INTRODUCTION

Text on Screen
The producers would like to acknowledge the Boon Wurrung and Woi Wurrung (Wurundjeri) peoples of the Kulin Nation as the traditional owners of the land on which Television Event was produced and pay respect to their elders, past, present and emerging.

[Title Screen]

Archival Clip
- [Woman] I, for one, felt that it was just devastating. The bleakness and the... It was an eerie... quality, you know? It was sort of like every horror story you've ever read rolled into one story.
- [Child] If there was a nuclear war, I mean, more than half of the people will probably just die right away, and that's what I want to happen. I don't want to survive.

Clip from The Day After
- (screaming)
- You can't see it, but it's here! All around us!

Archival Clip
- [Teen] I feel rather nauseous now. Had to leave the room.

Nicholas Meyer
For those who haven't seen it, it's just all about the bunch of people in the Midwest going about their business until they get nuked. Nuclear war. The most devastating possibility that has ever confronted the human race, short of climate change. And yet so terrifying that no one can bear to think about it. So how do you get regular people to watch? And I thought, well, maybe this is like a back door into people's consciousness, the fact that it was a TV movie. This was unprecedented. Nobody had ever seen anything close to this... on network television.

[Opening Credits]

ABC 1980 Fall Season Promo
- [Singing] We're gonna make this / A special year / A time for laughter / A time for cheer / Come on and join us / We're making friends across the whole land / Let's join hands / We're one big family / It could become our league / Sing out it's you and me / And ABC
WHAT IF?

Brandon Stoddard
In my early days at ABC, I was in charge of their movie department, but I had never made a movie in my life. We'll try this. We'll try movie of the week. We'll try then and we'll try that. And we had not a clue what we were doing.

ABC Promo
- [Announcer] A world of sights and sounds. Each week, ABC will present the world premiere of an original motion picture produced especially for the movie of the week. Herschel Bernardi is a recently widowed accountant.
- I'm not gonna marry any woman.
- What's so bad about getting married?
- [Announcer] But I Don't Want to Get Married
- My son's not a freak!
- I just want to be like a man.

Brandon Stoddard
I probably have done 200 television movies and, I don't know, 25 miniseries. But I felt that, if you're privileged enough to be involved with a medium that's capable of reaching millions of people, you have a responsibility to the audience but also to yourself. Because eventually you're gonna wake up at 40 years old, and if it's all been bullshit and nothing and crap, you're gonna be a very upset human being. I wanted to do new, unique stuff that was about something, that has meaning, that has important. It's very hard to understand now what that period was like.

News Clip
- Hi. Hold out your arms now. That's a good girl.
- [Reporter] They check the children for radio activity contamination that could lead to horrors not meant for children: loss of hair, ulcers, hemorrhages, death. It was a nuclear evacuation drill.

Brandon Stoddard
At the time, 75% of people in the United States thought there would be nuclear war within the next 10 years. They were scared, very, very scared.

Nicholas Meyer
During the '80s, we had enough nuclear weapons between America and Russia to kill every man, woman and child on the face of the Earth 54 times over. 54 times over!

Brandon Stoddard
The fear paralyzed people. They'd taken the fear and shoved it back on a shelf in the back of their minds, because they simply didn't want to worry about it. I thought, how do you bring this forward and make people decide for themselves what they were gonna do about it?
Brandon Stoddard (archival clip from the 1980s)
- There are all sorts of movies that are made which are called "what if?" movies.

Brandon Stoddard
So I talked to a guy who worked for me. I said, "I got an idea. How about like nuclear bomb? Like, a story of a bunch of people in the middle, Midwest in the United States, before, after and during a nuclear attack?" And he said, "What? Are you out of your mind?" And I said, "No, no. I mean, we could do it." And he said, "Brandon, no one's gonna watch that."

Stu Samuels
"The Day After" was in a category all by itself. Because when you're going out on a limb with something like that... When you put a show like this into someone's home... you're gonna hurt some people. You're going to hurt some people. You're going to make people distraught. You're going to do it to young people. You're going to do it to older people who have medical conditions. It's a very dangerous prospect to put something like this on the air. You know, our business was dependent upon advertising revenue. And advertisers hate controversy. So if it was controversial, that was an additional element which gave you pause. Well, do we really want to develop that script?

Brandon Stoddard
"The Day After" would be extraordinarily controversial. But I thought we should do this.

Stu Samuels
What we didn't know was whether we could get it made. And then we didn't know if we could get it on the air. But we knew that, if we could get it on the air, we would absolutely have a major television event. What he wanted from me was: "Find us a writer."

