

## CHILDREN OF MEN - CHARACTERS

**Theo Faron** (played by Clive Owen) is the hero of the movie. He is an apathetic and disillusioned former political activist. Theo has lost all hope for humankind until he becomes the unexpected guardian to Kee -- the mother of the last baby on Earth. Theo then embarks on a perilous journey that will revive the hope that he has long forgotten.

**Jasper Palmer** (played by Michael Caine) is reminiscent of the left-leaning activists and hippies from the 1960s. He is a wise, benevolent and pot-smoking old friend of Theo. Despite the gloomy future for humankind, Jasper keeps a humorous, optimistic but practical attitude. Michael Caine based his portrayal of Jasper on his old friend – John Lennon.

**Julian Taylor** (played by Julianne Moore) is the tough and intelligent leader of the underground rebel group, the Fishes, and also Theo's ex-wife. Although their marriage ended because of their only son's death, Julian still entrusts Theo with the fate of humankind.

**Kee** (played by Claire-Hope Ashitey) carries within her a baby in a world that has been infertile in 18 years. Kee exudes an aura of youth, positivity and life in a dark and hopeless world. Since she bears the future of the whole human race in her, she would be an extremely valuable asset to anyone who possesses her.

**Luke** (played by Chitwetel Ejiofor) is the calculating and pragmatic co-leader of the Fishes. Due to his frustration with the government's branding of the Fishes as a terrorist organization, Luke orchestrates Julian's death and plans to use Kee as a tool to gain support for the Fishes' revolution.

**Miriam** (played by Pam Ferris) is a member of the Fishes. She used to be a schoolteacher when there were still children and plays the role of a midwife to Kee. Throughout the journey, Miriam always is the strong comforter and caretaker.

**Syd** (played by Peter Mullan) is a soldier at Bexhill's refugee camp and a friend of Jasper's. He is a person of no allegiances and acts upon his will.

**Marichka** (played by Oana Pellea) is a Gypsy woman and friend of Syd at Bexhill refugee camp. She does not speak a word of English but becomes a reliable guide to Kee and Theo.

## CHILDREN OF MEN - SUMMARY

The year is 2027 and the world's youngest citizen has just died at 18 years of age. As women have become infertile and no children have been born for 18 years, humankind is facing its own extinction. Confronting massive waves of immigrants, Britain, the world's only functioning state, rounds up all of the illegal immigrants for deportation.

The film's protagonist, Theo Faron, has just narrowly escaped a bombing reportedly attributed to an underground pro-immigration guerrilla group called the Fishes. Shaken by the incident, Theo visits his friend Jasper, a former political activist who lives in seclusion with his catatonic wife.

The next day, Theo is captured by the Fishes and reunites with his former wife, Julian, who leads the group. Julian first tells Theo that the Fishes were not responsible for the earlier bombing and asks Theo to secure a few transit papers. Theo is then able to secure them due to his connections within the government. However, these papers state that Theo must accompany the refugee that the papers are meant for.

Theo joins the refugee, Kee, her midwife, Miriam, Julian and her friend, Luke, on a drive to the southern coast of England. On the way, they are attacked by a mob and Julian is killed. In their escape, a police car stops them and Luke ends up killing two policemen. Luke then finds another car and drives everyone back to a safe house on a farm.

At the farm, Kee reveals to Theo that she is 8-months pregnant and that Julian told her to only trust him. The Fishes then decide what to do with Kee. While Theo thinks that Kee's pregnancy should be made public, the Fishes think that the government will use the baby as a political tool. Kee agrees with the Fishes and decides to stay on the farm until the child is born.

That night, Theo wakes up to the commotion outside and sees two members of the mob who killed Julian coming inside the safe house. Theo finds out that Luke and the Fishes killed Julian and want to use the baby to unite people for their revolt. Theo then steals a car and narrowly escapes the Fishes with Miriam and Kee.

Theo seeks refuge at Jasper's house. Jasper then arranges for Kee to board a ship named "Tomorrow" from the Human Project – a group of scientists committed to curing human infertility. The plan is that Kee would be slipped in the waters near an immigrant camp called Bexhill with the help of Jasper's friend, Syd.

The Fishes eventually find Jasper's home. Jasper quickly finds Theo a car and shows him an escape route while he stays behind. Jasper euthanizes his wife before the Fishes kill him for not giving up information.

