



Recently released on home DVD (or if you are one of the many law breakers who visit such dodgy places as car boot sales it's been available since June 28th). This H.G Wells classic work gets a total rewrite from Spielberg or so we are told, don't think he ever read the book or heard the radio broadcast personally.

Rob Townshend is a friend of UFODATA and has worked as a special effects designer in the movie industry for many years pens his thoughts on this damp squid of a summer blockbuster.

A war of worlds... or is it words?

Hype, ballyhoo, hoopla...let's get the public whipped up into frenzy, shall we?

There is something to be said for the way the publicity machine grinds away at finding new ways to bait the hook; creating exciting scenario's to wrap new products up in, so as their target audience bites and runs. For the sounds of the metaphoric "reel" screaming out line, that is pure music to the ears of those business men who run the film industry.

Having sat through the latest screen adaptation of Wells' classic tale of alien assault – The War of the Worlds – my heart sank, as I watched in horror – for what was unfolding upon the silver screen. How could this masterwork of prose, be so brutally plundered and regurgitated into images, that my teary eyes were fixed upon?

Having grown up with classic tales of science fiction, setting their stories deep within uncharted realms of the unknown, their narratives whisking us off with words that strike cords that chill and thrill. Yet with this new adaptation – courtesy of Mr. Spielberg – for the only thing remotely associated with the book – is its title. I found myself wondering as to why a director so steeped in film lore, would choose to structure his version in such a way – for the way in which this tale of invading forces from beyond our earth, set about us, left me feeling rather flummoxed.

The premise of the film, sets out to show how these alien beings – or more to the point – their war machines that embodies them, have long-since been buried beneath our feet for countless years – millions in fact, according to the half-crazed owner of house our hero's take shelter in. It's via bolts of lightning, which zaps a hole into the ground, facilitates their owner's return, to dust-off the console, check instruments, starting the leviathan's engine in readiness for global incursion. Yet it is our gallant hero of the piece – played by Tom Cruise – that with a flash of inspiration, he connects this with the towering couriers of death.

"Tom's cracked it! Tom's cracked the son of a bitch, thank God old Tom was at hand to work it out," everyone agrees. Or nearly everyone sitting in the audience seems to concur; though keep quiet as they don't want to appear too foolish, this early in the film, just in case their wrong – though the odd titter, coupled with rustling is heard, as the silhouettes of heads come together and exchange whispering theories.

Now before those of you reading this begin to think that I'm just having a bit of a mindless rant – totally not! I'm saddened to think that in this remarkable day and age, where almost anything cinematic can be ushered into view with digital tools, it would appear that the fine art of story-telling has taken a bit of a backseat, letting the awe and splendor of visual effects take control of the wheel instead. Don't get me wrong – the basic crux of a story is there – though it would appear that as the massive war machines rose up out of their earthly slumber, to wreak havoc upon the people's of this world, I did start to see a remarkable similarity to the original 1953 version of the tale, play out in this. It was almost like Mr. Spielberg – who holds this 1950's classic piece of cinema close to his heart (and you can't fault the man for that), played out his own dream of remaking that *tour de force* piece of cinema. For I could see scenes from the George Pal version, reenacted in this. Take the look and feel of certain parts of the war machines themselves, the design of the feet are a dead give-away, are they not? Giant variants of the three-fingered Martians that inhabited Pal's film. In fact, as you sit and watch (with the added bonus of prior cinematic knowledge), you'll witness parts of Mr. Spielberg's film “smacks” of a plethora of scenes mirroring that of Mr. Pal. The farmhouse scene in the original is a cleverly crafted bit of cinematic suspense and terror; for the tension builds as a Martian cylinder, having ploughed it's way into their lives – spoiling a nice paraffin-lit dinner in the process. The shots of the disorientated Martian wondering amidst the ruins, it's eerie shadow casting a prelude of a chilling meeting that's about to take place. The looks of terror on the faces of our hero's, truly reflects the heart-pounding anguish they find themselves in – for it's not ever day invading forces from a neighboring planet drop-in to unleashing plans to quench us.

This new version however, finds our terrified cast hiding out in the cellar of some rural home somehow, left standing. While they come too terms with what's occurred over the last 24-hours – no doubt wonder what will happen to them in the next 24-hours? Though

I must admit, the film does have some nice touches involving the “the-three-legged-things-from-another-world”, for as they mooch round, wondering, “what on earth is this?” One of them gets entangled with a bicycle. It's also interesting to see these creatures from, “where are they from again? I mean, if they haven't popped over from Mars – as I heard the producer of the film utter quite proudly, saying words to the fact that, ***“we've been to Mars...so we know there's no life... nor has there ever been live on it!”*** So where did they come from? As you might have guessed, spawned from doodling pencils in art department, these chaps do look rather odd, hopping about on one leg as they seemed to do; made me chuckle as it did remind me of the “one-legged Tarzan routine”, so masterfully performed by Peter Cook and Dudley Moore!

That's the trouble with these out-of-place story elements, they act as a snap on the wrist courtesy of a rubber-band, shattering our focus on being swept away with the story and it's characters, only to now stop and think, ***“wait a minute, something not quite right here. I thought all the electrics had been disabled?”*** That sort of thing which to some of you reading, might just sound as though I'm just nit picking. No, it's a catastrophic distraction that causes those watching to lose focus. Again, lets return to the supposition that these war machines were buried a million-years-ago. The first question that popped to mind was, “why?” Yes, why bury you're weapons of mass destruction hundreds of feet below surface of an alien planet, whose only life-forms, that could be perceived as a threat – are still grunting the word “ugg” whilst banging rocks together! And surly, after all that time beneath our feet, wouldn't these metal monsters become as one with the earth, frozen in the matrix of deep time? And what of all our digging and chipping away at our habitats crusty surface? Surly one of us must have had the tip of his pick, strike the surface of one of these extremely “out-of-place” structures? Maybe the likes of the Smithsonian knew about this long ago, and thought, ***“no, better not tell them...might be cause for concern. And we***

don't want that...do we?" That's what I mean by the "snap on the wrist," it sends the mind off on a completely different tangent.

There is one other thing that still puzzles me – and many others who I've spoken to at great lengths about this I might add – is that, *"what is it about the heat-ray that selectively 'zaps' humans out of their clothes?"* How bizarre, I asked myself. For its almost bordering on the hysterically funny as you watch these super-beings, "lay waste" to all in sundry, yet something as delicate and flammable as clothing escapes unscathed, fluttering back down to earth with nary a singe – how odd indeed?

It is perhaps that these fiends from beyond know comprehension, are just working for some intergalactic clothing emporium – a magnate egger to procure and secure a foothold within our cosmos – well, as far as items of apparel go anyway; looks distinctly "rag-trade?"

Still, with all its' faults, those Wellsian aficionados amongst us (and there are many), will at least, finally get to savor the sights and sounds of those beloved tripods, romping and stomping all over this world of ours – hunting us down with a deliberate, calculating style that simply oozes malice!

For those scenes alone would have caused Mr. Wells to smile...me thinks?

Rob Townshend

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