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Waiting For the End
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What many consider to be the end of the millennium is almost here. I am of the party that believes the millennium will end with the end of 2000. If you want to avoid the over-hyped-end-of-the-millennium parties and curl up with a good end-of-time movie, I do not recommend the Arnold Schwarzenegger vehicle "End of Days." If you see this film, you may wish that the world as we know it would indeed end.

Almost anything is better than sitting through this absurd catalogue of borrowing from better films. "End of Days" takes its "plot" from such really disturbing works as "The Exorcist" and "Rosemary's Baby" and from the less successful but nevertheless superior "The Omen," and in doing so makes us long for the earlier films. Here, as might be expected, Satan is planning a return, one that for reasons that remain obscure, requires his impregnation of a young woman selected (without her knowledge) for this purpose at birth.

Most of the film depicts Satan's attempt to achieve his dastardly purpose, in the time allotted him, as the character played by Schwarzenegger defends the heroine against the unwelcome advances of the Dark Prince. And what a demonic power he is! Despite Satan's ability to enter into the body of a New York businessman, to unleash enough destructive power to nearly destroy a church, and in general to behave like a Hollywood super-villain, he is unable to locate his bride-to-be without wresting the secret of her whereabouts from Arnold, her stalwart protector. The film rapidly degenerates into a tedious chase through New York as the clock ticks the countdown to the (supposed) end of the millennium. Guess who wins.

If you feel that you really need a touch of the apocalypse to celebrate the most relentlessly-

hyped temporal event in, well, the last thousand years, go to your local video outlet and rent Stanley Kubrick's "Dr. Strangelove." Despite the end of the Cold War and the apparent relaxation of our nuclear anxieties, this film, more than any other I know, still has the power to make "The End" seem terribly plausible. It has no need of a specific, dreadful date nor of Satanic evil to imagine the apocalypse. Indeed, the power of the film derives from the recognition that evil is not some radically other force, but in fact derives from the continually likely perversion of human creativity.

If you choose to revisit "Dr. Strangelove," note the sexual imagery that Kubrick deploys throughout. On the "big board" of the Pentagon war room note the representation of Gen. Jack D. Ripper's bombers violating Soviet air space. This recalls the films we saw in high school explaining the microscopic details of human reproduction. Recall that the bomb was the result of uncounted hours of human creative dedication. Be reminded that we are all too often the creators of elaborate systems--political, economic, technological and even religious--that can ultimately replace critical thought with a dangerous conformity, a submission to the world as explained, arranged, and constructed. Is some of the glee with which so many approach such an allegedly significant a date as Dec. 31, 1999, a recognition of the imperatives of human creativity, a desire not so much for an ending but for a renewed sense of our ability to re-imagine and thus remake the world? I hope so.