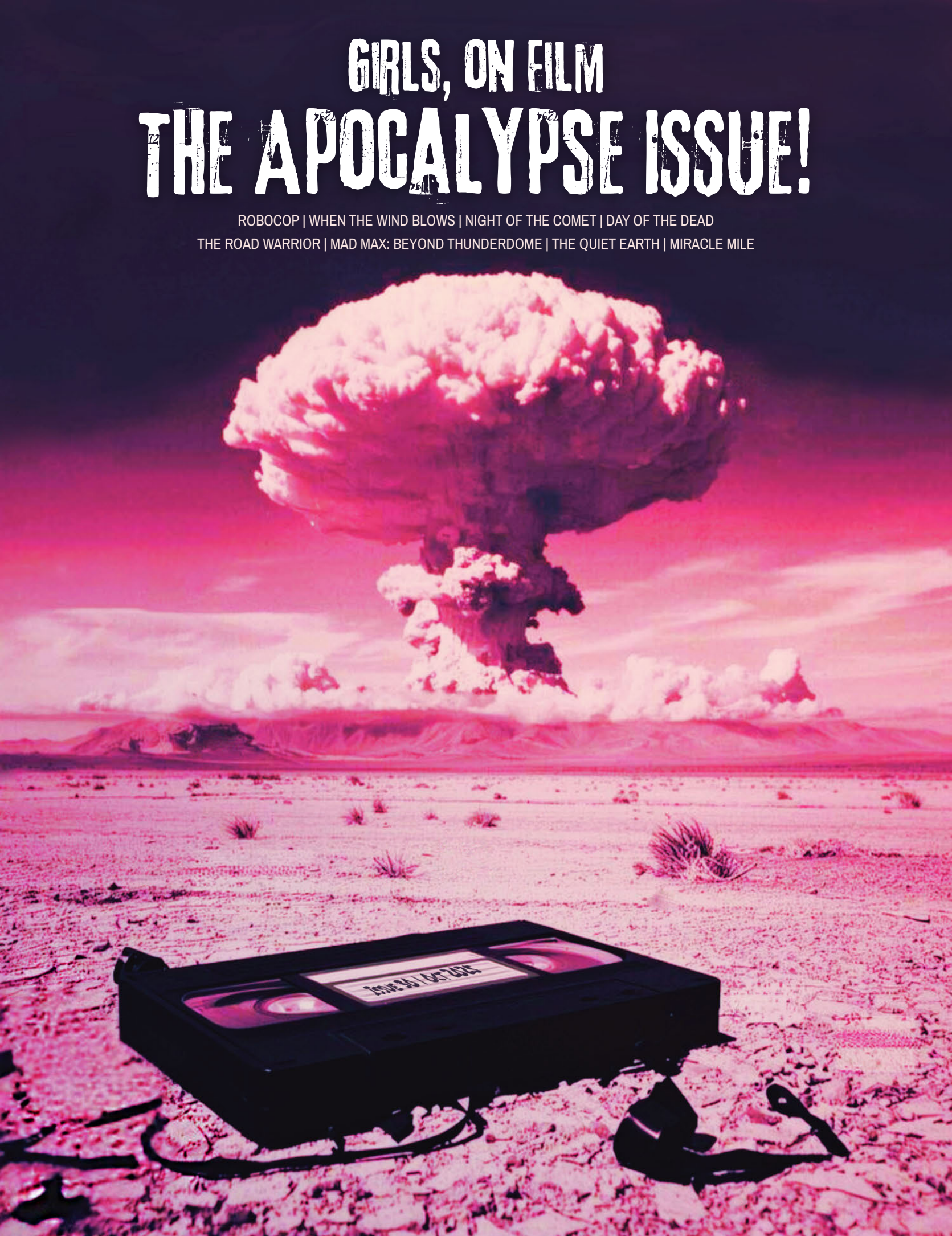
GIRLS, ON FILM

THE APOCALYPSE ISSUE!

ROBOCOP | WHEN THE WIND BLOWS | NIGHT OF THE COMET | DAY OF THE DEAD

THE ROAD WARRIOR | MAD MAX: BEYOND THUNDERDOME | THE QUIET EARTH | MIRACLE MILE

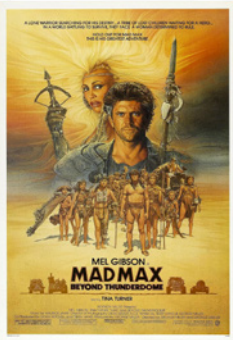


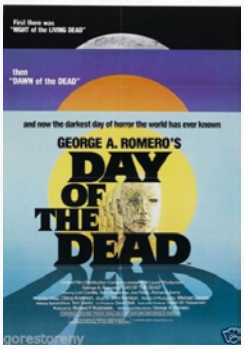

When the Wind Blows (1986)

GIRLS, ON FILM

THE APOCALYPSE ISSUE

ISSUE #30 | OCT 2025





SOUND THE ALARM!

Welcome to issue #30 of *Girls, on Film*, the zine that is hopelessly devoted to 80s movies! Each issue features eight movies released between 1980 and 1989 that relate to a specific theme. We cover all kinds of titles: popular, obscure, and everything in between. These essays are a mix of review, history, commentary, and personal reflection. Get digital copies, for free, or purchase full-color prints at girlsonfilmzine.com.

The spooky season is upon us once again, and this year, we dig into apocalyptic titles.

THE LINE UP

Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior - George Miller defines the neo-savage, post-apocalyptic Wasteland and unleashes a classic anti-hero.

Night of the Comet - Two teenage girls have to survive after a comet wipes out most of the population.

Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome - Mad Max finds its sweet spot with a rock star, a group of children, and a PG-13 rating.

Day of the Dead - The darkest day the world has ever known is a blueprint for saving humanity that we could learn from if we were so inclined.

The Quiet Earth - A scientist survives a suicide attempt only to discover that nearly everyone else on Earth has disappeared.

Robocop - A murdered cop with a shitty retirement plan is ressurrected as crime-fighting cyborg on the streets of Detroit.

When the Wind Blows - A 90-minute death scene in which an animated elderly couple survives a nuclear blast but not the radiation poisoning.

Miracle Mile - A random phone call sets off a night of chaos in what could have been a hell of a "how I met your mother" story.

ABOUT THE ZINE

WHO DIS?

Girls, on Film is an 80s movie zine that was founded in 2017. Get digital issues for free or purchase full-color prints. We also invite guest submissions, collaborations, and trades. Learn more on our website (girlsonfilmzine.com), reach out by email (info@girlsonfilmzine.com), or follow on Instagram (@girlson80sfilm).

FOUNDERS/EDITORS

Stephanie McDevitt - Stephanie's one big disappointment in life is that she wasn't old enough to fully appreciate popular clothing styles of the 1980s, as she was mostly attired in paisley sweatsuits. A full-time editor and occasional freelancer, Stephanie looks nostalgically back on 80s films such as *Ernest Goes to Camp*, *Adventures in Babysitting*, and *Can't Buy Me Love* and wishes she could pull off the hairdos of Cindy Mancini and her friends.

Janene Scelza - Janene spent her teen years making zines and combing musty video stores and public libraries for all the 80s movies she could find. Janene's got plenty of favorites, but it's stylish indie films like *Desperately Seeking Susan*, *Repo Man*, and *The Terminator* that she loves best.

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Dr. Rhonda Baughman - Rhonda, a teacher and freelance writer, raised adolescent hell in the 80s, and the horror films of that era were her BFFs! She loves all 80s pop culture, but nothing spoke to her quite like *Sorority Babes in the Slimeball Bowl-O-Rama*, *Nightmare Sisters*, and *Reform School Girls*. She got a pink laminated Video Time Video membership at 9 years old and she never looked back. Or forward, really; she still loves her VHS and VCR. And let it be known, the scrunchie never died for Rhonda: she STILL wears one proudly!

Matt Scelza - Matt loves to dissect and analyze everything. He co-writes essays for the zine with his sister, Janene. He has also logged a lot of hours at the same video stores and public library film collections with Janene in search of odd and unusual titles. He's got too many favorites to name.

GUEST WRITERS

Sebastian Gregory - Sebastian came of age in the fiery crucible of the 1980s. His parents were avid cinephiles who dragged him to every small, independent movie house in Houston and made sure he had a thorough education in film, which may explain his enduring affection for low-grade Italian westerns. He has been an editor, writer, musician, and actor while masquerading as an IT drone in Sector 17.

Katheryn Hans - Katheryn spent her childhood being afraid of, and captivated by, the movies she watched. *Child's Play* prompted her to lock up her dolls in the laundry room; before she understood the existential dread of *The Thing*, the images of alien body-invasion had her peeking through her fingers; and, while *The NeverEnding Story* graced her with the magical delight of Falkor, it also had that one scene (you know the one). Forged from these experiences, Katheryn harbors a deep love of horror, science fiction, and fantasy films.

John Kidwell - John is a writer from St. Louis, Missouri. An 80s baby himself, John has a special place in his heart for the movies of the 1980s, even the really bad ones. He lives in Baltimore with his girlfriend and their two cats.

GUEST WRITERS

80s movie fans are invited to guest write for the zine. Send a short bio and writing samples to info@girlsonfilmzine.com.

Carmageddon!

MAD MAX 2: THE ROAD WARRIOR

by Sebastian Gregory

We had no real heroes. We were the last of the Cold War kids: victims of the Science Age, the latch-key kids who came of age in the omnipresent shadow of the atomic bomb. We counted on the ludicrous concept of mutually assured destruction to avoid the end of humanity. This was the time of Reagan and the Iran hostages. The US and USSR, the world's mightiest superpowers, had their respective arsenals of nuclear megadeath cocked and locked as the Cold War played out across the world. Duck and cover, boys and girls. Don't stare directly into the atomic sunrise.

When it came to apocalyptic, end-of-the-world thinking, 80's kids inherited a potent legacy of existential fear and dread from the previous decades. The horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki cast a long shadow, a fear deep in our collective subconscious that became a festering dread. Add to that the reality of fallout shelters, the Cuban Missile Crisis, Three Mile Island, vast stockpiles of missiles and bombs. The evening news spewed a seemingly endless variation of war, starvation, natural disaster, nuclear meltdowns, disease, political unrest, and the occasional chipmunk waterskiing. We were kids who saw our parents freaking out about gas shortages, evil politicians, oil monopolies, military misadventures overseas, and the presumed death of Elvis.

