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**Q&A with Stuart Cohen on John Carpenter's The Thing**

**Stuart Cohen, co-producer of The Thing, very kindly agreed to take questions about the movie from Outpost #31. Stuart also writes a uniquely informative** [**blog**](http://theoriginalfan.blogspot.com/) **on his experiences making The Thing.  As such, he has been doing a tremendous service to The Thing fan community, for which we are highly grateful.**

**All of the questions were submitted by members of our discussion** [**forums**](http://thethingfan.fr.yuku.com/)**.  Here they are, presented in the order in which they were** [**asked**](http://thethingfan.fr.yuku.com/viewtopic.php?t=3717)**, along with Mr. Cohen's answers.   You can still submit questions and, if you lucky, Stuart might answer them.**

**Gary asks:**

In John W. Campbell's short story and Alan Dean Foster's novelization, there is absolutely no doubt that when somebody has been taken over by The Thing, the original person is dead and only his personality and memories are retained by the Thing in order to create a perfect imitation. This is the dialogue that confirms it in the original short story.

(...)

Kinner shuddered violently. "Hey. Hey, Mac, would I know if I was a monster? Would I know if the monster had already got me? Oh Lord, I may be a monster already."

"You'd know," MacReady answered.

"But we wouldn't," Norris laughed shortly, half-hysterically.

(...)

However, in the documentary "Terror takes shape" featured on the DVD and Blu-Ray of John Carpenter's The Thing, Charles Hallahan says that the actors wondered if you would know if you were a Thing. He concluded by saying that Norris didn't know that he was infected but on a subconscious level, he was. This completely contradicts the short story and the novelization and doesn't make sense to me, as Blair would probably have realized that something was wrong when he was building a UFO for instance, which was not a very "human" thing to do.

So, my question, taken directly from Outpost31's FAQ: there is no doubt about it in the short story and in the novelization, but in the movie, does a Thing know that they are a Thing?

***I listened to the DVD commentary again recently and I was surprised that Charles spoke of that. Our working presumption was that of the novella – and is really the only way to dramatically proceed. I think that Charles is referring to the sort of speculative discussion one has discussing motivation sitting around a table with other actors examining ways to play the role, but never intended to be put into effect… In any case, for our storytelling purposes I know John had all the actors play things absolutely straight, including Blair…***

**ChariotsOfTheGods asks:**

When was Blair assimilated? Specifically, was it before or after the radio room incident?

***Most definitely before…***

**Jeremy asks**

Mr. Cohen, in the deleted out takes of this film...there was this scene where Bennings seems to be taking out the trash and from our point of view we notice that he's not alone. Who is this shadowy character supposed to be?

Here's the scene in question

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Xu2cFljkPw>

It begins at 2:00 mark...

***Intended to be Blair, but never seen…***

**Mr. Noc asks:**

Was there any actual difference between the coat that Childs wore throughout the movie and the one at the end, or were they the same coat?

***I think it’s the same coat. I sent Rob Ager a fan letter when I first saw his analysis which I thought was thoroughgoing and scholarly, but I don’t believe there was anything specifically planned by John to indicate identity at the end. The scene was re-worked so many different times in editing in order to save it from being entirely cut that anything that arises ( Child’s lack of breath in two cuts, for instance ) was probably accidental…***

**Mr. Carmichael asks:**

Who killed Fuchs or was it suicide, either way who jumped him in the lights out scene?

***Ah, poor Fuchs – his off-screen demise was brought on by a combination of lack of time and money.  John disliked the way he had originally shot it, so something simple had to be devised for the location shoot in Stewart. We left open –ended  the idea of murder or suicide. Neither John nor I have a clue  as to who ran by Fuchs in the hallway – it was designed that way. Your guess in this instance is literally better than ours…***

Who set up MacReady with the torn shorts and who turned his light in his shack?

***Left open ended***

Was there a definite idea whether Childs or Mac was infected at the end?

***No definite idea***

Was Norris keeling over a true heart attack (the thing assimilating even his flaws) or a cell by cell assimilation reaching its end?

***Yes, we presumed the heart attack to be real…***

Who got to the blood, who took the keys and how did they get back to Gary?

***We don’t stipulate, was done off camera after Windows dropped them and then planted back onto Gary…***

Who was assimilated first; Palmer or Blair and did you ascertain timescales for Blair? (He studied the thing's cellular propagation at a computer before going nuts, a very 'unthing' act.)

***No certain timeline, but Blair early on, presumably before Palmer… don’t know that I necessarily agree with you about an “unthing “ act… could be a clever thing to do…***

Was there an idea as to the Thing's origins?

***No, not really. Endless discussions about this with writers before John came on as director, almost none thereafter – for the purposes of this story, it really does not matter – think of the creature as the ultimate distillation of  the Howard Hawks credo – a character  defined by its actions, doing what it has to to survive…***

Was there a plan as to what actually happened at the Norwegian camp? (excluding the prequel, obviously).

***No, the idea here simply  was to create an overall impression that all hell had broken loose, let you fill in the details in your own mind and carry that idea back to Outpost 31. Detail was in fact stripped from this scene, not added…***

What actually happened to the full and scripted lights out scene?

***Cut by John – felt it slowed things up…***

What happened to the scripted scene were the men listen to a tape from the Norwegian camp were a thing attack can be heard in the background.

***Originally a part of the Norwegian Camp sequence, then re-written as part of the video review scene, this was not shot…***

What changes were made from the 1st draft to the 2nd draft of Lancaster’s script?

***Bill’s first draft script, while several months late, was right on the money with the characters and dialogue you love to quote 95%  there. I don’t think much changed except some formatting done to make the script acceptable for widespread studio publication. The changes really began occurring from 2nd to 3rd and beyond, with Rob and budget considerations the biggest reasons…***

Was the Nauls death via the Blair box monster as bad as is made out?

***Well, we laughed at the test footage – probably not a good sign…***

Are there any deleted scenes as yet unknown?

***Kudos to Outpost 31’s deleted scenes page – I don’t think so, no. Perhaps some dialogue extensions here and there…***

Why was the story changed from them directly finding the thing to them coming across it via the Norwegians?

***A way to open the story up and get it away from Outpost 31 without sacrificing tension.  Bill Lancaster’s brilliant idea…***

Where there any sequel plans tossed around at the time?

***Absolutely not – as I’ve written about, we were accused at the time of deliberately leaving things open ended to encourage the idea of a sequel, which didn’t sit well with the audience –  times have changed…***

**Boomwolf asks:**

How many different "thing-outs" were conceived for the different characters, and were there ever any concept drawings?

***See below***

In the script, Norris and Palmer's "Thing-outs" are quite different from the final film. Norris is burned before hurting anyone, and Palmer-Thing Kills Copper instead of Windows (Sanchez) ALSO, Macready also fights Palmer thing "Mano-a-Thingo" when it "Windows" Copper to death. Mac literally goes to town on the nasty with some kind of steel tool! He still blows Palmer up, only he blows up INSIDE, Sending THING CELLS everywhere...

Was this changed because it didn't mesh well with the Idea of a single cell taking over an organism?

***No. The scenes you refer to were written by Bill Lancaster before Rob Bottin came on board. Keep in mind this script was also a sales tool to convince the studio to make the film, and Bill had to come up with something and write it in some detail. Once Rob joined, everything was re-conceived. Bill took an active part in many of the meetings and re-wrote the script to fit…***

Why did the "Norris-SPIDER-HEAD" wander out of its hiding place? Was Palmer's "betrayal” of a fellow Thing a scheme cooked up between Palmer-Thing and Norris-Thing to insure the trust of the humans if one of them was ousted?

Did the things have different identities, or is it one "Mind" with many bodies?

***I think we assumed they were operating independently..***

Was the thing ever supposed to have any sort of telepathy, either between its own assimilated forms, or even having the ability to read human minds? (as in the Campbell version – XidiouX)

***No, Bill Lancaster eliminated the telepathy element – we were having enough trouble explaining the mechanics of basic assimilation…***

A cut action scene involved Mac, Childs, and Bennings chasing infected sled dogs over the ice. How for did this scene make it before it was decided to be cut, and why was it cut? Were any creatures designed or as-of-yet unseen drawings produced? What would the running time of the entire scene be had it been shot?

