

## **WAR OF THE WORLDS:**

Director Steven Spielberg's latest venture in filming, a remake of the 1953 classic "The War of the Worlds," falls far short of some of his better works. In fact, it is abysmal.

In 1898, H. G. Wells wrote a remarkable veiled satire aimed at British colonization. It was written as a science fiction story and has stood up well. In 1938, Orson Welles set America into hysterics when the story was produced as a quasi real event on a radio broadcast on Halloween night. It actually was so believable, that it set masses fleeing their homes. In 1953, the venerable George Pal created the first film version, and compared to this version, it is much a masterpiece.

The 1938 radio broadcast created fear. The 1953 film version created awe. This version creates numbness.

Ray Ferrier (Tom Cruise) is a dock worker in New Jersey who has his kids home for the weekend. He is divorced from his wife. The kids are Rachel (Dakota Fanning) and her brother Robbie (Justin Chatwin). We know right off the bat (pun intended) that the kids don't get along with their father. Ferrier wears a New York Yankees cap and Robbie wears a Boston Red Sox cap. Those who know baseball get the meaning. It is a dysfunctional family.

After their dislike for each other is well documented, the movie becomes one of him trying to bond with his kids and surviving an alien attack.

The movie itself has some serious flaws. First, the creatures from outer space came here a million year ago, and "lived" underground until now. Actually, they must have hibernated. The aliens are activated in the film by lightning.

There is a sequence where none of the cars works except for Ferrier's. In one outlandish scene, he is able to drive from New Jersey to Boston around a highway that is littered with stopped cars. They must have known he was coming!

Wow! The alien machines are tripods that can walk, fly and float on water. The aliens themselves look like mini "Alien" creatures with enlarged heads and underdeveloped bodies.

Now, I must admit that Spielberg could have intended this to be a spoof of sci-fi films of the 1950s. But even at that, I found it absurd. What worked then doesn't work now. And, that may have to do with style. The sci-fi movies of the 1950s had a sense of naivete and were filmed with charm.

Many of the better ones had logical story lines and seemed plausible. This one defies logic. The special effects in those were limited but admirable. In this version, the special effects are gritty, grim and overpowering. They prevent the movie from becoming likeable. On the one hand, the special effects by CGI are cutting edge, but the dialogue and actions of the characters are dated. There is a lack of cohesion.

The film does have similar sequences to the original. There is a scene in both that contain a cellar which is also the only time we see the aliens. The streets are deserted as people scramble for safety. The aliens succumb to "earth" the same way they did in the original. But wait, if they were able to "survive" a million years underneath the ground, how come all of a sudden they are vulnerable to...?

The acting is tepid. Cruise is, all of a sudden, a world beater. Rachel is boring. Robbie at least shows signs of a distraught teenager. And Harlan Ogilvy (Tim Robbins) is over the top and useless here. I found myself rooting for the aliens even though I knew the inevitable.

There is an added bonus at the end although I'm not sure that it adds anything to the story. It is syrupy. The original stars of the first film Gene Barry and Ann Robinson make a brief cameo appearance as Ferrier's former in-laws.

It even has a ridiculous retro 1950s ending that is right out of this world. Do yourself a favor. Rent the original. Watch a master (George Pal) work his mastery on a subject he understands and does justice to. The special effects are pretty darn good, the movie is logical (the aliens came from Mars recently not a million years ago), there is no car chase scene, and the acting is pretty damn good. Hey, what have you got to lose?

118 Minutes

MPAA Rating: PG-13 (for frightening sequences of sci-fi violence and disturbing images)

**RATING: C-**

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