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Twelve Film Analysis for Post-Apocalyptic Genre

* Protagonist
* Conflict
* Tone
* Theme
* Relatable characters?
* What might be beneficial to my story?

Suggested by Advisor:

Cast Away (2000)
Mad Max: Fury Road (2015)
Lord of the Flies (1963)
Children of Men (2006)
The Book of Eli (2010)
Terminator 2: Judgement Day (1991)

Suggested by me:

7) Goodbye World (2013)
8) Aeon Flux (2005)
9) The Postman (1997)
10) After Earth (2013)
11) Blade Runner (1982)
12) Windwalker (1980)

In your essay include the following:

How does the film differ from your vision for your film? How is it similar?

Why and how does the film work, or why and how does the film fail?

Can you relate to the characters? If yes, which ones and why? If no, why not? What was it about what they said, how they look, how they behave, and how they were filmed that helped you form your opinion about them?

**CAUTION: CONTAINS SPOILERS**

**CHILDREN OF MEN (2006), Alfonso Cuarón**

**Protagonist:** Theo Faron (Clive Owen) is a British government official who was an activist and lost his son. There is also Julian (Jiliane More) his ex-wife who he met while they were protesting and serves as the gateway to the terrorist group. Later they are met by Kee (Clare-Hope Ashitey) who provides the hope and the key (hence the name) so that the human race can continue.

**Conflict:** Theo has to help a terrorist group to save the only baby left that could save humanity, but he has to deal with the fanaticism of the terrorists who wants to use the baby to their advantage and the government. The human race is in conflict with the few people left in power (the British government) and all of the refugees who are fighting for their equal rights.

**Tone:** Not-too-futuristic, dystopian, dark comedy, lots of photos and set design to tell backstory, camera is hand-held documentary style

**Theme:** Survival, hard choices, racism, sexism, birth of Jesus/savior, not having shoes

**Relatable Characters?** Theo is very reluctant, rather than being a stereotypical hero who shows up to the rescue like many of this genre. He also doesn’t take sides right away, and in fact is rather ambivalent and numb to what is going on (hence the drinking and smoking). On the one hand, he is very representative of how our modern society is numb to our reality of climate change and terrorism until it actually affects them. On the other, it is hard to empathize and like this character because he doesn’t care and there is no emotional investment to see him survive the journey.

**What’s beneficial to my Story?** I like how Kee is played by a woman of color and holds the power to keep the human race going. It speaks to how we are all one species, and I want the protagonist/hero of my story to be like that. The metaphor for the Virgin Mary is very apparent, which seemed a bit much and also puts Kee in a very vulnerable position. However, I want my protagonist to come at it from the opposite direction with the religious overtone and vulnerability at the front and provides a starting point to make her more powerful to stand up against the antagonist and “save the world”. I am also noting Theo’s ambivalence and refusal to take action, because my protagonist would be paralyzed by fear from the initial conflict (as anyone would be).

I also like the idea of the flood of refugees coming into conflict with those in power because my story is based on the descendants of environmental refugees, and there is conflict with the haves versus have-nots.

What I don’t think works is the outright religious overtone of the “Joseph and Mary” story. Kee’s conception is never explained, but neither is the reason for infertility, which gives off an undeeded mystical air to a sci-fi movie. I am wanting more of a realistic approach to a post-apocalyptic setting – what can actually happen based on what is going on now. Plus Children of Men’s setting is not so removed from civilization, and not too far into the future, as opposed to my story which very removed from civilization.

**BOOK OF ELI (2010), the Hughes Brothers**

**Protagonist:** Eli (Denzel Washington), a traveler going West with a copy of the bible. He is accompanied by Solara (Mila Kunis).

**Conflict:** Eli navigates his way through a post-apocalyptic wasteland to get to the West Coast. He crosses highwaymen, corrupt thugs and their leader, Carnegie (Gary Oldman), who is seeking a book that will help him take control over more towns which turns out to be Eli’s only known copy of the King James Bible. Carnegie and Eli have a unique knowledge of the world before the nuclear explosion unlike most people which put them in a position of power.

