



## Red Alert (RosettaBooks into Film)

*Peter Bryant*

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Peter Bryant's 1958 novel *Red Alert* tells the terrifying tale of just how close to nuclear destruction the world can be. Here, we are faced with the worst possible of all worst-case scenarios in the Cold War; an American general loses his reason and orders a full-scale nuclear attack on the Soviet Union. Air Force Brigadier General Quinten is a dying man suffering from the paranoid delusion that he can make the world a better place by setting in motion this catastrophic attack with Strategic Air Command bombers armed with nuclear weapons.

Once they get wind of it, the President of the United States and his advisors work frantically in all efforts to stop the attack. They order the American bombers shot down, and they succeed - all but with one frightening exception - a lone bomber called the "Alabama Angel" escapes destruction. The crew of the Angel ignore the President's orders and continue on with their deadly mission.

This book was originally published in the U.K. under the title *Two Hours to Doom* (written by Peter Bryant, the penname of writer Peter George). This intricately plotted and well-thought out novel conjures the vision of apocalyptic threat of nuclear war and illustrates just how absurdly easy such an attack can be triggered.

A virtual genre of such fiction sprang up in the late 1950s, led by Nevil Shute's *On the Beach*, of which *Red Alert* was among the earliest and finest examples. Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler's later bestseller, *Fail Safe*, so closely resembled *Red Alert* in premise and tone that George sued on plagiarism charges and actually won an out-of-court settlement. Both novels would inspire very different films that were both released in 1964.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peter Bryant was the pen-name of author Peter George. George's reputation rests largely on his novel *Red Alert* and the screenplay of the film that it inspired, *Dr. Strangelove or How I Learned to Stop Worrying*, which George co-wrote with Stanley Kubrick and Terry Southern. A pessimistic Englishman deeply committed to the campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the 1950s, George has previously served in the Royal Air Force. He drew on this first-hand knowledge of the new age of nuclear defense and felt compelled to publish under a pseudonym. With the interest in such stories peaking around the time of Stanley Kramer's film version of *On the Beach* in 1959, the film rights to *Red Alert* were sold that same year but only to be handed off from producer to producer until Stanley Kubrick bought the rights in 1962, reportedly for as little as \$3,500.

In the beginning, George collaborated with Kubrick on writing the film's script; Terry Southern's involvement and satirical overhaul would come later. Apparently, George disliked the ironic tone of Kubrick's film, though he wrote a new novelization of it that he directed to the director.

For the rest of his life, the threat of nuclear catastrophe continued to haunt George. He later wrote about life after nuclear war in a book entitled *Commander-I* and was at work on a novel entitled *Nuclear Survivors* when he ultimately committed suicide in 1966.

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