

distraction. Trickle of falling sand throughout the show could allude to multiple things – an hourglass, or the formation of new beaches, or a signal to pay attention. In the end, the sand translates the emotional weight of the show’s climax into the physical world, amplifying its impact by orders of magnitude. Most scenes leave no trace: the set is rearranged, we don’t hear from those characters again, and the show continues. At its most intense point, though, the sand allows for a proper aftermath – an acknowledgement of the irrevocable impacts of climate change.

At its core, *Climate Era* isn’t just a climate play. It’s a play about friendship and love, loss and grief, joy and laughter, despair and fear. It’s about personhood and the things that make us human, and how they play out against the backdrop of a changing world. It’s a play we can see ourselves reflected in – the things we do and think about on a daily basis, and the things we’re worried about for the future. On the other hand, it is a climate play, and it’s at the top of its game. It challenges us to rethink the way we view climate change: not as a singular crisis point, but a historical period spanning generations to come. Not as some massive abstract eventuality, but a tangible reality affecting the minutiae of your (yes, your) life. Not as the end of the world, but something that, with time and hard work, our distant descendants will someday emerge from the other side of.

We’re given ways to take action, but not blamed for things hundreds of times bigger than ourselves. Protest and mutual aid are examined through a refreshingly realistic lens. Hope is important, but it’s not going to save us. We leave the theatre informed, but not overwhelmed. Scenes from the *Climate Era* shows us real people in the real world, breaking through the immobilisation of climate distress to remind us to care.



Three Films to Take You to **THE END AND BACK AGAIN**



Film Reviews by Daniel Fagan



Way back in 1916, before film had sound, and a mere decade after Charles Tait wrote and directed the first narrative feature film *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906), the first surviving film dealing with the apocalypse was released. The Danish science fiction work, aptly titled *Verdens Undergang*, or *The End of the World*, depicts a comet passing near Earth causing a myriad of natural disasters and riotous social unrest.

Since this time, there have been innumerable films released considering the implications of, and depicting doomsday. Everything from Cold War dramas, speculative works of science fiction, comedies, or musicals, the end of the world is a topic ripe with stories to tell in any genre. It's all too easy to fall to nihilism, despondency, or melancholy when considering the prospect, and there are many great movies unrelenting in those themes, but for my money the best films concerned with the apocalypse are those concealing a kernel of hope.



Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb (1964)

dir. Stanley Kubrick

"Sir, you can't let him in here. He'll see everything. He'll see the big board!"

There is no film to combine desperate social commentary, unapologetically ridiculous screenplay and performances, with an absolutely terrifying premise, more successfully than Stanley Kubrick's 1964 black comedy *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. This film is the jewel in the crown of mid-twentieth century Cold War cinema, and may



be the sole film to fully capture the madness of M.A.D (mutually assured destruction). The film opens with a disclaimer – which may have been forced onto distributor Columbia Pictures and Stanley Kubrick by the US Air Force – that intends to reassure the citizens of the Cold War world, but only serves to make the following 95 minutes funnier ... and more terrifying.

It is the stated position of the U.S. Air Force that their safeguards would prevent the occurrence of such events as are depicted in this film.

Furthermore, it should be noted that none of the characters portrayed in this film are meant to represent any real persons living or dead.

Insane and paranoid Brigadier General Jack D. Ripper initiates a nuclear attack on the Soviet Union, an act that threatens to plunge the world into a nuclear holocaust – unless politicians, and a war room full of generals and mysterious scientists, each with their own agenda, can come

together to stop it. Away from the bureaucracy and politics of the war room is Major T. J. 'King' Kong, the gung-ho commander of a B-52, who receives Ripper's message and blissfully redirects his bomber toward Moscow. Due to a security measure to prevent fraudulent orders following the order to strike, there is no way to contact Major Kong.

