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'The Day After Tomorrow' — Don't Take It As Science

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Friday, June 4, 2004

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So far, so good. The real problem arises when a disaster movie attempts to make a serious point, and that is the blockbuster problem with "The Day After Tomorrow." Directed by Roland Emmerich, "The Day After Tomorrow" is about politics as much as entertainment, and the real danger is that some viewers might get sucked into its pseudo-science.

Released by Twentieth Century Fox, the film stars Dennis Quaid as Jack Hall, a paleoclimatologist, an irritable but likeable scientific wizard who thinks he has found a parallel between an ancient global winter and current climatological reality. All this is packaged as the result of "global warming," and is intended by its director to score political points for the environmental movement—and against President George W. Bush.

Joining Dennis Quaid in the cast are Jake Gyllenhaal, Emmy Rossum, and Ian Holm, among others. Gyllenhaal plays Sam Hall, Jack's 17-year-old son who loves his divorced father but secretly longs to have a closer relationship with him. Rossum plays Laura Chapman, Sam's teammate in an academic competition and his developing love interest. Ian Holm adds stature to the cast playing professor Gerald Rapson, a Scottish climatologist who shares Jack Hall's fear that global climate change is about to abruptly alter human life on the planet.

The movie cost \$125-million to make, and Roland Emmerich clearly intends to make some serious money with this film. Unfortunately, he also intends to make some serious ideological points as well—and that's the problem.

As reported by Andrew C. Revkin of The New York Times, Roland Emmerich "has made no secret of his environmentalist streak or his dislike of President Bush, saying in a spate of recent European interviews that he hopes that Mr. Bush is defeated in November."

Understandably, the plot takes something of a backseat to the ideological content of the movie. As the story unfolds, Jack Hall and his band of stalwart scientists try to warn the world—especially the American administration—about the imminent danger of a new ice age, presumably caused by carbon emissions. The first hint of trouble comes when Hall and his colleagues are conducting observations in Antarctica. Drilling for core samples results in a catastrophic cleavage of the ice cap. The scene then swiftly shifts to New Delhi, where Jack Hall attempts to warn the world of coming danger, only to be shut down by U.S. Vice President Raymond Becker—a character constructed to look as much as possible like Vice President Dick Cheney. "It's a paradox," Hall warns, "but global warming could trigger a cooling trend." Those words turn out—no surprise—to be a prophetic warning of what is about to happen, and fast.

As Hall's son Sam and his teammates head for an academic competition in New York City, their plane encounters severe turbulence, and by the time the youngsters are safely in Manhattan, the city is about to be turned into a killer deep freeze.

In terms of the ecological plot, we are supposed to believe that a warming earth has led to a melting of the polar ice caps. This leads to the desalinization of the oceans and the reversal of its currents. From that point, climatological chaos breaks loose and the atmosphere itself is inverted, drawing the coldest air from the troposphere down to ground level, leading to temperatures below -100 degrees Fahrenheit.

At the White House, President Richard Blake is trying to deal with the impending crisis, but must ask his Vice President for help in making major decisions. When the President is told that the FAA wants to ground all airline flights, he must ask the Vice President: "What do you think we should do?" In the end, President Becker—clearly intended to represent President George W. Bush—disregards the advice of his obstreperous Vice President and eventually orders the evacuation of the United States population in the lower half of the nation—leaving those in the northern states to face the storm's worst and die by the millions.

Political correctness takes on new heights when Americans illegally flee across the Rio Grande River in order to find safe sanctuary in Mexico. Surviving Europeans flee into North Africa, even as Third World countries agree to receive the fleeing Westerners who presumably caused the crisis in the first place.

As the plot develops, Sam and Laura, joined by their fellow teenagers, find refuge in the New York Public Library, even as the city is inundated by a giant tidal wave and as a terrorizing freeze descends upon the city. Jack Hall and two colleagues set out from Washington, D.C. to New York City in order to save the teenagers, but must walk most of the way when their vehicle is crashed into a snow bank. At this point the plausibility of the plot breaks down almost completely, with the movie portraying a global climate change that takes only three days to be completed and presents Jack Hall and his colleagues walking in arctic gear from Philadelphia to Manhattan in two days.

Anyone knowledgeable about the background of the film and its makers should be unsurprised. Roland Emmerich based his film on *The Coming Global Superstorm* by Art Bell and Whiteley Strieber. Even though he presents the research as serious science, Bell and Strieber are actually "paranormal experts" who have far more to do with science fiction than science fact. The book's cover identifies Art Bell as interested in "topics far and wide, from gun control to near-death experiences, from politics to UFOs." Strieber is identified as the author of several "vampire novels" and *Communion: A True Story*, a work in which he claims that aliens revealed to him that the world will meet its demise in an ecological disaster.

If the weird background of those two authors is not enough to dissuade you from taking the movie seriously, ponder the fact that Roland Emmerich has previously produced movies like "Independence Day" and "Godzilla." "The Day After Tomorrow" offers this director yet another way to destroy the world while making millions.

What about the science? Patrick J. Michaels, Senior Fellow in Environmental Studies at the Cato Institute, warns that the science is not only misrepresented—it is misrepresented dangerously. "This film is propaganda designed to shift the policy of this nation on climate change," Michaels asserts. A climatologist, Michaels is offended by the ridiculous presentation of global warming and climate change presented in the movie. In a fascinating article published in *The Washington Post*, Michaels asserts that global warming is indeed a matter of serious scientific interest, but will produce nothing like what is depicted in the movie. Furthermore, humans do make some contribution to climate change, but only on a minuscule scale compared with the larger operations of the cosmos.

As Carl Wunsch of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology commented, the only way to cause an ice age by reversing the Gulf Stream would be "either to turn off the wind system, or to stop the earth's rotation, or both." Not likely.

Democratic strategists and groups such as Moveon.org are buying full-page ads touting the movie as an indication of why President George W. Bush must be defeated in the upcoming election. "One man stands in the way of real progress towards stopping global warming," the Moveon.org ad warns—and that is President George W. Bush.

Viewers may want to keep this in mind as they watch the movie. "The Day After Tomorrow" is propaganda packaged as entertainment. Knowing that, viewers are unlikely to be seduced by the film's ridiculous theory.

Nevertheless, the movie is good entertainment. If you can suspend your concern for scientific substance and turn off your meter of political correctness, you may actually enjoy the outstanding special effects. The tidal surge engulfing New York City, giant blocks of hail falling in Japan, and tornadoes destroying Los Angeles are worth watching. Of course, on

a moral plain this raises the question of why Roland Emmerich gives so much attention to a developing love story between two teenagers and brings the movie to a rosy conclusion when the young people are saved—even as billions of others have died.

Happily, the movie includes virtually nothing that is sexually offensive, and the closest the film comes to a love scene is an ardent kiss shared by the two teenagers in the frigid confines of the New York City Public Library.

Frankly, the most terrifying aspect of the movie for this reviewer was the fact that the survivors kept themselves alive by burning the books in the New York City Public Library. Now, that's a true horror movie! The bottom line? Watch the movie for fun—just don't take it seriously.

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