

Trivia for

The Thing From Another World (1951)

- It is generally believed that Howard Hawks took over direction during production, and it has always been acknowledged by director Christian Nyby that Hawks was the guiding hand. However, in an interview James Arness said that while Hawks spent a lot of time on the set, it was Nyby who actually directed the picture, not Hawks.
- Partly filmed in Glacier National Park and at a Los Angeles ice storage plant.
- This film was based on the short story "Who Goes There?" by Don A. Stuart. The credits on this film list the author by his real name, the science fiction editor/writer John W. Campbell Jr.
- Midget actor Billy Curtis played the smaller version of "The Thing" during the creature's final scene.
- James Arness complained that his "Thing" costume made him look like a giant carrot.
- Howard Hawks asked the US Air Force for assistance in making the film. He was refused because the top brass felt that such cooperation would compromise the U.S. government's official stance that UFOs didn't exist.
- Only technical and production credits precede the film, no acting credits.
- It is believed that Ben Hecht and 'William Faulkner' - both good friends of producer Howard Hawks - contributed to the script. However, long-standing rumors that Orson Welles contributed to the dialog are believed to be untrue.
- Two months prior to principal photography, James Arness was brought in during the design and development of the makeup.
- James Arness reportedly regarded his role as so embarrassing that he didn't attend the premiere.
 - Close-ups of "The Thing" were removed. It was felt that the make-up could not hold up to close scrutiny. However, the lack of close-ups gave the creature a more mysterious quality.

Goofs for

The Thing From Another World (1951)

- **Continuity:** When the men arrive at the crash site and are looking it over, their shadows are always pointing away from us no matter whether we are looking at their faces or looking over their shoulders at the site.
- **Revealing mistakes:** When the thermite intended to free the saucer from the ice is

detonated, the camera pans up to follow the mushroom cloud produced by the explosive, and draws us right over the top of the painted sky-backdrop and into the darkened studio beyond, finally capturing one of the stage lights in the upper right before cutting away.

- **Continuity:** The length of the boards that the Thing breaks to confront the soldiers.
- **Crew or equipment visible:** As they fly over the crash site, you can see a small black squarish-object at the far right of the screen on the ice. This could be some piece of studio equipment, and it certainly doesn't belong there.
- **Factual errors:** The block of ice that contains the Thing they chop out would have to weigh close to a ton, and therefore near-impossible to lift out of the ice, or have the dog sled move it easily, or lift it into the plane.
- **Continuity:** In the credits there is a listing for "Lt. Ken Erikson," but he's introduced to the reporter as "Lieutenant MacPhearson, " and is continually referred to throughout the film as either "Mac" or MacPhearson.
- **Continuity:** The crew chief, Bob, tells Capt. Hendry that he hasn't seen Lt. MacPhearson scared since they "were over Reichenburg," probably alluding to a bombing mission during WWII. Since the action takes place in 1951, it would be very unlikely that two members of the same crew would still be together after six or seven years, or that one of them would still be first lieutenant and not have gotten a promotion.
- **Continuity:** To force the "Thing" up on the wooden walkway, a tool is slid at him. He jumps. The tool is seen in different resting positions in the following shots.
- **Continuity:** At the end, the co-pilot throws his tool to force the thing up on the walkway, but immediately after electrocuting the monster the co-pilot is seen holding the same instrument.
- **Continuity:** Immediately after landing the plane at the camp, the apparently stationary left propeller moves between shots.
- **Continuity:** When the airplane arrives from Anchorage, the camp is bathed in sunshine when seen from the air but the crew disembark in semi blizzard conditions.
- **Continuity:** In the Officers' Club early in the movie, money disappears from the middle of the poker table between shots.
 - **Continuity:** When the thing is attacked by the dogs it loses one of its arms, but when you see it run away both arms are visible.