**Tone:** Action/thriller, Post-Apocalypse SciFi meets Western, fragments of modern life seen in a different way, dry & dusty “Wild West”, cinematic but intimate with close-ups and shots that are crowded with junk to give a closed-in feeling, the necessity of literature for civilization

**Theme:** Survival, lone traveler with “super powers”, swords versus guns, book smarts versus street smarts, using religion as a tool of power, faith providing power to go on despite all odds

**Relatable Characters?** It is hard to relate to Eli since he has these almost super-human abilities to survive. Carnegie is such a melodramatic villain rather than being sincere in trying to re-create civilization in his own way. It would have made more sense if Carnegie’s intentions were at odds with Eli because he has the key to do it, but then he just turns into a psychopathic lunatic. Everyone else are either radiation-damaged bandits or Carnegie’s illiterate henchmen, except for Claudia and Solara. Essentially, the female characters seem to be the only “humans” left in this world having more depth and dark secrets about them to want to know more, plus seeming “neutral” but pulled into the conflict unwillingly, rather than being cartoony actiony stereotypes like the protagonist and antagonist.

**What’s beneficial to my Story?** My story has a similar neo-Western / post-tech theme, and how certain things that were common are extremely valuable like water. There are parts of Solara’s character I like for my protagonist because she is a child / a product of this new world rather than being forcibly brought into it like Eli; she has to rely on making due with what she has rather than technology or being educated.

I also liked the cinematography, although not the amber colorization and the dirty/dry feeling of the Wild West. The amber look actually got tired on the eyes after awhile, even though the tiny bit of greenery when they got to the coast was a slight relief. I think the same effect can be achieved with better location selection and design rather than making the whole thing in sepia tone. For design and composition, I like the intimate feeling made with shots cluttered with debris of the old world. It was interesting to see the unique uses of the “pre-flash days” with speed limit signs used as a windshield on a motorcycle, cement utility pipes used as a hideout for thugs, and a run-down nuclear cooling tower as a rest stop for the protagonists.

What did not work for me was Eli’s unexplained super-human ability, or assumed power from God, to sword fight a ton of attaching thugs and dodge bullets. I want my character to be “all natural” rather than a deus-ex-machina way to deal with larger-than-life problems. The whole “protection from God” with Eli seems a cheaty/lazy way to get him through and make it into a action/thriller, rather than approaching problems as most people would.

**GOODBYE WORLD (2013), Dennis Henry Hennelly**

**Protagonist:** Several groups of people staying at a homestead in Northern California - James & Lily, their daughter Hannah, Nick & Caroline, Benji & Ariel, Laura, and Lev.

**Conflict:** The group of friends, whom have been together since college and formed a tech company together at one point, find themselves together against the outside world as the known civilization crashes around them. In the isolation, they also have to deal with defending themselves from outsiders who want to take what they can to survive, and the group also has to deal with each other as they reveal past secrets and hidden feelings that deteriorate their relationships.

**Tone:** psychological/cerebral drama, character-based, pretentious, whiny, indy, mumblecore

**Theme:** isolation, relationship drama, what is really important, what happens when people don’t have modern conveniences

**Relatable Characters?** They could be relatable given the right audience, but not for me. They are young, entitled, techy Silicon Valley couples, but they are not too extreme and stereotypical. This is a character-driven piece rather than a Post-Apocalypse action/thriller therefore they did a thorough job at exploring the deep recesses of their backgrounds and psyches that unfolds in a confined space and lets on that people of similar age know (or are) people like this. They also react in a passive-aggressive way to the doom and gloom around them, turning inward rather than attacking the problem head on as in most of the Post-Apocalypse genre, which speaks to the ambivalence of our modern society.

**What’s beneficial to my Story?** Although this story was about the Apocalypse happening at the moment (only to be used as a device to get these awkward-together characters in one place), I keyed on the elements of the isolation and the lack of technology which brings them to make decisions they would have not otherwise had. I will not have the luxury of developing character arcs for a short, and mine is planned to be more action based. But, there is still something I think snaps when people are suddenly severed from their comfort zone and from society that I can use with my characters. They have no choice but to deal with what is essential and true, which tends to be ignored in real life until it’s forcefully brought into focus after a crisis. After all, it is the internal conflict than the external that creates drama so it will be interesting for me to find a right balance.

The drama of this movie, the fact that it was character-based than action, did make it pretty tedious and boring to watch for me. Everyone had their own unique problems, but they all come off as whiny and pretentious most of the time. Sure, they are relatable because I know people like this, but I want to elevate my characters to a point where they do save the world rather than wringing their hands and confess their forbidden love or wonder what is the point of living the whole time.

My characters are also generations after the initial Apocalypse, and actually a generation afterwards. Plus, my world doesn’t end with one “bang” like a nuclear explosion or EMP taking out everything, but happens in a more realistic decline – much like the fall of the Roman Empire.

**MAD MAX: FURY ROAD (2015)**

**Protagonist:** Max, a previous road cop who patrols the desert wasteland, is once again the unwilling hero who fights his way to save what is left of humanity. He is accompanied by Furiosa, who is trying to save the wives of the evil Immortan Joe to drive them to paradise of her former home, the Green Place.

