LATEST STORIES

COMICS
Exclusive: The Totality saga continues in first look at DC Comics' Justice League #6

MOVIES
The gag reel for Avengers: Infinity War will temporarily relieve the pain of Thanos' finger snap

MOVIES
Disney princesses are body-positive in Wreck-It Ralph sequel image

TV
Exclusive: Arrow Season 6 supercut breaks down Team Arrow's breakdown

THE TOP 30 ALIEN INVASION MOVIES, RANKED

Contributed by

Don Kaye

Jun 27, 2016

25 Shared

45 Comments

The alien invasion remains perhaps the most well-known storyline in science-fiction cinema. Its appeal is simple: While we may yearn to know whether there is life in the universe beyond the human race, we wonder what would happen if they came to us first -- and weren't friendly. That premise takes center stage this week in *Independence Day: Resurgence*, which takes place 20 years after Earth fought back in the original *Independence Day* and finds the aliens -- bigger and meaner -- returning to finish the job they started.

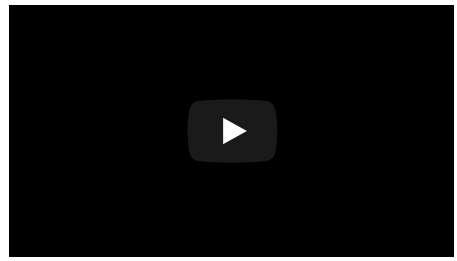
But alien invasions aren't always conducted by massive space vessels blasting all our landmarks to smithereens. They can be insidious and undetectable; they can spring from our past, from seed pods, from within a mother's womb. You'll find all those and more in this list. What you won't find here are superhero films that use alien villains, kaiju movies that involve extraterrestrials and alien abduction tales -- if we incorporated all of those, we'd be here for days.

Here are our nominees for the 30 best alien invasion movies, ranked in reverse order. Do you agree with our picks? Did we miss a favorite of yours? Let us know below.

30

10 Cloverfield Lane (2016)

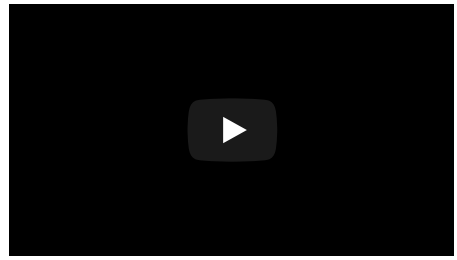
More a three-person mystery steeped in dread and paranoia than an outright alien invasion movie -- although **(SPOILERS)** it turns into one in its third act -- *10 Cloverfield Lane* does an excellent job of examining what would happen when three people of varying mental stability are thrown together in a survival situation where no one really trusts anyone else. The confrontation with the invaders at the end is, ironically, probably the weakest part of the film. Everything leading up to that, however, is milked for maximum tension, with a tight, character-driven script doing the job instead of explosions and spaceships.



29

Critters (1986)

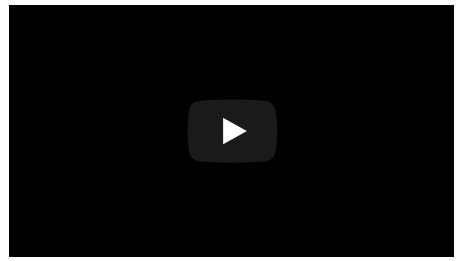
Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel gave two thumbs up to this low-budget horror comedy about a group of vicious prisoners from a little alien race, the Crites, who escape their asteroid prison and arrive on Earth, shape-shifting bounty hunters in pursuit. The Crites, who look like little Tasmanian devils crossed with hedgehogs (or something like that) create all kinds of havoc once they're here. A spoof of the genre, *Critters* boasts an eclectic cast (including Dee Wallace-Stone and Billy Zane), fun monsters and the right attitude -- and it worked for audiences, since three sequels were spawned, as well.



