

Hollywood's Viral Outbreaks and Pandemics: Horror, Fantasy, and the Political Entertainment of Film Genres

**Surtos virais e pandemias de
Hollywood: terror, fantasia e o
entretenimento político dos gêneros
cinematográficos**

Hudson Moura*

*Professor membro da Yeates School of Graduate Studies no programa de Immigration and Settlement Studies da Ryerson University, Toronto, Canadá. Ministra cursos sobre cinema, novas mídias e política no Departamento de Política e Administração Pública de Ryerson.
E-mail: hudsonc.moura@gmail.com

Abstract: Films revolving around big natural catastrophes, the end of the world, and global pandemics are viral in Hollywood. Some authors claim that 9/11 enticed the proliferation of disasters, zombies, and apocalyptic narratives. Will the coronavirus further increase these narrative tropes? A cinematic apocalypse takes many shapes, including zombie infestation, nuclear war devastation, and aliens' attack. Watching films such as *Twelve Monkeys* (1995), *Children of Men* (2006), or *Contagion* (2011) during a real-life global pandemic creates a much different viewing experience than when these films were released. Certain films kill humans with a deadly virus and turn them into zombies emphasizing and pushing forward to a cinema of genre its entertainment features, such as *I Am Legend* (2007), *Train to Busan* (2016), or *Blood Quantum* (2020). However, they also use horror, science fiction, and fantasy genres to portray a realistic compelling family drama or discuss structural racism and systemic colonialism against America's indigenous peoples. In all these films, scientific ambition, political greed, and economic power intermingle, becoming the unknown forces and real detractors behind these catastrophes. Whether or not the end of the world is an appropriate story for entertainment attracts most viewers to Hollywood cinema. Conventional postapocalyptic tropes create a film riddled with relevant political concerns. Every year, hundreds of films transpose to the screen compelling narratives related to pandemics and their effects. In Coronavirus's times, I analyze and contextualize several of Hollywood's viral outbreaks to situate their narratives to current political subjects and understand how disaster and pandemic films have become entertaining.

Keywords: Hollywood cinema, Film Genres, Pandemics, Coronavirus, Racism, Indigenous, Covid19, Politics, Film Aesthetic, Disaster Films.

Resumo: Filmes que giram em torno de grandes catástrofes naturais, o fim do mundo e pandemias mundiais são muito populares em Hollywood. Alguns autores afirmam que o 11 de setembro atrai a proliferação de desastres, zumbis e narrativas apocalípticas. O coronavírus aumentará ainda mais esses tipos de narrativas? Um apocalipse cinematográfico assume muitas formas, incluindo infestações de zumbis, devastação do mundo por guerra nuclear e ataque de alienígenas. Assistir a filmes como Os 12 Macacos (1995), Filhos da Esperança (2006) ou Contágio (2011) durante uma pandemia global se torna uma experiência de visualização muito diferente de quando esses filmes foram lançados. Certos filmes exterminam a população humana com um vírus mortal e os transformam em zumbis, enfatizando e avançando os recursos de entretenimento do cinema de gênero, como Eu sou a lenda (2007), Invasão Zumbi (2016) ou Blood Quantum (2020). No entanto, eles também usam gêneros de terror, ficção científica e fantasia para retratar drama familiares realistas e contundentes ou para discutir a questão do racismo estrutural e o colonialismo sistêmico contra os povos indígenas da América. Em todos esses filmes, ambição científica, ganância política e poder econômico se misturam, tornando-se as forças desconhecidas e os verdadeiros detratores por trás dessas catástrofes. Se o fim do mundo é ou não uma história apropriada para entretenimento, com certeza atrai uma grande parte dos espectadores dos filmes hollywoodianos. Os tropos pós-apocalípticos convencionais criam filmes repletos de preocupações políticas relevantes. Todos os anos, centenas de filmes transpõem para a tela narrativas convincentes relacionadas às pandemias e seus efeitos. Na época do Coronavírus, eu analiso e contextualizo vários desses surtos virais hollywoodianos para situar e atualizar suas narrativas com temas políticos atuais e entender como os filmes de desastres e pandemia se tornaram divertidos.

Palavras-Chave: Cinema de Hollywood, filmes de gênero, pandemias, Coronavírus, racismo, índios, Covid-19, política, estética de filmes.

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Introduction

Humans as an endangered species or the end of a livable society are nearby current subjects well explored by Hollywood films. These stories have been regularly and over depicted, making the world's destruction become a prevalent genre. Films revolving around big catastrophes always seem to catch the public eye and their imagination, whether they are about aliens invading the Earth, world wars, zombie attacks, or environmental disasters that can cause mass devastation. Where do come from the plots behind all these films? Some authors claim that 9/11 enticed the proliferation of disasters, zombies, and apocalyptic narratives. Will the coronavirus further increase these narrative tropes?

Global pandemics and long-term self-isolation seem plots exclusively for science fiction films. However, films showing the Earth itself surviving, but humanity near extinction is beginning to seem more and more believable. With the ever more fragile environment dictated by political and economic powers and the dangers that come with it, the end of the world, or at least humanity, now more than ever seems like an event that could occur soon. It seemed as if the lack of humans' activities has been beneficial to the Earth for the past year.

With the global pandemic and the coronavirus threatening humanity, these films seem like much more of a chilling warning than fun science fiction entertainment. Similarities with the actual pandemic include the media's role in informing the public, the increased vulnerability of frontline workers and disadvantaged populations, and the devastating experience of losing a loved one.

A cinematic apocalypse takes many shapes, including zombie infestations, nuclear war devastation, and aliens' attack. Watching films such as *Twelve Monkeys* (1995), *Children of Men* (2006), or *Contagion* (2011) during a real-life global pandemic creates a much different viewing experience than when these films were released. Suddenly, these films provoke audience reactions such as frightening and unsettlement while becoming a reality check as the world functions as one unit. Was it a coincidence, or did these films were

warnings trying to predict what the world would look like one day? How much in these films were pure imagination or a legitimate theory that filmmakers had for the future?

Certain films kill humans with a deadly virus and turn them into zombies emphasizing and pushing forward to a cinema of genre its entertainment features, such as *I Am Legend* (2007), *Train to Busan* (2016), or *Blood Quantum* (2020). However, they also use horror, science fiction, and fantasy genres to portray a realistic compelling family drama or discuss structural racism and systemic colonialism against America's indigenous peoples.

In all these films, scientific ambition, political greed, and economic power intermingle, becoming the unknown forces and real detractors behind these catastrophes. Whether or not the end of the world is an appropriate story for entertainment attracts most viewers to Hollywood cinema. Conventional postapocalyptic tropes create a film riddled with relevant political concerns. In Coronavirus's times, I analyze and contextualize several of Hollywood's viral outbreaks to situate their narratives to current political subjects and understand how disaster and pandemic films have become entertaining.

The End of the World: Apocalyptic Films

What is this obsession with the world's destruction? Hollywood's horror, science fiction, and fantasy genres are popular and understandable while challenging our notion of reality. "Many films can rely on the norms, rules and laws—the systems of 'everyday knowledge'—embodied in regimes of socio-cultural verisimilitude in accounting at a fundamental level for the actions, events and behaviour they represent" (Neale, 34). However, other laws and other norms may have taken their place in these specific genres. They must have to be explained by scientists, sages, doctors, seers, and other experts to viewers engage in the film's scenarios and plots.

