



THE
VISITOR



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CAST

MEL FERRER as Dr. Walker

GLENN FORD as Detective Jake Durham

LANCE HENRIKSEN as Raymond Armstead

JOHN HUSTON as Jerzy Colsowicz

JOANNE NAIL as Barbara Collins

SAM PECKINPAH as Dr. Sam Collins

SHELLEY WINTERS as Jane Phillips

PAIGE CONNER as Katy Collins

CREDITS

Directed by **GIULIO PARADISI** (as "MICHAEL J. PARADISE")

Story by **GIULIO PARADISI** (as "MICHAEL J. PARADISE")

and **OVIDIO G. ASSONITIS**

Screenplay by **LUCIANO COMICI** (as "LOU COMICI")

and **ROBERT MUNDI** (as "ROBERT MUNDY")

Music by **FRANCO MICALIZZI**

Cinematography by **ENNIO GUARNIERI**

Edited by **ROBERTO CURI** (as "ROBERT CURI")

Produced by **OVIDIO G. ASSONITIS**



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“A TURKEY MADE OUT OF CEMENT”

by Mike White

The original title of the Giulio Paradisi (aka Michael J. Paradise) film known commonly today as *The Visitor* (1979) was *Stridulum*. For those who aren't entomologists, the stridulum is the apparatus through which crickets chirp. The word's Latin origin of 'stridulation' translates as “to make a harsh sound”. Though no crickets are to be found in *The Visitor*, there are plenty of harsh sounds: the soundtrack by Franco Micalizzi (*They Call Me Trinity*) screams with stringed instruments, aided by the cries of birds that appear throughout the film.

The idea of the crickets may be just one of the many elements of other films that inform *The Visitor*. Some critics have compared it to *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Omen* (1976), with a little *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) thrown in for good measure. Yet viewers may find the most similarities with *Exorcist II: The Heretic* (1977) and its swarms of locusts, or with *Damien: Omen II* (1978) and its ominous raven and nefarious Lance Henriksen.

There's even a little bit of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) in the mix with Micalizzi's score quoting Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra*, albeit with a Deodato disco beat. However, *The Visitor* is far more convoluted than any of the aforementioned films: spinning a tale of religion, outer space, and basketball that could only come from the late '70s.

The film begins on another plane of existence where Jerzy Colsowicz (John Huston) faces off against a cloaked figure. The peaceful atmosphere becomes engulfed in a snow squall where Colsowicz's nemesis is revealed to be a young girl. She disappears and order returns. Cut to Franco Nero as Space Jesus telling a





group of young shaven-headed acolytes a tale of Satan (“It’s pronounced Zatine”) and God (“It’s pronounced Yaveth”). Yaveth was a space pilot who lost his quarry, the mutant Zatine, who took refuge on Earth. Zatine used his psychic powers to spread destruction and death. While he was on Earth, Zatine mated with human women, allowing his wicked spirit to live on. Yaveth used birds to hunt and kill Zatine though not before Zatine turned into an eagle before defeat.

Just as there is the Holy Trinity, it seems that Huston plays both Yaveth and another Christ-like figure (the J.C. of Jerzy Colsowicz standing in for Jesus Christ). However, budgets must be tight on this other plane of existence as Jerzy has to fly into Atlanta, Georgia via Eastern Airlines. Rumour has it that he had to fly coach. From there, he splits his time between a downtown Atlanta rooftop (where he’s joined by more shaven-headed guys – adults this time – who help set up some kind of UFO landing area) and the house of Antichrist-in-training, Katy Collins (Paige Conner). The second time we see Katy (after she causes an explosion at a basketball game) she’s seen with her pet bird, a stand-in for the eagle of Space Jesus’s story.

Katy is the child of divorced parents. We might infer that her biological father is Dr. Sam Collins, who we only see in one scene late in the film. Played by Sam Peckinpah, Dr. Collins’ voice comes from another actor. By 1978, when *The Visitor* was made, alcoholic Peckinpah was battling a cocaine addiction.

