

CHAPTER 1

THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE FILM

The final version of *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) was much different from Peter George's novel *Red Alert* (1958), upon which the film was based. The screenwriting team of Stanley Kubrick, Terry Southern, and George altered the latter's original story to expose the dangers of US nuclear policies in such a way that audiences could recognize. The writers altered the genre and constructed characters that satirized US military and political personnel and cold war strategies. The project underwent changes during production to become the most important statement of the cold war discourse.

When Stanley Kubrick decided to adapt *Red Alert* for a film audience, he selected a novel and an author that provided a unique perspective on the threat of nuclear war. In the late 1950s, Stanley Kubrick decided to make a film about the dangers of nuclear war, but he had difficulty finding a story upon which to base his film. Kubrick heeded Alastair Buchan's recommendation of *Red Alert*. Kubrick discovered the story he had been looking for in this novel.¹ George appeared to have privileged knowledge about the inner workings of the United States' war machine. Peter George served in the Royal Air Force during World War II. He withdrew from service for a brief time in the late 1950s before rejoining the RAF and serving until 1964. George filled the suspense novel with technical language that suggested his special knowledge of the subject and his intention that

¹ Stanley Kubrick, "How I learned to stop worrying and love the cinema," *Films and Filming* 9 (June 1963): 12-13.

readers closely tied to US nuclear policymaking examine his work. Kubrick and Terry Southern believed that the novel's language and detail gave it the necessary credibility.²

Although George's early works employed detective and mystery genres, his last and most significant works utilized the suspense formula to examine the theme of nuclear war and post-apocalyptic survival. In these works, George expressed criticism of military commanders and their tactics. Originally published as *Two Hours to Doom* in Great Britain, *Red Alert*, published under the pseudonym Peter Bryant, examined the possibility of an accidental nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. George filled the suspense novel with technical language that suggested the story was meant for readers closely tied to US nuclear policymaking. Kubrick and Terry Southern believed that the novel's language and detail gave it the necessary credibility. *Commander-1* (1965), which George dedicated to Kubrick, told the story of the remaining survivors of a nuclear war secretly instigated by China. George was writing a third book, tentatively titled *Nuclear Survivors*, when he committed suicide in June 1965.³

In a foreword of *Red Alert*, George warns readers that this story could happen. The narrative examines the battle in the skies over Russia, on a Strategic Air Command Base, and "in the minds of men." George's battle is "a pitiless, cruel story, because pitilessness and cruelty are inherent qualities of battle, and especially a battle fought with modern nuclear weapons."⁴ He guides the reader through three primary settings: the

² Louise Jury, "Unique Kubrick archive for sale," *Independent on London*, 9 July 2000, 2; Terry Southern, "Strangelove Outtake: Notes from the War Room," *Grand Street* 13 (summer 1994): 69.

³ "Peter George, 41, British Novelist," *New York Times*, 3 June 1965, 39; Peter Bryant, *Red Alert* (New York: Ace Books, 1958), 5; Peter George, *Commander-1* (New York: New York Dell Publishing, 1965).

⁴ Bryant, *Red Alert*, 5.

Alabama Angel, a bomber in the 843rd Wing of the Strategic Air Command (SAC); the SAC base at Sonora, Texas; and the Pentagon's War Room.

The mentally unstable General Quinten launches an unauthorized attack on the Soviet Union. Quinten's character allowed George to express his criticism of military tactics, although the author does not dismiss the use of nuclear weapons and the threat to use those weapons to halt the spread of communism. Quinten, whose mental breakdown has gone unnoticed by SAC, launches the attack at a time when he knows that the Soviet Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) are inoperative. He cites Rudyard Kipling's story of *Rikki Tikki Tavi*, claiming that the enemy must be destroyed before it has the opportunity to strike. He operates on the assumption that "a military force which is poised for attack, can often be knocked off balance by an opponent who himself attacks without warning."⁵ George also expresses his mistrust of military commanders when he suggests that members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) prefer to launch an attack on the Soviet Union rather than recall the 843rd Bomb Wing. George warns that, given the authority, military commanders would rather instigate war than preserve peace. General Franklin, a member of the JCS, believes that Quinten's actions may have been appropriate. George suggests that military officials and strategists act upon instincts rather than the interests of the nation.⁶

