

FILMS FANTASTIC 9

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This Issue
**THE THING FROM
ANOTHER WORLD**

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On June 24, 1947, private pilot Kenneth Arnold spotted nine strange objects while flying near Mount Ranier. He described them as a 'flying pie pan' or 'a flat disk'. Soon the press started referring to them as “flying saucers” and these mysterious craft were soon spotted around the world. Of course Hollywood discovered the flying saucers and a boom in Science Fiction films began. Republic Pictures entered the race with FLYING DISK MEN FROM MARS and ZOMBIES OF THE STRATOSPHERE featuring a young Leonard Nimoy. 20th Century Fox began work on THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL, based on the Harry Bates short story “Farewell To The Master” and Warner Bros. filmed THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD based on the story by John W. Campbell Jr.

THE THING takes place at an Arctic research station. An aircraft is reported going down in the vicinity and an Air Force crew is sent to investigate. The party is led by Captain Patrick Hendry (Kenneth Toby), and includes Lt. Eddie Dykes (James Young), Crew Chief Bob (Dewey Martin), Ken Ericson (Robert Nichols), and, along for the ride, reporter Ned Scott (Douglas Spencer. Among the scientists led by Dr. Carrington (Robert Cornthwaite) are Dr. Stern (Eduard Franz), John Dierkes (Dr. Chapman), Mrs. Chapman (Sally Creighton), Dr. Redding (George Fenneman), and Dr. Vorhees (Paul Frees). Also with the scientific party is Nikki Nicholson (Margaret Sheridan), an old flame of Capt. Hendry.



The next day the Air Force crew and some of the scientists fly out to locate the site of the aircraft's crash. They discover it frozen in ice. An examination shows it is saucer shaped, a real flying saucer.



They attempt to thaw the ice from around the saucer using thermite explosives, but something goes wrong and the ship explodes, leaving no trace except the body of one of the aliens, frozen in ice. A block is cut out of the ice so the frozen body can be transported back to the research station.



As the ice begins to clear the man left on guard tosses a blanket over the block of ice, not realizing it is an electric blanket and is turned on. The ice thaws and the not yet dead alien escapes from the building.

Captain Hendry considers the Thing (James Arness) to be a threat while Dr. Carrington wants to attempt to communicate with it, even after it breaks into one of the labs and brutally kills two of the scientists and draining their blood. Tests on a severed hand of the Thing reveal it to be a form of vegetable life. Bullets cannot harm it. Now it turns into a game of cat and mouse as the humans try to figure out how to defeat the creature and the Thing seeks more blood.



The situation turns desperate. The Thing cuts off the heating oil to the station and the temperature inside swiftly drops. They know that it will soon attempt to cut off the generators and desperately set a trap, hoping they might be able to

electrocute the invader before it is too late. Carrington, still believing he can talk with the creature shuts off the generator before the trap is ready. The situation grows more desperate as they run out of time.

Hendry is able to disarm the unhinged scientist and restore the power. But Carrington refuses to give up and approaches the Thing after it breaks through the door into the corridor where the trap is set.



Carrington's attempts to reason with the Thing fail and so the trap is sprung. The alien invader is cooked to nothingness by the powerful current and humanity wins this particular battle. When reporter Ned Scott places his story he ends it with the words, "Keep watching the skies."

In Campbell's original story the alien was a shape shifter which Howard Hawks wanted to use, but the effects team just did not have the technology available at this time to create the effects, so the decision was made to simplify things a bit. It

works, especially with the creature being kept in shadow or otherwise obscured except for brief shots. Also the presence and height of James Arness (soon to become television's Matt Dillon in GUNSMOKE) did a lot to create a threatening image of the powerful creature. It shall be noted Arness avoided roles in Science Fiction films afterward, being more comfortable in the saddle.

Kenneth Tobey became a fixture in Science Fiction films and television including roles in IT CAME FROM BENEATH THE SEA, THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS, SCIENCE FICTION THEATRE, X-15, and STAR TREK DEEP SPACE NINE. Robert Cornthwaite went on to appear in WAR OF THE WORLDS, THRILLER, and THE TWILIGHT ZONE. Douglas Spencer later portrayed an alien in THIS ISLAND EARTH.

Film Reviews By Tom Feller

Birds of Prey—

The film version of Harley Quinn (Margot Robbie) was introduced in *Suicide Squad* in 2016 as the girlfriend of the Joker. He has dumped her just before the start of this movie, the eighth in the DC Extended Universe series, and Harley retaliates by blowing up the chemical plant where he forced her to immerse herself in the chemicals that cause her face and hair to be permanently bleached. Without the Joker's protection, all of the enemies she has made in Gotham City in his company consider her fair game. She assembles a female superhero team, consisting, besides herself, of police detective Renee Montoya (Rosie Perez), assassin Huntress (Mary Elizabeth Winstead), night club singer Black Canary (Jurnee Smollett-Bell, who does her own singing), and pick pocket Cassandra Cain (Ella Jay Basco). (Barbara Gordon, aka Oracle, aka Batgirl, a member of the group in the comic book, was cut from the final script.) None of them is ever seen wearing a skirt in this film.

