

## 'Emergency' message made incredible

"A State of Emergency" is a movie with a message.

And a very timely one for this nuclear age. A physicist (Martin Sheen) working with computer simulations of nuclear war uncovers new evidence that sug-

gests the detonation of any weapon over 80 megatons would produce temperatures high enough to generate a self-perpetuating dynamo. At this point, any and every form of matter would become nuclear

fuel for this dynamo, resulting in a nuclear tornado that would sweep over the whole planet and destroy everything.

Chilled by this all-too-tangible scenario, Sheen calls for more extensive tests to confirm his theory only to see bureaucrats and the Pentagon tie him up in red tape, shut down his lab and refuse to consider the implications of his data. Even worse, he finds out the Russians are planning to detonate an 85-megaton missile as part of a new weapons test within the week.

Review by  
Mary Courtis

The rest of the movie is a race against time for Sheen to somehow get the hard evidence to support his theory and convince the Russians to stop the test.

All this sounds exciting and suspenseful. It is. Unfortunately, the film also suffers from a strong dose of born-again, Bible-waving sentiment that seeks to draw parallels between events in Sheen's lab and the miracle of Fatima and an unexplained, but possibly nuclear, blast that occurred over Siberia in 1938.

Here the film becomes preachy and implausible with scenes showing Sheen crying in front of the altar of the Blessed Mother in Lisbon. His catching sight of a beautiful weeping woman standing in the middle of the core of nuclear plasma during one of his experiments made me want to shout, "Come on!" The impact of the simpler, more straightforward story line is undermined.

Certainly, allusions to Armageddon are not out of place here (as in the "China Syndrome"), but such ideas and images have more power when they are hinted at and not laid on thick. How sad that the producers felt they had to hammer their points into our heads rather than letting the story and the characters speak for themselves.

Too bad also because the movie raises some important issues that should not be ignored.

One of the most disturbing is that the idea of a nuclear tornado is not new. It was considered as a possible outcome way back in the 1940s when Oppenheimer and his team were putting the finishing touches on the first atomic bomb. No one knew if detonating an atomic device might generate this kind of phenomenon.

Issues presented in a clear, accurate light can be effective in educating societies about nuclear war and the horrors associated with it. Nuclear war and research are complex issues, and some people will always ask, as one Russian diplomat does of another at the end of the film: "Can we afford to believe all this?" I would like to offer the same answer the second Russian offered him.

"Can we afford *not* to believe in all this?"

"A State of Emergency" plays nightly at Springfield Cinemas and the West 11th Entertainment Center.

Friday, November 21, 1986




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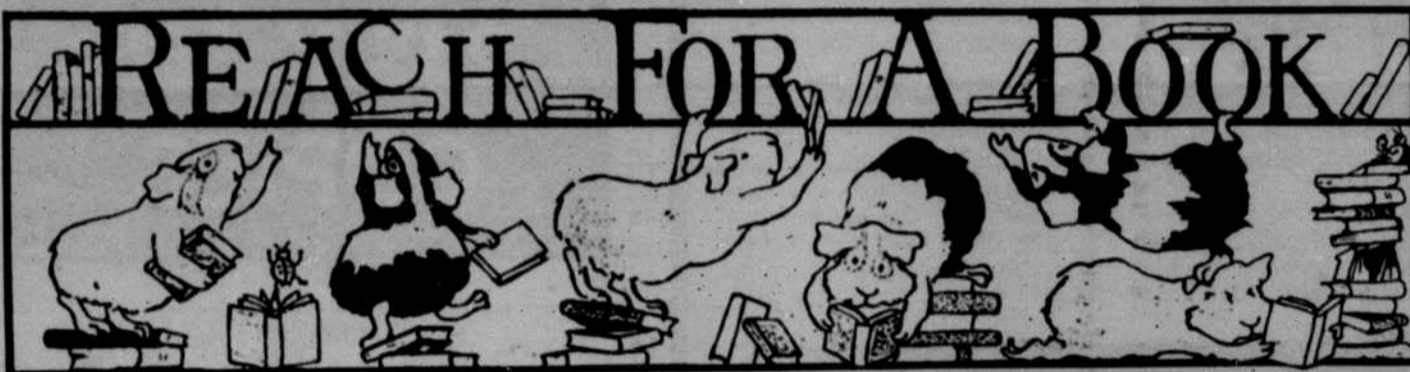
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