

# THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL

In *THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL*, a contemporary reinvention of the 1951 science fiction classic, renowned scientist Dr. Helen Benson (Jennifer Connelly) finds herself face to face with an alien called Klaatu (Keanu Reeves), who travels across the universe to warn of an impending global crisis.

When forces beyond Helen's control treat the extraterrestrial as a hostile and deny his request to address the world's leaders, she and her estranged stepson Jacob (Jaden Smith) quickly discover the deadly ramifications of Klaatu's claim that he is "a friend to the Earth."

Now Helen must find a way to convince the entity who was sent to destroy us that mankind is worth saving – but it may be too late.

The process has begun.

Mankind has long been fascinated by the possibility of life beyond Earth. Science fiction literature and films have served to not only entertain, but to address our questions, hopes and fears about extraterrestrial life. Such speculation has captivated our collective imagination and inspired the development of new technology to explore the farthest reaches of our universe and the very real possibility that we are not alone.

One of the most original and innovative films of the genre is the 1951 sci-fi classic “The Day The Earth Stood Still,” a truly groundbreaking movie that has influenced generations of sci-fi enthusiasts, authors and filmmakers. Directed by legendary filmmaker Robert Wise, the film tells the story of a benevolent, human-looking alien called Klaatu, who lands his spaceship in Washington D.C. with the goal of meeting with the leaders of Earth to warn that the violence that man is committing against man actually threatens the survival of other civilizations in the universe. With the help of Gort, his giant robotic bodyguard, Klaatu eludes the authorities who attempt to capture him and immerses himself in human culture to gain a better understanding of a species that seems committed to conflict and destruction. He befriends a widow and her son, and through the prism of their friendship he learns much about humanity – and ultimately challenges mankind to be its best version of itself.

The film was revolutionary, not only in its then-cutting edge conceptualization of aliens, spaceships and robots, but in its audacious variation on a familiar allegory for the escalating tensions of the early Cold War era. “The entire canon of science fiction in America in the Fifties was constructed in such a way as to reinforce Western fears of the Eastern Bloc,” notes producer Erwin Stoff. “The ‘other’ to be feared was always a metaphor for Communism. What was remarkable about ‘The Day the Earth Stood Still’ was that it placed the onus of responsibility on everyone equally. The ‘other’ to fear was ourselves – the nature of man and the terrible violence that humanity is capable of.”

Another aspect of the film that sets it apart is the perspective from which it unfolds. “One of the really unique things about the story is that it’s told from the alien’s point of view,” Stoff observes. “We’ve seen a lot of movies about aliens, but rarely do we see *ourselves* as the aliens.”

The idea of remaking “The Day the Earth Stood Still” first struck Stoff, who has managed Reeves for over 20 years, in the wake of their success on the 1994 blockbuster “Speed.” During a meeting with at Twentieth Century Fox studios, Stoff noticed a poster for the classic film hanging on the wall. “I said, ‘Forget about the project I came here to talk to you about. What we should do is develop ‘The Day the Earth Stood Still’ with Keanu playing Klaatu,’” he remembers. “It seemed like a great idea, but for one reason or another, it didn’t happen. Then, as destiny would have it, a draft showed up on my doorstep twelve years later.”

As re-conceived by screenwriter David Scarpa and director Scott Derrickson, the premise for the 2008 version of *THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL* is rooted not in man's violence against man, but in mankind's destruction of the Earth's environment. "I'm a tremendous fan of the original film," Derrickson says. "It was so interesting and original and progressive for its time – in the visual effects, in the way it commented on the Cold War tensions of that era, in the idea of seeing humanity from an outsider's perspective. It's a truly great film, but most modern audiences haven't seen it. I feel like people deserve to know this story, and this was a fantastic opportunity to retell it in a way that addresses the issues and conflicts that are affecting us now."

"There is nothing the original film says about the nature of mankind that isn't every bit as timely and relevant to this generation of movie audiences," Stoff believes. "It's the specifics of the way we now have the capability to destroy ourselves that have changed. The evidence that we are doing potentially irreparable harm to the environment is pretty irrefutable. The challenges that we face today are no less daunting, and if we fail at them, no less lethal, than the ones that we faced before the end of the Cold War."

"In re-imagining this picture, we had an opportunity to capture a real kind of angst that people are living with today, a very present concern that the way we are living may have disastrous consequences for the planet," says Reeves. "I feel like this movie is responding to those anxieties. It's holding a mirror up to our relationship with nature and asking us to look at our impact on the planet, for the survival of our species and others."

For Derrickson, the project is the unforeseen culmination of a close encounter he enjoyed with Robert Wise as a film student, when he made a short film that was accepted to a festival in Indiana where the legendary director was being honored. At a private dinner with Wise arranged by the festival's program director, Derrickson asked the two-time Oscar® winner if he had any advice for him as a young filmmaker. "He told me that if I was interested in genre films, then I should make my first film a horror film, because a horror film will really show what you can do as a director," Derrickson says. "I kept that in mind, and it was one of the reasons why I made [the successful horror film] 'The Exorcism of Emily Rose' as my first film. But I had no idea that I would be sitting here one day talking about re-imagining his great film 'The Day the Earth Stood Still.'"