By way of contrast, George draws the president as a capable diplomat, leader, and strategist, suggesting his belief that politicians were better suited to control nuclear weapons. Upon the recommendation of the JCS to launch a full-scale attack, the president

⁵ Bryant, *Red Alert*, 16, 36, 92-93.

⁶ Bryant, *Red Alert*, 74, 92-93.

reveals that the Soviets have buried a doomsday device beneath the Ural Mountains, a subject atomic scientist Herman Kahn would raise two years later in his work *On Thermonuclear War* (1960).⁷ The president rejects this proposal in favor of easing tensions with the Soviets by cooperating in the recall and destruction of any bombers that could reach their targets.

George portrays the Soviets as a legitimate threat. Quinten believes that the Soviet Union intends to incite a worldwide communist revolution. He tells his assistant, Major Howard, that economic containment has failed and the destruction of colonialism has left a void that will be filled by communism unless the United States acts.⁸ Howard believes that the general's argument is convincing and contemplates not providing the president with the recall code after Quinten's death. "In his [Howard's] mind reason pitted itself against probability. He was sure he had the power to recall the bombers. He was not sure he should exercise that power."⁹

Even as the president attempts to recall the bombers and ease tensions with the Soviets, the Russian premier remains obstinate, reinforcing the contention that the Soviets wished to conquer the western world. When the Russians realize that the *Alabama Angel* has eluded their defenses, the Soviet ambassador questions if the president would have been willing to sacrifice an American city if an American bomber destroyed a Soviet city. The President responds, saying, "If I considered the peace of the

⁷ Bryant, *Red Alert*, 48, 74, 78-79; Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1960), 145.

⁸ Bryant, *Red Alert*, 88-91.

⁹ Bryant, *Red Alert*, 92, 147.

world depended on making that sacrifice, yes I would have allowed it.”¹⁰ The Russians reveal that the *Alabama Angel* had not been shot down and expect the president to act upon this answer. The president agrees to sacrifice Atlantic City. George drew the Soviets as indifferent to humankind; they have no interest in avoiding bloodshed and war. The Soviets announce that they will choose their own target. When the Pentagon learns that the *Alabama Angel*'s device failed to detonate, the premier remains determined to destroy an American city. The president becomes defiant and announces his intention to launch the US nuclear arsenal against the Soviet Union, even though such an act would cause the destruction of all life on the planet. When disaster is averted and the Soviets declare that they never intended to destroy an American city, the president declares that the US should commit itself to the arms race under his command to ensure peace: “once both sides have missiles which will automatically retaliate, war will become profitless.”¹¹ Contrary to Quinten’s statement, George agrees with Georges Clemenceau’s view that “war was too important a matter to be left to generals.”¹²

Red Alert failed to attract the attention of literary critics. It received a limited amount of attention after *Dr. Strangelove* was released, and reviews of *Commander-1* favorably mentioned the first installment of George’s atomic series. By 1965, the thaw of cold war tensions allowed critics to view George’s perspective on nuclear policies in a positive light.

The novel’s primary value lay in its technical language and George’s knowledge of the inner workings of SAC and nuclear strategies. These qualities attracted the

¹⁰ Bryant, *Red Alert*, 169-170.