Alternate Versions for The Thing From Another World (1951)

- Some editions include a scene between Captain Hendry and Nikki right before the Thing escapes. In the scene Hendry "allows" Nikki to tie his hands behind his back. When she tries to give him a drink he slips free grabs her and kisses her. The film then cuts to the Thing in the storage room.
- There is a bootleg version of this film released by VidAmerica. It edits out parts where they find the Thing, parts of the Captain and Secretary's love affair, additional scenes with the reporters, scenes with the Thing and other scenes. It also edits out the classic soundtrack and kills-off characters not killed in the theatrical release.
- A colorized version was released in color on VHS in 1989 by Turner Home Entertainment as an "RKO Color Classic".
- The original 16mm U.S. television syndication prints were a slightly abridged 85 minute version. About 1980, when Turner acquired the RKO library, the syndication prints were replaced with the 79 minute re-release version. This shorter re-release version was also used for the initial video and laserdisc releases as well as the pay-tv and "colorized" versions.

- In an old Laserdisc newsletter it said two scenes were added to the Laserdisc. The kissing scene already mentioned and a scene of the slaughtered scientist hanging upside down being bled to feed the seedlings. It was originally cut because it was considered too gory. I bought that "Collector's Edition laserdisc" and those scenes were not included. Side 1 is CLV and side 2 is CAV. Running time on this Laserdisc is 87 Min.

THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLDakaTHE THINGRating:

USA. 1951. Director – Christian Nyby, Screenplay – Charles Lederer, Based on the Short Story *Who Goes There ?* by Don A. Stuart [*John W. Campbell Jr*], Producers – Edward Lasker & Howard Hawks, Photography (b&w) – Russell Harlan, Music – Dmitri Tiomkin, Special Effects – Donald Stewart, Makeup – Lee Greenway, Art Direction – Albert S. D'Agostino & John J. Hughes. Production Company – RKO Radio Pictures/Winchester Pictures. **Cast:** Kenneth Tobey (Captain Patrick Hendry), Robert Cornthwaite (Dr Arthur Carrington), Douglas Spencer (Ned 'Scotty' Scott), Margaret Sheridan (Nikki Nicholson), James Arness (The Thing)

Plot: *Journalist Ned Scott joins Air Force Captain Patrick Hendry on a flight up to a North Pole base to investigate the site of a meteorite crash. They arrive at the crash site to discover a flying saucer buried under the ice. Attempts to uncover the saucer using thermite charges instead end up destroying it. They find a body left buried and dig out the surrounding block of ice and take it back to the base. However an electrical cable running under the block of ice succeeds in thawing the creature out. It immediately starts attacking the men and proves impervious to bullets as they try to shoot back at it. As*

Hendry and men try to find a way to stop the creature before it kills them, Hendry finds his efforts thwarted by Dr Arthur Carrington and his team of scientists who insist the creature not be harmed so that they can study it.

The Thing from Another World was the very first alien invader film (unless one counts the odd serial entry of the 1940s). As is often the case, the first is one of the best, *The Thing* coming at a point where it was not influenced by the latter clichés of the genre that arrived soon after. The film took its basis in *Who Goes There ?* (1938), a novella by John W. Campbell Jr. As editor of *Amazing/Analog*, Campbell is regarded as the single most influential figure of the Golden Age of (literary) Science Fiction in the 1940s. Campbell groomed writers such as Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, Harry Harrison and A.E. Van Vogt (and okay, L. Ron Hubbard), while his tenure as editor of *Amazing* in the 1930s and 40s is agreed upon as being the one thing that transformed sf from pulp space opera into a conceptual genre. *Who Goes There ?* was one of Campbell's earlier stories. Even so the film ditches most of the story – everything really except the central idea of a group of men trapped inside an Arctic base and being picked off by an alien. (John Carpenter's remake of this film, *The Thing* (1982), is a much more authentic adaptation of the Campbell story). Perhaps the most disappointing change made to the Campbell novella is the ordinariness of the Thing, which seems not much more than an actor – in fact a young James Arness of *Gunsmoke* (1955-75) fame – in a boiler-suit with his head shaved.

