

**Guide for use  
with the movies**

**THE  
WAR  
OF THE  
WORLDS**



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# Welcome to *The War of the Worlds*

We at Vision Video are pleased to offer you the 1953 version of *The War of the Worlds* from Paramount Pictures. Although this film is over half a century old, we decided to offer it to you when a new adaptation of the same H.G. Wells story was released in 2005, starring Tom Cruise and directed by Steven Spielberg.

Dr. David Martin has pointed out that the two films presented drastically different outlooks on reality, although both were based on the same novel. The films are separated by only fifty-two years, scarcely more than one generation, but they portray two significantly contrasting worldviews. Viewed together, they offer insight into some of the foundational changes that have shaken American society over the past few decades.

It is common today to hear people speak of the “culture war” that is tearing apart the fabric of our society and is radically changing the way we view truth and reality. If we are indeed in the midst of a culture war, then perhaps the title *The War of the Worlds* takes on an additional meaning for us. A culture war is indeed a war between two different worlds, and we can easily see some of the differences between the two worlds when we examine these two films.

A simple summary:

The 1953 version shows us a world where Christianity is acknowledged and respected. It recognizes churches and ministers as a vital part of the society, and assumes that God exists and can be found through prayer and heartfelt searching.

In the 2005 version, there is no awareness of or need for God, religion, houses of worship and humble prayer. We are on our own.

In the following pages, you will find:

Some points to reflect upon as you view the two movies.

Observations from Dr. David Martin who first suggested this study guide.

An extended summary, comparison and review that first appeared in *MovieGuide*, which is reprinted here with permission.

## Points to ponder in relation to *The War of the Worlds*

- As you consider the two films, which does a better job of drawing you into the story, involving you with the characters, holding your attention, and giving you something to take away from the viewing experience?
- In a well-made movie, particularly one made by a master storyteller such as Steven Spielberg, there are no accidents. Every word, scene, prop, character, and non-verbal reaction are carefully planned and integrated into the filmmaker's vision of his finished product. As you consider the two films, put yourself in the place of the producers and writers of Spielberg's version. Try to imagine the process they went through in writing a new script for twenty-first century audiences and how they felt it must differ from a very successful film made for mid-twentieth century audiences.
- One of the key team members on the 2005 production commented that they drastically rewrote the story to reflect what he called "real life" today. But whose point of view reflects "real life?" What inferences can you make about the world in which those film creators live and what they consider to be the "real world?" Is their world the same one you know and recognize? (Note: We are obviously not referring to the science fiction dimensions of the invaders from Mars, but the world of the very human Americans who face the threat from the aliens.)
- What outlooks and beliefs about ultimate reality are suggested in the two films?
- Compare and contrast the implicit views expressed in the two film versions in regard to:

God

Religion

Prayer

Churches

Clergy

- Does either film confidently answer the question of whether or not we live in a created universe, cared for by God, subject to His superintendence, in which humans can relate to Him through prayer?
- Compare the two films in their outlook on human community, relationship among neighbors, mutual care and concern in the midst of crisis.
- And, as in any film, it is useful to look at the main characters and ask: What did they learn and how did they change? Did they grow as a result of their ordeal?
- How did you identify with the main characters and their experience? With whom did you empathize most?
- Did you take anything away from the viewing of the films that connected with your own life and self-understanding?

### **A Note regarding other earlier *War of the Worlds* treatments:**

**The Book:** The original novel titled *The War of the Worlds* by H. G. Wells was first serialized in a magazine in 1897 and then first published as a book in 1898. A paperback version is presently available from Penguin Books.

**The 1938 Radio Play:** On Sunday night October 30, 1938, the Mercury Theater of the Air presented a radio adaptation of the novel with actor Orson Wells (no relation to the novel author H.G. Wells). The broadcast created public panic. You will find the *New York Times* front page story of the chaos that ensued at <http://members.aol.com/jeff1070/wotw.html>.

The script for that radio program is at <http://members.aol.com/jeff1070/script.html>.