Then *Mad Max II: the Road Warrior* was unleashed in 1981 and we found our dude to guide us through the Wasteland. "Mad" Max Rockatansky (a stoic Mel Gibson, before he became, well...Mel Gibson) exploded into our lives with the thunderous roar of a super-charged V8 Interceptor (actually a Ford Falcon) and the stink of high-test "guzzolene", his faithful Dog by his side (an Australian Blue Heeler, rescued from a kill shelter for the movie). Mad Max was a mutated version of the fictional hero archetype. He fit easily into the pantheon conjured into being by Hollywood mythmakers, up there next to Eastwood's Man With No Name and Bronson's Harmonica, with a slice of Cool Hand Luke mixed in with Yojimbo and just a hint of Shane. Mad Max was the Anti-Luke Skywalker, kitted out in black leathers, a burnout who ate dog food out of a can with a silver spoon. One of those unsmiling bastards with

Max and the Gyro Captain discover an oasis.

On the road again.

dark sins and secrets in his past, tacit to the point of frustration, who isn't nice but gets shit done, and maybe almost cracks a sly smile right at the end—familiar to the point of cliché. Maybe it shouldn't have worked. But it did. Judging from reaction videos, kids today pick up on two things: the insane kinetic energy of the action and that Max is a nihilistic asshole.

Mad Max was the hero of the moment, but even back then we knew he was problematic. Max is a killer, a survivor of the last dying gasps of civilization. Broken, but not beaten. Burnt out and desolate, but not ready to die. Ruthlessly selfish and at best, morally ambiguous, qualities that ensure survival in the Wasteland but make interpersonal relationships a challenge. There isn't much difference between him and the villains Wez (Vernon Wells, also in Commando) and The Humungus (Kjell Nilsson), except those two have a rough sort of relationship, something not even afforded to Max. I didn't want to be Mad Max. But I wanted him around when shit went sideways.

If you've somehow not seen it, I envy your first viewing. It's a focused but stunning thrill ride that moves along at a blistering clip, especially the action sequences. Brief but welcome levity by way of some cheeky Australian humor (Bruce Spence's Gyro Captain is a motley delight) humanizes the characters.

The director, George Miller, has had a fascinating career. He was an ER doctor in Australia with a love of making movies. *Mad Max* was his first feature, which gave birth to the franchise and birthed a whole sub-genre of imitative post-apocalyptic movies. But he's also the director of *Witches of Eastwick*, *Lorenzo's Oil*, *Babe* and its sequel, *Three Thousand Years of Longing*, and the *Happy Feet* movies—not to mention a ton of work in Australian television.

After the near world-wide success of *Mad Max*, George Miller noted that different cultures saw Max as one of their own: a samurai, a Viking, etc. He proceeded to study up on Jungian archetypes and read Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* before he started working on the script. If, like me, you were raised on a steady diet of *Looney Tunes* and *Speed Racer* you're not really pontificating on how Max typifies the Jungian archetype of *The Shadow*. From the first viewing I accepted this movie at a base level and remained blissfully ignorant of the intellectual aspects until much later in life.

His first foray into feature movie making (*Mad Max*) left him wanting to do it better. Miller said in the DVD commentary that *Mad Max II* was made to "overcome all my frustrations on the first *Mad Max* because that was such a low budget and such a tough movie that I had all this sort of pent-up energy for the story and the filmmaking." It's one of those rare times in movie making where the sequel is better than the original. He hired the best crew he could get his hands on and headed out to the town of Broken Hill in New South Wales in the middle of winter. They shot in sequence, with Miller storyboarding after shooting all day. Principle photography was completed in 12 weeks. It was, at the time, the most expensive movie made in Australia, and the Settler's Homestead set was the most expensive set piece built in Australia.

Come on in and pull yourself up a chair.

Contenders for the Snarling Psycho Hall of Fame.

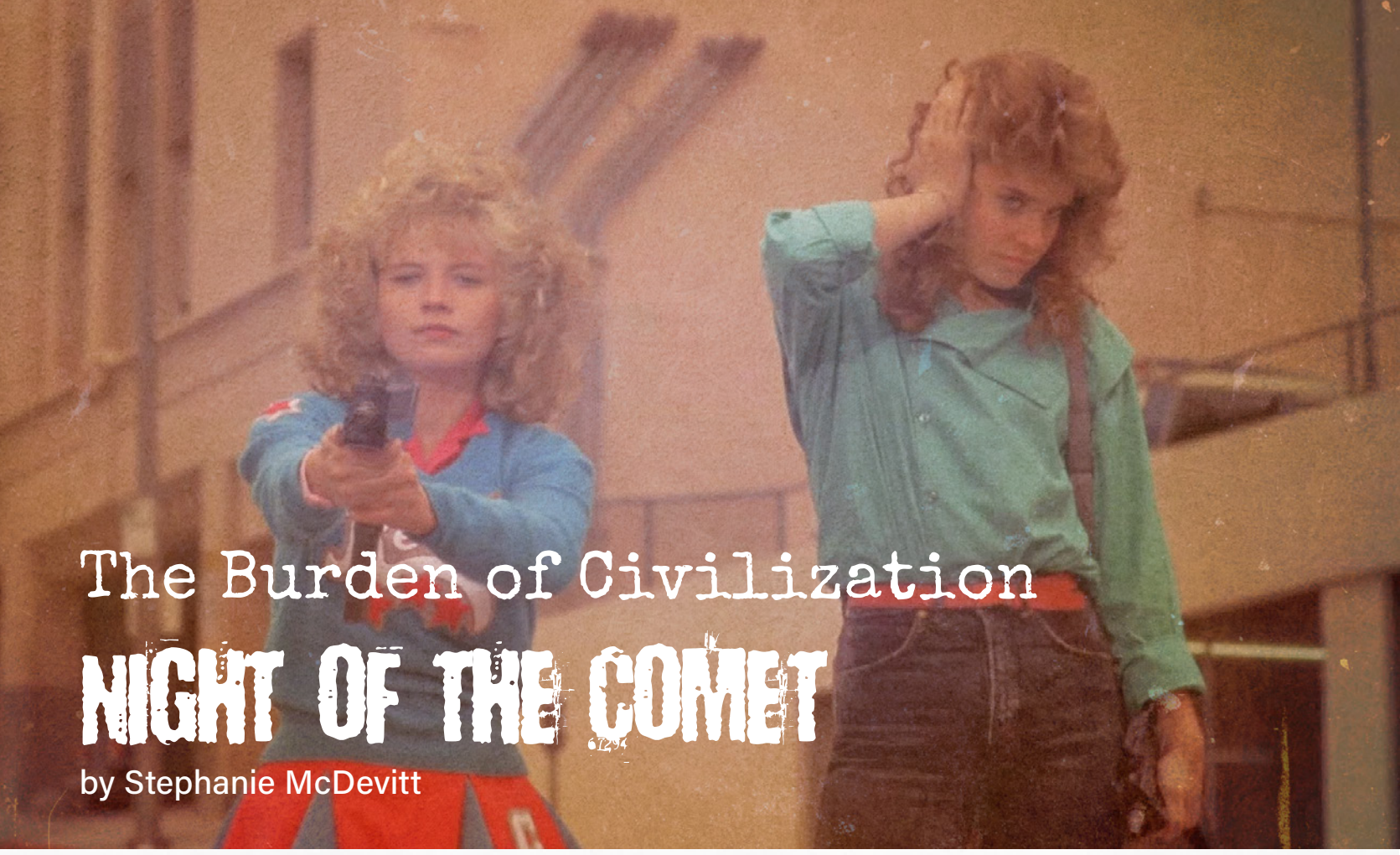
As they could access military grade explosives not available to civilians, Miller brought in the Army to blow it up for the grand finale. CGI may give directors more control, but I'll take a legit massive on-screen explosion that shut down local air traffic. The stunt work on this movie is fantastic, all practical effects, nary a blue screen in sight. One stunt went wrong and resulted in a broken femur, and of course that shot is in the movie and also the trailer!

In a 2006 interview with Paul Byrnes, Miller discussed the inspiration he took from the silent movie era when making his first movie. Miller admired Buster Keaton and Harold Lloyd, in particular the movie *The General* which features a bonkers train chase sequence. Miller wanted his movies to be understandable without sound, which guided him on *Mad Max* but was perfected on *Mad Max II*, which has minimal dialogue and a sparse soundtrack composed by Brian May (Australian composer, not the guitarist from Queen). Max has a total of 344 words, but Mel Gibson (a relative unknown at the time, though thanks to *Gallipoli* and the Mad Max movies, he was well on his way) makes it work with his low-key facial expressions and body language. The moment when he gives the Feral Child (Emil Minty) the music box is sublime as is his rueful half-smile at the end when he learns the Settlers tricked him.

The desolate landscape of the Australian Outback is a perfect stand in for a world that has suffered a crippling ecological disaster. The visual transition from the first movie to the sequel is drastic; there are now no more buildings, no infrastructure, civilization has collapsed. Nothing is left except the Wasteland and the vague promise of a better land thousands of miles away. The monochromatic landscape serves as a bland backdrop for the colorful over-the-top punk/BDSM/leather fetish costumes and highly customized vehicles and weapons. The wild look of the Marauders (Mohawkers, Smegma Crazies, Gayboy Berzerkers) brought certain aspects of punk and fetish style into mainstream culture, thanks to costume designer Norma Moriceau, who had worked in London in the 70s with the Sex Pistols on *The Great Rock n' Roll Swindle* (see Issue 16). For *Mad Max II* she was inspired by a leather and bondage store she passed on her way to the production offices in Sydney, as well as sporting goods stores and vintage shops.

A lot of critical ink was spilled about the movie, and the reviews were generally positive if not a bit hyperbolic (Roger Ebert) or dismissive (Pauline Kael, who said that it was a spaghetti Western done by George Romero). But the movie was a stunning financial success, earning $26 million in the US and Canada alone. It quickly became a favorite to rent (there used to be this place called Blockbuster) and was a staple of early cable TV, as well as the first movie to get proper distribution in America.