When films exterminate the world's population by natural disasters, radical activists, or mad scientists, the widespread creative solution is making the world go back to its original state without humans, who is for them the actual planet's disease. *Twelve Monkeys* (1995)

is a postapocalyptic film in the year 2035 when 5 billion people have died due to a plague caused by a deadly virus called Kalavirus, scientifically recognized as M5-10. Inspired by Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, a 28-minute science fiction classic French ciné-roman made in 1962, which is composed of still frames narrativized in time and concludes with a live-action sequence. In the 1990s version, Cole lives in an underground shelter with other survivors while all kinds of animals have swarmed the Earth's surface. Cole is a time traveller whose mission appears to be going back to 1996 to stop the Kalavirus before it mutates and spreads. However, Cole's main objective is to find and secure a pure sample of the Kalavirus for his society to develop a cure. In 1990, he met Jeffrey Goines in a mental institution, who—without knowing that he was referring to Cole's life in the future—wonders how humanity has become automated: “What are we for then?”

While savouring and enjoying his time in the past Kalavirus-free world, Cole slowly loses hope in his mission of saving humankind. He is imprisoned and disillusioned by both societies, the past and the future. Later, he learns that Goines is an activist for animal rights whose father is a famous scientist who contains the Kalavirus. After Cole discovers this, the critical question of if Jeffrey or his father aims to kickstart the spread of the Kalavirus to allow the wildlife to overtake Earth's surface emerges. How much could certain activist groups damage society to pursue their causes? How dangerous and violent measures, like spreading a virus, would they take? Humans are the sole ones responsible for the world's disgrace. Thus, it is ubiquitous to see some characters in an honoured gesture sacrifice their lives for the planet's sake or a better civilization.

In Hollywood, some film genres are historically known as allegorical disguised to avoid censorship or blacklists and to mask the real subject of its commentary or criticism. Therefore, the genre is a medium to promote thought and discussion while creating entertainment or a shock factor for its story to become memorable or recognizable. In other words, films can use genres to deeply encode political and social messages within the suspense and elements of horror or fantasy. At first sight, it does not sound the most appropriate to use horror and fantasy tales to address serious social issues, such as pandemics, political riots, and abuse of authority. However, they can ease the tense of a situation created by such circumstances while promoting awareness and clarifying them.

Christopher (2015) argues that the recent surge in dystopian cinema “appears to criticize the damaging effects of self-indulgent capitalism while posing fantasies of class integration” (56). Dystopian fantasies and postapocalyptic narratives closely reflect aspects of reality. However, they can also emphasize stories that “offer romantic justifications in which the altruistic tendencies of two characters resolve class contradictions in a narrative trajectory that ostensibly transcends capitalism and all of its evil, greedy commodification” (56). Thus, horror, science fiction, and fantasy films address social, political, and economic anxieties and modern-day challenges and fears.

The Bush-era created Americans’ distress through the financial crisis where millions of people lost their jobs, homes, and savings. According to Kellner, apocalyptical and post-political scenarios “represent existing political fears and discourses and are grounded in historically specific socio-political contexts” (269). Contemporary Hollywood socially apocalyptic films “transcode fears of apocalyptic crisis and collapse in areas ranging from the environment to the political, economic, and societal order.” (269) These films’ content indicates their historical periods of production and release, and thus, give “important insights into the psychological, socio-political, and ideological makeup of a society and culture at a given point in history” (270). They influence and affect the political, economic, and social order.

Crises in the 1960s and 1970s often presented social apocalypse films in horror, fantasy, disaster and other popular genres. Usually, horror films help suggest societal concern and the potential collapse in humanity, society and civilization. The numbers of postapocalyptic films increased during the Obama era (278). The film genres have expanded from horror and fantasy to more science fiction and big-budget blockbusters. Social apocalypse films in the 2000s continually bring up the social crisis and catastrophe to address current issues. It also provides cautionary warnings and disasters as signifying the end of the world (277). According to the author, the audience reads films diagnostically to gain insights into social problems and conflicts. They can also critique the dominant socio-political issues and crises of the present by watching social apocalypse films. It displays the potential world’s devastation where humans have failed to take responsibility

and actions to deal with global and pandemic crises and have not treated social problems seriously.

Horror has slowly evolved to become a key element in exposing much of the world's societal, political, and natural concerns, given its ability to evoke such feelings and strongly express a given message. For Kellner, related social apocalypse films post-9/11 in the Bush-Cheney era were to project the chaos and intensify the nerves in that period (278). The similarities between reality and film evoke societal fears and anxieties, yet human beings still haven't awakened from all the chaos. However, most films that Kellner analyses seem to carry the same repetitive and redundant messages suggesting potential crisis, social collapse, and unsolved problems. Hollywood social apocalypse films are indeed a wake-up call and cautionary warning to the contemporary age audience. There is the hope that they can take action and bring changes to societal chaos.

Horror, science fiction, and fantasy genre films help generate the ideas and potentials of societal crisis and collapse. Kellner exemplifies a famous horror and social apocalyptic film series in the 2000s: *Resident Evil* (2002-2016) written by Paul W.S. Anderson. A notorious Japanese video game inspired these films. The story revolves around a multinational's premises called the Umbrella Corporation, which became America's largest commercial company, and its political and economic power influence and controls the entire country. The corporation impacted and dominated all kinds of supplies such as computer technologies, medical supplies, healthcare, and more. Military technology, genetic experimentation, and viral weaponry generate massive profits. According to Kellner, the *Resident Evil* film series articulates the evil corporation's fears to portray domination and overpower of technologies on human beings. The films fell into subgenre cycles of a rebirth of zombie film focusing on the dangers of science and technology and carrying out control and produced catastrophic consequences.

Kellner demonstrates a correlation between current socio-political worries on various topics and the underlying themes of apocalyptic films, focusing on eco-disaster and supernatural films. Supernatural films, but more accurately described as bizarre apocalyptic films, take on a conservative path. Instead of blaming the human race for

bringing on a social, political, or environmental apocalypse, external sources are always to blame. These external sources of evil are out of the people's control, and therefore supernatural such as monsters, aliens, and zombies.

Zombie Films: Family Melodrama and Self-Sacrifice (1852 words)

Comparing a postapocalyptic to a zombie film, Berger (2015) highlights a similarity that may strike a difference between these two sub-genres, despite being part of a horror or thriller category: "In most apocalyptic and postapocalyptic films of our time [...] hundreds of millions of people die, and yet there are no bodies." (152) This apocalyptic imagination is relatively clean because of this human bodies' absence. Zombies are a horrible fantasy that wholly violates nature and, in some cases, entails characters' loved ones reincarnate as vicious monsters, which they may kill and mourn for a second time. The unimaginable horror of a zombie apocalypse is the incarnation of viewers' anxieties regarding the future. It stands as an analogy for pressing issues such as consumer culture, class wars, the first world economy, or a social conflict. As seen in several films, at the heart of any zombie narrative, a story of procreation can emerge as a symbol of hope like in *Train to Busan*.

