
Dr. Strangelove, A Movie By Stanley Kubrick: A Look At The Threat Of Nuclear War Happening During The Cold War

Dr. Strangelove is a 1964 political satire of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. It mainly focuses on the fear, at that time, of nuclear war. Within the story one witnesses a rogue U.S. Air force general who calls a first strike nuclear attack on the Soviet Union (bomb the Soviets to the point where they cannot possibly recover). As a result, for the remainder of the film, the president of the United States, his advisers, and a Royal Air Force officer try to recall the bombers through in a last ditch effort to prevent nuclear war. It was quite interesting to see how sexual themes drive the plot and how the “absurdity” of the Cold War is explored.

Sexual themes as a whole proved to be a pivotal part of the storyline in Dr. Strangelove. We are introduced to the rogue General Ripper, and his unsubstantiated claim: “Well, I ah...I first became aware of it, Mandrake, during the physical act of love. Yes, a profound sense of fatigue, a feeling of emptiness followed. Luckily, I was able to interpret these feelings correctly: loss of essence.” Gen. Ripper concludes that this loss of essence can be attributed to the fact that the Soviets are stealing the bodily fluids of Americans for evil intent, whatever that can possibly look like. “Men are generally driven to war and think of settling things at the negotiating table second,” the movie implies. Therefore, Ripper’s enemies, the President of the United States and his affiliates, are portrayed as being womanly in nature (“weak” and passive). The names of these individuals further corroborates this assertion- Merkin Muffley(a wig to cover a female’s pubic hair), and Mandrake (castrated plant). Real men love explosions not reason—this is what the audience is reassured with.

Additionally, the absurdity of the Cold War, as satirized by Dr. Strangelove, is memorable and remarkable. No one is quick to anger in this film and no one is truly afraid of the opposing faction, despite the possibility of nuclear war with a small misstep in policy. For example, when Major Kong and his pilot crew found out that they were to execute “Wing Attack Plan R” (nuclear combat with the Russians), his crew seemed quite jovial and carefree, despite knowing that it could be the last day of their lives. The probably has plans to cope with the situation by using their ridiculous survival kits- lipstick, condoms, and nylon tights! One guy even continued to eat his sandwich like nothing had happened. Similarly, president Muffley and the Russian leader, Dimitri, argue about who is sorrier instead of coming to terms with the fact that a nuclear strike is about to occur in the Russian homeland. The president even tells the Soviet leader to relax! “There’s no use getting hysterical about this!” The president throughout the remainder of the film is relatively passive, and even avoids coming to a resolution over strife between these two superpowers in the war room. Doomsday is looming, and both the American are less phased by the threat of nuclear annihilation in comparison to the Soviets.

In summary, Dr. Strangelove explores the Cold War through satirical yet critical means. Conflict is shown as the only resolution to a problem, and it is the most masculine one. Things are blown out of proportion, as they were during the Cold War, but without the sexual references and chronic carefree attitudes alluded by the film.