

## *The Blob* (1958) Notes

### THE FILM

- I could've sworn when I first watched the film, Steve McQueen was credited as "Steve Queen." I know I read that somewhere.
- This film has a catchy theme song. Very 1950s pop music.
- The title doesn't drop until the end.
- Starts with a couple kissing. Always good.
- McQueen was 28 playing...16, maybe? He looks too old.
- The old man looks familiar... He really sells his performance and the threat of the Blob on his hand.
- The scene with the old man discovering the Blob is suspenseful. We hear the dog barking for a while, and then it suddenly stop.
- The Blob is such a weird creature, especially by 1950s standards. The concept of it suffocating and dissolving victims is horrific.
- Hiding the old man's hand with a coat and revealing the Blob has grown was great. It also helps to save budget.
- Hubcap for a crown. Nice touch.
- Backwards drag race. Robert Zemeckis must've seen this. It's so 1950s.
- The cop knows Steve and Jane. Small town.
- It'd be easy to make these "racers" bad kids, but this takes a nuanced approach. They aren't villainous.
- "Unprotected women in the balcony." The cads!
- Could the Blob be stopped by amputation?
- The doctor doesn't hesitate to try to kill the Blob. This whole scene is tense. The Blob effects, while a little quirky, are effective and creepy. Very otherworldly. It's a creature unlike anything we understand, which is what makes it scary.
- What about the dog, Steve?
- Even these bit part cop characters get some background and backstory. One plays chess in his drawer while on the late shift.
- "He says Doc Hallen's dead, Jim." –sheriff. (Ha!)
- This is a remarkably made film, considering it was made outside Hollywood. It looks like a studio picture!
- I wish there were more films like this: takes place in smalltown USA; earnest; Americana. Unfiltered by Hollywood.
- The Blob doesn't leave any residue somehow and only dissolves its victims. Leaves no clothes.
- This film reflects the general attitude toward teens: they're delinquents who shouldn't be believed or taken seriously. The irony here is they're right and the heroes. It really is the first of its kind: a horror film starring teens as heroes. But thankfully, the adults aren't idiots or evil.
- "Steve isn't in the habit of telling lies." Ah, the Prof. Digory approach.

- The sheriff defends the kids. He says it isn't a crime to be 17.
- The characters try hard to sell the doctor dissolving. We didn't quite see that.
- "How do you get people to protect themselves they don't believe in?" Great line. The girlfriend says to find proof.
- "Daughter of Horror." Bela Lugosi.
- People took talking during the movies *very* seriously back then.
- 80 cents?!
- Paul Revere. Thanks, drunk!
- The shot of the covered old man in the mirror is my favorite.
- Steve and his girl hide amongst raw meat. Surrounded by death. Why did the Blob leave?
- A classic case of "kill people, but not the dog."
- The old couple sleeps in separate beds? Good grief.
- It's interesting that the tough cop talks about the kids hating him because of his war record right now they honk horns and blow alarms like it's an air raid.
- The Blob kills the projectionist while the murder scene plays on the movie. Clever.
- Quick shot of the camera in the panicking crowd. Shaky.
- *Forbidden Planet* poster! But wrong title.
- Ah! The Blob hates the cold. Makes sense.
- I swear I saw clips of this as a kid on, of all things, *Muppet Babies*. It was when the Blob retreats. They were throwing pies at it.
- The citizens of a small town defeat the monster. Not scientists are soldiers. The military only cleans up by removing the Blob.
- Mr. Martin resorts to breaking and entering to get in the schools to get extinguishers. In other words, He breaks the rules like a teen.
- Killed 40 or 50 people?!
- "As long as the Arctic stays cold." And all the global warming alarmists have a reason to advocate.
- Classic ending: "The End?"

*Commentary by Jack Harris and Bruce Eder*

- The background for the credits came from throwing a pebble in a lake.
- Harris saw McQueen on a TV series for 10 minutes and then as an understudy for a stage play. He was a day player at the time.
- The working title was "The Molten Meteor."
- The Blob's first appearance was an inflating balloon.
- He wanted to make a "delinquency" movie and a science fiction film because he hadn't seen them combined. He wanted to have bad kids be good kids.
- The studio that made the film was manned by monks who made religious films.
- This was the studio's 3,000<sup>th</sup> film (they made shorts).
- The film was rejected by every major studio, which made Harris more determined to get it released.

