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CINEMA

State of Emergency

Review by Richard Wilen

A fast paced science drama, *State of Emergency* plays on one of modern society's greatest fears: the unknown effects of nuclear weapons. The theme has a lot of potential for developing a strong tension in the audience, but in this film it just doesn't get you to the edge of your seat.

The plot revolves around Alex Carmody (Martin Sheen), a government physicist experimenting with nuclear fusion. Carmody's discoveries set off a twisted chain of events which interweave mysteries of science and religion.

The physicist's experiments indicate that explosion of even a single modern nuclear bomb in the atmosphere could lead to a chain reaction causing a "nuclear tornado" capable of destroying the earth. While Carmody and his colleagues see this as confirmation of earlier arguments against nuclear weapons, their superiors have other plans.

When the information is leaked at a peace rally, government security forces step in and the project is shut down. But the physicists are driven to continue the research by a second discovery: the emissions from atmospheric nuclear explosions appear to be related to a mysterious aurora which appeared in 1938, seven



years before nuclear devices existed.

With the aid of Father Ryan (Tim Piggott-Smith), the aurora is linked to the Miracle of Fatima, a visitation of the Virgin Mary to the three Portuguese school children in 1917. The mysteries of Fatima drive Carmody to Portugal and a new religious awareness.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union is preparing to resume atmospheric testing in response to stalled nuclear disarmament talks. The impending disaster propels Carmody into the international spotlight as he tries to warn soviet scientists at the risk of his career.

In weaving science and religion together the film takes on a lot, and in general, its treatment comes up short. The plot skates with too much ease in its transformation of Carmody from a

skeptical, narrow minded scientist to an enlightened ambassador of peace. At times the drama seems trumped up, and the film misses opportunities to stress important aspects of the personal conflicts, such as those involving the co-optation of academic researchers by the military.

A low level production style gets in the way at times, especially the insipid music. The scientific effects are humdrum, and the laboratory settings are not particularly convincing. Somehow I don't think high energy physics experiments are run this way.

While the film never really gets heated up, it is engaging nevertheless. The plot is largely based on the actual experiences of nuclear physicist Dr. J. Rand McNally, Jr., and this is a source of attraction: sometimes truth is stranger than fiction.

The producers, Estar Productions, are affiliated with the Marian Tradition of the Catholic Church, and their message comes out clearly in the film. However, the film raises some important issues, whether you agree with the producers' solution or not. The anti-nuclear theme may attract many viewers, but the production style and religious message will water down the film's impact for most.

now showing

Blue Velvet: Promoted as suspenseful, sexy, and surreal; surely controversial. A young man finds a severed ear, then follows its mystery to the evil side of an all-American town. Cinema World (342-6536).

Children of a Lesser God: William Hurt (*Kiss of the Spider Woman*) stars as a teacher of the deaf in this adaptation of the award-winning play. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

The Color of Money: Paul Newman recreates his role as "Fast Eddle," from the 1961 drama *The Hustler*, with Tom Cruise as his protege pool shark. McDonald (344-4343).

Crocodile Dundee: A celebrated Aussie adventurer, naive to city ways, spends some time in the Big Apple. West 11th (342-4142).

Flight of the Navigator: A 12-year-old boy becomes navigator of a superadvanced spaceship. Adventure from Disney Studios. Shows with *The Great Mouse Detective*. Fine Arts (747-2201).

The Gospel According to Vic: Comedy. A schoolteacher in Scotland is somehow connected to a series of miraculous events. Showing with *Sky Bandits*. Cinema World (342-6536).

The Great Mouse Detective: Animated feature from Disney Studios. Shows with *Flight of the Navigator*. Fine Arts (747-2201).

Home of the Brave: Multi-talented Laurie Anderson blends technological magic with high-brow rock and roll in this performance film. Bijou (686-2458).

Jumpin' Jack Flash: Comedy/adventure. A hapless bank clerk uses her computer to save an American spy. Stars Whoopi Goldberg (*The Color Purple*). Valley River Twin (686-8633).

Malcolm: Comedy. A socially maladjusted mechanical genius has some inventive adventures with a couple of imaginative friends. Cinema 7 (687-0733).

Peggy Sue Got Married: A woman awakens in the past, and has a chance to alter her future life. Stars Kathleen Turner (*Jewel of the Nile*). Directed by Francis Coppola (*The Cotton Club*). National (344-3431).

Ruthless People: Comedy. When an obnoxious wife is kidnapped, her wealthy hubby refuses to pay her ransom. Stars Bette Midler and Danny DeVito. Late show at the Bijou (686-2458).

Sky Bandits: Comedy/adventure. Two desperadoes join the Royal Air Force during WWI and turn their sights on the Kaiser's planes.

Shows with *The Gospel According to Vic*. Cinema World (342-6536).

Something Wild: A free-spirited woman seduces a Wall Street VP into coming to her school reunion. Cinema World (342-6536).

Soul Man: Comedy. A thoroughly white student turns to black skin and culture in order to enter the college of his choice. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Stand By Me: A reminiscence of boyhood adventure and friendship as four youths search for a missing corpse. This is the one they shot up by Brownsville last summer (originally called *The Body*). Springfield Quad (726-9073).

State of Emergency: A sane scientist tries to warn the powers that be of possible world-wide catastrophe resulting from nuclear testing. Science fiction? Stars Martin Sheen. Springfield Quad (726-9073) and West 11th (342-4142).

Streets of Gold: Opens this week at West 11th (342-4142).

Tai Pan: Based on the James (*Shogun*) Clavell novel about early western traders in China. Filmed in the People's Republic. Cinema World (342-6536).

Top Gun: Tom Cruise trains to be a hot-shot fighter pilot when he's not relaxing with Kelly McGinnis. Oakway (342-5351).

Tough Guys: Two aging train robbers return to the practice after a long stretch in the pen. Kirk Douglas and Burt Lancaster head this comedy/adventure. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

—Michael of Sussman

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