“A lot of my enthusiasm for getting involved with this project and wanting Keanu to be part of it was the fact that I had seen ‘The Exorcism of Emily Rose’ and was completely knocked out by Scott as a director,” Stoff says. “There is a thriller element to this film, a real sense of danger about Klaatu. You’re not sure what he’s going to do next, or how far he’s going to take things. Scott is a masterful storyteller in terms of creating that kind of tension and mystery and danger.”

As the representative of a group of alien civilizations that have suffered their own painful evolution in the wake of cataclysmic climate change, Klaatu travels to Earth with the intention of exterminating what he and his peers view as an imminent threat to a planet that is too uniquely abundant to be compromised. “The situation has reached a crisis point where the life of the planet itself is at stake because the humans are killing it,” Reeves says. “Klaatu comes to Earth to assess whether or not human beings are capable of changing their behavior, or if ‘the problem’ needs to be eliminated.”

It is Klaatu’s intention to speak to the world’s leaders at the United Nations before taking any drastic action, but when he is denied that opportunity, it simply reinforces his perception of human beings as inherently barbaric and resistant to change. “Klaatu comes to Earth with a pretty negative view of humanity,” says Derrickson. “He has certain ideas about our destructiveness and our reluctance to change, and his impressions of us based on his initial experiences here don’t do anything to change that opinion.”

Despite his preconceived notions about mankind, Klaatu approaches his mission with an eerie detachment. “There was a take that Keanu did one day that really freaked me out,” says Oscar-winner Kathy Bates (“Misery”), who portrays the U.S. secretary of defense. “I don’t know what happened, but his eyes just went black. It was a magical moment and I saw it up close and personal. For those few moments, he transformed himself into this other creature that wasn’t human at all. I’ll never forget it.”

“I tried to bring objectivity to the character and the way he observes everything around him,” Reeves says. “There is a kind of compression to Klaatu. He is an alien entity contained in a human body, and when he is looking out of that body, he is just looking out. But over the

course of the film, he is gradually affected by the people around him and, he experiences what it means to be human, and to have hope.”

“It was a very interesting process for me as a director to watch Keanu portray Klaatu,” Derrickson reveals. “We had talked about the physicality of the character, but Keanu worked that out mostly on his own. When we were shooting, I could see some things that he was doing differently in scenes that take place later in the story than the way he behaved earlier in the film. But it really wasn’t until I started cutting the movie together that I realized what a thoughtful, seamless transition occurs in his performance. He captured the experience of becoming humanized and recognizing, in all of his alien superiority, what it is about humanity that is remarkable. To do that without being overwrought or overly dramatic is very difficult, and Keanu did it with an amazing amount of nuance.”

It was this unparalleled ability to meet the singular challenges involved in playing Klaatu that Stoff recognized in Reeves and sparked his enduring interest in remaking *THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL* with him. “I know Keanu as an actor so incredibly well, and honestly, I knew there was nobody else who could play Klaatu,” Stoff attests. “I knew how right it was for him. It is the perfect union of actor and role. Keanu has a unique ability as an actor to simultaneously evoke a quality of cynicism and optimism. And those are two very important aspects of the character.”

Reeves worked closely with Stoff, Derrickson and Scarpa to develop and deepen Klaatu’s transformation through the relationships he forges with a mother and son in crisis. “Keanu brought a lot to this film, not only in his performance, but from very early on,” Derrickson says. “He spent weeks sitting in a room with David and me, working through every scene of the script, line by line. He was very disciplined, not just about his character, but about the movie as a whole.”

“I had a great experience working on the script with Scott and David and the producers,” Reeves reports. “It was a real collaborative effort and a lot of thinking was put into *What are we trying to say? How do we want to say it?* I like that within this big action adventure about an alien coming to Earth, we created these intimate relationships that have a real authenticity and impact on the story.”

“It’s when Klaatu begins to connect more intimately and personally with people that he starts to see the better side of humanity,” says Derrickson. “At the same time, because he is contained in a human body, he begins to experience human emotions. So through the course of the story, Klaatu learns more about us than he had initially counted on.”

Klaatu’s experience on Earth and his judgment of mankind is greatly impacted by Dr. Helen Benson, an astrobiologist who is drafted onto a hastily assembled team of scientists and engineers tasked with responding to the alien’s arrival. “As an astrobiologist, Helen studies the characteristics of life that you might find in other worlds,” says Seth Shostak, senior astronomer at the SETI Institute in Mountainview, California, and an astrobiology advisor on the film. “That doesn’t necessarily mean the kinds of aliens that will stand there and talk to you. Astrobiologists study the kinds of very small, single cell organisms that live in extreme environments here on Earth to gain insight into the kinds of critters we might find living in inhospitable conditions under the sands of Mars or on the moons of Jupiter.”

“Because what Helen does for a living is so specialized, we wanted somebody who understands the field to help us bring as much authenticity to her role as possible,” Derrickson says of Shostak’s participation on the film. “Seth not only informed her character, but he read through the entire script and made corrections as necessary so that the concepts behind the movie make scientific and rational sense.”

Helen is the first human being to make physical contact with Klaatu when he emerges from his spacecraft. “I wanted Helen to be the audience’s way into the movie,” Derrickson explains. “She really struggles with some of the ethical choices that she has to make in the course of the story. As a scientist, she feels a responsibility to this situation that goes well beyond what a normal person might feel, because she has thought long and hard about the possibilities of extraterrestrial life. But I don’t think she ever counted on making contact with an extraterrestrial being that is as sentient and communicative as Klaatu.”

