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Dr. Strangelove or Hitler Reincarnate?

Stanley Kubrick's 1964 black comedy *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* is a fictional account of a Cold War-era America in which complete nuclear devastation is a real, imminent threat. In the penultimate scene of the film, ex-Nazi Dr. Strangelove gives American President Merkin Muffley a possible solution regarding how to keep the American people surviving despite certain impending death. Although Dr. Strangelove incorrectly refers to President Muffley as "*mein führer*" and performs the Nazi salute with his right hand (only to restrain himself with his left), he is not solely invoking Nazism and attempting to resist that former shadow of his past life; he is actually a representation of Adolf Hitler himself.

At the beginning of the scene, Strangelove is the trusted advisor of the president and presents his self-proclaimed "easy" plan for preserving American civilization. He announces that it would be possible for people to be stored in an underground mine shaft, for it would be an impenetrable safeguard against the radioactive fallout from the nuclear explosions. Hitler, in reality, planned for the everlasting existence and reign of the German people and the Aryan nation, just as Strangelove is suggesting for the American people. Additionally, Hitler lived his last moments and committed suicide in his *Führerbunker*, an air-raid shelter, a structure intended to protect him from attacks from other nations. By suggesting that Americans populate an

underground bunker space in order to protect themselves from the hostile Cold War actions of the Russians (and then commenting that they would need to stay underground for approximately a century), Strangelove is sentencing those (people of several generations) who have to endure that living situation to spend all of their moments and then ultimately perish in a locale similar to where Hitler met his end. Strangelove, though under the guise of helping the Americans preserve themselves, is attempting to exact revenge on the United States by forcing its people to suffer the same fate as Hitler.

As Strangelove delivers his idea to the president, the president's advisors slowly but surely crowd behind the wheelchair-bound doctor. They have nothing to say about Strangelove's plan (in favor of or opposing it) and accept it with blind ignorance, thus representing the unfeeling and unthinking as the German people accepted and supported Hitler's philosophies without speaking out. Strangelove, just like Hitler, is gaining an entourage of people who can help propel his hopes, goals, and dreams for the future of humanity. Additionally, the stark contrast in lighting serves to highlight the fact that Muffley's many roundtable advisors are assuming the roles of Strangelove's inferiors. The advisors are in darkness while Strangelove, the center of attention and the center of post-apocalyptic thought, is the sole illuminated figure in the formation, as if he is enlightened and that his solution to the nuclear crisis is absolutely correct and that he has all the answers to life's problems, as if Strangelove is the chosen one. Strangelove becomes a representation of Hitler, being placed on a pedestal by these people who essentially become one mass of never-ending support and assuming the role of the treasured individual in a sea of supposedly very intelligent men who give up their own personal ideas for the good (or rather, evil) of the leader's intents.

In Strangelove's speech, after President Muffley admits that he would "hate to have to decide" who would be allowed into the underground mine shaft and saved and who would have to remain above ground and perish in the nuclear holocaust and fallout, he insists that only those with superior characteristics ("youth, health, sexual fertility, intelligence, and a cross section of necessary skills") should be elected to help repopulate America and that these people would be chosen by a computer programmed to (artificially) select for these traits. Strangelove's philosophy on this directly echoes that of Hitler's: that only people of superior quality should be saved. And for Hitler, those people comprised a whitewashed German and Aryan nation. Jews, gypsies, queer people, and those of differing political opinions were sent off to concentration camps to be overworked and systematically murdered because they did not measure up to Hitler's standards and were, in his eyes, all that was wrong with the world. Additionally, his doctors performed vasectomies on young men deemed unfit to prevent them from having children with their traits, if they were to even be lucky enough to survive to adulthood. This coincides with Strangelove's obsession with only allowing those at the peak of society to still exist and procreate. Those who do not meet Strangelove's computer program's requirements will be doomed to systematic extermination. In order to keep producing humans at their best, most intelligent, and most worthy, Strangelove suggests maintaining a ratio of ten women to one man so that as many children as possible with the desired characteristics can be brought into the supposedly new and improved world. And in regard to staging, Strangelove and his entourage are directly facing Muffley and his close advisors almost in a faceoff of democrats versus pseudo- (and in the case of Strangelove, real) Nazis. Strangelove also advocates for the retention of government officials who can continue to provide suitable "leadership and tradition." Hitler

believed that his Third Reich was going to be a new, powerful dynasty in German history and thus fashioned his society around maintaining and enforcing tradition, yet another indication that Strangelove is a Hitler representation. Strangelove, like Hitler, is so focused on eugenically and systematically fashioning a society of the future that can produce an even better and brighter human race.

Dr. Strangelove represents Hitler in contradiction to the president and his close advisors, who ultimately try to speak out against Strangelove's plan and then end up meeting their nuclear demise, who can be seen as a representation of those who were too scared to speak up, and when they finally did, it was too late, for Hitler's plans had been set in motion. President Muffley and his advisors spend time considering Strangelove's solution and inquiring as to the specifics of it. However, as this is happening, Strangelove completes his ascent into power (both metaphorically and literally). In a literal sense, Strangelove stands up from his wheelchair and frighteningly announces, "*Mein führer*, I can walk!" immediately before the doomsday device that Soviet Ambassador Alexei de Sadeski set up detonates, causing the nuclear devastation that ends the film—and presumably, humanity as we know it. Though Strangelove is, on the surface, invoking Hitler and proclaiming that he has been successful in something that he has obviously struggled to do for decades, he becomes a true representation of the *führer* himself. The moment Strangelove stands up and stands before his people—both those that are blindly listening to him and those that are frantically attempting (and ultimately failing) to oppose his idea—the ultimate goal of Hitler is realized: the destruction of the democratic world. Hitler was known as a powerful orator who stood before crowds of people and could engender visceral reactions from them, and when Strangelove finally stands up in front of his crowd of people, he gets what he

inwardly wants and has wanted for years, the complete and utter eradication of the free world, even if he must perish with it.

At first glance, Dr. Strangelove seems like a mentally unstable figure who has attempted to reform his Nazi ways in order to be pardoned by the democratic nations in the fallout of the Third Reich. Through serving as not only a supporter of but also—and more importantly—a representation of Adolf Hitler, Strangelove is showing how the American government in the world of the film is failing in solely confining itself to dealing with the impending doom thrust upon them by its main Cold War opponent, communist Soviet Russia. America still, ironically, has yet to eradicate the supposedly quashed threat of Nazi Germany and Hitler's fascist regime because of Dr. Strangelove's power, connections, and ideas, which ultimately ends up causing their demise, in the form of a nuclear holocaust, nonetheless.