

Carpenter's film is built around a burgeoning set of character conflicts as well as the ultimate conflict between The Thing and the twelve-man crew of the research station. The station itself is located in Antarctica and the story takes place in winter. At the beginning, two Norwegians in a helicopter are shooting with a sniper rifle at a husky who is running away from them. The husky runs toward the station, Outpost #31, and tries to befriend the crew. The helicopter lands, and the Norwegian passenger continues to shoot, accidentally wounding Bennings while doing so. Eventually, Garry shoots the Norwegian dead, and the camp tries to understand the Norwegian's behavior. The rising action takes place when the husky is placed in the kennel with the rest of the camp huskies and begins to transform into the Husky-Thing, threatening the lives of the dogs, which begin to bark ferociously. The crew comes with weapons to save the dogs and eventually burns one manifestation of The Thing, while another escapes through the roof of the kennel. Afterward, trying to understand the motives of the Norwegian shooter, part of the crew goes by helicopter along with MacReady to investigate the camp. There they find the burned, deformed remnants of one of The Things, along with a large space ship that had been submerged in the ice. They return to Outpost #31 with the remnant, which begins a series of strange occurrences, including Bennings' assimilation and destruction, Fuchs' demise, and Blair's destruction of camp equipment followed by his relegation to a tool storage shed for safety. Along the way, a series of conflicts, including a major one between MacReady and the rest of the crew, develop between the characters as they all begin to suspect one another as possibly being The Thing but disguised imperceptibly in human form. Blood bags that might help to track their identities are destroyed, as The Thing appears to anticipate their move. As a consequence, Garry loses his authority;

MacReady takes over the camp; Childs and Clark begin to threaten each other. One by one, members of the camp are killed until the climax, when Blair, now assimilated as Blair-Thing, murders Garry; Nauls seemingly disappears or is also killed, and MacReady is left to fight The Thing on his own with dynamite. MacReady manages to blow up Blair-Thing, and in the falling action as the entire camp burns, he finds a bit of shelter outside the main building to drink what will likely be his last bottle of whiskey as frost covers his beard while temperatures begin to descend to sub-100 degrees Fahrenheit. Childs joins him after claiming to have unsuccessfully pursued Blair. They share the whiskey and the film's resolution is ambiguous. Could either one of them now be infected? Will both of them die?

Note: As you read this plot analysis, along with the character analysis, ask yourself what makes more logical sense? Is it better to put the plot analysis first in the essay or the character analysis?