When United States secretary of defense Regina Jackson overrides scientific protocol and declares Klaatu to be the classified property of the U.S. government, and orders that he is to be sequestered, sedated and interrogated at a maximum security military installation, Helen faces a crisis of conscience. But her sympathies for Klaatu prove stronger than her fears about his true

intentions. “There is something about Helen’s compassion and the hope in her heart that he is drawn to,” Reeves says. “Through her efforts to help Klaatu escape and show him that humans are capable of change, he learns a great deal about the species that he came to Earth to judge.”

“To me, the character of Helen in this film feels quite different from the character played by Patricia Neal in the original,” Jennifer Connelly says. “She has a vocation that involves her more directly with Klaatu, and she plays a more crucial role in the story and in his experience of humanity.”

The filmmakers had no doubt that the Oscar-winning actress would bring her unparalleled dramatic veracity to her role. “We needed an actress who radiates the kind of intelligence and compassion that is essential to the character of Helen, and Jennifer was perfect in this regard,” says Stoff.

“Jennifer is fundamentally incapable of playing a false moment,” Derrickson says. “She just can’t do it. She is hardwired as an actress to be truthful, and that is why I wanted her in this movie.”

Connelly’s colleagues use the same terms to describe her and her work ethic as they do Reeves’ – thoughtful, disciplined, hard-working and collaborative. “The heart and soul and spirit she shares with us as Helen Benson – you’d have to be dead not to be moved by her,” says Reeves. He then adds with a laugh, “Klaatu doesn’t stand a chance.”

As Helen attempts to cope with the massive global catastrophe that is set in motion by Klaatu, the alien witnesses a much more intimate familial drama being played out between the scientist and her rebellious eleven year old stepson Jacob. The death of Helen’s husband – Jacob’s father – has left them both bereft, adrift and consumed by grief. Each serves as a painful reminder to the other of the man they lost, and Helen’s attempts to comfort the angry young boy only seem to push him farther away.

Their strained mother-son dynamic serves as a microcosm for the larger crisis that is unfolding around them. “The turbulence in their relationship has come to a crisis point. Something has to shift,” Connelly says.

Klaatu serves as an unlikely catalyst for Helen and Jacob to heal the seemingly irreparable rift between them. “The relationship between Klaatu and Helen’s son Bobby in the

original was arguably the heart of that film and was the single-most influential factor on the way Klaatu saw our world,” says Derrickson. “We wanted to preserve that aspect of the story, and yet update the dynamics between Klaatu, Helen and Jacob in way that reflects the complexities of contemporary relationships.”

In the 2008 version of the story, Jacob wants nothing to do with his mother’s strange new acquaintance. Unaware that Klaatu is an alien being, Jacob is suspicious of and threatened by a man he sees as Helen’s potential replacement for his dad. “Jacob is not always a nice character,” says Jaden Smith. “He doesn’t understand a lot of his feelings, or what this guy is doing hanging around his mom. Jacob is kind of the opposite of me, which is why it was so hard to play him.”

“One of the great things about updating this story was that it opened up the casting possibilities for Jacob,” Stoff says. “We weren’t bound to any particular ethnicity. We felt that Jaden, in addition to being really talented, is very much a child of 2008 – in the same way that Billy Gray as Bobby was the epitome of a contemporary 1950s kid.”

According to Derrickson, “Jaden has great acting instincts. Unlike most child actors, he has an ability to lose himself in a scene and do things that are unexpected. He makes choices that go beyond what the lines indicate or the direction he’s been given, and he can surprise you with real truthfulness in a moment. He just kind of feels it. So he brings a lot of creativity to the process.”

Smith proved his mettle to Reeves as they worked with Derrickson to build a tenuous bond between boy and alien as Jacob slowly lets his guard down and Klaatu finds himself moved by the child’s innocence and pain. “He had some hard scenes with some painful emotional places to get to, and he really rose to the challenge,” Reeves says. (The young actor and karate enthusiast first met Reeves while hanging out with his mother, actress Jada Pinkett Smith on the set of the ‘Matrix’ sequels.)

When Klaatu reveals his true nature through an otherworldly show of force against a state trooper, he doesn’t scare Jacob nearly as much as the thought of being left alone – and since his father died, he has become convinced that it’s only a matter of time before Helen “leaves” him too. Meanwhile, Helen sees so much of Jacob’s father in the boy, it’s almost too much for her to bear.



“Scott and Jaden and I spent a lot of time talking about the conflict between Helen and Jacob,” Connelly points out. “How are they not taking responsibility? How do they work it out? How do they make that transition? It was a difficult balance to hit, but Jaden is so interesting and talented, he created a character that you want to root for. And I think their relationship really grounds the film.”

At first, the tension between Helen and Jacob only serves to prove Klaatu’s theory that human beings treat the planet as they treat each other – with more fear and indifference than kindness and compassion. But as he observes their emotional journey toward reconciliation, he finds himself unexpectedly moved.

“The way Klaatu sees Jacob and Helen come together during the course of the film has a big effect on him,” says Reeves. “He sees that it is possible for humans to change, and he starts to feel conflicted about his decision to allow the plan for their annihilation to go forward. He begins to think humans aren’t as bad as he thought they were. And maybe they are worth saving.”