Like any great film, *Dr. Strangelove* is loaded with expertly crafted characters – praise should befall both the writers who created them, and the actors who brought them to life. Peter Sellers' performance as three characters (Captain Mandrake, President Muffley, and the titular Dr. Strangelove) is a particular standout, as is Slim Pickens as Major Kong and Sterling Hayden as General Ripper both of whom steal their scenes delivering some of the most insane dialogue ever put to screen with total sincerity. Ripper's rants about fluoride in water being a Commie plot (that's why they only drink vodka), and Dr. Strangelove's insane plots to continue life on earth in the event of Armageddon are delivered with such deranged energy it's impossible not to get lost in the ramblings of these madmen.

Among all of these incredible performances the one which truly stands above all others is George C. Scott as General 'Buck' Turgidson, a character who truly elevates *Dr. Strangelove* to the heights of indisputable comedy classic. Scott's performance is unlike anything else in his storied filmography.

Buck's obsession with 'the big board', the wild and crazy expression his face seems locked into, and his obscure and often bizarre turns of phrase like 'when the spaghetti hits the fan' make Scott's performance certifiably one of the greatest of all time. The moment Buck gets so overly excited he stumbles and falls flat on the floor then rolls back to his feet to continue his rant about the Russians seeing 'the big board' is one of the biggest laughs of the movie.



Dr. Strangelove is bleak. It's a movie with little hope for world leaders. Kubrick and Terry Southern's sharp satirical screenplay is unrelenting in attacks against the sheer mindlessness of atomic sabre-rattling in a world where ever-increasing atomic arsenals can only result in M.A.D. This is a movie made by and for people so terrified by the ever-increasing reality of a nuclear end of the world that all they have left is laughter.



Shaun of the Dead (2004)

dir. Edgar Wright

"Take car. Go to Mum's, kill Phil. Grab Liz, go to the Winchester, have a nice cold pint, and wait for all of this to blow over. How's that for a slice of fried gold?"

Zombies, despite their varying states of decomposition, are the youngest of all horror creatures to have embedded into the zeitgeist of the twenty-first century. Since their formal on screen introductions in George Romero's groundbreaking *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), zombies have infected horror and firmly cemented themselves as mainstays of the genre. Unlike the majority of filmic interpretations of Frankenstein's Monsters, their brides, mummies, invisible men, vampires, or werewolves, the humble zombie – so seemingly weak – instils inherent unease. In the hands of a skilled filmmaker this unease can quickly turn to abject terror. In the hands of Edgar Wright and writing partner Simon Pegg, terror and comedy walk hand in hand through an apocalypse indistinguishable from a Tuesday morning.

Shaun's life is going nowhere. He's stuck in a middle management position at an electronics store; is hated by his flatmate Pete; hates his stepfather Philip; has just been dumped by Liz; and his only real friend, Ed, is a hapless layabout who spends each day drinking lukewarm beers and each evening drinking cold ones at the Winchester pub. As the end of his twenties looms, Shaun's stagnation is unravelling and the hollow core of his life comes to full view. But, I'd be doing *Shaun of the Dead* a disservice to describe it so seriously, it is a hilarious movie, and the presence of those serious and existential facets only serve to make it even funnier.



Wright above all else, understands that the true terror of zombies lies in what they represent: the steady, unstoppable progress of time toward death. It's this knowledge that hangs over the entire film, like a blanket smothering our group of bumbling protagonists, until all they have left is to try their best to move on and live through it, or resign themselves to fear. Again, the film will have

you in fits of laughter: I'm making it sound far more morose than the tone truly is.



The characters, developed as real people with real problems reacting as regular people would to the zombie apocalypse and the chaos ensuing is where *Shaun of the Dead* shines. The issue for Shaun, Ed and the rest of the cast, is that dramatic progress where they are forced to introspection and change is continually interrupted by the ever-advancing dead. The movie pulls no punches, and while some deaths are treated as jokes, the vast majority of them have real impact on the characters and the decisions they make going forward. A lesser film may fall into the trap of having a major character die a shocking death then forsake that moment in the name of an action scene or progressing the plot. Not *Shaun of the Dead*. Here, deaths are agonising, slow, and heartbreaking and at times it truly feels like the world is ending.

