

# 'Earth, You Have a Problem': Kabooooom!

**Aliens invade the Land of the Free. BY DAVID ANSEN**

WHILE WE'RE ON the subject of the paranormal, has anyone noticed something almost ... extrasensory going on in Hollywood? (Cue the theremin music.) Somehow everybody in town knew, before a foot of film was seen, what the three summer blockbusters would be: "Twister." "Mission: Impossible." **Independence Day**. The first has already grossed more than \$211 million. The second more than \$156 million. The third will explode on the Fourth of July weekend to record-book figures.

In some weird way, the success of these products was preordained by the multimillion-dollar mumbo-jumbo marketing. Few civilian moviegoers actually speak warmly of "Mission: Impossible"; they find it cold and confusing. "Twister"? The computer tornadoes are great. But did anyone give a flying cow whether some Ping-Pong balls got sucked up by a funnel? No matter: there are a few high-concept movies that have been deemed Events, and Americans resist them at the peril of becoming aliens themselves.

Which brings us to "Independence Day." Unless you were sharing a cabin with the Unabomber, you already know what it's about (space aliens invade the planet, Earth fights back). So does it live up to the hype? Well, if I were a 10-year-old boy, I'd probably think it was the coolest movie going. Actually, I saw this movie when I was 10, for it turns out to be a reincarnation of a cheeseball '50s B science-fiction flick, albeit a B movie that cost \$70 million and comes with a PG-13 rating, which means its ideal audience needs Mom's and Dad's consent. (Give it.)

Brought to you by the "Stargate" partners (director Roland Emmerich and his producer and co-writer, Dean Devlin), "Independence Day" has the saving grace of not taking itself seriously: it knowingly serves up recycled popcorn. One of Emmerich's inspirations was '70s disaster movies; as in those lumbering epics, we're given a medley of wildly divergent characters coping with the imminent destruction of the planet. There's the president of the United States (an improbably cast Bill Pullman, keeping a straight face). Will Smith is a fighter pilot so cocky he leaps into an alien spacecraft no human has ever seen before and zooms off into battle. Quirky Jeff Goldblum is the smart Jewish cable guy who is the only person in the world to figure out the evil invaders' communication system. Judd Hirsch is his father, supplying borscht-belt comic relief. There's Randy Quaid swaggering around as a dipso cropduster who claims he was once abducted by aliens, and Vivica Fox as Will Smith's girlfriend, a stripper who dances only to support her kid (have we wandered into another summer movie here?). Even Harvey Fierstein shows up, camping giddily.

In the course of this amiably gung-ho adventure, New York, Los Angeles and Washington are destroyed, and Houston is contaminated by a nuke set off in a vain attempt to destroy a 15-mile-wide alien ship. Yet the surviving characters react to this apocalypse as if it were a mild flu epidemic. "How do I look?" perkily inquires the about-to-be-wed stripper, evidently having recovered from mourning the deaths of everyone she knew in L.A. The dialogue is tacky, the characters stock and the special effects no improvement on anything George Lucas did 20 years ago. Which is not to say you won't have some fun at this cheerful destruction derby, but just to prepare you for deep silliness. In the old days, this terribly important Event would have been on the bottom half of a double bill.

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