- The lead actress had trouble seeing dailies of herself because she thought was too old to play a teen.
- It took six months to do the special effects.
- “We were too stupid to think we could fail, so we succeeded.” –Harris
- Harris said McQueen was like a bad little boy who had to show off.
- Harris told McQueen, “Think young!”
- Eder says the midnight movie wouldn’t have appeared in a Hollywood script because it was a facet of life he was unaware of.
- Harris had a friend at Paramount who got him national distribution. They wanted something to put on double bill with a million-dollar bad movie called *I Married a Monster from Outer Space*. In some venues, they only got *The Blob*, and it did huge business.
- It was filmed in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. They used real houses.
- The head of Valley Forge Films was a Baptist minister who was great to work with during scripting but not as much while filming. He had to take Sunday off as his church’s organist. That happened five times.
- McQueen died in Mexico from cancer with Billy Graham praying with him and a poster of *The Blob* above him.
- Harris had to take out a second mortgage and borrow against his children’s college funds to fund the film. The theater wanted to charge them \$1,000 a day to shoot there. They needed three days. He talked the owner, a friend of his, down to \$75 for the three days.
- Their budget was \$100,000, and Harris was determined to come under budget. He went \$30,000 over.
- Aneta Corsaut (Jane) went on to play schoolteacher Helen Crump on *The Andy Griffith Show*, who married Andy.
- The silicone Blob prop had to be dyed several times a day to keep it red.
- Harris wanted to make it more graphic, but the religious studio wouldn’t let them. The doctor would’ve had a severed finger.
- Harris thinks the sequel is more funny than scary and that the remake did every they didn’t want to do and isn’t as good.
- When they screened the film, the audience looked up at the projection booth to see if the Blob was coming.
- Harris said he did the least promotion for this film. Things like the theme song topping charts and the film becoming a topic for comics made it Americana.
- Two times Harris said he was approached to make a Blob TV series. One producer jokingly suggested “a good Blob” and Harris joked he’d solve a crime. The next one, in 1999, would’ve picked up where the movie left off.
- *Rebel without a Cause* popularized the “teen delinquency” genre, which inspired this. These were typically cautionary tales, but filmmakers started thinking these needed happy endings. Teens could be forces for good.
- The principal was played by a minister, who was actually hesitant to break the window.

- The theme song broke the top 40 Billboard Chart (#33). It was credited to The Five Blobs.
- Harris said the “?” was his trademark.

*Commentary by Yeaworth and Fields*

- Ralph Carmichael composed a piece called “Violence” to open the film in a scary fashion, but it was replaced by the pop song.
- This was Yeaworth’s first film.
- They such a small budget and so little film to work with, they had to “edit in the camera” and shoot fewer shots.
- Yeaworth wanted unknown but recognizable people in the supporting cast.
- Yeaworth didn’t have any interest in sci-fi at the time.
- Yeaworth said McQueen said he wouldn’t play young but enthusiastic.
- They didn’t film many close-ups to save money.
- They worked to keep the menace off screen as much as possible to save money and make the Blob scarier.
- When McQueen died, people went into his bedroom and found only thing on the wall: a poster for *The Blob*.
- They spent two weeks coming up with a title. They wanted something that would get picked up by the culture. They had a blackboard where people suggested titles. Two popular ones were, “The Glob That Girdled the Globe,” and, “Night of the Creeping Dread.” They were going to call it, “The Glob,” but that was copyrighted.
- Smoke floats up over McQueen’s shoulder in one scene because he had a cigarette that he refused to snuff.
- The Colonial Theater was once an opera house and was since restored.
- They only hired one professional—a make-up artist—but the rest of the crew was “homegrown.”
- They used footage from an IMO camera after a cameraman fell filming a fleeing crowd in the theater.
- The electrical line that falls on the Blob was a hand drawn matte.
- A critic at the time joked that if this religious studio couldn’t convert anyone, they’d make this and “scare the hell out of them.”
- The shoot lasted three weeks.

*“It Creeps, It Leaps” by Newman*

- It’s left to the viewer to decide if the Blob is malignant or a force of nature.
- Blob creatures appeared before in “It” by Theodore Sturgeon, the Chicket Heart from the *Lights Out* radio show, the comic book character the Heap (a forerunner to Swamp Thing), an astronaut from 1953’s *The Quatermass Experiment*. Similar creatures appeared around the same time with *X the Unknown* (UK), *The H-Man* (Japan), and *Caltiki, the Immortal Monster* (Italy). They fell out of favor after the film’s release, but

1964's *The Creeping Terror* and 1988's *Killer Klowns from Outer Space* did mimic the structure and tropes with different creatures.