Theo drives to an old school to rest and wait for Syd. There, Miriam talks about her work as a maternity nurse and the onset of female sterilization. Syd arrives and takes everyone to Bexhill. On the way, Kee goes into labor. In order to protect Kee, Miriam fakes religious mania and was taken away. Inside the camp, Kee manages to hide her pregnancy and meets Marichka – Syd's contact,

who provides Kee and Theo with a safe place to stay. Right after Kee and Theo arrive in their room, Kee gives birth to a baby girl.

The next morning, Marichka and Syd tell Theo and Kee of the Fishes' uprising in Bexhill. The national guards have also mobilized their forces to contain the revolt. Syd and Marichka are dumbfounded after seeing Kee's baby. Theo, Marichka and Kee then manage to escape Syd after he tries to turn Theo in.

Luke later took Kee away while Theo and Marichka are left to be executed. Theo is able to flee when a battle breaks out. Theo then finds Kee with Luke in an apartment bombarded by the national guards. As Theo attempts to escape with Kee, Luke fires at Theo but is killed shortly after. When Theo and Kee find their way out of the apartment, everyone stops at the sight of Kee's baby. As Theo and Kee walk away, the fighting resumes. Theo and Kee find Marichka and rows away on a boat Marichka found for them. However, Marichka refuses to go.

Theo and Kee stop at a buoy where they were supposed to meet the "Tomorrow". On the boat, Kee discovers that Theo has been shot. Kee tells Theo that she will name her baby Dylan – Theo's son's name. From the boat they witness an aerial bombing of Bexhill by fighter-bombers. Theo dies just as the Tomorrow arrives. The credits roll out with the background music of children laughing.

# CHILDREN OF MEN - ANALYSIS

Children of Men is a cautionary tale of a society on the brink of extinction. This analysis will examine the characteristics of this dystopian future.

## Not your typical science fiction dystopia

Children of Men stands out from its fellow dystopian science fiction movies. Popularity and commercially successful films such as *Minority Report* (2002), *Blade Runner* (1982) or *Logan's Run* (1976) portray dystopian worlds in a futuristic way and deviate from the characteristics of contemporary society. Children of Men, however, is a darker version of our contemporary society. Cuarón said that he "...didn't want to be distracted by the future... [and that he] didn't want to transport the audience into another reality" (*childrenofmenstudy*).

This unconventional approach allows the audience to relate to their own circumstances and therefore, connect with the movie in a deeper way. Julianne Moore, an Academy Award- winner who also plays the character Julian in the movie, is famous for saying, "the audience doesn't come to see you, they come to see themselves" ("*Biography for Julianne Moore*"). Cuarón's technique skillfully brings the audience along on the thrill ride and adds to the shock by leaving them with an eerie image of the world they live in.

## Infertility

Infertility is not a new concept to science fiction writers as we've seen in George Orwell's 1984 (1949), Brian Aldiss's *Greybeard* (1964) and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). In fact, there have been numerous works on overpopulation as well such as John Brunner's *The Sheep Look up* (1972) or Harry Harrison's *Make Room! Make Room!* (1966) - and its movie adaptation, *Soylent Green* (1973). In *Children of Men*, Cuarón portrays a world of imminent genetic erasure. Humankind has not seen a baby born for 18 years and at the same time, are mourning the recent death of the youngest person on Earth. According to Nanelle R. Barash and David R. Barash, dystopian science fiction share a theme of "denial of biology"-a denial of human's basic needs. The prospect of genetic continuity is completely absent – a prospect that "is the motivation underlying sex, love, and indeed everything in the organic world". Infertility, therefore, not only means the absence of children, but, worse, the absence of hope and sense of purpose. When we lose purpose, we simply give up since there is nothing to fight and struggle for. When Theo sees his cousin Nigel's fancy home, he blankly asks, "Years from now there won't be one sad fuck to look at any of this. What keeps you going?" Nigel then comfortably replies, "I just don't think about it." This short conversation adequately sums up the apathy and ignorance that the sense of hopelessness dangerously ingrains into people's mindset.

## The Government

Allison Mackey posits that in *Children of Men*, “traditional figures of state authority – from border patrol guards to Embassy officials – are not to be trusted”. The British government portrayed by Cuarón is anti-immigration, totalitarian and fascist. The government has kept its borders closed for 8 years and all illegal immigrants are hunted down, rounded up like animals in cages and sent to refugee camps for deportation. These refugee camps are reminiscent of Abu Ghraib prison, Guantanamo Bay detention camp and the Holocaust.

