability to return from death (albeit not the absolute conquest thereof). Klaatu takes a measured but positive approach to science, and the film is very much Klaatu's bully pulpit. While H.G. Wells might be an unbridled cheerleader for science, Klaatu is by no means a detractor. *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, by extension, comes off as rationally pro-science. It takes a determined will to see SF film in general denounced as "anti-science" to make it fit that mold.





I don't believe I've seen this film before, though I might have back in high school (many, many, many years ago). So I looked it up on Netflix and found a second film titled THE DAY THE EARTH STOPPED, described as an "action-packed spoof of The Day the Earth Stood Still." What better article to write than one which views and compares the classic 1951 sci-fi film with a bad action sci-fi film from the 1980s that I don't ever remember hearing about? I mean, the newer film is directed by E.T.'s own C. Thomas Howell, and co-stars Judd Nelson, so obviously the film is from the 80s, right? The film is surely a delicious combination of action/sci-fi goodness and 80s cheeseball. Who cares if I don't remember one mention of this film? Well, let's save that for later in this article.

So first I put in the DVD for THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL and prepared myself for some bad special effects. The film starts off with the glowing spaceship landing on earth, and of course the arrival of a badly dressed space man (Klaatu) and his 8 foot tall robot Gort. I would say this film doesn't so much have bad special effects as they are just minimal. I had no problem with them at all. And actually, many of the scenes were shot quite impressively, and the musical score was outstanding. I especially loved the low baritone during the dangerous, scary scenes.

I'm sure Chris is going to go over the film itself and any sci-fi fan worth his salt already knows the plot. As a newcomer there were a few things that gave me chuckles, but mostly because of the time period in which it was made. First, as the space craft lands in Washington D.C. it becomes quite apparent that the city is 99% Caucasian. In the entire crowd there are only two women of color – but certainly no African-American men! Heavens, we don't want any scary black men in the crowd when it must be clear the enemies are the space men! The second funny part made me laugh out loud: When the widow Mrs. Benson needs a babysitter for her young child, and Mr. Carpenter – who she met the night before – offers to watch him, alone, for the entire day... she lets him! Sure, Mr. Stranger-probably-from-Outer-Space, I have a date with this handsome man here and I don't want to miss a

picnic, also, that Bobby is quite a handful anyway, so go ahead and take him! OH, and don't let me forget the third thing: In 1951 when a space ship lands, in Washington D.C. of all places, it is only required to have two guards keeping an eye on it. Two. On foot. Also, the town totally sleeps and no one cares about taking a peek during prime two-guards-only peeking time. Eh. It's a 1951 film. That's probably exactly what would have happened.

It was around this time that I made a note about Mr. Carpenter (space man) being Jesus. As the film went on it became quite apparent to me that this was the theme of the film. We have a "carpenter" coming down to Earth from an other-worldly place to bring a message of peace. Meanwhile he adopts the look and dress of a regular human man and walks among the people to learn more about them. He performs a miracle (shuts off all electricity and power to the world for 30 minutes) to prove who he is, and is killed and brought back from the dead. After giving his message of peace, he finally returns to his other-worldly home.

This film was based on the short story Farewell to the Master by Harry Bates. Apparently screenwriter Edmund North added the religious elements thinking it was "a private little joke," and he "hoped that the Christ comparison would be subliminal." It didn't get past the MPAA censor though, who was not happy about the robot Gort's apparent unlimited power over life and death, thus the addition of the clarification that "that power is reserved to the Almighty Spirit." Ahh, Free Speech in the 1950s.

When this film ended I immediately gave it 3 stars out of 5, taking off 2 stars for "the non-sensical message to Earth." The message of course was that we need to start getting along with each other. Or else. Or else what? Or else these peaceful space beings will sic their violent robots on us. Ehh?? Be peaceful or we will obliterate you because we are better at being peaceful beings than you. I felt this was a flaw. However, bear with me.

So then I immediately started THE DAY THE EARTH STOPPED. First of all, this film got an additional star for having a naked woman alien within 3 minutes of starting. An improvement over that 50s crap already! I knew I loved the 80s. But then we have a giant robot land in L.A., I'm talking a robot that is taller than the tallest building in L.A., and he just landed right in the middle of downtown without one ripple of an earthquake or the crunching of buildings underfoot. But if I just sat through the 1951 film and accepted those ultra minimal special effects, I have to allow this. OK, fine. But the film went on to introduce a government apparently run by incompetent 20 year olds, some guys who may or may not be stealing things (I was quite confused very early on), a naked male alien, and so many side characters I couldn't keep track of who was what.

But then the female (naked) alien reads someone's mind, and he is thinking that she looks a lot like Angelina Jolie. Angelina Jolie? Wasn't she a small child watching John Hughes films with the rest of us in the 1980s?? Where did that line come from? So I checked it out. And this film isn't from the 1980s, it's from 2008!!! AND it was straight to DVD. Which is totally, absolutely, not surprising whatsoever.

About five minutes later, 30 minutes into the 90 minute crapfest, I shut it off. This article just wasn't worth watching another 60 minutes of that mess. And suddenly the 1951 film seemed a whole lot better than I had given it credit for.

Producer Julian Blaustein wanted to make a film about the Cold War and Atomic Age. I think he got that, and Edmund North also got his religious parable. In addition we also get a little twist on the Christian story. It is Gort, the robot, who brings Klaatu the spaceman back to life, and it is Gort, like the Christian god, who will destroy the Earth if the humans don't shape up. But Gort and others like him were made by Klaatu's brethren. So in this case, man was not made in God's image. As Dr. Bonnie Cox, an SJSU English professor says, it was God who was made in man's image. But even if you don't follow this twist, this film still stands as a great piece of science fiction. Sci Fi should draw political or religious comparisons to present times, and I think the 1951 film does both, not only on both counts, but in every generation. It is quite impressive really, and I definitely allow it all the accolades it deserves.

The 1980s 2008 film is just a piece of crap. Oh, and I never did see Judd Nelson. I want my 30 minutes back.