**20th Century American Literature**

DongA University

Professor Carrier

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

Screenplay: Stanley Kubrick, Peter George, Terry Southern

Director: Stanley Kubrick

*An insane United States military officer attempts to start a nuclear war with the Soviet Union. The president and all of his advisors gather in a “war room” and frantically try to find a way to stop the war. The film depicts the irrational paranoia that existed in the United States during the Cold War period. It also shows the closed-minded militarism that was pervasive in American culture at the time.*

1. Characters
   1. Group Captain Mandrake (Peter Sellers) Mandrake is an English officer serving in the US in an officer exchange program.
   2. General Buck Turgidson (George C. Scott) Turgidson is the Secretary of the Air Force, the highest-ranking USAF member in the War Room.
   3. General Jack Ripper (Sterling Hayden) Commander of one group of bombers, which he has ordered to carry out a surprise attack on Russia.
   4. President Merkin Muffley (Peter Sellers)
   5. Dr. Strangelove (Peter Sellers) Director of Weapons Research and Development. A former Nazi scientist, Dr. Strangelove presents a plan to survive the crisis.
   6. Major ‘King’ Kong (Slim Pickens): Captain of one of the strategic bombers ordered to carry out a nuclear attack.
   7. Russian Ambassador Alexi de Sadesky (Peter Bull): The ambassador to the US, he tells the War Room officials about the Doomsday Device.
2. Categorization
   1. Time: Late 1950’s/early 1960’s
   2. Setting: USAF base, Pentagon “War Room,” USAF bomber.
   3. Genre: Black Comedy
   4. Tone: surreal, cynical, satirical
   5. Theme: the insanity of nuclear conflict, the danger
   6. Props: the bomb, “Doomsday Device,” cobalt thorium G, the radio, the gun, the water, fluoridation, the precious bodily fluids, Dr. Strangelove’s hand.
3. Plot Summary: Paranoid Brigadier General Jack D. Ripper of Burpelson Air Force Base, he believing that fluoridation of the American water supply is a Soviet plot to poison the U.S. populace, is able to deploy through a back door mechanism a nuclear attack on the Soviet Union without the knowledge of his superiors, including the Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Buck Turgidson, and President Merkin Muffley. Only Ripper knows the code to recall the B-52 bombers and he has shut down communication in and out of Burpelson as a measure to protect this attack. Ripper's executive officer, RAF Group Captain Lionel Mandrake (on exchange from Britain), who is being held at Burpelson by Ripper, believes he knows the recall codes if he can only get a message to the outside world. Meanwhile at the Pentagon War Room, key persons including Muffley, Turgidson and nuclear scientist and adviser, a former Nazi named Dr. Strangelove, are discussing measures to stop the attack or mitigate its blow-up into an all out nuclear war with the Soviets. Against Turgidson's wishes, Muffley brings Soviet Ambassador Alexi de Sadesky into the War Room, and get his boss, Soviet Premier Dimitri Kisov, on the hot line to inform him of what's going on. The Americans in the War Room are dismayed to learn that the Soviets have a yet as unannounced Doomsday Device to detonate if any of their key targets are hit. As Ripper, Mandrake and those in the War Room try and work the situation to their end goal, Major T.J. "King" Kong, one of the B-52 bomber pilots, is working on his own agenda of deploying his bomb where ever he can on enemy soil if he can't make it to his intended target. (from: www.imdb.com)
4. Summary of Scenes
   1. Prologue: Air Force maintains the things in this film are impossible. [00:00-00:34]
   2. Narrator: Rumors of Russian “Doomsday Device” [00:35-01:14]
   3. Titles [01:15-03:10]
   4. Control Room: Phone call between Capt. Mandrake and General Ripper. Ripper issues bombing order and seals the base. Orders all radios destroyed [03:11-05:55]
   5. Narrator: Description of American Strategic Air Command. [05:55-06:33]
   6. Bomber: Captain “King” Kong receives the order to bomb Soviet targets. [06:34-11:40]
   7. Hotel room of General “Buck” Turgidson and his secretary/girlfriend Miss Scott: He receives the news that General Ripper has launched an attack. [11:41-14:55]
   8. Burpelson AFB: Gen. Ripper makes an announcement at the USAF base. Capt. Mandrake discovers the radio and learns that there is no Russian attack. [14:56-16:27]
   9. Bomber: Captain Kong distributes the secret attack profile to the members of his crew. They cut off radio contact with the base and prepare to attack. [16:28-19:20]