But despite its abandonment of the source material, the film is highly effective on its own terms. Director Christian Nyby does a fine job in making *The Thing's* appearances into something really quite eerie. The first glimpse we receive of it comes only momentarily during a snowstorm, where we see it tossing huskies around its head. The scene where the men hunt it through the base, opening several doors to no effect and where Nyby then takes everybody totally by surprise as they open the next door to find it standing right there is one of the most effective examples of the red herring shock before it was done to death by just about every *Friday the 13th* clone. The scene where the men set *The Thing* on fire in the dormitory while protecting themselves with mattresses is genuinely exciting, holding an authentic seeming sense of danger on the part of the actors involved. Good too is the scene with the crew facing off against the monster in a narrow hallway, trying to get it to step onto the electrified platform, where the stakes are suddenly raised as the treacherous Carrington turns the power off. What is perhaps distinctive about *The Thing* over the other alien invader films of the 1950s is its sense of pace. It moves far more tightly and more excitingly than any other 1950s sf film. The script is incredibly slick – there is nothing to spare, nothing of excess. The film is also notable for its willingness to go out and shoot on what look in places like quite convincing Arctic locations, unlike almost every other 1950s sf film, which kept indoors.

There has been considerable debate ever since the film was released as to who actually directed it – whether the director was the credited Christian Nyby or whether it really was producer Howard Hawks, whose style the film very closely resembles. It is frequently argued that really Hawks directed the film but allowed his former editor Nyby to take the recognition so that Nyby could obtain a Director's Guild credit, or that Nyby did direct but was kept on a tight leash by Hawks. Whatever the case the argument is almost certain

weighed in Hawks's favour. The film is made with an assurance that does not readily come to first-time directors. It is also directed in the dramatically tight pace and with the wittily bantering and overlapping dialogue that is distinctive to Hawks films such as *Scarface* (1932), *His Girl Friday* (1940), *The Big Sleep* (1946), *Red River* (1948) and *Rio Bravo* (1959). Moreover the film has the distinctive almost Hemingway-esque man's man nature that is central to Hawks – the virile, commanding hero who is a man of action rather than of talk, the warm respectful camaraderie among his men. And certainly Nyby never went on to direct anything else of distinction. He made five other forgettable films – routine Westerns and spy thrillers – and spent the rest of his career up until his retirement in the mid-1970s directing episodes of tv series such as *Lassie*, *Gunsmoke*, *Perry Mason*, *Bonanza*, *The Twilight Zone*, *The Fugitive*, *I Spy*, *Gomer Pyle*, *The Streets of San Francisco* and *Kojak*.

This man's man nature of the film is really central to its understanding. The film taps into all the naked anxiety of the 1950s as much as any other sf film of the period. The alien is seen as indicative of a new type of threat out there. The famous end speech – “Keep looking at the skies. Everywhere – keep watching. Keep watching the skies” – is one that bristles with all sorts of suggestions of a new fear that was emerging – a fear of the nuclear age, fear of ICBM missile attack, of the newly emerged fascination with flying saucers. But the film also unquestioningly sides with its man of action hero in the form of Kenneth Tobey. *The Thing* is a threat that is seen as implacable, brushing aside everything brought against it. It is in the end something that can only be stood up to by men who have no doubt about who they are and what they are doing. Intriguingly though, almost as great a threat as the alien proves to be that of the cold intellectual scientist played by Robert Cornthwaite. Cornthwaite gets lots of speeches speaking up in favour of science over emotions – “No emotion, no heart – our superior in every way,” and “Knowledge is more important than life. We owe it to our species to stand here and die.” This was very much a post-WWII sensibility – the fear of intellectuals or the mind run rampant – and is a theme that runs beneath much of 1950s sf – see films like *Forbidden Planet* (1956) and *Fiend Without a Face* (1958). Equally intriguingly the film paints Carrington as prissy, even conceivably of questionable sexuality – he comes with dyed blonde and wave-permed hair and, while the rest of the men in the film who dress in uniform, he swans about the base in a silk dressing gown.

