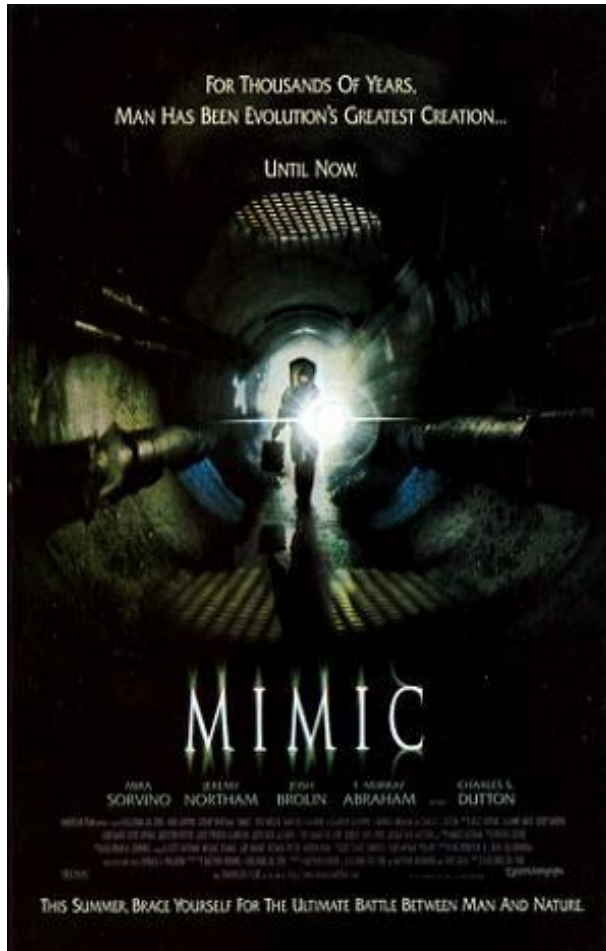


**An Official 'Bad-Bug-Movie' Review**  
**ENT 812, Insects in the Cinema**  
**Michigan State University**

**Mimic**

A review by Vianney Willot



Commercial poster



Jacket cover DVD

## **I. Movie Presentation and Awards**

Mimic was a 1997 American Hollywood production, released by Dimension Films. It was classified as a horror, science fiction film and was rated “R”. The film was classified as a fantasy film in France (allocine.com). It was inspired by a short story, also called Mimic, by Donald A. Wollheim. The screenplay was written by Guillermo del Toro and Matthew Robbins. The movie received good ratings from the New York Times.

(<http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9E07EED6143EF931A1575BC0A961958260>).

Mimic won several awards. The movie won “Best Make-Up” at the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films (USA). It also won “Opens, Closes & Titles - Best Achievement” and “Opens, Closes & Titles – Editor” at the International Monitor Awards. It received six other nominations including “Best Horror Film,” “Best Film,” “Best Actress” for Mira Sorvino role as Susan Tyler, “Best Performance by a Younger Actor/Actress” for Alexander Goodwin’s role as Chuy, “Best Writer,” and “Best Film”.


In spite of the awards, Mimic was not a commercial success. The budget of the movie was estimated to be \$30 million it but brought in only \$25.5 million. Mimic was followed by two others movies, Mimic 2 in 2001 and Mimic 3 in 2003. These movies were released directly to DVD.



## **II. Production and Directing**

The movie was directed by Guillermo Del Toro, an accomplished director, well-known for directing several films such as Cronos, Hell Boy 1 and 2, Blade 2, and Pan's Labyrinth. Pan's Labyrinth is his greatest success to date. The movie won three Oscar awards, sixty-eight International awards and was nominated fifty-eight times. Mimic was his second full length film after Cronos. Interestingly, this film also included insects. In the film, the machine that is said to give immortality is a scarab. Guillermo Del Toro has several movies on the way. He is supposed to direct the next Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and Bilbo the Hobbit movies.

The director of photography was Dan Laustsen. He worked as director of photography in several other movies such as Silent Hill, The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, and Brotherhood of the Wolf. The music was done by Marco Beltrami. He produced the music for several movies such as Knowing, Max Payne, The Hurt Locker, Underworld: Evolution, Flight of the Phoenix, Hell Boy, I Robot, Terminator 3, Blade II, The Faculty, Scream I, II, and III, and many more. Film editing was done by Patrick Lussier, a specialist in horror movies. Some of his work includes Scream I, II, and III, Halloween III, My Bloody Valentine, The Eye, and Cursed. Mimic was produced by Bob Weinstein, B. J. Rack, and Ole Bornedal. Each produced many movies, particularly Ole Bornedal, who produced more than 200 hundred movies, TV show, and TV films.