   10. Gen. Ripper’s office: Capt. Mandrake confronts Gen. Ripper with the radio and discovers that Gen. Ripper is insane. Ripper locks Mandrake in the office and threatens him with a gun. Ripper reveals that his motivation is to preserve the purity of his “precious bodily fluids,” which he believes the Russians are plotting to poison. [19:21-24:13]
   11. Pentagon-“War Room”: The president learns about “Plan R” from Gen. Turgidson. He also learns of Gen. Ripper’s insanity and that only Ripper has the code to stop the attack. Orders the Army to attack the Air Force and make contact with Gen. Ripper. Turgidson recommends full attack to prevent a Russian counter-attack. The president refuses and contacts the Russians to attempt to diffuse the situation. [24:14-35:30]
   12. Bomber: Capt. Kong describes the content of the Emergency Survival Kit. [35:30-36:28]
   13. War Room: Ambassador Sadesky arrives and President Muffley calls the Soviet Premier. The Ambassador and Gen. Turgidson get in a fight. [36:29-38:21]
   14. Burpelson AFB: The Army approaches the AFB and the Air Force security forces attack them. [38:22-39:43].
   15. War Room: Call to the Russian Premier. The president tells him of the attack and offers to help him shoot down the bombers. The Premier tells the Ambassador of the Doomsday Device, which is designed to destroy the earth if Russia is attacked. [39:44-45:34]
   16. Gen. Ripper’s office: While the shooting outside continues, General Ripper tells Mandrake about the source of his concern: fluoridation of the water. Gen. Ripper begins to shoot from his office. [45:35-49:11]
   17. War Room: The Ambassador gives the details of the Doomsday Device and Dr. Strangelove advises the president. He is puzzled why Russia never told the world about the Doomsday Device, as it has no value as a deterrent to attack if it is a secret. [49:12-54:00]
   18. Burbelson AFB: Fighting continues with both sides taking heavy casualties. Ripper and Mandrake talk more about the Communist plot to destroy their precious bodily fluids. Ripper reveals that he discovered the problem with fluoridation during sex, due to a loss of “life essence.” The Air Force security forces surrender. Gen. Ripper kills himself before Mandrake can get him to reveal the codes to recall the bombers. [54:01-1:01:22]
   19. Bomber: An attempted missile attack fails to destroy the plane. [1:01:23-1:05:30]
   20. Gen. Ripper’s office: The Army commander Bat Guano (for “bat shit” crazy) enters as Mandrake discovers the code: POE or “Purity of Essence.” Guano will not help him contact the Strategic Air Command but it is probably too late anyway, as the Bomber’s radio was destroyed in the missile attack. [1:05:31-1:07:48]
   21. Bomber: They assess the condition of the plane. They are losing fuel and have no radio, but they are able to fly very low so that no-one can see them on radar. [1:07:49-1:09:34]
   22. Burpelson AFB: Mandrake tries to convince Guano to let him call the president. Mandrake tries to call the president on a payphone but he doesn’t have enough money. [1:09:35-1:13:16]
   23. War Room: The recall code is sent to all of the planes but Capt. Kong’s plane, which is believed to have been destroyed by the missile, doesn’t receive it because their radio is broken. Gen. Turgidson makes a speech and a prayer. Premier Kissoff calls and he is angry. [1:13:17-1:14:25]
   24. Bomber: Still losing fuel but flying. [1:14:26-1:15:09]
   25. War Room: President talks to Premier and learns that one bomber is still continuing to its target. They learn that the Doomsday device will be set off if they attack. They tell the Russians to try to shoot it down near their designated targets. [1:15:10-1:17:49]
   26. Bomber: Learning that the fuel leak has gotten worse, they are forced to change the target. [1:17:50-1:19:25]
   27. War Room: The president asks Turgidson if he thinks the bomber “has a chance” (is likely to carry out a successful attack). [1:19:26-1:1:20:37]
   28. Bomber: They begin the final bombing run. They have a problem with the bomb bay door: it won’t open. Capt. Kong goes below to open the door manually. [1:20:38-1:27:44]
   29. War Room: Dr. Strangelove proposes that they attempt to preserve “a nucleus of human specimens” by sending a small group of people into the underground mine shaft for 100 years to attempt to survive the Doomsday device. [1:27:45-1:33:04]
   30. Montage of nuclear explosions (music: “We’ll Meet Again”). [1:33:05-1:34:32]
   31. Credits.
5. Conflict
   1. Reason vs. Fanaticism
   2. Capitalism/Democracy vs. Socialism/Communism
   3. Sanity vs. Insanity
   4. Deterrence vs. Provocation
   5. National Loyalty vs. Personal Self-Interest
   6. Power vs. Honor
   7. Idealism vs. Realism
6. Symbolism
   1. The radio/the telephone
   2. The bomb/“The Doomsday device”
   3. The gun
   4. The essence/“precious bodily fluids” (56:42)
   5. The War Room
   6. The Secret Code