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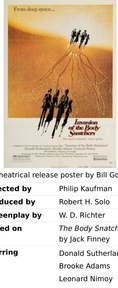
Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1978 film)

Invasion of the Body Snatchers is a 1978 American science fiction horror film[3] directed by Philip Kaufman, and starring Donald Sutherland, Brooke Adams, Veronica Cartwright, Jeff Goldblum and Leonard Nimoy. Released on December 22, 1978, it is a remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), which is based on the novel *The Body Snatchers* by Jack Finney. The plot involves a San Francisco health inspector and his colleague who discover that humans are being replaced by alien duplicates; each is a perfect copy of the person replaced, only devoid of human emotion.

Released in the United States over the Christmas weekend 1978, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* grossed nearly US$25 million at the box office. It received varied reviews from critics, though it has been named by some as being one of the greatest film remakes.[4]

Invasion of the Body Snatchers	
	
Theatrical release poster by Bill Gold	
Directed by	Philip Kaufman
Produced by	Robert H. Solo
Screenplay by	W. D. Richter
Based on	*The Body Snatchers* by Jack Finney
Starring	Donald Sutherland Brooke Adams Leonard Nimoy Jeff Goldblum Veronica Cartwright
Music by	Denny Zeitlin
Cinematography	Michael Chapman
Edited by	Douglas Stewart
Production company	Solofilm
Distributed by	United Artists
Release date	December 22, 1978
Running time	115 minutes
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	US$3.5 million[1]
Box office	US$24.9 million(North America)[2]

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Plot

A species of gelatinous alien creatures abandon their dying world. They make their way to Earth and land in San Francisco. They fall on plant leaves, assimilating them and forming small pods with pretty pink flowers.

Elizabeth Driscoll, a laboratory employee at the San Francisco Health Department, is one of several people who bring the flowers home. The next morning, Elizabeth's boyfriend Geoffrey Howell is cold and distant, ignoring her as he empties a trash bin into a waiting truck. When she confides in her colleague, health inspector Dr. Matthew Bennell, he suggests that she talk with his friend, psychiatrist Dr. David Kibner.

While driving to Kibner's book party, a running man hits their car and shouts "They're coming!", before being chased off by a crowd, then struck and killed just around the corner, where his body is surrounded by emotionless onlookers. At the party, Matthew introduces Elizabeth to his friend Jack Bellicec, a struggling writer who considers Kibner a fraud. Jack calls the police about the running man, and finds them strangely indifferent. A woman at the party causes a scene by claiming her husband is not really her husband, and Kibner makes a show of calming her and persuading her to go home with him. Elizabeth tries to validate the woman's experience and Kibner intervenes, suggesting Elizabeth's fears are rooted in a desire to be free of Geoffrey, and he tells Matthew to take her home.

Jack goes to the mudbath parlour he owns with his wife Nancy, where another pod plant is growing, a gift from the rather sinister Mr. Gianni, soaking nearby. Nancy discovers a transforming body on one of the massage tables after he leaves, as Jack soaks in the mud. After Jack wakes up, the body opens its eyes. Nancy calls Matthew for help, and he notes the increasing resemblance in size and weight to Jack; Jack's nose bled, then the body's nose bled. Matthew suddenly suspects Elizabeth is in trouble and goes to get her, calling Kibner to the bathhouse, where the body disappears.

Matthew breaks into Elizabeth's home and finds a semi-formed double of her in the garden. He takes Elizabeth to safety then calls the police from the bathhouse, but the duplicate body has disappeared by the time he returns with the police, and Kibner tries to persuade them that they are all crazy.

After Kibner leaves, they realize that the flowers are involved and Matthew tries calling all sorts of government agencies to no avail.

That night, the four friends are nearly duplicated by the pods while they sleep. They realize the pods emit tendrils that grasp victims in their sleep creating alien facsimiles devoid of human emotion; the victims die and disintegrate as the alien facsimiles awaken. Pod people try to raid Matthew's house while the police barricade the street, but the four manage to escape. Pod people they encounter on the street emit a loud shriek when they recognize them as still human. Jack and Nancy create a diversion to give Matthew and Elizabeth time to escape.