Were there ever any discussions on whether or not the thing might speak during the film?

***I can confidently say this is the first time I have been asked this question. No, but now that we know The Thing can sing…***

How many different endings were discussed?

***Discussed with John and Bill, only the one – three were shot and or edited…***

Were Kurt Russell or Keith David ever contractually signed on for a sequel, if the film did well? (if it hadn't been a poor reception)

***No***

 Do you think E. T. was a real reason for the film doing so poorly?

***Partly, but I think now it had more to do with the time – I am writing a long piece on this…***

Would audiences have felt differently if the fates of Macready and Childs had been less bleak and uncertain?

***See above***

 Was the "original" form of the thing ever shown in the film? Were there any bits and pieces that were "thing-original"? Was the "true" form ever planned to make an appearance?

***The closest thing to a true form would have been the originally envisioned Blair monster, with bits and pieces of its many assimilations ( as well as a partial Nauls ) – most of this was jettisoned because of time and money…***

If Blair WAS a Thing before destroying the radio....did he REALLY kill all the dogs? How does that explain the alternate ending showing a dog fleeing the camp? Were all the dogs accounted for? The dog that knocks Clark down, was it ever caught?

***Yes. Forget about the fake alternate ending…***

Why were some gory scenes from the Norwegian camp not in the film, specifically the scene with the severed arm caught in a door? Was this ever filmed?

***No, never filmed…***

One of the proposed endings included Macready trying to flush the Thing out in an amusing scene where he brings the outpost down around them with the snowplow, whilst singing a Mexican tune loudly. This scene is similar to a fight at the end of James Cameron's "ALIENS" Is this a coincidence?

***Interesting - I would think it’s a co-incidence, but wasn’t James Cameron hanging around the set of Escape From New York ? Bill was writing the script during that time…***

Considering The Thing came out first...

Had Rob Bottin not taken over the creature designs, do you think the Dale Kuipers "Thing" would have been better received by audiences? Which did you personally prefer, when it came time to choose the monster?

***As a single entity I  actually think Dale’s would have been harder to execute, forcing John into quicker cuts, etc.  I love Rob’s concept and think it fits perfectly with the films overall tone – a de-constructivist monster among  men in the process themselves of literally falling apart…***

 WHAT WAS THE LOGIC BEHIND HAVING FLAMETHROWERS IN ANTARCTICA?  Even Child's sounded surprised.

***None – but we liked the visual metaphor – fire and ice…***

**Jeremy asks:**

Mr Cohen, I know that the film isn't released yet but what are your thoughts on the upcoming prequel?

***My former partner is involved, so no comment…***

**Mr. Noc asks:**

On the DVD commentary track, Carpenter comments that they "didn't get it quite right" regarding the Thing's life cycle but that "it doesn't matter." From this it may be concluded that the goal with the computer sequence was not truly accomplished, so it must therefore be regarded with scepticism.

What is a more accurate look at the thing's life cycle?

***The computer sequences were re-written and re-shot to make it as simple as possible for the audience to understand the basic mechanics of assimilation (A into B, Dog becomes Man, etc. ), John’s biggest concern. Everything else was incidental…***

**Mr. Carmichael asks:**

What happened with the original dog kennel scene when it begins to attack the other dogs? The making of mentioned a vibrating dog built by Bottin and there are glimpses in the trailer of the dogs attacking the thing dog before it's face bursts open.

***The vibrating dog in the end looked too mechanical, and was cut…***

At what point in the shoot did you decide to go with the more low key ending over the scripted version (the one that involved MacReady taking on the Blair monster with a bulldozer).

***When we couldn’t afford the scripted version…***

Why have more behind the scenes shots failed to surface over the years? I for one would love to see more shots of Bottin's work without the goop.

***Most of the unseen footage you are aware of was cut around the same time. The reel that exists has been formatted into television aperture, which tells me it was probably meant to be included in that dumb ass version the studio prepared… perhaps that’s the only reason it still exists…***

Palmer thing has the same mutated hands as the Bennings thing and his transformation isn't as dramatic as the rest (as Bottin himself has admitted he isn't as pleased with it as the rest.) Was the budget running thin at this point?

***I’m sure you are right about the hands – I hadn’t thought of it, but as I’ve written about we were short on money and time at that point…***

Why was the MacReady blow-up doll stuff cut?

***It seemed more odd than funny, out of place. One of the earliest things cut…***

Was there a back-story made up for any of the characters but most specifically MacReady

***No.***

Also does he have a first name? (Also the other characters – we only seem to know that Bennings’s given name is George – XidiouX)

***Not that I remember***

Where there any characters that were difficult to cast and did anyone pass on the parts at all?

***I am currently writing about this and it will be up on the blog sometime soon…***

Was the lighting on the set all done with existing practicals or using stage lighting? I ask because it looks like it has been perfectly lit by the overhead lamps above rather than stage lighting.

***Yes, you are correct – we think of it as source lighting , and is accomplished by making it look like the room is lit by lamps, windows, etc. in the frame. In fact the studio mistakenly built a lighting grid above the set which Dean never used….***

What did Universal think of the film before it was decimated by ET and the reviews came in?

***Mostly disappointment. In the words of one executive, the film just “missed”. If you have any doubt what the film was thought of in certain quarters, take a look at the bastardized T.V. version, prepared without our knowledge…***

Did JC spend many takes getting the performances perfect or was the majority of it sorted out with rehearsals, also how involved was JC with the actors on set and getting those nuanced performances is the majority of it down to the old adage: 'Cast right and ninety per cent of your performance problems are over.'

***Really, a combination of all of the above, but rehearsals helped. All of the actors brought a lot with them to work with…***

Was there anymore stuff planned for the spaceship, was there meant to be an interior to it, etc.?

***No.***

The film is a masterpiece but if there was one thing better than it IMO it was Lancaster's script. If the film had had its 25 mill to pull of Lancaster's initial script do you believe the film would have gone down in history as a master piece rather than the cult film it has become.

***Not necessarily, but I agree it would have been fun to see more of Bill’s if we could have afforded it…***

Was anything planned by Bottin that couldn't be achieved due to budget reasons but would have been epic?

***Nothing you haven’t heard of…***

Did JC have anything to do with the writing process or was it all Lancaster?

***I am addressing this in an upcoming piece…***

**McTimmah asks:**

I've watched the film countless times now, and think there are a lot of wonderful little moments that encourage speculation, however there was always one scene in particular that I wondered about, and that is when MacReady goes to visit the wreckage of the alien's spacecraft.

When Mac goes out to the wreckage, he brings Norris and Palmer with him, both who are later revealed to be Things themselves. At least one of them had to be infected at this point, though I think the general assumption was that they were both probably infected by this point in the narrative. If that is the case however, how come neither took the very easy opportunity to infect MacReady here when they were far away from the rest of the group?

***Interesting, but we don’t know when Norris was infected – if not, would change the odds in Macs favour…***

**Mooretallica asks:**

Hi Mr Cohen,

It has always been my firm belief that Palmer was assimilated during Blair's meltdown when he destroys the communications equipment. During this scene he is the only absent person. I believe that an event in which a team member was shooting at other team members would attract everyone. If Palmers absence during this scene was not a clue by JC, why was the actor playing Palmer not in this scene? I can’t imagine JC giving him the day off for no reason.

We know the thing imitates, but do the cells take on the function as well as the form?  Norris' head sprouts eyes when it escapes, and Blair thing looks around, turning his head when assimilating Gary. Does this mean that the imitated human eyes are actually working as eyes?

Thanks for your time

Mooretallica

***I asked David Clennon this on your behalf at a reunion screening in Los Angeles recently to see if he remembered anything out of the ordinary, and he didn’t.  We think John simply had trouble staging the scene in those narrow corridors with 12 guys, and eliminated several…sure, we presumed the eyes worked as eyes…***

**Ravege asks:**

Ok, I don't have a plot specific question, as I like the movie ambiguous.

***Good man***

So production question:

Was the Norwegian camp, in fact, filmed using the remains of the American base? Is the Norwegian interior filmed using any of the interior sets of the American base, or some part of the base whose interior we never see?

***Yes, the back part of the base – my idea, kept us in one location, saved 250,000 – the Norwegian camp interior was a separate set on stage***

**VAGABOND asks:**

Hello, first time poster here.

