



NEW YORK TIMES

June 10, 2007

IN PENNSYLVANIA HAMLET, MUCH ADO ABOUT GOO

By Franz Lidz

THIS July, as they have for the past seven, fright freaks will swarm into Phoenixville, Pa., a flyspeck steel town at the junction of French Creek and the Schuylkill River. It was here in a nearby field that a movie legend was born. After oozing from a meteorite, an amorphous alien — looking like the love child of a lava lamp and a Gummy Bear — attached itself to dogs, hermits and groping teenagers, literally sucking the life out of them.

Bloated with the blood of its victims, the mass grew larger and larger, and redder and redder. It crawled ... it crept ... it ate you alive! Or so said the taglines for [“The Blob,”](#) the creature classic from 1958 that chronicled the adventures of film’s most notorious slime ball.

On July 13 — a Friday, no less — the Blob makes a homecoming of sorts at BlobFest, a two-day rolling carnival of horror in downtown Phoenixville, where part of the movie was filmed. With about 5,000 people expected this year, attendance keeps swelling, much as the Blob once did.

The party will kick off at the Colonial Theater, the setting for the film’s most infamous scene. At

the end of “The Blob,” the Blob seeps into the crowded movie house, whose marquee trumpets [“Daughter of Horror”](#) with [Bela Lugosi](#).

As the unsuspecting audience gapes at Lugosi, the Blob squishes out of the projection booth and feast on some of the patrons. The rest scream and flee in terror. “We call that the running out,” said Shane Stone, a local Blobologist who is also a child psychologist.

Opening-night festivities begin with a re-enactment of the running out. Dressed in mad-scientist whites, Mr. Stone will take the stage of the Colonial and introduce the M.C., a chained guy in a gorilla suit. Then, as he does every year, the gorilla will break loose and rampage down the aisles, inspiring hundreds of BlobFesters to burst out of their seats shrieking and bolt through the frosted-glass doors onto Bridge Street.

To maintain the mood between screenings, enthusiasts are invited to face off in a scream contest, compete in a tinfoil hat showdown and enter their chimeras and bogeymen in a costume competition.

There’s also a fire extinguisher parade, which Mr. Stone calls a “tribute to the device that saved us all.” Nearly a half-century ago townsfolk stopped the Blob by training the extinguishers on it. As it turned out, the gooey interloper had an aversion to cold.

Among the luminaries scheduled to appear at BlobFest VIII will be members of the film’s cast and crew; its producer, Jack Harris; and Kyra Schon, the zombie girl who murdered her mother with a garden spade and then devoured her in “Night of Living Dead.” “The Blob” was the brainchild of Irving Millgate, a [Northwestern University](#) humanities professor. Mr. Millgate told his idea to Mr. Harris, a Philadelphia film distributor with a desire to produce, who then pitched the concept to Good Times Films, an independent company in the Philadelphia suburbs that specialized in pictures with religious and social messages. The studio’s resident director, Irvin Shortess Yeaworth, known as Shorty, saw “The Blob” as biblical parable.

“To Shorty it was about God’s wrath upon evildoers,” Mr. Harris, 88, said. “To me it was an investment.” A \$130,000 investment that turned a \$10 million profit, he added.

Mr. Harris rejects the popular notion that “The Blob” was intended as a cold war metaphor for creeping Communism. “Hogwash,” he said. “Then again, maybe that’s why it never played Russia.”

Mr. Harris said the working title was “The Meteor Monster,” which begat “The Molten Meteor,” which begat “The Night of the Creeping Dead,” which begat “The Glob That Girdled the Globe,” which begat “The Glob”.

“I suggested ‘The Glob,’ ” said Kate Phillips, who was paid \$125 to collaborate on the script. At 93, she teaches screenwriting at Keene State College in New Hampshire. “I was looking for a word to describe an object that had no form.”

But “The Glob” was already the title of a children’s book illustrated by Walt Kelly of “Pogo” fame. So Mr. Harris substituted other letters in the alphabet. “I thought, “The Alob” doesn’t sound frightening,” he says. “On the other hand, ‘The Blob’. ...”

Mr. Harris said the name accounts for much of the film’s enduring appeal. “That and the catchy theme song,” he said.

Composed by the songwriting team of Burt Bacharach and Hal David, “Beware of the Blob!” featured the evocative lyrics “It creeps and leaps and glides and slides across the floor/Right through the door and all around the wall/A splotch, a blotch. ...”

Somewhat grudgingly Mr. Harris also gives some of the credit to [Steve McQueen](#). “The Blob” was the first star turn for Mr. McQueen, who, at 27, played a teenager who alerts skeptical adults to the gelatinous threat.

According to movie lore Mr. Harris offered McQueen \$3,000 or a lesser sum and 10 percent of

the profits. Figuring “The Blob” would bomb, the actor took the money.

“Nonsense,” Mr. Harris snapped. “McQueen got scale. He was an unknown who couldn’t get himself arrested. He’s lucky I gave him a job.” Mr. Stone said he believed that the Blob still resonates with moviegoers because it taps into their fear of the uncontrollable. “You could ward off Dracula with garlic,” he reasoned, “and Frankenstein was so slow, you figured you’d be able to outrun him. But the Blob is this jelly thing, and when it gets on you, you can’t get it off. You’re trapped. You’re smothered. You suffocate.”

Blobophiles will recall that the Blob was freeze-dried and shipped to a polar ice cap at the film’s conclusion.

But it is actually in the care of Wes Shank, a movie memorabilia collector who first saw the film at a Saturday matinee in 1965 at the Suburban Theater in Ardmore on the Main Line, outside Philadelphia. During the closing credits he realized that the studio — renamed Valley Forge Films — was nearby. “When I got there, a man showed me around a bunch of old barns that had been converted into soundstages,” he says. “Before we entered Stage C, the man said, ‘The Blob is in there.’”

The man turned out to be Shorty Yeaworth. Mr. Shank asked him if the Blob was for sale. Mr. Yeaworth, who died in 2004, said, [“Maybe.”](#) After a few months of haggling, they agreed on a price, which even now Mr. Shank declines to divulge. “The Blob is priceless,” he said firmly. “Real, live movie monsters from the ’50s are impossible to find these days.”

The Blob still reposes in its original container, a five-gallon metal bucket that bears the label: “Union Carbide, Silicone Division, Sistersville, W. Virginia.” The can is only half-full. “Some of the Blob was wasted in production,” Mr. Shank lamented. What remains is hard and tacky and the color of ripe cranberries. And it gives off a faintly musty odor. “If you lived in a can for 50 years,” Mr. Stone said, “you might too.”