**Conflict:** Max is taken prisoner by Immortan Joe’s War Boys to be used for blood to power them against the rivals of the Bullet Farm and Gas Town whom they suck all the resources in return for water. Max makes his escape, and at the same time Furiosa plans her escape, who is a champion of Immortan Joe and tasked to drive the huge War Rig to get more gas from Gas Town. When Furiosa commits treason by taking Joe’s wives to a safe haven, Joe sends out his War Boys with Nux who uses Max as “fuel”. Eventually they get separated in a dust storm, and end up in a three-way stand-off, which eventually leads to an alliance to take back the Citadel from Joe.

**Tone:** Un-apologetically action with explosions, rough, wild, cartoonishly gory, CGI-filled spectacle to outdo its predecessors, but just plain ol’ fun and exciting escapism

**Theme:** Lone- traveler who unwillingly gets caught up in things, escape from prison, survival, he who holds the water controls the world, revenge and saving civilization, what separates the “real” humans from the augmented ones created to only be weapons

**Relatable Characters?** No. Of course not. These are larger-than-life sci-fi extrusions of an extreme environment. Max hardly has any dialogue other than short, grumbly responses; the pursuing War Boys just yell crazily, and the fleeing wives just shriek in terror. The one character we do become attached to is Nux, one of the War Boys who goes rogue and ends up saving everyone at the cost of his own life.

**What’s beneficial to my Story?** This is way too spectacle and effects driven to apply to my more humble nuke&zombie-free apocalypse drama, but I am drawn toward Furiosa as a strong female action lead which I have my story. Furiosa really is the one that drives the story and the hero that goes through the trials to save humanity, and Max just gets in the way despite him being the title character. I also liked how we don’t know her backstory until she reaches her destination, rather than Max whom has already been established and explained in the first scene with a voiceover as a catch-up from the previous films.

She is the protector, yet a warrior, hard side versus soft side, nurture versus nature, so there is that dual nature which makes her intriguing and a great juxtaposition with Max who is unabashedly one-sided. This is what I really enjoy with female versus male heroes because there is that compliment and conflict of the warrior/protector duality that is hardly explored with Hollywood in excuse of making something more masculine = traditional = mass market. And despite Mad Max being a fun thrill ride, it does a nice job of exploring and offering both sides.

Another character I want to experiment with my story in is the loveable sidekick as with Nux. He eventually becomes the “the enemy of my enemy is my friend”, but he’s the guy who is the first-line‘s antagonist and then becomes a catalyst for future plot points. He takes on that “underdog” quality, more so than with Max, which usually leads to that guy the audience eventually falls for, and then dies for the sake of the heroes. My story is heavily inspired by Pacific Northwest Native American stories, many are about the Raven, or the Coyote for more southern nations, who is the Trickster and always provides a nice device for comedic relief for an otherwise dreary landscape.

**AEON FLUX (2005)**

**Protagonist:** Aeon Flux (Charlize Theron) is an agent of the rebellion (the Monicans) against the ruling class of the last human civilization on Earth, Bregna, in order to uncover the disappearance of random people. She is accompanied by a fellow agent, Sithandra (Sophie Okonedo) who is augmented by having hands for feet. Aeon is directed to infiltrate the base of the leader Trevor Goodchild, only to find the truth behind the charade of paradise.

**Conflict:** Aeon is at odds against “the Establishment” from the outset as we find out she is with the rebel group, and then she fights obstacles of the security systems, uncovering secrets, thereby becomes The One who can bring the system down and bring an end to the perceived utopia of Bregna.

**Tone:** Acrobatic action, Kurosawa-inspired, more “pretty” than the gaunt/angular roughness of the 90’s animated series, not a “typical” Hollywood future with people wearing spandex and plastic but taking cues from previous eras.

**Theme:** Platonism = Perceived “Utopia” as a prison (ala The Matrix), secret society, rebel uprising, unveiling the real truth as opposed to keeping the illusion of a perfect civilization

**Relatable Characters?** Aeon definitely has more “human” characteristics from her animated counter-part, which is not surprising and actually makes sense in a live-action setting. When I watched BTS and special features, it made sense that they had to give up some of the more far-fetched-humanly-possible-less-salacious actions with the cartoon characters (Aeon has a lot more clothing for example). The live-action makes her out to be a vulnerable character when things don’t go exactly as planned, and she has to react and adapt (the core human component).