In zombie films, the human aspects become as complex as the mix of genres, from thriller, horror, road movie to melodrama. *Train to Busan*, directed by Yeon Sang-ho, depicts a deadly virus's effects, causing a pandemic that spreads to animals and humans, turning the victims into flesh-eating zombies. The film explores critical and antagonistic themes, such as social class differences, individualism and collectivism, self-sacrifice and lack of empathy, and hope and fear. It displays the drastic transformation of characters when facing an unexpected crisis and a battle for survival.

The film's beginning is set on a highway somewhere in mountainous South Korea. A truck driver has been stopped for vehicle sanitization because there was a minor leak at a nearby biotech plant, as public health officials in full protective gear explained. As the driver recklessly continues to drive, he hits a deer. He drives off, and what first appeared as a dead animal in a big pool of blood, the deer rises from the dead and looks straight into the

camera with suspenseful music in the background. Yeon Sang-ho creatively foreshadows the coming disaster with a close-up of menacing-looking eyes of a beautiful deer.

The contrast to the following sequence is sharp. It shows the clean, well-groomed face of a businessman in his office in a busy workplace. Seok-woo is an executive in some hedge fund office and is giving orders to sell some stocks regardless of the negative effect on the stock market and country's economy. When a young employee warns him of that, he asks him to proceed with the sale and shows a complete disregard for the consequences it would have in people's life.

He is supposed to take his estranged daughter, Soo-an, to her mother in Busan the following day to celebrate her birthday. She is about seven years old and desperately wants to see her mom and insists that she can take the train by herself. This disconnection between father and daughter is apparent and sheds some light on the plot's sub-genre. Upon boarding the train, they meet the other passengers: a couple of high school students (Yong-guk and Jin-hee), a frightened homeless man, a wealthy man (Yon-suk), two elderly sisters (Jong-gil and In-gil), and a lower-class couple (Sang-hwa and Seong-kyeong) who is expecting a child.

In the beginning, Seok-woo seems to be an unlikeable character acting more like an anti-hero than a loving father. His life philosophy is quite selfish and individualistic: "At a time like this, only watch out for yourself," he says. But his daughter disagrees, pointing out his insensitivity: "You only care about yourself, that's why Mom left you."

Without passengers noticing, an unknown infected woman also boards the train and attack one of the attendants. Suddenly, this attack provokes mass chaos as Seok-woo and his daughter attempt to escape the conflict and end up facing many challenges along the way, both physical and moral. As soon as the pandemic struck, people instantly began to act crazily. Everyone started to panic and worried about their well-being. They threw away all their ethics and morals and began to behave mostly solely and selfishly for their survival.

From the train's TV sets, passengers learn about the zombie infection. Although South Korean authorities state the country is safe, they see from their windows that they are in imminent danger. The Government tries to play down the situation by calling the apocalypse as riots and praising themselves for their "rapid response" when the problem is only getting worse as the train must keep moving without stopping in the stations to avoid the zombie hordes.

The most affected are the train's workers who try to maintain order and keep everyone safe, emphasizing self-sacrifice as one of the main themes during a pandemic. Thus, the film focuses more on the characters' humanity and self-growing than the zombie attacks, making self-sacrifice protect loved ones as the film's essential quality and main plot.

While the pace of life in the actual pandemic has disproportionately become slower, in *Train to Busan*, it has accelerated. One of the main similarities between the film's zombie virus and the coronavirus pandemic is the profoundly human experience of losing a loved one in traumatic circumstances. The anti-hero redemption happens throughout the film when the father, driven by the panic of trying to survive, starts to ignore himself by focusing on protecting others.

Overall, he becomes selfless and makes his daughter's safety his main priority while apologizing for his negligence towards her. While some passengers, like Seok-woo and Sang-hwa, visibly dislike each other and are more than happy to let each other die, they end up teaming up and forming a bond. Thus, the survival struggles established a sense of community among the passengers. The power of unity is what the film suggests tackling life/death situations. The father now looks not only after his daughter and himself but after other vulnerable passengers, too. He finally becomes humanized while his physical world falls apart. But this cognitive sense of "seeing" others during a crisis is not clear for Seok-woo until his daughter almost dies and Sang-hwa saves her.

The pregnant couple, Sang-hwa and Seong-kyeong, stands as the film's moral center, embodying Soo-an's height of guidance. The couple seems to understand the world's catastrophes better and empathize with the people around them. They show compassion

regardless of the pandemic's despair in assisting vulnerable individuals throughout their trip.

In return, the daughter teaches her father essential life lessons about love and societal values. Their bonding grows more vital throughout their survival journey on the train to Busan. Later on, the viewers will realize that Seok-woo and the company he worked for may have a part to play in spreading the virus as the biotech company from where the virus had leaked were his investors. This guilt leads him to remorse and vengeance. He breaks down and tries to wash away the blood from his hands with more blood from the zombies. He becomes both more emotional and assertive as his survival instinct and protection of his daughter take over. The film's action pace becomes faster, the plot's events accelerate, and the setting moves from the train to the tracks. The surviving group becomes smaller and smaller until only the father, daughter, and the pregnant woman stay alive.

More than a drama, *Train to Busan* is a melodrama. As Berger states, "Zombies do not haunt. Their rising is inexplicable, without motive or cause. Some narratives invoke a virus or radiation or some such supposed origin. But these "causes" have no real relevance; they are merely pretexts." (150) The film touches on some very heart-wrenching topics relating to family and love by portraying a father-daughter relationship journey. An unexpected turnout puts the audience on the verge of tears for a film about viruses and zombies, making the watching experience unique and even more significant for today's viewers.

Love and sacrifice are significant themes that make the audience empathize with the characters and feel for them. Sang-hwa, who put his life at risk many times to save others, without hesitating, gives his life for the greater good of the group and gets bitten by the zombies. This husband's final brave act becomes a definitive turning point for Seok-woo. Afterwards, when Seong-Kyeong and Soo-an are in danger under the train, the homeless man sacrifices himself to save them and let them escape.

As the father becomes infected by the virus, he selflessly separates himself from them and asks the pregnant woman to look after his daughter. It is the climax scene and a very emotionally intense one with the daughter crying and screaming. In his emotional farewell,

he is standing on a train end, and the flashbacks of his baby girl are his last human experiences. Right in front of Soo-an's eyes, he throws himself off the train. Even Seok-woo, whose number one priority was his career, sacrifice himself not to hurt them. Sentimental piano music plays in the background as this happens, and the little girl cries behind the train window.

Nevertheless, this sacrifice revelation did not come without guilt as he thinks to be responsible for the viral outbreak. As Berger states, "the zombie fantasy is a pooling of all these anxieties regarding the world's future. It is an incarnation of anxiety about the future as such. Can there be a future? Is this a functional category in any sense?" (151) Seok-woo's death is also his ultimate sacrifice for having closed his eyes to the disastrous situation, freely himself a guilty conscience and engaging the audience in a moral reflection about how values and ideologies come into play in situations like these.

As the two remaining female passengers finally reach safely out of the pandemic zone, Seong-Kyeong could go into labour and symbolically celebrate the human race's continuation. *Train to Busan* is a double-sided coin, where one side is a melodrama of intimate and delicate nature, and the other is a searing and scary social commentary. The film constantly contrasts individualistic and collectivist ideologies in situations of survival. It also proves that zombie thrillers and disasters like a pandemic are opportunities for self-growth. However, if these human experiences are the film's essence, how or what kind of living experience do zombies agency? According to Berger, in many stories, the zombies' mindless flesh consumption is analogous to capitalism and consumer culture.