¹¹ Bryant, *Red Alert*, 185, 188, 190.

attention of two atomic scientists, Thomas Schelling and Herman Kahn. Schelling and Kahn made note of *Red Alert* in their discussions of the possibility of nuclear war. Schelling called *Red Alert* “one of the niftiest little analyses” of the possibility of an accidental nuclear war. He believed that George had proposed that such a war would be difficult to start, but that only luck could truly avoid a war.¹³ In *Thinking About the Unthinkable* (1962), Kahn suggested that the novel illustrated that no fail-safe system was full-proof. At the same time, he dismissed the possibility of a rogue general launching a nuclear strike against the Soviet Union.¹⁴ After the release of *Dr. Strangelove*, critics and the public engaged in this debate about the possibility of an accidental nuclear war.

By the time Kubrick made *Dr. Strangelove*, he had become one of Hollywood’s best young directors. Several themes recurred throughout his films. Kubrick examined the relationship between violence and sexuality in *Lolita* (1962), *Dr. Strangelove*, and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). He explored man’s inability to control advanced technology and machines of destruction in *Dr. Strangelove* and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). In each of his films, Kubrick challenged audiences to examine their own world in a different way and redefine how they perceived the cinema.

Kubrick’s developed his talents as a photographer and a filmmaker at a young age. He began his career capturing the world around him at the age of sixteen when he took a job at *Look* magazine. He had always been mesmerized by the world on screen, and he consumed literature on filmmaking, including Vsevolod Pudovkin’s *Film*

¹² Bryant, *Red Alert*, 68.

¹³ Thomas Schelling, “Meteors, Mischief, and War,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 16 (September 1960): 293.

Technique and Stanislavski Directs by Nikolai Gorchakoz. Kubrick believed that some of the best lessons on filmmaking came from the worst films, which gave him the confidence to make motion pictures. His first film was a documentary entitled *Day of the Fight* (1951) about prizewinning fighter Walter Cartier. Kubrick funded much of the film himself. After he sold the film to RKO, he made the short *The Flying Padre* (1951). Kubrick controlled all aspects of these films as director, writer, cameraman, and editor. A series of films in the 1950s displayed Kubrick's budding talent, and he continued to enjoy a considerable amount of control over all aspects of filmmaking.¹⁵ His breakthrough film was *Paths of Glory* (1956), starring Kirk Douglas. Kubrick offered audiences a critical view of the military's strategies and low regard for human life expressed in a historical treatment of a court-martial of three men chosen from a French battalion that failed to capture a German position during World War I.

Kubrick tried to avoid industry and studio intrusions following his experience directing *Spartacus* (1960). He did not recognize this film as one of his own works, primarily because he had been hired by the film's star, Douglas, to replace Anthony Mann, who had disagreed with Douglas's vision. Kubrick was given little opportunity to impart his vision upon the film; Douglas dictated the course of the project. Kubrick's short-lived role as the director of *One-Eyed Jacks* (1961) also supported his desire to maintain complete control over his films, as he had earlier in his career. In his early years as a director, Kubrick's financial support came from family and friends rather than Hollywood executives who were more concerned about box-office receipts than artistic

¹⁴ Herman Kahn, *Thinking About the Unthinkable* (New York: Horizon Press, 1962), 44.

¹⁵ Norman Kagan, *The Cinema of Stanley Kubrick* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 1-3.

merit. Kubrick filmed *Lolita* (1962) in England, in part to avoid the censors' constant watch. Kubrick never made another film outside England, where he enjoyed a degree of distance from the politics and business of Hollywood.¹⁶ As a result, he was able to make *Dr. Strangelove*. He avoided the scrutiny of the studio, the government, and the Production Code Administration.

