

Rapture Theology Hits Big Screen in Summer Blockbusters

The end of the world once again comes to Hollywood's big screens this summer, with movies ranging from big-budget action adventures to indie comedies putting their twist on the apocalypse.

Earth is annihilated after aliens destroy the moon, giant robots battle monsters, and in a comedy take on the biblical rapture, mortals are left behind to deal with atheists and spirits.

Oblivion, starring Tom Cruise and Morgan Freeman, starts the trend on Friday. Made on an estimated budget of \$120 million and set in 2077, it follows the last humans as they prepare to find a new home on another planet.

"There's an innate fascination with thinking about what life would be like after we're gone," the film's director, Joseph Kosinski, told Reuters.

Oblivion will be followed in June and July by M. Night Shyamalan's *After Earth*, starring Will Smith, all-star comedy *This Is the End*, zombie film *World War Z* and robots-versus-aliens adventure *Pacific Rim*.

British comedy *The World's End* opens in August.

Bob Thompson, professor of pop culture at Syracuse University, said the trend may reflect a sense of insecurity among Americans, particularly over the economy, the environment and political gridlock.

"Americans do have an 'end-of-days' feel to them. ... Our civilization is in decline, Congress can't get anything done. ... The metaphor for the end of the world is simply an

exaggerated story that deals with the same feelings," Thompson told Reuters.

Social insecurity is at the core of Guillermo del Toro's \$150 million *Pacific Rim*, which puts a comic book spin on the end of the world with epic battles between robots and monsters.

Del Toro told Reuters that the film reflected larger social concerns and fragility including "global economic collapse, war and terrorism everywhere."

"The accumulation of small problems and the accumulation of small solutions—you get frustrated. On a story-telling level, you want a big conflict so that you can also get big answers and big solutions," the Mexican director said.

'The Big Boom'

Packed with special effects and human drama, apocalypse films have often been summer box-office hits, like *Independence Day* in 1996, *Armageddon* in 1998 and *The Day After Tomorrow* in 2004.

"In the summer movie lexicon, you're going for the bigger gestures, the more operatic, the more acrobatic. You're going for the big boom," del Toro said.

But the apocalypse also has resonated with independent directors and comedy filmmakers.

"If you're doing an indie film that deals with it, you can do it beautifully from the perspective of a single family or a microcosm of the big event," del Toro said.

New Zealand director Paul Middleditch has taken that approach with *Rapture-Palooza*, a quirky comedy made for under \$3 million and out on limited theatrical release in early June.

Starring Anna Kendrick, John Francis Daley and Craig Robinson, it follows a young couple after the rapture has taken the religious masses to heaven and left the atheists among

zombies, demons and the Antichrist.

"The film very much embraced the idea of the apocalypse at the end of your driveway. ... There's something quite charming about the domestic-ness and simplicity of it," Middleditch said.

He said the subject is ripe for comedy.

"Ultimately I wanted the film to be a really distinctive and 'nuts' movie, to resonate with the ludicrous nature of the (Bible's) book of Revelation," Middleditch said.

There are more laughs in British director Edgar Wright's *The World's End*, about childhood friends who become mankind's only hope for survival after a trip to the pub.

Another comedy, *This Is the End*, features Hollywood actors, playing themselves, whose party is interrupted by the end of the world.

"We've been telling these stories as far back as the book of Revelation, if not further, and we'll continue to tell end-of-the-world stories until the world actually ends," Thompson said.

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