

## Flat, unexciting 'Earth Stood Still' lacks big thrills

Contributed by Tim Riley  
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### THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL (Rated PG-13)

Sorry to say, this reviewer is not familiar with the alleged 1951 science-fiction classic "The Day the Earth Stood Still," the basis for the quasi-remake starring Keanu Reeves.

The emotionless, stilted actor is not going against type as the alien visitor who comes to Earth on a mission to address world leaders, presumably at the United Nations since he crash lands his giant orb in Central Park. Fittingly, Reeves has an acting range that goes from emotionless to lacking emotion, and so he's terrific for a robotic creature.

Now that the Cold War has practically receded from public memory, "The Day the Earth Stood Still" takes up the cause of climate change. Keanu Reeves' Klaatu is, in fact, a global warming alarmist and probably a card-carrying member of Greenpeace.

To this end while holding negative views of humanity, the self-righteous Klaatu exclaims that mankind is killing the planet, and so he's just going to have to destroy mankind. His perverse, twisted logic wears thin after awhile, and you find yourself hoping that a few Sidewinder missiles might get the job done. OK, maybe it's just me wanting to see this annoying alien wasted, but by the movie's end you may come around to my point of view.

Making this science-fiction snoozer a bit livelier is the presence of the attractive Jennifer Connelly as Dr. Helen Benson, a renowned astrobiologist. What movie isn't improved by a hot scientist, even if her job title is obscure?

In any case, considering her status as a widow, she's saddled with the care of her estranged stepson Jacob (Jaden Smith), who happens to be one of the most annoying kids you could find, and who by the way adds virtually nothing to the story. After a set of circumstances hardly worth contemplating, Helen and the kid end up chauffeuring Klaatu around the New Jersey countryside, eluding a massive military manhunt.

While on the run, Helen seems to be trying to buy some time from Klaatu's plan to eradicate all human life. So she takes him to the home of Professor Barnhardt (John Cleese), a Nobel Prize-winning physicist who's presented as a genius operating on a much higher level of mental well-being.

When Barnhardt absorbs the full measure of Klaatu's mission on Earth, he tries to persuade the alien to give humans a second chance to rise to the occasion. The professor makes the point that we only act when on the precipice. This stuff would be ripe for mocking by the John Cleese of Monty Python fame. Alas, he plays it straight.

Another character who plays it straight but turns out to be much funnier is Kathy Bates as the United States Secretary of Defense Regina Jackson. Not only does she sedate, sequester and interrogate Klaatu inside a maximum security military installation, she constantly barks orders to annihilate the alien sphere, as well as Klaatu's gigantic bodyguard, the robot Gort.

Oddly enough, Gort looks like the Oscar of the Academy Awards, with the notable exception of the laser beams emanating from the slit on his face. Unfortunately, Gort is indestructible, even after he's placed inside an underground silo.

"The Day the Earth Stood Still" is filled with many things that make little sense or seem illogical or out of place. How come we see a trucker and his rig vaporized on a remote highway that looks like it's somewhere in Texas? Meanwhile, most of Manhattan remains standing, except for Giants Stadium? In any case, if the aliens wanted to make a statement, why not destroy the new Yankee Stadium, while leaving the old one still in place? That would have been a lot more fun.

For a fleeting moment, I thought about viewing the original film, more out of curiosity than for any intrinsic interest in a science-fiction potboiler. Upon further reflection, it seems best to just move on. For whatever reason, science fiction aficionados may be drawn to this updated version of "The Day the Earth Stood Still," choosing to ignore the warnings of a non-believer.

### DVD RELEASE UPDATE

The antidote to dispiriting science-fiction is some good old-fashioned TV that seems just as otherworldly but for different reasons.

Revisit the folksy, small-town charm of Hooterville and the quaint comfort of the Shady Rest Hotel in "Petticoat Junction: The Official First Season."

This feel-good series, from the creators of "The Beverly Hillbillies," follows the everyday happenings of the Bradley family — widowed mother Kate (Bea Benaderet); her three beautiful daughters, Billie Jo (Jeannine Riley), Bobbie Jo (Pat Woodell), and Betty Jo (Linda Henning); and their genial Uncle Joe (Edgar Buchanan), who fancied himself as the hotel's general manager but somehow managed to avoid anything that might be considered work.

The first season snagged guest stars such as Dennis Hopper and TV icon Adam West. "Petticoat Junction: The Official First Season" includes all 38 episodes of the classic comedy plus interviews with some cast members.

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