

## The Sum of All Fears



Allen Moon

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*The Sum of All Fears* stars Ben Affleck as Jack Ryan, Morgan Freeman as William Cabbot, James Cromwell as President Fowler, and Ciaran Hinds as President Nemerov. Ben Affleck delivers an acceptable performance as Jack Ryan, a C.I.A. analyst who gets wrapped up in an international crisis between the United States and Russia. Morgan Freeman plays the Director of the C.I.A. and, as always, plays his role well. James Cromwell plays the President of the United States. Cromwell plays the president as a stern man who is determined to present the United States as a strong super power. Cromwell's Russian counter part is played by Ciaran Hinds, who plays the Russian President quite well. Hinds exudes the cold, stern persona of a stereotypical Russian higher-up quite well. Overall, the acting in *The Sum of All Fears* is quite pleasant.

*The Sum of All Fears* is developed in a piecemeal fashion as several plot lines are explored. The formula is not new, but works successfully to keep the viewer interested. The movie opens with the crash of an Israeli jet in 1973. The jet was carrying a nuclear bomb that is lost in the sands of the Golan in Syria. Twenty-nine years pass, and the bomb is randomly discovered by a couple of local men. They are not quite sure what they have found, but know that someone may want to buy it.

Meanwhile, Ryan and Cabbot are sent to Russia to inspect a nuclear decommission facility. While touring the facilities, Ryan discovers that three of the Russian scientists are missing. It turns out that the three scientists missing together possess the knowledge needed to

construct a nuclear bomb. Ryan and Cabbot's suspicions are aroused, but the Russians claim they are not missing but simply not present for various reasons.

The bomb that the men found in the Golan is later bought by a mysterious man. The man knows that the bomb is nuclear, but tells the men it is worthless. He offers them \$400 for their trouble. This man then sells the nuclear bomb to a man named Dressler, who is a part of a new, world wide, but secret, Nazi organization. Dressler desires to see the United States and Russia to tear themselves apart. To accomplish this goal, he plots to detonate the nuclear bomb in the United States and have it appear as if the Russians were behind it.

The story is further complicated by the death of the Russian President. Nemerov then becomes the new President of Russia. This concerns the United States, because they are not sure about his intentions. Specifically, the United States fears that he may be a "hard liner" who will use the military aggressively. Certain events unfold that appear to confirm their suspicions, including a chemical attack by Russia against Chechnya. However, Nemerov did not order the attack. Some of his generals issued the attack on their own. Nemerov nonetheless claims responsibility for the attack to maintain the illusion that he has control over his military forces. In response, President Fowler sends in U.S. troops to be peace keepers. The U.S. fears that the extreme tension that exists between the U.S. and Russia may result in military action from the Russians.

Dressler's plans are set in motion after the missing Russian scientists finish reconstructing the nuclear bomb. Dressler arranges for the bomb to be shipped into the United States and actually detonates the bomb at a football game in Baltimore, Maryland. Panic then ensues as President Fowler suspects the Russians were behind the attack. President Nemerov

vehemently denies any involvement, but elevates Russia's alert status and mobilizes Russia's military forces.

Tensions are high and both sides are on the verge of launching full nuclear attacks when Ryan is able to prove that the plutonium used in the bomb is actually American plutonium and that the Russians could not have created the bomb. However, Ryan has difficulty in reaching President Fowler to give him this important information. In a last minute effort, Ryan is able to instead contact the President Nemerov. He informs Nemerov that he knows they did not detonate the bomb and to back his forces down. Nemerov reluctantly does stand his forces down, which encourages President Fowler to do the same. Disaster is averted, and the two countries sign a peace accord.

As a last bit of justice, the bad guys get it in the end. Both Dressler and the man who sold the bomb to him are eliminated by the Russian and United States Government respectively. I found it odd that they did not apprehend these men and try them before the public, but instead eliminated them in secret.

Overall, *The Sum of All Fears* is an enjoyable movie that provides a look, though exaggerated, at how two super powers could react in the event of a suspected attack. The movie, in my estimation, overplays the relationship that currently exists between Russia and the United States. The tension between the two countries more closely resembles the relationship that existed during the Cold War than it does the relationship that exists today. Furthermore, the way the interaction between the President and his cabinet is portrayed as an order for nuclear attack is being issued is, I hope, depicted inaccurately. President Fowler's Secretary of State has doubts about launching the attack but concedes as President Fowler eggs him on. The decision to attack



is made out of anger, and not reason. Hopefully such orders would be given with more certainty than is exhibited in the movie.

Theatrically, the lighting and music is used to increase the tension that is felt throughout the movie. For example, the decisions to use nuclear weapons are made by small groups of men in darkened rooms. Likewise, the music has been appropriately selected to convey the tension and drama that is being played out on the screen. There was nothing particular special about the lighting or music, but it did blend nicely into the movie.

This movie does not directly discuss or point out legal issues that could arise under the events that unfold during the movie. Nonetheless, the events bring to mind several questions including: what agency is in control in the event of a nuclear attack on United States soil and what other agencies will be involved? The movie vaguely mentions R.A.T., which is the Radiation Assessment Team. It seems that they are in command of the area that was attacked, but very little is mentioned about what is being carried out by the various agencies. There is no mention of the F.B.I., which would likely have a great deal of involvement in the event of such an attack. The movie focuses more on the United States' military response, than on the domestic response.

Biological/biodefense issues are also absent from this movie. The Russians do attack Chechnya with a chemical nerve gas, but no biological weapons are used. The result is similar, however, in that fear is pressed upon the people of Chechnya and the United States is compelled to act in the face of such an atrocity. This seems to suggest that there is an obligation for countries throughout the world to help police those who would use biological and chemical weapons. Additionally, a nuclear attack is somewhat similar to biological attack. Mass panic is created by the event, and the area must be evacuated. This creates a very complex logistical

scenario that must be coordinated quickly. In the event of a biological attack, similar issues are presented. However, a biological attack is more difficult to contend with because of its potential subtleness. It may not be known that such an attack has been initiated until people start exhibiting symptoms. By that time, hundreds or thousands could be infected. Such an attack demands some sort of quarantine to protect the rest of the country from infection.

Overall, I give this movie a 3.5 out of 5. The movie is enjoyable and contains no real flaws. On legal issues, I have to give this movie 2  out of 5 as legal issues are not really discussed in this movie. However, as mentioned above, the movie does raise many questions about how our government would respond in the event of such an attack. As a biological/biodefense movie I have to give this movie 2  out of 5. No biological issues are presented, but the chemical attack that is carried out on Chechnya does bring to mind what kind of actions would be necessary in the event of a biological attack being carried out.