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The Day The Earth Stood Still (1951) - Blu-ray

Should you opt for the original over the remake?

by Stuart Miles published on 24 April 2009

To coincide with the release of the Keanu Reeves' 2008 remake hitting the shelves, 20th Century Fox have rolled out the original 1951 version of the Sci-Fi masterpiece. But should you bother with this black and white offering? We get watching to find out.

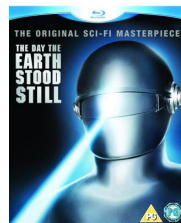
The premise is simple: alien comes to earth, tells us earthlings that he is an intergalactic policeman of sorts, gives us a warning to stop beating each other up and threatens to destroy the planet if we don't.

Featuring one of the most memorable scenes in Hollywood history, even if you haven't seen the movie, the whole plot focuses on the spaceship landing and the big robot coming out to threaten all those standing around watching.

Almost 60 years after the film first came out, it's obvious that the language is from another era - I can't see someone saying "Holy Chrimstmas's" can you? However what is amazing is that the tension and the themes have stood the test of time enough for this to still be not only enjoyable, but also relevant - probably why they decided to do a remake.

Of course as with all Sci-Fi classics of the 50s there isn't much by the way of special effects, but that didn't stop the film's soundtrack composer opting for the eerie sounding theremin to provide those scary moments.

At 90 minutes long the experience is short-lived, the film print is, considering its age, incredibly clean, benefiting from the Blu-ray experience although widescreen TV owners will be disappointed that it is 4:3 ratio rather than 16:9.



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Get past the movie and 20th Century Fox has gone to town on the extras. A directors commentary by the director Robert Wise (before his death in 2005) and Star Trek II: The Wrath Of Khan director Nicholas Meyer give an interesting commentary with Meyer acting as an interviewer asking plenty of questions as the film rolls on in the background.

Alternatively there is also a commentary by film and music historians John Morgan, Steven Smith, William Stromberg and Nick Redman.

Beyond the commentaries you can isolate that theremin score as well as play an interactive game to make up your own soundtrack to the movie's pivotal scene with an interactive game you control via the remote.

Of course there is the usual array of "making of" features, trailers, and other interviews with cast and crew as well as a smattering of photo galleries, but on the whole most are interesting rather than just more fodder to fill the disc.

VERDICT

While the film is clearly not the exploding Sci-Fi fest you are probably used to, there is an underlying tone that even Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry would be proud of: that we should do good to each other.

As for the Blu-ray experience, it's good with plenty on offer for the fan. The catch? Just don't expect it to be a racy 90 minutes, this is slow-burning tension at its 1950s best.

Rating: PG

Starting: Michael Rennie, Patricia Neal, Hugh Marlowe, Sam Jaffe, Billy Grant, Frances Bavier, Lock Martin

Directed by: Robert Wise

Extras: Commentary by director Rober Wise and Nicholas Meyer (Director Star Trek II: Wrath of Khan), Commentary by Film and Music Histroians John Morgan, Steven Smith, William Stromberg,

At a glance

What is it?

Sci-Fi classic

Good

A classic tension builder, plenty of extras, clean print, great sound

Bad

Slow, black and white, 4:3 ratio

Verdict

As for the Blu-ray experience - it's a good one with plenty on offer for the fan

Price £15.99

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10

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and Nick Redman, Isolated Score Track, Interactive Teremin: Create your own score, Gort Command! Interactive Game, The World of the Teremin, The Mysterious, Medodious Theremin, The Day The Earth Stood Still Main Title Live Performance by Peter Pringle, The Making of The Day The Earth Stood Still, Decoding "Klaatu Barada Nikto": Science Fiction as a Metaphor, A Brief History of Flying Saucers, The Astounding Harry Bates, Edmund North: The Man Who Made The Earth Stand Still, "Race to Oblivion": A Short Film Written and Produced by Edmund North, Teaser Trailer (1951), Theatrical Trailer (1951), Fox Movietone news from 1951 - Featuring the Film's Premiere, "Farewell to the Master": A Reading by Jamieson K. Price of the Original Harry Bates Short Story, Photo Galleries

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