28

Mars Attacks! (1997)

A series of trading cards is an awfully flimsy hook on which to hang a story, but director Tim Burton and screenwriter Jonathan Gems do just that with this parody of 1950s sci-fi movies. Some of the jokes are funny, the all-star cast is game, and the alien invaders are truly nasty in a blackly comic way, but the thin plot is stretched way too thin and the movie never really lights up or believes in itself, making the whole exercise dreary. But the movies does have some typically fabulous Burton imagery and has built a cult following over time.

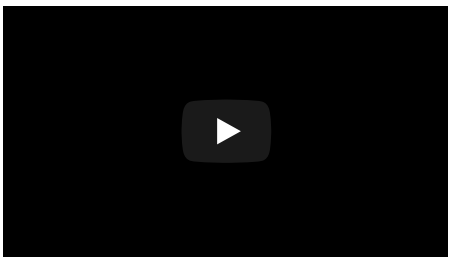


27

27

The Faculty (1998)

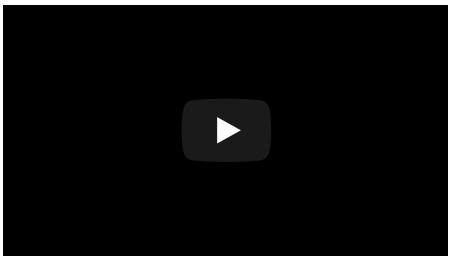
What if all the teachers in your high school were being controlled by aliens? That's the problem that vexes a group of students in Robert Rodriguez' geeky little horror outing. It borrows a lot from other movies like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *The Thing*, but just churns up those elements in a blender instead of finding something new in them. Still, as part of the wavelet of "ironically hip" genre outings that included films like *Scream* and *Final Destination*, *The Faculty* still manages to eke out some chills thanks to its charismatic cast and Rodriguez' pulpy sensibilities.



26

Kronos (1957)

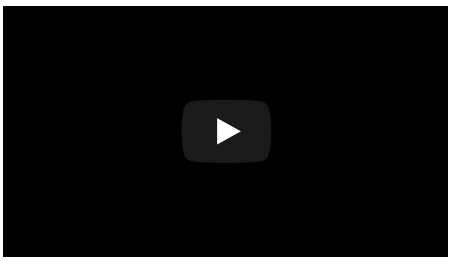
This cult gem is one of many sci-fi outings from the '50s that has endured for years due to its unique title menace and a more thoughtful than usual approach to its subject matter. An alien ship parked in deep space fires an object at the Earth that turns into a massive, four-legged machine. The device begins stomping around the world, seemingly indestructible, as it drains energy from every available source to bring back to its power-depleted masters. The movie's themes about over-consumption of natural and human-made resources still ring true today and Kronos remains a striking sci-fi creation.



25

Oblivion (2013)

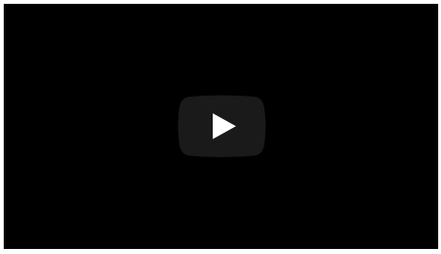
Another underrated recent film, *Oblivion* does mix and match a lot of elements from previous sci-fi efforts, but it all hangs together reasonably well and intelligently, aided by the typically committed Tom Cruise performance and some breathtaking visuals courtesy of director Joseph Kosinski. The director, who also came up with the story, conceived an unusual alien menace in the Tet, a massive intelligence that first destroys the Moon to destabilize the Earth before sending in its drones and clones to wipe out what's left of humanity. Idea-driven and visually sumptuous, *Oblivion* warrants another look if you have the chance.



24

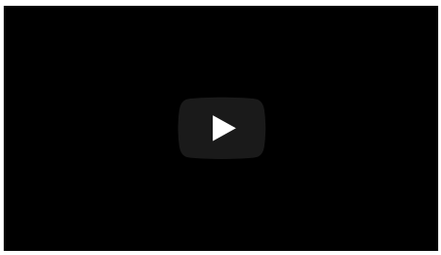
It Came from Outer Space (1953)

The first science-fiction film to be shot in 3D (yes, they had 3D back in the '50s), *It Came from Outer Space* is based on a story by Ray Bradbury and directed by Jack Arnold, famous for films like *The Incredible Shrinking Man* and *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*. A UFO crashes near a small Arizona town and its crew begins kidnapping humans from the nearby town of Sand Rock -- but their intentions are not what you initially might think. As with all Arnold films, *It Came from Outer Space* is atmospheric and sophisticated, with a humanist story at its core and a neat twist on the alien invasion formula.



