

I Married a Monster from Outer Space | The Atomic City

“THE BRIDE WORE TERROR!”

Bill and Marge – happy as clams, in love and about to be married. He’s affectionate, a dog lover, thoughtful – the perfect man. Until... he’s not. It’s a girl’s worst nightmare – the loving man she just married is suddenly not the man she thought he was. Why is he suddenly no longer affectionate? Why is he not affectionate to the dog? Why is he not affectionate to anything? Stranger still, why are some of the other men in their town behaving the same way? If only she’d seen the poster for this film, she’d have known exactly what was going on – because there’s no mistaking it with a title like *I Married a Monster from Outer Space*. You see, hubby Bill has been “taken over” by an alien, as have other men in the town because females from their planet are extinct and they want to mate with Earth’s women to save their race. This, of course, is unsettling to poor Marge and she tries to warn others, but unfortunately no one believes her until she tells her doctor. He believes her and together they gather some good folks until the aliens are eventually undone – not by bullets, not by bombs, but by German shepherd dogs.

Made in 1958, *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* is not as lurid as its title would suggest. It’s actually a very well-made, thoughtful, low-budget sci-fi film with an excellent script, which has gathered a loyal following over the years. Shot in black-and-white, it’s a moody film, very much of its time, and very much filled with the paranoia of the 1950s. Any number of sci-fi films of the 1950s had at their core the underlying fear of Communism – that alien ideology lurking around every corner – infiltrating the United States, taking over and ruining everything good and decent. Why, there might be a Communist sitting next to you on the bus, and, yes, you might have even unknowingly married one.

Starring Tom Tryon and Gloria Talbott, *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* is a textbook example of how to make a terrific little film on a terrifically low budget. The screenplay by Louis Vitte is taut and to the point. The direction by Gene Fowler Jr. is very atmospheric, as is the photography by Haskell Boggs (*Fear Strikes Out* and many other Paramount pictures, including the Jerry Lewis films *The Delicate Delinquent*, *The Geisha Boy*, *Rock-a-Bye Baby*, *The Errand Boy* and *Cinderfella*). Fowler had begun as an editor for some great directors like Fritz Lang (including Lang’s classic *The Woman in the Window*), as well as Samuel Fuller (*China Gate*, *Run of the Arrow* and *Forty Guns*), Stanley Kramer (*It’s a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*) and John Cassavetes (*A Child is Waiting*). He worked on classic TV series such as *Gilligan’s*

Island and *Rawhide*, and edited any number of classic TV movies from the 1970s.

One of the most interesting aspects of the film is its wonderful score. The film carries no credit for music at all, despite having really effective music and quite a bit of it. The reason for the lack of a music credit is simple: In 1958 there was a musicians’ union strike. And so Hollywood studios had to go outside the United States and Canada to record music for their movies. In certain cases, especially in the case of the very low-budget *I Married a Monster from Outer Space*, they would re-record selections from existing scores that were owned by the studio’s publishing companies. To protect everyone involved, no records were kept of the folks who chose the selections, the conductor, or the recording venue. Therefore, what we have with *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* is a score composed by Victor Young, Hugo Friedhofer, Aaron Copland, Franz Waxman, Leith Stevens, Daniel Amfitheatrof, Walter Scharf, Lyn Murray, Nathan Van Cleave, Roy Webb – well, you get the idea. The surprising thing is how well it all works and how seamlessly it all plays. Because of the wide variety of film genres – including sci-fi, noir, action – the music fits all the moods of the film perfectly. Today, it would be called temp tracking, but back then it was born out of necessity and budget. It’s actually kind of a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence, where several of the greatest film composers of all time have music in the same film. We’ve included a cue assembly to show you who wrote what and from what films the material originally came, which is historically interesting and which we hope you will find fascinating.

The music, housed in the Paramount vaults, was in mostly excellent condition. A little wow and flutter on a couple of tracks was the only problem and we’ve left it as is because the music is so good and the problems only last for a few seconds.

“HELD FOR RANSOM – KIDNAPPERS DEMAND ATOMIC SECRETS!”

Six years earlier, Paramount released a tense little low-budget thriller called *The Atomic City*, starring Gene Barry, Lydia Clarke and Nancy Gates. The basic plot is simple: Enemy agents kidnap the son of a nuclear physicist in Los Alamos, New Mexico; their ransom demand isn’t money, however – the bad guys want the physicist to turn over the formula for the H-bomb. Yes, it’s another film that plays on the Cold War paranoia that was then permeating the United States. In those days, Los Alamos was, in fact, a self-contained city, *The Atomic City*. The people who worked at Los Alamos

lived in Los Alamos securely and the children attended schools within the secure city. Hence, the kidnapping actually takes place outside the city, when the boy’s school goes on a field trip.

Directed by Jerry Hopper, the screenplay was written by Sydney Boehm, a great writer who wrote several great films, including *When Worlds Collide*, *The Big Heat*, *Union Station*, *Violent Saturday*, *The Tall Men*, *The Revolt of Mamie Stover*, *Shock Treatment* and many others. His screenplay for *The Atomic City* was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Story and Screenplay – very unusual for a low budget programmer in 1952 (fellow nominees were Terence Rattigan for *Breaking the Sound Barrier*, Ruth Gordon and Garson Kanin for *Pat and Mike*, John Steinbeck for *Viva Zapata!*, and the winner that year, T.E.B. Clarke for *Kind Hearts and Coronets* – heady company indeed).

The superb music for *The Atomic City* was composed by Leith Stevens. Stevens, born in 1909, began his film-scoring journey in the late 1940s, but it was the early 1950s when he made his mark, beginning with two sci-fi scores that became instant classics – *Destination Moon* and *When Worlds Collide*. After *The Atomic City*, he would go on to write great scores to some iconic films, including *War of the Worlds* and *The Wild One*. He worked in almost every genre, turning out scores for such films as the noir classic *The Hitch-Hiker*, *Scared Stiff*, *Private Hell 36*, *World Without End*, *Julie*, *But Not for Me*, *The Interns*, *A New Kind of Love* and many others, as well as for such classic television fare as *The Twilight Zone*, *Have Gun – Will Travel*, *Gunsmoke*, *The Untouchables*, *Burke’s Law*, *The Time Tunnel*, *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, *Land of the Giants*, and on and on. Stevens passed away in 1970.

His music for *The Atomic City* is greatly responsible for the tense atmosphere and keeping the film an edge-of-the-seat thriller. Whether it’s his warm music for the close-knit happy family about to be plunged into turmoil; the edgy, suspenseful music for the kidnapers and their plot; or the propulsive music for the race-against-the-clock chase scenes played against the Indian ruins of New Mexico, Stevens mines every bit of tension, terror and excitement out of the film’s taut eighty-five minute running time.

The music for *The Atomic City* was thankfully preserved on a set of acetates in good condition. These were transferred as carefully and lovingly as possible, and we hope you’ll be pleased with the result.

— Bruce Kimmel