With time running out, Helen tries to convince Klaatu to stop “the process” by introducing him to her colleague Professor Barnhardt, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist who specializes in the study of the evolutionary basis of altruism. “I think of Barnhardt as being a man who operates on a much higher level of mental health than almost anyone I know,” says John Cleese. “He is fascinated by how human beings can make themselves better and have a more civilized and intelligent life.”

Barnhardt gets some answers to the mysteries of the universe when Klaatu makes a few corrections to a long and complex mathematical equation that the professor has written on a blackboard. “It’s obvious to Barnhardt from what Klaatu is writing that he knows more than the professor does, and there aren’t too many people in the universe who know more than Barnhardt about this particular subject,” Cleese says. “The trouble is, I had to be able to write the equation, because Barnhardt has been working on it for 60 years. I learned to carefully copy things down that mean nothing to me at all. In [the motion picture comedy starring Cleese] ‘A Fish Called Wanda,’ I spoke a lot of Russian without having any idea what it means.”

In real life, Cleese is concerned with his own set of big picture questions. “I’m actually not terribly interested in whether or not there is extraterrestrial life,” he says. “I’m much more interested why we’re here on the planet. Is there any point to it all? Is there a rule book somewhere? And where can you get decent caviar at a reasonable price?”

When Barnhardt absorbs the full measure of Klaatu’s mission on Earth, he tries to persuade the alien to give humans a chance to rise to the occasion and change for the better. “Barnhardt has a lovely line that he says to Klaatu: ‘Judge us not by what we deserve, but by our potential,’” says Cleese. “I think human beings have extraordinary potential. But we grow up in a fundamentally trivial world. There is so much emphasis on money, and trying to accumulate huge piles of money that we can never possibly spend, isn’t a particularly intelligent way of life.”

“Barnhardt was the hardest part to cast because he plays such a pivotal role in the story,” Stoff says. “He only appears in one scene, but it’s the scene on which the entire film hinges. I had met John Cleese once or twice and knew him to be a man with an absolutely searing and intimidating intellect. I knew he would approach the character from an unexpected, unsentimental, interesting angle, and that’s exactly what happened.”

As Barnhardt strives to convince Klaatu that mankind is worth saving, the responsibility for defending the planet against the alien’s impending attack rests with Secretary of Defense Regina Jackson. “Regina is a strong woman. She’s worked hard to get where she is, and she commands a lot of respect,” says Kathy Bates, who makes her science fiction debut in *THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL*. “She suspects from the outset that Klaatu’s presence here is not benign, because his people disarmed our defense satellites so he could enter U.S. airspace. So she’s put on the defensive from the get-go. But she tries to control the situation as best she can.”

“One of the biggest challenges for me was being able to say the line, ‘I’m the Secretary of Defense of the United States’ with a straight face,” Bates continues. “Our consultants were incredibly helpful in terms of protocol and attitude, and answering any questions that I had. I was able to immerse myself in their world, and take comfort and confidence from their response to my work. I could not have walked onto the set without them being there to cheer me on and steer me in the right direction.”

With only two weeks to shoot all of her scenes for the film before segueing to another production, Bates took a slightly unorthodox approach in working with Derrickson. “Kathy Bates was a blast. I’ve never worked with an actress quite like her in the way she interacts with the director,” he says. “She’s very, very direct. She would occasionally put me on the spot. I’d be giving her a direction in abstract terms about how to play a scene and she would say, ‘You do it.’ And I would have to stand there and act for Oscar-winning Kathy Bates, which was a bit intimidating, but she would immediately understand what I was looking for, and she would say, ‘Okay, I got it.’”

“To me, you just have to cut to the chase when you’re working so fast and you don’t have the luxury of a lot of rehearsal time,” says Bates. “So the best way for me to understand exactly what Scott wanted was to say, ‘Okay, do it for me.’ A lot of actors get an ego about line readings. But to me that’s not a line reading. It’s a tone, it’s a flavor, and it puts me in the pocket of where he’s coming from.”

When Jackson realizes that military attacks against the deadly force unleashed by Klaatu are only making the situation worse, she allows Helen one last shot at persuading him to stop the madness. With the survival of not just mankind, but every species on Earth hanging in the balance, Dr. Michael Granier volunteers to accompany Helen on her final rendezvous with the increasingly ambivalent alien. Jon Hamm, who stars as a gifted but troubled advertising executive in the acclaimed television series “Mad Men,” portrays Granier.

“Michael is kind of caught between two sides,” Hamm says of the scientist, who leads the emergency response team recruited to make first contact with Klaatu upon his landing in New York. “He is a believer in the observed scientific process, and this unbelievable scientific discovery lands at his feet. It’s the opportunity of a lifetime to study this alien. On the other hand, he’s also a government official, so there is that obligation to say ‘No, no, no, we have to control this. We have to squash it. We have to kill it.’”

Despite being a self-described “math and science geek,” Hamm found it challenging to deliver mouthfuls of scientific lingo with the expertise and momentum demanded by the intense, end-of-the-world scenario that propels the film. “When you have to say those ten dollar words

really fast, they tend to trip you up, even if you're a fan of them," he admits. "They can be really hard to say, especially after the sixth or seventh time you've tried to get them out."

