



Ray (Tom Cruise) and Rachel (Dakota Fanning) caught up in a crowd of refugees.

PARAMOUNT PICTURES, 2005.

Terror Attacks

Growing up in wartime.

WAR OF THE WORLDS: Directed by Steven Spielberg. Written by Josh Friedman and David Koepp, based on H.G. Wells' novel. Produced by Kathleen Kennedy and Colin Wilson. Executive producer, Paula Wagner. Cinematography, Janusz Kaminski. Production design, Rick Carter. Editor, Michael Kahn. Costume design, Joanna Johnston. Composer, John Williams. Visual Effects Supervisor, Dennis Muren. Starring Tom Cruise, Dakota Fanning, Justin Chatwin, Tim Robbins and Miranda Otto. Paramount Pictures, 2005. PG-13. 117 minutes.

While we are assailed by cosmic themes such as interplanetary invasion, worldwide annihilation and the alien takeover of Earth, the human drama plays out within a fairly typical American family. Ray (Tom Cruise) is a New Jersey crane operator who's not a very responsible weekend parent. Mary Ann (Miranda Otto), re-married and pregnant, enjoys her new life with a sweet man but worries when the kids are with Ray. Teenage son Robbie (Justin Chatwin) fights with dad a lot, but 11-year-old Rachel (Dakota Fanning) is true to her feelings and quite aware of his faults. Rachel is the emotional center of the film. In a nod to Spielberg's prescient film children, Rachel asks the question everyone is thinking: "Is it the terrorists?"

Ogilvy (Tom Robbins), a survivalist type planning to use his firearms against the enemy, is a menacing, passionately patriotic crank. Ray needs to show Rachel he can take care of her, since he can't stop the aliens' scary game of hide-and-seek against the human race just outside Ogilvy's basement hideout. But Ray can prevent Ogilvy, metaphorically his own shadow-side, from getting them killed.

Unlike other critics I've read, notably Roger Ebert (who got this one all wrong), I find *War of the Worlds* more thrilling than most thrillers and more disturbing. Images of panicked people fleeing from attack are nothing new, but the fear of being hunted down by an alien predator is palpable. It evokes the terror Spielberg captured in *Jaws* of being eaten by a shark turned killer. We somewhat self-directed individuals living now also fear being reduced to a blur by a mindless mob. The dark side of human nature on display in *War of the Worlds* may not be pretty, but it is psychologically sound, and we might learn something we need to know by getting acquainted with it.

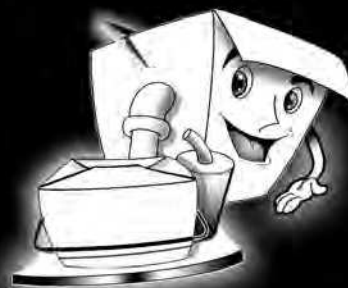
Grouse all you want about summer blockbusters, but I'm glad to have Spielberg's classy new film to make up for the truly insignificant movies of summer. Now playing at Cinemark and Cinema World, *War of the World* gets my very highest recommendations. **CW**

I've come to expect memorable science fiction films from Steven Spielberg, and in *E.T.*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Minority Report* and *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* he did not let me down. With *War of the Worlds*, Spielberg again pairs his keen intelligence and inventive filmmaking skills and sensibilities with his special gift for imagining alien others. Curiosity is his major characters' most interesting trait. Whether trying to look at the aliens invading Earth or trying to keep a child from viewing their unsettling visages, inquisitiveness often trumps the flight urge. Spielberg bestows his own desire to know whole-heartedly on his characters, and *War of the Worlds* delivers.

In the science fiction I read when I was a kid, I was interested in how it would feel to be human on a strange planet, in a spaceship, or living in the future with good or evil aliens around. How would I feel about an almost human robot? Hardware interests me only as it affects the characters, which is why I'm not losing sleep over exactly how the aliens in *War of the Worlds* get to their underground, destructo-Tripods, which were planted "millions" of years ago.

I appreciate many of the terrific images: the great electrical storm; the pavement-buckling eruption of the Tripods; the ferry boat disaster; the wreck of a plane scattered around a bunker; a runaway train speeding through a station, flames licking out the windows; a burning tree near where a child stands, silhouetted by battle. I love the scene of the aliens looking through a family's scrapbook and taking away a glossy, 8" X 10" photograph they are quite interested in, but who or what the photo portrays remains a mystery to be solved on second viewing.

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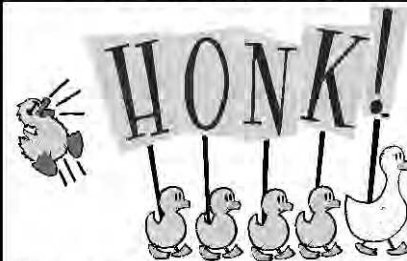
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