I know there are already tons of super-specific questions and these have been asked already, but, I'd love to know the answers (or your best guesses) to the general timeline questions for the things that happened off-screen so we can all go back and watch the movie knowing who is doing what and where at all times. I think that would be so cool

For example:

- The point in times where Blair and Norris were assimilated and by which thing (Dog, Palmer, cell contamination)

***We don’t know***

**ChariotsOfTheGods asks:**

Question: When writing and filming the movie, was Antarctica's unusual first-week-of-Winter day/night cycle taken into account with relation to the exterior lighting in each scene?

***No.***

**Splitface asks:**

What really happened after the landing at Outpost 31? Which one of the two characters is played by Larry Franco and who plays the other Norwegian?"

***I notice there has been some confusion recently on this. Larry Franco ( our esteemed assistant director) was shooting at the dog  from the helicopter. Larry Franco also blows himself and the helicopter up. Norbert Weisser (taller, thinner ) goes after the dog and is shot by Gary….***

**Jeremy asks:**

Why was Blair making a noose? ( I remember seeing a still shot from a pamphlet that came with the DVD of Wilford Brimley holding a rope)

***A wonderful touch by Bill Lancaster – this is part of Blair playing possum, a theatrical way to convince  McCready and the others that he really was over the bend…***

**XidiouX asks:**

Can we expect a new release with perhaps additional features to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the film next year?

***I don’t know – probably time for someone to do a little digging.***

Carpenter has expressed some dissatisfaction with the ultimate form of the Palmer-Thing.  I read, in Anne Billson’s book, that the original intention was to have another head come out of Palmer’s head and have seen such a monster illustrated in Dale Kuipers’s Sketchbook.   If this is the case, what were the problems with realising this monster?

***No, this all evolved well after Dale left the film. There were no discussions on how to execute anything Dale did – it was too early on in the process… The scene now is one in which the mechanics begin to show…***

There’s a lot of green goo during The Thing’s transformations.  Was there any discussion of what this is in terms of the creature’s biology?

***Not in terms of the creatures biology, but absolutely intentional in trying to avoid comparisons with real life blood – letting. The best example would be Norris’s head separating and beginning to move off the table. We all had real concern that this would be way over the top if there was too much red – Rob himself insisted on using green and yellow, comic book colors to try to make clear that this was no longer a human being. It didn’t seem to work at the time. Many people still thought they were looking at a slow motion human decapitation, and this was the partial origin of all the gore –pornographer charges that were beginning to circulate…***

My view is that Windows was the last to have the keys (as seen around the time he discovers Bennings.)  If this was the case, did he run down the corridor to break up the argument over the issue before it started to focus on him?

***Windows does have the keys and you hear him drop them off camera..***

Was there intended to be have been any antipathy between Windows and (the human) Palmer?

***There was more of this sort of byplay between all of the characters shot, but whittled down in editing…***

If so, was the fact that the Palmer-Thing chose to attack Windows intended to convey something about the nature of The Thing, in relation to the organism it is an imitation of?

***No***

What was the purpose of the fluid that The Thing sprayed on the dogs?

***I don’t know – seemed like the right thing to do at the time…***

What was the intended significance of the chess game?

***None beyond the usual – no specific significance with the number of pieces, their positions, etc.***

Is it mere coincidence that the movie (almost) begins and ends with characters picking up live explosives about to go off?

***Yep.***

Did Blair ‘catch’ The Thing during either of the autopsies?

***Blair was infected off – camera…***

During the opening sequence, the alien ship is seen to tilt suddenly as it approaches Earth.  Was this intended to indicate something significant happening on board, such as a struggle over the controls?

***No, only that the craft was having trouble…***

**Continuation on our discussion forums...**

**ChariotsOfTheGods comments:**

Maybe this is obvious already, but I've never seen it mentioned and I think it's worthwhile.

In the kennel scene when the Thing sprays stuff at the first dog, there is some looped editing going on. First we see a long shot of the dog getting sprayed and not really enjoying it, and then we see a left-side closer shot of the exact same action. One take, two camera angles.

I just think it is cool that JC used editing to make the sequence feel longer, rather than subject the dog to more duress. At least that's how I imagine things happened.

***GREAT attention was paid to the welfare of the dogs in this scene. John is a dog lover (check out his Facebook page for charities he supports), as am I ( I work with abused dogs in my spare time). I'll write about the precautions taken on my blog in the near future...***

**9114117 asks:**

I would like to ask to Mr. Cohen if he could give to us some details about the various early designs of the Thing in the first scripts and if this one was always seen as a mimetic lifeform as in the short story, when Tobe Hopper was hired ( John Carpenter said he had read some deleted scripts including a very complete description of the alien lifeform, it would be nice to have more on it ).

Are the drawings from unknown artists seen on The Thing's DVD ( with short-story reminiscence ) were based on the scripts or made freely from John Campbell's story?

***I regret to say I remember almost nothing about the monster in Kim and Tobe's script - the story and characters didn't work, so by the time it was revealed it didn't really matter...  
  
David Wiltse's script rejected the idea of a organic entity in favor of some sort of abstract hovering light sculpture..  
  
The early designs on the DVD were influenced by the novella....***

**Checkers Wizard asks:**

Hi Stuart,  
  
I have a few questions for you.  
  
Having recently re-watched the syndicated T.V. version of The Thing (complete with blinking corpse, Jans Bolen), it's testament to just how good a movie it is, that it can withstand having almost all the effects sequences removed, extraneous shoddy dialogue and scenes inserted, and a ruinous ending replete with "keep watching the skies" sentiment tacked on, and still seem pretty darned bullet proof!  
  
Thankfully, here in the U.K. we have the BBC (whose programming has no advertising, so no commercial breaks) and our independent television stations are not slave to a corporate sponsor - so usually we just get the theatrical cut unmolested, or at worst, with small cuts for extreme violence or profanity.  
  
The American Syndicated T.V. version of The Thing is quite something to behold, and there are many things to discuss about it. But the thing that has me most amused right now, is how it continually misunderstands who Blair is, or what his state of mind is at any given time :  
  
During the computer simulation sequence, the Blair "sound-alike" is reading aloud the onscreen text (I've never actually met an American who can't read, but the T.V. syndicates seem to think you **all** need spoon feeding).  
  
The inflections in the actors voice leave you in no doubt that the information appearing on the computer screen is all unexpected news to Blair.  
  
Clearly in Carpenter's cut of the movie, Blair has himself written that simulation programme. And having input that data in to the computer, asks it to calculate the probability that members of the team may be infected.   
  
The computer crunches the numbers and comes back with an answer of 75%.  
  
Taking this data in to consideration, he now asks the computer to project what would happen if the intruder organism reached civilised areas.  
  
The computer spends a while calculating the variables, and comes back with the answer "Entire world population infected 27,000 hours from first contact."  
  
Blair is being pro-active and thinking several moves ahead.  
  
But in the T.V. cut, Blair is shown to be passively absorbing the exposition that the computer has rather generously decide to spew out of it's own accord.  
  
Then, even more bafflingly, at the end of the movie, when the audience is in no doubt that Blair is The Thing - he attacks Garry, fusing his "hand" in to his victims face, and proclaims :  
  
"The whole damn world's in jeopardy! Nobody gets out of here. Nobody!"  
  
Talk about a character being conflicted.  
  
The line is looped in from the Radio Room scene, where Blair's intent is to save humanity from infection by isolating the team completely.  
  
By the time he is in full Thing-out, and assimilating Garry, what on earth did the T.V. syndicates think he was trying to do, other than **get out of Antarctica and jeopardise the whole world**?  
  
The mind boggles (though that might explain the removal of the "Blair's project" craft subplot).  
  
And then finally, you have that tacked on ending that completely undermines the official ending, by leaving you in no doubt that The Thing got away.  
  
  
1. I suspect we all know the answer to this question, but was there any attempt by the network to consult with the studio or film makers about the changes being made to make the film both T.V audience friendly, and T.V. format friendly (both in terms of commercial breaks, subplot deletions, and pan & scan reframing)?  
  
2. How do John and yourself react to this version (angrily, with the resignation that this was par for the course at the time, or with a sense of humour)?  
  
3. What was the situation with the D.G.A. regarding the title, as it's not really any longer "John Carpenter's The Thing"? More like "NBC's The Thing".  
  