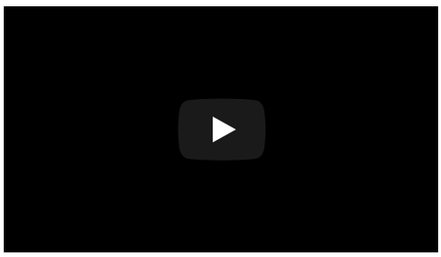
Lifeforce (1985)

There are not really any "bad" films on this list -- with the possible exception of this one. But *Lifeforce* isn't so much bad as it is insane. Based on the novel *The Space Vampires* by Colin Wilson and directed by Tobe Hooper (*Poltergeist*), *Lifeforce* throws a lot of ideas into its two hours, then stirs them into a frothy, incoherent mix that nevertheless has considerable entertainment value. There is also value of another kind in French actress Mathilda May's completely unclothed alien energy vampire, one of three awakened aboard their derelict ship and inadvertently let loose to wreak havoc in England. The Earth invaded by a voluptuous nude alien psychic vampire? That alone should give you some idea of what this weird, wonderful trainwreck of a movie is all about.



Invaders from Mars (1953)

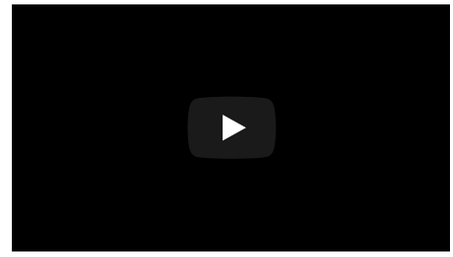
He's all but forgotten now, but director William Cameron Menzies was responsible for two of the most innovative and imaginative sci-fi films of all time: 1936's *Things to Come* and this, a surreal alien invasion yarn told from the perspective of a young boy. It was also one of the first sci-fi movies to be shot in full color, and featured some of the striking production design that was a Menzies hallmark. The movie has a dreamlike quality unlike many other genre efforts of the time; a 1986 remake by Tobe Hooper was played more for laughs and far less effective.



21

I Married a Monster from Outer Space (1958)

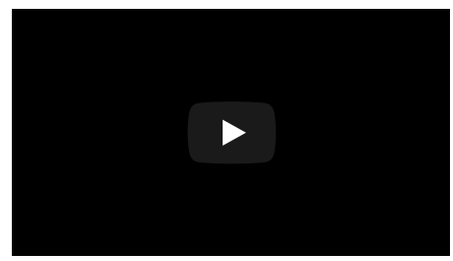
A kind of companion piece to *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, this quaint, but still eerie, little film featured a dark subtext about male and female sexual relations that perhaps hit more of a nerve than anyone realized. Eager young newlywed Marge (Gloria Talbott) discovers after her honeymoon that her husband, Bill (Tom Tryon), has lost all interest in and affection for her and just about anything else in his life, including his beloved dogs. When other local husbands begin acting the same way, Marge discovers that the men are being taken over by alien beings who want to mate with Earth women to preserve their race. The ludicrous title and low budget aspirations hide a creepy little thriller that's subtle and atmospheric.



20

Slither (2006)

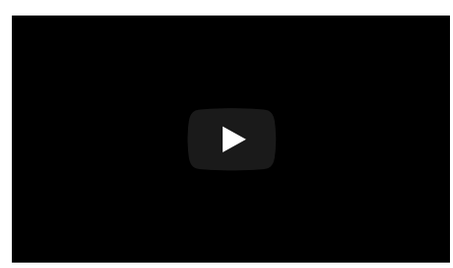
Eight years before he made a little picture called *Guardians of the Galaxy*, writer/director James Gunn concocted what may not be the best alien invasion movie ever, but what is certainly the ickiest. A malevolent alien parasite lands on Earth and goes about possessing/absorbing anyone it can find (including Gunn regular Michael Rooker), either turning them into giant blobs of gunk or hordes of alien slugs. Meant as a throwback to pulp '50s sci-fi, the movie features all of Gunn's quirky touches and is never less than thoroughly entertaining, even as it's being utterly disgusting.