Matthew and Elizabeth are chased across San Francisco. They hide out in a Health Department building, and witness pods being distributed to people gathered in the square outside. They are eventually trapped by Jack and Kibner, who tell them that the alien species simply wants to survive and it is beneficial for humans. They are injected with a sedative but having already taken a large dose of speed, the couple overpower them and escape.

They find Nancy, who has learned to evade the pod people by hiding all emotion. Outside, Matthew and Elizabeth are exposed when Elizabeth screams at seeing a mutant dog with a human face, an alien facsimile of a local busker and his dog.

Matthew and Elizabeth flee aboard a truck delivering pods, and discover a giant warehouse at the docks where the pods are cultivated then shipped to other cities. Matthew leaves Elizabeth to find a way out of town, following music to a cargo ship being loaded with pods. Matthew returns to find Elizabeth asleep and her body crumbles after he tries to wake her. When he rejects her duplicate's pleas to sleep she shrieks and Matthew flees. He goes to the warehouse and sets it on fire, destroying many pods, then hides alone.

The next morning, Matthew walks to the office and sees schoolchildren led into a theater to be replaced, while pods are loaded into the theater from a truck in an alley. An intercom directs pod people to other West Coast cities. At the end of the day, he stops by the crowded laboratory where Elizabeth and her coworkers idly wait to go home, ignoring him. As he walks along a street lined with barren trees near City Hall, he is approached by Nancy. When she calls out to him, he shrieks to which Nancy screams in horror realizing that Matthew is now one of them.

Cast

- Donald Sutherland as Dr. Matthew Bennell
- Brooke Adams as Elizabeth Driscoll
- Leonard Nimoy as Dr. David Kibner
- Jeff Goldblum as Jack Bellicec
- Veronica Cartwright as Nancy Bellicec
- Art Hindle as Dr. Geoffrey Howell
- Lelia Goldoni as Katherine Hendley
- Kevin McCarthy as Running Man,[5] who played Dr. Miles Bennell in the original *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*
- Don Siegel as Taxi Driver. Siegel was director of the 1956 film version
- Tom Luddy as Ted Hendley
- Philip Kaufman (the film's director) as the man wearing a hat who bothers Dr. Matthew Bennell in a phone booth; also the voice of one of the officials whom Bennell contacts
- Rose Kaufman (wife of Philip Kaufman) as the woman who argues with Jack at the book party
- Joe Bellan as Harry, the busker

Production

The film features a number of cameo appearances. Kevin McCarthy, who played Dr. Miles Bennell in the original *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, makes a brief appearance as an old man frantically screaming "They're coming!" to passing cars on the street. Some reviewers have taken this scene to mean that the film is not a direct remake, but a sequel to the original, with the man on the street being an older version of Bennell.[6]

The original film's director, Don Siegel, appears as a taxi driver who alerts the police to Matthew and Elizabeth's attempt to flee the city. Robert Duvall is also seen briefly as a silent priest sitting on a swing set in the opening scene.[7] Director Philip Kaufman appears in dual roles both as a man wearing a hat who bothers Sutherland's character in a phone booth, and the voice of one of the officials Sutherland's character speaks to on the phone. His wife, Rose Kaufman, has a small role at the book party as the woman who argues with Jeff Goldblum's character. Cinematographer Michael Chapman appears twice as a janitor in the health department.

The film score by Denny Zeitlin was released on Perseverance Records; it is the only film score Zeitlin has composed.[8]

The film featured a number of sound innovations. Bay-area sound designer Ben Burtt, who had just completed the groundbreaking sound effects for the 1977 *Star Wars*, created a number of "Special Sound Effects" for this film. The film's sound was mixed by Mark Berger at American Zoetrope in the four-channel Dolby Stereo process, which was not yet standard exhibition equipment in most theaters.

