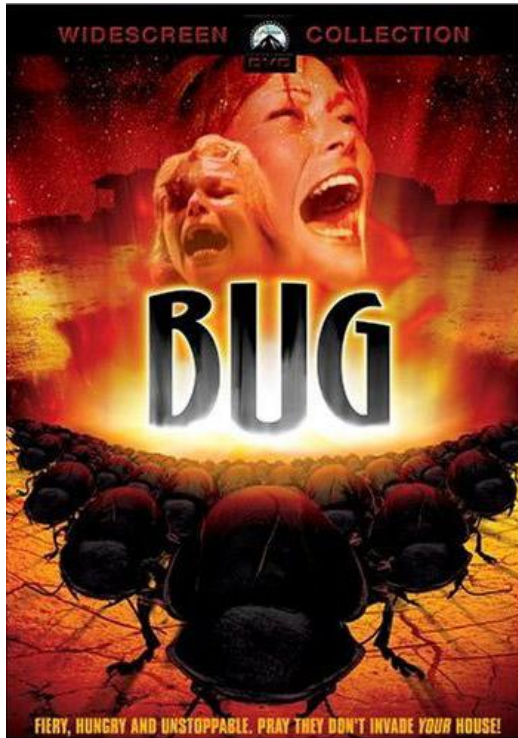


An Official 'Bad-Bug-Movie' Review
ENT 812, Insects in the Cinema
Michigan State University

Bug (1975)

Reviewed by Liu Yang



Bug (1975)

Liu Yang

1. Background

Bug, released in 1975, was directed by Jeannot Szwarc, a French film director. He was born in 1939 in Paris and began working as a director in US television during the 1960s. Besides Bug, he also directed Jaws 2 (1978), and Somewhere in Time (1980), and television episode Heroes (2007) (<http://www.answers.com/topic/bug-1975-film>). The screenwriters of Bug were William Castle and Thomas Page. Bug was based on Thomas Page's 1973 novel The Hephaestus Plague (Hephaestus was a Greek god of fire, volcanoes, metals, blacksmiths and so on) and concerned a highly intelligent species of roaches which can make fire by rubbing their cerci together. It was the last film William Castle was involved in before his death (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0072750/>). Castle and Page were both the screenwriters of this movie. Bug got one nomination and one win in 1976 for Best Horror Film from Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, USA and Best Special Effect in Sitges - Catalanian International Film Festival respectively.

2. Plot Summary

An earthquake occurred in the first scene of this movie. A large number of ancient cockroaches from the earth, with the ability to set fires, were released by the earthquake. This talent was dramatically revealed to the public after a few of the bugs had crawled into a vehicle's tailpipe and caused explosions, which led to chaos in a peaceful small town. But most of the bugs died soon after emerging because they could not survive in the low air pressure on the Earth's surface

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bug_%281975_film%29,
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0072750/>).

When first observing the dead bug, Prof. James Parmiter, an animal-loving local biology professor, identified those little creatures coming from underground as mutant cockroaches (although they looked like beetles a lot). The roaches were highly intelligent—they could barely move, but spread to each corner of the town, by hitch hiking.

Arson events continued haunting people in the small town. The first accident happened to Norma, the sister of Tom, who first brought the roaches to Prof. Parmiter. Norma's ear got seriously burnt and bit by a resting-on-phone roach while she was trying to pick up a phone call. Then came with the second case; Prof. Parmiter's dear wife Carrie was burnt to death because a roach crawled into her very thick hair and set a fire! Prof. Parmiter's life went dark afterwards, and he began to have certain weird spiritual connections with roaches. He isolated himself from the outside world, with a pressure tank built by Tom for experiments. He observed, fed, bred and ran tests on the roaches. Basically roaches were his only company for days and nights. Dr. Parmiter not only successfully bred a whole new species, crossing a female fire-roach with a male American roach (and witnessed the offspring killing their mother), but also discovered their highly formal organization and intelligence. They obeyed strict rules when they were feeding. Moreover, they spelled 'we live' on the wall after 'knowing' Prof. Parmiter tried to kill them. During this very long time being companied by roaches, tragic things kept happening to Prof. Parmiter. The roaches attempted to feed on him in the middle of night, and he was mentally shocked after seeing Sylvia, Carries' good friend, die tragically because roaches spread from his house and killed her. One night later, Prof. Parmiter fought against super-offspring roaches and fell into the big cleft caused by the earthquake in the first place. Then, very dramatically, both Prof. Parmiter and his roach "children" were buried underground together for good, like they never existed, end of story.

3. The players

-The biologist/entomologist, Dr. James Parmiter, was played by Bradford Dillman.