SILENCE IN HEAVEN

Ed Hume
I was approached by ABC in a very straightforward fashion. They asked if I'd be interested in doing this project. They said, "Would you be interested in writing a piece about nuclear war?" It was that simple, that direct. And I said yes. It was like the dream assignment for me.

Ed Hume (archival clip from the 1980s)
- I had a long sympathy with disarmament movement, which I don't think ABC was aware of, but I saw it as a very fortunate coincidence of the right person at the right time.
- [Interviewer] Did you make them aware of what you were thinking?
- No.

Ed Hume
I did expect that they'd have a distinct point of view. But they throw it right back at me: how would I do it? I said I would not make it a political film, not about the Soviets and the Americans.
We will not know who to blame. It's not a question of blaming one side or the other, but it's the nuclear arsenal itself that's the problem. No one had made a film like that before. I was very excited about writing this script. I don't think I've ever written anything faster.

**Stu Samuels**
I only remember one draft. And it was... killer. But the title that Ed Hume put on his script was "A Silence in Heaven". You know. I'm in Brandon's office, and he said to me, "We're gonna need a title." I said, "No kidding". "A Silence in Heaven". It could have meant anything. It's poetic... but it doesn't give you a universal metaphor. I was in the hallway, going from his office to my office, when I thought most of this thing is about the aftermath of a nuclear war. And I just suddenly thought of the words "the day after", did a U-turn... "How about 'The Day After'?" He lit up. That was it. Everybody just loved it.

**Ed Hume (archival clip from the 1980s)**
- No.

**Ed Hume**
I was very hurt. I wasn't even told about it. It simply appeared on a later draft, "The Day After". I don't even know what that means.

**Stu Samuels**
We're doing a nuclear war movie called "The Day After". You know what it's about. You don't have to see a trailer. All I have to do is tell you it's a nuclear war movie, it's called "The Day After". That's how you sell a television movie.

**WHO YOU REALLY ARE**

**Stu Samuels**
Brandon and I had both had our own joyful experiences with Bob Papazian. I honestly don't remember ever discussing another producer.

**Bob Papazian**
I read the script as fast as I could. I called Brandon up immediately. I said, "Are you sure you're going to make this movie?" At that point in time, I was producing one movie after the next for the networks. We were going along like gangbusters. The producers in those days controlled their own destiny. So they were the boss. Television was the producers' medium. Brandon Stoddard said, "I'd like to have you produce 'The Day After'." And I said I didn't want to waste a good two and a half years on this project. I didn't think "The Day After" was gonna be aired. He said:

**Brandon Stoddard (archival clip from the 1980s)**
- It's gonna go on the air.
Bob Papazian
So then I said, "Great. Let's get started." Brandon wanted prestige, quality, a step above the norm. You know, bring me a really high-end director.

Clip from Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan
- There she is! There she is.

Nicholas Meyer
I was a successful Hollywood director. Oscar nomination, lots of girls. It was all good. I have to emphasize I'm not a person who walked around thinking about nuclear war all the time. Who wants to do that?

Stu Samuels
We were going for the biggest ratings we could possibly get. Our primary goal was not to save the world. At least mine wasn't.

Nicholas Meyer
Ronald Reagan came to power, and I was appalled, 'cause I thought he was a jerk. What Reagan brought to the table was the notion of a winnable nuclear war. It was survivable. He thought that. He thought a lot of nutty things. I was thinking, if I just made a movie showing what nuclear war was, that I could unseat Ronald Reagan when he ran for reelection. And here was Hollywood giving me a chance to put my work in the service of my beliefs. I also was being psychoanalyzed at the time. So I'm lying on the couch... and trying to... rationalize my way out of doing this... very grim, depressing... movie. And my analyst said very quietly, "Well I think this is where we find out who you really are." And I think, "Fuck. Now I'm gonna have to do this movie."

EVERYDAY PEOPLE

Ed Hume
In the Midwest, there are many missile silos planted in the ground. In beautiful farmland, there'd be a missile silo. That's a very ironic combination: farmers and nukes. What we identify as pure and wholesome and American have the seeds of death in it. It sounds horrible, but that's the reality, and it still is.

Bob Papazian
We scouted all of Kansas, and we zeroed in on Lawrence, which is only a few miles outside of Kansas City. And it happens to be at the crosshairs of the United States, and that's why Ed put it in the script.

Stephanie Austin
Bob asked me if I would come onboard as, I don't know what my title was. I don't even know if I had one. Anything that came up was my job. I started doing research, and it was shocking to me that, in between Kansas City and Lawrence, you couldn't fly over any of that without seeing...
dozens of these missile silos. And I thought it wouldn't be a good idea to be around here if there was ever an event. Like, this is a target. I went to several Air Force bases and got access to their libraries. I believe I one of the first people to get access to all of the nuclear test footage. The truth is so brutal. So how can we do this for family audiences?

