

Little Shop of Horrors Notes

THE FILM

- Scroll up text like Star Wars. Popular at the time.
- “Not too long before our own...” It’s the ‘60s. President Kennedy mentioned.
- The singers at the beginning are an old stage tradition: a “Greek” chorus. They exist sorta outside the story and serve as ambassadors to the audience. Although they do appear as characters later.
- I feel like this has the perfect cast and director.
- Having seen the stage show, being a movie allows them to do things that would be difficult to impossible on stage. The multiple sets, the big sets. The crazy editing. The nutty cinematography.
- Audrey II cost \$1.95, huh? Appeared out of nowhere at a Chinese shop.
- The customer’s acting is intentionally stilted, which makes it funny.
- Audrey II does bring in business. It’s the beginning of the fall.
- Audrey II brings in customers but lilt. Without her, no customers. But she must have blood. The next step. She keeps demanding more.
- The tiny puppet is great, too. Lots of personality.
- Audrey II sounds constipated when she grows.
- John Candy! Wow! I think I found my spirit animal. That and Robin Williams in *Good Morning, Vietnam*. I love how the chorus chimes in for a beat when Seymour is about to tell the story of Audrey II.
- “Don’t tell me: you got tied up for a bit.” “No, just handcuffed a little.”
- Audrey (I)’s story is all too common. She got involved with an abusive man and feels trapped, fearing for her life, when she’d rather be with Seymour and have an idyllic life.
- Animated bird?! Is she a Disney princess? Regardless, this fantasy sequence is something that would be hard to do on stage. “Big screen 12-inch TV.” Wow.
- The POV shot from the back of the mouth!
- Holy crap, the shrine to his mother!
- “Dentist” is one of my favorite songs in the film. Steve Martin owns it, the sequence, and the character. Sadistic greaser Elvis. Gets high on laughing gas. Taps into people’s hate of going to the dentist. “Lreader of the plaque.”
- The puppet—my gosh. It’s freakishly expressive. The lipsync is uncanny. It’s a testament to how practical effects can compete with CGI.
- “Feed Me, Seymour!” is when the Faustian deal happens. Classic.
- Bill Murray?! This scene is what happens a sadist meets a masochist. This scene doesn’t add to the plot, but it hilarious. “Masochist says to the sadist, ‘Hurt me,’ and the sadist says, ‘No.’” Meets his match.
- Is that Godzilla with bad teeth in the picture?
- Interestingly, Seymour doesn’t kill the dentist. He does that to himself. He does mutilate the body, though. So, is he responsible?
- Audrey II is quite the lustful glutton. (Guilty of all 7 deadly sins?)

- Audrey (I) is a good girl who kept having to do terrible things to get by. Like work at a nightclub wearing “tasteless” outfits.
- During “Suddenly Seymour,” Ellen Greene’s voice goes up in pitch. Her true voice? It’s when Audrey (I) becomes herself. She doesn’t have to be mousey and afraid.
- The puppet can stutter and press its lips for certain sounds!
- Even Mushnick succumbs to the temptation of the Audrey II. He wants to keep using the plant to make money. Seymour doesn’t kill him; he just positions Mushnick so Audrey II can eat him.
- The score is used for sound effects. “Mickey Mouse-ing.”
- I wonder if Audrey II fakes her lilt.
- Matthew 16:26: “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?”
- “Oh, Seymour, this is so sudden!” Haha.
- The tragedy is Seymour tries to break the deal, but he’s too late. Audrey II gets what she wants.
- (Audrey II was the unofficial mascot of my college’s writers club).
- Can Audrey II eat dead meat and survive? If not, he’s a monster.
- I have no doubt Kazuki Omori saw this, which inspired Biollante.
- “I’ve done terrible things, Audrey, but never to you.”
- “Somewhere that’s green.” From the Americana life to Audrey II (and possibly Heaven?)
- Seymour nearly jumps off a building until, inexplicably, the exec appears and says he’ll take leaf clippings and make more Audrey II’s.
- In this cut, Seymour turns on Audrey II to avenge Audrey (I).
- Plants are public domain? I’ll ask Raymund about that.
- “Mean Green Mother from Outer Space” isn’t in the stage play. I shocked when I listened to the stage show soundtrack and it wasn’t there. It’s my favorite song in the film. The tone in the director’s cut is Audrey II torturing Seymour before eating him. Play with his food. The theatrical is about him battling Audrey II. The last shot is Audrey II spitting out Seymour’s broken glasses.
- Audrey II grew his own chorus.
- A whole song was cut from the theatrical. It didn’t make sense in that one since Audrey II was defeated. “Don’t Feed the Plants.”
- Black Friday for Audrey II. Exploits consumerism.
- A legion of kaiju-sized Audrey II’s! This expands on the stage show ending. It’s the ultimate end to the Faustian deal. It’s all miniatures and puppets. American tokusatsu, baby! Wild scenes. Blowing the smokestack. Eating the train like his mouth is a tunnel. Fights the military.
- *Jason and the Argonauts* is playing at the theater. Harryhausen reference.
- “The End?!?” Then Audrey II breaks the fourth wall—literally—and eats the audience.
- Bill Murray as Arthur Denton, not Arthur Dent.
- **THEATRICAL ENDING:** Audrey (I) doesn’t die from nearly getting eaten. Seymour doesn’t consider suicide. “Suddenly Seymour” is reprised. A different exec comes—