Together with Klaatu and Jacob, Helen and Michael race to a fateful confrontation with the source of catastrophic worldwide destruction that is quite literally bringing the planet to a standstill. But it may be too late to stop the global catastrophe, even for an alien whose otherworldly powers are exceeded only by the hope he finds in a species he once doomed to extinction. "Klaatu sees the best and worst of humanity, but what he learns from his experience on Earth is that the human race has tremendous resiliency and we do have the capacity to change," Derrickson says. "But sometimes those changes only come through the crucible of pain."

Despite its unflinching look at the perils of being human, the twenty-first century re-imagining of *THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL* shares a prevailing sense of optimism with its predecessor. "People desperately want to feel that we're not on an inevitable ride to something bad, that we can take control of our own destiny," Stoff suggests. "We intended to stay true to the original film in telling a tale that is hopeful, about man's ability to rise to the challenges presented to our evolution and existence."

"I think the film is really positive in its view of human nature," says Reeves. "Once things get pretty dire, we tend to rally. And I think this picture shows some of the worst of ourselves, and then promotes the idea of how we can be the best of ourselves."

"We may be in peril as a species when it comes to how we treat the world and how we treat each other," Derrickson says, "but that doesn't mean that we're doomed to some despairing end. It means that we have to pay attention and work hard to adjust some of the choices that we're making."

"I hope it makes people realize that this isn't 'our' planet," says Bates. "We're merely taking care of it for the generations that will come after us, and we haven't been great stewards of it so far. So we'd better get to work on that."

"The idea of being a conscious custodian of the Earth is not American, it's not European or Asian or Canadian, it's not black or white or anything else – it's just human," Hamm points out.

“If this film leaves audiences with something to think about or sparks conversation about the issues addressed in the story, that’s great,” says Derrickson. “But what I really hope audiences take away from the movie is a fantastic two-hour experience. I want them to get what they pay for on a Saturday night – a great sci-fi thriller that is engaging, interesting, emotional and moving.”

### **ABOUT THE VISUAL EFFECTS**

To bring to life a story of the size, scope and imagination of THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL, the filmmakers knew they would need to rely in part on the magic of CGI visual effects. But director Scott Derrickson wanted to be sure that the film’s computer-enhanced imagery served to support, and not overwhelm, the narrative. “I don’t think that modern audiences are craving more in terms of CGI effects; they’re craving something that feels real and sparks their imagination,” Derrickson muses. “The defining experience that audiences want from the sci-fi genre is a sense of wonderment, a sense of awe about the possibilities that the universe and the future may hold.”

A major challenge for the director and his visual design team was re-imagining three iconic features of the 1951 classic that would be achieved through a combination of computer generated and practical effects: the means by which Klaatu travels to Earth (a “spaceship” in the original film); the form that Klaatu takes upon his arrival (in the Robert Wise version, Klaatu looks like a 30-something human man and wears a sleek spacesuit when he emerges from his ship); and the design of “Gort,” Klaatu’s giant robot accomplice.

“There was a great simplicity to the original film in that Klaatu, his spacesuit, Gort and the spaceship were these things that clearly belonged to each other and didn’t belong to the Earth,” says director Scott Derrickson. “We wanted to emulate that in a way that feels right for our time, but isn’t rooted in what we usually think of as traditional science fiction technology. A progressive alien civilization might be based on advanced biology and ecology and systems that are more organic than the hardware we’ve come to expect from sci-fi over the last 60 years – flying saucers, spaceships, laser blasters. This notion opened up our discussion to come up with ideas that ultimately have a simplicity to them that feels real and very right for the story.”

In keeping with his approach to all aspects of the production, Derrickson mandated that the visual effects, especially those supporting Klaatu and his extraterrestrial accoutrements, should feel as real – and as little like “FX” – as possible. “Scott wanted to ground us in reality,” visual effects supervisor Jeffrey Okun says. “The biggest challenge was to create things like a giant spaceship and a 28-foot robot and make them look organic and naturalistic.”

Derrickson and Okun collaborated with production designer David Brisbin on countless conceptual explorations in trying to find the right look for Klaatu’s appearance prior to assuming human form, his mode of interstellar transportation, and Gort. “As one concept would develop and progress, that would inform the design of the other two,” Derrickson says.

Keanu Reeves played an important role in developing these concepts as he worked through the script with Derrickson and screenwriter David Scarpa. “Keanu brought a thinking man’s artistic touch to the process,” Okun says. “As he honed the script with Scott and David, he would come back to us with some really cool suggestions. Many of the things he brought to us had to do with the question ‘What if...?’

“For example,” Okun elaborates, “Conventional ideas about aliens tend to be based on a carbon life form in a humanoid shape. Considering how vast the universe is, there may be other life forms that do not breathe air or look like us at all. What if Klaatu’s physical presence is not a physical presence as we know it? What if he has no form?”

It was decided that Klaatu would be represented in his rawest form as an entity made of light. Under Brisbin’s direction, conceptual artist Aaron Sims designed the look for Klaatu’s “lightbody.”

But what kind of spacesuit, if any at all, is worn by a being made of light? “One of the challenges that we faced was how do we bring Klaatu into this world?” says Derrickson. “What does a spacesuit look like to a modern audience?”

This discussion spawned one of the most innovative ideas in the film. “What if the imagery we associate with aliens, the triangle heads and the big eyes, what if that isn’t really the alien?” Okun asks. “What if that’s a spacesuit the alien is wearing to survive in our environment? We don’t recognize it as a spacesuit, because it looks like skin.”

