

THE LAWNMOWER MAN

[1992]

by

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A medical scientist/computer expert, Dr. Angelo, is using virtual reality machines to experimentally increase the intelligence of monkeys. His animal experiments having gone awry, he decides to use his retarded gardener named Job, as a human test subject. As Job's intelligence increases, he dresses better, becomes the love object of the sexiest single woman in town, and desires more learning. Unbeknownst to the scientist, the military substitutes a medicine intended to make soldiers more aggressive. Job becomes telepathic and telekinetic. He uses his new powers to wreak vengeance on those who tortured him when he was retarded. In a grasp for the ultimate power, to take over the phone system (I'm not kidding), he and Dr. Angelo battle in the world of virtual reality. Dr. Angelo escapes from the lab before it explodes. In the final scene all the phones the world over ring at once.

As with many of the films made from Steven King's stories, the religious references are made quite obvious. Job, the central character, through no fault of his own, is selected for these hideous experiments. His tormentor is Dr. Angelo! Yet the religious implications are taken no further – this is typical of King's writing, a quick reference to get the audience's attention and then on to other matters.

The Prometheus myth is worked out here in much the same way as in most Frankenstein movies: the altruistic scientist is dedicated only to his research, only his quest for the improvement of humankind. But his too narrow path blinds him to the unfortunate consequences of his work. In the 1930s Dr. Frankenstein built his monster, in the 1950s Dr. Deemer made giant tarantulas, and now Dr. Angelo makes his Job.

Adults probably won't find this film very frightening at all. Especially with the expectations of gore and shock of a "Steven King film." The plot is linear, the clichés obvious, and every turn signaled far in advance. As soon as we see someone putting together a customized, bright-red lawnmower, we know that it will be used to kill someone (off-screen, mercifully). As soon as we see the boorish, working-class neighbor beating and berating his cute son and attractive wife, we know he will not last the length of the movie. All that is left to enjoy are the breathtaking visual effects – and its assault on some contemporary myths.

Teenagers, especially girls, will find this film more frightening than adults. Most teens will find in Job, the lawnmower man, much of themselves, internal and external. For instance, his major source of income is mowing lawns, he is beaten when he doesn't do his assigned

domestic tasks, and he's constantly told he's stupid. Furthermore, many teenage boys dream of becoming hunks to be seduced by an older, beautiful, and sexually experienced woman.

But Job is also a direct assault on many contemporary teenage myths. As mentally handicapped, Job is the least threatening male in the film, he is likable very much like a large dog. He's naive, innocent, and a virgin. With his newfound intelligence he becomes a hunk: boosted IQ tells him which men's magazines to read, which jeans to buy, and when to take off his shirt to show his muscles. Thus, he is very safe to fall in love with. As the film progresses and his intelligence grows beyond human proportions, the hunk turns into a monster. This then requires a deeply disturbing reassessment of the average teenager fantasy love object.

The Lawnmower Man is yet another listless reworking of the Frankenstein/Prometheus myth of the altruistic scientist seeking good for all but going astray. A combination of *Carrie* [1976], *Flowers for Algernon* [2000], *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* [1996], *Frankenstein*, and paranoia about the workings of the military intelligence establishment within the United States. This film version of Steven King's *The Lawnmower Man* is unremarkable, save the eye-popping special effects and the attack on the mythology surround its victim/hero figure,