19

Earth vs. the Flying Saucers (1956)

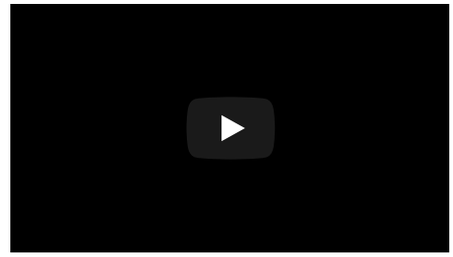
Stop-motion animation wizard Ray Harryhausen made a rare foray into straight science-fiction with this black and white '50s programmer, which ended up influencing the likes of *Independence Day* and *Mars Attacks*. In fact, the movie almost plays its story too straight compared to its descendants, but Harryhausen's effects are always a hand-crafted joy and the film's final battle sequences are thrilling, as the invaders lay waste to a number of famous landmarks.



19

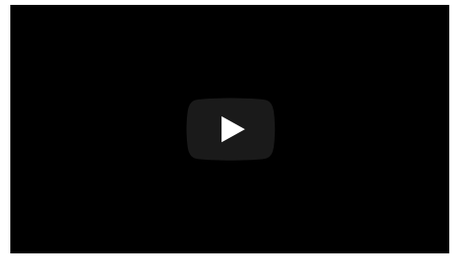
The Arrival (1996)

This small, yet effective, thriller stars Charlie Sheen as a radio astronomer whose search for extraterrestrial life leads him to discover a conspiracy involving power plants (shades of *Quatermass 2*), greenhouse gases, alien imposters and miniaturized black holes. It's a smart, involving mix, cleverly written by David Twohy (who also directed), and it plumbs a lot of the same interesting territory as *The X-Files*. Plus, it's a reminder that Charlie Sheen could deliver on screen, before he became a tabloid disaster.



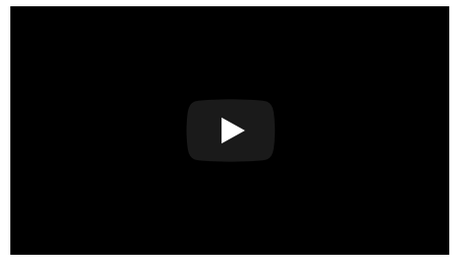
Quatermass 2 (1957)

Writer Nigel Kneale's series of Quatermass tales, which originally started as BBC serials and later adapted as three excellent films, remain among the finest examples of British science-fiction from the 1950s and '60s. The first, *The Quatermass Xperiment*, was more or less a straight monster story, but *Quatermass 2* (U.S. title *Enemy from Space*) went for a larger scale as rocket scientist Bernard Quatermass (Brian Donlevey) discovers that aliens have infested the highest echelons of the government and are secretly building a giant industrial complex, from which they'll refit the Earth for their purposes. Eerie images, stark cinematography and a constant level of tension make this a crackling, unsettling 90 minutes.



Quatermass and the Pit (1967)

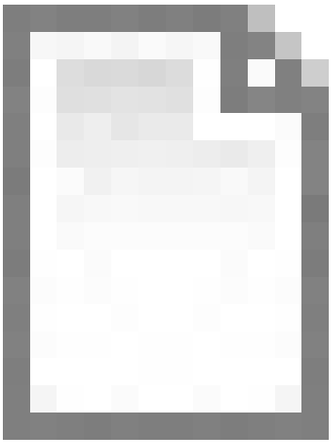
Arguably Nigel Kneale's masterpiece, this third Quatermass outing finds our rocket scientist (now played by Andrew Keir) investigating the discovery of a strange artifact buried under a tube station in the center of London. The object is a dormant Martian craft that was part of a colonization effort by the long-dead Martian race. When the craft is activated, it possesses the minds of any humans who have the remnants of Martian genetic programming from millennia ago and sends them on a murderous racial purge. Alien invasion by proxy is what this gripping film serves up, with the ideas coming fast and furious (the Martians look vaguely Satanic, suggesting our racial memory of the Devil) and the atmosphere full of suspense and terror throughout.



