

Them Encyclopedia Article

Them by Joyce Carol Oates

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Them

First and best of the giant insect/arachnid subgenre of horror films, *Them!* was directed by Gordon Douglas and released by Warner Brothers in 1954. Atomic bomb testing in the American Southwest causes ants to mutate, growing to great size. A scientist (Edmund Gwenn), his daughter (Joan Weldon), an FBI agent (James Arness), and a police officer (James Whitmore) lead the effort to find and destroy the migrating horde of ants before it is too late.

The film is characterized by a matter-of-fact approach. Early witnesses to the ants' existence are either semi-catatonic, like the young girl who can say only "Them!" or the pilot (Fess Parker) who is placed in a psychiatric ward after claiming to have seen giant bugs. The climax, an all-out assault on the ant colony living in the Los Angeles sewers, is moody and frightening, especially by the standards of 1950s' special effects.

Later, lesser films in this genre included *Tarantula* (1955) and the 1957 films *The Deadly Mantis*, *Beginning of the End*, and *The Black Scorpion*.

Further Reading:

Parish, James, and Michael Pitts. *The Great Science Fiction Pictures*. Metuchen, N.J., Scarecrow Press, 1977.

Walker, John. *Halliwel's Film Guide*. New York, Harper Perennial, 1994.