Bob Papazian
And Brandon, he kept insisting make the movie real, make it as real as possible.

News Clips
- [Reporter] This is a normal soybean crop. But on this farm near Lawrence, it's about the only normal thing you'll see. The reason? Hollywood came to the country. ABC Television is filming a four-hour special on the effects of a nuclear war. The Hollywood folks will require 24 days of shooting near Lawrence, and it should add over a million dollars to the Lawrence economy.
- [Reporter] A peaceful and prosperous community of 50,000 was forced to contemplate the idea of nuclear destruction, when television staged its tragedy here. It was perfect casting. Main Street America... local farmers, and people from the university, all that's decent in the American dream.
- [Reporter] The producers of "The Day After" have called upon the people in the Kansas City area to participate in the film.

Jack Wright
At Kansas University, I was Director of Theatre, and they came to me and asked me if I would be willing to consider being a local casting director for the movie. And I said, "Okay." Naively.

News Clip
- [Reporter] About 40% of the speaking parts are cast with local men, women, and children.

Ellen Moore
I remember seeing all these huge trucks. They showed me my trailer, and this trailer has my name on it, you know? That's incredible. Lawrence is a friendly, warm place. And all of a sudden there was this shift in tone that was very palpable. We surrendered our innocence. We surrendered that to this larger goal. We were gonna do something very serious.

Bob Papazian (archival clip from the 1980s)
- We wanted to have everyday people. We didn't want to have recognizable stars, because the story really is the star, and we didn't want to neutralize that at all.

News Clip
- [Reporter] The most recognizable member of the cast is Academy Award-winning actor Jason Robards.

Nicholas Meyer
You know, I bumped into him on an airplane. And so, you know, trade chitchat: "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, I'm making a movie about nuclear war." And I thought, "There's no agents around. We're at 36,000 feet." So I said, "You want to be in it?" And he said, "Beats signing
petitions." You know, luckily for me, no one had a conniption fit when I told them I had just hired the leading man on a TWA flight.

**Clip from The Iceman Cometh**
- There is no yesterday or tomorrow to worry about! You won't give a damn what you are anymore!

**Nicholas Meyer**
But I didn't want Jason Robards doing "Iceman Cometh". I didn't want that. I just wanted invisible actors. I didn't want people talking about how well-executed it was or how cool the special effects were. These were all cop-outs. I wanted to make it like a public service announcement.

**Public Service Announcement**
- Only you can prevent forest fires.

**Nicholas Meyer**
Only you can prevent forest fires. And I didn't want you talking about how cute Smokey the Bear was.

**Public Service Announcement**
- Only you.

**Nicholas Meyer**
You had to get around the paradox, which is no one wants to think about nuclear war. They'd rather think about anything than think about it. I just wanted the it.

**NOTES, NOTES, NOTES**

**Stephanie Austin**
Nick had no idea what it's like to work for a network. I mean, soon enough he did, because they slam you right away. It's like notes, notes, notes, notes, notes, notes, notes.

**Ellen Moore**
We shot the scene that was a little bit risqué, in which I steal the diaphragm of my older sister.

**Clip from The Day After**
- Joleen! Joleen, you give that back to me!

**Ellen Moore**
But I don't know what that is. I knew that the idea was she wanted to get this object from me that I was keeping from her.
Bob Papazian
I got a phone call from ABC.

Nicholas Meyer
Bob taps me on the shoulder at dailies and says, "They want to talk to you." And an executive goes, "Nick, Nick! What are you doing?" And I go, "What do you mean?" And he says, "Well, you filmed the scene with the diaphragm and the birth control and the this and the that!"

Bob Papazian
"Watch this, don't do that, make sure he does this." "Okay, okay." I had a ton of phone calls.

Nicholas Meyer
The next day, I'm called to the phone again. And it's like, "Nick, Nick, listen. This is your movie. You make it the way you want. But I have to tell you, as a fiduciary executive of the corporation, that those scenes are not going to be in the finished film." I said, "Fine, you've told me." P.S., they're all in the finished film.

FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

Bob Papazian
We filmed a big scene in the field house. That was born out of walking around the university. I said, "Nick, Nick, come here. I want to show you." And I said, "Remember 'Gone With the Wind'? Where the camera lifts up, and we see thousands of people." And he says, "Done."

Jack Wright
With local casting, they said now we'll probably need 1,500 people and maybe 200 people the next day. And I'm thinking, "Whoa."