Now my vision dims and all that are left are the memories of walking out of the movie theater, blinking back the rays of the sun, thankful to be back in the screwed up, scary, uncertain world of the 1980s and comforted knowing that somewhere out there in the Wasteland was an emotionally unavailable leather-clad hero, ready to reluctantly save us all from ourselves.



The Burden of Civilization

NIGHT OF THE COMET

by Stephanie McDevitt

Long-time readers of *Girls, on Film* might know that I am one of a few of our writers who doesn't like scary movies. I just don't like being scared. It's not fun at all for me, and when we decided to write about apocalypse movies, I figured it might be hard to find something that wasn't scary or devastating. However, Janene, our resident movie encyclopedia, suggested *Night of the Comet*, which is the perfect apocalypse movie for me. Despite its depiction of the world being wiped out by a comet, it's still silly and fun and mostly devoid of jump scares.

Night of the Comet came out of Thom Eberhardt's love of post-apocalyptic science fiction and strong female characters. While working on a PBS after school special that starred teen girls, Eberhardt ate lunch with them one day and asked what they would do if they woke up one morning and discovered everyone else was gone [1]. He said, "their immediate reaction was not to question where everybody went, why they were alone, nor to be afraid of anything. Their immediate reaction was all the stuff they could do" [2]. The only downside they saw was the potential lack of boyfriends.

So Eberhardt sat down to write *Night of the Comet* based on that conversation, and he took the script to Atlantic Releasing Corporation. Atlantic had a huge hit in 1983 with *Valley Girl*, and they wanted to repeat that success by continuing to make teen movies on the cheap while reaping large box office returns [3] (see my *Teen Wolf* essay in Issue 27). *Night of the Comet* was filmed for only $700K and it brought in $14.4 million in the US [4], so it fit that description perfectly.

The premise of *Night of the Comet* is that Earth is passing through the tail of a comet, which hasn't happened in 65 million years, and, according to this movie, the previous comet event coincided with the dinosaur extinction. So, it makes sense that in this Los Angeles suburb, everyone is gathering outside to have comet watching parties. Our hero, Regina (Catherine Mary Stewart), is stuck working at the local movie theater that night. She doesn't seem to care about the comet because she gets to

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

I wear my sunglasses at night.

spend the night in the steel-lined projector room of the movie theater with her boyfriend Larry (Michael Bowen).

Meanwhile, Regina's younger sister, Sam (Kelli Maroney), gets into a fight with her stepmother Doris (Sharon Farrell) because Sam calls her out for cheating on their father (he's deployed on military duty in central America). When Doris hits Sam, she runs away and spends the night in a steel-lined backyard shed. The next morning, when Regina leaves the theater, she looks around and sees clothes laying all over the ground. She eventually realizes something isn't right, and then she's attacked by a zombie (who had just killed Larry). Regina manages to defend herself, and she jumps on Larry's motorcycle and heads home through empty streets.

When Reggie gets home, Sam is there and is totally clueless as to what happened. She tells Regina about her fight with Doris and that she spent the night in the steel-lined shed. Reggie concludes that the steel saved them from death, and she tells Sam that the comet destroyed everyone, either turning them to dust or turning them into zombies. Sam points out that the radio is still broadcasting, so there must be some people left on Earth. They head to the radio station only to find that the broadcast is automated and there are no people around.

The girls decide to arm themselves (attributing their knowledge of guns and self defense to their dad's military training), and eventually they start running into other survivors. They meet Hector (Robert Beltran), a truck driver who was saved by spending the night in the cab of his truck, and they decide to partner up with him when he returns from checking on his family.

They also start running into zombies. On a shopping trip to the mall, they try to fight off zombies, but they're taken prisoner. Before the zombies can kill them, they're saved by a rescue team sent by government scientists who are trying to develop an antidote to whatever it is that is causing people to turn to zombies. But, once we meet these scientists, it's clear that no one should trust them.

I really enjoyed *Night of the Comet*. It's a pretty light end of the world movie. As Keith Phipps says in his review for *The Dissolve*, "There's nothing urgent about Eberhardt's direction or the film's plot. Even the zombies don't seem like that great a threat: There aren't that many of them, and they aren't particularly hard to defeat" [5]. Furthermore, John Kenneth Muir says in his book *Horror Films of the 80s, Volume 2* that *Comet* is almost optimistic for an apocalypse movie. Muir says, "It's the end of the world and they know it, but Regina and Sam feel fine. They get to drive great cars, go shopping, and wear terrific clothes" [6].

In Muir's book, Eberhardt explains that while they were shooting the scene in the mall where Sam drops a television off the third floor railing to try to kill the zombies, his producer stopped him and said "'What are you doing? These girls look like they're having fun. It looks like a joke to them! It's the crisis of their life, they should be terrified!' [and Eberhardt said] 'this is fun. They

What seems to be the problem, officer?

The new Nuclear Family.

are having fun on a certain level'" [7].

The girls do have fun and they don't really mourn anything, but they also don't have much to mourn. They hated their stepmother, and Reggie was unhappy with both Larry and her job. Sam has a moment where she's sad about losing her friends, but now they're free to do whatever they want, and that is very exciting. The only issue they have is which one of them will get with Hector to start building up the human race again. As Muir says, "The whole burden of civilization has fallen to them, and they have the vitality, energy, and good humor to face that challenge" [8].

I agree with Muir. All the adults in this movie were just the worst. Before everyone is killed we see Regina arguing with her boss, and he seems like such a pain. Scenes of Regina at the theater are mixed in with scenes of Sam fighting with Doris, who punches Sam in the face. When the girls meet the scientists, it's pretty clear they are up to something.

We eventually find out that the scientists were in a steel-lined bunker in the middle of the desert, but someone left the vents open and they were all exposed to whatever it is that is turning people into zombies. I loved that not only were the scientists taken out by a really stupid mistake, but that all the adults in the film are disappointments in some way. So the girls' positive outlook on starting over makes sense and gives them an opportunity to do better than the previous generation.

One plot point I really enjoyed is that the automated world of the 80s didn't just end when all the people disappeared. For example, the radio station kept broadcasting the recorded music countdown and traffic lights kept working. At the end of the movie we see Hector and Reggie teaching some children who survived how to cross at the crosswalk. They make them wait for the walk sign despite the fact that there are no cars coming. I'm guessing those systems won't run forever without people, but I've never understood post-apocalyptic worlds depicted with no power. I imagine we'd have electricity for some time (especially now since so much of our world is automated).

So that's *Night of the Comet*. Eberhardt said "I had no illusions when I did it that this was anything more than a drive-in movie" [9], but it was well reviewed and made a ton of money. It also has female leads, which you don't often see in these kinds of movies, and they kick some ass. I thought it was fun watching the girls run around and raid the mall while also trying to take out some zombies. I thought it was fun, and I recommend it to anyone looking for a light, silly zombie movie.

There had been rumors of a remake. Horror filmmaker Roxanne Benjamin had written a script that leaned more heavily into the science fiction aspect of the story. However, as of 2023, the project appeared to stuck in studio limbo. In any event, the original version is available now, and as of this writing, it's free to watch on Tubi.

The Man, The Myth, The Legend

MAD MAX BEYOND THUNDERDOME

by Katheryn Hans

George Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road* released in 2015, reinvigorating the franchise after a 30 year hiatus. I had never seen the earlier Mad Max films, but I did go see *Fury Road* in IMAX. And it was fucking amazing. When I went to see *Furiosa* in 2024, I understood that it was a slight departure from the franchise, centering a secondary character from *Fury Road*, not necessarily on Max, himself. In my mind, this all made sense for some reason. It shouldn't have. How was it that a character was played by Mel Gibson in the 80's still existed so many years later and played by a different actor (Tom Hardy)? I could get on board with a recast, but this wasn't a reboot, and *Fury Road* wasn't a sequel. So, how could there still be a Max?

I chose to watch *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* (1985) for the post-apocalyptic issue because, duh, Tina Turner. Her album, *Private Dancer* (1984), had come out the year prior to the film and was a huge success, staying in the top ten for 39 weeks, and, to some extent, was considered her great comeback [1]. Meanwhile, the *Mad Max* franchise was popular, the first movie, *Mad Max*, setting a Guinness World Record for the most profitable film in 1979 and was a critical success [2]. *Mad Max: Road Warrior* (1981), the second film in the franchise, earned all-around praise, from Mel Gibson's performance as the titular character, to set design and musical score [3]. An artist at the top of her game and a successful film franchise, it just makes sense.

And George Miller seemed to think so. In an 2023 article for *The Guardian*, two days after Tina Turner's death, Miller reflected on his relationship with Turner. He noted that while he and co-writer Terry Hayes would work on the Aunty Entity character, they decided that "anyone who survives [the apocalypse], let alone becomes a dominant force, has had to survive a lot of things that would normally diminish a person—someone like Tina Turner" [4]. "She was the only person we ever asked," Miller said [5]. It is perfect casting. *Beyond Thunderdome* stars Mel Gibson as Max and Tina Turner as his rival, Aunty Entity, the leader of Bartertown, a semi-organized town pulled out of the dust of apocalyptic events that scorched Australia, demolished Sydney, and desolated society.

Who run Bartertown?

All we are is dust in the wind, dude.

This movie has a clear three act structure:

Act 1: Max goes to Bartertown, fights in Thunderdome, but doesn't obey the law, pisses everyone off and gets banished to the gulag.

Act 2: Max awakens after having collapsed in the desert, dehydrated and exhausted. He discovers an oasis in the desert where a tribe of children, from toddlers to late teens/early twenties, have settled, a little society complete with their own folklore and history. The children believe Max is the second coming of their savior, a pilot, who will shepherd them out of the desert.

Act 3: There's a badass car chase, (obligatory) , where Max helps the children leave the desert in a plane, but not as the pilot, and he disappears back into the desert in a cloud of dust.

But the film is strange.

In Act 1, Max stumbles his way to Bartertown after being robbed of his camels and covered vehicle, which he discovers has been taken to the Underworld. According to Aunty Entity, Bartertown is the only civilized place left in Australia, a feat she owns and jealously guards. To maintain this status, Aunty has a tenuous partnership with a little person named The Master (Angelo Rossitto), who rides on the back of his heavy, The Blaster (Paul Larsson)—like Yoda rides on Luke Skywalker's back in *The Empire Strikes Back*. Master/Blaster runs the Underworld, the area underground below Bartertown, powering Bartertown with pig shit. Aunty walks a delicate line with Master/Blaster and maintains control of the citizens of Bartertown by feeding their blood-lust through their judicial system: Thunderdome. When there is a dispute, the two people fight it out in the Thunderdome. The law is "Two men enter, one man leaves."