Very handsome Bradford Dillman was picked to play Dr. Parmiter. He played highly suspect characters throughout most his career. Graduated from Yale with a B.A. in English Literature, he served with the U.S. Marines in Korea (1951-1953), then focused on acting as a profession. As quoted from The International Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0226947/bio>) "Dillman took his initial Broadway bow in the Eugene O'Neill's play "Long Day's Journey Into Night" in 1956, originating the author's alter ego character Edmund Tyrone and winning a Theatre World Award in the

process. This distinct success put him squarely on the map and 20th Century Fox took immediate advantage by placing the darkly handsome up-and-comer under contract. Cast in the melodramatic soaper *A Certain Smile* (1958), he earned a Golden Globe for "Most Promising Newcomer" playing a Parisian student who loses his girl ('Christine Carere') to the worldly Italian roué Rossano Brazzi. He went on to share a "Best Actor" award at the Cannes Film Festival with fellow co-stars Dean Stockwell, who played the other youthful murderer, and veteran Orson Welles". Besides *Bug* (1975), Dillman was cast in *The Swarm* (1978), another bug movie (<http://www.answers.com/topic/bug-1975-film>).

In the movie *Bug*, Dillman's character was not as bad-looking as other "typical scientists in movies (he was not wearing thick glasses, acting awkwardly and mumbling scientific words all the time), but Prof. Parmitter showed a private and dissocial zoologist to the audience. In the movie, Prof. Parmitter could easily identify insect species, obviously had tricks of getting trust with animals, for example, a squirrel which randomly ran into his class. Those details were pretty amazing and reminded people of his role as all typical scientists in other bug movies - knowledgeable, highly confident in his specialty, slightly workaholic, with a crazy obsession with new things (<http://www.popmatters.com/film/reviews/b/bug-dvd.sht ml>). As the narrator, Prof. Parmitter also was responsible for providing audience with necessary biological knowledge and information, and connecting each story pieces in the whole movie.

At the first part of the movie, Prof. Parmitter was totally normal, a little arrogant and cranky, but perfectly consistent with his role as a university professor. When Tom first came to the university asking for help with the strange roaches, I thought the scene where he showed off his skills playing with animals in class and attracting lots of female students' eyeballs was a bit exaggerated or kind of amusing from nowadays' perspectives, but it represented what most people think about a university professor. When Prof. Parmitter first saw the bugs, he gave his professional identifications, but didn't get fully interest until his wife died in a fire set by a bug. He asked Tom to build a pressure chamber for experiments and moved with bugs and equipment into an isolated little house.

After that, Prof. Parmitter went crazy and became overly emotional. There was one scene that went a little far, in which Prof. Parmitter tried to kill his roach and then said "even though under terrific pressure, I almost can feel her pain". The writers wanted to express his sensitiveness or compassion, but as a matter of fact it was the "normal" pressure for the firebugs, they were from underground - high pressure is normal and he knew it well! The writers successfully built an emotional lonely professor's full-of-conflicts complicated-inside world. What's more, after successfully developing super offspring, Prof. Parmitter put them back together with their mother, and watched the new powerful generation destroyed their biological mother. He smiled evilly at first then shared tears (how dramatic!)

-***The female characters*** (a group of weak women, including Norma, Carrie and Sylvia) All seriously injured or dead one by one. Norma saw her father and brother burned to death, and she couldn't save them. She was suffered from huge mental fractures, and got

severely bit and burned by a bug while answering the phone. Carrie survived after the earthquake, but ended up being burned alive! That was an unexpected huge shock for Prof. Parmitter, almost destroying him. The filmmakers kill for tremendous horrible effect in this movie, all those girls' terrifying screamings, close-shots of their twisted faces in pain...But for me, that was the ridiculous and unbelievable part of the movie. How could it be possible with such a big and heavy bug crawling into her hair and probably already touched the neck, that Carrie didn't even notice at all until she smelt burning hair. I couldn't help wondering how thick her hairs were!! Was that a wig? Too fake to believe. But the scene in which Sylvia died was scarily-good. Imagine having a big number of fuzzy-legged creatures falling onto your face! Each incident got worse and worse. Norma was injured, then Carrie died, very quickly. At last, Sylvia died after severely mental torture being burned to death by roaches.

The movie peaked along with three women's tragedies. Female characters in this movie didn't have leading or significant roles, they merely helped move the story. They were represented as needy, to-be-rescued-by-men-kind-of-women. They easily got terrified and jumped up with screamings and tears. This was a typical way of describing female characters either in movies or in reality in early days. Women were usually treated as useless housewives or shallow beautiful vases. In later movies, female characters became more and more strong, challenging and various, which has much to do with women's liberations.