David Longhurst
It was just like, my God, look at this! Look at that makeup! Look at those people! Wow, that's pretty cool.

Archival Clip
- Well, it's not my most glamorous role.
- We decided it'd be a once-in-a-lifetime deal that, in 10 years, we'd tell all the friends that we were in a movie.
- I'm just really excited about it. I just think it's fun.
- We missed school today and came down here at six o'clock this morning, and here I am.

Jack Wright
We'd have a raffle after the filming was over for 1,500 people, and they would give away televisions and things like that, to not only draw them to the film, but we had to keep people. My wife said that she'd never seen me quite so happy.
Archival Clip
- [Interviewer] Why are you doing this?
- ’Cause I wanted to see what things would look like if something like this actually happened. And just to get an idea of how it would actually go. And it really scares me.

Archival Clip
- [Ronald Reagan] Many Americans have become frightened. And let me say, fear of the unknown is entirely understandable.

News Clip
- [Reporter] The director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency said Mr. Reagan needs no reminders of the consequences of war.
- [Ken Adelman] The president realizes very well the horrors of nuclear war.

Ken Adelman
When I was in the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, I don’t remember spending lots of times on the horror of nuclear weapons. I knew that logically. I didn’t have to be convinced of it emotionally. And my job was to do everything I could to make sure that the day after never happened.

Archival Clip
- [Ronald Reagan] The most threatening of these forces are the land-based missiles which the Soviet Union now has aimed at Europe, the Middle East and Asia. If my defense proposals are passed, the blue line is the United States.

Ken Adelman
It was always important for Ronald Reagan to communicate with the American people. But the fact was the anti-nuclear approach had far more appeal than his approach of peace through strength. In June of 1982, there was an enormous protest in Central Park. I think it was bigger than any protest during the Vietnam War.

Archival Clip
- What would you guess?
- I have no idea. A lot of people. I’d say so far about 178,000.
- Oh, come on! 178,000!
- Are you calling me a liar?
- [Edward Markey] One million people! The largest single demonstration in the history of this country! Do you think that Ronald Reagan is gonna freeze the arms race?
- [Crowd] No!

Ken Adelman
There was fear of Ronald Reagan. That he was the cowboy from the West... shooting his pistols in the air and would use nuclear weapons to show that he was tough.
Clip from *The Day After*
- Will the Russians advance straight from the Rhine and defy NATO's declared policy of defense by all means, including the use of tactical nuclear weapons.

**Stephanie Austin**
The project reflects what was going on in the country.

Clip from *The Day After*
- The president tonight declared all United States military personnel on worldwide stage-two alert.

**Stephanie Austin**
Even though there was a lot of stuff on the news, I think for many people, "I gotta go to work tomorrow. I gotta go there. I gotta get gas for my car. I need to babysit." You know, the normal things of life... can be used as a shield when one has to face tremendous conflict going on.

Clip from *The Day After*
- Aimed at finding ways to defuse the heightening crisis in Berlin.
- My God, it's 1962 all over again.

**THAT'S HOW IT WAS**

**Jack Wright**
I knew early on that this was going to be a good film. Everybody was working so hard every single day. Every scene had such integrity to it. And that's what gave me pride, the feeling that, God, that we're doing good work here. The debris was brought in in trucks. Making downtown Lawrence look like the Holocaust had happened. It was a powder kind of ash that was all over everything. What was once a side of a building is now ash, and everybody had it all over them. You could taste it in your mouth. You could feel it. It was very powerful. We moved right from this scene, it was just a couple of days later, down under the bridge we had tent city.

**Bob Papazian**
The production designer was on a bridge, and he was sketching. A Japanese woman walked up and looked at his sketch, and she said, "That's how it was." Meaning that's how it was in Hiroshima.

Clip from *The Day After*
- Can you give me a hand?
- We're running out of body bags, and we're using trash can liners instead.

**Stephanie Austin**
I look at that, and I feel almost sick to my stomach. It's just hopeless. It's hopeless.
Clip from *The Day After*
- That's it. No more.
- What do you mean, no more?

**Nicholas Meyer**
I think the only way that I got through this movie was to concentrate on the task of making the movie and not to think about nuclear stuff. There was a lot of sick humor. It was like, well, what if we had a real nuclear war while we were making the movie? Would that be cool or what? I mean, just think of the footage.

**Archival Clip**
- And cut.
- Okay. We still didn't get the whole line, and the three-shot was a different configuration.
- But otherwise, how was it?
- Perfect.

**Ellen Moore**
For someone who's 11 years old, it was deeply emotional. My mom had to tell me that, if there was a nuclear war, it wasn't just unfortunate; it was the end.