### III. The Actors

			
<b>Mira Sorvino</b>	<b>Jeremy Northam</b>	<b>Giancarlo Giannini</b>	<b>Josh Brolin</b>
<b>Role :</b> Susan Tyler	<b>Role :</b> Peter Mann	<b>Role :</b> Manny	<b>Role :</b> Josh
<b>Main films</b>	<b>Main film:</b>	<b>Main films:</b>	<b>Main films:</b>
-Mighty Aphrodite (Oscar and Golden Globe Award) -The Final Cut	-Cypher	-Man on Fire - Quantum Solace -Casino Royale	- The Goonies - No Country For Old Men -W -Milk

	?		?
<b>Charles S. Dutton</b>	<b>Alix Koromzay</b>	<b>F. Murray Abraham</b>	<b>Alexander Goodwin</b>
<b>Role :</b> Leonard	<b>Rôle :</b> Remy	<b>Rôle :</b> Dr. Gates	<b>Rôle :</b> Chuy
<b>Main films:</b>	<b>Main film:</b>	<b>Main films:</b>	<b>Main film:</b>
-Legion -Fame (2009) -Several TV series	-Mimic 2	-Scarface - Amadeus (Oscar for Best Actor in a Leading Role) - Finding Forrester	

### IV. The Storyline

The introduction of the movie begins with a snowy day in New York. Next appears images of pinned insects, mostly butterflies, moths, dragonflies, and broken insect wings. In the background we can hear the sounds of insects. Next, images of newspaper pieces appear. The newspaper articles speak of a deadly disease spreading throughout New York City. We then see several pictures of happy children. The images combined with the background music give the viewer an uneasy feeling. Next, we begin to hear voices in the background, much like a radio. We also hear the voices of frightened people and happy children. The introduction concludes with someone pinning a Passalid beetle- alive!

The scene changes to images of empty schools and huge hospital, filled with dying children. It is in this hospital, surrounded by dying children, that the two protagonists first meet. Peter Mann asks Susan Tyler for her help in fighting this disease and saving the children. We arrive quickly at a dark scene which appears to takes place in the sewer or subway of New York

City. Here we see Susan with a container that she open to release insects. The newly released insects produce a secretion that attracts cockroaches. The cockroaches feed on the secretion and died because of an enzyme that speeds up their metabolism. The scene changes to a press conference where the two protagonists, Susan and Peter, who are now married, officially announce the end of the disease in New York City. The New York children are now safe. They also introduced a new insect, the Judas breed. She explains that the insect is a result of genetic manipulation between a termite and a mantis. *(It is interesting to note that during the conference Susan Tyler is said to be from New York State University, a very well known university impossible to find on internet... or maybe they want to refer to Cornell, but it is not in the city of New York.)*

The next part of the movie is confusing. It takes place three years after the release. We see the pursuit of a priest by an unknown character. The frightened priest tries to run away by climbing on the roof of a building. When he attempts to climb down, he falls to his death in the street. Next, we see his body being swallowed up by something in the sewer. We also see an autistic child, Chuy, who loves to look at the shoes of people through the windows of his apartment. He is puzzled by the strange shoes of the man that attacked the priest.

The next important scene takes place in Susan's laboratory. She meets with children who are interested in insects and want to sell her one that they found in the subway. During this scene, the children ask Susan the question that so many entomologists are asked, "How can you like bugs so much?" The insect that they brought to her looks like a Judas breed, which should have disappeared three years ago! She starts to study the insects and runs some tests. She uses a pH strip to determine the identity of the insect(!?). The test confirms that this insect is a Judas Breed. The only other possibility is it is a leaf cutter ant from the Amazon. *(Since it is obviously not an ant, so it must be the Judas Breed)*. Next, someone breaks into her office and steals the insect that she was studying. The thief looks much like the man that was running after the priest.

The next scene takes place in Susan's house where she explains that she found a live Judas Breed. Susan and Peter have an argument, where we learn that the Judas Breed was genetically manipulated to be unable to reproduce, and therefore should have disappeared by now. This starts the search for the bugs! Peter and Susan are lead into the subway by the two children that found the first Judas Breed. It is during this scene that all the main characters meet. Here we are introduced to the subway policeman, Leonard. It is also here that Susan meets Chuy and his dad Manny. Chuy shows Susan a statue that he made of the man with strange shoes and six legs. It is also the first time that we see one of the giant insects. Susan puts her hand in a hole to reach for flashlight, but is interrupted by Leonard. She removes her hand just before the insect grabs her. At this point the characters are still ignorant of the presence of the giant insects. Susan and Peter asked to the children if they found any egg cases. The two children begin to look for eggs cases in the subway with hopes of getting more money if they find some. They find one, but they also find a giant insect. They are both killed while trying to run away.

The next scene is philosophical! There is a conversation between Susan and her old professor about the difference between a lab experiment and the real world. He reminds that what happens in a lab does not necessarily happen the same way outside of the lab. (*For an established scientist it is a pretty late discovery!*)

In the next scene, several events happen simultaneously. Chuy has disappeared and his dad is searching for him in the subway. Susan and her friend Remy discover the body of a giant insect in the water system of New York City. This insect has lungs and is gigantic compared to the insects released three years ago. They discover that the insect is part of a colony. It is a soldier cast. There is also the beginning of the subway exploration by Peter, Josh (Peter's colleague), and Leonard. They are looking for the insects, unaware of the danger. Peter and Leonard fall and are trapped. Josh is sent to find help, but is killed by an insect before he arrives. Next, Susan is kidnapped by an insect while she is waiting in the subway. All the main characters meet again in the subway. Manny, who is looking for Chuy, finds Peter and Leonard. Manny asks for their help to save Susan, who has escaped and is now being chased by an insect. Together they find refuge in an old train. They try to escape by fixing the electricity to restart the train, but the insect tries to kill them with some success. Manny and Leonard are both killed. They find Chuy, who has apparently spent time with the insect without incident by mimicking the insect's noise (!?). Peter finds the colony and blows it up with gas, but the male Judas Breed escapes. Susan finally kills the male. Only Susan, Peter, and Chuy have survived. Together they form the family that Peter and Susan could never have. The end!

