

Hollow Man, hollow indeed

By John Andrews
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I found director Paul Verhoeven's latest movie, as crass and disgusting as it is, perhaps a bit more revealing than he intended.

In case you haven't already heard, *Hollow Man* is an update of 1933's *The Invisible Man* (directed by James Whale), which introduced Claude Rains as an actor.

We probably all know the plot: well intentioned scientist creates formula to make himself disappear; unable to reverse the process he goes mad, turning into a homicidal maniac. There is something of a Greek tragedy here. The scientist is motivated by the desire to help mankind, but through a cruel twist of fate his discovery winds up causing him to do the opposite. But that is precisely the element missing from *Hollow Man*.

Here our scientist, played by Kevin Bacon, does science—for the military only—apparently because it gives him access to a flashy Porsche and attractive ladies. There is not a shred of social consciousness. Invisibility doesn't change him, it just allows him to better get away with being a bigger jerk than he could be when people could see him.

The only thing motorizing this absolutely flat-line story are the truly spectacular special effects, which consist primarily of the scientist's body undergoing disappearance and reappearance organ-system by organ-system. But it all adds up to nothing more than another large box-office weekend.

In his early Dutch films, *Soldier of Orange* (1979) and *Spetters* (1980), Verhoeven used his talents to address significant issues confronting youth. Even his first big US film *RoboCop* (1987) alluded to a society corrupted by corporate greed and had something to say about the human condition. Then came *Basic Instinct* (1992) and *Showgirls* (1995), about which nothing more need be said. By now, like his *Hollow Man* mad scientist, Verhoeven has no purpose other than self-gratification. He seems entirely empty himself. It's a little sad, actually.

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