

## INVADERS FROM MARS

Directed by William Cameron Menzies  
Ignite Films 4K/Blu-ray

*Invaders from Mars* scared the hell out of countless young Baby Boomers who either saw it in theaters or, more commonly, watched it on television. Wherever they encountered the movie, many left shaken to the core. In a bonus feature included on this disc, filmmaker John Sayles (age 72) calls *Invaders from Mars* "the movie that taught our generation not to trust our parents or other authority figures."

A loud crash of thunder awakens young David McLean (Jimmy Hunt) in the middle of the night. From his bedroom window he sees a glowing, green flying saucer appear to crash and sink into a nearby sandbank. His parents, naturally, think he was having a nightmare. But his dad (Leif Erickson), after sending David back to bed, decides to investigate just in case. He's soon abducted by aliens and turned into an automaton with no will of his own. The next morning, the previously warm and cheerful Mr. McLean is distant and cold, and even slaps David down. David immediately connects his father's strange behavior (and a mysterious X-shaped mark on the back of his dad's neck) with the flying saucer. Everyone David turns to for help—his mother, two police officers, and even a neighbor girl—are all quickly possessed by the aliens. Finally, David finds a receptive, non-mind-controlled ear in pediatrician Dr. Pat Blake (Helena Carter) and her astronomer boyfriend Stuart Kelson (Arthur Franz). Together, the trio piece together that the aliens have arrived on Earth from Mars to try to sabotage an experimental atomic space rocket which David's father is helping build at an army base near their sleepy Northern California village. But can they convince anybody of this crazy-sounding story before the Martians take over the entire town?

*Invaders from Mars*, a modest (\$290,000) independent feature, was rushed to market by producer Edward L. Alperson to compete with Paramount's lavish \$2 million *War of the Worlds* (1953)—or at least to ride the coattails of George Pal's much-ballyhooed epic. Both films wound up finding receptive audiences and both are classics, but they couldn't be more different in their approach. *WOTW* operates on a sweeping, panoramic scale, while *Invaders* remains intimate and more than a little eccentric. *Invaders* holds its own against *WOTW* because Alperson had one thing Pal didn't have: Academy Award-winning director/production designer William Cameron Menzies, who Alperson lured out of semi-retirement. It was Menzies' idea to shoot *Invaders* entirely from the perspective of 12-year-old David, and to imbue the picture, though meticulous set design and clever photographic tricks, with an eerie, nightmarish quality. There's nothing else in the canon of Fifties sci-fi that looks or feels anything like it. Its visual and makeup effects are simplistic but effective, and film practically overflows with bizarre and unforgettable imagery, like its hulking, green Martian "mu-tants" in green velour jumpsuits, and their leader—a bubble-brained, silver-faced head in a glass bowl.

Even though Menzies wasn't terribly interested in working with actors, *Invaders* features several effective performances, including Franz and Carter as the tale's nominal heroes and Erickson and Hillary Brooke as David's eerily robotic parents. But little Jimmy Hunt carries the weight of the entire film on his back, and makes everything work with a touching and, for its era, relatively unaffected portrayal of David. Richard Blake's screenplay, based on a story by John Tucker Battle, is tight—perhaps too tight—and the story's playful yet downbeat ending also must have thrown young viewers for a loop.

The film's only serious drawback is that, to reach an acceptable feature length (73 minutes), Menzies was forced to stretch the story's final act, extending the climactic sequence set in the interior of the Martian spacecraft by reusing the same shots over and over. This turns what should have been a bang-up conclusion into something of an endurance test. This flaw is exacerbated in the British version of the film, which featured a different, less effective ending and was padded with eight minutes of static dialogue sequences shot a year after the original production wrapped. (Hunt was a year older when these scenes were filmed, and sports a completely different haircut in them than in the rest of the film.)

*Invaders from Mars* dented the psyches of Baby Boomers even though many of them first saw it on tiny black-and-white TVs, with the broadcast interrupted by commercials. For decades afterward, the film could be viewed only in videos and DVDs of at best sketchy quality—grainy and choppy pan-and-scan versions with washed-out color and tinny sound.

Ignite Films has restored *Invaders* to its resplendent SuperCineColor glory, in its original 1.37:1 aspect ratio. The 4K restoration, overseen by Scott MacQueen for Ignite, in conjunction with Roundabout Entertainment, The George Eastman Museum, the UCLA Film and Television Archive, and the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, is simply jaw-dropping. It's a quantum leap in sound and picture quality from any previously available version. This scintillating presentation demonstrates that *Invaders from Mars*, visually at least, stands alongside the very best of Menzies' other work—up to and including *Gone with the Wind*. It's certainly one of the most dazzling viewing experiences to be found among the canon of 1950s science fiction films. Plus, the lossless audio restores Raoul Kraushaar's unsettling and unorthodox score to its full dynamic range.