15

Edge of Tomorrow (2014)

While the main thrust of this terrific (and underseen) sci-fi action epic is the continual time loop that turns Tom Cruise from a cowardly PR flack into a resolute hero, it's also worth noting that *Edge of Tomorrow* is a crackerjack alien invasion flick, too. The Mimics are a truly monstrous race, and it's their ability to reset time that provides the narrative engine for the Cruise character's arc, making for an unusually coherent and smart script (all the more wonder since it was finished during filming). The utterly alien nature of the Mimics, the savagery of the battles with them and the story's ingenious structure make this top notch.

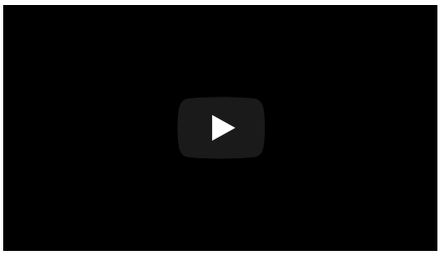


fileL6GARp

14

District 9 (2009)

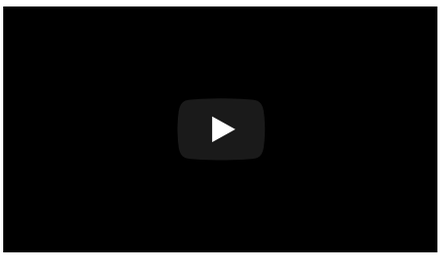
Is *District 9* an film about an alien invasion? Yes -- if you consider the invasion to be a passive, yet still pervasive, one. Neill Blomkamp's directorial debut finds some 300,000 aliens in a massive ship seeking asylum on Earth and getting it -- only to live in squalid refugee camps on the edge of Johannesburg, South Africa, where tension and suspicion between aliens and humans rages daily for the next 28 years. The aliens' true intentions remain murky, but the film's brilliant central metaphor is perhaps even more relevant today, with the ongoing refugee crisis happening abroad. And it's one hell of a thriller, to boot.



13

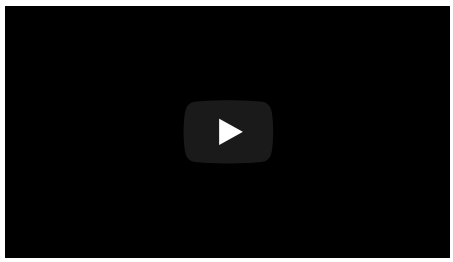
Village of the Damned (1960)

One day, the entire population of the town of Midwich, England falls unconscious, as does anyone who enters the hamlet. When they wake up, it's discovered two months later that all females of child-bearing age are pregnant, and they give birth -- all on the same day -- to children who develop quickly and begin to manifest both a telepathic bond with each other and strong psychic powers. It's soon apparent that they are not human -- and that their intentions may not be benevolent. Based on a novel by the great British sci-fi writer John Wyndham, *Village of the Damned* is a thoroughly haunting and different take on its subject matter.



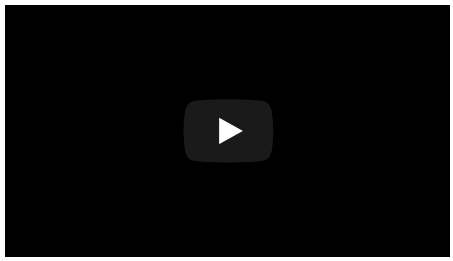
Predator (1987)

Predator seems to start out as a typical Arnold Schwarzenegger action vehicle and veers into weirder territory once the Predator, himself -- an alien being stalking humans in a South American jungle -- starts pursuing and killing Schwarzenegger's team. Is the alien an advance scout? A lost explorer? An extraterrestrial mercenary? We never know and we don't care; this movie lives on its relentless suspense, its hideous monster and Schwarzenegger's winning performance, not to mention the final confrontation between him and the Predator.



