

The cover features a dramatic space scene. At the top, the Earth and Moon are visible against a starry background. Below them, a dark, cratered asteroid orbits. The central focus is a large, fiery orange and yellow planet, possibly Mars, with a bright, glowing impact point on its surface. A smaller, dark asteroid is positioned above this planet. The overall color palette is dominated by the reds and oranges of the planet and the blacks and greys of space.

SCI-FI FILM FLEETS A

VOLUME 7

THE END IS NIGH!

Chris Christopoulos

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Any acknowledgement would be greatly appreciated when referencing or distributing material from this eBook.

Dedications

Dedicated in loving memory of my wonderful parents:-

Konstantinos (Dino) Christopoulos who took me to see my very first science fiction film in the early 1960s, *The Man With The X-Ray Eyes* (1963)

Rosemary Christopoulos who sat with me after school as I watched on TV episodes the first two doctors of the *Doctor Who* series and insisted on asking me interminable questions about who was who and what was going on! Thanks mum and dad!

The SCI-FI FILM FIESTA eBook series is intended as a salute to the pioneering work of science fiction film makers. May future generations have the privilege of enjoying your work and never stop wondering....*What if?*

Dedicated also to *you*, the reader who appreciates these classic gems from the golden age of sci-fi film-making. It is you who help to keep such films alive for future generations to enjoy

Other eBooks in the Sci-Fi Film Fiesta series:

Volume 1: “Here Be Monsters”

Volume 2: “Into Space”

Volume 3: “Other Worlds”

Volume 4: “Journeys Within”

Volume 5: “Alien Contact”

Volume 6: “Alien Invasion”



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SCI-FI FILM FIESTA VOLUME 7: THE END IS NIGH!

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Introduction

***Asteroid or comet impact!
Deadly global pandemic!
X-ray or Gamma ray burst from space!
Massive solar flares!
Supernova explosion!
Re-emergence of ancient viruses and bacteria!
Alien invasion!***

***Nuclear and biological warfare!
Runaway global warming!
Devastating ice-age!
Global famine!
Super volcano eruptions!
World wide economic and social collapse!***

The above are just some of the ways by which human civilisation could be brought to a crashing end – all of which have from time to time been the subject of science fiction films.

Human beings don't have a particularly good track record when it comes to predicting the end of the world. Take for instance biblical predictions foretelling the end of the world which have had to be revised again and again. In our own times we seem to have managed to get through the predicted Y2K or millennium bug unscathed and the year 2012 came and went without a hitch despite our best efforts at misinterpreting the Mayan calendar.

The biggest danger posed to our own survival as a species most likely will come from ourselves and will originate from human complacency, smugness, hubris and plain stupidity.

In the 1950s and throughout the Cold War period, the threat of nuclear annihilation was a very real prospect. Unfortunately with the passage of time, collective amnesia has taken hold and it is more than likely a miscalculation will result in the unleashing of a nuclear holocaust if we are not careful. The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the number of nuclear weapon (and near nuclear weapon-ready) states in a volatile Geo-political environment make such a prospect more than likely.

There are those who believe that somewhere in the depths of space there is a sizeable chunk of rock with our name on it. However, we are increasingly assured that good old science and technology will come to our rescue by ensuring we can identify any potential planet killer that may be heading towards us and that once identified measures can be taken to deflect said object before any encounter with our planet can take place. It wasn't that long ago, however that people in a region of Russia were knocked off their feet and windows in buildings were shattered when an object rudely entered earth's atmosphere and reminded us that perhaps we are not so much in charge of things as we think we are!

The recent Covid-19 Pandemic has provided us with some interesting lessons which with the passage of time we seem to be increasingly failing to learn from. What might have happened had no vaccine or effective anti-viral medications been developed? Even with such means at our disposal with which to fight the virus, people do continue to die from Covid or at least are falling ill and are being hospitalised. Not surprisingly political and economic considerations have taken precedence and the true extent of mortality and illness and their effect on various sectors of society tend to be somewhat "disguised" and underplayed. Also not surprising is that the seriousness of the situation is being overshadowed by a willingness on the part of most of society to ignore what is happening and to just get on with life and not think too much about it. We can only hope that our

carelessness does not result in the development of a deadly new mutation of the virus with catastrophic consequences for humankind.