Aunty Entity offers to help Max recover his stolen goods if he helps her take out her rival, Master/Blaster. Agreeing to the bargain, Max instigates a fight with The Master, and before a rumble happens in the streets, Aunty sends them to the Thunderdome, where Max is to fight The Blaster. The fight is cool. The Thunderdome is an extra large version of that playground thing, called a dome climber, that looks sort of like a cage that you can climb on and inside of. The characters are hung from the top with a harness around their waists, attached with rubber, bungee cord-type ropes that prevent them from touching the ground. The men bounce around the dome a bit before Max gets the upper hand, but he decides he can't kill The Blaster, so Aunty—giving into the crowd—punishes Max by banishing him to a gulag.

I was on board with all of this; standard post-apocalyptic stuff, in line with what I had known about the *Mad Max* franchise. But, in Act 2, the tone shifts. When Max discovers the children, led by Savannah Nix (Helen Buday), in the oasis, my first thought was why is he meeting the lost boys from Peter Pan?

This whole act is sort of sweet. Savannah tells him their lore: how a plane crashed in the middle of the desert as the "pockyclypse" happens; how the pilot guided the living passengers to

Generation: Next

Bust a deal, take the wheel?

the oasis, where they established their little society; how the children now tell the story of their history every night so they never forget the pilot, who will one day come back to save them. Max listens and insists that he is not the man they think he is, but Savannah is determined to leave and rounds up a group of children, disappearing in the night. The next day, Max and the other kids set out in a search to find Savannah and the others.

I was baffled. I could see that the search would lead back to Bartertown, because that's how narrative works. But what I didn't understand was why this was happening. By the time the badass car chase scene happened—after Max had helped Savannah and her group escape the Underworld where they had been taken at some point after being captured—I genuinely didn't understand what was going on. What exactly was this story?

In a 2006 interview, George Miller reflects on the success of the first *Mad Max*. He talks about how it became a hit around the world, and he came to the understanding that "Mad Max was a mythological figure" [5]. When I came across this interview, things started to make a lot of sense. Max could still exist in 2024, 2015, 1985, 1981, and 1979 because he is not just a character—he is a folk hero. Mel Gibson is not Max, nor is Tom Hardy. Instead, Max is the legend of a man in a post-apocalyptic world, helping others—reluctantly at times—in their moment of need before simply walking off to other places.

At the end of the movie, Savannah, surrounded by even more children gathered around a fire, is telling the story of Max, the man who got them out of the desert so they could start their new lives in the ruins of Sydney, who brought them closer to the world they had heard once existed before. This movie is her tale.

My favorite part about this is that I started to see how George Miller's realization about Max as a legend informed choices he made in *Fury Road*. For instance, in Savannah's group, there is a mute, lanky teen boy, who has painted his face pale and surrounded his eyes in dark rings; he moves in jerky motions, skittering around, a little unpredictable. In *Fury Road*, Nicholas Hoult plays a character called Nux, a thin, unhinged driver in the road gang that terrorizes the desert. Nux is skittish, seemingly huffing paint, and has his face dusted in white with dark rings around his eyes, one of the War Boys, an underclass of fighters who all have that same look.

I don't think we are supposed to think that Nux is the boy from *Beyond Thunderdome*. I do think we are invited to consider that the story of *Beyond Thunderdome* is a Max legend that has been kicking about the desert for a while, and that some people in the newer world of that universe have fashioned themselves after those old legends.

I'm sorry, but that shit is cool as hell. And, it just shows the amount of love and care that Miller has for these films. And, Tina Turner.

Stir Crazy

DAY OF THE DEAD

by Dr. Rhonda Baughman

Film lovers passionate about the zombie apocalypse genre often cite legendary George A. Romero's living dead trilogy—*Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) [1], and *Day of the Dead* (1985)—as the moment; that is, the moment they fell in love with this series' rules and guidelines for the undead apocalypse. Of course, Romero's films had us lovestruck—they're classics for obvious reasons [2]—and the films allowed us to sit around and both obnoxiously quote dialogue (with friends and aloud happily to ourselves) and geekily fantasize about how we would ultimately survive the zombie apocalypse [3]. Strangely, both hobby aspects are still fun for me [4], as are watching any other zombie movies (at least once); yet even in the midst of enjoyment I'll still think quickly, unintentionally, about how whatever new film I'm watching stacks up against the trilogy. Not merely in aesthetics or execution, but in message—and for *Day of the Dead*, specifically (except critics and fans alike often focus on the epic gore effects or Bub's brilliant evolution), Romero's film digs deeper into themes repeatedly smacking humanity in the face: fractured authority and labor breakdown, the psychology of survival, and the quieter meaning of apocalypse—issues that feel newly urgent today although *Day* was released 40 years ago [5].

Numerous critics dismissed *Day of the Dead* upon its release [6], citing everything from slow pacing and overly-theatrical performances to its bleak atmosphere and depressing vibes; however, rewatching this year once more for the spooky season, I think perhaps both the film's music and distinctive lighting choices had a lot to do with that initially cool critic reception. Seven years had passed since the release of *Dawn*, and while that brilliant late seventies classic was similarly gloomy in many ways, it summoned a score downright comedic (zany and zippy) in major action and zombie sequences, moreover its color palette reflected a brightly lit mall, sunlight filtering in through mall windows, allowing its human inhabitants access to direct sunlight, a la the rooftop mall [7]—all of this often set against shockingly stark red gore. *Day's* score, on the other hand, contains none of its predecessor's musical levity and remains

Like Frankenstein, but without the fire hazard.

It's no Thoreau, but it'll do.

generally intense, an ominous aural assault at times, while its color palette is muted—dark grays and shadows, as well as no sunlight permeating their underground, militaristic bunker (and no one is outside for long) [8].

Romero continued his zombie series [9], but *Day of the Dead* remains the concluding chapter of the original trilogy and depicts one intensely brutal microcosm at the end of the world and that mindless, ravenous, and rotting zombies now overrun that world. A small group of scientists and military personnel hole up in an underground bunker with one side assigned to the science such as causes and cures for infection and devastation and the other side assigned to presumably protect those attempting the aforementioned science [10]. Interactions between scientists and military members become increasingly antagonistic [11] as they repeatedly clash over everything. It's scientist Dr. 'Frankenstein' Logan's (exquisitely played by the late Richard Liberty) controversial experiments to domesticate and control zombies, which leads to the final breakdown of their fragile group, and arguably leads to the death of Logan and initiates the film's climax.

Overall, the unease within the bunker is present from the moment the viewer is allowed in; obvious from the film's helicopter intro, too, with the interactions while flying between three 'good guys': pilot John (Terry Alexander), his RIO Bill McDermott (Jarlath Conroy), and Dr. Sarah Bowman (Lori Cardille). Merely exiting the helicopter shows more tension between Sarah and Pvt. Miguel Salazar (the late Anthony DiLeo, Jr.), romantically, personally, medically, emotions have been bottled and brewing and soon to detonate. Sarah exchanges words again with John, they note a new grave (the death of leader Major Cooper), and with nothing but their tension, they all head back down into the bunker. Once inside, it soon becomes clear the mentality is that no one is safe anywhere, since it's now us vs. them—or scientists vs. military—as opposed to the humans vs. zombies as it should be, and it is the absolutely unhinged performances by the late trio Joe Pilato (as Capt. Henry Rhodes), Ralph Marrero (as Pvt. Robert Rickles), and Gary Howard Klar (as Pvt. Walter Steel) that make the bad guys so delightful and memorable to watch unravel. Grand performances abound for the entire cast, including the main zombie Bub. He's the "the first zombie with feelings," sure, but Bub represents memory as rebellion and Romero's warning: dehumanization always backfires. Those dismissed as "other" will adapt and often it is those quiet ones you gotta watch.

Inasmuch as *Day* is a story of survival, both physically and psychologically, it's also a sociological snapshot at heart, as most Romero films are—it's a study of various institutions and structures, group and unit dynamics, social change and gender, as well as the consequence of human behavior. Sociologist viewers can detect a breakdown of the dynamics for authority structures in this film as they do, in fact, actually breakdown. Most analysis reduces the conflict to "scientists vs.

Dr. Strange Lab

Everybody's cracking up.

soldiers," however Romero depicts a complete erosion of institutional legitimacy—military command is cartoony, performative bluster, scientific method veers into obsession, and worse, distraction, projection, and deliberate ignorance of the scientific method. Whew! It's almost as if the film mirrors real-world crises where leadership becomes symbolic rather than functional. Almost as if we viewers currently have our own continuing pandemic-era distrust in governments and science communication echoing in our synaptic halls. Gosh, almost like the underground compound is our modern-day toxic workplace.

For me though, it's the pilot's epic monologue [12] halfway through the film that he delivers to Sarah in his and Bill's area of the underground compound (dubbed 'The Ritz') situated far from everyone else, that beautifully sums up every sociological element I present here (and explains why I'm fervently testy about the not-discussed-enough silly 40+hour work week. Like, it's the apocalypse and these people are still sitting in meetings). Additionally, another least-discussed element of the film that should make me even testier [13], and this is an idea I'd discuss with Cardille should I ever seek her out for a full interview: Sarah is usually framed as "the lone female scientist," (and the object of sexual harassment in a scene so stressful). She also becomes the film's emotional mediator, absorbing the stress of both factions. The film not-so-subtly critiques how women are often forced into stabilizing, emotional support roles while being denied any real authority. And as I write this, there are ongoing debates about gendered expectations in personal, professional, militaristic, and crisis settings. Unfortunately, a few remain less evolved when it comes to understanding and accepting a woman's own agency and personal autonomy, I'm personally finished entertaining debates to the contrary. In short, Romero and I understand each other.