4. So how *did* this Monkey Fella wake up after thousands of years in the ice? http://static.yuku.com/domain/bypass/images/lol.gif  
  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4t6zNZ-b0A>  
  
Priceless!

***We now refer to this as the MSTK3000 version of the film. It was prepared without our knowledge, consultation, or approval. I sat open-mouthed watching it when it premiered on CBS television in what I think was a late-night slot. Network television then was still the most important aftermarket revenue producer ( cable and VHS in its infancy ) and I fully expected them to slash the effects sequences to pieces, but I was unprepared for the magnitude of the changes. The destruction was so complete, I didn't initially feel angry, just stunned...  
  
If you wanted concrete evidence of the low esteem the executive branch at Universal Studios held for THE THING at the time of its release, this is it. They considered it bereft of narrative drive (hence the added narration and unseen 3rd person narrator) lacking proper character development ( hence the back story descriptions ) and was dull, confusing and slow ( music now everywhere to help move it along, as in the blood test scene). John has been quoted elsewhere referring to this version as the one where " Sid Sheinberg tried to teach me how to make a horror movie". Sheinberg was then the President of Universal Studios, and made it known at the previews he was no fan of the film ( he got into a well-publicised fight with Terry Gilliam a few years later with BRAZIL). This version is really his work...  
  
GGiven the animosity displayed at the time, I now think we got lucky in being able to release the film as it stands - John did not have the right contractually to final cut, and the studio could easily have taken it away from him ( as it turns out, they later DID, with this version). Great credit is due to the executives on the PRODUCTION side of Universal (Ned Tannen and Helena Hacker) who behaved responsively and allowed us our head, even though they took some flack for it ( don't forget we were allowed to restore the original ending at the last moment).  
  
With THE THING's reputation now restored, John and I both hoped this version was dead and buried, but thanks to the internet and YouTube this probably won't happen, so all I can say is we both don't recommend this highly enough...***

***PP.S. - I realize you guys have one thing to thank Sid Sheinberg for - the deleted scenes footage on the DVD. These were re-formatted for this version, which is why they appear on the DVD in 1:33...***

**Mr Carmichael asks:**

Could you shine some light onto why Carpenter never wrote the movie himself in the first place?

***John half-jokingly said he had reached the point in his career where he didn't have to write - he could pass the misery along to someone else...***

**CplFerro asks:**

Has anyone ever considered how dangerous it is to have a functional flamethrower on a movie set? I mean, it's not like a firearm, that might, in almost every case, be loaded with blanks. Were there dummy flamethrowers that the actors wore most of the time, only switching to a real one when the scene required it? How did they tell the difference between the dummies and the reals?

***Flamethrower practice was held on an empty sound stage, usually after cast read throughs ( with John and Kurt being the most enthusiastic participants ).These were under the watchful eyes of Roy Arbogast ( our special effects foreman ) and a Los Angeles Fire Marshall, who was always present while filming, along with a wide array of extinguishing equipment. The flamethrowers the cast wore were real, just not filled with propellant... lf-jokingly said he had reached the point in his career where he didn't have to write - he could pass the misery along to someone else...***

**9114346 asks:**

So I just got this on blu-ray, and at the very beginning of the film, just before you see the helicopter for the 1st time, you can see the mountains in the background scrolling past!?! I'm guessing this is how the special effect is done.. I've checked my DVD version too, but on the blu-ray it's much more obvious....  
It's at 0:02:20. Just after 'Antarctica, Winter 1982'...t really looks like a matt painting.

**Checkers Wizard comments:**

What you have there is the camera in a Helicopter, about 1/2 a mile from the mountain range, shooting on I'd guess about 100mm (anamorphic) lens.  
  
The Camera Helicopter is hovering from right to left, and also closing the distance to the mountain range (which itself appears to be somewhat horseshoe shaped - the apex being the furthest point from camera, the ends closet to camera - as well as being taller at the ends than in the middle, where the "Hero" helicopter appears) in a slow arc.  
  
In the foreground is the ice field, in the mid-ground is the mountain range and the "Hero" helicopter, and in the background is another distant mountain range.  
  
Even though the middle (low point) of the mountain range, and the "Hero" helicopter appear fairly static in the frame, they are actually rotating anti-clockwise, which is why the perspective of the distant mountains in the background is constantly changing, giving the impression that they are scrolling along sideways.  
  
Below is a very crude diagram :  
  
..............(Distant Mountains)

MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM  
  
MMMMMMMMmmm.......mmmMMMMMMM (Mid-Ground Mountains)  
  
............CH:B  
  
............................................CH:A  
  
CH:A = Camera Helicopter point A  
  
CH:B = Camera Helicopter point B  
  
If you imagine the Camera Helicopter moving from point A to point B, looking through the gap in the middle of the Mid-Ground Mountains, from point A it can see the word "Distant" on the Distant Mountains (like the Hollywood sign).  
  
When it reaches point B it can see the word "Mountains" (and throughout the duration of the shot the words have appeared to scroll past).  
  
I hope that makes things more clear.

***Correct. It's only what the camera saw. There is no matte work..***

**XidiouX comments:**

Great new update about the sound and how The Thing's signature polyphonic scream was created. Very sad to hear about Bill Varney - the [in memoriam](http://www.outpost31.com/movie/memoriam.html) page on the site has been updated. Hope Stuart doesn't mind me borrowing his very nice picture.

***Bill Varney's favorite character was Garry. He usually ended the work day by stating he wasn't "going to spend the rest of the winter tied to this fucking chair". Years later you would run into him on the street and ask him how things were going. He would assume a vacant stare and say "It's gone, MacCready"...***

**Checkers Wizard asks:**

Hi Stuart,  
  
Thanks for the terrific update. It throws up a few more questions :  
  
1. You mention "Rob's effects work was still in full swing, his operation a few minutes away" which must mean you were mixing not to a locked picture (some things never change).  
  
At what rate were new cuts of the picture coming in, and how did this re-balancing effect the schedule?  
  
2. You state "The low drone sound that begins as MacCready and Co. slowly approach is a **sound effect**, actually background air conditioner hum sharpened, shaped, and eventually pushed to absurd levels".  
  
I have to admit, I'd always thought that was one of John and Alan's synth cues (it sounds just like a Prophet-5). It's an incredibly resonant filer sweep, was it processed through a synthesiser's filter section (Korg MS-20 maybe)?  
  
3. Regarding the blurring of lines between score and sound effects, I think it's worth mentioning the Stinger created by Alan Howarth, that sells the two pop-up scares (the "Shape" startling Fuchs, and the appearance of Blair when he attacks Garry).  
  
That Stinger is fundamental to those scene's, but is technically part of the score. So, had John & Alan submitted their cues prior to the final mix commencing, and was it always planned that they would provide those stingers (were they in fact submitted as separate elements from their musical cues, or embedded in the mix)?  
  
I brought up some of these points in relation to Anne Billson expressing an interest in the technical aspects of the film, where I also drew attention to [David Lewis Yewdall's book](http://www.amazon.com/Practical-Motion-Picture-Fourth-Edition/dp/0240812409/ref=sr_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1335837110&sr=1-3) (I see there have been several more editions since I bought my copy dammit).  
  
4. There is mention in that book, with regard to The Thing, where he is talking about an academic/critic analysing the sound, and specifically the use of a heartbeat sound effect to build tension during the blood test sequence (I think either the critic or David is mistaken, as the sound occurs somewhere else in the film - possibly Bennings assimilation, I can't quite remember as it's only really audible in theatres).  
  
David points out that the academic/critic has invented this interpretation. In actual fact the "heartbeat" sound effect is a magnetic thump caused by either a botched bulk erase of the sep-mag, or the accidental gaussing of the metal rack on which the film was stored (I can't remember off the top of my head) - naturally, as the low frequency thump prints through to the middle of the reel's core, the length of tape between thumps get shorter, so the "heartbeat" appears to increase its pace.  
  
I was curious as to how much of a problem this presented at the mixing stage, and what other horrors you ran in to along the way?  
  
By the way, The Thing is one of my all time favourite sound mixes (others being Alien, Blade Runner and The Terminator - specifically the original mono mix).  
  