In the 1960s and 1970s, American cinema begins to explore disease as a mechanism of societal destruction. "In these tales, the biological agents spread due to human ineptitude or nefariousness. In apocalyptic and postapocalyptic tales that deal with catastrophic disease, external biological agents (usually viruses or bacteria) invade and violate the human body." (Booth 19) In most of these films, humans become zombies by biological contamination. According to Booth, George Romero's influential *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) states that zombies are the apocalypse's agents of infection. The zombie becomes a cannibal and revenant, with either a mindless hunger or mindless "rage." One can see the

shift to a “zombie by disease” (19) model in Richard Matheson’s 1954 horror novel *I am Legend*, where vampires are a global pathogenic catastrophe.

Undead Monsters: Political Ambiguity

Francis Lawrence’s *I am Legend* (2007) is politically ambiguous in its portrayal of science. A vaccination designed to cure cancer mutates into a lethal virus that either infects humans or turns them into monsters. Because of its portrayal of science as both provoking the problem and producing the cure, the evil is ambiguous as it can be in real life.

The film opens by showing a news broadcast where the subject is on the cure for cancer, which involves infecting those affected by the condition with a modified engineered virus. It’s called krippin, named after its creator Dr. Alice Krippin. In their hubris, humankind believes they have found the cure to cancer using a genetically re-engineered measles vaccine, only to end up cursing themselves to a life of destruction and extermination. The vaccine turns animals and humans into horrific beasts, with only a fraction of the globe’s population resistant to the side effects. Ultimately, the virus turns those infected into vampiric, undead zombies, rabies-like beings that ravage the entire population. These creatures are called darkseekers or hemocytes. They are extremely dangerous, full of anger, and very intelligent. However, like vampires, they are photosensitive, which forces them to stay secure in dark places during the day.

In a desolate New York where everyone had either left the city or have fallen victim to the pandemic remains Dr. Robert Neville. He was designated to find the cure in New York, where it all started. Neville, a US Army virologist who is immune to the virus, has lost everything except his perseverance to find the cure. He aims to bring back those infected into humans again. He believes to be the last man on Earth. The film follows him battles these mutated souls and other issues, one of which is purpose. What is it that keeps Neville going through his bleak reality? Why does he frantically search for a cure even in the face of

oblivion? Find the vaccine becomes the only motive pushing him forward in this dark and dangerous world. Albeit not exactly sane, Neville manages to save his mental state from complete self-destruction through self-imposed daily objectives and aspirations.

In times of lockdown and isolation, Neville maintains a healthy quotidian life. Every morning during his breakfast, he watches old episodes of the morning news and drives around the city with his dog Sam, a German shepherd, to find food and life necessities. In the big and devastated New York, there is no traffic, he does not pay for anything, and he can even play golf on the roof of an aircraft carrier on the harbour. Neville chases deer, walks on the empty streets, and always greets and chats with the store's mannequins. Those from the video store he gave names and chat with them as they were humans. If in 2007, it was almost impossible to imagine New York empty as the center of a postapocalyptic world, but these days it could not look more ordinary. After the coronavirus, these scenes have not the same effect on the audiences. The memories of his wife and daughter leaving him are constantly haunting him. The film repeats flashbacks from the day the city was getting evacuated when his family died in the helicopter leaving the harbour.

Neville's character is more like an anti-hero figure, with disturbing flaws and under psychological pressure and distress. After years of isolation and loneliness, his psyche seems to be deeply affected. While chasing a deer, Sam, his only companion, entered into a dark building where hemocytes seek refuge during the day. When Sam gets out bitten by an infected dog, Neville has no choice but to kill her before becoming a monster. Sam was adopted as a puppy by his daughter Marley. After the pandemic, Sam became Neville's companion and best friend.

Besides taking care of his safety, Neville has no real responsibilities. He tries to stave off his loneliness by creating a routine for his daily life and tasked himself with studying the hemocytes. Before being infected, these creatures were humans. His goal is to get back their human form by developing a vaccine against the virus that has turned them into vile monsters. He routinely carries out his time battling his crippling loneliness and depression while almost blindly enduring his harsh reality in hopes of a better day. At the same time,

the mutated hordes of creatures attempt to dismember him physically. He fends off crowds of monsters, but ultimately, his one true enemy is himself by day. Neville is in a state of isolation, slowly losing his mind and his purpose.

Loneliness fills the entire screen. Everywhere Neville travels, he is carrying a gun or other weapon, portraying the fear and risk that every point of his life holds. His uncertainty with safety consumes him to such an extent that he completely dismisses the possibility of a safe colony existing anywhere in the world. However, he never gave up on the radio to find survivors.

The fear of being alone is all-consuming. Neville lost all hope believing himself to be one of the only people left alive on the Earth. Neville craves social interactions with other human beings. But they are all dead or became a hemocyte who wants to kill him. The idea of continuing without anyone else drives him to attempt suicide.

As the mutants were about to kill him, Anna comes and saves him. Anna found him after listening to his speech on the radio. When Anna tells him that militaries maintain a survivor's colony, his first reaction is denial and anger. He has lived for so many years alone that going back to live in a community escapes his perception of reality. Anna and her son, Ethan, are heading this safe military zone. However, he needs to complete his mission and find a cure for the virus.

For the past three years, he has been working diligently to discover a cure for the virus by studying a hemocyte's body. He has created a close and dependable relationship with them. Even when the monsters threaten his survival, kill them is no easy choice. This sensibility is reflected in multiple scenes, most notably towards the film's end when the hemocytes are in his laboratory. Neville, Anna, and Ethan hide behind plexiglass, which the hemocytes are trying to break down. Neville is trying to plead with the hemocytes, explaining that he has a cure and wants to save them from their affliction. Unfortunately, they continue to try to break through the glass.

Ultimately, Neville abandons his will for personal survival to facilitate Anna and Ethan's escape with the virus's cure. He prioritizes their survival and that of the rest of humanity before sacrificing himself and killing hemocytes. In the act of pure selflessness, he keeps society without a trace of recognition by running into the horde of monsters as his companions escape with the cure.

Despite Neville's death, a new sense of hope arises at the end of the film. Anna and Ethan arrive in the safe colony where she is accepted and passes on the virus's cure to an army officer. This action displays the public's underlying faith in the Government, the army, and goodwill, demonstrated through Neville's brave, heroic, and resilient role.

Although the film has raised various viewpoints about life, human nature, and faith, in the end, goodwill rises over evil, and peace restores over chaos. This happy end concludes that despite the many challenges that may come upon the main character, they will increase against them and ensure that in the future. Moreover, he also highlights the significant challenges and sacrifices that come at the cost of achieving this peace. Thus, *I am Legend* is a film that displays humans' impact from both good and bad extremes and the power that resilience holds.