The film dives deep into its portrayal of everyone and everything as antagonistic at the end of the world, and it does not let the viewer come up for air. Time and stasis are big enemies in *Day* and much of the film's dread comes not from action but inactivity—characters essentially holding their breath and waiting underground while the world outside rots. Boredom, despair, paranoia, lack of options and creativity corrode morale, and this was 1985. Imagine today's world trying to cope in a situation like this. This waiting-as-horror and those simply waiting-to-die rather than taking advantage of what is left has renewed resonance in a world shaped by lockdowns, isolation, constant conflict. We've allowed the chaotic and mostly irritating histrionic social media and TV personas to dominate humanity instead of allowing real human connection to come first [14].

There's still time to course correct and the denouement of *Day* thought so, too; the apocalypse doesn't need to be fire and brimstone as many have been indoctrinated into believing. Instead, the apocalypse can simply mean a new revelation. Something new and better can manifest, bring a cosmic renewal through unity rather than permanent destruction coming from that which is tired and played out and no longer serves us.

Pump up the Volume

THE QUIET EARTH

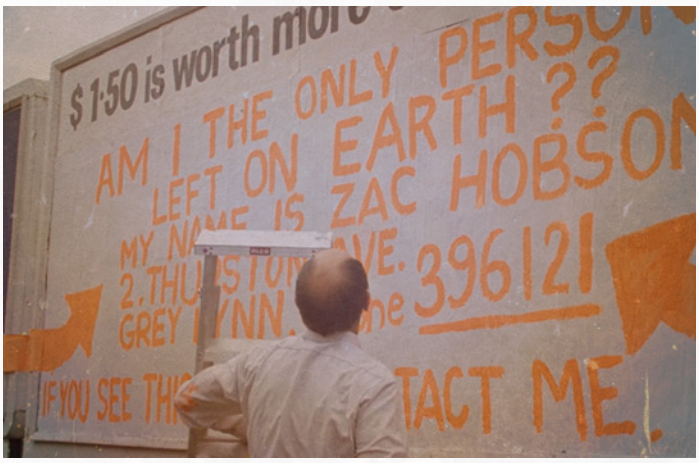
by Janene Scelza & Matt Scelza

A little less than a year after *Night of the Comet* hit theaters, another film about newly ordained apocalyptic survivors popped up on the big screen called *The Quiet Earth*. We discovered the movie eons ago, during one of those cherished Friday night sojourns to our beloved Edgewater Video (excuse us while we mourn both their extensive video collection and fab rental prices). Like a few other movies we have covered lately for this zine, *The Quiet Earth* was not something we ever expected would survive into the Streaming Age, or at least on some legit service that doesn't require serious preventative measures to avoid ads and malware. But, Tubi was pulled through once again and made writing these essays (and sharing the movies with you) a hell of a lot easier. They also have a fair number of other 80s apocalypse fare, should this issue have you thirsting for more. Anyway, back to *The Quiet Earth*.

The 1985 New Zealand science fiction film—the country's first sci-fi movie!—is based on Craig Harrison's 1981 novel of the same name [1], (producer Sam Pillsbury said he bought the book on a Friday and optioned the rights on a Monday, he thought it was that good [2]). It is a surprisingly grounded and incredibly unique contribution to the slew of "Last Man on Earth" and post-apocalyptic tales to date.

The film opens the morning after an apocalyptic event referred to as the Effect. A hi-tech energy suddenly caused nearly everyone to abruptly vanish. For a while, there appears to only be a single survivor, a scientist named Zac Hobson, but eventually, he finds other people. The strangers soon discover that they have an unusual connection: they were about to die at the moment the Effect occurred, which curiously altered their fate. It's an interesting premise, for sure, though all these years later, we're still trying to wrap our heads around how a power grid could reverse mortality in such a way.

The first half of the movie is the late, great Bruno Lawrence all by himself, portraying Zac. He is already out of sorts when he wakes up in the morning, having fully expected a handful of pills to have done him in by now. Zac prepares for yet another presumably average work day. But, the commute feels dreadfully amiss. Everything



Hanging all alone by the telephone.

Condemned to live.

is eerily quiet. Cars are abandoned on the road. Business and homes are empty. Even the animals seem to be gone.

What follows feels like a cruel experiment in extreme isolation (though it's not as depressing as that might make it sound) as Zac goes through the gambit of emotions in a kind of "five stages" of post-apocalyptic survival. In the first few days following the Effect, he tries to locate other survivors. A few days later, he indulges in the fantasy of pure liberation like the gals of Comet, commandeering a mansion, loading up on fun stuff at the mall, touching the rare artifacts, and even driving a full-sized train at one point. But as time drags on, Zac descends into madness, and eventually utter desperation until, finally, fate sort of throws him a bone.

He can hardly believe his eyes when a bubbly young woman named Joanne (Allison Routledge) suddenly appears one day. There is trepidation at first; she appears armed but eventually surrenders her fake weapon, and they embrace, relieved to finally have some human contact again. Remember those days not too long ago?

Zac and Joanne chat and sleep together and have their fun, but the relationship turns rocky with the introduction of a third survivor: a quiet, leather-clad Maori man named Api (Pete Smith) who looks a little closer to the typical post-apocalyptic survivor character. There's a clear demarcation when Joanne and Api enter the picture, as though we're watching two different movies. Joanne's presence pulls Zac back to reality, and then we start to learn more about the Effect.

The Quiet Earth is devoid of a lot of the usual post-apocalyptic messiness. As J.C. Macek III wrote in his *PopMatters* review: "Unlike Australia's loud and violent *Mad Max* (1979), New Zealand's *The Quiet Earth* approaches the end of the world in a very different way, worthy of its title" [3]. Sure, most of the people and seemingly anything else in the animal kingdom are gone, but everything else is pretty much intact, including all the modern conveniences. This soon after the Effect there's no need at this point to worry about rationing food or hoarding weapons, or even fighting off roving gangs. (Hell, Zac isn't even the typical family man survivor mourning the loss of a wife or kids). There's no threat of supernatural "others" like mutant mole people or zombies, and there's too few numbers for dangerous zealots to spoil the fun. However, a very serious, much more unpredictable danger still looms; the Effect will likely strike again, and Zac can't be sure when or to what extent.

We learn that Effect was (surprise, surprise) an avoidable, man-made catastrophe, and Zac had a hand in its development as part of a group of New Zealand scientists working with the Yanks on something called Project Flashlight. He suspected there were major problems with it, but never spoke up, hence the suicide attempt. Back from the brink, he has a new purpose: to learn about the Effect and mitigate further disaster.

These dated, more grounded post-apocalyptic films are exceptionally frustrating to watch now, given the state of the world and how all of its shittiest history seems to be repeating itself all

Romance in style.

Last Man on some other planet.

at once. Bruno Lawrence delivers a brilliant mad man's monologue in the first half of the film, his own version of Howard Beale's "I want you to get mad" speech in *Network* (1976). As the isolation starts to drive him batty, Zac begins to hallucinate and in one scene, he imagines himself a leader on the world stage, interacting with cardboard cutouts of famous and infamous historical figures. We see a recording of a generic "thought leader," apparently corrupted by power, touting the grid as a technological marvel before ultimately admitting its higher purpose. Project Flashlight would solidify someone's position at the top of an arm's race. Api is stupefied when Zac shares the story. "You were monkeying with existence without even knowing what the hell you were doing?" he asks Zac. As the Billy Joel hit goes: "it will still burn on, and on, and on."

The majority of post-apocalyptic stories, even the ones riddled with mutant mole people and brain-lusting zombies, end on some kind of optimistic note, some hope that society can rebuild. The original script tried to be just as pleasing [4], but was eventually changed to a much more jarring finale with Zac standing on an other-wordly beach, though we're not going to spoil too much; the film hinges on surprises and we have ruined a few already. But, it's a wild sight, considering the movie up to that point, like something you'd see in an episode of *The Twilight Zone* or at the end of an 80s music video.

It sounds kind of funny that a science fiction made in 1985 should be New Zealand's first science fiction movie, but Sam Pillsbury and Geoff Murphy's 2015 interview with *The Project Booth Podcast* [5] makes it pretty clear why. This particular movie came together as it did because once Sam Pillsbury secured funding, his financiers gave him a limited time to get started so they could take advantage of some tax breaks that were set to expire within a few months. He hired a seasoned director (Murphy) who in turn knew Bruno Lawrence because they performed for several years together in a band. And with a very small cast, much of the time could be devoted to working on the script. Although there was the little matter of shooting in 90-some different locations.

But making films in New Zealand was hard to do in the first place (and maybe it still is?). Murphy noted that the country doesn't have the population to support big-budget movies like Hollywood makes and, at least at the time, TV was the bigger medium. The tax breaks not only gave the opportunity to make films locally, but, as Pillsbury explained, they could do it without too much interference from studios and the like. (Interestingly, Murphy went on to do American action, including as a second unit director for *Lord of the Rings*).

Pillsbury said that when the film was finished, everyone expected it to be a bomb. Geoff Murphy and his girlfriend even removed their name from the writing credits. But, it went on to win several awards and garnered positive reviews. We're still thinking about—and loving—this movie 20-some years after we randomly found it on the shelves of a video store.

I'd Buy That for a Dollar

ROBOCOP

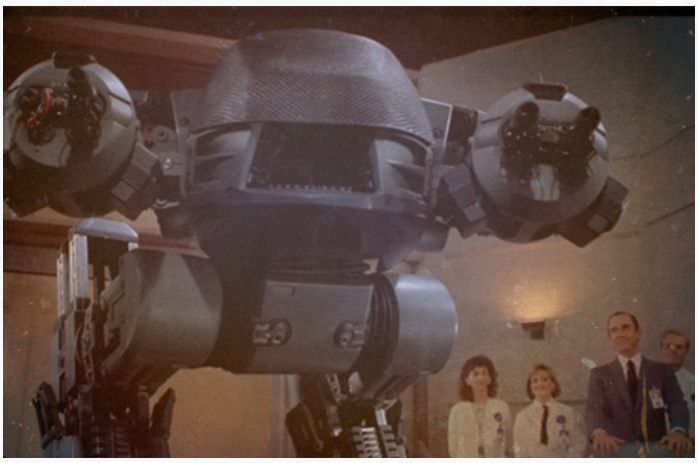
by John Kidwell

Why do foreign directors often have a better grasp of America than its native filmmakers? Does America's long held obsession with individuality compromise our propensity for self reflection? Does it take an outsider to fully grapple with all the idiosyncrasies and contradictions of a country as vast and populous as the United States? For every auteur of Americana like John Ford, there are several directors from overseas—Alfred Hitchcock, Fred Zinnemann, Joseph Losey, Billy Wilder, and Elia Kazan, to cite just a few—who arrived in Hollywood with their fingers already firmly planted on the pulse of their adopted country.