In those days they knew how (and were afforded the time) to tailor a specific sound element, and add sweeteners to punch it up. Sadly, nowadays insane schedules seem to result in a cacophony of competing sweeteners, and no central sound element.

***When we began the mix Rob was behind schedule. We had no Blair Monster at all, and were missing several close-ups in the Palmer transformation. Also had no final matte work from Al Whitlock... The first several weeks were spent pre-mixing dialogue and effects tracks for scenes that were complete, which bought us some time...  
  
John and Alan added their stuff after John had completed editing Morricone's score into the picture and had reached a determination on what he needed to add - they recorded at night, and something would show up the next morning ( I usually heard the tracks for the first time at the mix ). The stingers you mention were provided as separate elements...  
  
Things were meant to be kept very quiet during the blood test scene - there certainly no intent to provide any sort of subliminal heartbeat motif here, or anyplace else. We did have a problem with the six 70mm prints made for release containing six track magnetic soundtracks. They would sound fine initially, but begin a "motorboating" sound that got progressively worse. Turned out that the glue holding the soundtracks in place hadn't sufficiently dried, and the tracks themselves were physically sliding around - several more days in cool storage did the trick...***

**Checkers Wizard asks:**

Hi Stuart,  
  
Thanks so much for the further enlightenment Stuart.  
  
Sadly I wasn't fortunate enough to see a 70mm print (did they make it to the U.K.?) only 35mm, and later digital presentation when Universal gave it a limited theatrical re-run in 2009 - it had been digitally remastered.  
  
How do you feel your original theatrical mix translated, having been remixed in 5.1 (lossy) for DVD and eventually Blu-ray?  
  
I ask because, besides the reinstatement of Stevie Wonder's "Superstition" and the obvious benefits to clarity, frequency response and separation, it sounds exactly as I remember it sounding in mono and stereo versions.  
  
Obviously great care and respect went into the remix, and presumably great care had gone in to archiving the original sound elements.  
  
Conversely, the stereo and surround mixes of James Cameron's The Terminator (made for the DVD, and now the only way it is ever presented) are an absolutely ruinous abomination, that completely disregard the fantastic work originally done in the mono mix (presumably the original sound elements had been lost, and there was insufficient time and money to either track them down, or attempt to replicate them).  
  
Do you feel you dodged a bullet with regards to how things could have gone for the conversion to DVD, and was the archiving of the films various sound and picture elements (as well as production archives) something you were directly instrumental in organising, or was that Universal's responsibility?

*We did have a problem with the six 70mm prints made for release containing six track magnetic soundtracks. They would sound fine initially, but begin a "motorboating" sound that got progressively worse. Turned out that the glue holding the soundtracks in place hadn't sufficiently dried, and the tracks themselves were physically sliding around - several more days in cool storage did the trick...*

Cripes!  
  
I've only noticed the phenomena Dave Yewdall was referring to in the theatre, during the 2009 remastered re-issue, and it was not during the blood test scene (it may be audible on the DVD/Blu-ray if you were to crank up the sub-woofer excessively???).  
  
I meant to ask in my previous post :  
  
There is a brief moment during the opening sequence, during the beat between the UFO disappearing in to the atmosphere, and the title burning on to the screen, where there is a droning sound, like that of a distant propeller plane.  
  
I could never figure out if it was part of John and Alan's synth cue, or a sound effect, but it totally sets the tone of the film for me (it's like the perfect sound sandwich, between the swirl of the UFO and the sear of the title).  
  
Do you happen to know what that sound is?  
  
Also, for anyone who is interested :  
  
If you skip to 03:05 you'll find the raw audio of Foley artist John Post, having fun creating squishy sounds for The Thing's autopsy scene, using paper towels soaked in egg yolks.  
  
Thanks again.

***I know the film a had 70mm release in Europe, Japan, and Australia, but did not have a hand in supervising the print run - the six prints made for release here were gorgeous, essentially handmade, used for the cast and crew screening and critics screenings on both coasts, and all totally trashed by the end of the first week in theatres due to the platter system...  
  
THE THING, as I'm sure you know, was mixed in Dolby Surround which meant no dedicated surround information, as in Dolby digital. It had in its original mix a remarkably active sound field for it's time, done primarily by manipulating frequency response and phase relationships ( the gunshots in the opening appearing to come over the audience's head from the right rear to the left front channel, for instance...  
  
I smiled when I read your statement about materials being carefully archived. I wouldn't have given a plugged nickel for their survival two weeks after release. This brings to mind the following story: After John and I had chosen ONE CHAIN DON'T MAKE NO PRISON to substitute for SUPERSTITION in the non-theatrical versions of the film ( a track the studio owned outright ) I received a "courtesy call" from one of the on lot mixers to whisper to me that they were about to dub the song into the picture - they had instructions NOT to let me know about it, and just to do it down and dirty, as quickly as possible, but as a friend he thought he'd give me a heads up. I hustled over there to find them in the midst a single pass - the song sounded lousy, the whole reel sounded bad, compressed, as if one of the recording heads hadn't been cleaned. I complained loudly, to no avail. The film was a failure, it was explained to me, nobody cared anymore and the studio had it's own way of taking the it back... I seem to recall, but am not sure, that Goldwyn Sound kept the masters and this is likely the source of the remix efforts...  
  
I'll take your word that the Dolby Digital mix is good. I am personally not enamoured of home surround systems, finding them fatiguing, hard, and bright ( not enough information ). A system test - If the high string passage over the reveal of the ice block is at all shrill or hard sounding, something is amiss - the original sound was high but sweet, liquid sounding...  
  
I call the sound you mention at the beginning " space glare" and was definitely a sound effect provided by David Yewdall - I asked him what it consisted of and he just smiled...***

**ChariotsOfTheGods asks:**

Hi Stuart,  
  
Great blog, thanks http://static.yuku.com/domain/bypass/images/thumbsup.gif  
  
I noticed this today:

*Initially Universal made a concerted pitch to have us stay at the studio...but we made the case that* ***it wasn't the equipment that made the difference, it w****as the ski****ll and the instinct of the men who were utilizing it****...*

(bold emphasis mine, hope my editing didn't alter the intent)  
  
Did you have to manage any egos in the sense of Universal's sound people being insulted, dismayed, bummed, disappointed, etc? Were they cool about it? Were they even involved (directly or otherwise) with the discussion about going outside Universal?  
  
Thanks,  
COTG

***The studio wasn't happy about our decision to leave the lot - they considered it a slap in the face after they had spent a lot of money to re-furbish their sound facility. Verna Fields was enlisted to try to talk us into it, to no avail... the sound department executives kept asking what was so great about Bill Varney ? Our answer? Come and see. Which they did from time to time. Several years later, Bill was hired to head Universal Sound, and under his supervision it became the sort of place where you wanted to work, not because you had to...***

**Fatalerror94 asks:**

Hi, Stuart.  
  
This is great, to get some first-hand info on the production of The Thing from someone who was pretty much at the center of it all while it was happening. I want you to know I really appreciate it.  
  
I'm a new poster, but a long time visitor, though I've been away for awhile, and I'm looking forward with having discussions with other fans here and the insights that it can bring.  
  
Thinking about it, there is a moment in the film I was wondering about. It happens just before the 1hr:05m:28s mark, right after the lights in the lab go out and Fuchs reaches for a candle in his desk, if you listen to the music closely, you hear an abrupt minor shift in the pitch of the piece  
  
It happens maybe a millisecond before the movie switches to another angle of Fuchs, this time viewing him though an open doorway that leads from the lab to the building's main corridor (this is, of coarse, the spot where the “shape” will pass Fuchs just before he leaves the lab).  
  
It seems to me that a portion the score was cut here and the remaining two halves where spliced together, which implies that a scene was cut-out between the shot of Fuchs grabbing the candle and the shot of him walking through the Lab, in fact we don't actually see him light the candle, it is already lit in the next shot which also supports sudden jump forward in time.  
  
Of course I might be reading to much into it, it is possible that the score just plays out that way.  
  
Still, I wonder, was there additional footage at that point in the movie that was cut?

***The music underlining this scene is one continuous cue written by John - the shift you hear is in the score. Fuchs walking forward with the candle lit ( and the jump scare ) is a surviving part of the original "lights out" sequence. To cover the transition, John much later in post-production shot the insert of the lamp going out, with a hand reaching for the candle. This was also done to "tighten up " the scene and to get Fuchs to the door faster, but nothing interesting was cut..***

**Checkers Wizard asks:**

Hi Stuart,  
  
apologies if this is the wrong place to be asking this, but I thought if anyone ought to be able to answer this question, it would be you.  
  