Clip from *The Day After*
- There's nothing wrong out here. It's a beautiful day.
- It only looks that way!

**Ellen Moore**
It was hard for me as a young person to understand that we had the ability to destroy ourselves totally. It takes away your faith in adults, frankly. That's why we decided to tell this story, with hopes of getting the attention of the world.

**IT’S A MIRACLE**

**Stu Samuels**
Everyone, people in the network, people outside the network, other networks, everybody was saying, are you seriously gonna do this? You're gonna put a nuclear war on television? We knew that it was going to absolutely shake the rafters. It had to. How could it not?

**ABC Promo**
- [Announcer] The living may be better off dead. The Day After.

**Bob Papazian**
We were going into post-production, which is far more complicated. I mean, all our special effects were handmade. There wasn’t any CGI then.
Nicholas Meyer
I think sometimes that movies are like souffles. They either rise or they don't. My editor, William Dornisch, who had also cut "Star Trek II", he had a company called Miracle Pictures, and their sobriquet was, "If it's a good picture, it's a Miracle."

Walton Dornisch
There wasn't a frame in between the time when Nick asked would you do "The Day After" and my father saying yes. My father was mythic in my life, so I adored the idea of working with him.

Nicholas Meyer
I had never edited a movie for television before.

Walton Dornisch
The network hands you a format. Your first commercial break is gonna be at 20 minutes. Your next break is on the half hour.

Commercial Montage
- How do I feel?
- Just like a chocolate shake.
- And it tastes...
- Miserable.

Nicholas Meyer
If the thing was too terrible, people were gonna click it off, so you had to sort of walk a fine line.

Clip from The Day After
- Joleen, what are you doin' out here?

Walton Dornisch
It was, how do we make this the most gut wrenching thing it can be? And then let's go to lunch. And we come back, and we do it for another five hours. It was just great.

Bob Papazian
But the time was shortening up. One of the things that Stephanie was responsible for was the coordination of the visual effects. And she did a ton of research, and I kept hammering, "The mushroom. We need the mushroom cloud."

Stephanie Austin
We were trying lots and lots and lots of different things every single day.

Bob Papazian
And we weren't getting anything that really worked. So one day the visual effects guy called me up. He says, "I think we came up with something." And he had a roll, and we put on the Moviola,
and I went, "Ah!" That's beautiful!" I said, "How'd you do that?" He says, "Well, we were sitting in the lunchroom and saw somebody drinking some ice tea, and they put some cream in it, and the cream went to the bottom, and it exploded and came back up." He says, "So we filmed it. Then we flipped it upside down." I said, "Son of a gun. Now that's brilliant." We just needed to add a little bit of fire into it. You know, the crazy stuff that makes it real.

PANIC EVERYWHERE

Stu Samuels
The national television press came to Los Angeles for a screening. Brandon asked me to do the press conference with him. We did not sell the film. We were on defense the whole time. "What are you people doing? Why are you scaring the hell out of America?" Just one after another.

Archival Clip
- [Interviewer] Does the film take a political stand?
- [Nicholas Meyer] Um... Yeah. The film says that nuclear war is bad for you, and that if a nuclear bomb goes off, it's gonna ruin your entire day.

Nicholas Meyer
Before the movie got on the air, the New York Post was asking, "Why is Nicholas Meyer doing Yuri Andropov's job?" Yuri Andropov at that point being the Soviet premier. At that time, it was a big deal to be called the traitor.

Archival Clip
- [Ronald Reagan] There is sin and evil in the world, and we're enjoined by scripture and the Lord Jesus to oppose it with all our might. I urge you to beware the temptation of blithely declaring yourselves above it all, to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of evil empire, to simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil.

Ken Adelman
1983 was the coldest part of the Cold War, or at least since the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Archival Clip
- [Ronald Reagan] I’m coming before you tonight about the attack by the Soviet Union against 269 innocent men, women and children aboard an unarmed Korean passenger plane.

Ken Adelman
Four months after I took office, the Soviets walked out of the arms control talks, protesting the deployment of missiles by NATO countries, especially the United States. And so, with all this real tension going on in the world, I was very dismissive of "The Day After". But then, as time went on, it seemed like it was gonna be a bigger and bigger deal.
News Clips
- [Anchor] Rarely has a television program made by the entertainment division of any company caused such a controversy, even before being shown in public.
- [Reporter] The controversy surrounding the film spread across the country like a nuclear reaction.
- [Protester] This is human blood upon the pillars of the White House, representing the blood of the children that is being spilled as we pursue an insane nuclear arms policy!