## Observations from Dr. David Martin

*The War of the Worlds* was one of the first Science Fiction movies I ever saw, and it made a lasting impression on me. It was released when I was three years old, and I must have seen it 20 or more times over my lifetime. I looked forward to seeing it each time, not so much for the fantastic special effects, but because of the clear story line that good conquers evil and the uplifting finish which proudly declares that even when all of mankind fails to find an answer to a crisis, God will provide the answer often in a most humbling and unobvious form.

What a wonderful message. The film's effect on me was profound, and I can recall watching at different stages of my life and career in scientific research, gaining something new with each viewing. It was a constant source of hope in time of trouble, a diversion that created a sense of cosmic justice that, in the end, it will be alright because God is watching over us.

It was with great anticipation that I looked forward to the 2005 version. I felt that Steven Spielberg's interpretation of this spiritual theme was just what our nation and society needed in 2005. To what great new heights could this creator of *E.T.* take us in exploring humanity and our place in the cosmos under the guiding hand of God? I fought to get into the largest theatre with stadium seating and Dolby sound, and there I sat—once again a child, wanting to be taught the Greatest Lesson of life with widescreen super digital cinimatechnology.

And there I sat, waiting and saddened.

I sat there saddened to see the leading character, who in the original version was a respected scientist with great ethical qualities, was now cast as deadbeat father that used profanity to discipline his children who lived with their remarried mother. What happened to the leading man you could look up to? Why did he change?

I sat there waiting for the uplifting finish, only to see that the central figure and forerunner to the True Hero of the film was erased from the 2005 version. The Minister who so courageously marched into the face of the unknown with a cross raised reciting a Psalm in an outstretched hand of peace was martyred in the original film. In the 2005 version, he did not appear at all.

Stephen Spielberg undoubtedly created a series of fireworks on film that dulled the senses and dampened the soul. Shell after shell of pyrotechnic digital effects using stunning new technology allowed the film to be shot in only 72 days in a hurry-up effort to meet the conflicting schedules of Cruise and Spielberg.

What is left is a not an uplifting film, but a series of sensational digital effects with little story line and an ending that gives new meaning to word “anticlimactic.” It was not uplifting like the original film and was purposely devoid of any mention of God as the true Hero and master of the universe.

In reporting these impressions to my neighbor and friend Ken Curtis, President of Vision Video, we felt it was important to highlight this conscious erasing of God from society by Hollywood, specifically the belief in God that is being methodically eliminated from modern film and history. Our hope is that this will allow readers and viewers to recognize this secular, Godless trend that Hollywood is promoting and empower believers to recognize it and resist it.

# The War of the Worlds: 50 Years Apart

By Tal Brooke

**EDITOR'S NOTE:**

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The first movie version of War of the Worlds came thundering down on my young mind with the force of a giant meteor and to this day remains one of the most compelling movies I have ever seen.

I remember standing in line with my father at Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, eagerly waiting to enter the afternoon matinee. I was nine years old and the film had been re-released, a rare treat when long summer afternoons on the East Coast could be hot and tedious. Anticipating this landmark film that had just come to town, I was excited and expectant. As we sat down in perfect middle row seats in a half empty theater, I was ready for an enthralling cinematic thrill ride.

When the curtain came down after two hours of intense drama and special effects, I sat stunned and intensely affected. It took a while for me to even get up from my seat. I had things to think about for a long time. After all, I had now seen the classic HG Wells novel put to film at an age when films used to haunt me. That night as I lay in bed looking through the open window into the night sky, I searched the heavens in quiet awe, far too energized to go to sleep at the regular time.

The backdrop of the film was small town America, like Rehoboth Beach, where we used to spend summer holidays away from Washington D.C. before going abroad. The film captured a more innocent America and as such remains a cultural archive of an America whose gradual disappearance I have deeply lamented. I have seen the film a number of times since that initial viewing as a young boy.

In the opening scenes of the 1953 version of War of the Worlds, a fiery object in the night sky—one of the Martian cylinders disguised as a

meteor—comes down in the distance. In the foreground stands a lone church in a small southern California town—a foreboding juxtaposition.