Kubrick studied nuclear strategies and policies amidst these increasing cold war tensions. The Bay of Pigs invasion, the Berlin wall crisis, and the Cuban missile crisis placed the world on the brink of a violent clash between the Soviet Union and the United States. Kubrick found that these strategies lulled listeners into "a temporary sense of reassurance." As he probed deeper, he found that a paradox lay at the heart of these strategies. Kubrick described this paradox to biographer Alexander Walker: "If you are weak, you may invite a first strike. If you are becoming too strong, you may provoke 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."¹⁷ Kubrick believed that the possession of nuclear arms required the superpowers to maintain a posture that boasted their readiness to sacrifice their people for the sake of winning a nuclear conflict that could have no winner. He believed that over the course of the arms race the bomb had become an abstraction that the public could no longer comprehend. Kubrick believed that as an abstraction, nuclear war became even more dangerous

¹⁶ Alexander Walker, *Stanley Kubrick, Director* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 23, 27.

¹⁷ Walker, *Stanley Kubrick, Director*, 28.

because the American public did not understand the consequences of such a war but were more willing to support deterrence policies that threatened rather than prevented war.¹⁸

In interviews and articles published in the years surrounding the release of *Dr. Strangelove*, Kubrick expressed his concern about the state of cold war and nuclear policies of the United States and the Soviet Union in the early 1960s. He often talked about the need for an alternative to current US strategies that would prevent a nuclear conflict. Kubrick believed that the American public needed “a concrete alternative to the present balance of terror—one that people can understand and support.”¹⁹ According to Kubrick, politicians and military officials had misinformed the public about their control of the situation. He proposed that the democratic process be used to eliminate the threat of nuclear war.²⁰ With these thoughts in mind, he prepared a film about the possibility of a nuclear war.

Kubrick began the project with the intention of making a serious suspense story. In addition to entertaining audiences, he also intended for the film to serve a constructive purpose. He wrote that “since this tragedy has not yet occurred, any insight which could be provided, any sense of reality which could be given so that it didn’t seem just an abstraction” would be valuable.²¹ Producer James Harris and Kubrick often worked late into the night on the original screenplay entitled *Edge of Doom*. As these sessions grew longer, they began to discuss humorous scenes that could not have worked in a serious treatment of nuclear war. Shortly after Harris abandoned the project to direct *The Bedford*

¹⁸ Gene Phillips, ed., *Stanley Kubrick: Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 28-29.

¹⁹ Phillips, 70-71.

²⁰ Phillips, 70-71.

²¹ Kubrick, “How I learned,” 12-13.

Incident (1965), Kubrick decided to alter the genre through which to tell his story. He finally began to develop the screenplay as a “nightmare comedy.”²²

Kubrick intended to adapt *Red Alert* into a suspense drama, but he quickly found that the novel and its genre were not capable of communicating his own views on foreign and nuclear policies. George had only criticized US military commanders’ instinct to wage nuclear war without any consideration of the losses incurred. He believed that nuclear weapons could be utilized to prevent nuclear war. In the novel’s *dénouement*, the president seizes control of the US nuclear arsenal, declaring that he will preserve peace with the threat of mutual destruction in the event of a Soviet attack.²³ Kubrick did not share George’s faith in deterrence.

As Kubrick adapted George’s novel and attempted to incorporate his research and his warning into the story, he found that these paradoxes produced absurd scenes and scenarios. He eventually decided that these absurd scenes were the most realistic because they exposed the dangers of the government’s cold war policies. In order to convey his criticism of US cold war policies, Kubrick decided to develop the project as a satire or “nightmare comedy.”²⁴

The genre of satire serves as what Robert Rosenstone has called a “distancing device” that makes the audience “think about rather than feel social problems and human relationships.”²⁵ Films such as *On the Beach* (1959) and *Fail-Safe* (1964) examined the

²² Phillips, 97; *Inside the Making of Dr. Strangelove*, dir. by David Naylor, 45 min., Columbia Home Video, 2001, DVD; Walker, 30.

²³ Bryant, *Red Alert*, 190.

²⁴ Kubrick, “How I learned,” 12; Phillips, *Stanley Kubrick: Interviews*, 97.

