

**An Official 'Bad-Bug-Movie' Review
ENT 812, Insects in the Cinema
Michigan State University**

**Invasion of the Bee Girls
Reviewed by Megan Woltz**

Background

Producer: Centaur Films
Director: Dennis Saunders
Writer: Nicholas Meyer
Music: Charles Bernstein
Cinematography: Gary Graver



Main actors:

Susan Harris (Mad scientist/
Entomologist):

Neil Agar (State Dept security agent):

Julie Zorn (Brandt head librarian):

Captain Peters (local sheriff):

Henry Murger (gay sex researcher at Brandt):
Scientists

John Grubowsky (dead bacteriologist)

Herb Kline:

Stan Williams (geneticist):

Aldo Ferrara (diagnostics)

Bee girls (among others)

Nora Kline:

Harriet Williams:

Gretchen Grubowsky:

Anitra Ford

William Smith

Victoria Vetri

Cliff Osmond

Wright King

Ben Hammer

Sid Kaiser

Andre Philippe

Anna Aries

Beverly Powers

Katie Saylor

Setting: Peckham, CA and the Brandt research facility

Writer Nicholas Meyer went on to work on numerous other projects, most notably the Star Trek films II, IV, and VI. Actress Anitra Ford was one of the original Barker's Beauties on The Price is Right and a popular fashion model in the 1960s. After doing other B movies and a few TV roles, she now lives as an artist in California.

William Smith is probably the most well-known person involved with the movie. He has been acting since 1942, and has appeared in several TV shows including *Hawaii Five-O*, *Kung Fu*, *Gunsmoke*, *The Rockford Files*, *I dream of Jeannie*, *Murder She Wrote*, *The A Team*, *Simon and Simon*, *Knight Rider*, and *CHIPS*. In present day, he continues to star in B movies like *Zombiageddon* and *The Erotic Rites of Countess Dracula*.

Though not very well known for her acting, Victoria Vetri was Playboy's Playmate of the Month Sept 1967 and Playmate of the Year 1968. Dan Brown modeled the

heroine of his book *Angels and Demons* after her, as he has been a long time fan. Her playboy centerfold picture was included as a joke in the lunar-surface checklist for Apollo 12 Astronaut Pete Conrad with the caption “seen any interesting hills and valleys?”

The Historical Context

Invasion of the Bee Girls is a campy science fiction B-movie considered by some to be another sex-ploitation film of 70s. Released in 1973, the film reflects a distrust for a government involved in both the very unpopular Vietnam War and the Watergate Scandal. *Invasion of the Bee Girls* is also directed at an audience willing to believe in far-fetched scientific endeavors. The film was released a mere four years after the lunar landing, and the space age was fully upon us. In 1973 alone, NASA was involved in several space missions including launching *Pioneer 11* to study the solar system, launching *Skylab 2, 3, & 4* to make improvements to the *Skylab* space station, launching *Mariner 10*, the first space probe of Mercury, and receiving the first close-up images of Jupiter from *Pioneer 10*. The rapid and very public advances in science and technology spawned not only *Bee Girls*, but also such science fiction television series as *The Bionic Man*, and is reflected in the use random use of science-sounding words in the film such as genetics, genes, chromosomes, controlled mutation, estrogen hormones, androgen hormones, and “analysis form.” Also during this time in America, the increasing legal power and freedom of women was evident in the Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade* and the proposed Equal Rights Amendment for women.



Plot Synopsis

The film begins at a motel, the first suggestion of sexual deviance (we all know naughty things go on in motels), where a body is found. During the opening credits we see someone typing up a memo indicating that the death is somehow connected to top-secret government research. Apparently the victim was conducting research on bacteriological warfare for the government. A man from the adjacent motel room tells police that he heard humming coming from the room and we find out that the victim had no history of heart trouble. State Department agent Neil Agar (Smith) is deployed to Peckham, California to investigate the mysterious death of a scientist from the government research facility Brandt Research. He teams up with the facility’s librarian, Julie Zorn (Vetri) to investigate the facility’s

other scientists, quickly discovering that many are involved in sexual games and wife-swapping. The investigation continues, and the body count grows as more men from the town of Peckham and from the research facility die of congestive heart failure induced by exhaustion in sexual acts.

The laboratory's sex researcher, Henry Murger, urges the people of Peckham to abstain from sex at a town meeting held by the local sheriff. At the meeting Murger hints at a cause of the strange deaths, but is run over by a car before Agar and Julie can meet with him to learn about his theory. Upon searching Murger's laboratory, Agar meets Murger's gay lover, Joe, who informs him both that Murger could not "make it" with a woman and that he saw Murger driving off with an unidentified woman before he was run down.