played by Jim Belushi. So, a new guest star exclusive to this version. The tone here is one of defiance. The ending is darkly funny (Audrey II's final words and reaction) and the explosion effects are nice. Seymour and Audrey (I) do get their happy ending, but Oz did sneak in a nod to tragedy with the tiny Audrey II in the flower garden who smirks at the camera.

Commentaries by Frank Oz

- He was asked by the creators of the stage show to direct the film.
- The opening wasn't intended to be the credits sequence. The chorus girls are supposed to be magical because the rain doesn't touch them. It introduces characters and shows geography. He joked with Moranis that his credit would be on his butt forever.
- Rick Moranis was cast before they knew he could sing.
- Ellen Greene played Audrey on the stage show for four years. She knew the character well.
- There were three sets for the shop: one for humans, one for the effects, one for the fight.
- He originally said, "No," to this because he thought there would be too much to manage.
- He didn't use wide shots to keep the edgy off-Broadway flavor and show that people feel trapped in Skid Row.
- All the plants were made by Lyle Conway.
- Christopher Guest's first take was more naturalistic; Oz made him go cartoony.
- There are only two optical effects in the whole movie (Chinese florist and subway).
- The dialogue and music are rhythmic.
- Unlike most musicals, there's no transition from talking to singing.
- It took 9 months of prep to make all the plants.
- The plants were done by cables below the frame and not remote control. It goes from 4 or 5 to 60. Oz says that makes it more organic.
- The shot of Audrey II growing the first time was actually done in camera. It's forced perspective and camera angles.
- John Candy adlibbed much of his dialogue despite the dialogue being successful for 4 years in the play.
- Frank Oz planned the film a year ahead of time.
- Test audiences were more squeamish about the small amounts of blood than large ones. That's why Oz cut back on the bloodletting shots.
- Steve Martin had models behind him in his first shot.
- They initially had blood on the walls of the dentist office, but the test audiences didn't like it.
- "Foam rubber does not sing that fast." They had to speed up the film to get proper lip sync. It switches between 16 and 24 frames per second. Moranis had to adjust his movements to accommodate.
- Brian Henson moved Audrey II's mouth. It took 30+ 10-second takes at a time.
- Levi Stubbs of the Four Tops played Audrey II.
- Heather Henson was the unfortunate patient before Bill Murray.

- Once they go into the operating room, Murray's dialogue is all adlibbed. The important thing was maintaining the attitudes. The scene had no ending, and it took 32 takes for them to find an ending they liked. Martin and Murray came up with it.
- Martin worked hard to not make Oren the Fonz. He wanted him to be original. There's an Elvis influence, though.
- They did have a fake severed head of Martin for the feeding scene. It was cut and covered with newspaper because it was too gruesome.
- Gardenia flubs a line—"Special gardening tips" ~ "Special dining tips"—which cracked Moranis up so much, Oz needed to do a single shot instead of a two-shot.
- Oz says reshooting the ending was a great lesson for him as a filmmaker. The audience loved the movie until the leads died. You can't kill people the audience sees in closeups so much. This is interesting because he wanted to stick to the play's ending.
- Grabbing the dime took 73 takes. Oz says that was the most he's ever done in a movie.
- (I love how Jim Belushi breaks the fourth wall and tells the leads to stop singing for a moment).
- The "Mean Green Mother" scene took 5 weeks to shoot. Some shots were 12 frames per second.
- Oz says this is one of his favorite movies he ever made.
- They did get some critical flak from those who saw the play, but Oz says, "The heart always wins."
- When Audrey II tries to eat Audrey (I), there's a joke where Moranis shoots Greene.
- Everyone on the film played ping-pong all the time. It became the source of in-jokes.
- Oz wanted the feeding of Audrey to Audrey II to be ritualistic, religious, a sacrifice.
- NO music was written for the suicide scene because it wasn't used. It was supposed to be suspenseful.
- Oz figured out how to shoot at 16 frames because he watched the rehearsal tape and rewound and fast forwarded it.
- The beginning of the last song in director's cut is an homage to *Patton*.
- Oz said it was meant to mimic a Godzilla film.
- Audrey II attacking the Statue of Liberty = strangling America.