**What’s beneficial to my Story?** I was inspired with Aeon Flux with the action-oriented female hero, whom I wanted to use in my story. I didn’t realize this would be a good film to watch until I remembered the original series I saw on MTV back in the 90’s (and re-watched on DVD), and then remembered how this was Post-Apocalyptic with a female hero, which is pretty rare even twenty years after the original animated series was aired.

Another point of analysis was “The Matrix” allusion, or the illusion that our current perceived (or what our perfect vision of that is) reality is not in fact reality, being very prevalent in many Post-Apocalyptic films (especially when the hero is first unaware of what is going on, and then is brought through the threshold into actual reality). I remembered reading the “Cave Allegory” by Plato which many of these stories stem from (or at least this one came before all of those), in which “reality” that we currently perceive is shadows cast on the wall in a cave that we are a prisoner of. We only need the “mentor” to help brake us from our bonds and show us the way to the real reality outside the cave.

My story involves a woman who is not aware, or admits to herself, what is going on – her whole familiar life destroyed. Aeon has that background, which is interestingly left out in the animated series (geared to a more mature audience), but had a bit more explained in the live-action feature. I will have to find that balance with a short to explain my character’s choice to take up such drastic measures against her foes.

**TERMINATOR 2: JUDGEMENT DAY (1991)**

**Protagonist:** TheTerminator (Arnold Swartzenager) comes back from the future to save the main protagonist, John Smith (Edward Furlong), from another cyborg terminator, the T-1000 (Robert Patrick). They are helped by John’s mother Sarah Conner (Linda Hamilton) who was the target of the previous Terminator but was saved by the man that became John’s father.

**Conflict:** The main conflict involves The Terminator and John Conner escaping and avoiding the incessant T-1000 who will stop at nothing to kill the future leader of the humans to rise up against the cyborgs in the war after the Apocalypse. During which, John has the conflict to teach The Terminator how to be more human with Sarah always being wary that he can turn at a moments notice like the one that came after her. Sarah tries to escape from the metal institution she is in while battling with premonitions of the impending Apocalypse caused by the artificial intelligence known as Skynet. Then there is the conflict with the creator of Skynet, Miles Dyson (Joe Morton), whom they convince to destroy his life’s work to create the perfect AI (even though the cyborgs still exist after that, but it’s all one big paradox thing).Basically it’s a story of survival with the main characters, and then the general ethical dilemma of creating technology that can turn against us.

**Tone:** Action/thriller, James Cameron-big screen-big explosions, fast-paced chases, lots of movement like a roller coaster ride of the relentless pursuit

**Theme:** “The future is not set. No fate, but what we make.” There is much stoicism with the warrior-ethic, but there is also the rejection of authority/the Establishment for the bigger picture. Essentially, it puts “preppers” in a very positive light and gives credence to their paranoia of a giant conspiracy that will eventually end modern life as we know it. It gets all tied into the overall theme that we need to value human life over technology and material things as it can go away at any time.

**Relatable Characters?** While the cyborgs show no humanity (because they are merely weapons), it puts more emphasis on the humanity displayed by Sarah and John which hides under the military stoicism. In fact, the final battle has The Terminator and T-1000 ripping each other apart, but all without any expression or cries of pain (an interesting opposition where most Sci-Fi AI is portrayed as showing emotions trying to be more human).

One moment that show this is their respite in the desert where we see John trying to play with The Terminator, and Sarah looks on seeing a glimmer of hope and that the cyborg has no way of harming him. There is also one at the end after the final battle where The Terminator has to destroy himself (or get John to do it for him since his programming would not allow that) and John can hardly bring himself to loose such a good friend.

**What’s beneficial to my Story?** The main takeaway is the common theme of other post/near Apocalyptic stories how we need to take care of ourselves, all humans, and value what we have because it can be gone in a flash. Although my story takes place years after the initial decent of modern civilization, the main character her own sudden Apocalypse when her family and home are instantly destroyed by the Raiders.

I also like Sarah’s future visions, seeing people vanish from the nuclear explosion “like burning paper”. I am very inspired by visions of Native American cultures, and how that gives a sense of impending doom which instigates a hope to prevent that happening, or clues to how to make that happen.

**OBLIVION (2013)**

**Protagonist:** Jack Harper (Tom Cruise) lives a life of service with his partner Vika Olsen (Andrea Riseborough) and waits for their turn to leave the wasted planet for the new human colony on Titan. As he battles the alien Scavengers, he comes across a survivor of an old crashed ship, Julia (Olga Kurylenko). Jack and Julia go off to discover the truth and confront the real alien threat.

**Conflict:** Here is another “unwilling” hero brought into conflict with what is actually causing the Earth’s destruction. There is Jack’s conflict to accept what’s going on, and when he does is conflicted with Vika who tries to keep him in line with direction of the Tet above them, supposedly a station for the last remaining humans.

