



Moviedrome: Bringing the Cult TV Series to the Big Screen

The Fly (1986)

The Fly

Director: David Cronenberg
Production Companies: Brookfilms, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation
Producer: Stuart Cornfeld
Co-producers: Marc Boyman, Kip Ohman
Unit Production Manager: David Coatsworth
Production Co-ordinator: Debbie Cook
Post-production Co-ordinator: Carol McBride
Location Manager: Howard Rothschild
Assistant Directors: John Board, Kim Winther, Patricia Rozema, Thomas P. Quinn
Casting: Deirdre Bowen
Screenplay: Charles Edward Pogue, David Cronenberg
Original Short Story: George Langelaan
Director of Photography: Mark Irwin
Additional Photography: Kenneth Post, Robin Miller
Assistant Photographers: Marvin Midwicki, Donna Mobbs
Computer/Video Effects Supervisor: Lee Wilson
Special Effects: Louis Craig, Ted Ross
The Fly Created/Designed by: Chris Walas Inc
Fly Creature Effects: Peter Albrecht, Peter Babakitis, Brent Baker, Jon Berg, Margaret Beserra, Donald Bies, Robert Burman, Blair Clark, Stéphan Dupuis, Keith Edmier, Bob Hall, Jonathan Horton, Sir Guy of Hudson, Conrad Itchener, Jim Smash Isaac, Michael Jobe, Marie-Louise Kingery, Patricia Kowchak, Anthony Laudoti, Kelly Lepkowsky, Michelle Linder, Donald Mowat, Jerrold Neidig, Gregg Olsson, Michael Owens, Zandra Platzeck, Robin Ralston, Michael Smithson, William Stoneham, Valerie Sofranko, Debra Tomei, Wim Jan Van Thillo, Carol Kaefer Walas, Mark Walas, Harold Weed, Mark Williams
Editor: Ron Sanders
Production Designer: Carol Spier
Visual Consultant: Harold Michelson
Art Director: Rolf Harvey
Set Designer: James McAteer
Revolving Set Designer: Kirk Cheney
Set Decorator: Elinor Rose Galbraith
Set Dressers: Gary Jack, Danielle Fleury
Scenic Artist: Nick Kosonic
Costume Designer: Denise Cronenberg
Wardrobe: Trysha Bakker
Make-up: Shonagh Jabour
Title Design: Wayne Fitzgerald, Gary Kanew
Opticals: Dream Quest Images
Music: Howard Shore
Music Performed by: London Philharmonic Orchestra
Orchestrations: Homer Dennison
Music Editor: Jim Weidman
Music Recording: Keith Grant
Sound Recording: Bryan Day, Michael Lacroix
Sound Re-recording: Gerry Humphreys
Sound Editors: David Evans, Wayne Griffin
Dialogue Editor: Richard Cadger
Sound Effects Editor: Jane Tattersall
ADR Editor: Robin Leigh
Foley: Terry Burke
Stunt Co-ordinator: Dwayne McLean
Stunt Double for Mr Goldblum: Brent Meyers
Gymnastic Doubles: Doron Kernerman, Romuald Vervin
Animal Training: Steve Martin's Working Wildlife
Cast:
Jeff Goldblum (*Seth Brundle*)
Geena Davis (*Veronica Quaife*)
John Getz (*Stathis Borans*)

'What is a cult film? A cult film is one which has a passionate following but does not appeal to everybody. Just because a movie is a cult movie does not automatically guarantee quality. Some cult films are very bad. Others are very, very good. Some make an awful lot of money at the box office. Others make no money at all. Some are considered quality films. Others are exploitation.' From 1988 to 2000 *Moviedrome* was presented by Alex Cox and then Mark Cousins. Across that time, more than 200 features were shown, and generations of movie fans and filmmakers would be informed and inspired by the selection, alongside the wit and wisdom of the introductions that preceded each screening. *Moviedrome* was a portal into the world of weird and wonderful cinema. This two-month season features some of the most notable titles screened and wherever possible they are preceded by the original televised introduction.

Nick Freand Jones, season curator and producer of *Moviedrome*

Mark Cousins: David Cronenberg is a mild-mannered Canadian who has made some of the most horrific artworks of the century. *Scanners*, *Rabid*, *Videodrome* and *The Brood* were, for me, brilliant and unsettling movies about our bodies and our fears. His controversial new film, *Crash*, is surely a masterpiece. When Cronenberg's long-planned film *Total Recall* fell through – it later appeared with Arnie Schwarzenegger – comedian Mel Brooks offered to produce a remake of the '50s b-movie *The Fly*, with Croners at the helm.

The director liked the idea of a film about decaying bodies but rewrote the script, preserving just one line of Charles Edward Pogue's original. The outcome was by far his most successful film to date.

Released in the mid-'80s it was widely taken to be a film about AIDS. In fact, what attracted the director was the way that Goldblum's character ages before his lover's eyes. 'We've all got the disease,' he said, 'The disease of being finite.' I think this helps explain why I find this film so emotional. Goldblum's performance – look at his face and hair and eyes in the very first sequence – reminds me of Lon Chaney's as the Phantom of the Opera or Charles Laughton's as the Hunchback of Notre Dame. Each is in love with a woman who is repelled by his looks. Watch the last scene in this movie, think of someone you're in love with and see what happens. It's noticeable how simple Cronenberg's film is: it's basically two characters in a room, which looks like a cellar with dust constantly in the air. Only the music is epic. In the original script the fly-man loses the power of speech. Cronenberg changes this. He makes his monster articulate. He makes him explain how he feels as his flesh falls away.