Soon the main characters collect around this event—honest and straightforward people who live in easy familiarity and trust. There is a square dance that ends when all electrical devices



suddenly die. Even wrist watches are frozen. Could this be from the meteor?

Late at night, three witnesses charged with guarding the meteor see a huge metallic top slowly unscrew. As a snake-like deathray looms above them, they approach it waving handkerchiefs as a sign of peace and are vaporized.

After that, a handsome young scientist appears at the crater. Police and others are on hand to keep an eye on it as it cools. The scientist is soon joined by an attractive local girl, accompanied by her uncle, who is eager to be of help. She announces that she is waiting for the famous Dr. Forrester and divulges her knowledge about him. The handsome scientist, played by Gene Barry, is indeed the famous Dr. Clayton Forrester, and humbly introduces himself. She is taken aback and soon composes herself. Extremely pretty, engaging with a type of feminine dignity common in earlier eras, Ann Robinson plays Sylvia Van Buren, niece of the local reverend, a man held in high esteem in the community.

After the army appears and quickly builds a bunker near the meteor site, the reverend, trying

for a non-military solution, attempts to offer peaceful greetings. The Martian death machine hovers menacingly as he approaches, its huge cobra-like death ray crackling and surging. From the bunker with the others the audience looks on as the reverend waves the white handkerchief. He is blasted into ash. Sylvia screams and runs outside the army bunker as others look on helplessly at her uncle's death, stopping her just in time.

It soon becomes obvious that the sheer technological power of the Martian machines is overwhelming as more meteors descend on the region. Death machines emerge, hovering in the air and armed with an array of death rays. They are protected by an impenetrable force-field. The best weaponry that post WW II America has to offer—tanks, howitzers, bazookas, and even an atomic bomb—are no match against the Martian craft. People and guns are vaporized time and again.

The Army encampment outside of town knows the game is up and soon calls Washington, having seen a demonstration of their best tanks and weapons vaporized. Clayton and Sylvia are on hand along with military top brass in a special bunker and all suited-up to watch an A-bomb



dropped on the craft. It is a dramatic demonstration. Unfortunately, the Martian craft are unscathed.

After the bunker outside of town is abandoned and the rest of the military scatter, Dr. Clayton Forrester and Sylvia Van Buren are thrown

together in a common mission. He takes her to his plane to escape before the Martian craft annihilate the region. It is a frantic ride of evading death beams as he flies dangerously low between trees. Finally he crashes in a field. They are both exhausted and run for cover.

Some distance from his crashed plane, Dr. Clayton Forrester holds Sylvia in his arms as she



sleeps. Their affection is unself-conscious and spontaneous. It is a thing of beauty, a rare diamond, in a vast cosmos. In the most convincing way we see how this most rare flower of human love is formed and know that it is something of unquantifiable value.

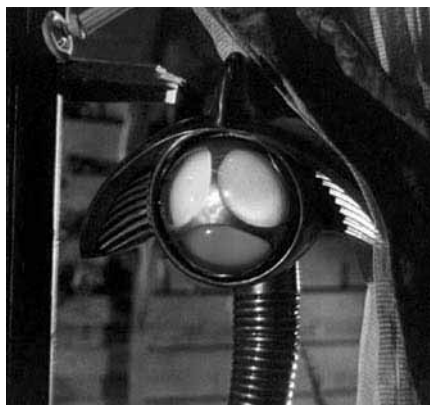
This innocent moment of their affection, he holding her in the field, is filmed and graciously preserved long before the strident voices coming from the war of the sexes, radical feminism and gay, lesbian and transgender groups descend on the national scene in vituperative power. And what a welcome break it is to have all these angry twisted voices, constantly haranguing the public forum of America (and given carte blanche by today's media) off stage and absent from the landscape of our perception. In today's films their presence is now obligatory (strange how market share is dropping as audiences resist Hollywood's social toxins).

