

'Stepford'—cupcake women

The *Stepford Wives* is an unconvincing, ridiculous horror-supernatural-science fiction-thriller (choose one) about a group of husbands in a nauseatingly antiseptic New England town who have a sinister habit of turning their wives into ultra-beautiful and bosomed domestic house kittens. The trick is that the wives apparently love it; pittering about their neat little kitchens, looking like meek, condescending beauty queens and saying charmingly drab things such as, "I'll die if I don't get this recipe" and, "I just love my brownies."

The movie comes from a story by Ira Levin, the man who wrote *Rosemary's Baby*. Both are stories of overnight persecuted women pushed

greg lukow
key grip

to the end of their ropes by seemingly supernatural forces. But if Roman Polanski turned *Rosemary* into a scary, campy thriller (a movie preceding and superior to the style of the *Exorcist*), *Stepford Wives*' director Bryan Forbes and screenwriter William Goldman have produced a boring, nonsensical zero.

Katherine Ross is our heroine-victim, playing a young New York photographer who moves to Stepford with her husband (Peter Masterson) and children. It takes her very little time and only a few disbelieving experiences with her neighboring hausfraus to realize that things are amiss. It's not much of a comeback role for Ross, who's been out of the commercial movie picture for some time now—shoved into the rear along with Ali

McGraw and others who looked like hot property back in their *Graduate* and *Love Story* days. The best thing in the movie turns out to be a properly kinky performance by Paula Prentiss as Ross' effusive, free-spirited best friend. When Prentiss suddenly undergoes her premature change in life, Ross is convinced of her own, fast-approaching fate.


From there the movie rushes headlong to its climax (after the previous ho-hum hour and a half) as a half-crazed Ross rushes out into the night with iron poker in hand. The mysterious source to this challenge to her womanhood, she believes, lies hidden in the creaking hallways of the town's Men's Association building. The whole mess is proof that old gothic mansions, pouring rainstorms and thunder and lightning do not a good horror story make.

The *Stepford Wives* is entirely forgettable—I don't even remember any of the main characters' names—yet if the movie wasn't so dull it would almost be insulting. Just when women have been inching their way back into the popular culture of the movies, we get this silly, demeaning story of men who would rather have these mindless, cupcake robots than meaningful human beings. The movie's biggest disappointment is that the filmmakers have taken Ross, the movie's only character with any attempt at depth and dignity, and not let her come out on top.

It appears that the only prerequisites for the Ira Levin movie heroine, whether she's a weakling (*Rosemary's* Mia Farrow) or free and spirited (Ross), is that she (1) be susceptible to forces that freak her out and turn her completely paranoid by movie's end and (2) that she be flat-chested. As a matter of fact, in retrospect *The Stepford Wives* seems nothing more than an excuse to give Katharine Ross bigger breasts.

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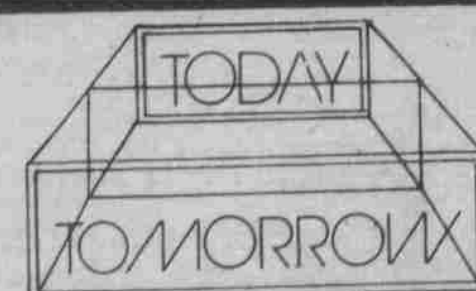


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