Movie Review: 'The Invasion'

by David_Elliott

As if by evolving, cultural necessity, "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" keeps returning. Its potent new morph is "The Invasion," from a director whose previous film horror was Adolf Hitler ("Downfall").

'THE INVASION' - Nicole Kidman portrays a psychiatrist and a desperately protective mother in the thriller 'The Invasion,' which co-stars Daniel Craig. CNS Photo courtesy of Warner Bros. Pictures. RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) Nicole Kidman portrays a psychiatrist who is also a desperately protective mother in "The Invasion," which co-stars Daniel Craig. Oliver Hirschbiegel joins the creeper caravan so chillingly begun in a small town by Don Siegel in 1956. Next came a succulent, San Franciscan update in 1978 from Phil Kaufman and a tasty Southern treatment by Abel Ferrara (1993's "Body Snatchers"). No doubt, brainy pods using iPods will merge them all together.

"The Invasion" is one of the best chillers ever made. It has little suspense foreplay but plunges right in and is packed with startling moments. Instead of pods for transition, people seem to suddenly just become robotized aliens. One of the space shuttles fell in broken pieces, scattering a viral contagion over much of the Earth.

Pandemic infections include the movie's one brazenly visceral touch: Aliens spew internal juices by mouth onto victims. They must then fall asleep to morph into emotionless beings who never blink, talk with rote precision and have all the charm of bacteria.

The movie is rich in microscope shots and sci-talk like "endospores" and "conjugate vaccines," because only scientists at the militarized emergency lab can really address the crisis beyond fear. But the heroine, Carol (Nicole Kidman), is a Washington psychiatrist with a piercing mind, rivaled in smarts by her aspiring boyfriend, Dr. Driscoll (Daniel Craig).

For an action-pump thriller that almost never slows down, "The Invasion" is remarkably pitched to adult interest. Though relentless, it doesn't fall into pulp-grind thrills like "The Bourne Ultimatum." Its core appeal, though, is as primal as a D.W. Griffith film: Carol is a mother desperate to save her child (Jackson Bond) from the omnipresent creeps.

Past "Snatcher" classics were ensemble gems, though Ferrara tried to pivot his '93 version on a girl. But while Gabrielle Anwar was fine, she wasn't a star powerhouse like Kidman, whose tall, pale beauty gives "The Invasion" a quicksilver heart. She's both commanding and vulnerable, a vision on the move but also a tired, scared woman trying not to fall asleep.

Her zeal to save her son gives the movie a drive beyond adrenaline kicks. Hirschbiegel, superb editors and Rainer Klausmann's cold-crisp images don't deny us those - like the car chase in which Carol's vehicle is crusted with aliens like nasty ticks on a dog - but it is emotive propulsion that motivates the suspense.

Sly touches abound. Aliens begin to forge a world of peace, but it's a dead world inside. George W. Bush and Kim Jong-Il, as peace-minded aliens, flick past like a sick joke. And here with the famed warning ("They're

coming!") is Veronica Cartwright from the '78 film, in which Kevin McCarthy of the '56 film had a small reprise.

In letting a Russian ambassador speak as sinister prophet, Dave Kajganich's script invokes the Cold War fevers of 1956. But the mad global fevers of 2007 feel far more rampant, and "The Invasion" is an alarm bell that might keep you awake at night.

A Warner Bros. release. Director: Oliver Hirschbiegel. Writer: Dave Kajganich. Cast: Nicole Kidman, Daniel Craig, Jeremy Northam, Jeffrey Wright, Veronica Cartwright. Running time: 1 hour, 30 minutes. Rated R. 4 stars.

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