**Tone:** Suspense/action/Sci-Fi, techy, lots of flashy CGI, wide panoramic shots of an empty world to give a sense of insignificantness and loneliness of the last humans on Earth

**Theme:** Other than the usual “unveiling the curtain” Platoism, there are some interesting themes of nostalgia/hard to let go what was when we see Jack with his pre-Apocalypse memorabilia of old baseballs, an old stereo with old records (reminds me of Book of Eli with the older cannibal couple listening to the disco hit “Ring My Bell” like classical music). Then there is the alliance reversal between Vika and Julia, which woman is right for him, who is his true friend? There is also the reversal from the authoritative Tet to the rebel human resistance group. This leads to the discovery of clones and asks the Philip K. Dick question “what really makes us… us?” as in are we the same person or different with a shared history?

**Relatable Characters?** I did like how Vika provides the conflict with being subservient to the authority of the Tet, and Jack has his rebellious nature. Vika is relatable in that sense because I know people who need authority in order to operate or else they don’t know what to do, but also she shows hesitancy and doubt.

I think the only credence we have with Jack is his nostalgia as with most guys going through a mid-life crisis (maybe a far-fetched metaphor?), in the middle of the range from young guy who sees things with fresh eyes (Neo in The Matrix or John Conner in T2) to the older guy who’s been-there did-that but still has some spunk left (Book of Eli/Mad Max). Other than that, Tom is an action guy with (still) a pretty face, but it does show how that role is falling out of favor with a growing diverse and global audience.

**What’s beneficial to my Story?** Again, it’s about the Platoism / Hero’s Journey with a fresh new face. I did like how this one kept the mystery going (despite it being a little predictable) with each step of unveiling the truth. In hindsight, the boundaries and obstacles Jack has to pass to get to the next level is pretty obvious (the border of the Radiation Zone, the cave of the rebels, the Tet).

As a study piece, it makes the Hero’s Journey pretty clear, the fact you need three layers of antagonism, but how to keep an audience engaged and surprised with each phase.

I did like Morgan Freeman’s mentor/threshold guardian character, like an older Morpheus, being the first-tier enemy and then takes on the “enemy of my enemy is my friend” which ushers Jack along to do his ultimate task to save humanity. In my story, the main character’s grandmother, the matriarch of the family, has that role to impart the wisdom of their ancestors, to pass on the torch in order to keep human civilization going.

**CAST AWAY (2000)**

**Protagonist:** Chuck Noland (Tom Hanks) works for FedEx and survives a plane crash in the middle of the Pacific Ocean only to be stranded alone on an island. He creates a friend with a volleyball, Wilson (Himself), as a means to keep him somewhat sane until he is rescued. He tries to re-stablish his old life on the mainland only to find out everyone left him for dead, including his fiancé Kelly (Helen Hunt) who finds another man to marry. Chuck then goes on a journey to return a package to another woman in Texas which gives hope to a new life.

**Conflict:** From the beginning, Chuck has a conflict between his job and his personal life. He is a workaholic, and even (what some might consider) OCD about being on time. This comes into conflict when all that goes away being stranded on a desert island with no real deadlines other than trying to get food and not get sun burnt.

**Tone:** Slower-pace, character drama, quiet introspective and provocative on what we really value as opposed to made to value due to working/living in a fast-paced tech-dependent environment, showing the value of taking the time to enjoy our environment and having a balanced life.

**Theme:** Human ingenuity, surprise what people can do with very little in a very stressful/dangerous environment, and how that is juxtaposed surviving back in the modern world – what does one really need to survive? What do relationships really mean to us? And then there is how Chuck manipulates and craft things that wash up on shore to use things in interesting novel ways, or seeing things differently.

**Relatable Characters?** While Chuck does portray many people in our lives who are workaholics and obsessed being punctual, he does seem to evolve into a “Professor from Gilligan’s Island” being able to use his engineering mindset to take the FedEx packages that miraculously wash up on shore without damage to craft things to keep him surviving and sane and still able to track time.

**What’s beneficial to my Story?** Besides the basic survival aspect, and being creative with what few things are about to survive, I did key in on the difference between our modern world governed by time and technology, as opposed to living off the land and being patient.

What also stands out is another common theme of the Post-Apocalyptic genre of seeing items from our everyday life used in interesting novel ways like Book of Eli’s set design, or Mad Max’s costume & vehicle design. There is that notion of a future civilization finding artifacts from our time and wondering what they were used for, and their interpretation might be completely off much like how we guess how people used things thousands of years ago.