One thing we can be sure of is that nothing – nothing in creation or in the whole universe lasts forever, including the human race. One way or another, our planet and our species along with everything else will come to an end. Nor will the rest of the universe care one bit or even notice. It is worth considering that our species on more than one occasion in the distant has come perilously close to extinction due to severe climactic calamities with only a few hundred or perhaps a few thousand human individuals left alive on the entire planet!

If any of the above scenarios don't result in our demise, then our planet will cease to exist when our sun in its death throes expands to become a red giant, engulfs the earth and then eventually consumes whatever is left of itself before shrinking to a white dwarf star and puffing out of existence. Aeons from now the universe will continue to expand until the light from the myriad stars gradually extinguish and darkness and nothingness reigns supreme.

I doubt that the end of our planet or our civilization will be result of a single factor. Rather, the end will most likely result from a combination of factors with one perhaps culminating in the knock-out punch.

In the meantime, dear reader, I'd like to share with you my own enjoyment of many individual classic films from the golden age of science fiction with this 7th volume of the Sci-Fi Film Fiesta series: "The End Is Nigh," which features sci-fi films of the 1950s that depict end of the world scenarios as well as post apocalyptic and dystopian futures.



When Worlds Collide (1951)

A Very Good Film For Its Time

Director: Rudolph Maté

Producer: George Pal (See my tribute to George Pal)

Written by: Sydney Boehm

Music: Leith Stevens

Cinematography: W. Howard Greene; John F. Seitz

Editing: Arthur P. Schmidt

Release date: August 1951

Running time: 83 minutes

Cast

Richard Derr (David Randal)

Larry Keating (Dr. Cole Hendron)

Barbara Rush (Joyce Hendron, Cole's daughter)
John Hoyt (Sydney Stanton)
Peter Hansen (Dr. Tony Drake)
Alden Chase (Dr. George Frye, Dr Hendron's second in command)
Hayden Rorke (Dr. Emery Bronson)
Frank Cady (Harold Ferris, Stanton's assistant)

Background

"When Worlds Collide" began life as a six-part monthly serial from September 1932 to February 1933 and as a 1933 science fiction novel both co-written by Philip Wylie and Edwin Balmer.

Synopsis

David Randall, a skilled pilot is paid to deliver some mysterious and secret information from one esteemed astronomer to another astronomer, Dr. Hendron. Hendron confirms the sender's shattering findings that a planet called Zyra, orbiting a sun called Bellus, will enter our solar system. The sun, Bellus will collide with the Earth and bring about human civilisation's end.

The UN is informed that the world is about to end, and that the only hope for humanity's survival lies with the construction of a rocket-ship to send a select few (40) to the planet Zyra as it passes. The urgent information about humanity's fate is met with by the response that there "is no cause for alarm."

We learn that two philanthropists pledge to help Dr. Hendron finance the building of this rocket ship that hopefully will take them to the planet Zyra, assuming that it is habitable for humans.

Sydney Stanton, a cynical and bitter wheelchair-bound old man puts up the rest of the money, provided that he is taken on board the rocket ship.

The problem is that only so many passengers and only so much cargo can be accommodated on the rocket ship, not to mention that the countdown is on for the approach of doomsday!

Will this modern-day Noah's ark save what remains of humanity from total extinction.....

When Worlds Collide?

Points Of Interest

(Some spoilers follow....)

Even though the film, “When Worlds Collide” was made about 70 years ago, it does remain relevant to the concerns about potential threats to humanity’s existence in the 21st. century such as global warming; earthquakes and tsunamis in the Indian Ocean and Japan; devastating floods in England, wild fires in Australia, California and Europe; Hurricane Sandy in the US; meteors hurtling across the sky and blasting out windows in Russia and more.