Frank Oz and Little Shop of Horrors: The Director's Cut (blur-ray)

- The "kaiju" sequence had to be storyboarded completely because Richard Conway the effects director had two months to work on it.
- Movie audience get to see the nuances of the characters through close-ups. Also, in theater, the actors come out for a bow. The audience can express appreciation. They can't do that in a film. That's why test audiences were disappointed.
- Oz wasn't satisfied with the new ending, but he was glad the audience at the time was happy.
- Oz was sad that no one got to see Conway's work for years, until the DVD and blu-ray came out.

A Story of Little Shop of Horrors (blu-ray)

- Corman says the original film started “almost as a joke.” He used leftover sets for two days just to prove he could make a film that fast. Chuck Griffith wrote in two weeks after a day of brainstorming with Corman. It was Jack Nicholson’s first movie (he’s the dentist patient).
- The musical started off-Broadway in 1982.
- Corman liked the musical.
- Geffen also produced *Cats*.
- Originally, the film was gonna be made for \$6 million with Spielberg as a producer and Scorsese as director.
- Oz took it out the shop, unlike in the play, but only when it made sense for them to leave it.
- Moranis was Geffen’s only choice for Seymour.
- Oz thinks Greene was first actress to go from the stage play to the film.
- Greene says Audrey opens up when she sings.
- Geffen says people suggested Barbara Streisand for Audrey. Geffen said Greene was a cross between Judy Holiday and Vivian Blaine.
- The chorus give the film style. “It was a story with style.”
- Conway went through 15,000 handmade leaves, 2,000 feet of vine, and 11 ½ miles of cable by the time he was done to realize Audrey II.
- There were 7 sizes of puppets.
- Moranis joked that he often felt like the puppet was an ugly guy he worked with. He’d try to go over and talk to the plant, but it wouldn’t respond.
- Conway said he talked with the Atomic Research Institute to research a new cable for them to use for Audrey II.

Other sources

- “The film's concept may have been inspired by "Green Thoughts", a 1932 story by John Collier about a man-eating plant.[6] Hollywood writer Dennis McDougal suggests that Griffith may have been influenced by Arthur C. Clarke's 1956 science fiction short story "The Reluctant Orchid"[7] (which was in turn inspired by the 1905 H. G. Wells story "The Flowering of the Strange Orchid").” (Wikipedia)
- “Little Shop of Horrors was filmed on the Albert R. Broccoli 007 Stage at the Pinewood Studios in England, where a "downtown" set, complete with overhead train track, was constructed.” (Wikipedia)
- It cost \$25 million to make while the original cost \$30,000 (\$240,000 in 2019).
- The original ending was only available as a black-and-white work print for years but was restored in 2012 by Warner Home Video.
- John Landis was also supposed to direct at one point.
- Scorsese wanted to film this in 3D, but production was halted due to a lawsuit filed by the original’s screenwriter, Griffith.