## **V. Theme of the Movie**

There are two principal themes in the movie, the first being Christianity or Christian themes. This theme is introduced in one of the first scenes when we are in the hospital with the sick children. The nurses in the hospital are nuns and it is a priest that is killed at the beginning of the movie. The name of the insect, Judas, is a biblical name of an apostle, known for betraying Jesus. The insects also betray the people that created them. There are several scenes filmed in a church where we can see a statue of Jesus. At the end of the movie there is the self-sacrifice of Leonard to save the other characters. Sacrifice is an important theme in Christianity.

The second theme is family and procreation. It is ironic that Susan and Peter save all the children of New York, while they are unable to have a child of their own. There are several scenes where Susan and Peter speak about a baby. The Judas Breeds was supposed to be sterile but can reproduce, unlike Susan and Peter, who are not supposed to be sterile but cannot have a child. The end of the movie is the reversal of the beginning. Susan and Peter eradicate the Judas Breeds and then receive the child they always wanted.

## **VI. Events Surrounding the Movie**

This movie shares many similarities with the blockbuster Jurassic Park, released in 1993. Both stories involve genetic manipulation. In Mimic, the insects were not supposed to be able to reproduce, much like the dinosaurs in Jurassic Park. The 90's marked a period where people could observe the first results of the research on DNA. The first GMO plants were created in 1994. In 1996, the sheep known as Dolly was the first animal to be cloned. It was a time when people were afraid of DNA research because it opened a lot of new possibilities, both positive and negative. On March 4, 1997, President Bill Clinton made human cloning illegal.

The Second World War and The Cold War brought new fears. People were afraid of the potential of the radiation. This fear of radiation is at the origin of many other insect movies such as 'Them' and 'Beginning of the End'. I think this fear disappeared because people became used to it. DNA fear came at the beginning of the 90's. This fear will be replaced in 10 years because people will become used to DNA manipulation. The next fear will be maybe the Nano-technologies. *It will be hard to do an insect movie with that!*

## **VII. Position of Woman and Minorities**

Susan is the movie's main character. She is a successful, intelligent, entomologist working for New York State University. The second leading scientist is her old professor, Dr. Gates. He is also an entomologist. Susan is the bright scientist who has all the answers. No one questions her knowledge or abilities. It is interesting to compare her role with the woman in other similar movies of that time such as 'Them', 'The Swarm', or 'Beginning of the End'. Mimic is the only movie where the woman is truly respected and accepted as an authority. In the other movies, the woman scientists are saved by their male counterparts.

Although Mimic displayed positive female roles, it was criticized for promoting African Americans stereotypes. There is only one black character in the movie, Leonard the policeman. Leonard is not the most well-liked character; he follows the rules and complains a lot. At the end of the movie, Leonard is killed. He sacrifices himself to save the other (white) characters. This kind of scene is present in several science fiction horror movies of the 90's. Some examples of movies where the black character is killed while white characters survive are 'Terminator 2', 'Cube', 'Alien Resurrection', 'Jurassic Park', 'Virus', 'End of Days', and many more.

## **VIII. Entomology Facts:**

In the movie, the Judas Breed is a genetically modified insect. It is said to be a combination of a termite and a mantis, but the insect that we see at the beginning of the movie looks more like a big cockroach than anything else. It is also interesting to note that in three years, the insect of 5 or 6 cm in length evolves into a giant, human-sized insect with lungs. Insects have been on the earth for more than 300 million years and have yet to develop lungs. Even if scientists introduced

a gene to increase the speed of the insect's metabolism, the development of lungs in three years is quite impossible.

In the movie, the children find an egg case of the Judas Breed. This egg case is very similar to a cockroach egg case, which is strange because the Judas Breed is supposed to be a mix of mantis and termite. Termites do not produce egg cases and mantises produce a very different egg case (right).



The action of the Judas Breed against the cockroach is also extraordinary. It is said to produce a toxic secretion that attracts the cockroaches, which feed on the secretion and subsequently die. I do not know of any similar example that exists in nature. The use of pH strips to identify an insect is humorous. I do not understand how a pH could help identify an insect.

During the entire movie the characters speak about the fact that if they kill the male, they will ensure that the colony disappears. The same idea is used in the movie 'Reign of Fire', except that insects are replaced by dragons. We can assume that the Judas Breed has the same life style as the termites because both live in colony. Killing the termite male will not stop the colony from reproducing. It will affect the colony but the female will have enough sperm to create a new wing generation that will spread.