With such events seeming to occur with greater frequency and impact, our minds tend to become more focused on the rather precarious nature of our existence. Even on a more personal and individual level, as we continue on our journey through life, we eventually come to the realisation that the number of days that lie ahead of us will be far fewer than the number of days that lie behind us. The important question then for civilisation and for individuals is how do we meet the challenge presented to us by our inevitable mortality, the impermanence of any civilization and the transitory nature of our existence?

The characters in the film, “When Worlds Collide,” find that circumstances have forced them to consider such a question head on as the countdown is on to the end of the world.

In the film we see aspects of ourselves as we witness people.....

At their very worst:

In the film we see people acting selfishly, not caring about anyone else's survival, and merely just looking out for Number One. For instance, Stanton bankrolls the whole rocket ship project not due to any sense of altruism on his part but rather as a means of buying his own survival. Here we see a man used to “weighing the percentages,” who doesn’t “deal in theories, only realities” and who views civilization as merely being governed by the principle of “dog eat dog” and the “law of the jungle.”

We also see reason being replaced by fear and desperation as the work crews question “Why should our lives be decided by a raffle?” and attempt to gain entry to the rocket by means of mob violence. Would we act differently if we were faced with such a threat to our very survival?

A similar scenario occurs in the film “2012” whereby a moral dilemma is faced by those on the arks containing the select few who have been chosen to survive the global flood and whether or not to admit the workers and others outside onto the arks.

At their very best:

The worst possible state of affairs can also bring out the best in people. In “When Worlds Collide” we see examples of self-sacrifice whereby characters find themselves forced to decide between saving their own lives or opting for something more ethical, moral or just more important than life itself.

The rather blatant but understandable attempt by Dr Hendron to rig the lottery so that his daughter and future son-in-law, David can get a seat on the ship, manages to produce a dilemma requiring an ethical and moral decision to be made by David.

We know earlier that David did not succumb to the offers from “Donovan from the Sentinel.” So some kind of moral framework is being established here for which we can forgive him his obvious past philandering and womanizing ways. Hendron did “stretch the point to include” David who according to David himself would be little more than an “aerial taxi driver.” David’s sense of ethics therefore won’t allow him to go along with Hendron’s decision.

As was mentioned in the film’s synopsis, acts of selflessness were shown when the two philanthropists pledged (with no strings attached) to help Dr. Hendron finance the building of this rocket ship.

Another such act, but on a more personal and emotional level, was Doctor Drake’s convincing David to go on the flight, even resorting to deception by stating that, “if Frye doesn’t make it, you’ll be in command of the ship.” Of course, there is nothing medically wrong with Frye! Despite Drake’s involvement with Joyce Hendron, he places the happiness of the woman he loves above that of his own feelings and desires. If her happiness lies with being with David, then he’ll be the one to make it happen.

Placing their lives in perspective:

Money, material possessions and all those petty concerns and conflicts no longer seem so important when faced with the inevitability of total annihilation. For example, following from Bronson’s earlier comment that a “day will come when money won’t mean anything,” we see David Randall in a nightclub contemplating a dollar bill. Knowing that it soon will be of no use to him, he decides to light a cigarette with it. This one action demonstrates how aspects of life that were once taken for granted and were seen to have been important no longer matter when faced with a threat of such magnitude as the one being faced by the film’s characters.

The petty conflict developing between David and Dr. Drake over Joyce Hendron is soon seen by both of them for what it is. Just as they are about to come to blows, the radio operator merely has to turn up the radio’s volume where they hear an urgent plea for more penicillin. Without anyone having to say anything obvious, they both come to their senses and focus on what is important. Even a bit later when both men are rescuing a young boy from a rooftop, it seems as if Drake is about to leave David behind. However, he quickly circles back in the helicopter and picks David up. It seems that there are far more important things in life than petty jealousies and rivalries in the face of the devastation around them.

There are times when even one’s personal life and survival is a secondary concern when faced with the prospect of losing something or someone who is more important than life itself. An example of this is young Eddie deciding to stay behind with his sweetheart, Julie Cummings rather than taking his place on the ship and possibly living life without her. Fortunately, it worked out well for both of them.