In my story, these people are far separated from our current society and located remotely from current populated areas that there won’t be physical things that connect to the past, but stories and traditions that were once forgotten and then seen as valuable to keep that link. I do see the antagonists using old technology to their advantage, again like Book of Eli, but it is our cultural heritage that goes beyond material possessions.

**LORD OF THE FLIES (1963)**

**Protagonist:** Ralph (James Aubrey) is a boy stranded on an island with other British boys who survive a plane crash being shot down during the war. He is accompanied by Piggy (Hugh Edwards), until the group turns against them.

**Conflict:** Aside from their basic survival (which they seem to handle without too many issues), there is the conflict with Ralph and Jack struggling for control of the group, there is Ralph’s alliance with Piggy who is the outcast, and there is the threat of the Beast (their version of the Boogie Man) and how best to handle it. Jack has the group behind them as they execute Piggy, and Ralph hides and is then rescued. Simon finds the truth of the Beast, but he dies on the way so the myth lives on which further fuels the group to do horrible things in defense. The ultimate conflict is civilization versus basic human/animal instinct.

**Tone:** Dark, dramatic, thought-provoking.

**Theme:** Dark view of what humanity does without rules and authority, how we go back to a tribal nature of banding together to defeat a common enemy, mob mentality. The good of the whole outweighs the value of an individual. But what is “good” and “evil” at its basic core with the absence of religion (or innocence of children)?

**Relatable Characters?** I remember talking about how these boys are relatable to adults reading this book in my high school literature class. That is to say that no matter what age, we would still de-evolve to our most basic instinct to survive much like our neo-lithic ancestors. In fact, the more “grown up” they try to act (Jack trying to take control, keep order, use weapons), the more paranoid they become and how Jack uses that to his advantage. As the quote goes, “Absolute power corrupts absolutely”

**What’s beneficial to my Story?** Besides the basic concept of exploring what is civilization and how that is different from our more “tribal” nature, I noticed what motivates the group to do what they do and how the motivations of the antagonist(s) of the story shouldn’t be cartoonishly fiendish or outright evil, but actually make sense yet be at odds with the protagonist.

The boys that align with Jack have that same motivation as the antagonists of my story (and many other Post-Apocalyptics) with the need for their own survival at any cost, even if that means to steal or destroy. But it’s not just an “us versus them” mentality. Also, the antagonists are not “evil” in the sense they are doing something bad just for the fun of it; they have a valid (albeit skewed) reason and then take it to extremes.

I also like the commentary of how we tend to form groups with those that think like us, and easily jump to conclusions to act reactively (leading to a dystopian future) rather than critically think and then behave accordingly logically (leading to a utopian future). Much like how terrorists use their propaganda to recruit and brainwash people to destroy themselves for however they think is a good cause, and then we have our own propaganda to either rally an opposition or temper our reaction based on what can really be done (which is debatable depending on which side is trying to do what).

Essentially, this story says that no matter the culture or religious beliefs we are all the same at our core, and will behave irrationally in crisis, and that might be at odds with other groups who are trying to remain rational and then forcibly brought into the crisis either by nature or by force.

**THE POSTMAN (1997)**

**Protagonist:** The Postman (Kevin Costner) is the hero with intelligence that brings hope to the remaining populous of United States. He is joined by Ford Lincoln Mercury (Larenz Tate) to carry on the torch.

**Conflict:** The Postman and his mule Bill wander the post-Apocalyptic landscape performing Shakespeare that inspires the villagers, but are kept down by the Holnists lead by General Bethlehem (Will Patton). The Holnists take in The Postman as a prisoner/warrior in training until he escapes and finds a pre-war vehicle to hide in which is a US Postal Van. He uses his acting skills to get into a town, but they take him as the real deal as hope of a new US Government, but he has to keep up the charade. The conflict with the Holnists continue as The Postman is pursued by Bethlehem and tries to squash the uprising of the people and a new militia of young Postal Carriers. It finally comes to a head with The Postman challenging the General and wins the day to save the US.

**Tone:** Post-tech, Neo-Western – more Western than Sci-Fi (more so than Firefly), American-patriotism, constant hope that something will change soon, slower pace with intermittent action punctuations

**Theme:** Prisoner playing along until he can escape and just the right moment. Value of humans despite their racial makeup or disabilities, Moses story (taken into prisoner, then becomes a savior), allusion to the American Revolution and slavery.

