

Wargames



WARGAMES The more time goes on, the more d WarGames becomes, not only because of the archaic technology employed within the movie, but also in the Cold War nuclear politics that were still quite all-consuming during the Reagan era. Glaring leaps of logic and the impossibility of such an event ever taking place aside, it's a thought-provoking way for the youth of America to understand not only the danger of hacking, but also that the annihilation of the human race might only be minutes away at any time, and might be caused by something as random as a computer glitch.

Matthew Broderick memorably stars as 17-year-old David, a computer geek who spends a great deal of his time trying to figure out ways to hack into places for his own entertainment, or to do such delinquent deeds as changing his own grades in the school computers. His latest goal is to discover how to get into the computers at a gaming company to play their latest big game before it comes out, but he unwittingly ends up inside WOPR, the top defense computer the Pentagon has at its disposal. Presented with a list of games to play, David is especially intrigued by one entitled, " Global Thermonuclear War", a simulation of US vs. Russia nuclear war scenarios. Alas, what started out as a game seems all too real, as WOPR takes over the systems at the NORAD project, and the folks there aren't sure if it is all a game or if the Russian missiles that appear to be poised to wipe out the US means World War III is imminent.

Although WarGames is mostly considered a juvenile sci-fi adventure today, it was taken very seriously at the time of its release, thanks to the prevailing fear of nuclear war, in addition to the vast majority of the public not knowing of how such things as modems and computer actually work. The weightiness of some very real issues led to it earning three Academy Award nominations,

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including Best Writing for the screenplay by Lasker and Parkes (they would revisit the hacker theme in a future film, Sneakers).

Some aspects admittedly dated, WarGames still manages to be a riveting and intelligent thriller, with some terrific performances from a cast of very appealing actors. Matthew Broderick makes for a perfect reluctant hero, seeming like a bright boy next door as you'd find in almost every neighborhood, which furthers the feeling that certain calamity could come at any time from any corner of the globe. Superb character actors fill in the supporting roles, including fantastic parts for Dabney Coleman, Barry Corbin, and John Wood as the only men with the power to stop world destruction, if they only had a clue. Ally Sheedy also shows early signs why she would become one of the most sought after actresses of the next several years with an effervescent portrayal of Broderick's would-be girlfriend.

WarGames is a cool science fiction movie to see as it offers three great thrills. The first is to see to which extent our lives are defined by computers and how much we depend on them. The second thrill of watching WarGames is that it offers a picture of basic hacking techniques and easy phone phreaking, things common in the 'Seventies and 'Eighties but more dangerous nowadays. While not much shown of that field in this film can still be applied today, WarGames stays in movie history as one of the few which tackled the idea and showed to many computer illiterates the power and usefulness of PCs in modern society. The final thrill is the era in which the movie is taking place. WarGames has somewhat aged badly as its then cutting-edge (8" diskettes, 300 bps modems) consumer technology is now ripe to trade at good prices as museum relics. But what could be seen as a fault is more like a look at the past, complete with early 80's classic haircuts.

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Of course, now that the Cold War is officially over, nuclear fear of the USA vs. USSR kind is greatly diminished, and so might the movie climax be.

In order to properly enjoy WarGames, you have to overlook some very glaring plot holes, leaps of logic, and outright inaccuracies. Credit director John Badham for keeping the energy and action flowing just fast enough to never dwell on anything long enough to notice, as we go with the flow for the sake of the nicely constructed thriller aspects. Ultimately, we are rewarded with a gripping climax, with the fate of the world in the balance, nicely visualized by the set design and special effects teams.

WarGames is very flawed in many ways, but is still quite entertaining, delivering interesting theories out of preposterous ideas in a way where you almost believe it could actually happen. As a historical document, it's all hogwash, of course, but as a movie, WarGames made a splash in the public psyche of the early 1980s, showing us how the brink of destruction could be closer than we would have ever imagined possible.