Philip Kaufman said of the casting of Nimoy, "Leonard had got typecast and this [film] was an attempt to break him out of that," referring to the similar quirks that Dr. Kibner and his pod double had in common with Spock, the *Star Trek* character that Nimoy was most well known for. According to Kaufman, it was Mike Medavoy, then head of production at United Artists, who suggested the casting of Donald Sutherland. Sutherland's character had a similar curly hairstyle as that of another character he portrayed in *Don't Look Now* (1973). "They would have to set his hair with pink rollers every day", recalled co-star Veronica Cartwright.[9] According to Zeitlin, Sutherland's character was originally written as an "avocational jazz player" early in development.[8]

Release

Box office

Invasion of the Body Snatchers premiered in the United States on December 22, 1978,[10] showing on 445 screens nationally.[2] Between its premiere and December 25, the film had earned a total of $1,298,129 in box office sales.[2] It would go on to gross a total of nearly $25 million in the United States.[2]

Critical reception

Contemporaneous

The New Yorker's Pauline Kael was a particular fan of the film, writing that it "may be the best film of its kind ever made".[11] *Variety* wrote that it "validates the entire concept of remakes. This new version of Don Siegel's 1956 cult classic not only matches the original in horrific tone and effect, but exceeds it in both conception and execution."[12]

The film was not without negative criticism. *The New York Times*' Janet Maslin wrote that the "creepiness [Kaufman] generates is so crazily ubiquitous it becomes funny."[13] Roger Ebert wrote that it "was said to have something to do with Watergate and keeping tabs on those who are not like you", and called Kael's praise for the film "inexplicable",[14] while *Time* magazine's Richard Schickel labeled its screenplay "laughably literal".[15] Phil Hardy's *Aurum Film Encyclopedia* called Kaufman's direction "less sure" than the screenplay.[16]

The film received a nomination from the Writers Guild of America for Best Drama Adapted from Another Medium. The film was also nominated for the Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation. It was also recognized by the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Films. Philip Kaufman won Best Director, and the film was nominated Best Science Fiction Film. Donald Sutherland, Brooke Adams, and Leonard Nimoy received additional nominations for their performances.

Subsequent assessment

Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1978) has been named among one of the greatest film remakes ever made among several publications, including *Rolling Stone*.[17][18]

Film scholar M. Keith Booker posited that the film's "paranoid atmosphere" links it to other films outside the science fiction genre, and that it "bears a clear family resemblance to paranoid conspiracy thrillers like Alan J. Pakula's *The Parallax View* (1974)."[19] Chris Barsanti, in *The Sci-Fi Movie Guide* (2014), praised the performances of Adams and Sutherland, but criticized some elements of the film, writing: "The subtlety of Donald Siegel's original gives way to gaudy f/x and self-consciously artsy cameawork ... the film is overindulgently long, too, though it certainly has its shocking moments."[20]

On review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, the film received an approval rating of 94% based on 52 reviews, with an average rating of 8.2/10. The site's consensus reads, "Employing gritty camerawork and evocative sound effects, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is a powerful remake that expands upon themes and ideas only lightly explored in the original."[21] On Metacritic, the film has a weighted average score of 75 out of 100 based on 15 critics, indicating "generally favorable reviews."[22]

In a 2018 review published in Complex, the film was ranked among the greatest science fiction films of all time: "*Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is doubly impressive; it both improves upon the '56 film and Jack Finney's literary source material with a scarier disposition and more layered character development."[23]

Home video

Invasion of the Body Snatchers was released on DVD in the United States, Australia and many European countries. The film was released on Blu-ray Disc in the United States in 2010 and in the United Kingdom in 2013 by MGM Home Entertainment. Then released once more on Blu-ray by Shout! Factory in the United States and Canada in 2016. This release contains a 2K scan of the interpositive.[24]

Legacy

The Chicago Film Critics Association named it the 59th scariest film ever made.[25]

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External links

- *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0077745/) on IMDb
- *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (http://www.tcm.turner.com/tcmdb/title/title.jsp?stid=5448) at the TCM Movie Database
- *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1010679-invasion_of_the_body_snatchers) at Rotten Tomatoes

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