Meanwhile at Brandt, entomologist Susan Harris flirts with researcher Herb Kline while wearing her enormous black bug-eyed sunglasses and invites him over for dinner. In this critical scene we get our first evidence that insects are involved in the mysterious deaths. We learn that Harris craves sugar and is allergic to smoke. Making logical leaps of Olympic proportions, Agar moves from the comment "they're dropping like flies" to "there seems to be a social pattern" and draws the conclusion insects are involved. The next scene switches back and forth between Harris and Kline having sex and Agar watching an informative movie about insect reproduction. As the two engage in sex, the audience hears buzzing and sees Harris' black compound eyes, right before Kline dies of a heart attack.

Agar seeks out Dr. Harris in her office filled with pictures of bees to question her about bee mating habits. She emerges from her laboratory wearing nothing but a lab coat and her overlarge sunglasses and impatiently answers his questions until he leaves, at which point she returns to her laboratory with its giant “Danger: Radiation” sign and resumes her sinister experiments. The audience learns that mad scientist Harris is using radiation to mutate women into Bee Girls. Previously transformed women cocoon housewife Nora and place her into a chamber where she is swarmed by bees, after which Nora is blasted with radiation, completing her transformation to a Bee Girl.

Suspecting what has taken place, Agar and Julie attend Grubowksy’s funeral with a radiation detector, which indicates that the group of housewives (all wearing the bug-eyed sunglasses that indicate they are Bee Girls) have all been exposed to radiation. With lots of buzzing, the Bee Girls kill the remaining scientists and capture Julie intending to transform her as well. At the climax of the film, Agar rushes to Harris’ lab where he rescues Julie and fires a shot into Harris’ fancy radiation machine, causing an explosion that kills all of the bee girls. During a subsequent interview with the police, Julie explains that the radiation sterilized all of the women, causing them to be endlessly driven to repeat the mating cycle. The Bee Girls are dead, the boy gets the girl, and everybody is happy.

The Players

Government

The government is portrayed sort of ambivalently in the film. On the one hand, the hero Agar is a government employee. He is portrayed as both strong and smart, as it is he, not the scientists, who figures out what the bee girls are up to. His physical prowess is exhibited in several fight scenes. On the other hand, the government is implicated in some of the mad-scientist research going on at the Brandt research facility, such as ‘bacteriological warfare’. The Capitol Building is shown immediately after the first body is discovered, symbolizing the government’s involvement. The scientists who work for the government are all licentious old men who play sex games with each other’s wives. In addition, the local cops are portrayed as bumbling and ineffectual, and the local townspeople repeatedly indicate their suspicion of the government research facility.

Men/ Women / Sexuality

Although some reviewers were of the opinion that *Bee Girls* is a portrayal of the increased sexual liberation of women in the 1970s, the fate of the characters suggests otherwise. While sexual liberation is suggested by the sexual games and wife-swapping of the scientists and the uncontrollable lust of the Bee Girls, all of the licentious scientists wind up dead at the hands of the Bee Girls, and all of the sex-hungry Bee Girls wind up dead in the laboratory explosion. Julie, the only woman in the movie not depicted as a sex fiend, is portrayed as helpless and has to be rescued by the male hero Agar on multiple occasions. Homosexuals are also weirdly stereotyped as sexual deviants, with a lab full of sex objects including an inexplicable unicorn.

Scientists/ The Entomologist

Scientists in the movie are not portrayed in a favorable light. All of the male scientists are portrayed as licentious old men cheating on their wives. The only female scientist, Susan Harris, is the typical “jaded” mad scientist, with no regard for human life or for anyone who stands in the way of her twisted scientific endeavors.

Insects

Insects are crucial to the plot of this movie. The writers needed an insect to employ the plot device of killing the male after mating, as this is not typically found in other groups of animals, although something like a praying mantis might have made more sense. Similarly, much of the entomology in the movie is half-right. Queen bees do only mate to reproduce, and they do only have one mating flight, but they may mate with multiple males during that one flight. Male bees do die after mating, but not due to exhaustion. Bees do like sugary nectar, but they also love protein-rich pollen. Bees are not allergic to smoke; it interferes with their alarm pheromones. Insects do have compound vision, but no one knows how they see.

The most egregious misrepresentation of insects in the movie is the famous mutation/pupation scene. However, what this scene lacks in entomological realism it makes up for in hilarity. The scene mostly serves as an opportunity to show women wearing nothing but lab coats licking their lips and fondling their own breasts in their erotic excitement over watching other women being transformed into sex-hungry killers. The scene also provides the opportunity for scantily clad women to caress another woman’s breasts as they cover her naked body in what is either supposed to be royal jelly or some weird pupal casing, but mostly just brings to mind cream cheese frosting.