I noticed over on the late James Cummins blog, in an entry entitled "Shades of grey" written shortly before his death, he mentions his involvement in a new book about the making of The Thing :  
  
"Over the past several weeks, I and dozens of cast and crew members have been contributing observations to a book about John Carpenter's The Thing."  
  
I was wondering if you had also been involved, who the author might be, and what had become of this book?  
  
Many thanks,  
  
CW So the guy laying on the table is Norbert Weisser and the other guy looking for the live grenade is Larry Franco?

***Yes. The book is being written by Michael Doyle, who has interviewed me extensively. I can tell you that he knows a great deal about the making of this movie, and has been dogged and thorough in tracking down people to interview. This is as I understand it, still a work in progress and when I last heard Michael was shooting for a publication date sometime in 2013. I believe there is a message from Michael announcing the book somewhere here on this website...***

**jeremy asks:**

I'm not sure if you mentioned this in your blog...I've been following your blog but I'm not sure if I've come across this..lol  
  
My question is about the blood test scene...as soon as palmer's blood jumps out of the Petri dish...the screams that you can hear...doesn't match up with the actors....I mean...as soon as the blood jumps out you hear screaming but then when the camera zooms out to show David Clennon changing....Garry, Nauls, Childs...do not appear to be screaming  
  
I hope...my question isn't confusing..lol.

***When we played the sequence back it seemed odd that there was no immediate reaction from the men to the blood jump. The cuts of the blood moving and the flamethrower being dragged along the floor seemed like dead space. The decision was made to add a track of the men yelling off-screen to cover the hole, and we had to live with the match back. Probably not our finest hour...  
  
It seemed odd.***

**jeremy asks:**

Hey Stuart...  
  
Where was this photo taken? <http://thething.ca/collection/photocastandcrewreprint.jpg>

***The official cast and crew photograph taken by unit still photographer Peter Sorel ( who also shot the Norwegian photo). Shot outside stage 27 ( where the sets for Blair's shack and the kennel were built ) at Universal sometime in September, 1981  
  
I couldn't be there that day so I was photographed later and my face matted in - you can find me just behind and to the right of Donald Moffat...***

**ChariotsOfTheGods asks:**

Hi Stuart,  
  
Thanks for the new updates!   
  
While reading your latest post I started thinking about some of the pot-related scenes that were deleted, specifically Child's pot grow-room and Fuchs' original death. Given that pot smoking can sometimes have a side effect of paranoia, I wonder if there was ever any consideration given to incorporating such a theme into the film? It has been some time since I read the script, but I don't recall any emphasis being given to pot paranoia. On the one hand I can imagine ways that this could have been incorporated into the film, but ultimately I suspect it would have distracted from the central themes and led to even more scenes/dialog that would have been pruned out of the final cut. Yet, I also try to imagine how the critical reaction might have been affected had this alleged gore-fest film contained a Reagan-esque "Just say no!" subtext...  
  
Cheers and thanks,  
COTG

***No, there was no thought given to the pot paranoia aspect. It was only used as a countercultural tip of the hat to help define character and refine the idea that these men were living outside the normal restraints of civilization (remember that 31 years ago personal possession was a felony in California).  
  
Then again, if you thought a joint or two was smoked while we were in the process of designing the effects sequences you would not be wrong - the beverage of choice was not J&B but beer...***

**XidiouX asks:**

Hi Stuart,  
  
In our interview with Joel Polis, he spoke of JC creating a lot of new scenes for the character of Fuchs:  
  
<http://www.outpost31.com/JoelPolisInterview.shtml>  
  
Was this part of the process of JC making The Thing his?

***Yes. Joel is referring to the scenes John wrote that were shot in Stewart, B.C. As I've outlined, they include a revised scene restaged in the snowcat between Fuchs and Mac and a new prelude to his death. John structurally uses the character throughout to feed information to MacCready, and as a result has him hanging around a lot. I know John was very comfortable working with Joel, and this helped make him the beneficiary of the new work...***

**(As part of a discussion about the large-lipped 'blood-Thing' that erupted from Palmer's Petri dish.)**

***For a while Jagger made an uncredited appearance in THE THING. After attending a Stones concert at the L.A. Coliseum John, as an affectionate tribute, used START ME UP as the original cutting track before we settled on SUPERSTITION. This was always meant to be replaced, and was for our ears only...***

**Moses455 asks:**

I think Stuart in his Q&A claims Carpenter believed the men were both human? I find that more convincing personally.

***No. I said it was Bill Lancaster who felt that way in conversation with me. I specifically said in the blog John has kept his own council on the matter. His response was a surprise to me, but we never had a specific discussion regarding who's who at the end (nor did we really need to).  
  
But by stating "all the rumors are untrue" regarding the ending John has put to bed the idea that he planted any clues to identity throughout the film ( Child's breath, the coat. the whiskey bottle, etc.)...***

**Checkers Wizard asks:**

During the scene where Bennings-Thing is caught on the ice, mid-transformation, the men form a circle around the alien.  
  
Was this simply the most effective blocking for the scene, or was it a conscious reference to the visual motif of the Norwegians forming a circle around the alien craft?

***A staging question for JC, really. The reference never occurred to me, but John may have had something in mind...***

**jeremy asks:**

Hey Stuart...  
  
Where was this photo taken? <http://thething.ca/collection/photocastandcrewreprint.jpg>

***The official cast and crew photograph taken by unit still photographer Peter Sorel ( who also shot the Norwegian photo). Shot outside stage 27 ( where the sets for Blair's shack and the kennel were built ) at Universal sometime in September, 1981  
  
I couldn't be there that day so I was photographed later and my face matted in - you can find me just behind and to the right of Donald Moffat...***

**XidiouX asks:**

Dear Stuart,  
  
My [avatar](http://thethingfan.fr.yuku.com/topic/2466#.UfVk9W2BVIY). Can you tell me who painted it?

***The UK original. I think I saw all of the original artwork done for the film here and don't remember this - it is different enough in design and execution, with the use of both old and new taglines, that I think the art was done on your side of the pond...***

***I had no idea there was a discussion about or interest in this particular poster until I saw your thread. The North American original was " Glow Face " - your style never made an appearance on our shores. I find it far superior, and closer to the idea we were going for before Universal panicked. They may have taken cues from some elements developed here ( see the unused black and white poster in THE FINAL DAYS entry on my blog ). but in the end I do believe it was finally designed and executed in Europe, most probably the UK...  
  
The line "The Ultimate in Alien Terror " was added at the last minute by Universal President Sid Sheinberg to make sure the audience saw the word "ALIEN" above the title THE THING and hopefully made the connection...***

***In the US, the "Alien Terror" tagline replaced "Man" - I thought it was buried by the studio until I saw it reappear on the UK and European one sheets...***

**Checkers Wizard asks:**

Hi Stuart,  
  
I certainly don't want to waste your time by going over old ground, but it occurred to me that you might have an opinion on this (unfortunately I wasn't aware of this website at the time of your Q&A).  
  
There is a debate going on in this thread, that I thought I'd bring to your attention, and see if you had anything to add...  
  
here is a copy of my argument (sorry it's so damned long) :  
------------

evilroboknee wrote:It has been confirmed by Stuart Cohen a producer on this movie, that Blair was in fact a Thing at the point of the "freak-out".

Sort of...  
  
  
Stuart says on his blog, that it was their intent to follow Who Goes There? by having someone (Blair) assimilated early in the story, and off camera.  
  
He also states that they weren't entirely successful conveying this idea, and that dialogue was added to the scene where Mac, Nauls and Garry discover Blair's escape vehicle, in order to leave the audience in no doubt that Blair was (and clearly had been for some time) an imitation.  
  
He very cleverly, and deliberately does not specify when Blair was assimilated - leaving it ambiguous.  
  
I'm aware he says in the Q&A on this site, that Blair was taken prior to the radio room scene, but I'm putting that down to the fact that he hasn't heard my counter argument...  
  
