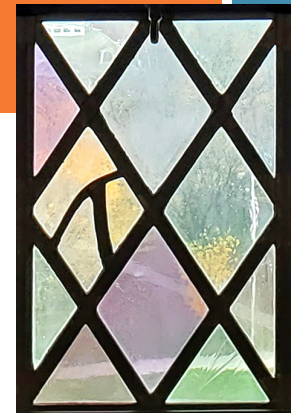


Treasures from the Yale Film Archive



Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb



Thursday, January 25, 7 p.m.
Humanities Quadrangle Lecture Hall

Directed by **Stanley Kubrick**
Screenplay by **Stanley Kubrick, Peter George, and Terry Southern**
Based on the novel *Red Alert* by **Peter George**
Cinematography by **Gilbert Taylor**
Produced by **Columbia Pictures** (1964), 95 mins.
Starring **Peter Sellers, George C. Scott, Sterling Hayden, Keenan Wynn, Slim Pickens, Peter Bull, and James Earl Jones**

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A SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

Stanley Kubrick's interest in nuclear weapons began in the 1950s, when he read approximately 80 books on the subject. Kubrick: "I became aware of the almost wholly paradoxical nature of deterrence. If you are weak, you may invite a first strike. If you are becoming too strong, you may invite a preemptive strike. If you try to maintain the delicate balance, it's almost impossible to do so, because secrecy prevents you from knowing what the other side is doing, and vice versa, ad infinitum."

One of the books that fascinated Kubrick was a thriller, *Red Alert* (1958), by Peter George, with whom Kubrick began developing a script in early 1962. "I started work on the screenplay with every intention of making the film a serious treatment on the problem of accidental nuclear war," Kubrick said, "but as I kept trying to imagine the way in which things would really happen, ideas kept coming to me which I would discard because they were ludicrous...I began to realize that all the things I was throwing out were the things that were the most truthful...The only way to tell the story was as a black comedy, or better, a nightmare comedy."

The Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, which threatened to turn the long-standing U.S.-U.S.S.R. Cold War into nuclear war, ensured that we couldn't stop worrying about the bomb. The public's continual anxiety made *Dr. Strangelove* — a pitch-black, way-over-the-top satire in which the world may be annihilated (mild spoilers ahead) because a sexually dysfunctional, psychopathic general named Jack D. Ripper believes that his "precious bodily fluids" have been weakened by Commie fluoridation — especially outrageous.

Kubrick had demonstrated his flair for dark comedy in his most recent film *Lolita* (1962), which is often overshadowed by Peter Sellers's wild turns as the multi-faceted Claire Quilty. Sellers similarly dominates *Dr. Strangelove*, with inspired semi-improvisations as three characters. The film also recalls Kubrick's *The Killing* (1956) and *Paths of Glory* (1957), with its deep-focus photography, combination of documentary-style realism and Expressionism, long takes, expressive use of settings (notably the War Room, designed by Ken Adam), and tight structure; and it introduces the director's signature brilliant

DID YOU KNOW After reciting the Survival Kit contents, Major Kong (Slim Pickens) said, "A fella could have a pretty good weekend in Dallas with all that stuff," but, due to Columbia's continued sensitivity about JFK's assassination, in post-production looping the city was changed to "Vegas."

use of "found" non-diegetic music.

A press preview scheduled for November 22, 1963, the day of JFK's assassination, was canceled. Columbia then set the premiere for December 1963, but the studio, concerned that it was still too soon to present a satirical portrayal of a U.S. President, delayed the opening to January 29, 1964 (almost exactly 60 years ago today). The film was instantly controversial. Some critics objected to the military and political caricatures and, predictably, called it un-American. But others were positive, even ecstatic. Dwight MacDonald: "the funniest and most serious American movie in a long time. Stanley Kauffmann: "It is so truthful, so unsparing, so hopeless in the last pit-bottom depths of that word, that the very blackness has a kind of shine." Even Bosley Crowther (*The New York Times*), who disparaged the film as "beyond question the most shattering sick joke I've ever come across," credited it as "one of the cleverest and most incisive satiric thrusts at the awkwardness and folly of the military that have ever been on the screen."

Dr. Strangelove was a commercial success, and a year after its premiere, it received four Academy Award nominations: Picture, Director, Adapted Screenplay, and Actor (Sellers). The film emerged Oscarless, but it has stood the test of time and is inarguably a landmark of world cinema. Back in 1964, a few months after *Dr. Strangelove*'s premiere, Kubrick, still contemplating humankind's possible fate, approached Arthur C. Clarke about collaborating on a science fiction film set in the not-too-distant future. Opening four years later, *2001: A Space Odyssey* envisioned a world in which we really might stop worrying about the bomb, but would confront a new potential Doomsday Machine, artificial intelligence.

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NEXT UP Filmmaker Charlie Kaufman and poet Eva H.D. will be on hand for a screening of their short film *Jackals & Fireflies* (2023) at the 53 Wall Street Auditorium on Tuesday, January 30 at 7 p.m.