- The film differs only slightly from the stage play. The title song is expanded to include an additional verse to allow for the opening credits.[citation needed] The song "Ya Never Know" was rewritten into a calypso-inspired song called "Some Fun Now", although some of the lyrics were retained.[citation needed] Four other songs ("Closed for Renovation", "Mushnik and Son", "Now [It's Just the Gas]", as well as "Call Back in the Morning") were cut from the original production score, and "Finale (Don't Feed the Plants)" does not appear in the theatrical version of the film. A new song, "Mean Green Mother from Outer Space", was written by Ashman and Menken for the film.
(Wikipedia)
- The studio wanted Cyndi Lauper to play Audrey, but she turned it down.
- The masochistic patient from the original film was cut from the stage play but added to this version.
- Greene and Moranis put ice cubes in their mouth to prevent their breath from being seen in the cold studio.
- As mentioned, additional sequences and songs from the original off-Broadway show were dropped or re-written in order for the feature version to be paced well. The notable change was for the "Meek Shall Inherit" sequence. As originally filmed, it detailed through a dream sequence Seymour's rising success and the need to keep the plant fed and impress Audrey. In the final cut, the dream sequence and much of the song is cut out. Oz said, "I cut that because I felt it just didn't work and that was before the first preview in San Jose. It was the right choice, it didn't really add value to the entire cut." [3] The full version of the song was included on the film's soundtrack album, as were the songs from the original ending. The sequence was deemed to be lost until in 2012 when it was rediscovered on a VHS workprint that contained alternate and extended takes and sequences. (Wikipedia)
- The original ending reportedly cost \$5 million to make. This was the most expensive film reportedly that WB had made up to the point.
- It grossed \$39 million after a brief delay to film a new ending. This was considered an underperformer, but it was a hit on home video.
- Little Shop of Horrors was the first DVD to be recalled for content.[4] In 1998, Warner Bros. released a special edition DVD that contained approximately 23 minutes of unfinished footage from Oz's original ending, although it was in black and white and was missing some sound, visual and special effects.[citation needed] Producer and rights owner David Geffen was not aware of this release until it made it to the stores. Geffen said, "They put out a black-and-white, un-scored, un-dubbed video copy of the original ending that looked like shit." As a result, the studio removed it from shelves in a matter of days and replaced it with a second edition that did not contain the extra material. Geffen wanted to theatrically re-release the film with the original ending intact.[30] Geffen also claimed to have a color copy of the original ending, while the studio had lower quality, black and white duplicates as their own color print was destroyed in a studio fire years earlier. But Geffen had not known, until after the DVD was pulled, that the studio did not know there was a colored copy of the original ending in existence.[3] (Wikipedia)

- In January 2020, Full Circle Cinema reported that a remake of the film is in the works, with Taron Egerton in talks to play Seymour, Scarlett Johansson as Audrey and Billy Porter voicing Audrey II.[35] The Hollywood Reporter affirmed in February that the film was being developed by Warner Bros. Pictures with Greg Berlanti directing and producing with Marc Platt and David Geffen, Porter confirmed, and Egerton and Johansson in negotiations. Additionally, Chris Evans was also in talks to play Dr. Scrivello. Matthew Robinson will pen the screenplay.[36] As of May 2021, the remake has been postponed indefinitely.[37] (Wikipedia)
- A budget was set at \$18 million, but reports claimed it had doubled by the time initial filming wrapped,[17] and an additional \$2 million was spent for reshoots.[12] Coincidentally, \$38 million is also what it took in at the box office.[18] Other estimates claim it cost \$25[19] and \$26 million,[12] and Oz once remarked that it cost \$30 million,[20] so a precise budget is difficult to tally. (Little Shop Wiki)
- The way that the test screenings worked is that the studio gave out cards with various questions, concluding with, "Would you recommend this movie to a friend?" "You have to have a 55% 'recommend' to really be released and we got a 13%," Oz noted.[25] The movie received a second test screening in hopes of getting a better reaction from a different audience, but it fared about the same. (Little Shop Wiki)
- Awareness of the lost footage was boosted with the rise of YouTube and other online video sites, allegedly prompting Warner Bros. reps to state in 2007 that the original negatives were destroyed in a fire in 2002.[33] It's unclear where this rumor originated, but it was repeated ad nauseam across the internet, leaving fans heartbroken and serving to inflate prices for the recalled DVD, which had already been selling on eBay well into the triple-digits for years. (Little Shop Wiki)
- When Frank Oz attended the 2012 premiere, he was bracing himself for a negative reaction similar to the ones he'd endured during the test screenings,[24] but something unexpected happened: The 2012 Film Festival audience applauded Audrey and Seymour's respective deaths and cheered on the plants during their rampage. "Sadly, I think audiences have gotten more cynical," he remarked of the modern audience's enthusiasm.[23] (Little Shop Wiki)
- Although the music was generally well-preserved and intact, the finale's special effects extravaganza was never completed, so all of the sound effects were newly created for this version of the film.[23][27] (Little Shop Wiki)
- Some CGI was used to complete the work print of the original ending.
- As part of the film's promotion, the "Audrey II" plant was occasionally interviewed, in character, by the press. On at least one occasion, the interview concluded with Audrey II "eating" the interviewer. (IMDB)
- "Mean Green Mother From Outer Space" (written for this film) is the first Oscar-nominated song to contain profanity. As a result, when the song was performed at the Oscar ceremony by Levi Stubbs of the Four Tops, it was edited, replacing the more risqué lyrics with lyrics cut from the final film (though included on the film soundtrack). (IMDB)
- Gene Wilder was considered for Orin.