Cronenberg fills the dialogue with complex funny ideas. Look at the scene for example where Davis and Goldblum talk about the poetry of steak. It makes me so angry when I hear people say, as one critic did of *Crash*, that this director's films are 'beyond depravity'. In the hands of Mr Cronenberg cinema tries to tell the truth. That's what people don't like.

Mark Cousins' original introduction for *Moviedrome*. With thanks to moviedromer.tumblr.com

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away the film's ending.

A contemporary review

'Is this a romance?' Seth Brundle ingenuously asks Veronica Quaife as they plan a holiday to celebrate the success of his teleportation project. And, indeed, *The Fly* is romance Cronenberg-style, where lovers are transformed by desire into victims of uncontrollable destructive urges, unleashing disaster on themselves and others. Brundle is a typical Cronenberg hero, obsessional, repressed, sublimating sexuality in scientific enquiry. Characteristically, sexual and intellectual knowledge are linked: Seth's work is blocked by his lack of sexual experience, and only when his affair with Veronica brings him into intimate and pleasurable contact with human flesh is he able to figure out a successful teleportation programme.

Joy Boushel (*Tawny*)
Les Carlson (*Dr Cheevers*)
George Chuvalo (*Marky*)
Michael Copeman (*2nd man in bar*)
David Cronenberg (*gynaecologist*)
Carol Lazare (*nurse*)
Shawn Hewitt (*clerk*)
USA 1986
96 mins
Digital

Moviedrome transmission date: 22 June 1997

With thanks to

Bob Cummins and Sharon Maitland

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So far, so good: love provides the breakthrough to the scientific discovery which, Seth claims, will 'change the world as we know it'. Before long, however, the dark forces of the human unconscious intervene to put paid to naive notions of scientific progress: within minutes of celebrating his success, Seth is blinded by jealous rage, throws scientific caution to the winds, and teleports himself together with the insect whose genes will fuse with his, transforming him into a sub-human monster. Put so schematically, *The Fly* would seem to confirm the accusations of self-defeating pessimism made against Cronenberg by critics like Robin Wood. The evil forces within (particularly male) individuals quickly overcome the good, and external agencies are either indifferent or powerless to contain and manage them (Seth builds his telepods without supervision or interference from Bartok Science Industries, while his rival in love, *Particle Magazine* editor Stathis Borans, seems to enjoy a similar autonomy within Monolith Publishing).

This emphasis on the individual detached from society and institutions clearly puts Cronenberg's work outside the 'progressive' strand of modern horror identified by Wood and others in, for example, George Romero's films. It belongs rather within more extreme Gothic traditions in which the human body becomes the external site of an internal struggle between ego and id, 'good' and 'bad' psychic forces, providing a metaphor for modern anxieties about the loss of individual identity in a dislocated, divided self. This tradition, rather than attempting political or social criticism, radically questions what it means to be human, seeing progress in limited, individual terms (if it is possible at all—generally, an apocalyptic act of destruction is the only solution to the disintegration of human values).

In *The Fly*, Seth's mutation into Brundefly is presented explicitly as a loss of humanity consequent upon sexual desire going out of control: he teleports himself prematurely to punish Veronica for leaving him to go to Stathis, an act of power and revenge which is also a fall from grace. Jeff Goldblum's wide-eyed performance perfectly expresses Seth's engaging innocence, at the same time presaging his transformation into bug-eyed monster; and he gives that transformation a tragic dimension as Seth, at first unaware that the violent change in his personality is the result of his fusion with the fly, and convinced that he has freed himself from the shackles of straight society, suddenly comes to realise that he is in the process of mutation and that it is irreversible. This self-knowledge (manifested in a series of very funny cracks at the expense of his physical and mental deterioration) redeems him up to a point, and there are two very touching scenes, one in which Veronica, having witnessed Seth uncontrollably vomiting, losing an ear and sundry other parts, loves him enough to suspend her disgust and embrace him, and another where Seth, at a more advanced stage of transformation, asks Veronica to help him become human again, but then sends her away because he knows he will hurt her if she stays.

Love is not enough to save Seth, however; he mutates into a monstrous, uncontrollable id and has to be put down – leaving Veronica holding the baby, so to speak. Indeed, she is already responsible for quite a lot: for seducing Seth in the first place and triggering the jealousy which leads to his tragic decline, for instance. And it is in her that the film invests the human values of compassion and co-operation (though in the beginning it's not clear whether she acts out of love or career ambitions). All this may seem more of a burden than a tribute to feminine values, but there is no doubt that the future will be better left to Veronica than either Seth or Stathis.

This *Fly* has little in common with the 1958 version of which it is supposed to be a remake, and which appears positively discreet by comparison. Cronenberg's films (*The Dead Zone* apart) usually contain a high disgust quotient, and *The Fly* is no exception – Seth's transformation and his repulsive insect habits are graphically portrayed. For many, this is the unacceptable face of the horror film, but then Cronenberg has always worked outside conventional boundaries, in the cracks and crevices of human experience. It is there, after all, that we hide what we would rather not know.

Pam Cook, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, February 1987