

'50s-style film at its pinnacle with big bugs, performances

By Ryan Nyburg
Freelance Reporter

During the 1950s, there was a rash of films dealing with the possibilities of atomic mutation, specifically its effects on insects. Most of these "big bug" movies ended up as fare for Mystery Science Theater 3000, assuming they were remembered at all. But a few of them were good enough to have staying power. "Them!" is one of the best of that latter category.

FORGOTTEN FILMS

Released in 1954, it was one of the first big bug movies, and it set a standard for all the rest — a standard which, sadly, was rarely ever met. It deals with the emergence of giant ants in the New Mexico desert, formed from the first atomic bomb test, that eventually make their way to Los Angeles. This is of course laughably absurd, but the film avoids campiness by being funny in its own right. The supporting cast is full of memorable scene-stealing performances, and the script is smart enough to avoid many of the pitfalls for this subject matter.

The film is full of memorable shots that look too good to be in a B-movie. One of the opening shots, a bird's-eye view of a catatonic little girl wandering through the desert, has the kind of gorgeous expansiveness evocative of a John Ford western or an Ansel Adams photograph.

The police pick up the little girl, which leads to the investigation of a number of mysterious incidents, including an attack on a roadside market. The scene in an aban-



Eric Layton Illustration

"Them!," released in 1954, was one of the first bug movies.

doned market, which is partially demolished and clouded in a sandstorm, is another of the film's highlights. The lighting is dark and eerie in a way that approaches high horror-film art. By this point the film has created a lonely, bizarrely foreboding sense of atmosphere. All this without revealing any giant insects.

When the ants do arrive, they're somewhat anti-climactic. To an audience tempered in a decade's worth of near-seamless computer effects, a few giant puppets might seem almost funny. The effects weren't even all that great for the times, or even for big bug movies. "Tarantula," which came out a year later, did a better job by using real spider footage interposed over desert scenery.

But the effects hardly matter, as there are so damn few of them. The giant puppets are used mostly to show you the ants are actually there. The film takes this perceived deficiency and turns it into an advantage, evoking the ants more often than showing them, much in the way "Jaws" did with its shark. Everything is done in such a way that it is conceivable the film could have never shown a single ant, while still remaining just as effective.

And while the ants might look a little silly, they sure

Turn to **THEM**, page 8

Get the word out!

Advertise in the Emerald classifieds



SELL

- cars
- furniture
- sports equipment
- computers

FIND

- employees
- lost items
- jobs
- roommates

Best Rates In Town

Call **346-4343** NOW!

Oregon Daily Emerald/Advertising

What Does It Mean If The Police Tell You To Leave An Area?

When a police officer issues a "Notice to Disperse" or asks people to clear an area, it is important that everyone realizes that this is a directive issued by law enforcement personnel in the performance of their duties in an emergency situation. This supercedes rights individuals usually have to peacefully assemble or observe a situation.

So, if a police officer asks you to leave an area, remember the following:

1. You must leave right away. Failure to leave could result in your being cited or arrested for interfering with a police officer. This is a Class A misdemeanor punishable by jail time and up to a five thousand dollar fine.
2. Once the police have given an order to leave, you must leave.
3. While you may consider yourself an innocent bystander, your presence alone contributes to the crowd that police are ordering to disperse.
4. It is never a good idea to join a large crowd (even as an observer) that is gathering in the streets. While you may be curious to see what is going on, you are contributing to the problem if you remain in the area.
5. In large public disturbances, you should leave so that you aren't interfering with a police officer, and you should leave for your own safety. Bricks and bottles that are thrown in these types of situations have seriously injured people.
6. If the police ask you to step back into your residence or off a porch or balcony you should do so. Remember, dispersal orders given during an emergency situation supercede rights individuals usually have to peacefully assemble or observe a situation.

Brought to you by: Office of Student Life, ASUO, and Eugene Police Department