- Little Shop of Horrors comes from a long tradition of shows and plays that have a Greek Chorus. One of the first was Sophocles' famous play *Antigone*. (IMDB)
- The film was nominated for the Best Special Effects along with *Poltergeist II*. They lost to *Aliens*. “Mean Green Mother from Outer Space” was nominated for Best Original Song along with “Glory Of Love” (*The Karate Kid Part II*), “Life In A Looking Glass” (*That's Life*), and “Somewhere Out There” (*An American Tail*). They lost to “Take My Breath Away” from *Top Gun*.

Faustian Bargains

- The predecessor of Faustus in Christian mythology is Theophilus ("Friend of God" or "Beloved of God") the unhappy and despairing cleric, disappointed in his worldly career by his bishop, who sells his soul to the devil but is redeemed by the Virgin Mary.[5] His story appears in a Greek version of the 6th century written by a "Eutychianus" who claims to have been a member of the household in question. (Wikipedia)
- The legend is loosely based on the life of Johann Georg Faust (c 1480–1540), an alchemist and practitioner of necromancy, a form of ‘black magic’. A chapbook speculating on his infamous exploits circulated in the late 16th Century, inspiring Christopher Marlowe’s play *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*, first performed in London around 1592. At approximately the same time, the legend of Pan Twardowski, a sorcerer who sold his soul to the devil, began to take root in Polish folklore. (Ramm)
- It was originally written to warn Christians that God has set limits and humanity must respect those limits or face eternal damnation. However, in some versions of the story, Faust outsmarts the devil. Other versions of the story have the bargainer try to use a technical point only to lose, anyway. The pact, if written, is sealed in blood.
- The most influential interpretation of the Faust legend was written by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832). The project dominated his intellectual life: the first part of his dramatic poem, *Faust*, appeared in 1808; the second part was completed in 1831, the year before his death. With the exception of *Frankenstein*, published by Mary Shelley in 1818, it is difficult to think of a more enduring modern legend – both stories reflect unease about the dawning of a new world, full of possibility and anxiety. (Ramm)
- The legend seems to have particular resonance at times of moral crisis. (Ramm)
- 20th-century takes on the story focus the temptations of fascism and wealth.
- Despite its theological underpinning, the Faust legend has thrived in secular consumer societies, particularly in a culture of instant gratification. From credit cards to fast food, we opt for immediate pleasure even in the knowledge that it brings long-term pain. Faustus states that the only God he serves is his “own appetite”, and Goethe’s Mephistopheles offers him the opportunity to “sample every possible delight... grasp at what you want!” In David Luke’s lyrical translation: “Your palate also shall be sated, / Your nostrils sweetly stimulated, / Your sense of touch exhilarated.” (Ramm)
- The Faust legend gained traction at a time when the ‘closed’ medieval world was being cleaved open by a new mercantile culture. Karl Marx identified the influx of gold from

the New World as the dawn of capitalism, a system he compares to a sorcerer who is no “longer able to control the powers of the underworld he has called up”. (Ramm)

- Goethe’s major innovation is the introduction of Margareta (also referred to as Gretchen), whose story provides the most poignant episode of the drama. Faust pursues her, seduces her, and then – unwittingly – destroys her and her family. Mephistopheles guides his hand but Faust’s actions are unbearably his own (the demon goads him: “Who was it who ruined her? I, or you?”). (Ramm)
- Pop culture examples:
 - *Death Note* (manga/anime)
 - Ghost Rider
 - *Spider-Man: One More Day*
 - *Hellblazer: Dangerous Habits* (Constantine tricks the Lords of Hell into curing his cancer)
 - *Perelandra* by C.S. Lewis: Professor Weston offers his soul to Satan for free, without asking for any return - with very terrible results[28]
 - *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a novel by Oscar Wilde. Dorian Gray vocally offers his soul in exchange for eternal youth so that a painting will age for him.[29]
 - Spawn
 - *Star Wars, Episode III*
 - *Transformers: The Movie*
 - *Kamen Rider Revive* explicitly portrays this in the form of inner demons that are brought out from people making contracts through a device called the Vistamp.[106] The term itself is also used as part of the opening theme's lyrics.

Sources:

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