Seeking spiritual strength:

When faced with the prospect of death and total loss of everything, it is no surprise that we learn in the film that never have people “felt so close to God.”

Reflecting on what one's life has amounted to, wondering what will happen when we die, thinking about whether or not there is an afterlife and so on. Such thoughts probably occur to most of us at some stage in our lives and probably more so for many people when faced with the prospect of inevitable and imminent extinction. Only a select few in the film can be physically saved. The rest of humanity must cling to some hope of salvation after the Earth's destruction, even if it is in the form of faith in humanity's rebirth in both a spiritual sense and as a species.

There are of course some aspects to this film, "When Worlds Collide", that tend to detract from its finer qualities. Among them are;

- A rather ageist view that no senior citizen can possibly be useful to a new society. As Dr.Hendron stated, "This new world isn't for us." Have we really changed our perceptions as to the worth and value of our older citizens significantly since that time?
- An awful representation of the planet Zyra. Just look at it. Words are not needed.
- A mixed collection of special visual effects ranging from a convincing interior room shot during an earthquake through to disaster-type stock footage. Some scenes look convincing but others plainly do not.
- Suspect science even for the times. For example, human beings and much of everything else would have been vaporized from Bellus' heat long before being hit by it.
- Overdone parallels with the biblical story of Noah and the Great Flood complete with quotes from The Book of Genesis, a craft being constructed to take the chosen few to safety, livestock being led in to the ship two by two, ethereal music and on it goes.....



Five (1951)

*A historically important and visionary
sci-fi film that's ahead of its time*

Director: Arch Oboler

Producer: Arch Oboler

Screenplay: Arch Oboler

Story: Arch Oboler

Music: Henry Russell

Cinematography: Sid Lubow, Louis Clyde Stoumen

Editing: John Hoffman, Ed Spiegel, Arthur Swerdlhoff

Studio: Arch Oboler Productions

Distributor: Columbia Pictures

Release date: April 25, 1951 (U.S.)

Running time: 93 minutes (Black and White)

Budget: \$75,000

Cast

**William Phipps (Michael Rogin)
Susan Douglas Rubes (Roseanne Rogers)
James Anderson (Eric)
Charles Lampkin (Charles)
Earl Lee (Oliver P. Barnstaple)**

Synopsis

(Some spoilers follow)

As stated in a newspaper headline, a warning had been issued that detonating a new type of atomic bomb could result in humanity's extinction. The film's title, "Five," refers to the number of survivors of this atomic bomb disaster that has wiped out the rest of the human race.

The film opens with the once invincible and dependable icons of civilization (Big Ben, Tower of London, Kremlin, Eiffel Tower) suffocating in a sea of destruction - smoke, sirens and screams. An aerial shot slowly closes in on the small isolated and exhausted rag doll figure of Roseanne Rogers as she numbly staggers in shock along the roadway in her search for another living human being. We discover that Roseanne was in a hospital's lead-lined X-ray room when disaster struck. It is almost ironic that she has been saved from death by radiation by undergoing a process that involves radiation (X-rays) which outside of controlled medical uses is deadly to humans.

Receiving no reply to her piteous plea, "Somebody please help me!" Roseanne makes her way to her aunt's isolated hillside house. Walking in upon a scene with a strangely unreal homely atmosphere, she finds that someone else is already living there. It turns out that the man, Michael, a sensitive young poet and philosopher who is glad that the "cheap honky-tonk of a world" is dead, had been in an elevator in the Empire State Building ("mighty edifice") when the 'end' came. He can even recite the speech he used to give to visitors to the building which now seems utterly absurd under the circumstances. Too numb to speak, Roseanne slowly recovers. She rejects Michael's attempt to force himself onto her, stating that she is both married and pregnant.