No filmmaker, native or foreign, has a better read on America than Dutch director Paul Verhoeven. The seven films he made for Hollywood (from 1985's Flesh and Blood to 2000's Hollow Man) don't just comprise an extraordinary creative streak by a talented artist; with these movies, Verhoeven leveraged Hollywood entertainment for maximum satirical impact, employing the tropes and aesthetics of popular films against the culture that created them.

Of all Verhoeven's films, RoboCop may be his most overtly satirical. Set in a near future Detroit, the movie envisions the mid-sized American city's post-industrial decline as a dystopian landscape of abandoned factories and drug labs. Unable to transform this criminal's paradise into a sanitized "Delta City," City Hall approves an overhaul of the Detroit Police Department by Omni Consumer Products, who plan on replacing human officers with the armed "enforcement droid" ED-209. Before they can do so, however, ED-209 malfunctions in the middle of a board meeting, machine-gunning one unlucky volunteer to a bloody pulp.

This tragedy presents company man Bob Morton (Miguel Ferrer) an opportunity to jump the corporate ladder with his own project: a cyborg officer named RoboCop. To build its prototype, OCP will first need a body, which shouldn't be difficult to find in a city where police officers are dropping like flies. Enter Officer Alex Murphy (Peter Weller). After chasing Clarence Boddicker (Kurtwood Smith) and his gang to their warehouse hideout, Murphy and his partner Anne



The (almost) latest in crime management technology.

Gunslingin' Murphy

Lewis (Nancy Allen) find themselves outgunned. Lewis survives a bad fall, but while she's unconscious, the gang tortures and kills Murphy.

After Murphy is pronounced dead at the hospital, in accordance with the fine print of his employment contract, OCP assumes control of his body, implanting his head and torso inside a titanium exoskeleton. Now bulletproof and fearless, the technologically reanimated Murphy quickly becomes the most effective cop on the force, dispassionately collaring all manner of criminals. (One especially deadpan line reading from Weller: "Madam, you have suffered an emotional shock. I will notify a rape crisis center.") However, remnants of Murphy's psyche keep resurfacing, eventually causing RoboCop to go AWOL and hunt Murphy's killers one by one.

During his investigation, RoboCop discovers that Boddicker and his gang were hired by OCP senior president Dick Jones (Ronny Cox) to murder Bob Morton. However, when RoboCop tries to arrest Jones, a fail-safe measure meant to prevent the apprehension of senior OCP employees scrambles his circuits. Though he manages to escape OCP headquarters, a hail of police gunfire almost destroys his wiring.

Fleeing to an abandoned steel mill, Lewis and RoboCop (now unmasked) face off against Boddicker and his gang, dispatching them in exceedingly gruesome ways. (Poor Emil gets the worst of it—mutated by a tide of toxic waste before an oncoming car turns him to mush.)

RoboCop returns to OCP to expose Jones for Morton's murder, and Jones responds by taking the CEO (Daniel O'Herlihy) hostage. Knowing that RoboCop can't touch senior OCP employees, the CEO fires Jones, thus allowing RoboCop to blast him out the window to his death. After thanking RoboCop for saving his life, the CEO asks what his name is. "Murphy," he replies.

Like RoboCop revolting against the system that built him, Verhoeven deploys RoboCop against the corporate media apparatus that finances and markets his films; interspersed throughout the movie are satirical TV segments, including a doctor from the Family Heart Center hawking artificial hearts ("qualifies for health tax credits"), news anchors grinning through stories about nuclear escalation and wildfires, and a commercial for Nukem, a nuclear war-themed board game. Only slightly removed from the hypernormalized horror of modern media, these parodies set the backdrop for a film about the inherent violence of privatization and corporatization.

Verhoeven contrasts this indirect and impersonal form of violence with a physical violence that is visceral, excessive, and spectacular. "I strongly believe that people like violence," the director stated during RoboCop's audio commentary, and the film's success as satire largely hinges on how effectively Verhoeven and company embed this innate bloodlust within the film's ironic design [1]. Whether he's shooting a rapist in the dick, destroying a mini-mart, or executing the president of the company that created him,

sympathy.exe

A little wine with your dirty dealings?

when we cheer on RoboCop, we indulge the same culture of violence that he was ostensibly built to mitigate.

Even as RoboCop emulates the violence of contemporaneous action films, its take on artificial intelligence and the nature of the self runs closer to Blade Runner than The Terminator, where the question of the robot's humanity cleverly misdirects from the film's true concern: man's inhumanity. The criminals' gleefull torture of Murphy would not feel out of place in a Death Wish movie, but unlike those more traditional fascist entertainments, this brutal violence is performed at the behest of corporate interests, implying that the consolidation of corporate power during Reagan's "Morning in America" only amplifies mankind's worst, most barbaric tendencies.

That same lack of compassion enabled the crucifixion of Jesus, and RoboCop's not-so-subtle Christian allusions—Murphy's death and resurrection, RoboCop's hypostatic union of man and machine—suggest that if Jesus returned today, companies like OCP would be the first ones to call for his head. Verhoeven's direct engagement with Christianity is relegated to his European output (i.e., The 4th Man, Benedetta), while his American films depict the U.S. in unusually secular terms. Christian in name only, Verhoeven's America transcends religious belief, a godless society where only one overriding objective remains: the desire for more.

It's through this sick society's lens that a robotic agent of downsizing, gentrification, privatization, and corporate control may be viewed as a savior. Western culture's enduring hero worship means that just about anyone can be idolized, even those who are not fully human, and in many ways RoboCop is the ideal hero for the age of the manosphere: an unstoppable, impenetrable, masculine vessel, whose human emotions are so effectively enshrouded in circuitry that they barely need to be suppressed. Andrew Tate wishes he could be so cold and detached.

Like most popular movie heroes, RoboCop reappeared in multiple sequels, none of which hold a candle to the deranged, hyperviolent spirit of Verhoeven's original. The filmmakers behind the sequels shared the unenviable task of not only continuing a story that had arguably run its course but of doing so in a way that didn't undermine the original's satire. I suspect one reason that neither film works is because their American directors were situated too close to their targets to skewer them as savagely as Verhoeven had. The eye cannot behold itself, and when it comes to making fun of America, sometimes only an outside perspective will do.

In the era of automation and AI, RoboCop feels especially prescient—a wake up call for a society on the brink of self-inflicted destruction. Neither quick nor decisive, its apocalypse begins with the gradual devaluation of human life and ends in monopolistic techno-corporate domination. As our world resembles RoboCop more each day, we can only follow its hero's lead and assert our humanity to those who would prefer to streamroll it, lest we surrender it entirely.

Ours is Not to Reason Why
WHEN THE WIND BLOWS

by Stephanie McDevitt

Most 80s movies about the threat of nuclear war tend to be action packed and riveting, sometimes even resulting in avoiding the big blast (like *War Games*). *When the Wind Blows* is not one of those movies. Instead, this animated feature focuses on an elderly couple living in the countryside, trying to survive a nuclear bomb. It's a devastating watch as they don't really grasp the severity of the situation, and they slowly succumb to radiation poisoning. Despite the horrifying premise, *When the Wind Blows* is a great movie, and if you can stand to watch some lovely animated characters die a slow, horrible death, I recommend checking it out.

When the Wind Blows tells the story of Jim (John Mills) and Hilda (Peggy Ashcroft) Bloggs, a retired British couple who live in the isolated English countryside. Jim likes to go to the library to read the news and stay up to date on the Soviet-Afghan conflict. When he hears on the radio that a full-blown war is likely, he decides it's time to prepare, and he follows the instructions in the government pamphlets he got at the library. He takes all the doors off their hinges and uses them to build an A-frame shelter inside his house. He paints the windows white, finds sacks for he and Hilda to lie in when the nuclear bomb hits, and attempts to stock up on supplies.

While Jim is prepping, Hilda goes about her daily life. She makes tea and sausages, cleans up the house, and continually asks Jim if this is all necessary. She doesn't want him to get paint on the curtains, she doesn't want him to use her nice pillows in the shelter, and she down right refuses to use a make-shift toilet that Jim wants to keep in the shelter. But, Jim insists that "the powers that be" know what to do and he must follow the instructions in the pamphlets. When a radio report says a nuclear strike has been launched, Jim and Hilda jump into their shelter just in time. The bomb hits and leaves a trail of utter destruction.

Throughout the movie, it is apparent that Jim and Hilda have no idea what it means to be hit by a nuclear bomb. In fact, they're sure they can survive this war since they already survived the London bombings in World War II. As the movie

There's no good news these days...

A completely nuclear-proof shelter.

goes on, they get more and more nostalgic about WWII: Jim dreams of being a soldier again and Hilda actually says, "It was nice in the war, really." They cut corners in their preparation, and when they realize they have no utilities, they have faith that the government will come to their aid shortly. However, as we all know, no one is coming to help them. Jim and Hilda are completely on their own, and they start to deteriorate pretty quickly. The fate of these characters is obvious from the beginning, and watching it play out is a brutal message about the horrors of war.

When the Wind Blows was written by Raymond Briggs and was adapted from his graphic novel of the same name. It was Briggs's second film adaptation from one of his books (you can read about his first movie, *The Snowman*, in Janene's essay in GOF Issue #8). Prior to becoming a movie, Wind was adapted into a radio show for BBC Radio 4, and it won the Broadcasting Press Guild award for the most outstanding radio program of 1983 [1]. It was also adapted into a stage play, and the earliest known date for script publication is December 1, 1983 [2]. It looks like the stage play was in performance as recently as 2024.

According to Neil Mitchell's review with The British Film Institute, Briggs's original novel was commended by the British government. However, when the movie came out, Mitchell says, "the film was criticised in other quarters as 'propaganda for unilateral nuclear disarmament', as well as being 'smug' and made for 'radical yuppies'" [3]. Wind very much has an anti-war message. But is it propaganda? If you want to classify any art form that satirizes government and doesn't support annihilating the human race as propaganda, then maybe this qualifies.