The most important among many villains out to get Harley and her new friends is Roman Sionis (Ewan McGregor), aka Black Mask. The Maguffin that drives the messy, but energetic, plot is a 30 carat diamond that Cassandra steals from Roman's main henchman Victor Zsasz (Chris Messina). The actors are all over-the-top, but that seemed appropriate in this film.

The fight choreography by the same person who directed the *John Wick* movies, cinematography, and costumes are excellent, but the dialogue is on the level, well, of a comic book.

The Turning—

One of the controversies concerning *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James is whether it is really a ghost story. Some critics argue that the narrator does not actually see ghosts, but because she is mentally disturbed, they are all in her head. Deborah Kerr, the actress who played the character in the 1961 film adaptation, *The Innocents*, made this assumption. I tend to favor a third interpretation, which is that the ghosts are real AND the narrator is crazy. When asked, James himself said he left it to the reader to decide which interpretation is correct.

This version is set in 1994, which gives it a modern look but before cell phones and widespread access to the Internet. Kindergarten teacher Kate Mandell (Mackenzie Davis) takes a position as live-in tutor of the orphaned seven year old Flora (Brooklyn Prince) who lives in a spooky mansion in rural Maine. Kate's mother (Joely Richardson) lives in a mental hospital, and her father abandoned them when Kate was a child. Kate's predecessor, Miss Jessel (Denna Thomson) left the house under mysterious circumstances. Flora's older brother Miles (Finn Wolfhard) comes home, because he has been expelled from boarding school for beating up a fellow student. He is shown to be sadistic and cruel to animals. Their parents had died in an automobile accident a few years previously. The only other inhabitant is Mrs. Grose (Barbara Marten), who is a combination housekeeper/cook, and they contract outside services for gardening and additional housekeeping. Kate comes to believe that the house is haunted by the ghost of Quint (Niall Greig Fulton), the deceased horse master. This is a very creepy, but conventional, horror movie with an ambiguous ending, and Davis is excellent in showing how her character is going mad.

The Invisible Man—

The concept of invisibility is at least as old as Plato. Using a character named

Glaucon, he elucidates a thought experiment in Book 2 of *The Republic* in which a shepherd obtains a ring giving him the power of invisibility and enabling him to seduce his queen, murder his king, and take over a kingdom. In the 1897 H.G. Wells novel, a scientist invents an irreversible invisibility serum, which he uses on himself, goes mad, and becomes a murderer. The basic premise of this new movie has already been revealed in the previews. Adrian Griffin (Oliver Jackson-Cohen), a rich tech entrepreneur who is an abusive boyfriend, invents an invisibility suit. He fakes his own death and continues to abuse his ex-girlfriend Cecilia Kass (Elizabeth Moss), who had run away from him by this time with help from her sister Alice (Harriet Dyer). Cecilia has taken refuge in the San Francisco home of her childhood friend James (Aldis Hodge), who is now a police detective, and his teenage daughter Sydney (Storm Reid). According to Adrian's lawyer brother Tom (Michael Dorman), Adrian has left Cecilia five million dollars, payable in monthly installments of \$100,000, on the condition that she neither be arrested nor confined to a mental institution. This film is actually more of a remake of *Gaslight* starring Ingrid Bergman than it is of the Claude Rains movie of the same name.

Moss is excellent at convincing the audience of her situation and performed a lot of her own stunts. I think she is in every scene, and she is ably supported by the other actors.

The writer/director Leigh Whannell is a veteran of the *Saw* and *Insidious* movies and knows how to scare moviegoers. This film is very intense and has several plot twists. I anticipated one of them because of my familiarity with the Sherlock Holmes story "Silver Blaze", but the one at the very end surprised me. It is well worth seeing if you think you can stand it.

Call of the Wild—

One of the pleasures of the 1935 film version of Jack London's classic 1903 novel is watching Clark Gable play with the St. Bernard who portrayed Buck. Gable definitely showed himself to be a dog-person. On the other hand, you can't tell with this new Harrison Ford version, because Buck is played by a human, Terry Notary, in a motion capture suit. In the book, Buck is a St. Bernard/Scotch

Sheperd mix, and the wife of director Chris Sanders actually rescued such a mix from an Emporia, Kansas animal shelter for the benefit of the computer animators and adopted him.

This movie begins like the book with Buck being stolen from his owner (Bradley Whitford) in Santa, Clara California to be sold in Skagway, Alaska during the Klondike Gold Rush and ends like the book. The parts in between, however, are quite different. First, he is sold to a dogsled team owned by Perrault (Omar Sy) and Francois (Cara Gee), who deliver the mail before being sold again to an abusive gold prospector (Dan Stevens). John Thornton (Ford) rescues Buck, and they set off to explore the wilderness. There are no contests to see which dogs can pull the most weight, but there is a dog fighting scene in which Buck takes on the alpha dog of the dogsled team. The movie was better than I was expecting, especially 77 year old Ford's performance and the Alaska and Canada scenery, and actually quite a bit of fun.