I'm certain Blair is human when first locked in the toolshed. Here's why :  
  
At the end of the scene where Blair is running his simulation on the computer, he reaches in to a drawer and pulls out a revolver...  
  
The implication is that he realises they are all doomed, and that if they survive, then the entire world is doomed - so he is about to commit suicide.  
  
This is a red herring.  
  
The slight of hand / diversion is continued when Fuchs reveals that Blair has locked himself in his room, and is refusing to answer - we assume Blair has done himself in.  
  
That's why it's a welcome surprise, when it transpires that Blair is alive and well, and very much in full control of his faculties - having formulated a plan to stop the creature in it's tracks, and quarantine the outpost from the rest of the world.  
  
He disables all means of communication, and escape, and kills the remaining dogs (a proven means of escape for The Thing, a prime target that's difficult for the team to distinguish any tell-tale signs of imitation, and disastrous if left as the sole survivor for a rescue team to pick up).  
  
Look at it another way :  
  
What are The Thing's primary objectives...?  
  
1. anonymity  
  
2. assimilation  
  
3. escape  
  
So...  
  
1. anonymity :  
  
the radio room  
  
Blair :  
  
You understand me?  
  
Anybody interferes, I'll kill 'em.  
  
Nobody gets in and out of here (Outpost 31), Nobody!  
  
You guys think I'm crazy, well that's fine.  
  
Most of you (the humans) don't know what's going on around here...  
  
Well I'm damn well sure some of you (the imitations) do.  
  
Do you think that Thing wanted to be an animal?  
  
No dog can make it a thousand miles to the coast.  
  
No, you don't understand. That Thing wanted to be us!  
  
If a cells gets out, it could imitate everything on the face of the Earth, and it's not going to stop."  
  
If Blair is already an imitation (presumably taken some time between reaching for the revolver, and Fuchs relaying to Mac that he was locked in his room) it has reduced itself to the level of a cheap Bond villain, spelling out it's entire plan, and alerting everyone to it's motives, capabilities, and possible presence among them, at a time when nobody (with the possible exception of Fuchs) has a clue what's at stake, or even begun to connect the dots.  
  
Not exactly anonymous, stealthy, or under the radar. It's thrown away the advantage, the element of surprise.  
  
2. assimilation :  
  
By killing the dogs, The Thing has thrown away a proven, successful escape / infiltration opportunity, and by destroying the radio it has reduced the chances of a rescue party showing up to possibly evacuate everyone, or at least provide an opportunity for a new assimilate returning to McMurdo / civilisation.  
  
3. escape :  
  
By destroying the helicopter and other vehicles, the thing has lost the opportunity and means of escape.  
  
Cutting off all communication, and destroying the transportation, is counterproductive to it's needs - never mind alerting everyone to it's possible presence and abilities.  
  
Cutting off all communication, destroying transportation, and alerting everyone to it's presence in order to be able to hide it's presence and build transport, is, well... a rather convoluted, and fundamentally flawed tactic.  
  
If we were to assume Blair was assimilated after running his computer simulation, there is the issue of the notebook, Fuchs concern for Blair's safety, and his beginning to comprehend Blair's hypothesis :  
  
Fuchs : There's something wrong with Blair. He's locked himself in his room, and he wont answer the door. So I took one of his notebooks from the lab... Listen :  
  
It could have imitated a million life-forms on a million planets. Could change in to any one of them at any time. Now it wants life-forms on Earth. It needs to be alone, and in close proximity with the life-form to be absorbed. The Chameleon strikes in the dark. There is still cellular activity in these burned remains. They're not dead yet."  
  
Even if Blair wrote the entry in the notebook, was subsequently assimilated, and then Blair-Thing noticed the notebook was missing, all it had to do to cover it's ass was raise these concerns in conversation, then lead those conclusions down a blind alley, or on a wild goose chase.  
  
It's highly unlikely The Thing wrote the notebook, as again that puts us in Bond villain territory - certainly not what the writer is going for. The dialogue serves a specific, functional purpose - exposition.  
  
If Blair really were an imitation, it would make far more sense for it to remain anonymous, keep quiet - other than disseminating misinformation, leave the dogs alive, and keep the radio and vehicles fully functioning.  
  
That way it has the entire winter to assimilate whomever it likes (starting with Fuchs, before he can raise greater awareness), and can either leave in the summer rotation, or whenever Norris has his inevitable heart attack, and is evacuated (assuming it doesn't all kick off when the defibrillator gets put to use) - if he can't cook up any other reason to leave, or for one of the dogs to make a break for the next nearest base.  
  
Never mind that Blair already being assimilated simply does not stack up from a strategic point of view, consider, if Blair were human when he is locked in the toolshed, the horror of Blair's Cassandra complex :  
  
He has foreseen the outcome of the situation, and has taken active steps to prevent it from happening, and warn the rest of the team - knowing full well the increased danger that puts him in.  
  
And yet he is ignored.  
  
Disbelieved.  
  
Considered unhinged, and a danger to himself and others, he is drugged up and locked away - trapped like a chicken in a coop, knowing full well a ravenous beast is out to devour him.  
  
Imagine the frustration and helplessness, at knowing exactly what needs to be done, yet being prevented from doing it by the very people you are trying to save (if they are still people - who do you trust?).  
  
Now imagine the sheer panic, and terror, as the inevitable happens - trapped in a box, something starts to pry it's way in, and attack.  
  
That, for me, is the most horrifying idea in the film, and why I view Blair as the hero of the movie.  
  
From a filmmaking standpoint, if Blair is still human at the point he is locked in the tool shed, you still achieve the goal of putting him out of sight and out of mind. He still gets assimilated early, and off screen (I'm of the opinion that only Palmer is an imitation at this point in the movie, taking Blair whilst he is locked in the tool shed, and Norris later being contaminated / invaded / assimilated during the 54 hours that happen off camera, during the storm), and this allows him to go about his Thing-Business, in a less problematic way than if he is already an imitation.  
  
By the time Blair says "It ain't Fuchs." It is Blair - and he knows damned well it ain Fuchs, as the protégé torched himself when confronted by his former mentor - Blair's tragic fall from hero to villain.  
  
Fuchs had understood what Blair was trying to tell them, and became the hero - sacrificing himself, rather than let his own likeness betray his friends.  
  
Whilst Mac has understood, from the moment Bennings was assimilated, what was at stake in terms of personal survival, he doesn't fully come to accept the inevitable responsibility until the generator goes out :  
  
Mac : It's got no way out of here. It just wants to sleep in the cold until the rescue teams finds it.  
  
Whether we make it or not, we can't let that Thing freeze again. Maybe we'll just warm things up a little around here...  
  
We're not getting out of here alive. But neither is that Thing."  
  
Which is in keeping with the original idea that MacReady would slowly come to the fore, and emerge from within the group as the hero.  
  
Finally all that Chess is paying off, as Blair and Fuchs (and Palmer-Thing ironically) have taught him sacrifice - too bad it ends in Stalemate.  
  
I guess at the end of the day, it doesn't really mater either way - though it would actually require quite a bit of effort on my part, to actively will myself to view the radio room scene thinking Blair is not Blair - that just seems counter to what is on screen - a bit like trying to will myself to believe Lex Luthor has a full head of luxuriant hair.  
  
Some view The Thing as a puzzle to be solved.  
  
I prefer to see it as a mystery to be savoured.  
  
That said, whilst I prefer ambiguity, and mystery, I've never felt that Blair's humanity during the radio room scene was ambiguous, or up for debate...  
  
Fundamental to my thinking on this issue is the belief that The Thing is an intelligent creature who CHOOSES its victims according to a rapidly evolving gameplan based on its own survival, NOT a sort of supervirus that automatically spreads through contact . Although we don't specifically lay the groundwork for this, I am personally fond of the idea that the creature has some limitations and therefore some vulnerabilities, and needs to be CAREFUL in its application of its' powers of disguise ( maybe used for the first time, or in any case the first time in 100, 000 years - maybe a bit rusty ?...)  
  
Although I think it most likely that Blair was assimilated somewhere between the autopsy and the radioroom ( and remember, we never had a SPECIFIC moment in mind ), it is relatively easy for me to make the case that Blair, in terms of working knowledge, represents the biggest immediate threat to the creatures survival, and is therefore the first to go - his entire performance in the film an act ...  
  