Wright and Pegg walk a near impossible tonal tightrope – combining comedy, horror, and drama in a brisk 100-minute masterpiece that you can watch dozens of times over and still find something new to appreciate. *Shaun of the Dead* is the most fun you can have at the end of the world.



WALL·E (2008)

dir. Andrew Stanton

“Wait, that doesn’t look like Earth. Where’s the blue sky? Where’s the- the grass?”

The beauty of Andrew Stanton’s powerhouse of mid-2000’s sci-fi lies in its earnestness. It is a simple story, told in an effective and unique fashion that pushed animated and filmic storytelling in a direction no one has come close to reaching in the seventeen years since the film’s initial release. There’s really nothing else like Wall-E, an extraordinary work of art that wears its heart on its sleeve and is unafraid of big acts of sincerity that some would falsely label overly melodramatic.

Seven hundred years in the future, in a time where humanity and the mega-corporations we enable have left Earth as little more than a garbage heap, a garbage-cleaning robot named Wall-E roams the abandoned streets collecting, compacting, and piling the waste left by humanity. Centuries of isolation have made Wall-E forget that he’s lonely – his only companions are a surprisingly hearty cockroach, and the protagonists of mid-

twentieth-century film – particularly Hello Dolly. He picks through mounds of waste for sometimes useful, but mostly interesting trinkets – small boxes, Rubik’s cubes, bowling pins, basket balls and, quite morbidly, remains of other Wall-E units, long broken down. It is in collecting, appreciating, and trying to understand these relics of an unimaginable world, far in the distant past that proves this lovable cube-shaped cleaner has a personality, and beyond that, perhaps, a soul.



Stanton and co-writers Jim Reardon and Pete Docter deliver an impeccable first act nearly totally wordlessly. It’s as pure as cinema can get. There’s nothing else like watching Wall-E roll around the desolate, barely recognisable world, finding joy in the remnants of humanity and the garbage left behind. The trio proved themselves to be geniuses of the cinematic form, and while the storytelling is amazing, it is in the visuals that Wall-E elevates beyond typical post-apocalyptic fare. Wall-E is a visual marvel, with terrific art direction that maintains a cartoonish style while

erring toward a realistic look, especially in the first thirty five minutes on the ravaged Earth. It is a truly beautiful film filled with breathtaking sights. However, that realistic tinge to the film falls away in the latter half set on the Axiom, the last remaining bastion of human civilisation in the stars – highlighting the disparity between what humanity has become and where they came from. It's rare for a film to integrate story into the visuals so seamlessly, and Wall-E is a great example of it accomplished exceptionally.

Undoubtedly, the highlight of the film is the 'define dancing' sequence in which EVE and Wall-E glide through the cosmos in a swirling waltz. It is a moment of cinematic magic, projecting raw emotion onto the screen in such a palpable and breathtaking manner that you could be forgiven for forgetting that you're watching a pair of animated robots fall in love. But, why should the fact these are robots inhibit the emotions Stanton injects into the audience? 'What does it mean to be human?' is a well-trod science fiction query. Wall-E explores this notion perfectly, reflecting a basic answer easily understood by its intended audience, yet simmering beneath the seemingly simplistic elucidation is something far more complex and contemplative.

Wall-E sits firmly with Ratatouille and Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse as some of the greats of modern western animation. Where less

confident filmmakers, especially those making a film for families and children, are liable to dull their messaging, Stanton and the crew sharpen their terribly urgent message with a miserable vision of the future. A future without connection, without romance, without laughter, dancing, smiles or joy. It is a future absent of anything that makes life worth living, and one that Stanton is desperate to ensure must never come to pass.



Wall-E is a movie for everyone. A serene post-apocalyptic fable that holds worlds of emotion and galaxies of meaning in its brief, yet beautiful 98 minutes. Who knew that an animated movie about robots falling in love could be so life-affirming? Since earnestness is the key to Wall-E and sincerity is something to be celebrated, I leave you with this: go and enjoy the world. As Wall-E would, go and 'put on your Sunday clothes', there's lots of world out there. Enjoy it while it's around.