**Relatable Characters?** General Bethlehem was pretty far-fetched with the “eccentric evil overlord” personality who is educated enough to quote Shakespeare back to The Postman. Then there are the wacky villagers who have a messiah-complex. I guess Costner was “relatable” in that he gave a very subdued performance (as opposed to his Shakespeare performance), and he struggled by trying to keep up the various charades in every situation he gets into. In the end, his meekness is just a device to show how he has to overcome that to finally become a warrior and defeat Bethlehem.

**What’s beneficial to my Story?** I thought the use of the non-traditional Hollywood view of what is a “normal” human, ie. people of mixed race, physical/metal disabilities, was pretty refreshing in that you don’t normally see that with this genre even though they were subservient and only used to add a bit of diversity to the background.

I mainly liked the setting, being set in the Pacific Northwest in Oregon, and society has gone back to riding horses, living in log cabins, and using medieval tools. In fact, Bethlehem must have been inspired by the feudal system trying to recreate that to build his army and control the populace. My story has the antagonists, the Raiders, structured in a very similar fashion as without a central government you get warlords that take over their territory and demand people to provide them with food (or just end up ransacking a farm to take it).

More so, it was good to learn what not to do considering the dismal reviews it got (Siskel & Ebert gave it two thumbs down, and won the Razzie for Worst Picture). I learned that even if it is a society that has gone back to the Dark Ages and they are trying to comment on how people use ideology in crazy ways, there is still no excuse to have a glacial pace at a near 3 hours for all this to take place. It seemed that the first act was enough and just end it with him escaping to town to start the revolution, and we can take it from there.

**AFTER EARTH (2013)**

**Protagonist:** Cypher Raige (Will Smith) with his son Kitai (Jaden Smith) crash into a distant future Earth to wander and survive a planet that has survived without humans for aeons

**Conflict:** At the beginning, humans are in conflict with aliens who want to take over their colony world of Nova Prime, and Cypher is in conflict with himself until he can suppress the pheromones that the creatures can sense so they essentially can’t “see” them. As they escape, we see the conflict with Cypher and Kitai, as Kitai is not able to be a warrior and join the Rangers so there is the threat of shame he has to battle. Once they go on a father-son bonding trip, it’s ruined when they get sucked into a wormhole and crash on Earth where they have to constantly battle nature that has evolved without the threat of mankind. This provides the opportunity to test Kitai’s true strength as he learns to defend himself

**Tone:** Suspense, survival, adventure, CGI creature feature, sentimental family-friendly

**Theme:** Tech versus nature, is the Earth better off without us?, a son leaving the nest of his father (literally), conquering fear, the pains of growing up, the tests of becoming a man, experiencing loss, feeling guilty for the past and not able to do anything about it

**Relatable Characters?** It is hard to relate to humans in a distant future, but what we relate to is Cypher and Kitai’s father-son relationship and how that (and they) survive the wilderness. It is cheapened a bit by how they break out their very advanced technology to counteract very advanced wildlife and environments.

**What’s beneficial to my Story?**  Despite its terrible reviews (some maybe unwarranted, see below) and trying to study what not to do, I did think Kitai’s dream of his sister (killed by an alien Ursa creature) was very similar to my story. In my story, the protagonist has a dream of turning into a Thunderbird (from the Pacific NW Native stories) to seek revenge of the Raiders who took her children and ruined her home. It seems a pretty typical call to action, linking back to Hamlet with the ghost of his father seeking revenge, but I want to integrate it in a way that also connects my protagonist to her culture that provides the wisdom to build up courage and confront her foes.

Along that similar line, there is also the re-connection to nature (albeit in a more extreme way). Another reason why I am inspired by Pacific Northwest Native legends is that connection with nature and how it can teach us wisdom if we pay attention to it rather than the technology that we make that distracts us from that.

There is also the father-son relationship which I likened to my protagonist and the mentor, which is a woman of Native heritage and her grandmother that carries the wisdom of their culture, as well as the wisdom of learning the mistakes of our modern culture which created the situation they are in now.

I am wanting to do that without doing what has made this film and The Postman critically panned – slow pace and saccharine sentimentality to make bland family-friendly marketability. I will have to learn how to not sacrifice my true message for mass appeal, but in a way that still draws people in and keeps them engaged.

**BLADE RUNNER (1982)**

**Protagonist:** Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford) has to track down illegal Replicants, and comes across one called Rachael (Sean Young) that he initially tracks down and then tries to save.

**Conflict:** Deckard is conflicted by his job (to kill illegal replicants) and his acceptance they have worth and value like biological humans. There is also the conflict of Rachael trying to prove she is human even though she was manufactured, but just has the programming to think she is human,

**Tone:** Dingy but techy dystopian future, Neo-Noir, edgy, Cyberpunk (lots of dark polyester and neon lights), the future as imagined by current culture and views of the time

**Theme:** What is real humanity? Can it exist with something manufactured opposed to natural life? Will we be able to develop AI that passes the Touring test (where we can’t tell if they are real human or artificial)? Will our technology lead to a greater divide of the haves and have-nots?