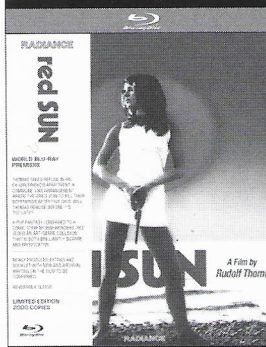
Ignite sweetens the deal with a plethora of bonus material, including: Restored footage from the British version of the film, including the alternate ending; a restored original 1953 trailer (2:19) and a newly assembled trailer (2:17); an appreciation featuring directors John Landis and Joe Dante, editor Mark Goldblatt, special visual effects artist Robert Skotak, and Scott MacQueen (22 minutes); a delightful interview with star Jimmy Hunt (10 minutes); a rewarding interview with William Cameron Menzies' biographer James Curtis and special guest Pamela Lauesen, Menzies' granddaughter (16 minutes); John Sayles' introduction at Turner Classic Movie Festival from 2022 (7:30); a restoration demonstration with commentary by MacQueen (6:50); an image gallery; and a 20-page booklet essay on the restoration process by MacQueen.

Fully restored and loaded with supplements, *Invaders from Mars* stands ready to freak out a whole new generation of audiences.

Mark Clark

## RED SUN (ROTE SONNE)

Directed by Rudolf Thome  
(1970) Radiance Blu-ray (region free import)



If, like me, you saw the title *Red Sun* and immediately assumed that Terence Young's 1971 "Western meets Eastern" toppling Charles Bronson and Toshiro Mifune was finally receiving a Blu-Ray upgrade, such is not yet the case . . . nor should one purchase Warner's disc on demand under any circumstances due to its horrendous visual quality. In comparison, Rudolf Thome's virtually unknown (on these

shores) effort from 1970 proves quite the optical treat even as it challenges its viewers to find its substance.

As *Rote Sonne* opens, we meet a young man by the name of Thomas (Marquard Böhm) hitch-hiking his way across Germany and re-acquainting himself with a woman from his past (friend? lover?) known as Peggy (Uta Obermaier) in the process. As Thomas currently finds himself between lodgings, Peggy graciously invites him to crash with her and her four female roommates in their well-appointed pad for a while. Naturally, Thomas doesn't need to be asked twice; nor does he realize the danger he's in. As the viewer soon discovers, Peggy and her clique have a way of dealing with men... they are to be executed once their relationship reaches the five-day mark! Thomas eventually gets wise and attempts to turn the various women against each other for his benefit. Yet while the provocative premise suggests plenty of excitement and suspense to come, director Thome deliberately distances himself (and thus the viewer) from any emotional involvement with the story or its various characters. The women are undeniably attractive and the colorful, cosmopolitan sets seem to anticipate Italian *giallo* thrillers to come, but the sex is implied, what little nudity there is takes place in long shot, and the violence is played for zero impact (at least until the very end of the film). To give a perfect example? Early on we see a terrified man bound to a chair and gagged as the ladies discuss his fate. At that point most viewers would brace themselves for a brutal payoff to the scene, but instead we hear a muffled "silencer" sound effect off screen and then see the victim slumped in his chair with no visible wound, let alone the anticipated splat of red on the white wall directly behind him—leading this reviewer to assume that the unfortunate fellow had merely been tranquilized (not so).

And yet this utter lack of urgency, motivational background and overall effect stands as the director's intention; Thome even went on record as noting that he approached the narrative as if he were filming a documentary about performers hired to act out this story while his critical contemporaries noted the influence of the French New Wave and the anti-cinema stylings of Jean-Luc Godard. None of this makes *Rote Sonne* any more enjoyable in thriller terms, of course, but those who appreciate deep-dive criticism of this sort will enjoy the extras Radiance supplied with their visually impeccable rendition of the film at hand. Director Thome and fellow filmmaker Rainer Langhans provide a feature audio commentary (in German with optional English subtitles, of course) that can be played straight through or formatted to accompany one scene at a time. Historian Margaret Derwin gives us a 50m exploration of German film history from the 1960s and onward, while Johannes von Moltke gives us his own perspective on the story behind the film and a critical appreciation in his 20m audio essay "*Rote Sonne* Between Pop Sensibility and Social Critique." An insubstantial booklet supplies new writing by Vinegar Syndrome producer Samm Deighan and a collection of archival pieces, including the film's attention-getting appreciation by director Wim Wenders (*Wings of Desire*).

Shane M. Dallman