I have no problem with the amount of information Blair disseminates to the other men as he goes berserk - to me, he is simply applying the very human idea of DEFLECTION - giving ones enemy just enough information to hang themselves, and in the process deflect suspicion from itself. After setting things in motion with " IT WANTED TO BE US " what better plan than to leave it to the men to knock each other off one by one, all the while safely removed from the scene? And, indeed, events in the film bear this scenario out - if it weren't for that bastard MacCready it seems to me it was working...  
  
As you say, in any case the film works both ways. I just find the novellas idea of a diabolical Blair more dramatically compelling, and is one big reason I always wanted to film it...y laying on the table is Norbert Weisser and the other guy looking for the live grenade is Larry Franco?

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**Mythology1 asks:**

Hi, I'm new here. First topic posted.  
  
I was wondering if anyone knew what Palmer changed the tape to when him and Childs were smoking pot in their room. I've heard people say it's porn. I'm not sure if the music was very sexual. Maybe it was just another game show. Did anyone here who likes old shows find the music familiar?   
Doesn't that just sound like an awkward thing to watch with another person in the room? They may have become good friends, but that still sounds like something you'd want privacy for, if that's what they were doing.

***Sorry to disappoint, but the picture and music are from the American game show LET'S MAKE A DEAL, hosted by Monty Hall. I remember I spent too much time negotiating for the rights with the game show people and their attorneys, who wanted to know how we planned to use it in the picture. I sent them a copy of the scene, carefully omitting the joint, and had to assure them that the program wouldn't be used in a derogatory manner. The idea John simply wanted to get across was boredom, and what could be more mundane and boring than a game show seen more than once ?***

**Checkers Wizard asks:**

Hi Stuart,  
  
great to see you made it through the forum migration.  
  
I was aware that the game show they are watching is "Let's Make A Deal" (though it was never shown over here), but I'd always assumed that at the point Palmer gets up, saying "I know how this one ends" and switches tapes, that he put on a porno tape.  
  
Are you saying he put on a second episode of "Let's Make A Deal"?  
  
So is the music we hear the actual theme tune to "Let's Make A Deal"? I'd always thought it was a piece Carpenter had composed / recorded...  
  
Thanks.

***Yep. It's another episode of the game show, with its original title music...***

**jezconolly asks:**

Another technical question: does anyone know why Carpenter shot The Thing in 2.20:1 aspect ratio? Other than Dark Star (1.85:1), Starman (also 2.20:1) and his TV work he's always gone for 2.35:1 anamorphic. 2.20:1 was developed in the 50s to support the planned growth of 70mm prints of films. Forgive my ignorance but are there 70mm prints of The Thing in existence? Did he shoot in 2.20:1 for other reasons?  
  
Cheers,  
  
Jez

***John shot THE THING in 35mm 2:35 Panavision anamorphic. A 70mm release was not contemplated or approved until early May, 1982, at the conclusion of the final mix. We made the push because the other studio's standard bearers were all releasing in 70mm ( POLTERGEIST, E.T., BLADE RUNNER, FIREFOX, et all ) in large cities that summer. Six prints for the U.S. release were approved - they were frame by frame optical blowups, the image reconfigured into a 65mm space -the other 5mm was reserved for the 6 track magnetic soundtrack...***

**Checkers Wizard asks:**

Thanks Stuart.  
  
Jez, I'm curious as to where you got that information.  
  
Both the original DVD, and the anamorphic re-release stated 2.35 : 1 on the sleeve, as does the Blu-ray.  
  
[IMDB also states 2.35 : 1,](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0084787/technical) as well as 2.20 : 1 for the 70mm blow-up.  
  
But I've definitely seen it stated somewhere (I can't remember where) that there was a release, possibly DVD, in 2.20 : 1 which surprised me at the time.

***Anecdotally, almost none of the theatres I surveyed in Los Angeles ( save the two 70mm venues ) on opening weekend, particularly the multiplex crackerboxes in the San Fernando Valley, ran the film in the proper aspect ratio. It seemed to range from about 2:15 to 1 to 2:00 to 1 - absolutely ridiculous...***

**The Opening**

***I see there's been some confusion regarding the opening sequence of events in THE THING and how they tie into the prequel. Your own updated trivia section has it wrong, so I thought I would clarify what happens in our film:  
  
Norbert Weisser plays the helicopter pilot and is the one shot by Garry. Weisser, Screen Actors Guild member, was the only one entitled to speak dialogue on camera. In casting John had Norbert improvise his dialogue and he repeated the process here ...  
  
Larry Franco, our esteemed assistant director, is the shooter in the helicopter. Dialogueless, reduced to frantic arm gestures, he blows himself and the helicopter up with a grenade...  
  
Hope this helps...***

***I note that in your Q and A with Matthijs van Heijningen Jr. he refers to the confusion over the opening as a "mistake" on our part, one where we mixed things up. I really have no wish to revisit this topic and Mr. van Hejiningen certainly has the right to his own interpretation of events some thirty years on (particularly in terms of the story he wants to tell ), but the idea that we were at fault and somehow careless in our execution of the scene is bothersome. The events in our film are as I have described...***

**jeremy asks:**

So the guy laying on the table is Norbert Weisser and the other guy looking for the live grenade is Larry Franco?

***yep...***

**Checkers Wizard asks:**

So the guy laying on the table is Norbert Weisser and the other guy looking for the live grenade is Larry Franco? Stuart, whilst we're on this subject, there's something I've been meaning to ask you as I've followed the development of your blog :  
  
With regards to the various illustrators and concept artists involved in the production, what is the legal situation in terms of copyright over their work?  
  
Were all illustrations produced considered the property of the production (and therefore owned by Universal) or were they simply a means of conveying an idea, with the illustrations themselves still being the personal property of the artist?  
  
I would absolutely love to see a large format book that reproduced in full, the complete contributions of Mike Ploog, Mentor Huebner, Willy Whitten and Gary Meyer.  
  
From conceptual art to storyboards and Mike Ploog's technical drawings / cartoons.  
  
I would imagine John Lloyd also contributed plenty of designs, both conceptual and detailed construction plans.  
  
And of course there must be a wealth of photographic documentation detailing Rob Bottin's workshop, Stan Winston's work and Susan Turner's model making, let alone the personal snapshots by yourself, other crew members, and official "behind the scenes" shots from the unit photographer.  
  
If it were also possible to include reproductions of Albert Whitlock's matte paintings, and Dale Kuipers original conceptual work, that would make for a satisfyingly exhaustive visual bible.  
  
I'm only aware of Kuipers work being sold independently. Even Ploog only seems to have two illustrations officially available ([here](http://www.mikeploog.us/item/sketchbook_-_the_thing_-_storyboard-626/1/filters/medium:pencil-14;collection:sketchbook-61/) and [here](http://www.mikeploog.us/item/sketchbook_-_the_thing_-_concept_design-637/1/filters/medium:pencil-14;collection:sketchbook-61/) - neither of which I've seen anywhere else) in spite of a number of his storyboards being widely available.  
  
So, is all art work the property of Universal or the original artists?  
  
Are personal photographs the property of the individual (Rob Bottin for example) or the production, and if the former, could they still be subject to a studio embargo?  
  
Was it ***the*** Gary Meyer who designed so many great movies posters, and what was his contribution?  
  
I'm thinking we should try and make it three books being published in 2013 http://static.yuku.com/domain/bypass/images/yay.gif

***My assumption is Universal controls the underlying rights to all the artistic material produced for THE THING. I don't think anyone was in a position to demand control of their work, including Rob Bottin. Remember, no one was interested in any of this stuff for fifteen to twenty years, and a lot of it was just scattered in the wind - I think the studio could technically re-claim everything out there ( Rob's original molds, for instance which he has held on to) but I think they have figured out it isn't worth the effort...  
  
I also assume that some effort was made to track down footage cut from the film at the time of the special edition laserdisc release. The excised film that does exist was clearly prepared for the bastardized network T.V. version - it is in pan and scan format, and it is probably the reason it was rescued...  
  
There was a full still run shot during production on THE THING ( subject to severe restrictions placed on the photographer by John in terms of showing any of the effects work ) but I do not know whether any of this material still exists. I personally have very little in the way of additional photographs ( I'm still trying to liberate some pictures with Kurt and myself on set that are with family members scattered around the globe)...***