Brandon Stoddard
The Left thought "The Day After" was the greatest thing that ever happened in the history of the world, and they went to come up and drop to their knees and say, "Oh, you're the most wonderful person. You're going to save the world." And that was as wacky as the Right.

News Clip
- [Protester] And it's our right as Americans to stand up for America and for the free world against communism!

Brandon Stoddard
They came unbelievably strong in doing everything they could to stop it from going on the air. That was a living terror in terms of all the problems from a business standpoint, but also, I mean, I was getting threats on my life. There would be a piece of paper on my car, and I'd pick it up, and it would say this could have been a bomb.

News Clip
- [Brandon Stoddard] We tried to keep all discussion on the left-right out of this movie. The only thing that we really deal with in this movie is what it's like.
- [Jerry Falwell] One can think of no other subject from foreign policy to the economy that a network would dare to present in such a one-dimensional manner.
- [Reporter] ABC wouldn't tell us what major companies, if any, bought time in "The Day After".

Brandon Stoddard
You know, it's not exactly a perfect advertising climate for Pepsi-Cola. We're selling it to Orville Redenbacher. He bought some stuff for popcorn.

Commercial
- It's delicious!
- That fits our budget!

Brandon Stoddard
But we did not remotely sell out.

Stu Samuels
Not only could they not sell two nights, they weren't gonna be able to sell one night.
Bob Papazian
ABC took a big step, and said, okay, let's just do it in one night, from 8:00 to 11:00. Right there, that was a first. That's three hours of primetime that they weren't gonna get paid for.

News Clip
- [Interviewer] If there was not a spot sold in this, would you go ahead and air it?
- [Interviewer] Swallow the $7 million?
- [Brandon Stoddard] It's going to go on the air.

Brandon Stoddard
It was panic everywhere.

Bob Papazian
The picture is almost ready. I got a phone call telling me to send it to the White House. And I said, "Excuse me?"

Brandon Stoddard
And I was called by the head of legal department. He said, "Brandon, listen. I just took one of the copies of "The Day After". I sat down with some friends in Washington. But don't worry about it."

Mark Weinberg
The Reagans saw of variety of films at Camp David. They liked a lot of films, but none more than those that were entertaining and fun and maybe a little bit humorous.

Clip from Back to the Future
- I'm gonna read your thoughts!

Mark Weinberg
If you're gonna be the President of the United States, you need to know what the people are seeing and thinking and reacting to. Once the movie began, the Reagans' eyes stayed on that screen until the movie ended, because they would really study that movie. They also liked big, fat, red-blooded American stories like "Top Gun", where the military was glamorized and the Americans won and the good guys triumph. And so, when he saw "The Day After", it was a little too real.

Clip from The Day After
- Start decontaminating the soil and plan next spring's planting.
- Can you explain what you mean by scraping off the top layers of my topsoil?
- Exactly that, Jim. You just take the top four or five inches of your topsoil.
- Yeah? And do what with it? We're talking 150, maybe 200 acres a man in here.
- That's right.
- Suppose you find a hole where you can drop all this dead dirt. What kind of topsoil is that gonna leave you for growing anything? Where'd you find out all this information, John, all this good advice, out of some government pamphlet?

News Clip
- [Reporter] Though there was no immediate response from the president, White House aides acknowledge the film will have a devastating impact on the American public. The movie includes a scene with a Reagan-like presidential radio address to the nation.

Clip from The Day After
- [President] My fellow Americans...

News Clip
- [Reporter] And what worries officials here is that the American people might identify the horrors of nuclear war with President Reagan himself, a lasting image that would be difficult to erase.

Clip from The Day After
- [President] God bless you all.
- That's it? That's all he's got to say?

Ken Adelman
We were summoned to the White House. There were representatives of the Pentagon, the CIA, the State Department, the Arms Control Agency, USIA, National Security Council, their general White House staff. I think that was about it. As I remember, our whole focus was how to react to the film and not how to reform the film. The point of it was what do we do before the movie comes out to minimize the damage? So our message was look at all that we and the Reagan administration were doing to make sure that what you see on the screen tonight doesn't happen.

News Clip
- [Reporter] Although the White House denies it's launched a formal campaign to counteract the effect of the movie, late Friday it released a hastily compiled White House Digest on the president's plan for nuclear arms control.

Brandon Stoddard
We had a legal department say, "I think we've got to pull this. I think we've got to take it off." And I was totally isolated. The sales department didn't want it to go on the air. The legal department didn't want it to go on the air. The program department didn't want it to go on the air. Management didn't talk to me. My staff didn't talk to me. And Friday night before we air on Sunday, the White House issued instructions to ABC: "We want the following edits".