The Thing was enormously influential, although the film that really started the alien invader genre of the 1950s off was *The War of the Worlds* (1953) rather than *The Thing*. Subsequent to *The War of the Worlds*, the genre followed suit, contriving alien invasion on a vast socially devastating scale rather than the single invader here. Indeed *The Thing* really holds a lineage, if anything, to the monster movies of the 1930s and 40s more so than it seems a characteristic 1950s alien invader film. *The Thing* was copied by many films including *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* (1958), which created the idea of a single alien nasty loose on board a spaceship that in turn gave inspiration to *Alien* (1979) and a vast body of imitators. One could really say that the true ancestor of *Alien* is in fact *The Thing*. *Destination Inner Space* (1966) was the first film to try the idea of setting *The Thing* underwater, another variant that has proven surprisingly prevalent.

The Thing was of course later remade as John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982), which returned much more closely to the Campbell novella and altered the basic notion of the alien to a shape-changing body snatcher.

There are numerous *Thing* references in other films – *Lobster Man from Mars* (1990) parodies the famous end line; while clips turn up in John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) and in *Invasion Earth: The Aliens Are Here* (1987). Kenneth Tobey also found himself considered a genre icon in the 1980s as a result of *The Thing* and was cast in bit parts in a number of genre films – *Strange Invaders* (1983), *Honey I Blew Up the Kid* (1992), a number of Joe Dante films including *The Howling* (1981), *Gremlins* (1984), *Innerspace* (1987) and *Gremlins 2: The New Batch* (1990), while in both *The Lost Empire* (1983) and *Attack of the B-Movie Monster* (2002) he played a character named Captain Hendry.

The Thing from Another World

(Das Ding aus einer anderen Welt)

USA 1951

by Christian Nyby, Howard Hawks

with: Kenneth Tobey (Captain Patrick Hendry), Margaret Sheridan ("Nikki" Nicholson), Robert Cornthwaite (Dr. Arthur Carrington), Douglas Spencer (Ned "Scotty" Scott), James R. Young (Lt. Eddie Dykes), Dewey Martin (Bob, crew chief), Robert Nichols (Lt. Ken McPherson), William Self (Corporal Barnes), Eduard Franz (Dr. Stern), Sally Creighton (Mrs. Chapman), James Arness (The Thing)

The scene is a distant Arctic missile base, where a UFO has crashed. The investigating scientists discover that the circular craft has melted its way into the ice, which has frozen up again. While attempting to recover the ship, Captain Patrick Hendry (Kenneth Tobey) accidentally explodes the vessel, but the pilot—at least, what seems to be the pilot—remains frozen in a block of ice. The body is taken to base headquarters, where it is inadvertently thawed out by an electric blanket. The alien attacks the soldier guarding him and escapes into the snowy wastes. An attack dog rips off the alien's arm, whereupon Dr. Carrington (Robert Cornthwaite) discerns that "The Thing" is not animal but vegetable, subsisting on blood. While the misguided Carrington attempts to spawn baby "Things" with the severed arm, the parent creature wreaks murderous havoc all over the base. Female scientist Nikki (Margaret Sheridan) suggests that the best way to destroy a vegetable is to cook it. Over the protests of Carrington, who wants to reason with the "visitor" (a very foolhardy notion, as it turns out), the soldiers devise a devious method for stopping The Thing once and for all. This oversimplification of The Thing does not

do full justice to the overall mood and tension of the piece, nor does it convey the lifelike "business as usual" approach taken by the residents of the military base in dealing with something beyond their understanding. A superior blend of science-fiction, horror, naturalistic dialogue and flesh-and-blood characterizations, **The Thing** is a model of its kind.

Hal Erickson, All-Movie Guide

Although Christian Nyby is officially credited as director, there can be little question in anyone's mind but that 'producer' Howard Hawks is primarily responsible. ... Based on 'Who Goes There?', a terrific short story by John W. Campbell (writing as Don A. Stuart), it deals with an isolated group of scientists threatened by the malevolent, extra-terrestrial vegetable they thaw out of the Antarctic permafrost. (Actually, the film gives the scientists a better break than the story; in the original, the monster was telepathic, while in the film it's merely strong.) Lightning pacing, overlapping dialogue, and a concentration on group dynamics (all the Hawksian trademarks, in short) work to make this a guaranteed edge-of-your-seat thriller. The scene where the scientists spread out on the ice to mark the outlines of a buried spaceship, and form a perfect circle, is one of the most chilling moments in cinema — and worth the price of admission alone. James Arness plays The Thing.