Wind's anti-war message is wrapped up in the "intimate, beautifully realised portrayal of Jim and Hilda's loving relationship and quiet life" [4]. The movie opens with Jim in the library reading the papers, and then he takes the bus home. Once he arrives home, there are no other characters in this movie. Hilda waits for him with some sausages and a cup of tea. They listen to the radio, tend their garden, and are very devoted to each other. Their relationship is very sweet, and even when they're arguing over Jim's preparations, it's very obvious that they love each other.

Unfortunately, as lovely as Jim and Hilda are, they don't have any comprehension of what's to come, and it's their naivety that eventually dooms them. In a review for *Bloody Disgusting*, Neil Bolt said, "The seriousness of their situation gets diluted by skewed reasoning and impatience, and this ultimately proves lethal" [5]. And the devastation of this movie comes from the fact that the protagonists don't know how bad their situation is, so they assume someone is going to come and help them, and we're just forced to watch their slow demise. As Bolt says, "Disbelief turns to dread, turns to the bleak realization of just how fucked they are" [6].

While the outlook is bleak from the beginning of the movie, I really did enjoy Briggs's commentary on the ridiculous instructions the British government handed out to help civilians prepare for nuclear war. Jim and Hilda's prep pamphlets

Nuclear winter looks a bit dreary.

Radiation poisoning always wins.

come directly from the Protect and Survive Program, which was a British civic program designed to educate the public on how to protect themselves during a nuclear attack [7]. Painting the windows white, creating a lean-to with the doors from his house, and using a box of sand to wash dishes were all actual recommendations to help people survive a nuclear bomb [8].

I enjoyed that Briggs poked fun at this government program and called it out for being complete rubbish. Hilda asks Jim at one point if they'll have an Anderson bomb shelter like they did during WWII, and Jim says, "Oh no dear, that's old-fashioned, with modern scientific methods you just use doors with cushions on top." Cushions are just what we need to protect from all that fallout. I think my favorite line in the movie comes when Jim reads about what to do when you get bored in the shelter. He says, "Steps to combat this may include the following: At intervals, stimulate group activities" and Hilda replies, "Don't you dare start stimulating, James. I'm not in the mood."

In addition to using the Protect and Survive pamphlets, Briggs also mimicked the animation style from the public information films that came out of that same program. This movie was shot with both hand-drawn and stop motion animation. Hilda and Jim and the area outside their house are all hand drawn. But their home and the objects in it were all filmed in the stop-motion style of the *Protect and Serve* movies [9]. If you're interested in some BTS pictures, Mitchell's review on The British Film Institute's web site has some shots of the production [10].

The soundtrack also proved to be a cool part of the production process. David Bowie provides the opening theme. He was supposed to add more songs to the soundtrack but pulled out of the project. After Bowie left, Roger Waters (co-founder of Pink Floyd) stepped in to finish the project [11], and on some versions of the album, Waters's tracks are pulled into one 24-minute song [12]. The soundtrack also featured songs from Squeeze and Genesis.

When the Wind Blows is not a fun apocalypse movie. There are elements reminiscent of life during the pandemic that kind of made me feel like I should look away. Jim and Hilda attempt to follow instructions, but they also misinterpret advice. After the bomb hits, they go about their daily lives as if nothing is wrong. It all hits a little close to home. Their inability to recognize and understand the danger they're in leads to their demise. Even though living through a pandemic is different than living through a nuclear blast, we all heard stories that echoed these themes.

However, as I said at the beginning of this essay, I highly recommend this movie. (As of this writing, it's available on Tubi). Briggs's characters are very sweet and the animation is lovely. And, as the reality of nuclear war always looms closer than I think most of us would like to admit, it's a reminder of how unprepared and well...fucked we would all be if the bombs actually hit. So, yes, *Wind* is an anti-war movie, but it's a very good one.

The End is Nigh

MIRACLE MILE

by Janene Scelza & Matt Scelza

Miracle Mile takes place over the course of a single night. A guy answers a ringing pay phone. A panicked stranger on the other end claims that the Atomic Bomb is going to hit the United States. What in the hell do you do with that information? (The exchange would make for a great Bud Light "Dude" commercial parody). Get ready for a wild ride.

The movie opens like an innocent rom com. Cream puff Anthony Edwards is Harry Washello, a dorky big band performer visiting L.A. (He's a little early to the swing revival, no?). In a classic Hollywood monologue over the opening credits, Harry tells us he's finally found the perfect girl: a punky diner waitress named Julie (Mare Winningham). They foreshadow and chill at the La Brea Tar Pits.

They really hit it off, freeing some lobsters and eating tube steaks with Julie's grandpa. Then, they make plans to meet after midnight when Julie gets off work. Harry shows up hours late, but she is long gone. He finds a phone and profusely apologizes to her answering machine. After he hangs up, the phone rings. Could it be Julie? Silly rabbit! Julie is home in a Vallium-induced snooze, as you did in the 80s when a boy you barely know stood you up.

The caller is a panicked young man (Raphael Sbarge, one of many familiar character actors) calling from a missile silo in North Dakota. He is trying to call his dad to warn him that the shit has officially hit the fan and bombs are expected to hit the United States in a little more than an hour. Harry asks the guy if he's serious, but some typical G-men types who sound like Elaine Benes's meddlesome doctors get on the line and tell him to forget everything he's heard. *Dude!*

Harry doesn't know what to think, and for a long time, De Jarnatt keeps us guessing, too. He returns to the diner and starts to freak out a little bit (maybe too little, given the news) and pretty soon, so do most of the other people in the diner when he relays the information in remarkable detail. The clock ticks while they argue about it. One of the regulars, the penultimate 80s

Foreshadow and chill.

Business lady means business!

Business Lady (Denise Crosby of Pet Semetary fame)—who hangs out at the diner at four in the morning in a powersuit and full makeup to watch foreign stock tickers over breakfast—whips out her brick cell phone to verify some of the details that no lay person would just know for laughs.

That's all the people in the diner need to leap into action. They pack supplies, make lists of potential candidates to repopulate society (but not mother fucking Joyce Brothers!) and formulate plans. Harry overhears Business Lady making arrangements for a helicopter to fly out from the top of the Mutual Benefits Building. One of the regulars thinks they're all rushing to the wrong conclusion and stays behind, while another proceeds to his street sweeping job, maybe thinking nothing can be done, or that he's too low on the ladder to be rescued anyways.

Harry asks the diner cook (Robert DoQui) to swing by Julie's, but he refuses and ditches him. This movie is often compared to Martin Scorsese's *After Hours* (1985), where a guy encounters various city dwellers over the course of a single night. Harry is kind of in the same boat as he races around the city trying to find Julie and get to the choppa in time.

He hijacks a charismatic thief (Mykel T. Williamson, *Forrest Gump*) [1] who wants to bring his sister (Kelly Jo Minter, *Summer School*). They get ambushed by an armed gas station attendant. The cops get involved. The guy that Business Lady hired to organize the flight (Kurt Fuller, *Wayne's World*) grows impatient and they still need to find a pilot. Julie's zonked out on goddamn Valium. And, the *Miracle Mile* descends into violent chaos as the news spreads throughout the city. Whether the bombs are on the way or not (and De Jarnatt leaves us guessing for a long time), we can't imagine any happy outcome at that point, given how much damage Harry is directly and indirectly responsible for.

The second half of the movie is the best. Harry is running out of time and we're biting our nails watching as various obstacles continue to pop up to the very end. Tangerine Dream's energetic synths punctuate the moment, similar to the way they did the safe-cracking scenes in *Thief*. Who would have thought a movie that started as a dopey romantic comedy would have ended up here? Such was De Jarnatt's intention; *Miracle Mile* may give you someone to root for, but it doesn't mince the reality of the situation. The ending is BLEAK.

The movie was about a decade in the making [2]. Steve De Jarnatt started working on the script in the late 1970s, when Cold War paranoia was at a fever pitch. Warner Brothers—under the tutelage of the late Mark Rosenberg, whose brother Alan plays one of the diner patrons—bought the script with the intention of turning it into a standalone *Twilight Zone* movie [3].

The premise would have been quite fitting for the series—a grand, romantic day turned totally upside down by a strange phone call warning your country is about to be bombed—but De Jarnatt hated the new ending: a kind of *Groundhog Day* time loop where the protagonist wakes to repeat the same day again and again [4]. That, too, would have worked great for the

The trouble with Harry.

Wait for the ding.

series, but again, De Jarnatt wanted an ending grounded in the unfortunate reality. "In some ways, this film was me exorcising that [Armageddon conviction], giving other people nightmares," De Jarnatt told Hollywood Reporter. "I think when I wrote it the intention was to wake people up and, you know, change the world" [5]. We wish it were as much of a reminder today, given all the arrogant world leaders currently engaged in their various pissing contests.

The studios balked at the ending, but for us, it's the romance that was the weakest part of the story. Harry and Julie have only known each other a few hours, but he's risking his damn life to find her, and she's not too pressed when they separate from her kindly old grandparents, weirdly estranged lovebirds who decide to spend their last moments on earth, happy together at breakfast (assuming anyone is still serving customers in all that ruckus). De Jarnatt told *The Project Booth Podcast [*6] that if the movie ever gets a remake, they should use an earlier version of the script which focused instead on the estranged exes who finally make their way to each other, which sounds similar to the ab fab horror comedy, *Shaun of the Dead*.

In any event, De Jarnatt used all of his earnings from making the Canadian comedy *Strange Brew* to buy the rights back from Warner Brothers, please and thank you. (Meanwhile, the *Twilight Zone* released in 1983 as an ill-fated anthology). He did some rewrites and shopped it around again to the big studios, but they all seemed to balk at the ending. Luckily, the Helmdale Group, which produced indie hits like *The Terminator* and *Platoon* came to the rescue, giving De Jarnatt around $3.5 million to finally make the picture [6].