Dystopian Tales: Racialized Minorities and Gruesome Reality

One thing about fantasy, horror, and science fiction is that it is usually illusory and unbelievable. How is it that a director can make the audience invested in what happens to a character? According to Kroon, there is a paradox of empathy in fiction that posits three statements and their incongruity about the audience's emotional responses: "(A) People experience emotions for fictional objects and situations, knowing them to be fictional (B) People do not believe that fictional objects and situations exist (C) To experience an emotion for an object or situation, one must believe that it exists" (23) The viewers can feel the terror one might feel in the apocalypse, without feeling the terror of the apocalypse. In effect, the viewers can empathize with characters that they do not necessarily identify with but with the screen experience.

The growth of the dystopian genre in the post-9/11 era inflicts fear and pain. They show audiences real concerns that are happening around the world through terrorism, environmental destruction, or war. *Children of Men* (2006) by Alfonso Cuarón is a science fiction film that portrayed a new political system that carried out apocalyptic collapse and Orwellian fascism. Based on a novel written by P.D. James where the world fell into terror and hopelessness while global infertility erupts after a flu pandemic in 2009. It shows the present's political tendencies leading the world into chaos and society into collapse. The film's content draws attention closely to the growing fascism and the downfall of democracy. It also provides cautionary warnings that if they are not willing to change the world, they will slide into the civilization's collapse. Cuarón uses settings similar to the present day, which gives the photography a dark and gloomy feel. This failure transforms into a dystopian age of fascism. The children from the title refer to the good old days in society and the key for humanity.

In 2027, humanity has become infertile for some unknown reason. As society decays, Theo Farron stumbles upon a secret organization's efforts to smuggle a young refugee pregnant woman out to safety. Moreover, the film portrays a very accurate future as the world turns its back on refugees. When they arrive in England are taken to concentration camps, making today's audiences connect to the Latin American refugees' unjust treatment by the Trump administration. In Kellner's words: "this plot-line provides the occasion for a stunning montage of a police state, terrorism, refugee internment camps, and accelerating social disintegration, intensifying tendencies of the present moment and providing a cautionary warning tale that if things are not drastically changed, we are sliding into the social apocalypse and the collapse of civilization" (274). The film also shows media images of Islamic terrorists while portraying right-wing and conservative imagery. These views are quite contemporary as they associate refugees as terrorists rather than homeless people needing shelter.

In the first sequence, Theo Farron narrowly avoids a terrorist bombing at a coffee shop. He was watching the TV news report announcing that Baby Diego has died, the world's youngest person. The whole world seems to be affected by his death and appears profoundly upset and hopeless. This fact introduces the film's core idea that humanity has

become impotent, incapable of procreating. The reason for this impotence is never examined or explained. However, it is clear that it extends worldwide and that no new children have been born for 18 years. The story is set in Britain, which appears to be one of the last habitable countries—or so the Government makes them believe. This last oasis has led to a large influx of refugees—or Fugees as colloquially referred to. Theo is an evident classist struggling between the British police force and the Fugees.

Children of Men takes place in a state where barrenness is a metaphor for society's fading sense of hope. Plagued by infertility, Britain's Government turns to nationalism to find security. The British Government uses media propaganda to portray the nation as the only answer for human despair among evildoers synonymous with immigrants and foreigners.

Realism, awfulness, and suspenseful viewpoints in the film are uncanny and confuse them with current frightening events: terrorism, refugee internment camps, and social chaos. The visual is a reference to the world in terror after a swine flu outbreak. Additionally, it depicts anxiety through the camerawork: fast-paced camera movements and editing, hand-held recording, action sequences, and quick cuts build tension and release an uneasy feeling. In the warfare scene, some drops of blood land on the camera lens. The camera's interference in the action places the audience in the center of the scene as if their eyeglasses have been splattered by blood, bringing the sense of touch and contamination. Although, some sequences can use long, drawn-out shots. The long takes made it feel as if everything was happening in real life and in real-time. These plan sequences add a documentary quality to the filming, reinforcing the story's realism and positioning the viewer on an eyewitness perspective. The clever use of background details revealed the ideologies of the depicted society. The camera often diverts its attention away from the characters' perspective to linger on the setting descriptions. From showing immigrants in cages to the striking image of a mother crying out with her dying son in her lap, the camera informs about the neglected society's citizens.

From the onset, the ongoing plague of infertility this society faces results in the violation of women's reproductive rights, as is imposed by the existing totalitarian Government. In the posters and signs, strategically captured in the setting's background by the camera, one

can read: “Government Enforced Fertility Tests.” Conversely, the deportation of immigrants conveys further intolerance of the Government as a by-product of struggle and ailments endured by the human race, as noted in the state’s chaos portrayed by rebels throwing objects at a train and the radio comments on illegal immigrants.

For Booth (2015), the postapocalyptic tale “in Western cinema mirrors Judeo-Christian eschatological and cosmological notions of ‘end times,’ and several ostensibly secular films have both subtle and, at times, obvious religious themes.” (18) *Children of Men* is primarily a spiritual film. Kee’s storyline implies a religious theme mirroring Mary, mother of Jesus, as she symbolizes hope for the human race being the first woman in 18 years to get pregnant. This parallel was further confirmed when Kee exposes her pregnant belly to Theo in a barn-like setting, and later she jokes, inferring that she conceived without having sex. The infertility crisis stems from Mother Earth or ‘Gaia’ punishing humanity for misconduct, pettiness.

Theo has an important task to accomplish. He must take Kee, an African refugee, to a foreign aid group known only as The Human Project. Initially, a rebel group called the Fishes helped Theo and Kee. However, they want to politicize Kee’s pregnancy and take advantage of her child. Their malicious intentions drive Theo and Kee (and one trustworthy midwife) on the run from both the Fishes and the authorities. Theo finds purpose when Kee reveals that she is pregnant. Even though Britain is desperate for newborns, Kee flees because she does not want her baby to be paraded around by another woman who upholds British ideals. Theo and Kee make it to the refugee prison, which seems to be a medium-sized city slum area chalked full of Fugees. It gives the atmosphere of a warzone.

While they wait for the best moment to proceed in their journey, Kee gives birth to a baby girl. The following day they make the trek to the ocean to meet the boat. In an all-out war scene, the Fishes capture Kee while the police try to apprehend the Fishes. Theo manages to make his way through a dilapidated apartment building to find Kee and her daughter. In the background, we can hear Kee’s daughter crying. He finally leads her out of the building, and all the Fugees make way for the newborn child to exit. While they are fleeing

under intense military fire, a wave of soldiers is advancing in. At one point, when the British soldiers realize that Kee is holding a baby, they withhold fire against them. This scene reinforces the symbol of faith and spirituality of the film. The soldiers are shocked. They stop the fire as they allow them to pass through safely. Immediately following, soldiers begin firing again.

This sequence strikes back the humanity of both sides of this war. Despite their differences, both Fugees and Government cannot help but be stopped in their tracks by the sight of the first newborn child. In the final sequence, Theo takes Kee to Project's boat. After briefs moments of nostalgia and emotion, the story quickly goes back to the gruesome reality. Under the firing, militaries seriously injured Theo, and he slumps over dead through the fog in the distance. As when Julian is shot dead, even the soundtrack reminds viewers that hope can be fragile and momentarily. The Rolling Stones' dark lyrics of *Ruby Tuesday* plays in the background: "Catch your dreams before they slip away... Ain't life unkind?". Every component of the production reassured me that the cruelty of men prevails.

