

FURTHER REVIEW

'NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL A CLOSE ENCOUNTER'

By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

The big Independence Day blockbuster movie of 1996 was a little different from the usual Fourth of July weekend fare. It showed major U.S. cities and landmarks — New York, Los Angeles, the Capitol and the White House — destroyed by enormous alien spaceships.

Nevertheless, "Independence Day" — which was released a day earlier than scheduled on July 2, 1996, 30 years ago — sold an awful lot of tickets and popcorn.

A FRESH TAKE ON AN OLD IDEA: AN ALIEN INVASION OF EARTH

Director Roland Emmerich and writer Dean Devlin had worked together on the science fiction film "Stargate."

While on a press tour for that film, a reporter asked Emmerich why he made a movie about aliens from other worlds if he didn't believe in that. Emmerich replied that he was fascinated by the idea of aliens arriving on Earth.

He asked the reporter to imagine what it might be like to wake up one morning to discover 15-mile-wide spaceships hovering over the world's

largest cities.

At that point, Emmerich paused, turned to Devlin and said: "I think I have an idea for our next film!"

Emmerich and Devlin later took a month long vacation to Mexico. While there, they collaborated on writing a story about an alien invasion. Devlin typed up a screenplay while Emmerich sketched the scenes they came up with and taped them to the wall.

When they finished their work, they

sent it to nine major studios, pitching it as "War of the Worlds" meets "Pulp Fiction." 20th Century Fox green-lit their project the next day and preproduction began three days later.

Part of the rush was due to an alien invasion movie from Warner Bros. — "Mars Attacks!," a comedy directed by Tim Burton. It was aimed at a late summer release, so Emmerich and Devlin knew it was important to beat that film to the box office.

"Independence Day" was scheduled

to open on July 3, 1996, but after an extensive promotional campaign, 20th Century Fox chose to begin showing it a day earlier. The film made \$11.1 million that night and then another \$17.4 million the next day.

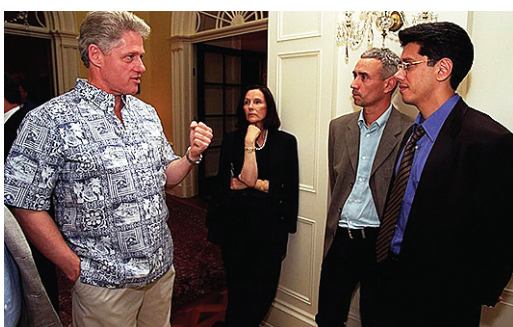
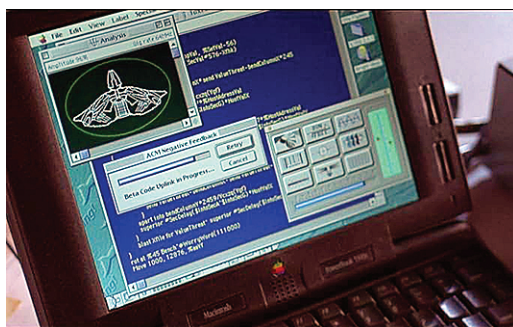
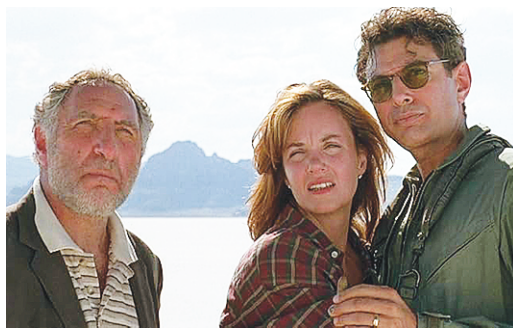
The movie grossed \$104.3 million its first week in theaters and, within 12 days, had passed the \$150 million mark.

"Independence Day" grossed \$306.2 million in the U.S. and \$817.4 million worldwide, making it the No. 2 highest grossing movie of the year behind Stephen Spielberg's "Jurassic Park."

'OH GOD, I HOPE THEY BRING BACK ELVIS ...'

Emmerich and Devlin had envisioned Will Smith as Marine Corps pilot Steven Hiller but studio executives didn't think the rapper and TV sitcom star could carry a major motion picture. They offered the part to Ethan Hawke, who said he thought the script was terrible.

Also considered were Eddie Murphy, Tom Cruise, Keanu Reeves, Johnny Depp and William Baldwin.



The film was called "ID4" at first because Warner Bros. owned the rights to "Independence Day," which was the title of a 1983 film. 20th Century Fox considered alternative titles for the film: "Invasion," "Sky on Fire," "Doomsday" and "The End of the World." Fox executives even suggested releasing the movie in late May and calling it "Memorial Day."

Hoping to encourage Fox to pursue the rights to the title he and Devlin wanted, Emmerich added a line to the end of the inspirational speech Pullman's character gives to before the climatic battle: "Today, we celebrate our Independence Day." This worked. Fox bought the rights and the project was officially named "Independence Day."

That speech was filmed at Utah's Wendover Airfield, in front of the hangar where the Enola Gay — the B-29 that dropped the first atomic bomb on Japan — had been stored for a while. By total coincidence, Pullman's speech was filmed on Aug. 6, 1995 — exactly a half-century after the Enola Gay dropped that bomb.

Making "Independence Day" required 3,000 special effects shots — most using models because CGI wasn't a big thing just yet. Models of the alien ships were 30 feet long. The White House model was 10 feet wide. Its destruction was shot at high speed with nine cameras. The movie won an Academy Award for best visual effects.

President Bill Clinton invited the cast and crew to a special showing in the private theater in the East Wing of the White House. Pullman sat between Bill and Hillary during the movie. The president stayed in his seat until right after the White House was blown up. Then, he leaped to his feet and ran for the nearest rest room.