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"Independence Day" Exploits UFO Community

By Glenn Campbell

The Twentieth Century Fox Film Corp. is currently spreading cash around the UFO community trying to build pre-release interest for their upcoming movie, "Independence Day." They are implying that the movie is going to be some kind of E.T. breakthrough along the lines of "Close Encounters of the Third Kind."

Fox has cut a questionable deal with the State of Nevada to promote its movie at the unveiling of the new "Extraterrestrial Highway" through Rachel, Nevada. This consists of new road signs for Route 375, accompanied by tons of publicity. Fox is funding and organizing the lavish two-day unveiling ceremonies, April 17 and 18, under an agreement with the state. In effect, they have purchased the official endorsement of the governor of Nevada, who will be hosting their events.

Fox has recruited a number of well-known names for their UFO panel to be held at the unveiling, including Walt Andrus of MUFON, Vicki Cooper and Don Ecker of UFO Magazine and Las Vegas newsman George Knapp. Fox is also patronizing UFO publications and radio shows with more advertising money than these bare-bones operations normally see.

One wonders if these respectable ufologists know the contents of the movie they are supporting. "Independence Day" is an uncredited remake of "War of the Worlds" - which might have been cutting-edge stuff during the radio broadcast of 1938 but seems dated now. The movie's aliens are purely evil and have nothing deeper to say than, "Die, exterminate... We kill you all!" They say hello by wiping out most of humanity until eventually being stopped by a computer virus.

The script has been floating around the Hollywood underground for a while. Everything in it is subject to change as the movie is re-cut and rearranged in response to test audiences prior to the July 3 release, but all the editing in the world won't resurrect the tired plot or one-dimensional characters. Billions of people are killed in this movie... but rest assured, there is still time for romance between the leading characters. In the final climactic battle, the President of the United States takes to the air as the pilot of a jet fighter, providing air support for the final assault on the alien mothership.

Special effects might save the flick, however. With all the world's major cities being blow away, it should be a film to cherish. It might even become the next "Rocky Horror Picture Show" as cult audiences cry out, "Oh, no, not WASHINGTON!" and throw popcorn at the screen.

Here's the story in a nutshell, from the original script:

>>> FADE IN. After being detected by radiotelescopes, a huge alien ship approaches Earth and is at first thought to be benign. It splits into multiple ships which hover above Earth's major cities. Naive UFO buffs gather on rooftops with signs welcoming the aliens, but a computer nerd sees danger in the signals emanating from the otherwise silent ships. He manages to alert the President, who immediately orders evacuation of the cities. Just then, the ships unleash the WALL OF DESTRUCTION--the main character in the movie. After many futile attempts to stop it, the WALL decimates most of the world's metropolises. Billions killed. The President and a few other survivors take refuge at Area 51. In a final all-or-nothing battle, the computer nerd joins forces with a fighter jock to fly a captured alien scout craft back to its orbiting mothership. The President, piloting a fighter jet, provides air support. A computer virus, designed by the nerd, is delivered to the mothership. Mothership explodes. Earth saved. Heroines fall into arms of heroes, as pieces of the mothership rain down in "Fourth of July" fireworks. FADE OUT. ROLL CREDITS.

UFO buffs are portrayed as buffoons who fail to recognize the threat. They are the first ones blown away by the evil aliens. It is surprising to see the representatives of MUFON and UFO Magazine and the respected Knapp buying into this. They might claim, "We don't really endorse the movie; we're only here for the highway," but the movie is paying their way, and the credibility of their presence alone is exactly what Fox is seeking.

Because it lacks big-name stars or a compelling story that will build word-of-mouth, Fox is banking on a massive nationwide release on July 3rd. That way, even if the reviews are dismal, millions will see it before word gets around. Between now and then, Fox will be pumping the airwaves with the standard "It's coming!" publicity. Seducing the UFO community and hooking into the Area 51 phenomenon are key to their strategy, and they have essentially purchased the "E.T. Highway" for this purpose.

Fox has also purchased an "E.T. Governor," Bob Miller. Miller never visited the highway and never consulted with local residents or county officials before he renamed it, but he did fly to Los Angeles to finalize the unusual deal with Fox. Under this agreement, which the governor's office will not discuss, Fox has organized and funded the lavish unveiling ceremonies according to its own design and interests. The governor only provides the road signs and the state dignitaries to give the event legitimacy.

Miller apparently never considered the legal and political implications of turning a state-sponsored event over to private enterprise. With Fox controlling the process, there is no opportunity for input from Nevadans, and when problems arise there is no time to address them. Fox will accept no delays. Their deal with the state appears to have been initiated before the designation was passed, so the question arises, "Whose highway is it?" Was it really intended for local economic development, or only to promote the governor and his Hollywood friends? If it was truly a gift to the local area, why wasn't the local area consulted? Elected officials in Lincoln County learned officially about their new highway only when they received invitations to the unveiling a few days ago.

"Extraterrestrial Highway" may seem a harmless designation for a lonely stretch of road, but it has obviously generated massive publicity which will result in massive tourism, in an area that isn't prepared for it and where, honestly, there isn't much for most people to do. The main problem with such an overt state endorsement is that it will attract very naive visitors, like the pullers of slot machine handles in Las Vegas, who are not familiar with the tensions and dangers of this remote desert area. To the west of the highway is a tense and poorly marked military boundary where there are many unresolved civil rights problems. The border is almost impossible to detect in places, and many tourists have inadvertently crossed it and been arrested. Other visitors have had their film confiscated or become stranded on remote dirt roads. Rather than addressing these issues, the state is attracting still more tourists to the area. The more bodies you have wandering near the border, the greater chance there is for problems, and the state has given no consideration to these impacts.

The "E.T. Highway" does not advance the UFO movement because the state is endorsing only the weakest of the UFO claims: the lights in the sky seen from the highway. Being in the middle of the nation's most intense military war-games area means there are plenty of "UFOs" in the sky - which turn into "IFOs" as soon as you understand the exercises. Bob Lazar, who inadvertently started the Area 51 phenomenon with more tangible claims of a government saucer program, says he thinks the UFO watchers are "nuts." Eventually, the world will look at this circus on the highway and make the same conclusion. As Area 51 turns into a cliché, the more credible claims will be dismissed along with the ridiculous ones.

Although it has been struggling for years to gain official recognition, the UFO movement does not need this kind of attention. The tone of the state is more of ridicule than acknowledgment, and the last thing we need is more politicians telling "little green men" jokes.

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For more on the E.T. Highway, see <http://www.ufomind.com/highway>

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