²⁵ Robert Rosenstone, “History in Images/History in Words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film,” *American Historical Review* 93 (December 1988): 1183.

dangers of nuclear war, but these dramas failed to expose any flaws in the system. *Dr. Strangelove* pulled back the curtain to expose the men who had recklessly constructed US foreign and nuclear policies

Kubrick and George lacked the necessary satirical wit to construct this “nightmare comedy.” Terry Southern, who had been assigned by *Esquire* magazine to write an article about the film, was hired to add to the satirical tone to the film. His first novel, *Flash and Filigree* (1958) had utilized satire; part of this work also focused on sexuality, which became a recurring motif in *Dr. Strangelove*. Critics praised his second novel, *Candy* (1958) for the freshness of its satire and ridicule of American institutions. Jonathan Miller, an English doctor and writer, recommended Terry Southern’s next novel *The Magic Christian* (1959) to his friend, Peter Sellers. Sellers distributed one hundred copies to his friends, including Kubrick, who had directed Sellers in *Lolita*. Kubrick would later claim that he and George had made many of the script changes during filming and that Southern contributed little to the final project, having only worked on the film for a month in the winter of 1962. Most scholars assume that Southern had a greater impact on the film than Kubrick suggested, although Kubrick certainly altered much of the picture on the set and in the editing room.²⁶

When Kubrick decided to tell George’s story as a satire, he and the writing team had to alter the characters, dialogue, and scenes. Many of the characters’ names were changed, in an attempt to establish the relationship between war and sexuality explored throughout the film. General Quinten’s name was changed to General Jack D. Ripper

²⁶ Southern, 66; “Kubrick puts Southern in 3rd Place on *Strangelove*,” *Film Daily*, 17 August 1964, 1, 6; Jeffrey Helterman and Richard Layman, eds., *American Novelists Since World War II*, vol. 2 of *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Company, 1978), 452-453.

(Sterling Hayden), recalling the exploits of a serial killer who stalked prostitutes in nineteenth-century London. Captain Howard became Royal Air Force Group Captain Mandrake (Peter Sellers), whose name makes reference to the mandrake plant, which “is said to induce conception in women.”²⁷ While George never named his president, the screenwriting team named the film’s president Merkin Muffley (Sellers), a slang reference to female genitalia. General “Buck” Turgidson (George C. Scott) was a composite of the generals in George’s novel who discuss the feasibility of a nuclear attack against Russia. “Turgid” means swollen, and the general’s nickname suggests his preoccupation with masculine endeavors, particularly making love and war.²⁸ Dr. Strangelove (Sellers again), created during the writing process and developed further by Sellers, referred to the marriage of man and science. His name also suggests that this relationship depend upon the “strange love” of weapons that inspire hatred, distrust, and destruction rather than peace and creation.

Kubrick’s Russian characters, Ambassador Alexi de Sadesky and Russian Premier Dimitri Kissoff did not reflect the villainy of their counterparts in *Red Alert*. Kissoff, who never made an appearance on screen or uttered a single audible word, is depicted as an alcoholic and a womanizer. The ambassador’s name is a reference to the Marquis de Sade, known for his sexually explicit works in nineteenth-century France. De Sadesky and Kissoff are as incompetent as their American adversaries, but appear to have been forced to build the doomsday device by American aggression.

²⁷ Phillip L. Gianos, *Politics and Politicians in American Film* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1999), 142.

²⁸ Gianos, *Politics and Politicians*, 142.

Amid the laughter, Kubrick utilized the scenes on board the *Leper Colony*, formerly the *Alabama Angel*, to remind audiences of the reality and terror of war.²⁹ The film used much of George's technical language, and production designer Ken Adam constructed a realistic bomber from the pages of aviation magazines and the cover of a book entitled *Strategic Air Command*.³⁰ Although the screenplay mimicked George's extensive details about the journey of the crew, the finished project did not utilize the depth he provided for the crew members in *Red Alert*. Terry Southern suggested that Kubrick did not wish to make a film about a group of soldiers such as Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930).³¹ *Dr. Strangelove* focused instead on the interactions at Burpelson Air Base and in the War Room because these locations mattered most in the time of nuclear war.