Katy desperately seeks a father figure and seems to have found one in Ray Armstead (Lance Henriksen). She wants her mother, Barbara (Joanne Nail), to marry him so they can be a family. Unfortunately for Barbara, Ray is secretly a member of a group of old white men who hang out in Ted Turner’s mansion and want to take over the world.

As Dr. Walker, Mel Ferrer tells Ray that “Barbara is a miracle of nature. She carries in her womb the power to give birth to children of immense power... We cannot wait much longer. We need another child like Katy.” The men need Barbara to give birth to a boy child, which seems all kinds of sexist, but what can you expect from a cloistered group of old men colluding for absolute power?



Things get a little easier for Ray after Katy somehow transforms a toy bird into a gun and shoots Barbara in the back, putting her in a wheelchair and making Dr. Walker's name all the more ironic. To help out at their incredibly ornate home, Barbara hires housekeeper Jane Phillips (Shelley Winters) and new babysitter Jerzy Colsowicz.

Huston and Winters had already appeared in a previous Italian production together, *Tentacoli* (aka *Tentacles*, 1977). Its director, Ovidio G. Assonitis, had done a demonic possession film with 1974's *Chi sei?* (aka *Beyond the Door*). Like *The Visitor*, the film has a score by Micalizzi and utilises American exteriors blended with interiors shot in Italy.

Assonitis provided the original story for *The Visitor*, hiring and subsequently firing writer Lou Comici after the first screenplay draft was complete. Sometimes the film feels like it's a poor adaptation of an intricate book. Other times, it feels like it was cobbled together from abandoned bits of scripts that were gathering dust in Assonitis's office. *The Visitor* doesn't seem to have gotten past the first draft as it's rife with half-baked ideas and subplots that don't go anywhere. One highlight involves police detective Jake Durham (Glenn Ford), who investigates the mysterious shooting of Barbara before being attacked and killed by Katy's pet hawk.

When *The Visitor* hit America, it wasn't as we see it today on the Arrow Blu-Ray release. The version on North American television and VHS was roughly 20 minutes shorter than the one available to the rest of the world. The cuts omitted Nero's first appearance as well as bits of Ford, Peckinpah and Winters's already brief appearances. The confrontation on the otherworldly plane between Katy and Jerzy is sprinkled throughout the film rather than being solely at the beginning. Surprisingly, this version made even less sense than the current cut, making some wonder if there is even more of *The Visitor* somewhere.

Even the film's star found *The Visitor* difficult to understand. In an interview for *The Projection Booth* podcast Conner said, "The American version with all the cuts and edits didn't make sense. I mean, I had to watch it four times as a youngster to say, 'Alright, I might get it'. It's kind of a weird flick, you know?"







Conner didn't know that she was surrounded by movie stars when she played Katy Collins. The only person she really knew of was Winters who turned out to be less than glamorous. "I couldn't stand her. She was just a witch! She hit me in the scene where we're fighting at the table. She really slapped the crap out of me. She knocked me down on the floor a couple of times. I couldn't stand her. I didn't talk to her. I didn't go to her dressing room. She had a private, elite dressing room. She just looked at me and said, 'I love scenes where I get to hit children'. I guess she was staying in character."

Conner continues, "John Huston was a dream. He sat down and talked with me about my hobbies, what I liked. He was so nice. He gave me this beautiful book and he signed it. We were in Italy and he wanted me to know all about Italy. He told my mother, 'You need to take her on a tour. You need to go and explore. This is educational for her.'"

Apart from her mother, Conner didn't have any friends on the set. Aside from in her birthday party scene, there were only two girls her own age onscreen for any significant amount of time and both of these were her doubles; one for the uneven parallel bars scene and another for the ice skating scene. (Conner's double for her confrontation with Nail was a little person in a wig.) "We worked and it was very tiring. I didn't get to do anything during the week. The only time I had off was on the weekends. The rest were fifteen, sixteen-hour days. By the time I was done my mother was rehearsing lines with me for the next day."