Michael Goodwin, Pacific Film Archive

One of the greatest science-fiction films ever made, **THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD** was produced by Howard Hawks and supposedly directed by his editor on **RED RIVER**, Christian Nyby. Anyone familiar with Hawks's films will immediately recognize that the director's style, themes, and handling of actors dominate **THE THING** and that Nyby's participation was that of an apprentice observing the master. [...]

THE THING was based rather loosely on a science-fiction story by John W. Campbell, Jr. (it was first published under his pseudonym, Don A. Stuart), in which the alien had the ability to change its shape at will, causing havoc among the soldiers who begin to suspect each other of harboring the monster (John Carpenter's remake of **THE THING** in 1982 stuck closer to this story line but the film turned out to be a massive disappointment). Lederer's screenplay (rumor has it that frequent Lederer-Hawks collaborator Ben Hecht had a hand in it as well) streamlines the narrative and allows Hawks to concentrate on the human interaction in the face of crisis. Where the original story (and Carpenter's remake) is a study of paranoia among comrades, Hawks's film revels in the interworkings of a hardened group of professionals capable of handling any crisis if they stick together. Tobey is the leader of the group and the star of the film, but the characters operate as an ensemble and no one is really given much solo screen time. Their unity is what the film is about (with the point beautifully emphasized visually when they assemble to make the circle on the ice), and anyone familiar with Hawks's work will know that it is a theme

that runs throughout most of his films.

While the film is frequently stunning on a visual level, *THE THING* is a symphony for the ears as well, with Hawks's patented overlapping dialog, with the protagonists snappily going about their work, asking each other questions, and providing quick, succinct responses. Whereas it is the very nature of the science-fiction film to be filled with long, ponderous explanations of the rather incredible things presented, Hawks manages to handle the same material in a wholly realistic and entertaining manner sprinkled with doses of light humor. *THE THING* also draws the line that would mark most science-fiction films of the 1950s—the conflict between the military and science. Although Cornthwaite is shown in a bad light, Hawks still has compassion for the character. Cornthwaite believes the invader to be a superior being and is sympathetic to it because he sees it as an extension of himself—high intellect devoid of emotion, feeling, or pain, the perfect scientist (although the viewer sees it as a violent, rampaging monster that demonstrates little intelligence, only strong survival instincts). The scientist's intentions are valid and noble—of course, studying the thing would yield valuable information—but his intellectual concerns begin to take over his rational sensibilities and lives are lost because of it. Hawks is a much more practical man—sometimes the price of knowledge is too high. If the survival of the group is threatened, the choice is clear: the group (i.e., society) must survive.

In a genre where elaborate special effects are required (and expected), *THE THING* is sweet simplicity. As in a horror film, the monster (played by James Arness who would later be Sheriff Matt Dillon in TV's "Gunsmoke") is only glimpsed in shadows and darkness, thus making the imagination fill in the terrifying details. Harlan's cinematography and Tiomkin's eerie electronic score (he used a theremin) provide enough chills to satisfy any horror fan. No ray-guns, strange costumes, or futuristic inventions are needed here; even the spaceship is only suggested, never seen. The fact that the alien closely resembles a man heightens the sense of personal (human) struggle that is a cornerstone of all good drama.

Those who still doubt that this is Hawks's film need only look at production stills that show Hawks very much in control of the actors and examine Nyby's directorial filmography. There was a five-year gap between *THE THING* and Nyby's next film, *HELL ON DEVIL'S ISLAND*, which is odd for a "hot" director (*THE THING* garnered critical raves and was a big hit at the box office). None of Nyby's subsequent films even came close to the brilliance of *THE THING*, leaving one to assume that Hawks granted his friend Nyby directorial credit as a favor so that the editor could begin a new career.

TV Guide