When Kubrick decided to construct this "nightmare comedy," he was also required to alter the dialogue. Ripper constantly discusses "bodily fluids" when discussing the communist plot of fluoridation, the poisoning of drinking water by communists meant to exhaust capitalists. He believes that this plot has allowed the communists to make significant advances during the last few years. George C. Scott portrays Turgidson as a teenage boy obsessed with the opposite sex and war and dependent upon the president's approval of his actions. When he and Ambassador Alexi de Sadesky (Peter Bull) wrestle to the ground and Turgidson claims to discover the diplomat secretly photographing government material, Muffley scolds the men, declaring,

²⁹ In changing the name of the bomber, Kubrick suggested that the bomber carried a disease (radiation) that threatened mankind.

³⁰ *Inside the Making of Dr. Strangelove*.

³¹ Southern, "Strangelove Outtake," 73.

“Gentlemen, you can’t fight in here! This is the War Room!” This line became one of the film’s most memorable, mocking what Kubrick perceived as man’s predisposition toward war.

During production of the film, Kubrick faced a variety of problems. He originally cast Peter Sellers to play four roles: President Merkin Muffley, Group Captain Mandrake, the commander of the *Leper Colony* (Major “King” Kong), and the title character. During filming, Sellers injured his leg and was unable to meet the physical requirements of the role of Major Kong. Terry Southern recommended that Kubrick replace Sellers with Dan Blocker from the television series *Bonanza*. When Blocker’s agent was informed about the part, he reportedly responded, “Thanks a lot, but the material is too pinko for Dan. Or anyone else we know for that matter.”³² During production in 1963, *Dr. Strangelove* had quickly gained the reputation as an anti-American picture, which critics and audiences would later debate. Kubrick eventually replaced Sellers with Slim Pickens, who he had met during his short-lived assignment as the director of Marlon Brando’s *One-Eyed Jacks*.

Kubrick also dealt with problems presented by Columbia Pictures, the film’s distributor. The studio had designated Mo Rothman executive producer of the film. Rothman told Southern to tell Kubrick “that New York does *not* see anything *funny* about the end of the world!”³³ Throughout the project, from inception to release and publicity, the studio struggled to understand how an audience would react to a comedy that foretold the end of the world. As author Phillip Gianos has noted, audiences will not pay to see

³² Southern, 70-71.

³³ Southern, 69.

films that contain objectionable material or perspectives. This philosophy dictated what films studios made and, perhaps more importantly, what films they did not make.

Kubrick maintained that this film was precisely what people would want to see because of its treatment of this sensitive subject.³⁴

One can also assume that Columbia Pictures was concerned about public opinion regarding Hollywood's "pink" past. Studios had been severely weakened by inquisitions conducted by the House Committee on Un-American Activities during the 1940s and 1950s. Studio executives remained weary of the watchful eye of the government and the public's demands for "American" pictures.³⁵

Kubrick exchanged letters with Geoffrey M. Shurlock of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA). Shurlock, who was the head of the Production Code Administration, first wrote Kubrick in January 1963 to express several concerns about the film. Like Rothman, Shurlock wondered "how a satire involving the President of the USA and the armed forces is going to be received by the public." Shurlock was also concerned that the language and subject might threaten the image of the film industry in the mind of the public. *Dr. Strangelove* was originally supposed to end with a massive pie fight in which the President was to be "struck down," a scene suggesting the foolish behavior of men who held the fate of the world in their hands. Shurlock suggested that the President be removed from this scene to conform to "industry policy." The MPAA was concerned that this scene was disrespectful of the office of the presidency and

³⁴ Gianos, *Politics and Politicians*, 1.

³⁵ Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-1960* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1980), 422.