Nevertheless, against a backdrop of escalating conflict, we see convincingly how love and affection develop between this attractive man and woman as issues of mortal risk become inevitable. We see love between a man and a woman in their prime as a poignant statement



about human worth and divine intent. On a lesser level, examples of honor, bravery and loyalty among the townspeople, out-gunned by this awesome enemy from space, show further examples of human uniqueness.

After Sylvia wakes up, they try to evade the death machines. Clayton and Sylvia head for an abandoned farmhouse. She cooks them a classic farm breakfast. But soon a Martian war machine is nearby. They hide in the shadows of the damaged farmhouse as a surveillance monitor snakes about, its machine face glowing red/blue/green or RGB. (RGB had become the cutting edge technology of the time, allowing this new generation of films to be in "Technicolor." David Sarnoff, founder of both RCA and NBC and a key player in Paramount, had just won a huge decision from the FCC in favor of his patented color technology, hence the highly visible RGB color signature tied to the alien craft in the Paramount production.)



Clayton and Sylvia manage to successfully dodge the surveillance monitor. Soon it coils back into the craft like a huge metallic anaconda. Next a real Martian enters the house. We see a long hand touching Sylvia's shoulder from behind. She is aghast. It is a leathery misshapen creature and the encounter brings mutual horror as both parties flee in dread. The couple knows that once the creature is back in the craft, it will vaporize them unless they find a means of escape, which they do.

But Clayton Forrester is separated from Sylvia in Los Angeles as crowds become desperate, stealing and plundering anything that drives along the densely crowded street. Sylvia is driving a school bus filled with her townspeople. It soon gets ransacked.

Clayton is at the Pacific Institute loading up on materials from the lab. The scientist leaves with a truck filled with critically important scientific material, including items from the Martian death machine. This seems the last hope for a scientific solution. But the mindless crowd, heedless



of the scientist's warnings, plunders the truck as he drives along the crowded Los Angeles street. The hijackers drive off leaving the scientist to fend for himself on the streets, having punched him to the ground. Another group of human traits emerge—blindness, self-destruction and savagery. We carry the seeds of our own downfall.

Clayton's mission now focuses on finding Sylvia if she is indeed still alive. He has already seen remnants of her bus on the streets of Los Angeles where his truck was hijacked and he is worried.

Now comes another cardinal insight about the America of that era. Where do people go for safety and solace? Where do they go for comfort and hope? Answer: The church.

The young scientist knows that if he wants to find Sylvia, a devout believer, his best chance is to search the churches. He finds three of them. Each scene is touching. Then he enters a large church and spots Sylvia tending to someone in a pew. Clayton Forrester and Sylvia glimpse each other, rush desperately and embrace. The world is on



the brink of ruin and each precious second together is beyond value. But there are needs even greater than theirs.

It becomes increasingly clear that only One greater than man will be able to save the human race.

In the churches the prayers are impassioned and ever more desperate, calling on God for a miracle of deliverance. There is every fear that the churches will fall like all the other buildings. But for now,

they are standing as though protected by an invisible hand as the terrible glare of the Martian rays ripple across the sanctuary through the stained-glass windows. Urgent pleas continue from the rector and the congregation for some miracle of divine intervention. Mankind is at the brink.

Suddenly there is a different feeling—a sudden quiet. The loud death rays can no longer be heard firing in the distance. The crowd tentatively moves to an open area outside the church to the street. The once colorful lights of the Martian death machine across the street go dark as the craft falters in the air then crashes to the ground.



A lone Martian arm extends through a portal. Dr. Forrester checks the pulse and finds it lifeless.

The famed scientist then looks up toward the sky and remarks in awe, “We prayed to God for a miracle . . .” At that point the narrative voice that opened the film continues with the observation that the earth’s smallest creatures, its microbes, by God’s grand design destroyed the invaders, Martians with no in-built resistance to the earth’s germs.

To my young mind, an important message had been given. People sought refuge in a place that uniquely represented God’s presence, the church. They prayed to Him in desperation and their pleas were answered as the machines came crashing down. God’s greater design had intervened.