Two more survivors eventually arrive: Oliver P. Barnstaple, an elderly assistant cashier who is in denial in that he believes he is on vacation, and Charles, an African American, who we learn wanted to be a teacher but wound up becoming a doorman. Charles has been taking care of Oliver since they were both accidentally locked in a bank vault when the disaster occurred.

Later on while at the beach, they discover a man in the water. After dragging him out, they learn that his name is Eric, a cosmopolitan Alpinist who was stranded on Mount Everest during a blizzard when disaster struck. He was making his way back to America when his plane ran out of fuel just short of land.

After seeming to recover, Barnstaple dies peacefully at the kind of place he had always wanted to be.

With Eric's inclusion in the post-apocalypse community, the seeds of conflict and discord have been sown. Eric believes the reason that they lived was because they were immune to the radiation. He wants to search for and gather together any other survivors. Michael, however, believes that the radiation is more intense in the cities that Eric wants to search.

As can be seen from his attitude toward Charles, Eric is a racist. The fight that erupts between the two men is halted when Roseanne goes into labor. With Michael's help she gives birth to a boy.

With hopes emerging for making a better life, it is Eric who spoils things by deliberately driving the jeep through the little community's cultivated field, destroying a portion of their crops. Michael orders Eric to leave, but Eric resorts to a show of power and threat of violence as he brandishes a pistol and states that he will leave only when he is good and ready to.

Needing to discover what became of her husband, Roseanne accompanies Eric to the city. Eric, not surprisingly insists that Roseanne not tell Michael about this. Eric has been stealing supplies, and a fight results between him and a suspicious Charles who is stabbed in the back and killed by Eric.

In the city, while Eric is looting, Roseanne discovers her husband's skeleton in a waiting room. Eric refuses to let Roseanne return to the group and after they struggle his shirt is torn open to reveal that he has radiation poisoning.

*Eric's fate seems to be sealed.
But what of Roseanne and her baby's fate?
What about Michael?
Will they ever be reunited?*

*Is there any hope left for the fledgling little community?
Or has all hope for humanity's survival been destroyed by the fallout of
its most destructive sins of violence, domination, fear, lust and greed?*

Points Of Interest

"Five" is the first film to depict the aftermath of a catastrophe involving fall-out from a super-atomic bomb that, with the exception of a few survivors, wipes out humanity on earth.

Remember that this film was made just over five years after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that brought an end to World War II. While the film was being made the world was embroiled in the Korean War. General MacArthur proposed using nuclear weapons on strategic targets in China. Meanwhile, in the US, children were being taught to "Duck and Cover." Since then we have had the Cuban Missile Crisis; Mutually Assured Destruction concepts; proliferation of nuclear weapons with politically unstable states having access to them; headlines

screaming the hysterical rhetoric of nuclear retribution and retaliation from bellicose political leaders who sorely need to see what life would be like for the survivors of a nuclear holocaust.

The film makes one wonder whether anything will really change should such a calamity befall humanity. Judging from the characters' words and actions, it seems that the failings of humanity would not magically disappear even with the prospect of being able to start afresh. Racism, lust and all the other self-destructive human failings will probably still rear their ugly heads. Take for instance, Michael's attempt to force himself on the last woman on Earth-and this from a fairly nice, deep and introspective character. In this study in group-dynamics, this small but diverse group of survivors face, and try to overcome a great cataclysm. While doing so they are forced to face a crisis within-a crisis of their own making where prejudice, fear, intolerance, greed and other base human instincts threaten to cause an implosion of the last five surviving members of the human race.

If that sounds pretty dark, well that is certainly the mood and atmosphere for much of the film. The tension and sense of dread is palpable during the shooting of the city sequence as we see the image of the buildings, abandoned cars and scattered skeletons through a shaky camera lens, as we witness the emotions register on the close-ups of Roseanne's face and hear the constant soul-shattering wailing sound of sirens.