- The director worked with Billy Graham for a time.
- This definitely fared better than *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, as sci-fi films made by religious studios go.
- This the forerunner to other indie genre pictures that made it big, like *Carnival of Souls*, *Night of the Living Dead*, and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.

### *Creature Features by Schoell*

- One of the few creature features released in widescreen and Technicolor.
- When the Blob oozes out of the diner, it's actually a photo of the diner.
- The horror of the Blob is the creature is undefinable.

### *Keep Watching the Skies! By Warren*

- He's harsh to the film, saying it's plodding and amateurish.
- The girl is credited as "Judy" but it's "Jane."
- Some fleeing theater patrons are laughing.
- The crew started each day of shooting with group prayer. Yeaworth was a pastor's son.
- McQueen was willful and insisted on things being filmed his way, which Yeaworth did along with his way. McQueen sent an apologetic postcard later.
- He says it's better-written than most Hollywood monster films, it is perhaps a tad too intelligent. The unpolished actors add a sense of realism.
- The Five Blobs was actually a redubbing of Bernie Klee as all the voices.
- Wes Shank has what's left of the Blob.
- Olin Howlin, who played the old man, was a singing derelict in *Them!*
- In 1990, LA-based comedy troupe L.A. Connection made a comedy redub that went to video called *Blobermouth*.

### *ZHYXTHEMAN*

- Before this, most horror and sci-fi films featured soldiers and scientists. The few that were teen-centered died quickly at the box office.
- Steve is rebellious, as was common with teens at the time, but it rewards his rebellion. He's right about the Blob and the adults are wrong for disbelieving him.
- The adults' involvement makes things worse. An old man unleashes the Blob. But the cop is prejudiced toward teens, so the cops ignore the problem until it's literally too big to handle.
- Authority figures, like the doctor and the cops, can't stop the Blob.
- The adults don't listen to the teens when they use traditional means to communicate, so the teens resort to troublemaking—blaring horns, etc.—to communicate.
- Steve discovers the Blob's weakness, and it's only then that the adults can do anything.
- In other words, it validates teens.

## Hendershot

- The U.S. teen population doubled (5.6 million to 11.8 million) between 1946 and 1960. “The years 1948-1953 saw the number of juvenile delinquents charged with crime increase by forty-five percent.”
- “For horror films, authority frequently does not so much fail; it willfully creates monsters.”
- “Jane’s father shows concern only for his reputation. He shows no concern for the welfare of Jane or the other teenagers. This is especially ironic because his job at the high school calls for him to oversee and protect young people.”
- “Adult authorities fail in both *The Giant Gila Monster* and *The Blob* because of their caution and lack of open-mindedness, but the horror itself remains safely distant in a reptilian freak and an alien substance.”
- “Ultimately, *The Giant Gila Monster*, *The Blob*, *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*, and *Monster on the Campus* convey images of a world where authority is deeply flawed and frequently monstrous. Moreover, these films suggest that in order to negotiate the dangerous world they live in teens must either steer clear of authority figures or assume authority themselves. The teens cannot rely on teachers, principals, doctors, scientists, policemen, or parents. Fifties horror films project the post-WWII irony that the drive toward self-destruction embodied in the creation of nuclear weapons is frequently cloaked in the language of self-preservation. In order to better mankind, Tony must be made into a werewolf or Blake must make himself into a caveman. These films provide a glimpse into the insanity at the heart of many Fifties authority figures, an insanity that, at least as far as teen-focused horror films are concerned, was much more terrifying than juvenile delinquency could ever be.”

### TOKU TOPIC: Star Jelly

- The film was inspired by a true story. According to Wikipedia, “*The Blob*...was supposedly based on the Philadelphia reports from 1950, and specifically a report in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, called ‘Flying “Saucer” Just Dissolves,’ where four police officers encountered a UFO debris that was described as evaporating with a purple glow leaving nothing. Paramount Pictures was also sued for this movie by the author Joseph Payne Brennan, who had written a short story published in *Weird Tales Magazine* in 1953 called ‘Slime’ about a similar creature.”
- This is connected to a phenomenon called “star jelly” (or astromyxin or “astro jelly”). It is gelatin that appears on the ground or plants and is translucent or grayish-blue. It quickly evaporates after “falling.”
- Folklore says it is deposited on earth during meteor showers, but scientific explanations have ranged from being the remains of frogs or toads or worms or the byproduct of cyanobacteria. Specifically, it’s theorized that when birds eat frogs or toads, they leave

the oviducts, which swell and distort when exposed to moisture. However, some studies haven't shown any DNA present.