News Clip
- [Interviewer] The Reagan administration or anybody in that administration contact you about the film at all?
- [Brandon Stoddard] We're going on the air.
Brandon Stoddard
And I said, "Tell 'em to fuck off. We're not touching the film."

HARD TO WATCH

ABC Broadcast
- Before the movie begins, we would like to caution parents about the graphic depiction of nuclear explosions and their devastating effects. The emotional impact of these scenes may be unusually disturbing, and we are therefore recommending that very young children not be permitted to watch.

[Scenes from The Day After]

Ellen Moore
That's really hard for me to watch. Because that's... It's really hard for me to watch, because that's my town. That's my childhood. I'm sorry. I can't say it right now.

David Longhurst
The first time I saw the completed film was when everybody else saw it. It was that evening. Everything that led up to that... the filming, all those kinds of things, you didn't really feel it until you saw that movie.

Ellen Moore
Those locations are the locations of my childhood.

David Longhurst
Late at night, after seeing that movie, as mayor I was asked to address the crowd in Lawrence. I'm looking down the hill, and there are what seemed to be thousands of people holding candles, all looking at me, and it is dead silent. And they hand me the microphone. And I... I don't know what to say.

David Longhurst (archival clip from the 1980s)
- We saw our community destroyed this evening. We saw all the nightmares come true and the despair and hopelessness that followed.

David Longhurst
There wasn't anything I could do. I mean, I just felt like everybody else did.

Ted Koppel
It was sort of necessary to pick up a glass of water and say... Okay, well, wake up now. We're gonna talk about this, but... That movie, you know it was a movie, right? It didn't happen, and everything is okay for the time being.
I'M SCARED

News Clips
- [Announcer] This is an ABC News special edition of Viewpoint.
- [Ted Koppel] There is, and you probably need it about now, there is some good news. If you can, take a quick look out the window. It's all still there. Your neighborhood is still there, so is Kansas City and Lawrence. The very question that many of us may be asking ourselves right now is whether the vision that we've just seen is the future as it will be or only as it may be. Is there still time? To discuss, and I do mean discuss, not debate...

Brandon Stoddard
The Secretary of State opened it up, and he talked about the administration's position. And he was very uncomfortable.

Nicholas Meyer
And Ted Koppel said to him, "Mr. Secretary, is this the way it's going to be?" And he said:

News Clip
- [George Shultz] That is not the future at all.

Nicholas Meyer
You know, they had to calm down the whole country by having somebody in the government tell us to all chill.

News Clip
- [Ted Koppel] Tonight, we are joined here in Washington by a live audience and a distinguished panel of guests.

Ed Hume
I remember feeling slightly odd by the fact that this film had drawn important people together. Henry Kissinger and was it Carl Sagan?

Nicholas Meyer
You know, who the hell else was on?

News Clip
- [Ted Koppel] Former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Elie Wiesel, philosopher, theologian and author on the subject of the Holocaust, William F. Buckley, Jr., publisher of the National Review.

Ted Koppel
These were the top people. This was one of those occasions when pretty much everyone said yes, I'll be there.
News Clip
- [Henry Kissinger] Demonstrating how terrible the casualties of a nuclear war are and translating into pictures what are we to do about this? Are we supposed to make policy by scaring ourselves to death?

Nicholas Meyer
And I remember shouting back at the television, "That's exactly the way I think you should make nuclear policy!"

News Clip
- [William Buckley] The whole point of this movie is to launch an enterprise that seeks to debilitate the United States.

Nicholas Meyer
Buckley was insisting that this was a movie that aided the Russians.

News Clip
- [Ted Koppel] You think that there is a deliberate political effort behind this film?
- [William Buckley] Well, it's certainly a deliberate on the part of the writer. He says that was his motives. Now, if you say, was it deliberate on the part of the shareholders of ABC? I don't think they were consulted.

Ed Hume
Categorizing "The Day After" as a political film I think is a little silly. What I say doesn't really mean anything. The film's supposed to speak for itself.

News Clip
- [Carl Sagan] The reality is much worse than what has been portrayed in this movie.

Nicholas Meyer
By the way, this is the optimist's view. You know, we did not depict nuclear winter.

News Clips
- [Carl Sagan] Nuclear winter would reduce the temperatures globally to subfreezing temperatures for months. Agriculture will be wiped out.
- [Ted Koppel] Let me stop you on that point, because if our viewers were not depressed enough after seeing the movie, I suspect you've brought them to an even greater nadir.

