

Culture War of the Worlds

So there I am watching Steven Spielberg's "War of the Worlds" with a bunch of swells at the movie's premiere in New York City. The film is a sci-fi extravaganza where Spielberg takes the basic premise of the 1898 H.G. Wells novel, borrows freely from his previous suspense films "Jaws" and "Jurassic Park," and creates a special effects bonanza that is bound to please a mass audience hungry for thrills and chills.

But, early on in the movie, something stranger than gross-looking aliens chasing humans all over the place emerges. A rather populist political subtext takes shape that is somewhat surprising, coming from a Hollywood insider like Spielberg. "War of the Worlds" parallels the attack on 9/11.

Narrator Morgan Freeman opens things up by stating that forces with "envious eyes" have targeted earthlings for destruction. They simply want the planet for themselves. No one is safe, no target off limits. Civilians are routinely destroyed without reason or rational explanation. Sound like anyone we know? Osama somebody?

The actual first wave alien attack comes from the sky, just as 9/11 did. Then it's a grind-it-out process as the invaders stalk humans. Some of us fight back, some of us run.

At one point in the movie, one of the characters makes the point that an occupying army can never win. Iraq reference? Sure it is.

The messages in the film, however, are not overtly political. There is no left-wing, right-wing thing going on. Tom Cruise cruises along without much point-of-view other than to save his kids from the alien killers. Spielberg is not Michael Moore. His aim is to entertain and to make a few a subtle points that do not intrude on the suspense. By the way, Spielberg is right; history shows that occupying armies cannot

win in the long run.

This is the first post-9/11 movie I've seen that is actually influenced by the death and destruction visited upon us by the Islamic killers. It was clear to me that Steven Spielberg is teed off about what the terrorists are doing. His view is reflected by Cruise's teenage son who desperately wants to confront the aliens and kill them. The boy seethes with anger throughout the film because of the alien barbarity. Good for him.

So this isn't the usual Hollywood cheap shot leftist propaganda. "War of the Worlds" actually reflects the view of everyday Americans, rather than a few Beverly Hills pinheads. I liked the movie for that.

In the end, the aliens are actually confronted by God, if you can believe it. Another huge departure from the Hollywood playbook. I'm not going to dent the suspense and tell you more, but trust me, the ACLU will not like the film's conclusion.

The downside to "War of the Worlds" is that it's kind of loopy in its execution of the story line. The special effects overshadow everything and the resolution of the basic plot would make Mr. Welles shudder. But you might like the tone of the film, and if you crunch enough popcorn you might even swallow the thesis that Tom Cruise and his 11-year-old daughter are able to walk from New Jersey to Boston without changing clothes.

Strange things happen when aliens invade. Even in Hollywood.