Besides being placed in the future, the whole film treatment is of realism, like a documentary. The camera mimics a gentle shaking that drives the audience to the authenticity of the story. For Booth, the illegal African immigrant who is essentially humanity's new Eve does not represent the image that "immigrants and foreign nationals are usually presented [in the media] more as threats than as sources of salvation." (Booth 22-23) As Britain soldiers on, immigrants are essentially forced into concentration camps so that the nation can maintain its alleged civility. From reminiscing about life before infertility to glamorizing younger generations to euthanasia forms, citizens struggle to find hope. The fear provoked by police brutality is a mind killer and brings people to act with irrational violence and cruelty. The conflict between the Fugees and the Government is reminiscent of current events involving Black Lives Matter and police brutality. Repeatedly in the film, the police use excessive force and even murder Fugees with little to no provocation. Police brutality radiates through the inhumane caging of refugees while the state attempts to instill structure amidst a failing war on terror. Some characters reinforce these themes by anti-government and left-leaning ideologies.

The film shows science as a root cause of evil and economic and social destruction. *Children of Men* is primarily a spiritual film. Several characters sacrifice themselves for Kee's baby, including Theo. As by its realism approach, the film seemed to approach its tagline: "If things are not dramatically changed, we are sliding into the social apocalypse and the collapse of civilization." Thus, it is a calling for the morals (or its absence) behind the pursuit of wealth and technology. However, the film ends with Kee crying tears of joy as a boat appears out of the fog with the word "Tomorrow" painted. Though this film had many twists and sometimes seems that Kee would never make it to safety, Cuarón sends a message to the viewer that no matter how bad things may seem now, there is *always* hope for a better "tomorrow."

Indigeneity Immunity: Horror Portraying Political Horrors

How many history textbooks fail to mention the full extent of the horrors the aboriginals had to endure? *Blood Quantum* reverses these injustices and ethnic prejudices through the horror genre to address years of 'cultural genocide'¹ in North America. Suppose the director, Jeff Barnaby, an American native, uses the classic zombie film tropes. In that case, his story delivers a strong political message about the aboriginals' horrific past and the contempt they hold to this day. The film highlights colonization's political theme and the Aboriginals' tireless effort in protecting their culture and traditions. Barnaby uses the apocalyptic scenario to go back centuries of history to enlighten what aboriginals have experienced until these days.

According to Booth, in most postapocalyptic films, the main characters tend to be racially white of European-American descent as primary protagonists and survivors. "That is one reason why [George] Romero's choice of an African American as the rational protagonist in *Night of the Living Dead* [1968] was held to subvert this racial order." (22) In the Western films, where Aboriginals were commonly the bad guys, "there is often little moral

¹ Declaration made by Murray Sinclair, Ojibwe, who chaired the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) for the Canadian Government from 2009 to 2015. (<http://www.trc.ca/index-main.html>)

difference between the outlaw and the man who operates within the law. Still, the sheriff's star must be seen as constituting a sacrament of justice, whose worth does not depend on the worthiness of the man who administered it" (Bazin, 147). In this case, there is no doubt, and once more, Barnaby inverts the roles and makes an Aboriginal as the law representative.

Set in 1981 on Mohawk and Mi'gmaq land at the Red Crow Indian Reservation in Quebec, Canada. An old native, Gisigu, is gutting the fishes but notices that they move and come back to life. He decides with his son Traylor, the police chief, to burn them all, including one White man returning from the dead. The infected ones start to bite the villagers and wide and fast spread the infection. Soon, the Aboriginals realize that they are immune to the virus because of their blood and develop strongholds to protect their people, including the mixed-bloods. The story leaps six months forward in time. As organized in fortresses, the Aboriginals from the reservation lead a group of warriors to protect them from the zombies' attack. Even though the zombies cannot kill the natives by biting, but they can harm them: "Turns out, immune to the plague does not mean immune to being eaten alive," says James explaining why they cannot allow the infected people to live among them.

Nonetheless, kind-heartedly, the natives use this immune power over the zombies to help out the white refugees nearby. This situation immediately refers to historical facts in a different light. Initially, the natives were the rightful owners of the land on which they lived. The history repeats as the natives have the white people living in a different section from them, similar to the reservations. The irony here is that they live on native American land turned into reservations by white colonizers, where now they seek refuge.

In the movie, Lysol, who is police chief Traylor's older son, is a character that acts with anger and hate. He is the only one in the film that stands against those who bring non-native people to the fortress. "Speaking of which, what about this place? Some of these f** ain't local. Never seen a brown person since their grandparents owned one. And they outnumbered us too. How long before it comes to pass, they get tired of being herded by a bunch of Indians?" Most of the things Lysol says come true even though they are from an angry place. Almost every American native person's life got severely affected when they

let Europeans settle and live on their land. Many agreements were disrespected, many foundations were forgotten, many languages were silenced, and many traditions were prohibited.

Traylor had Lysol from a previous marriage and put his son into a foster care home when his wife passed away. He is the typical troubled young man that has a drinking problem and finds himself in custody quite often. Lysol represents this reality that many First Nations in Canada struggle with alcoholism, poverty, unemployment, and alienation. Lysol is the only native that feels threatened by the white survivors living in the fortress. His behaviour stems from generations of trauma suffered by First Nations people, rooted in systemic racism and assimilation. He still holds his hatred for the people who killed his ancestors and took their land. He doesn't want that historical native's enforced assimilation to continue to repeat until its disappearance, so he's cautious and antagonistic towards people who are vulnerable to being infected, what he calls "a time bomb." He responds with violence to protect his people, and his anger comes from a place of fear and desperation. As says his friend Moon while pouring gas on tied people: "We got a chance to get rid of all these fucking dependents once and for all!"

On the other hand, his half-brother, Joseph, who is also police chief Traylor's son, has an entirely different approach towards those infected. Joseph has a white girlfriend, Charlie, who is pregnant. The film essentially revolves around their relationship and what the future holds for their baby. There is hope that the baby may be immune to the virus, but not for Charlie. Their baby carries the whole film's discussion, the 'blood quantum' policy. It is a system where "Any legitimate claim to an Indian identity rests, in part, on tribal membership, which requires certification" (Hamill 267). The Government gives this certification only if a certain percentage of the person's blood is of aboriginal descent. This law establishes their citizenship and membership to a specific tribe. What is certain is that this policy regulates, most of all, an extinction date for all tribes because "the use of blood quantum may be more harmful to Native cultural survival than any other federal Indian policy. [...] The blood dilution over generations has decreased the number of Indians who meet the minimum blood requirement." (The Oneida Trust and Enrollment Committee) Although specific blood quantum levels vary by tribe, this can determine the specific

policies that will affect and segregate each descendent for better or worse, guarantee their rights, disregard their cultural and lineage ancestry, or impose more sanctions.

Throughout the film, the events that take place to mirror the real-life atrocities faced by indigenous people at the hands of colonizers and subtly references how current political systems treat them. The system keeps pushing them aside and forgets about them: “Who says we’re immune? Maybe the Earth just forgot about us,” says Moon, an old native. Seconds later, Lilith, a young White female who got inside the fortress, bites Lysol. An animated sequence features a young warrior (looking like Lysol) emerging from the flames wielding his sabre and transforming himself into an evil avenger.