Ted Koppel
We've just had three hours of the emotional side. I was trying to get us away from the emotional and toward the rational.
News Clips
- [Robert McNamara] I do not believe the American people understand the world we live in. I do not believe they understand the full risk that we face. That's what that film shows. It's stimulating discussion on exactly the issue we ought to be discussing. There is a million times the Hiroshima destruction power out there! We must ensure it not be used!
- [Ted Koppel] Before we slide too far into the technical, Elie Wiesel, we've deliberately invited you here so that you were bringing a humanistic touch to what otherwise threatens to become a very theoretical kind of discussion.

Ted Koppel
Elie had seen bodies piled up like cordwood, when the number of dead were counted in the millions

News Clip
- [Elie Wiesel] Not being a nuclear specialist in any way... I'm scared. I'm scared, because I know that what is imaginable... can happen. I know that the impossible is possible. I've seen the film, and while I was watching it, I had a strange feeling that I had seen it before. Except, once upon a time, it happened to my people, and now it happened to all people. And I hear about thousand bombs, megatons. I don't have that kind of imagination. To me, it's an abstraction. But to me, all this means is that the human species may come to an end.

Ted Koppel
That may have been the first and last time a serious conversation about the danger of nuclear war happened in front of as close as you ever get to reaching the entire American public.

A SENSE OF HOPE

News Clip
- [Anchor] The ABC television movie about the aftermath of nuclear war was seen last night by about 100 million Americans, more than half the adult population.

Stu Samuels
We got 67% of the eyeballs watching television that night in the United States of America. I mean, that's a number.

Brandon Stoddard
The advertisers were beside themselves with joy. Oh my God! Orville Redderback, or whatever his name is.

Commercial
- I'm Orville Redenbacher.
Brandon Stoddard
The happiest man ever, because he reached 100 million people for $11,000.

Commercial
-I'm Orville Redenbacher.

Bob Papazian
100 million people saw the movie all at the same time. That in itself is powerful. And that's communication at its finest.

Stephanie Austin
I thought that we stopped short of telling the real truth. But watching something at the same time, you had a shared bond, and people really wanted to talk about this.

News Clip
- [Ted Koppel] Let's go on to the next question. The lady in the back.

Brandon Stoddard
The public reaction was fabulous. Where they ended up was I, viewer, have to do something about it.

News Clips
- Is it time for us to question our policies in the Middle East?
- How do you accomplish a verifiable reduction in nuclear arms?
- How do you think this next generation should be educated about these issues so that they can engage in planning for their own future with a sense of hope?

News Clip
- [Children] We want to live! We want to live!

Brandon Stoddard
It was distributed theatrically. It went to 35 countries in 17 languages. The first American film ever broadcast in Russia. I said, "When you show it in Russia, you hand carry the film to the station, and you sit there the entire time, because I don't want anybody touching that film."

Archival Clip
- [Russian Announcer] We are hoping that the events shown in the movie will encourage people all over the world to find a way to avoid this day. These are the final words we hear in the movie “The Next Day”.

Ken Adelman
I vastly underestimated the importance of "The Day After". I could not believe any movie could have a following like that and a reception like it did.
Nicholas Meyer
I was thinking that, oh yes, I could unseat Ronald Reagan if I just made a movie showing what nuclear war was. And of course I didn't succeed in doing that, but I succeeded in something weirder.

Archival Clip
- [Ronald Reagan] To preserve our civilization in this modern age, a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.

Nicholas Meyer
Ronald Reagan says in his memoir that "The Day After" left him upset and depressed.

Ken Adelman
So I think the film is important because it led to something else. It led to the biggest decline in nuclear weapons in history.

Nicholas Meyer
Reagan eventually went to Reykjavik, met with Gorbachev and signed the Intermediate Range Weapons Treaty.

Archival Clips
- [Ronald Reagan] On our side, our entire compliment of Pershing II and ground-launch cruise missiles, with some 400 deployed warheads, will all be destroyed.
- [Ronald Reagan] I can only tell you that we have both agreed that talking to each other instead of about each other is the way to keep out of trouble.

Nicholas Meyer
"The Day After" was an important thing, and people realize in retrospect just how important it was. It's certainly the most valuable thing I've gotten to do with my life to date.

News Clips
- [Reporter] Today, "The Day After" was shown for the first time in Hiroshima. It was seen by some who were there on the real day after.
- [Japanese woman speaking]
- [Reporter translating] Yes, the movie did bring back painful memories, but she's pleased that this movie was made. It could carry on her attempts to warn others... if they listen.

Clip from The Day After
- Hello? Is anybody there? Anybody at all?

David Longhurst
This is Lawrence, Kansas. Is there anybody out there?
Archival Clip
- [Nicholas Meyer] And cut! Print!

[End Credits]

[ END ]