Kennedy.³⁶ Kubrick dismissed this fear, noting that “there is nothing in this film which hasn’t been represented by the statements by various Government Officials including J.F.K.”³⁷ Kubrick cited Kennedy’s address to the United Nations on 25 September 1961, in which the president warned about the “nuclear sword of Damocles.” With this reference, Kubrick displayed the detailed nature of his research regarding the threat of nuclear war. Kubrick also dismissed concerns about the pie-fight scene, noting that “since the Doomsday Machine has gone off, one might say that anything goes at that point.”³⁸ With the world’s fate sealed, Kubrick believed that this sequence expressed the absurdity of his characters’ world view. Shurlock’s response was much shorter than his original letter concluding, “if you are convinced that what you intend to put on the screen will be without offense, that ought to be enough for us.”³⁹

Dr. Strangelove bombarded audiences with numerous sexual images and references.⁴⁰ In the 1950s, the MPAA’s Production Code and local censorship boards underwent changes dictated by the industry and the Supreme Court that allowed Kubrick to explore the relationship between sexuality and violence. The appointment of Shurlock as head of the Production Code Administration in 1954 marked the beginning of a more liberal era in the application of the Code. In 1956, the Code was revised, removing

³⁶ Letter from Geoffrey M. Shurlock to Stanley Kubrick, 21 January 1963, *Dr. Strangelove* file, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences Library.

³⁷ Letter from Stanley Kubrick to Geoffrey M. Shurlock, 6 February 1963, *Dr. Strangelove* file, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences Library.

³⁸ Letter from Stanley Kubrick to Geoffrey M. Shurlock, 6 February 1963, *Dr. Strangelove* file, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences Library.

³⁹ Letter from Geoffrey M. Shurlock to Stanley Kubrick 20 February 1963, *Dr. Strangelove* file Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences Library.

⁴⁰ For a brief discussion of the film’s sexual content, see F. Anthony Macklin’s “Sex and *Dr. Strangelove*,” *Film Comment* 3 (summer 1965): 55-57.

restrictions on the “portrayals of illicit narcotics practices, abortion, prostitution, and kidnapping,” while maintaining bans on sexual perversions and venereal disease. The revised code also prohibited blasphemy. The Supreme Court also handed down a series of decisions that attempted to refine the court’s definition of “obscene,” thereby restricting the censorship practices of local boards. Kubrick benefited from these changes when he directed *Lolita*, although Shurlock required that the film be altered slightly to eliminate any lurid sexual references.⁴¹ By 1964, Kubrick enjoyed virtual freedom to explore the relationship between male sexuality and nuclear war.⁴²

Kubrick and George were also forced to deal with a competing interpretation of the possibility of nuclear war. Sidney Lumet’s *Fail-Safe* (1964) depicted the accidental destruction of Moscow that resulted from a mechanical malfunction at SAC Headquarters in Omaha, Nebraska. Lumet’s president sacrifices New York City to prevent a nuclear war. The film was adapted from a book by Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler that Kubrick believed closely mirrored *Red Alert*. George and Kubrick sued the studio and the authors, claiming that the project violated copyright laws by copying George’s scenario. Kubrick and George failed to stop the production of *Fail-Safe*, but the lawsuit delayed the film’s release.⁴³ The world witnessed Kubrick’s nightmare comedy before it witnessed

⁴¹ Edward de Grazia and Roger K. Newman, *Banned Films: Movies, Censors, and the First Amendment* (New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1982), 92, 101, 104; Garth Jowett, *Film: The Democratic Art* (Boston: Brown, Little and Company, 1976), 417.

⁴² Shurlock expressed concern about a few scenes. He asked Kubrick to “make certain that this bikini (worn by Miss Scott) is not of the extreme type.” Kubrick promised that the bikini would not be “the tiniest bikini ever seen.” He also asked Kubrick to eliminate the word “prophylactics” from the scene in which Kong reads the contents of the crew’s survival kits. Kubrick responded to this request, arguing that this was a reference to World War II that was critical. Letter from Geoffrey M. Shurlock to Stanley Kubrick, 21 January 1963, *Dr. Strangelove* file Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences Library; Letter from Stanley Kubrick to Geoffrey M. Shurlock, 6 February 1963, *Dr. Strangelove* file, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences Library.