From time to time, the film’s narrative is interrupted by these short-animated scenes as aside commentaries or complementary imaginaries. In the beginning, surges the film title and a pregnant woman sitting at the top of a deforested hill with factories on the horizon. Camera movement continues to approach in her direction while giving birth to a fetus that disappears in a water stream.

Thus, the punishment seems to be a response from Earth itself, who, according to Moon, has created this plague to turn infected in fertilizer: “The Earth is an animal. Living and breathing. (in Mi’gmaq): White men don’t understand this. That’s why the dead keep coming back to life. Not because of God. Because this planet we’re on is so sick of our shit. This old, tired, angry animal turned these stupid fucking white men into something she can use again: fertilizer.”

How can apocalyptic horror films be used as learning tools for history? The screenplay written by the director, Jeff Barnaby, is full of historical references and social commentaries to racism, xenophobia, and cultural genocide without losing the capacity of entertainment and using one of the most appropriate genres to digress and speculate about the colonialism horrors. Even though the source of the virus, which transforms White men into flesh eaters, is unknown. The plot’s villain cannot be more evident and less political, as he points out about his artistic choices and social engagement as well as his unapologetic criticism of North America’s history:

“The weird thing about being native and making a comment on viruses, in particular, is the history of the pandemics and the colonization of America,” said Barnaby. “Once you put a native person in a zombie film, you immediately start thinking that it’s a virus. It’s one of the benefits of being a native film director: You have so much history to riff on. It exists in history and our society and the history of our cinema and literature.” He paused, lingering on the thought. “It’s so much to unpack. It’s a lot to take on, being a native filmmaker, man.” (Yamato 2020)

When Charlie gives birth, Barnaby uses Joseph to express his discontent with the blood quantum laws. Joseph asks Charlie, “Do you want to hold her?” “No, I’ve been bitten. I’m sick. I can feel it,” replies her. “She can’t get sick. It’s okay.” In a final pact, she begs for her death to protect their daughter: “Joseph... we have to end this. Don’t let me turn into one of those dead people.”

Because the natives have this power not to be infected, they are the largest group dominant across Canada and maybe the only group alive. The land returns to them. Once more, their kindness towards the Whites will turn back against them. A White woman named Lilith, who has been bitten and is infected, decides to tell no one. She infiltrates their base and turns into a zombie, killing and causing the destruction of their newly made survival home. Although the natives in the fortress are immune, many other people are not. She causes mass destruction, and ultimately, the end of the haven.

Contagion and Pandemic: Too Close for Comfort

Even though films are mainly for entertainment and the rest is mere “cinema,” some filmmakers aspire to communicate some wisdom and learnings, like any oral story. The subjects vary, from environmental to social issues. Since its title and headline, *Contagion* makes its purpose and goal very clear: “Nothing Spreads Like Fear.” In a mix of genres from the documentary, thriller to drama, the film is a succession of contagions that spread fear among the viewers. Once the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus

global pandemic on March 11, 2020, the film became a hit on the world's streaming platforms.

Contagion, directed by Steven Soderbergh and released in 2011, is a fast-paced storyline (with overlapping plots) about a global outbreak of a deadly virus (MEV-1), mainly focusing on the panic comes with a pandemic. Besides following those infected, the plot shows how governments, doctors, and researchers handle the crisis and the media's role in informing or misleading the population. The film showcases many aspects of a pandemic, from depicting how a virus can spread, the changes it can cause in people's daily lives, the difficulty of finding a cure, and tracking down the origin of the disease, all while keeping the general public on edge. The film aspires to be highly informative, enlightening, and applicable in a real-life situation in its descriptive style. How can one learn about the actual pandemic from it? Many viewers consider *Contagion* to be didactical from today's perspective, informing how people should act or do. Thus, the film presents a plausible series of events and scientific accuracy to deliver its story. However, this is not futuristic science fiction but rather a realistic survival manual on how to handle a pandemic. The filmmaker uses experience and facts from previous worldwide outbreaks such as H1N1, MERS, SARS, and Nipah viruses to realistically convey the story while raising political debates. Soderbergh makes a great effort to make a film as realistic as possible with the inclusions of these actual events, without losing the undeniable alarmist tone so overused by mainstream media.

The entertainment side of this real tragedy that viewers today are seeing mirroring in their lives is the sensationalism, panicking, conspiracy, and violence sub-plots that overcrowded this fast-paced story. During the vaccination, will this sort of violence become a reality? Will there be enough vaccines for everyone in Canada, and who will have access to them first? Who will have the power and control over decisions related to vaccines? Will money or contacts "buy" a vaccine? Can we trust our leaders to act in good faith? Can we trust that we get the actual vaccine and not the placebo? Following conspiracy theories, governments and pharmaceutical companies fabricated this virus to make a profit?

The countdown on the screen emphasizes the fast-paced editing and the narrative's suspense. Throughout the film, the red text shows the number of days passed since the virus's onset. The intertitles add the number of infected, creating a sense of urgency and fear: "Day 16 8 million infected". Cleverly, it does not start with day one, which should be the zero patient or the virus origin. It begins on day two with a group of infected people moving and travelling across the world, spreading the virus. Beth Emhoff, who is away for business in China, is unwell as she sits in an airport lounge. Simultaneously, a montage introduces indiscriminately other characters of all ages, ethnicities, and gender spanning the globe who are exhibiting similar symptoms. The camera focuses on the surfaces these individuals infect with their hands (the subway, elevators, planes, trains, buses, hotels). The close-ups of sweat bodies and distress in the characters' faces show symptoms (coughing, dizziness) emphasized by the visual imagery through touches, textures, and diegetic sounds. Another compelling cinematic element is the subjective point of view of an infected person embedded by the camera. The world, through their perspective, is entirely blurred and messy. All these cinematic elements place even more of the audience into the scene while building tension and increasing the suspense. Suddenly, all these infected patients die of this unknown respiratory disease. The storytelling is surgically descriptive, leaving little room for the audience to create empathy with the characters or situations due mainly to the high number of plot and sub-plot lines that were taking place simultaneously, thus, not creating any emotional impact.

The novel virus has already been out of control before the scientists comprehended the actual situation and how fast it could spread. Its infection results in high fever, dry and robust coughs, headaches, and painful seizures similar to other pandemics. Two leading doctors from CDC (Centers for Disease Control) are trying to lower the virus's spread and create a possible vaccine in the United States. An epidemiologist from WHO (World Health Organization) goes to Hong Kong to investigate the virus ground zero contamination. The film methodically shows step by step how occurs a virus outbreak investigation, concentrating most of the plot on the scientists' research and their effort to contain the spread of the virus. In the third week of the pandemic, there have been indications of the virus mutating and growing even more deadly. One month later, CDC comes up with a potential vaccine. To accelerate the progress and tests, Dr. Hextall injects

the first sample of the vaccine into her leg and visits one of her sick relatives at a hospital. Her self-sacrifice and the US FDA's (Food and Drug Administration) accelerated approval process expedited the timeline from human trials, manufacturing, and distributing the vaccine to the public. The vaccination was on a random selection of birth dates. After more than four months, finally, the vaccine shows its results and reduces the number of patients infected. The doctors find out that the virus has animal DNA strains that belonged to bats and pigs. A scientist places a sample of the MEV-1 virus in cold storage next to samples of SARS and H1N1 viruses, two other recent severe pandemics that society have faced a few years back.