“We came up with the idea for a spacesuit that is essentially like an incubator for the human body that Klaatu has chosen to inhabit, to represent him on Earth,” Derrickson explains. “He is an alien contained in a human body, and the spacesuit is what he comes into our world wearing so he can be birthed into human existence as a fully-formed human being.”

It is in his lightbody form that Klaatu first shows himself to Dr. Helen Benson and the team of scientists and military personnel who brace for his landing in Central Park. When he is shot in the fear and chaos surrounding his arrival, his light fades and he takes shape as a grey-skinned alien being. This grey “skin” is the womb-like spacesuit that houses Klaatu’s human body.

The biosuit serves a purpose beyond incubating Klaatu’s human form – it plays to our expectations of what an alien would look like, and is therefore more comprehensible and less intimidating to us than what he actually looks like in *his* world, which, as he cautions Helen, “would only frighten you.”

These different phases of Klaatu’s appearance and “birth” were accomplished with a combination of CGI and practical special effects. “The whole transition from the moment Klaatu first appears to the point at which he takes human form, as played by Keanu, was really treacherously detailed and difficult to pull off,” Okun says.

CGI was used to create Klaatu in light form. His human body that is revealed to be incubating within the gray flesh suit, was achieved practically with CG enhancements.

Special effects makeup designer Todd Masters and his team created the seven-foot-tall prosthetic alien suit comprised of gray “flesh” that is surgically removed in the story to reveal Klaatu’s human body inside. To achieve the organic yet otherworldly look, the filmmakers envisioned for Klaatu’s flesh (it’s described in the story as resembling placental tissue), Masters and his team created a special “alien skin” specifically for the film using a mixture of thermal plastic, silicones and other materials.

Like the forms Klaatu takes and his bioengineered spacesuit, Klaatu’s spaceship in Derrickson’s film represents an equally innovative departure from the dated “flying saucer” that brings him to Earth in the original. In their screenplay, Derrickson and Scarpa envisioned

Klaatu's ship as "an enormous sphere [that] seems almost like a planet of its own: its surface teems with swirling gases and scattered sparks of lightning."

It was up to Okun and his colleagues to reverse-engineer the sphere concept and determine how it might function as a mode of transportation for an advanced alien race. In their extensive research, they explored every natural object they could think of, from molecules and water drops to the surfaces of Saturn and Jupiter, for inspiration and insight.

After many iterations, the filmmakers conceptualized the sphere not as a mechanical spaceship or a travel device that one might have to occupy for a million years as it moves across the universe, but as a "temporal space translator" – a movable portal that Klaatu and his people use to maneuver from one world to another.

Despite the inherent simplicity and perfection of the shape, bringing the sphere-as-portal from concept to reality was a daunting proposition. "I have a particular fear of spheres, having done the movie 'Sphere,' and I know what difficult objects they are to deal with," Okun attests. "Inherently, there is no scale to a sphere, so you don't know how big it is unless there is something in the frame to compare it to."

With Klaatu's sphere standing 300 feet tall, composing shots that capture both the breadth of the sphere and the characters involved with it proved to be very difficult.

Then there were the practical considerations. "When the sphere lands in Central Park, how does Klaatu get out? Is there a ramp?" Okun muses. "How close can the scientists and the Army get to this thing? What is the surface of the sphere like? What happens when you touch the surface? Does it bend? Is it a force field? The whole process just gets to be mind-boggling."

Klaatu's sphere is actually one of many that appear on Earth throughout the course of the story. Those that measure nine feet in diameter or less were physically built and shot with practical special effects; those that are larger (such as Klaatu's sphere, or another that rises out of the ocean and towers over the water's surface at 3,000 feet) were created with CGI.

Constructing the practical spheres presented special effects coordinator Tony Lazarowich with an unprecedented challenge. "Generally, we can build anything that is required for a scene, but these spheres were something that none of us knew how to make."



Lazarowich turned to Custom Plastics, a Vancouver-based company that produces spheres that are used at Disney's theme parks. Because of the sheer size of the spheres required for the production, they were shipped in "hemispheres," or halves, which the special effects team then glued together and dressed to hide the seams.

Each "ball," without any lights, other equipment or set dressing applied to it, weighed approximately 700 pounds. "The very first time that we put two halves together, it took twelve of us to try and flip it over, and when we did, it shattered," Lazarowich recalls.

Moving the massive objects around a set – let alone between locations – presented another set of challenges, as did the lighting of the spheres. "We had to find a way that David Tattersall's team could put lights in the balls without melting them," he explains.

While the original film takes audiences inside Klaatu's spaceship, Derrickson decided not to reveal the sphere's interior. "I think it's better to leave that to the audience's imagination," the director says. "Hopefully this will create curiosity in the minds of the viewers about the mystery of what is inside the sphere, and make them imagine more than you could ever show them."

Leaving something to the audience's imagination was a driving principle behind the design of the 2008 version of Gort, Klaatu's bodyguard and, unbeknownst to their human captors, the failsafe for the alien's mission to destroy mankind.

In the original film, Gort, when activated by the presence of violence, was capable of vaporizing humans and objects (such as guns and tanks) with a laser beam fired from his visor, and restoring life to Klaatu when he is fatally shot. He was portrayed by a seven foot tall usher from Grauman's Chinese Theatre dressed in a rubber costume designed to look metallic and cutting edge for its time.