**Relatable Characters?** Despite not being completely human, we can relate to the Replicants with their existential question that we ask ourselves, “What is ‘life’?” and what is the point of it. It builds the audiences connection with them, unlike the opposite with Terminator, so we want Deckard to save them and integrate with biological humans since they were used as tools for hard labor rather than as weapons.

**What’s beneficial to my Story?**  One thing I noticed with futuristic Sci-Fi stories is that they are inspired by the current events and technology of the moment it was created - hence why 2015 of Back to the Future 2 does not look like the actual 2015 of now. That was another bonus with Aeon Flux and with Blade Runner as they both took cues (despite still being infused with current time) from previous cultures of the 1920’s and 30’s respectively in terms of wardrobe and art design. Blade Runner has the inspiration of film noir detective films with harsh contrasts of shadows and light, much like the contrast of the elite utopian civilization amongst the grime of the largely poorer, grittier society.

While I plan to have a more dystopian future with no technology for my story, I liked the look and feel linking back to film noir, bringing the past and blending into the future. It has been done so much with the Sc-Fi genre, but my spin is inspired by a much older culture of Native American tribes of the Pacific Northwest who have been on this continent for thousands of years.

**Windwalker (1980)**

**Protagonist:** Windwalker (Trevor Howard) searches for one of his twin sons. He dies, while his other son Smiling Wolf (Nick Ramus) takes over for the tribe until they are attacked. He is saved by Windwalker who is brought back from the brink of death to save the family.

**Conflict:** Windwalker first has to deal with the loss of his family that was taken by raiders, then battle the elements as we wanders the wilderness for his lost son until he is brought to near death but saved by the Great Spirit. His son is confronted by Crow warriors and is attacked, but Windwalker is saved by the Great Spirit to help them. They re-group and confront the Crows only to find one of them as his missing son.

**Tone:** Adventure, romantic, flashbacks = history blending into the present

**Theme:** Survival, importance of the family unit, redemption, the thin line between life and death, deus ex machina

**Relatable Characters?** While Windwalker (both his older self and more youthful self) is played by a non-Native British man, he portrays Windwalker exactly as he is – a vulnerable elderly man braving the elements who depends on strength from beyond. He also speaks the Cheyenne language (like everyone else).

**What’s beneficial to my Story?** This is probably the closest to what I had in mind for my story in terms of a Native American person being the victim of raiders who killed/kidnapped their family and then set on a journey to get them back, but along the way has to learn the way of the land and seek spiritual guidance to eventually find their lost family members.

What was also interesting was seeing the similar and differences of the Cheyenne and Crow cultures which are considerably different from the Pacific Northwest tribes of my story.

I liked how this was very much an adventure film rather than a pure treatise on Native American culture; Windwalker’s grandsons provide that levity, humor, and hope despite the winter backdrop and constant pursuit of the Crow warriors.

**SUMMARY:**

Coming up with a “Sci-Fi Post-Apocalyptic Action/Thriller” genre with the script I am developing, I have noticed a few common themes with my research of similar films:

1. Action & CGI is king (unless you’re doing an indy) considering the storylines seem pretty similar of “modern civilization is gone, and then there is a hero, and on their journey they bring back a hope of humanity by overcoming obstacles and an evil dude who wants to keep the status quo going” with the philosophical kernel of Plato’s Cave allegory on the journey to true enlightenment and wisdom.
2. Traditionally the protagonist is a muscular white dude, but trends are changing to a more diverse hero (Book of Eli, Aeon Flux). What I want is a fresh take on the genre with real people rather than the traditional action dude.
3. This genre seems to be great escapism in terms of action and special effects, but I want to use it as a warning of an actual reality of our future (due to climate change) rather than a supernatural zombie attack or all-out nuclear annihilation (stemming from 1950’s Cold War propaganda).
4. Therefore, I like my idea of a more diverse and realistic theme to show a more realistic future, and features a more diverse cast, but at the same time provide an action-packed sequence that entertains and thrills and keeps the audience involved.
5. Another source of inspirational story telling that the Film Connection should consider are video games, now that they are more like “choose your own adventure” films with fully voiced characters and realistic animation. Some games I have been inspired by: Minecraft (survival, living off the land), SOMA (thriller/suspense post-apocalypse), and Fallout 4 (retro-future post-nuclear survival)