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If only life were fiction . . .

Posted on June 3rd, 2010 by earleholland

I was working on the desktop computer, listening to a [national radio talk show](#) where folks were calling in with wild ideas for shutting off the spewing oil flow at the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico. To my right, the laptop was showing the live video feed, called "[Spillcam](#)," of robots working at the same well-head.



Multi-tasking has become a way of life for many of us.

But when I checked New York Times environmental writer [Andy Revkin's blog](#), it stopped me dead in my tracks, centering my mind on a singular idea.

His "[Dot Earth](#)" blog was reporting that the Obama administration had officially ruled out the so-called "nuclear option" as a way to perhaps cap the well. Revkin, as well as some other news media coverage that I'd apparently missed, wrote that the idea of setting off a nuclear blast adjacent to the well wasn't on the table, even though the Soviet Union had successfully used that method to shut off oil and gas wells four out of five times during the Cold War. The accompanying [Soviet video](#) Revkin offered almost made the suggestion sound reasonable, at least for a moment.

What surprised me most about the news coverage I later found was not the obvious fears that could arise from nuking the well — a nuclear blast 50 miles from our coastline, the potential for a tsunami-like reaction from the Gulf and its impact on coastal communities, and the not-so-small political fallout that would follow.



As a child of the '50s and '60s, only one concern filled my mind . . .

Monsters!

Those of us past 60 now were weaned on a diet of science fiction movies, most of which had the unexpected adverse effects of radiation as a central plot device. Were the people suggesting nuking the well too young to

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remember these morality tales?

In one memorable film, "*The Attack of the Crab Monsters*," radiation from Pacific atomic tests had caused ordinary crabs to grow as big as houses. In a novel vision of genetics, the film explained the crabs' human-like intelligence as a result of their huge growth. Moreover, by decapitating and eating the heads of humans, they absorbed the person's knowledge as well.

Tar balls on the beaches in Panama City and Destin are minuscule inconveniences compared to the threat of 50-foot crabs that think like humans really ruining the tourist industry.



Pop culture has offered plenty of warnings about the danger of radiation and mutation. The giant octopus in "*It Came from Beneath the Sea*" was radioactive, the result of similar atomic bomb tests. The giant ants that overran Los Angeles in "*Them*" were said to have grown as big as buses as a result of atomic testing in American Southwest. And of course, "*Godzilla*," the dinosaur-like creature that destroyed cardboard Japanese cities in a handful of movies, could trace his heritage back to nuclear bombs as well.

Sure, these movies were fiction, and low-budget fiction at that. But the ideas voiced on that radio call-in show seemed not that much saner than plots for monster movies — giant umbrellas and parachutes placed over the well to capture the spewing oil, a massive shower curtain stretching from the ocean floor to the surface to entrap the oil, and so many more.



Like these films, the disaster that has arisen from the Gulf's unbridled oil well only reminds us of the potential for unexpected consequences from the technology we often think we understand and can control. In the movies, however, we're usually assured that humanity will solve the problem and win the day.



Sadly, in real life, the plots are seldom that kind. __Earle Holland

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[Stephanie S](#) // Jun 7, 2010 at 3:54 pm

Hi Earl. I, too, am a SF movie buff. Do you remember “The Blob”? It may be possible that even without a nuclear blast, a gigantic blob of tar might take over the Gulf of Mexico. And, if you remember “On the Beach,” then you also remember that human kind doesn’t always solve the problem and win the day.

[full lace wigs](#) // Jun 9, 2010 at 11:50 am

OMG

[Kaushik Biswas](#) // Jun 10, 2010 at 6:26 pm

I was looking at some pictures of the oil spill disaster, someone put those in Digg; normal people like me really don’t know how to express our concerns and the horror.

If we don’t know how to tackle such disasters, then we must not even invite possibilities of such incidents which causes unthinkable loss to the atmosphere and natural habitat.

[brown shower curtain](#) // Feb 21, 2011 at 9:31 pm

The Gulf oil spill was a disaster of almost biblical proportions, and an event that brings back memories of the mayhem caused by giant monsters in the old sci-fi movies.

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