The movie released in May 1989 to mostly positive reviews and a wide release, but then it kind of disappeared. We're not sure the movie would have been a major hit, but it's a pretty good thriller, and that it was never an immediate hit might in part be explain by bad timing. *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* rolled into theaters about two weeks after *Miracle Mile* and pretty much blew up the box office. (Admittedly, it's more fun seeing Indie kick Nazi ass than watching a sweet young couple succumb to nuclear annihilation). But more improtantly, global politics changed significantly since De Jarnatt started work on the movie in the late 70s. As the 80s came to a close, the Berlin Wall fell, and the Soviet Union collapsed two years later. By the time we saw the movie, probably in the late 1990s, the Cold War was a distant memory. (Frankly, we were really too young even in the 1980s to be all that cognizant of world affairs).

Miracle Mile eventually found its audience through the home video and cable TV circuits, and for good reason. It starts as one kind of movie and ends on a wildly different note, and it keeps you engrossed the whole way through. Look for it on...you guessed it...Tubi!

Sidenotes: *Miracle Mile* released the same weekend as the Savage Steve Holland teen comedy, *How I Got Into College*, also starring Anthony Edwards and O-lan Jones (who has a bit part as Julie's work pal). Read about it in Issue 18. Also Anthony Edwards and Mare Winningham wound up marrying many years after this film. Adorbs.

ENDNOTES

Carmageddon! Mad Max II: The Road Warrior

Release Date: December 24, 1981
Written by: Terry Hayes, George Miller and Brian Hannant
Directed by: George Miller
Essay by: Sebastian Gregory

The Burden of Civilization: Night of the Comet

Release Date: November 16, 1984
Written by: Thom Eberhardt
Directed by: Thom Eberhardt
Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

[1] John Kenneth Muir. Horror Films of the 1980s. McFarland. 2010. https://tinyurl.com/bdevzpw3

[2] Ibid

[3] "Night of the Comet" (Wikipedia) https://tinyurl.com/2ypte99f

[4] Ibid.

[5] "Night of the Comet" (The Dissolve, 2013) https://tinyurl.com/yc77e553

[6] Horror Films of the 1980s (John Kenneth Muir, 2010) https://tinyurl.com/bdevzpw3

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

The Man, The Myth, The Legend: Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome

Release Date: July 10, 1985
Written by: Terry Hayes and George Miller
Directed by: George Miller and George Ogilivie
Essay By: Katheryn Hans

[1] "Private Dancer" (Wikipedia) https://tinyurl.com/mw6uywhx

[2] "Mad Max (film)" (Wikipedia) https://tinyurl.com/yvd6ad3t

[3] "Mad Max 2" (Wikipedia) https://tinyurl.com/2zzxayf3

[4] "Tina Turner remembered by Mad Max director George Miller: 'She was the opposite of a diva'" (The Guardian, 2023) https://tinyurl.com/4ftfvh3v

[5] Ibid.

[6] "George Miller: Mad Max mythology" (National Film and Sound Archive of Australia) https://tinyurl.com/yyr4tejw

Stir Crazy: Day of the Dead

Release Date: June 30, 1985
Written by: George Romero
Directed by: George Romero
Essay by: Dr. Rhonda Baughman

[1] The historic Monroeville Mall – Dawn's primary shooting location – is slated to be demolished in April 2027. Say what you want – this is about taking away something people love, not adding a new store – and mark my angry writer words – Dawn of the Dead will long outlive this family's pointless empire. In case the irony here is lost – Romero's message in Dawn of greed, hyper-capitalism and mechanized consumerism bolstering the 'profit no matter the cost' battle cry – is playing out right in front of us AT the actual Dawn of the Dead mall. George Romero always was ahead of his time, as Day star Lori Cardille mentioned to me. See footnote 4.

[2] Romero's trilogy contained relevant and scathing social commentary as well as many compelling, memorable characters destined to speak endlessly quotable dialogue; his films are literally the blueprint for all zombie films to follow, whether future filmmakers were/are aware or not.

[3] Like folks do now with TWD universe: Romero's vision looks more fun to survive – and that's saying something.

[4] In the late nineties through the early aughts, I ran around numerous film conventions meeting and taking pictures on my disposable camera with a good number of Dawn of the Dead's cast and crew, and would then do the same for Day of the Dead including George Romero himself, as well as Day talents Lori Cardille, Terry Alexander, Joe Pilato, Anthony DiLeo, Tom Savini, John Amplas, Gary Howard Klar, and Howard Sherman

[5] It's actually a social media post both commemorating the anniversary and mentioning current theatrical showings that lured me to Day star Lori Cardille's FB page to say thanks for her impressive film performance. Her lovely reply to me is noted here. Post Baughman – "I didn't realize it was the 40th anniversary until this post. It's a dark film I love (obviously) but it's hard sometimes to write about a dark film while we're in an often dark time. Makes for a writer's dark mood …" Reply Lori Cardille – "I hear you about the darkness! Thank you for appreciating Day of the Dead. It tends to be overlooked, at least in the beginning it was. Happy after all these years it's getting the recognition it deserves. George was always so ahead of his time."

[6] And this critic would like to note for the record there are two attempts at remakes -- a 2008 version directed by Steve Miner and a 2017/2018 version called Day of the Dead: Bloodline directed by Hèctor Hernández Vicens.

[7] Those Dawn lighting and score choices are two reasons why that film resonates today – the mall setting, part of a bygone era and a place designed for leisure and comfort – instead is the backdrop for the violence and death at world's end. The characters get to have a little comfort finally, but at what cost? The world is over and there are people coming to forcibly take what the characters have built and stolen (repurposed, technically).
[8] Technical specs such as film stock, cameras, and lenses varied and played their parts – those choices gave Dawn a grittier look and Day a more polished, professional look. OVERALL, Day remains the darkest of the series AND darkest toward all of the senses - atmosphere, mood, score, characterization, and outlook. Taste and scent, too, I'd imagine – since all of Tom Savini and team's stellar and visceral FX were practical (no CGI). DVD BTS extras will tell you that REAL pig intestines procured from a nearby slaughterhouse were used for one of the epic death scenes; HOWEVER, a crew member accidentally shut off a refrigeration unit storing the blood and intestines causing them to spoil: the stench became worse than before (and it was rough according to multiple cast members]. Finally, a few folks who came into contact with the spoiled blood and innards became physically ill.
https://tinyurl.com/7abuxmjv

[9] Land of the Dead (2005), Diary of the Dead (2007), and Survival of the Dead (2009)
[10] Filming location was actually an old limestone mine - not a soundstage. The scenes above ground were filmed in and around Fort Meyer, Florida. Another historian/photojournalist writer friend of mine went scouting for – AND FOUND – many of those locations.

[11] Example - any reprieve, such as laughter in the film, is deliberately placed and used to sharp effect.

[12] Much too long to print in this issue. You can currently see it here: https://tinyurl.com/4pf8wz4h
[13] It does not though, because like Bub in the film, I'm learning.

[14] As this essay's footnoted historian friend also mentioned to me: social media feels as dead as this film's zombie cast.

Pump Up the Volume: The Quiet Earth

Release date: October 18, 1985
Directed by: Geoff Murphy
Written by: Craig Harrison (novel) Bill Baer, Bruno Lawrence, and Sam Pillsbury
Essay by: Janene Scelza & Matt Scelza

[1] "The Quiet Earth" NZ On Screen, https://tinyurl.com/yc82cnz9

[2] "Episode 209: The Quiet Earth (1985)" (The Projection Booth Podcast, 2015) https://tinyurl.com/5n6k838d

[3] "In 'The Quiet Earth' The End of the World Arrives with a Whisper" (PopMatters, 2017) https://tinyurl.com/5775u5u4

[4] "Episode 209: The Quiet Earth (1985)" (The Projection Booth Podcast, 2015) https://tinyurl.com/5n6k838d

[5] Ibid.

I'd Buy That for a Dollar: RoboCop

Release date: July 17, 1987
Written by: Edward Neumeier & Michael Miner
Directed by: Paul Verhoeven
Essay by: John Kidwell

[1] [VIDEO] "Robocop Criterion Collection Audio Commentary - Slideshow Version" (1987) (YouTube, 2024) https://tinyurl.com/4jjtvk5e

Ours is Not to Reason Why: When the Wind Blows

Release Date: October 24, 1986
Written by: Raymond Briggs
Directed by: Jimmy T. Murakami
Essay by: Stephanie McDevitt

[1] "When the Wind Blows (comics)" (Wikipedia) https://tinyurl.com/4t7hhnhd

[2] Ibid.

[3] "Why apocalyptic animation When the Wind Blows is still devastating." (BFI, 2018) https://tinyurl.com/4fdw6npw

[4] Ibid.

[5] "The Very British Apocalypse of 'When the Wind Blows' Feels Horrifyingly Relevant Today" (Bloody Disgusting, 2021) https://tinyurl.com/5fyesz45

[6] Ibid.

[7] "Protect and Survive" (Wikipedia) https://tinyurl.com/mtcxh6b3

[8] "When the Wind Blows (comics)" (Wikipedia) https://tinyurl.com/4t7hhnhd

[9] "When the Wind Blows (1986 film)" (Wikipedia) https://tinyurl.com/5e6sh329

[10] "Why apocalyptic animation When the Wind Blows is still devastating." (BFI, 2018) https://tinyurl.com/4fdw6npw

[11] "When the Wind Blows (1986 film)" (Wikipedia) https://tinyurl.com/5e6sh329

[12] Ibid.

[13] "The Very British Apocalypse of 'When the Wind Blows' Feels Horrifyingly Relevant Today" (Bloody Disgusting, 2021) https://tinyurl.com/5fyesz45

The End is Nigh: Miracle Mile

Release date: May 19, 1989
Directed by: Steve De Jarnatt
Written by: Steve De Jarnatt
Essay by: Janene Scelza & Matt Scelza

[1] Steve De Jarnatt told The Projection Booth Podcast that he got a lot of shit for stereotypical casting. The original script called for a skate punk type. But also, what struck us about Wilson is that it was pretty much the same character Mykel T. Williamson is that he's playing the same character he did on TV in Miami Vice.

[2] "Episode 208: Miracle Mile (1988)" (The Projection Booth Podcast) https://tinyurl.com/43jfuzab

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] "'Miracle Mile' at 30: The Nixed Happy Ending and Alternate Castings Revealed" (Hollywood Reporter, 2019) https://tinyurl.com/37aefw92

[6] "Episode 208: Miracle Mile (1988)" (The Projection Booth Podcast) https://tinyurl.com/43jfuzab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