In the end, the film reveals to viewers day one of the contagions. This short last sequence constitutes the climax of the film and its most revealing social message. It also brings knowledge, awareness, and comfort for the audience for knowing the truth behind so much despair, speculations, accusations, and fake news.

An American executive, Beth Emhoff, identified as the zero patient, travels to Hong Kong. She works for a multinational corporation that promotes deforestation in China, leaving a cauldron of bats without a home. One of the bats carries and drops a piece of an infected banana into a pig farm ceiling. A pig eats the banana, and the same pig is sold to a casino's restaurant. When the chef was cleaning and preparing the pig, he is called to greet and take a photo with Beth and a group of local businessmen in the restaurant's lounge. Unfortunately, he leaves the kitchen without washing his hands, contaminating her, who in turn touches the food, cutlery, and glasses, and greets and shakes other peoples' hands, passing on the virus.

In this brief sequence, the viewers discover how the viral contamination started while increasing awareness about environmental imbalance and deforestation, sanitation, food security, and personal hygiene. The second degree also represents a severe criticism towards capitalism and globalization and people's greed, selfishness, and hypocrisy. Once again, as seen in other outbreak virus films, Mother Nature punishes humanity for the depreciation and exploitation of the planet's natural resources.

In the film, characters could not know for sure the reasons and how everything has started. As with any conventional Hollywood film, the ending brings a resolution plausible enough for a regular viewer does not get frustrated or confused about the film's storyline. The depiction of a deadly virus coming from China and global societal disruption accurately mirrors the real-life connections to today's coronavirus pandemic. In the film, Dr. Mears warns that humans touch their faces over 3000 times a day, so they should wash hands, wear a face mask, adopt physical distance, and implement improvised hospitals for mass treatment and vaccination.

The mass hysteria and global-scale problem are the film's central points. The virus hits the world unexpectedly and contaminates even those who are having little contact with infected people. The virus is deemed dangerous as it can be passed on by touching objects that a contaminated person has touched. When the government ration has run out and declared national lockdown, closing schools and businesses, people start to steal from each other using violence and even firearms—plundering grocery stores, fights, and rampage over medical supplies. Empty streets full of garbage and supermarket shelves running out of can food, water, and toilet paper, have become the new reality. Coincidence or not, the film introduces the drug Ribavirin (a real-life medication that fights viruses) by the media.

Similarly, with coronavirus pandemic, every day, the media have been given numbers about the spread of the virus, total infected, new cases, deaths, etc. The empty cities, the auditoriums full of ill patients, and thousands buried in outdoor trenches are all realities of 2020 depicted in a 2011 science fiction movie. This coincidence could be one of those typical cases of 'life imitating art.'

Soderbergh also raises a debate regarding what is legal versus what is morally correct. At this point, the virus was becoming more severe than the public knew, but to avoid panic and chaos, the CDC director, Dr. Cheever, said, "just make sure nobody knows, until everybody knows." Essentially, he was not allowed to disclose any information about the severity of the virus. However, he warns his wife to leave the city when the pandemic strikes. Once he hangs up the phone and realizes a janitor has overheard his entire

conversation, the janitor states, “I got people too, Dr. Cheever. We all do.” These human selfish and emotional reactions affect most of the film's characters, including doctors, scientists, and journalists. They abuse power and use privileged information to protect themselves and family. Through these actions, the film reinforces its criticism of society's greed and corruption and questions frontline professionals' ethics into question. On the other hand, what Dr. Cheever did was the morally correct way to handle the situation. “I told a loved one who told a loved one, and I'd do it again,” says the doctor.

From another level of lack of ethics, morality, and disregard for public safety is blogger Alan Krumwiede's story. He tries to gain financial profit during the massive outbreak of the MEV-1 virus posting false information, spreading fear and mistrust on the Government's work and scientists. He gives false testimony that a drug named Forsythia can cure the infected. He fakes the infection symptoms and reveals that Forsythia cured him. He then acquires a lucrative amount of money from a hedge fund to invest in miracle medicine. As the demand for Forsythia is skyrocketing, the supply could not keep up with it, which incites violence in the society. He misleads people that the vaccine can cause sequelae. The CIA eventually decided to arrest him for misinformation, conspiracy, and possibly manslaughter by tailing his investor.

The film ends on “Day 135” and a flashback to Day 1, which outlines the virus's path to reach humans and ultimately Beth, the zero patient. Contagion's fictional virus registered an estimated 26 million deaths worldwide. Soderbergh was precise in capturing wildly accurate predictions of how contemporary society would react to a pandemic. Despite technological advancements and innovations, today's society is fragile and can crumble to the threat of human extinction. The media continues to *spread* devastating news about climate change, depleting the Earth's natural resources, massive deforestation, the end of wildlife habitats, the world's overpopulation, and overcrowding urban centers.

Conclusion

The coming of the end of the world, the ever-feared Armageddon, doomsday is on its way and the annihilation of the human race—all popular, extreme themes present in films that

the audience hates to love but loves indulging in. The seemingly impossible scenarios that make up the thrilling movie plots ranging from eco-disasters, zombie films, social collapse, and bio-mutant pandemics could genuinely be all too real when analyzed parallel to today's society. These films are not far from some aspect of truth. They reflect fears and anxieties that people have towards political, environmental, and supernatural forces, which are often the apocalypse's driving forces. Nevertheless, this ounce of relatable truth is the reason people keenly keep watching doomsday films.

Similarities between cinematic pandemic and real-life were media usage to inform the public and shape responses to rapidly developing events. On the one hand, government officials broadcasting from safe studio spaces announce that they contained several outbreaks thanks to their rapid response. On the other hand, separate video footage shows street scenes of violence, panic, and terror in the general population. Moreover, this panic footage mimicked a YouTube video format, identical to how with coronavirus. The majority of citizen-posted footage online depicted social panic, despite the Government telling people to stay calm. Another aspect of these films is the heightened risk that frontline workers and disadvantaged populations have to the contamination and their sense of self-sacrifice to save their loved ones.

May Hollywood social apocalypse films continue to grow to remind people to take action and bring changes to solve societal chaos. It is safe to say that cinema surrounding great concepts like the social apocalypse is most often politically charged on a subliminal message to establish links from the storyline portrayed on the big screen to the audience living in real-time.

Frequently politics in films have a negative connotation for most average moviegoers. Still, British filmmaker Ken Loach acknowledges cinema's natural political essence: "A movie isn't a political movement. At best, it's a film. At best, it adds its voice and shines a light on political outrage."

Because of their political anchorage and social engagement, these films are more than ordinary genre films for entertainment. It is an overstatement to call them overt political

films, but they present, derive, and offer powerful metaphorical views of history and society. The films analyzed in this article depict several disillusionment and confinement stories. These films intertwine and engage basic socio-political storylines about indigeneity, humanity, self-sacrifice, hope, and more through various genres and sub-genres. Placing their stories and characters in the near future or a supernatural world, science fiction, horror, and fantasy films have the freedom and capacity to oversee anything other than our ordinary reality. Often, they use concrete situations within a fictional context to inform us about the moral consequences and qualities required to alert or enlighten audiences.

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