-The bugs

According to Prof. Parmitter's sight identification, the bugs had 6 legs, 3 body sections, and clawing legs. The spiracles are almost underneath the body. They had a high metabolic rate (Prof. Parmitter can feel its breathing??), and running legs. But the bugs could hardly walk. Then how can they move from one place to another to set fires? Apparently they were smart enough to take automobiles (smile). They were eyeless-as-blind-as-a-bat (I hate to interrupt here, but I saw their eyes as clear as noon in the movie, weren't they that careless??), they ate ashes and all kinds of carbon, had no digestive system. They were full of bacteria that metabolize carbon. Their shells were very hard, like steel. Prof. Parmitter needed to use hammer to open it. They couldn't be poisoned or paralyzed by antibiotic. The roaches couldn't breed because they were too weak.

In the pressure chamber, with the help of Prof. Parmitter, the roaches mated successfully under high pressure. The mother wouldn't let strangers near her egg case, and according to the movie, the egg case tripled in size in 24 hrs, and the nymph became adults in 5 hrs, which was high speed and very exaggerated. Offspring were a combination of both parents, unlike either one: elongated, brown in color, with two chitinous hornlike projections on the head (looked like demon?), and spotted segments on the back.

Because they were ancient cockroaches and based on science fiction, we cannot test their phylogeny, but quoted from Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cockroach>) "the world's largest cockroach is the Australian giant burrowing cockroach, which can reach 9 centimetres (3.5 in) in length and weigh more than 30 grams (1.1 oz). Comparable in size is the Central American giant cockroach *Blaberus giganteus*, which grows to a

similar length but is not as heavy”. I think the roaches on film were pretty much this length. The mouthparts of roaches are on the underside of the head and include generalised chewing mandibles. They have large compound eyes, two ocelli, and long, flexible antennae. Many roaches have wings, but rarely fly. Roaches are nocturnal animals and will run away when they are exposed to light.

Quoted from Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cockroach>, <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7467.html>)” Cockroaches leave chemical trails in their feces as well as emitting airborne pheromones for swarming and mating. Other cockroaches will follow these trails to discover sources of food and water, and also discover where other cockroaches are hiding”. Thus, cockroaches can exhibit emergent behavior, in which group or swarm behavior emerges from a simple set of individual interactions. This can partially explain how they spelled “we live” pattern on the wall, which I considered as one big light spot of the movie.

4. What else:

This movie is different or creative compared with others we watched in class. Main character died at the end. All the movies we watched focused on the fight between humans and insects. Most insect movies had a nerd scientist, a tall nice charming guy, a pretty high-heel narrow-waisted blond girl and a bunch of insects. Story always went as the charming guy started to work with pretty girl and they fell in love, and beat the insects together, and they lived happily ever after like fairy tales. But this movie was different, without a romantic love story, without a scientist beating up on bugs. On the contrary, the roaches showed their intelligence side, for instances, they moved by taking cars, they were able to “hear” people’s talk and they could even “speak” by spelling words on the wall. These details were really creative.

About the time period, Bug is said to be an entertaining throwback to the mutant-monsters-amok theme of the 1950s. To be honest, I was a little surprised when I found it was PG rating, because how the three women got injured was pretty scary, and the huge bugs were so real. But maybe it’s just my thoughts.

BTW I think Bug is way better than Bee Girls, I don’t buy it’s only rated two stars!

5. References:

1. Bug(Film). Wikipedia. [online]2010.[Cited: Feb.23th,2010]
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bug_%281975_film%29
2. Bug(1975). Popmatters.[online]2010.[Cited: Feb.23th,2010]
<http://www.popmatters.com/film/reviews/b/bug-dvd.shtml>
3. Bug(1975). Answer.com.[online]2010.[Cited: Feb.23th,2010]
<http://www.answers.com/topic/bug-1975-film>
4. Bug(1975). TopTenReviews.[online]2010.[Cited:Feb.23th,2010]
<http://movies.toptenreviews.com/reviews/mr49517.htm>
5. Bug(1975,DVD). DREAD CENTRAL.COM.[online]2010.[Cited:Feb.23th, 2010]
<http://www.dreadcentral.com/reviews/bug-1975-dvd>

6. Bug(1975). CINEMA de MERDE.[online]2010.[Cited:Feb.23th,2010]
<http://www.cinemademerde.com/Bug.shtml>
7. Bug(1975).BURIED.COM.[online]2010.[Cited:Feb.23th,2010]
<http://www.buried.com/horormovies/bug-1975/2049/>
8. Bug(1975). IMDb(The International Movie Database).[online]2010.[Cited: Feb.23th,2010] <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0072750/>
9. Cockroach. Wikipedia. [online]2010. [Cited:Feb.23th,2010]
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cockroach>
10. Cockroaches, pests of Homes, Structures, People, and Pets. UC IPM Online. [online]2010.[Cited:Feb23th,2010]
<http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7467.html>
11. Biography for Bradford Dillman.[online]2010.[Cited:Feb.23th,2010]
<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0226947/bio>
12. Bradford Dillman. Classic Movies.[online]2010.[Cited:Feb.23th,2010]
<http://www.thegoldenyears.org/dillman.html>