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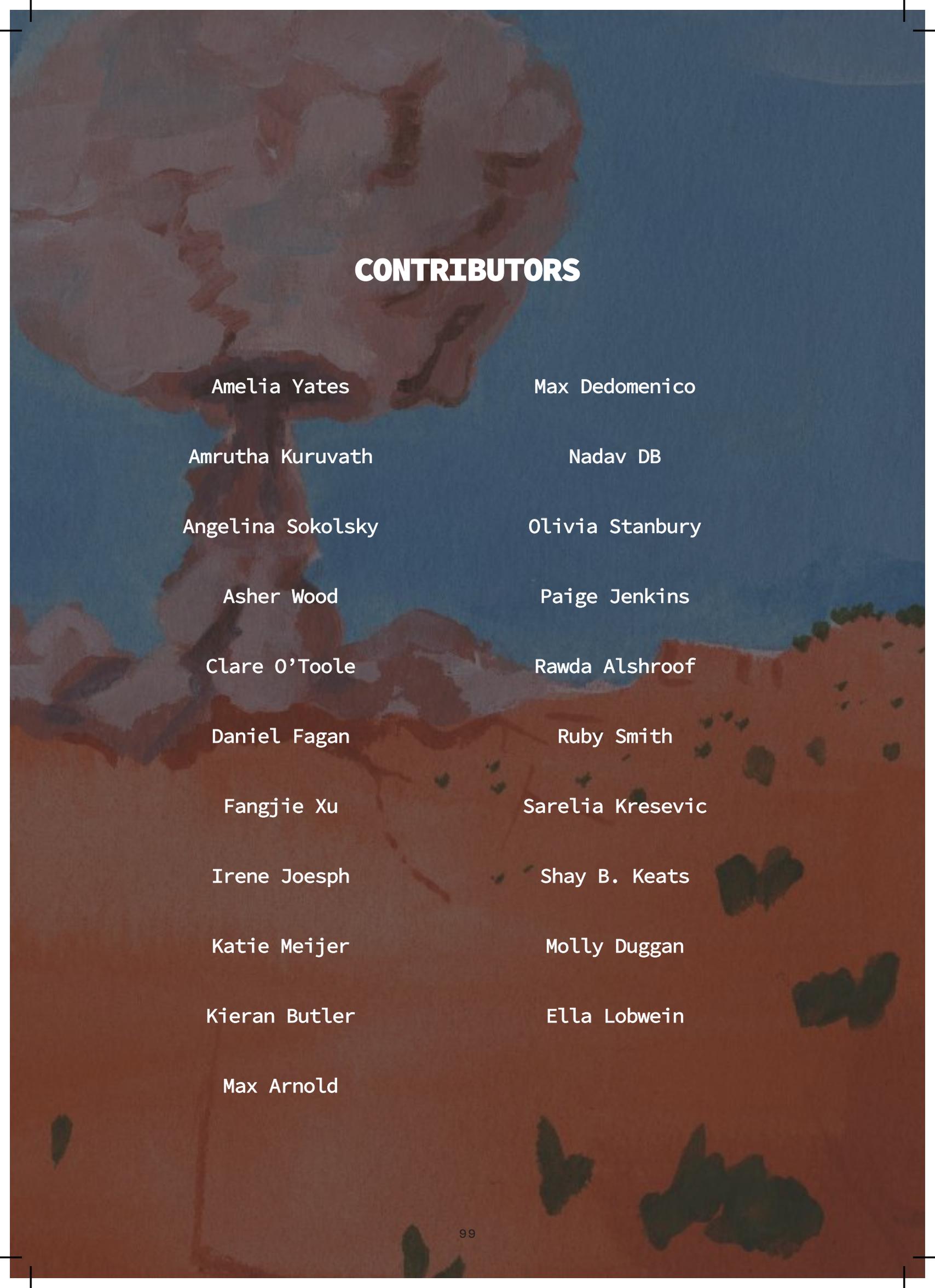
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