⁴³ “*Alert-Fail-Safe* Litigation Looms” *Hollywood Reporter*, 4 January 1963; *Variety*, 20 January 1963.

Lumet's dramatic treatment, although the two films would be compared throughout reviews and public debates.

Several important changes were also made during the post-production phase. Initially, the screenplay opened with a narration that described the film as an alien documentary about an ancient nuclear war on earth, in a period "marked by the fact that though every nation feared surprise attack, the full consequences of nuclear weapons seemed to escape all governments."⁴⁴ Kubrick also decided to remove the pie-fight sequence that Shurlock criticized. After discovering that de Sadesky had been taking photographs of classified material in the War Room, the president orders a full cavity search for other espionage devices. De Sade refuses to submit and strikes Turgidson with a custard pie. A pie fight develops among the JCS and de Sadesky. During the conflict, Muffley is struck with a pie. Terry Southern recalled that Turgidson then announced, "Gentlemen, our president has been struck down, in the prime of his life and his presidency. I say massive retaliation." Kubrick decided that the actors had not played their parts convincingly. The scene was meant to express the absurdity and childishness of the characters and their determination to instigate a war that could have no winners.⁴⁵ He cut the scene, replacing it with Strangelove's rise from his wheelchair and his announcement, "Mein Fuhrer, I can walk!" Kubrick followed this with stock footage of atomic explosions scored by Vera Lynn's "We'll Meet Again," which had been an emotionally charged song that referenced the British effort during World War II.

⁴⁴ Peter George, Stanley Kubrick, and Terry Southern, *Dr. Strangelove; or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (Sheperton, England: Hawk Films, 1963).

⁴⁵ Southern, "Strangelove Outtake," 75-78.

The film's premiere was originally scheduled in New York City on 22 November 1963, but Kubrick and Columbia Pictures decided to postpone the event and the release of the film after President Kennedy's assassination. Kubrick was also forced to alter a line in the film. When reading the contents of the survival kit, Major "King" Kong originally said, "Shoot! A fella could have a pretty good weekend in Dallas with this." In order to avoid any reference to the assassination, Kubrick dubbed "Vegas" over "Dallas."

Mo Rothman had been concerned about the public response to a film about the end of the world. Kubrick supervised the publicity for *Dr. Strangelove*. Advertisements made reference to the more humorous moments in the film. Advertisements asked, "Why did the fate of the world hang on a Coca-Cola Machine?" Other newspaper listings questioned, "Where was the Red Premier when the hot-line rang?" Others asked, "Why did Dr. Strangelove want ten women for each man?"⁴⁶ Despite Rothman's concerns, *Dr. Strangelove* was the fourteenth highest-grossing film of 1964.⁴⁷

The film garnered a variety of nominations and awards around the world, but the true proof of its impact was the discourse about the motion picture and nuclear strategies that emerged after the film's release. Kubrick had hoped that *Dr. Strangelove* would serve a constructive purpose and the debates in the *New York Times* and other newspapers and periodicals provided proof of this achievement. The events of the late 1950s and early 1960s had shaped *Dr. Strangelove* and created an environment that fostered interest in its message. Amid the proliferation and development of powerful nuclear weapons, *Dr.*

⁴⁶ *New York Times*, 29 January 1964, 23.

⁴⁷ Charles Maland, "Dr. Strangelove (1964): Nightmare Comedy and the Ideology of Liberal Consensus," *American Quarterly* 31 (winter 1979): 717.

Strangelove emerged as a rare and strong voice for ending the madness of nuclear confrontation.