The film "Five" contains characters who each symbolize different elements that go to make up our modern civilization and community. There is something of each character that we recognise within most of us. For instance, we have the mountain climber, Eric ("I climbed Mt. Everest. I alone. Always alone.") who represents the kind of politically ideological, dogmatic, racially intolerant, destructive and domineering fascism that left much of Europe in ruins a few years previously. Perhaps there is a bit of Eric buried within all of us with our need to have, possess and control things and people. For Eric, the cities are there "bursting with food" ready to be plundered. Not for him the "return to primitiveness" and living by the sweat of one's brow. He must lead others (preferably the select few of humanity who have "special immunity") by his strength of will toward the mountain summit no matter what the human and material cost. How many people have had to die as the "King Eric 1's" of this world have led others in their quest to turn their "theory" into "fact" just so that they can "justify their existence?"

Then there's the banker, Barnstaple, who represents an old-order mentality which he tries to hang on to cope with the dire circumstances. After all, "vacations are delightful, (but) one has obligations to one's work." It is such a mode of living that can make one want to "sleep under the stars" for "40 years" but never get to do so. It is too easy to have one's priorities and values twisted so much that the only life that is lived is a life of lost opportunities, unrealized ambitions and unfulfilled wishes-a wasted life. For Barnstaple, and for most of us, we have always wanted to go somewhere, be something or do something but are left thinking, "I don't remember why I didn't." Barnstaple is only now able to enjoy the simple pleasure of being at the beach at the last moments of his life. Only with the approach of death is he able to appreciate the value of what he has lost sight of for much of his life while dutifully fulfilling his role and function as assistant cashier.

For me, Charles represents the true heart and soul of this little community. He is like 'one who was blind but can now see' type of character who wanted to be a teacher, "but lost my way somewhere I guess." Like most of us, Charles settled for a "piece of security" with the result that, "all my life in the city and I never saw the lights." A life of security and obligation is fine but a question inevitably has to be asked; is that all there is? Looking behind and beyond the façade to really see "the lights," to really hear the "dripping of a faucet," or to derive satisfaction at growing something simple like corn, helps to connect one to what is truly meaningful and important in life. We never know how important and significant such things are until we are deprived of them.

Finally, there is Michael and Rosanne. In many respects they seem to represent a kind of new Adam and Eve of a new Eden. They hold out a promise of future hope and a fulfillment of a God's hope when He "shaped a lump of clay into his own image." Now that a breath of life has been given to a new living soul in the form of the birth of a child, we have a sense of the possibility of a new life where people "work together, live together, like friends" and never repeat the mistakes of the past. For Michael, it could be a world where a Roseanne can be seen for who she is; a Roseanne, a person with an identity instead of being objectified and seen as being "just a woman."

The shooting location of "Five" was the remote 360-acre ranch owned by director Oboler and his wife Eleanor in the Santa Monica Mountains near Los Angeles. The cliff-side house used in the movie was designed by famed architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. A gatehouse and the hilltop retreat were the only buildings actually completed. The shooting location seems to reinforce the isolated (exterior) and cramped feel (interior) of the film itself.

You will soon notice that dialogue or talk tends to dominate the film at the expense of action. This tends to make the film rather slow-moving, especially for many of today's audiences who might be more used to action and special-effects dictating what happens on screen. This may not be the film for you if you have a short attention span or prefer a diet of sci-fi films where one damn thing happens after another in a universe, far, far away.

There is also far too much in the way of religious messaging and Biblical imagery. One can only take so much of needing to repent ones sins along with references to Eden and quotes from the bible.

Arch Oboler's handling of the issue of racial tolerance is interesting and is probably a product of the times. For some people, Charles seems to be there largely to assist Barnstaple or help out with tending the crops. Strangely from our perspective, Charles doesn't seem to show the kind of sexual interest in Roseanne as the other men do. He is even killed off along with any hope of passing his heritage on to any future generations! Such a scenario would have made a reprehensible character like Eric quite happy!

The depiction of nuclear war doesn't seem to coincide with what we know about effects of a nuclear explosion and radiation fallout. In places it almost has more in common with the aftermath of a neutron bomb explosion whereby organic material is impacted while leaving inorganic materials largely intact.