In his twenty-first century incarnation, Gort is an entirely CGI character who stands 28 feet tall – and there are no limits to what he is capable of. While government officials perceive Klaatu to be their biggest threat to the well-being of the planet and its inhabitants, it is Gort who unleashes a lethal force programmed to annihilate humanity in a manner that is deadlier than anything mankind has ever encountered.

Okun, Derrickson and Brisbin considered literally hundreds of images, ideas and illustrations in their quest to update Gort for modern audiences. "We started off down a path of

thinking that Gort needed to have a completely different guise and not be in humanoid form at all,” Brisbin says. “We explored numerous mutations and looked at every kind of creature we could think of – animals, fish, seashells – and tried applying those ideas to Gort.”

“Everything that we initially came up with for Gort felt too much like aliens that we had seen in other films,” says Derrickson. “Some of the Gorts we devised were truly scary, and some of them were stunningly amazing, but none of them made sense,” Okun adds.

The filmmakers went back to the original Gort to analyze what made him so formidable and enduringly appealing to sci-fi audiences. “There was something about the simplicity in the design of Gort that made him so effective,” Derrickson notes. “That solid, intractable, inscrutable human shape was the essence of what was so threatening about him. It also made him fascinating, because you had no idea what was going through his ‘mind,’ or what it was that he wanted. And so we came back to the human shape and a design that honors what was so fantastic about the original Gort, but has aspects to it that are only possible with current technology.”

Once the design for Gort was finalized and the character rendered, his impassive, impenetrable surface was carefully sculpted to reflect light in a dramatic manner, heightening his sinister appearance.

Meanwhile, Gort’s movement was achieved through motion capture. Okun and the MoCap team shot several takes with their Gort “performer,” and then put weights on his arms and legs and directed him through another round of takes. This data was then blended and tweaked to create a fluid movement for Gort “so that he has just the right feel of power and menace,” as Okun puts it.

“I think the way we have updated Gort is both true to the original and extremely innovative,” Derrickson says.

Visual effects were also used to adapt an emerging technology from Microsoft into a tool used by the scientists and governmental officials attempting to study Klaatu. Called “The Surface Table,” it features an interactive tabletop that resembles a flat-panel computer screen, which responds to hand movement and objects that are set onto the surface. (One of Microsoft’s planned commercial applications for the Surface Table will be to furnish them in bars and

restaurants, where customers will be advised how much their drinks cost and be given recommendations for other beverages when they set their drinks on the table.)

The myriad visual effects that were rendered for *THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL* were created by the Oscar-winning effects house Weta Digital in Wellington, New Zealand, which handled all elements relating to Gort and his mechanism for destruction, the spheres and Klaatu's "alien" form, with significant contributions to other facets of the film's imagery made by Cinesite, Flash Filmworks and CosFX.

As Keanu Reeves sees it, "I think that Scott and Jeff and everybody involved in bringing these concepts to life have been really inventive and responsible in taking us from the elements we were inspired by in the original film to the organic-based designs in our version of the story."

"In the end," Okun promises, "we have made this film with as much intellect as we could muster and as much passion as is humanly possible."

### **ABOUT THE PRODUCTION**

Director Scott Derrickson's stylistic approach to the making of *THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL* was informed by the example set by filmmaker Robert Wise, who directed the original film. "One of things I've always respected about Robert Wise is that there isn't really a 'Robert Wise style,'" Derrickson says. "He didn't impart his style on a film. He put the story first and then built a style out of that story. For this film, I tried to establish a process with the crew that would create a style that serves the story the best way possible."

This process was led by an intensive collaboration between Derrickson, production designer David Brisbin, director of photography David Tattersall and their talented teams of artists and artisans. Like the science and technology that powers the story, Derrickson and company grounded their design concepts in the real world. "We wanted to make a film that had a stylish look and a distinctive quality in terms of color, lighting and set design, but we didn't want to push the boundaries of reality too far," the director says. "The film is expressionistic and stylish, but we tried to root it in reality so that you don't feel as though you are watching a comic book movie or a graphic novel movie."

The first key step in Derrickson's process of conceptualizing the look of the film was developing a color palette. "He is obsessed with color," says Brisbin, who previously worked with Derrickson on "The Exorcism of Emily Rose." "It's very important to Scott to find a color code for the whole film and be very rigorous about how it's applied. You can have an enormous football stadium set and there'll be one red tomato far on the other side, and he'll say, 'David! What's that red doing there? We don't do red.'"

"I think color is one of the most effective aspects of cinema," Derrickson explains. "When I think of movies I love, the color palette of the film is inextricable from the film itself. I think about 'GoodFellas' and that movie was green and a dark maroon red. 'Taxi Driver' was this kind of dirty taxi yellow color. There's a certain palette control in really good films that becomes part of your memory and what you take away from them in the end."

Derrickson applied a similar discipline to the selection of the color palette for *THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL*. Together with Brisbin and Tattersall, he compiled an eclectic batch of images for inspiration, and ultimately boiled the collection down to twenty stills that form the *tabula rasa* for the film. "I don't like too many colors in the frame, and at the same time, I don't like a wash of just one color," says the director. "We went through each scene and talked about controlling and compressing the palette in a way that feels real and yet immerses the audience within these particular colors for the duration of the film so that when it's over, you're left with an indelible impression of what they film looked like."