As we left the movie theater, I tucked the message deep in my soul where one day in India, I would kneel in a South Indian hotel room and call on this very God for salvation.



### **War of The Worlds 2005**

Steven Spielberg’s *War of the Worlds 2005* is a ride through an ugly world, a much darkened America since the first film in the wake of fifty years of social change. Its people are alienated, cynical and mistrusting as they exist in a chaotic ethnically diverse soup. Unlike the dignified language of the first film, obscenities and trash-talk begin from the start. Tom Cruise, playing Ray Ferrier, cusses out his punk son Robby (Justin Chatwin), who is also a trash mouth and so it

goes with various random encounters on the street. The language embodies the new bottom-line realism. True to Spielberg’s propensity, spectacle and not the characters is what drives the film, which is presented in the metallic gray tones of photo journalism.

Unlike the humble and winsome scientist in the 1953 film, the male lead played by Tom Cruise is brash, egotistical, alienated from his kids, his ex-wife, and just about everybody else and is ready to take on the world. This isn’t to say he doesn’t exhibit courage—he does—but it reminds you of the impossibly contrived courage in other Cruise extravaganzas such as *Mission Impossible*.

Tom Cruise, as Ray Ferrier, works in a New Jersey shipyard that looks a lot like it’s in Hoboken, New Jersey. He operates a crane that moves huge shipping containers (Spielberg in interviews talks about incorporating post-911 terrorism fears). After his shift Ray Ferrier races his souped-up car through nameless ugly neighborhoods of New Jersey across the bay from New York City. As he pulls into his driv, his ex-wife and her new husband are impatiently waiting to drop off the kids for the weekend. Ray’s house is a small depressing New Jersey row house that is rapidly becoming a slum. It sits under a towering freeway with a token back yard identical to all the other trash-filled overgrown yards lined up and fenced in. The kids, in this typically dysfunctional family, are already bored and resent being stuck in a messy bachelor’s pad for the weekend without all the conveniences of their new home. Life’s tough.

But the adrenaline ride soon begins and lasts till the final credits. Cruise enters a frantic survival mode, his son Robby remains resentful and antagonistic, the ten-year-old daughter Rachel, played by Dakota Fanning, is ever weepy and terrified as the story unfolds. Spielberg fills the screen with shocked and awed faces. Rather than invasion by falling cylinders, Spielberg introduces swirling clouds and explosive bursts of lightning that Ray and his daughter look at fearfully from the back yard.

True to H.G. Well’s novel, the aliens appear towering in the sky in huge metallic tripods armed with devastating destructive power. It seems the tripods have been hidden underground for the right moment of invasion.

The first tripod emerges from deep beneath the city streets at an intersection as surrounding buildings begin crumbling into an abyss as though being swallowed by an earthquake. People run in terror. Cruise looks up and sees this





immense tripod towering way up in the air. Among the first building to go is a church, sliced in half like a loaf of bread, its steeple falling off into the street. Clearly the church won't be any kind of sanctuary in this 21st century film.

On the special effects end of it, the Steven Spielberg rendition of *War of the Worlds* undoubtedly has the benefit of fifty years of technological advancement over the first film. Spielberg has full access to all the digital and computer breakthroughs that can put any image conceivable on the screen.

Meanwhile, there's the inevitable Hollywood hype as Tom Cruise makes the media rounds pushing not only the film, but Scientology, as well as his latest romantic endeavor, *Katie Holmes*. Tall elegant showpiece wife number two, Nicole Kidman, has already been forgotten.

Yet no matter what Tom Cruise does on the screen, we are very aware that it is Tom Cruise—trying to be intense, and/or emotionally authentic, and so on. We also know that Tom Cruise is intensely aware of himself, self-absorbed and aware of every nuance of expression. Charged moments of “bonding” with the kids or “emotional authenticity” feel lifeless and hollow.