Whatever the finer points are of the film “Five,” the one inescapable fact to be derived from it is the stark and shocking manner in which it grapples with the enormity of having to face the consequences of nuclear war. It seems that we still have a lot to learn....



“1984”
(1954 BBC version starring Peter Cushing)

doubleplusgood!

What is featured here is the 1954 BBC produced made-for-TV live recording of George Orwell’s dystopian novel, “Nineteen-Eighty Four” published in 1949.

(Spoilers will follow below.....)

Cast

André Morell ... O'Brien
Yvonne Mitchell ... Julia
Donald Pleasence... Syme
Arnold Diamond\... Emmanuel Goldstein
Campbell Gray... Parsons
Hilda Fenemore... Mrs Parsons
Pamela Grant... Parsons Girl
Keth Davis ... Parsons Boy
Janet Barrow ... Woman Supervisor
Norman Osborne ... First Youth
Tony Lyons ... Second Youth
Malcolm Knight ... Third Youth
John Baker... First Man
Victor Platt... Second Man

Introduction

"If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face forever..."

I vaguely recall a speech made by the former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher back in 1984 when she gloated about how the UK had not become like the place depicted in George Orwell’s novel, “1984.” Orwell’s novel, however was not intended to be a prediction of how England or the world would become in the year 1984. Instead, it was intended to serve more as a warning of what could happen if

the State is given the opportunity to acquire and exercise unbridled and unchecked power over its citizens. Thank heavens that, unlike the characters in Orwell's world of Oceania in 1984, we at least still have the capacity (should we wish to exercise such capacity) to "recall" and remember the past as we stumble forward into the future. The question is, can we learn from the past?

At the time the book was written, the blight of Nazi Germany under the dictator Hitler was fresh in peoples' minds, along with the devastation in Europe caused by the Second World War. Britain had just stopped WWII era rationing in 1950, only four years before the BBC production and a year after Orwell's book was published. There was also the looming Cold War between the United States and its allies on the one hand and the USSR under the Stalin and the Communist Party on the other.

The warning signs were definitely there and they provided a solid template for Orwell's literary warning to his readers about what could happen should a society embark on a particular path that increases the power of the State at the expense of individual freedom and liberty.

Since then, we have had the advent of the Cold War between opposing global power blocks and ideologies; Mao's China and the Cultural revolution; the totalitarian regime of North Korea; wars in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan; the fear of the spread of Communist ideology and the paranoid Communist witch hunts in the US during the 1950s; fear of terrorism with consequent increases in surveillance and loss of personal privacy; the all-pervasive presence of technology in the hands of governments, corporations and individuals with privacy and personal information implications; security laws and clamdown on freedom in Hong Kong by the Chinese Communist party and so on...A warning is useless if no-one takes any notice.....

In the film, "1984" we see the capacity of the Party / State's power to destroy individual autonomy, to suppress independent thought, and secure the future for itself by the indoctrination of its children. For the dictatorial Party, the system is not geared to defending the rights of the individual, but rather to maintaining and extending the power of the Party itself.

Winston Smith, played by Peter Cushing, is a bureaucrat and outer-party member who does and says what he is told to do and say. He is, however a "thought criminal" since he secretly loathes Big Brother and the Party.

PART 1: BACKGROUND & SETTING:

"This, in 1984, is London, chief city of Airstrip One, a province of the state of Oceania."

At the beginning of the film we are given a close shot of a huge circular hoarding containing the head and shoulders of a stern-faced moustachioed man (Big Brother), and the slogan;

"BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU."

Amidst a scene of ruin stands the pyramid-shaped edifice of the Ministry of Truth. It and the system it represents grew out of conditions of chaos, war and destruction. Now, like the pyramids of Egypt, it seems that the new order is destined to last for

an eternity. The architecture of the Party has been designed to convey a message about the enduring and overwhelming power of the Party. Prominently emblazoned on the sides of the building are the seemingly antithetical statements:

***WAR IS PEACE
FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH***

This is a society in which opposing contradictory concepts can be simultaneously held in the mind and accepted because that is the kind of view of reality demanded by the Party of its citizens.