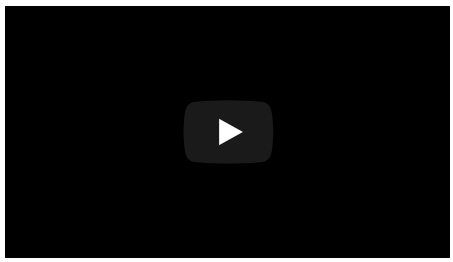
The Thing from Another World (1951)

Although it's been supplanted by the Carpenter masterpiece, *The Thing from Another World* is still a classic in its own right and one of the best sci-fi films of its decade (which is saying a lot, since the 1950s were a hell of a decade for sci-fi cinema). Although this Thing is a highly evolved, intelligent form of plant life in a humanoid shape (a "super carrot" as reporter Ned Scott calls it), it still has the ability to reproduce itself -- making *The Thing from Another World* about the vanguard of an invasion, if not the invasion itself. The Cold War allegory is intact as well, and Scott's final plea to "keep watching the skies" is a potent one.



Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956)

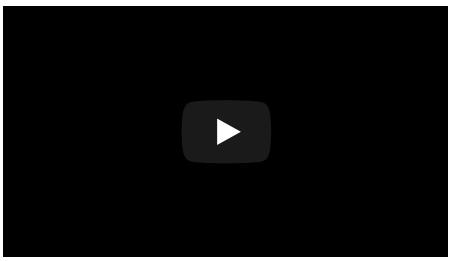
The first film version of this story remains a classic in its own right, with director Don Siegel's adaptation of Jack Finney's novel becoming a chilling metaphor for the Communist scare of the era and the McCarthyism that reared its ugly head in its wake. While less drenched in the alienation (pardon the pun) and urban angst of the 1978 version, the 1956 film is just as creepy in the way its small town of Santa Mira, California is effortlessly absorbed and replaced by the pods.



09

Attack the Block (2011)

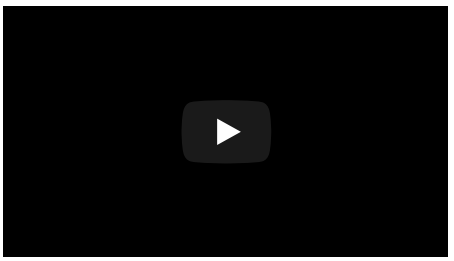
This thriller takes place in one of the genre's most unusual settings yet: a council estate (a.k.a. a housing project) in South London, where a gritty street gang led by the wise-beyond-his-years Moses (*Star Wars: The Force Awakens* star John Boyega in his stupendous film debut) proves more than a match for the malevolent, light-repelling creatures infesting their territory and their home. Relentlessly suspenseful, exciting and funny -- not to mention on point with its subtle explorations of race and class -- *Attack the Block* is a modern take on the genre that is fresh and furiously entertaining.



08

They Live (1988)

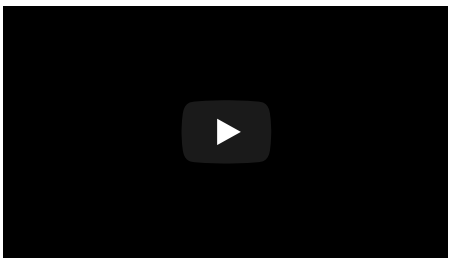
Yes, the late Roddy Piper is not much of an actor, but *They Live* has nonetheless slowly achieved cult status over the years to become one of John Carpenter's most enduring films. Piper plays a drifter who accidentally discovers that Earth's leaders have all been replaced by aliens, who are sending out subliminal commands to keep the human population distracted, in debt and under control. A rousing action thriller as well as a satire on our complacent, conformist society, *They Live* is the kind of cynical science fiction that only John Carpenter could make.



