

# Two Film Remakes for These Perilous Times

By Donald Alexander

Two defining films of the World War II era have become surprisingly relevant - albeit with a twist. One movie held out the hope of peace. The other flick affirmed that a war-making regime—with a little encouragement—would turn on its own.

I remember “Lost Horizon” and “Address Unknown”. I attended Saturday wartime matinees, paying my admission with a can of saved bacon-fat which would be used to make explosives. Admission was also free when I brought a bag full of milkweed pods. (For a short time the military made life preservers with the fluffy milkweed, until they discovered that it became waterlogged in a just a few hours. My first lesson in the follies of war!) With a wartime shortage of new releases, the two films received lots of replays in my neighbourhood Elmwood Theatre in London, Ontario.

“Lost Horizon”, the 1937 Frank Capra film, told the story of five people escaping by airplane from an uprising in central Asia. Their pilot kidnaps them and they wind up in a peaceful monastery, Shangri-La, in the Tibetan mountains.

“Address Unknown”, the William Cameron Menzies film of 1944, showed us how a repressive regime would become paranoid and turn on its own. Increasingly suggestive and seemingly coded messages, sent by mail from North America, finally lead to the disappearance of a Nazi supporter in pre-war Germany. The last letter is returned, marked Address Unknown.

“Lost Horizon 2003”. Scene. North eastern Afghanistan. Jets scream overhead. There are explosions nearby. A bearded man, Osama bin Laden, accompanied by four other people, rushes to a waiting helicopter. After taking off they discover their pilot—protected by a

wall of bullet proof glass—is flying in the wrong direction. They crash in a remote Tibetan mountain area. Monks rescue them, take them to their mountaintop monastery and tame their warlike ways. Now we know where Osama is!

In a surprise ending, the tall, bearded lead, has become a force for peace, living in this secret and gentle Tibetan refuge of Shangri-La. The monk, Chang, Osama’s mentor, in a direct quote from the original book, says, “...it is possible that many religions are relatively true,” and then adds as the camera dissolves to credits, “but, of that, we are only moderately certain.”

“Address Unknown, 2003”. A Canadian film. A business associate returns to live in the United States. His former Canadian partner is disturbed that the man is blindly agreeing with and supporting the aggression of U.S. President Bush. Aware that new snooping provisions in both countries permit email to be monitored, the Canadian begins to send e-mails with key phrases that will cultivate suspicion. Easily decoded words and euphemisms for words like, explosion, hijacking, target, flight training, are inserted in each e-mail. The man disappears, without charge, into the U.S. anti-terrorist prison where he is held indefinitely. E-mails are returned to sender marked Address Unknown! □

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