Much later in the film, Winston reads from a book that is given to him by O'Brien. The truth about the nature of the whole social and political order is laid bare;

WINSTON [reads]: 'When the United States absorbed the British Empire to form Oceania, and Russia took Europe to form Eurasia, two of the three World States were in being. Their ideologies were Ingsoc, Neo-Bolshevism, and later Death-Worship in East Asia. These three States are permanently at war.'

JULIA: Then it's not a sham?

WINSTON: Wait! [reads] 'War has changed its character. It exists only to preserve tyranny. Fighting - when there is any - takes place on vague tropical frontiers, or round the floating fortresses. The essential act of war is the destruction of human labour. A way of shattering or sinking the materials which might be used to make the masses too comfortable, in the long run, too intelligent. No invasion of enemy territory must ever take place.'

JULIA: Then the real war isn't with Eurasia at all! It's between all of us...

WINSTON: ...and them! [reads] 'The Party member, like the proletarian, tolerates conditions because he has nothing with which to compare his way of life. Efficiency, even military efficiency, is no longer needed. In Oceania nothing is efficient except the Thought Police. Big Brother...'

JULIA: Does he exist?

WINSTON: [reads] '...is the guise in which the Party shows itself to the world. No-one has ever seen him.'

PART 2: POWER....ABSOLUTE!

I fully recommend that the reader takes the time to read Orwell's novel. The film itself is quite a faithful portrayal of Orwell's original story and it effectively presents the factors that have combined to produce the kind of social and political conditions whereby the Party exercises complete, total and overwhelming power over.....

THE INDIVIDUAL

Winston Smith (Outer Party Member, KZ 6-0-9-0, Smith W) is not an individual but is instead a number, an entry, a piece of data that can be recorded, filed and referenced when necessary.

A combination of fear and constant surveillance keeps people in line. At the start of the film the camera zooms in on the pyramid and then fades to a close-up of Winston Smith peering out of a circular window out beyond the confines of the Ministry of Truth. He is then yanked back from his “aberrant” behaviour by the Voice of the Telescreen,

"KZ 6-0-9-0, Smith W, face the Telescreen. You have been standing at the window of Bay Two of the Records Department for over eighty seconds, what are you doing there?.....This irregularity has been recorded," it concludes with, "Return to your cubicle, Smith."

The various characters that appear before us demonstrate clearly the types of individuals who find themselves caught within the Party’s grasp. First there is Parsons with his overly jovial attitude who believes in and toes the Party line. Second, there is Syme who appears to be intelligent, perhaps too intelligent, and who ardently wishes to be seen to be devoting his intelligence and being to his work or function in that society. Third, is Winston who, although he helps to perpetuate the system, knows and feels deep down inside that there is something definitely wrong with the current state of affairs. However, apart from initial small passive forms of resistance, Winston cannot see any way of doing anything about it for the time being. Finally, Julia, like Winston, abhors the way things are, but she is only concerned with happiness and living and loving for today instead of worrying needlessly about the future and changing the status quo.

The ultimate irony in any mention of the individual in the context of the world of 1984 is that as we shall see below, in the eyes of the Party the individual.....does not truly exist! The individual is the Party and Party is the individual.

THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Although it is proclaimed that the Party has supposedly done away with the inequalities of the past, it has in fact encouraged and perpetuated class / social distinctions and inequalities. Notice that at one point when Winston is walking back to his work cubicle, he passes a door marked "INNER PARTY MEMBERS ONLY." Here we see O'Brien, who wears the distinctive uniform of an Inner Party Member which immediately sets his status apart from that of Smith, a drably attired Outer party member.

Another and far larger sector of society consists of the Proles. Syme expresses the kind of prejudiced contempt with which the Party regards the bulk of the population:

“Except the Proles? They're not human. Look at that creature over there with the ladle: ‘Them stew with salt, them stew without!’ Thoughts like that don't need simplifying.....they've no minds, they live by instinct. The Proles are animals.”

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