"It was interesting that John Huston and Shelley Winters got put up in this beautiful hotel on top of the Spanish Steps and we got put in this hotel that – when you think of those little rooms in hotels where you have the single chain hanging down with the light bulb just exposed and there's no lamp shade, that really cold, barren hotel room – that's what they put us in. They put us in that for a little bit but my mother has a little temper on her. She said, 'I don't sleep like this at home and I'm not going to sleep like this here.' They finally changed our room to the same hotel on top of the Spanish Steps. Quite an experience for a youngster."





“With the pigeons that were attacking me; that’s the only thing I couldn’t stand. When I watch myself in the film I’m just dying laughing because I was laughing then thinking, ‘Oh my god, how fake! How phony!’ I’m supposed to be screaming, crying, and yelling but I’m cracking up because I’ve got a ton of bird feed all over me and those birds are just pecking and eating that food off of me.”

After working as an actress for a few more years, Conner returned to Atlanta to take care of her father. Unable to stay away from the bird motif, she would go on to be a cheerleader for the Atlanta Falcons. “I grew up to be a dirty bird.”

At 39, *The Visitor* was one of Henriksen’s early film roles. Often Henriksen would show up as more of a bit player in films like *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975) and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. To say that Henriksen doesn’t look back fondly on *The Visitor* is putting it lightly. “That’s a turkey made out of cement. I was the young stud who they were trying to get to seduce this woman to bring about some kind of a space baby. I don’t know what the hell it was but I could understand everything up to that moment. This movie was actually about budget. It was about a producer in Italy who decided that the way to make a movie and get it released is to get John Huston, Shelley Winters, Mel Ferrer and Glenn Ford, and that that would sell it. It didn’t matter what the story was. He was just throwing scenes at the wall and hoping they stuck.”

“When Shelley Winters was doing her scenes I thought, ‘We are in trouble because she had a little recorder that had some symphonic music on it and she was walking around the set wafting it through the set to make the set her own. And then she proceeded to sit in a chair while her secretary brought her white wine. I was with a girl at the time and the girl was taking pictures. Shelley screamed at the girl, ‘Who the fuck is taking those pictures?!?’” Henriksen had to explain that it was his girlfriend taking the photos before Winters would back down.

Henriksen loved working with Huston. “‘Lance, Lance, you have to go to Mexico.’ ‘No, I don’t want to go to Mexico.’ He lived down there and he had a house built where all the walls were just canvas that slid on cables to a central point and, at night, he’d be in bed and a panther would walk through. He felt very good about

that. His life had gotten simplified to the point where he felt that nature and he were one. He was a king. He would talk about the simplest shit. He could talk about what he ate for lunch and you'd sit there mesmerized by that guy. I would have loved to have met him in his youth, he must have been feisty."

"When I saw it, I was on Broadway with a bunch of friends of mine up on 42nd Street and I remember the poster; it was lightning striking an eyeball. And I went, 'Oh, man, I am so ashamed.' We got into the theatre and this black guy up in the balcony said, 'Motherfucker! I want my money back!' And I'm sitting there with my buddies and they all laughed."

The poster to which Henriksen refers is a striking image of a huge eyeball above a cityscape. The eyeball is surrounded by lightning. It possesses monstrous three-fingered hands that hold a bloody garrote. The poster is one of the most captivating things about *The Visitor* and, much like the film, makes little sense.

The Visitor remains a fascinating failure and time capsule of other, better films that came before it.

Mike White is the head honcho over at Cashiers du Cinemart and a co-host on The Projection Booth podcast – www.projectionboothpodcast.com





ABOUT THE TRANSFER

The Visitor was restored by Drafthouse Films, who delivered the final master to Arrow Films for this release.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and booklet produced by: Ewan Cant

Executive Producer: Francesco Simeoni

Production Assistants: Louise Buckler, Liane Cunje

QC and Proofing: Michael Brooke, Ewan Cant

Subtitling: IBF Digital

Authoring: Utd by Content

Artist: Erik Buckham

Design: Jack Pemberton & Emily Fordham

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Ovidio Assonitis, Lou Comici, Fabrizio Giona, Ennio Guarnieri, Lance Henriksen, Evan Husney, Jim Kunz, James Shapiro



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