This yielded a design scheme anchored by one or two colors per set – primarily blue-green and orange – with the rest of each environment bathed in neutral tones. "The Flash Chamber is a good example of how we compressed our palette," says Brisbin, describing the converted missile silo in which Gort, Klaatu's massive bio-mechanical bodyguard, is subjected to a battery of diagnostic tests by military technicians. "Among the twenty images we settled on was a photograph of a gray field with orange lava flowing through it. The orange is very bright, almost livid. We decided that these two colors – gray and orange – would be our 'zone' for the Flash Chamber.

"It's a pretty complicated matrix to hit the color marks that Scott is after and still keep everything looking real," Brisbin elaborates. "The great thing about collaborating with Scott on

design and color issues is that he wants to arrive at a very specific and controlled destination, but he wants the process of getting there to be intensely collaborative. That's really as good as it gets for a designer.”

Another important facet to achieving the realistic look Derrickson envisioned was in the processing of the film itself. (The director opted to shoot on film, rather than in HD.) “We did a ‘pull process,’ which has the effect of reducing the contrast slightly,” says Tattersall. “It makes the colors a little bit more subtle and pastel-y, if you will. That’s a new thing for me.”

Self-described film buffs Derrickson and Tattersall spent hours discussing shots, composition and camera movement in determining their shooting style for the film. Rather than apply one particular style to the entire movie, they formulated their visual approach on a scene-by-scene basis, depending on what each moment of the story called for. “Different sequences felt like they needed to be shot differently, so the shooting style changes throughout the film,” Derrickson says. “There are some scenes that we shot with long lenses, some scenes that we shot very static and other scenes that were shot with wide lenses and the camera never stops moving. We tried to create symmetry between sequences so the result is a cohesive tapestry of styles within the film.”

“Our approach is sort of classic old-school cinematography mixed with a lot of state-of-the-art technology,” says Tattersall, who utilized rear-screen projection and painted backdrops in lieu of green screen and CG visual effects whenever possible.

“David Tattersall can bring a set to life like nobody’s business,” Brisbin attests. “He is a master at lighting, at taking good foreground scenery and a painted background and using old school techniques to give it depth and dimension.”

Tattersall’s enthusiasm for traditional methods of stagecraft and his expertise at lighting indoor sets standing in for exterior locations played a crucial role in the production. Filming took place in Vancouver, which doubled for New York, in January through March 2007. The difficulties of shooting in Canada in the middle of winter with unpredictable weather – and a script that calls for multiple night exteriors and special effects like snow, fog, wind and rain – prompted the filmmakers to mount some of the exterior scenes on soundstages, ensuring greater control over lighting, blocking and environmental factors.

The incredibly lifelike outdoor settings constructed on stages by Brisbin's art department include a forest, a swamp and a snow-covered mountain ridge. "I depended heavily on my greensmen and my construction team and we were generally able to make things believable," says Brisbin, "but we would not have been able to pull it off if it weren't for our cinematographer. He's a visual genius and a fantastic collaborator." (Like Tattersall, Brisbin has previous experience creating believable night exteriors on interior stages – his first effort was constructing a realistic outdoor campfire setting for a pivotal night scene between Keanu Reeves and River Phoenix in "My Own Private Idaho.")

Weather is a significant factor in the story, all of which had to be manufactured by the special effects department (with CGI enhancements where necessary) and adhere to Derrickson's desire for realism. "What I'm going to remember most about working on THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL is the smell of the fog," Jaden Smith says. "It was horrible."

As part of Twentieth Century Fox parent company News Corp.'s corporate mandate to become a carbon-neutral company by the year 2010, THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL was chosen to be the studio's first green production. "For the first time ever, I found myself working with a studio to find ways of being more efficient in the work we do in the art department and less wasteful," says Brisbin, whose team typically uses "mountains and mountains" of paper in printing, especially location photo stills.

For this production, the art department transitioned to a digital approach, posting photos on a website that could be accessed by other departments as needed, thereby cutting down additional printing and paper waste. Meanwhile, Brisbin's scenic painters, construction crew and set dressers used recyclable materials and biodegradable products whenever possible in the creation of sets and props. When it was necessary to use lumber, it was sourced from sustainably-managed forests.

Costume designer Tish Monaghan's team also adapted from paper printing or taking Polaroids to using digital photography for wardrobe fittings. Efforts were also made to use more environmentally-conscious solvents and dyes, and to recycle garment bags and hangars and other items that are often thrown away after filming. When principal photography wrapped, all of the

wardrobe that was purchased for the film (or re-purposed from another show) was either given to Fox to be utilized by future productions, or donated to men's and women's shelters.

Much attention was also focused on fuel efficiency through the use of hybrid vehicles, substituting biodiesel for fossil fuels in the generators, and strict enforcement of the "idle-free mandate" – if any member of the crew found themselves sitting in their production vehicle for more than three minutes, they had to turn off the engine. Energy-efficient appliances were also used to conserve electricity.

"Everybody on the crew dug into it with zealously," says visual effects producer Jeff Okun of the collective effort. "It's really exciting to be involved in making a movie about saving the world, and at the same time, taking steps to make sure we leave a zero footprint."

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