On with the plot. Near the beginning, after Ray's son Robby takes his car for a drive without permission, he manages to get into a wreck and leaves it in the streets nearby. Cruise is furious, betrayed once again. Enraged, Cruise as Ray runs off to find his abandoned car. That's when the first tripod comes blasting out of the pavement. It is huge. Think of being ant-sized and watching a large man with an insect bomb spraying away. Those are the proportions and the mood. Crowds are zapped, turned to powder as their clothes blow off in the wind like snow. They are chased around like insects on the run.

After escaping the first tripod, Ray gets the kids, finds a car that works, and drives frantically out of

the neighborhood heading into the country. His neighbor who refuses to get in is buzzed, turns to powder, and his clothes blow away as they drive off.

There are pivotal points on the road—and that is really the rest of the film. The human masses move like sewage being sprayed down a storm drain by a fire hose, that's the feeling. Cruise is avoiding the big choked-up freeways as he drives. At one point the son is driving, enters some town into a huge mass of people near the ferry. The van is rocked by the crowd, then hijacked. Cruise tries to keep it when he pulls out a pistol, but someone else has a pistol pointed at his temple. Ray and kids watch helplessly as the van drives off. Then the hijacker's head is blown off. So it goes. Now they move slowly with the crowd toward the ferry.



When they eventually get on the ferry to head ultimately for the shore of Massachusetts, a massive tripod emerges from the depths of the water, turns the boat over as Ray and his two kids swim to shore.

The next scene is worthy of Heironymous Bosch: on a bank several hills away, they crouch in the bushes and watch three massive tripods herding people scattering in terror. The terrible sound of the death rays fill the air as bodies turn to ash by the hundreds and the clothes blow away. It's obvious this will go on till the earth's surface is scoured of all its earthly inhabitants. And nothing on earth looks like it can stop them.

Later, on another hillside, we see the latest U.S. weapons take on the tripods. F-16's, Cobra helicopters, tanks, and so on. Out of the dense smog emerge the tripods still standing. The planes, tanks and helicopters are burning on the ground. It is here that the son announces that he wants to be on his own, and leaves Ray and his sister. Soon the two hide out in a country house, encounter a lone nut, then real live aliens. Ray and Rachel are detected in the house and soon end up in the eating basket of one of the tripods. Now the horror element ramps up. These creatures are into eating peo-



ple. Blood and guts spurt out from the tripod. Cruise's moment of heroism, once he and the daughter are trapped in the food basket, is to be sucked halfway into the main pod, where he throws two grenades as others pull him out. The grenades, of course, have penetrated the force field, and down the whole thing goes.

Eventually the hellish journey ends when they make it to the door of the ex-wife in Boston. By then the giant tripods have started to collapse because of the earth's old nemesis that killed the Martians in the first film—microbes.

As the credits go up, the narrative voice of Morgan Freeman echoes H.G. Wells' original lines about God creating the microbes. But Spielberg has something extra for the narrative voice to add to the original story.

I watched the recent film with some of the SCP staff. When the added narrative began, Josh Ong looked over at me with a look of irony and recorded the message. Later Josh gave me what he wrote down:

Not content with God's original casting as deliverer, Spielberg's narrator closes with the additional lines: “By the toll of a billion deaths, man had earned his immunity, his right to survive among this planet's infinite organisms. And that right is ours against all challenges. For neither do men live nor die in vain.” Spielberg's portrayal of a depraved world that has turned from the things of God, and instead trusts itself to its own wisdom and technology, is unfortunately becoming all too accurate.

Indeed, the real ode in the 2005 film version is to humanism and not to God. I am not sure what sort of world Spielberg's survivors are going to rebuild. Certainly I wouldn't want to be trapped in such a world.

It is also true that the second version of *War of the Worlds* is as much of an archive of the America of the present day as the first film recorded the America of the early 1950s. What is sad in comparing the two worlds is how much we have lost socially, spiritually and

**EDITOR'S NOTE:**

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For endnotes and documentation, please see our website at [www.scp-inc.org](http://www.scp-inc.org).

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morally in the intervening decades. It has been a downward journey and America's undoing has not even needed the Martians.

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