

**"IF THEY KNEW,
THEY WOULD
HAVE TO DO
SOMETHING."**

**THE UNITED STATES
REMAINS SILENT
ABOUT THE ISRAELI
OCCUPATION.**

BY CHARMAINE SEITZ



Wreckage in Rafah.

GAZA STRIP

Yasser is an 11-year-old boy who lives along Gaza's border with Egypt. I met him in April after the Israeli army had razed the homes of more than 400 Palestinians, including his own. Tanks entered the refugee camp near midnight, forcing the families from their beds and bulldozing the houses in their wake.

"So we hate you," he says matter-of-factly when he learns that I am American.

Like most Palestinians, Yasser believes it is the United States that allows this to happen. I try to explain that many Americans don't even know what his life is like. And then I hear him say, almost to himself, "Yes, because if they knew, they would have to do something."

In these southern regions of the Gaza Strip, daily life defies such logic. It was here on May 22, just hours after Israel's defense minister "ordered the army to cease fire and to follow regulations for opening fire that are activated when lives are in danger," that Israeli troops made three incursions into areas under Palestinian Authority control, demolishing one house and bulldozing Palestinian fields.

The next afternoon, 45 Palestinians, many of them young children, were injured near the border town of Rafah as Israeli tank gunfire and shell blasts pierced the stifling desert heat. Cease-fire or not, residents say this was a normal day. "It is difficult to work, to move, to sleep," says 66-year-old Hasan Tahrawi. "What can you say when you see airplanes shooting, and tanks? There is nothing I can say or do."

Israel has occupied Gaza since the 1967 Six Day War, when it defeated the Egyptian army here. Peace agreements with Palestinians have created areas of Palestinian Authority control, while leaving more than 6,000 Israeli settlers on the remainder of the land. But since the September start of the

Aqsa Intifada—the Palestinian uprising against continuing Israeli occupation and growing settlements—Israeli incursions into Palestinian Authority areas have become commonplace.

On June 23, just 10 days after CIA Director George Tenet personally set into motion a plan that called for several weeks of "calm" before a return to talks, Israeli tanks again invaded the Rafah refugee camp at 3 a.m., bulldozing another 20 homes. An Israeli army spokesman described the demolitions as "engineering works," claiming it was a response to shooting from the houses. But those who live there, while admitting that Palestinian shooters do fire at Israeli positions, were adamant that they certainly have not done so from these residences.

The Israeli incursions have met with feeble international protest. The only time that Israeli troop movements in the Gaza Strip incurred U.S. condemnation was in the week after the demolition of Yasser's home—when the Israeli military invaded three swathes of Palestinian-controlled territory, cutting off Palestinian population centers from one another. The soldiers appeared to be preparing to stay, and only then did Secretary of State Colin Powell issue a bluntly worded statement. The army was gone in hours.

Since mid-April, however, the army has carried out similar incursions, invading and then bulldozing Palestinian land more than a dozen times. Other invasions have lasted just minutes and effectively weakened the lines of Palestinian control set down in previous peace agreements. "There appears to be no genuine security justification [for these demolitions]," says Richard Falk, a member of a U.N. commission to the area, "and even if there were, Israel could proceed in a far less inhumane manner: giving notice, providing alternative housing, offering compensation and making a demonstration of security needs."

Machine Love

By Joshua Rothkopf

We fade in on huge churning waves, not a bad place to start: Steven Spielberg's *A.I.* pegs our end of days as waterlogged, with whole cities drowned under melted ice-

A.I.: Artificial Intelligence
Directed by Steven Spielberg

caps. It's the future and people now live in places like New Jersey—comfortably, in fact—thanks to science: Robots fill the void imposed by ecological disaster and strict sanctions on pregnancy. That's a lot of doom and zoom to be riding in on those cresting waves, and you brace yourself for the chop—just as Spielberg must have when he picked up this project from the late Stanley Kubrick, who, insiders say, secretly obsessed on its finer points for decades.

But Spielberg, as toned and well-positioned as he is, just can't surf these waves; they might have even thrown the master. At its essence a retelling of the lost-boy Pinocchio story bathed in a meticulously imagined high-tech universe, *A.I.* has the overpowering taste of a dense French reduction left to stew for too long; it's so saturated with baroque detail and curly-cue plot extensions that you choke on the richness. It's like a million hours spent playing with the same toy.

This is not the typical problem that sinks most summer blockbusters, that mysterious alchemy by which the input of dozens of high-paid and presumably talented writers is somehow combined into a lump of coal. *A.I.* is deliberate in a way than can only be attributed to its two chief creators, Kubrick, the mechanic supreme, and Spielberg, the great pop impresario. As such, it's a psychotic piece of filmmaking, but a strangely personal one too, a mythic boyhood fantasy (*E.T.*, *The Empire of the Sun*) modeled on a blueprint made by a HAL computer. The strangled result, while never less than arresting, is the most maddening of failures, a double-

stymie of genius: a Kubrick film literalized to the point of obviousness, a Spielberg film largely choked off from emotion.

Someone must have thought this was a good idea, maybe Spielberg himself, though his fulfillment of *A.I.* strikes me as duty as much as tribute. (There may have also been guilt: At one point he agreed to a formal collaboration with Kubrick but extricated himself after a month or so of intense transatlantic faxing.) At any rate, *A.I.* is certainly the most expensive honor ever paid a 90-page treatment, itself based on a one-gag short



We are the robots.

story by sci-fi author Brian Aldiss called "Supertoys Last All Summer Long," published 30 years ago and expanded over time by other writers, primarily novelists Ian Watson and Sara Maitland.

Whatever spark was there though, holding Kubrick's interest for 25 years and burning unspeakable amounts of development money, will remain a mystery, now even further obscured by Spielberg's personalized version of the

material. (The rambling screenplay is his first since *Poltergeist*.) But how could it not be? Kubrick, more than anyone else, depended on his own eye and stylized remove for his work's transcendence.

O.K., so *A.I.* isn't a masterpiece rescued from an untimely death. It's here, though, and if hosannas aren't exactly in order there's certainly a lot of captivating whiz-bang to process, starting with the slightly menacing first scene—a robotics lecture given by William Hurt, who calls on his company to create a "mecha" who can love. It's an erudite chamber of the gods: self-satisfied with their progress and quick to applaud. (Hurt seems too wan a presence for the required arrogance; it's a part that calls for one of those plummy scientists from *A Clockwork Orange*.) Not five minutes in and we're already at a meta moment, where the creation of robot life can be swapped for the creation of cinema: Spielberg prevails (of course) as the benign god of what we see here—dramatically lit scientists with good intentions hesitating at moral quandaries—over what would have likely played as all-too-human buffoonery in the lapsed church of Kubrick.

Suddenly it's 20 months later and their experiment is a reality. Enter David (Haley Joel Osment), a serenely beautiful child stepping tentatively into his adoptive parents' foyer. Osment's debut, so haunted and intuitive in *The Sixth Sense*, heralded a talent unseen since the lankier days of Jodie Foster, and he's clearly the real deal. With *A.I.*, he has applied himself to a plasticine weirdness that would be a challenge to any actor, masking layers of expressiveness under artificially designed wraps. He's almost too perfect when he calmly asks, "Would you like me to go to bed now?" (The question is certainly a first in the history of child-rearing.)

Spielberg stretches out in this initial section, and you might be surprised by how far he strays from familiar ground, leaving behind the picture of idyllic family life for some sharp commentary. David gives his owners the creeps, jolting them to nervous glances at the dinner table after a pre-programmed explosion of