

# 'Dr. Strangelove' is cold rationality

VIDEO VAULT from Page 10

world, existence on planet earth. It is satire, and the people exist as caricatures, but we recognize them as such and see the humor involved because it is rooted in the real world. We laugh at the characters (Kong's cowboy approach to nuclear annihilation, Ripper's paranoid commiephobia, and Mandrake's nervous calm) because they are exaggerations of personalities in our own socio-political existence.

At the same time, Kubrick points out that these caricatures, though created by the situation at hand, go absolutely nowhere when it comes to solving the crisis. Indeed, they make it worse. In the war room, as President Murkin Muffley (also played by Sellers) confers with the Joint Chiefs of Staff regarding the crisis, someone comments, "The human element seems to have failed here."

The conferences in the war room are also populated by ridiculous characters: the President, upset and bewildered that such a thing has happened; General "Buck" Turgidson (George C. Scott), who puts stick after stick of gum into his mouth as he explains that Ripper was able to order an attack due to a program of "credible deterrence;" and visiting Soviet ambassador Kissov, who embodies the ugly, humorless, stereotypical Russian.

Naturally conflict arises: Turgidson protests the breach of security that Kissov is allowed to see "the big board," and accuses him of taking pictures of the room. A wrestling match ensues, and is broken up by the President who exclaims, "Gentlemen, you can't fight in here -- this is the war room!"

Although connections with Moscow are made, and everything possible is done to recall the bombers, it is not enough. Kong's bomber finds a target and releases its device which reads "Nuclear warhead, Handle with care." Kong rides the bomb down to the ground bronco style, detonating the Soviet's secret "doomsday machine" and ending the world to the musical accompaniment of "We'll Meet Again."

As the film progresses, it becomes more and more difficult to laugh at the characters: if their attitudes are not so different from those in our world, is it not possible that the doomed planet on screen is also our own?

Is ours a world where ends have become separated from means, where "doublethink" is commonplace and humankind has advanced to a stage of existence beyond that which it is able to sustain? Kubrick is fascinated with these themes, and although at times it is undoubtedly funny, it is dark at the same time.

Nowhere are the themes so unified as in the third character played by Peter Sellers, Dr. Strangelove, from whom the movie takes its name. Strangelove is cold rationality, in which matters of the survival or death of Earth are reduced to a chess game. His is not the only voice in this crisis, how-

ever. There is the nervous Mandrake, who worries about the impending doom, but does nothing.

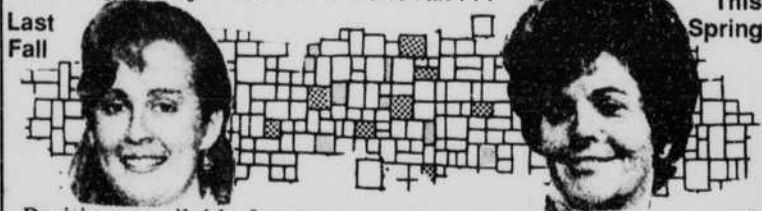
And then there is Turgidson, who at one point reveals what may well be the current condition of humanity. While in conference in the war room, Turgidson tells his mistress that one day she'll be his wife, but before he hangs up, says "Don't forget to say your prayers."

We make our plans and say our prayers that the plans will be carried out, but our world is hanging by a thread. Unless something is done, the movie suggests, that thread will someday snap, destroying our plans and our world.

"Dr. Strangelove" should be available at most video stores. I've discovered that finding it not checked out, however, can be a problem.

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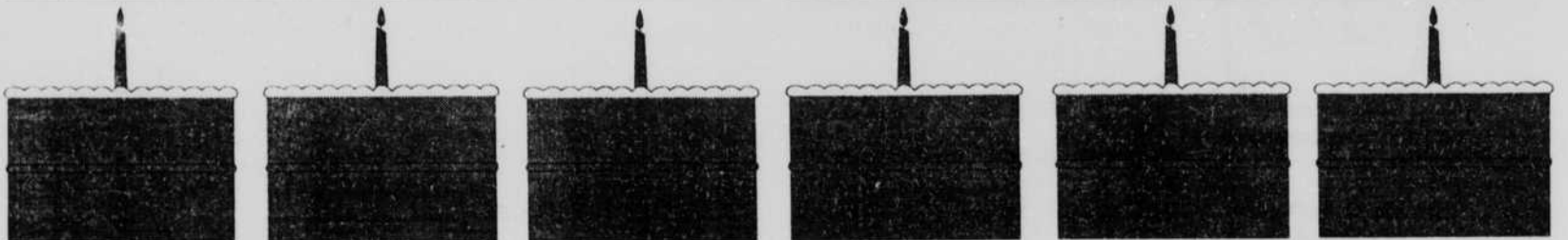
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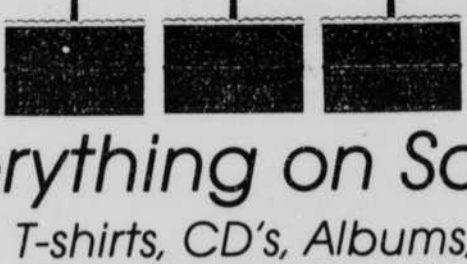
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