- Another theory: *Myxarium nucleatum*, a clear, gelatinous fungus that grows on decaying wood.
- *Nostoc*, a type of fresh water blue-green algae (cyanobacteria) forms spherical colonies made of filaments of cells in a gelatinous sheath. When on the ground, it is ordinarily not seen; but after rainfall it swells up into a conspicuous jellylike mass which is sometimes called star-jelly. (Wikipedia)
- Slime molds are a possibility.
- Other theories: communication method with the dead, stag semen, fungus, something excreted by aliens, residue from scientists trying to control the weather.
- Perhaps the most widely-read recent mention of star jelly was in Fate Magazine, which focuses on strange and unexplained phenomenon. In 1979 they published an article claiming they'd solved the mystery. They wrote that the substance "consisted of extra terrestrial cellular organic matter which exists as presellar molecular clouds." Now if you're like me and had a bit of trouble following that sentence, let me make it a bit easier: Essentially, star jelly came from cosmic objects like the Eagle Nebula.
- Wikipedia: There have been reports of 'star-jelly' for centuries.[7] John of Gaddesden (1280–1361)[8] mentions *stella terrae* (Latin for 'star of the earth' or 'earth-star') in his medical writings, describing it as "a certain mucilaginous substance lying upon the earth" and suggesting that it might be used to treat abscesses.[6] A fourteenth-century Latin medical glossary has an entry for *uligo*, described as "a certain fatty substance emitted from the earth, that is commonly called 'a star which has fallen'".[9] Similarly, an English-Latin dictionary from around 1440 has an entry for "sterre slyme" with the Latin equivalent given as *assub* (a rendering of Arabic *ash-shuhub*, also used in medieval Latin as a term for a "falling" or "shooting" star).[10] In Welsh it has been referred to as "pwdre ser" meaning "rot from the stars".[11]
- It has multiple names, but hilariously, the slime mold *Enteridium lycoperdon* is called "caca de luna" (moon's feces) by the locals in Veracruz, Mexico.
- A few examples:
  - On 11 November 1846, a luminous object estimated at 4 feet in diameter fell at Lowville, New York, leaving behind a heap of foul-smelling luminous jelly that disappeared quickly, according to *Scientific American*[17]
  - On 11 August 1979, Sybil Christian of [Frisco](#), Texas reported the discovery of several purple blobs of goo on her front yard following a [Perseid meteor shower](#). A follow up investigation by reporters and an assistant director of the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History discovered a [battery reprocessing](#) plant outside of town where [caustic soda](#) was used to clean impurities from the lead in the batteries, resulting in a purplish compound as a byproduct. The report was greeted with some skepticism, however, as the compounds at the reprocessing plant were solid, whereas the blobs on Christian's lawn were gelatinous. Others, however,



have pointed out that Christian had tried to clear them off her lawn with a garden hose.<sup>[22]</sup>

- Star jelly sightings are fairly common. In 2008, BBC Radio Scotland asked its listeners to send in details about any sightings to their webpage and comment on what they thought the jelly might be. In just four months, over 130 sightings were posted from all over Britain, including 47 from Scotland, where the phenomenon is known as “pwdre ser”. (Amusing Planet)
- Blue balls of jelly rained down on a man's garden in Dorset in January 2012.[24][25] Upon further analysis these proved to be sodium polyacrylate granules, a kind of superabsorbent polymer with a variety of common (including agricultural) uses. They were most likely already present on the ground in their dehydrated state, and had gone un-noticed until they soaked up water from the hail shower and consequently grew in size.[26] (Crypto wiki)
- The most recent sighting of star jelly was in Goochland County in Virginia, the United States, in June 2019, where a couple found five small piles of strange crushed-ice like substance, but gelatinous in nature. An agricultural expert in Chesterfield County took a look at it under a microscope but failed to find evidence of a living organism. To the relief (and probably some disappointment) of the couple, the expert concluded that the substance was a man-made, water-based polymer used in gardening as a soil replacement. (Amusing Planet)
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- A strange substance falls to the ground after a meteor shower in the H.P. Lovecraft story, “The Colour Out of Space.” Alien spores fall to the ground as a jelly-like substance in the 1978 remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Jordy Verill from *Creepshow?* That was Steven King.
- The subject even found its way into 19th century literature. Sir Walter Scott mentioned the jelly in his 1825 novel, “The Talisman. He writes, “And thou shalt only light on some foul jelly, which, in shooting through the horizon, has assumed for a moment an appearance of Splendour.”

## Sources

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