07

Signs (2002)

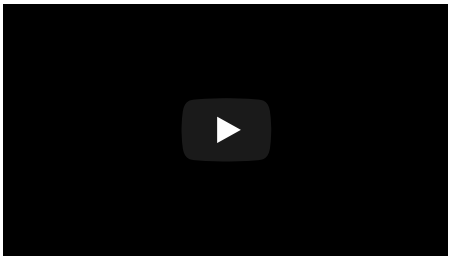
M. Night Shyamalan makes alien invasion into a personal matter, focusing on one small family led by Mel Gibson in rural Pennsylvania and their response to the bizarre events occurring around their farm and, by extension, in the world outside. The movie's a bit heavy-handed at times, and the final lapse in logic (why would aliens invade a planet that is made up mostly of a substance harmful to them?) deflates the terrific, sustained mood of dread that the director builds up. But *Signs* contains some of Shyamalan's creepiest sequences to date -- the TV news footage of an alien emerging in a doorway still packs a wallop -- and puts a different face on a now standard template.



06

The Day the Earth Stood Still (1951)

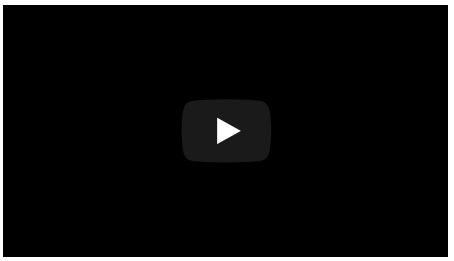
One of the greatest science-fiction films ever made, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* is the story of a promise and a threat. The invasion, itself, is spectacular, but non-violent: the human emissary Klaatu and the giant robot Gort land on Earth and make a simple declaration -- that we must get our act together and stop our violent ways if we want to join the larger universe, or else risk elimination. But behind that declaration is vast, unimaginable power. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* remains gripping and involving not because of what is shown -- although Gort is one of the great movie automatons -- but because of what is implied.



05

The Thing (1982)

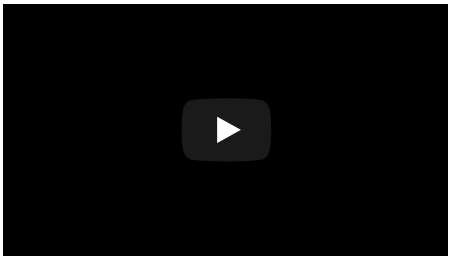
John Carpenter's modern classic is not a remake of the 1951 film, but a fresh adaptation of the original source material, John W. Campbell Jr.'s novella *Who Goes There?* It retains the original premise of a malevolent, aggressive alien organism capable of assimilating other lifeforms and imitating them. The threat is clear: this organism will absorb and imitate everything in its path and cannot be allowed to reach civilization. The invasion here is insidious and biological: the very essence of every living creature that comes in contact with the thing is consumed. Somehow, that's more frightening in a way than giant spaceships hovering over the Earth.



04

The War of the Worlds (1953)

Although it takes a lot of liberties with the original novel and is dated in some ways, producer George Pal's epic adaptation of the Wells book retains a considerable amount of power to this day. Director Byron Haskin draws maximum tension out of a tightly written script and the story's Cold War backdrop, while the film also provides a human element to the devastation that the Martian invasion wreaks. *The War of the Worlds* was one of the first big sci-fi movies of its kind -- a precursor to the modern blockbuster -- but it's got heart and a mournful quality that's hard to shake.

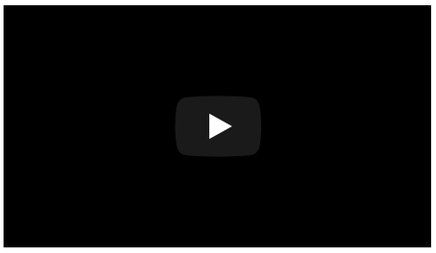


03

03

Independence Day (1996)

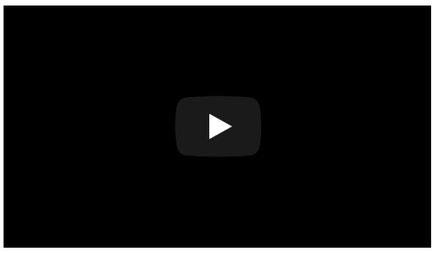
ID4 was one of those game-changing movies that upped the ante for summer blockbusters, sci-fi spectacles and the kind of destruction porn that's now a regular feature of both. But at the time it was released, those brain-searing images of the White House and New York City being pulverized by massive alien spacecraft were like almost nothing that had been seen before. More importantly, the movie is vastly entertaining from start to finish. From the tense build-up to the invasion, through the catastrophic first attack, to the unabashedly patriotic and resolute counter-attack by a united human race, *Independence Day* is grand pulp adventure that crackles with energy and is bolstered by a cast that digs into their one-dimensional characters with relish.



02

Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1978)

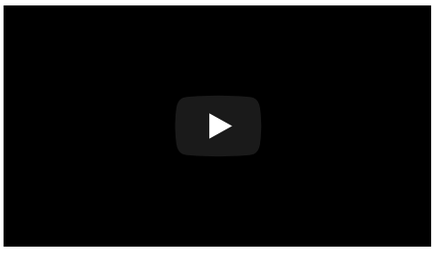
A world class exercise in rampant paranoia, Philip Kaufman's remake of the 1956 classic is eerier and more terrifying than the original, not to mention one of the best sci-fi outings of the 1970s. The idea of updating the story to modern-day San Francisco during the "Me Decade," is a masterstroke: everyone is so absorbed in themselves that it's easy to miss other human beings being duplicated by the insidious alien pods. Your spouse has stopped showing emotion? Why, he's just having trouble connecting with his feelings. By the time anyone in the brilliant cast (Donald Sutherland, Leonard Nimoy, a young Jeff Goldblum) wakes up to what's really happening, it's far too late.



01

War of the Worlds (2005)

One of Steven Spielberg's darkest films, this was his angry, frightened response to the events of September 11th and the way the world changed after that. Although staying true to many elements of H.G. Wells' landmark novel (including the alien tripods that march across the land), the script changes other aspects of it: no longer do the aliens arrive in "cylinders" from Mars, but they emerge from the ground, having been buried there millennia ago. What triggers them? It's never really explained. That is the genius of the film: with the focus on everyman blue collar worker Ray (Tom Cruise) as he tries to save his estranged family, there are no scientists or leaders around to explain what is happening. That somehow makes it all much scarier. *War of the Worlds* is



not a perfect film (and blame Wells for the much-maligned ending) but it's the most visceral, immediate and, dare we say, realistic alien invasion epic ever made.

Independence Day… Spotlight Rankings

Popular Conversations

WATCH: SOME OF GENRE'S GREATEST FEMALE

Alphan SINAV
5h
What is it with all this fascination with

SHOULD WE BE EXCITED ABOUT MARVEL'S

Theodore Wolf
13h
I have been seeing hetro heroes and love

BATTLE-HARDENED WOMEN AND LINDA

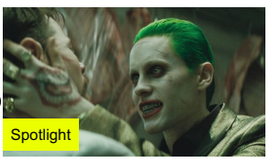
Dragrick Ironwolf
43m
Welcome Back Sarah Connor!

THE BOOKS THAT GENRE LOVERS

Cliff Kel
20h
Loved all of M Lackey's work

Sign in to comment

MORE STORIES



Love that Joker: Every performance of the Joker, ranked

Henry Hanks Aug 5, 2016 | 36

The 18 greatest G-rated sci-fi films in the galaxy

Jeff Spry & Elizabeth Rayne
Jul 31, 2016 | 33

Commandresses in Chief: The top 12 female presidents in science-fiction

Cher Martinetti Jun 30, 2016 | 13

All 7 Star Wars film openings, ranked

Lisa Granshaw Mar 2, 2016 | 6

Powered by ZergNet

Characters Killed Off Because of the Actor's Ridiculous Behavior

Twist Ending of 'X-Men: Days Of Future Past' Finally Explained

What We Know About the New Hulk Trilogy
The Truth About Why 'Firefly' Was Canceled

We and our partners use cookies on this site to improve our service, perform analytics, personalize advertising, measure advertising performance, and remember website preferences. By using the site, you consent to these cookies. For more information on cookies including how to manage your consent visit our cookie policy.

CONTINUE