In one of the opening scenes of the movie, a bomb explodes in a cafe filled with civilians. Manohla Dargis of *The New York Times* relates the streets of Britain to Iraq’s in the sense that the streets of Britain has become “a universal battleground of military control, security zones, refugee camps and warring tribal identities”. However, the Fishes, an underground pro-immigration group says the government staged the bombings to cause fear and then points its fingers to the Fishes.

This insight into the Fishes prompts the audience to turn the question around and ask whether the government or the Fishes are the protagonist. Is the government using its absolute power to do whatever it wants? This is indeed a legitimate question to ask because after all, the Fishes are only fighting against the mistreatment of immigrants. This technique by Alfonso Cuarón is reminiscent of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) where the audience first assumes the androids as villains but as the plot progresses, it is revealed that the androids only want to be humans (Aman-jatt).

The world is in total chaos and despair. The newspapers are filled with headlines about nuclear fallouts, military attacks, religious fundamentalism - based terrorist attacks, backlash against refugees and immigrants, mass suicides, fatal fertility drugs, mosques being put under surveillance, allegations of tortures of journalists, medical malpractice, political coup d'etat and dirty bombs. Even though the British government is the sole functioning governmental body in the world, it is in charge of a chaotic and hopeless society of pollution, religious extremism and social collapse. The brutal anti-immigration methods of the government show that even a capitalistic and democratic country like Britain - bear in mind that Britain's one of the oldest democracies in the world, can adopt fascist ideologies and terror-invoking methods.

## Why Britain?

The film takes place in the year 2027 when Britain stands alone as the only functioning government in the world. Why does Cuarón choose Britain? Why not America, Germany, France or some other country? It appears that Britain is not a coincidental choice by Cuarón. According to Slavoj Žižek, a renowned continental philosopher and critical theorist, one of the possible explanations is that Britain’s government has a de facto constitution (no written core constitution) and works, according to Žižek, based on “substance of tradition” and history. In such a country, the loss of a "historical dimension", the "substance of meaning" would be most devastating to the nation and its people.

## **Finally, can Cuarón's world become a reality?**

Totalitarian, and fascist governments, nuclear bombs, pollution and religious fundamentalism are all feasible future scenarios. These disasters have all happened if we look at the historical cases of Nazi Germany, the decimation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Great Smog of 1952 in London and the 9/11 terrorist attacks. However, since the movie never provided any explanation to infertility and we have not seen a mass infertility epidemic in the past, the more interesting question to ask is whether or not humans can completely lose the ability to reproduce. Today, countries like Germany and Japan are already experiencing negative population growth. Dr. Mousa Shamonki of the UCLA School of Medicine says radiation or fertility-killing microbes can cause widespread infertility. However, Dr. Patrica Dranchak, a geneticist, and many other scientists agree that because humans are so genetically diverse, there would be someone somewhere immune to the infection and would still be able to reproduce. Furthermore, the genetic disaster won't happen overnight but over the course of hundreds or thousands of years. That means humans will even have an ample amount of time to prepare and deal with the situation. Therefore, with the knowledge available to us today, mass infertility can only be proved when it actually happens.

# CHILDREN OF MEN - MEMORABLE QUOTES

Jasper: What did you do for your birthday?

Theodore Faron: Nothing.

Jasper: Oh come on, you must have done something.

Theodore Faron: Nope. Woke up, felt like shit. Went to work, felt like shit.

Jasper: That's called a hangover, Amigo.

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Miriam: As the sound of the playgrounds faded, the despair set in. Very odd, what happens in a world without children's voices.

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Newsreader: Day 1,000 of the Siege of Seattle.

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Newsreader: The Muslim community demands an end to the Army's occupation of mosques.

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Newsreader: The Homeland Security bill is ratified. After eight years, British borders will remain closed. The deportation of illegal immigrants will continue. Good morning. Our lead story.

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Theodore Faron: Julian? I haven't seen you in twenty years. You look good. The picture the police have of you doesn't do you justice.

Julian Taylor: What do the police know about justice?

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Julian Taylor: Y'know that ringing in your ears? That 'eeeeeeeeee'? That's the sound of the ear cells dying, like their swan song. Once it's gone you'll never hear that frequency again. Enjoy it while it lasts.

## CHILDREN OF MEN – FUN FACTS

Theo Faron is Greek for "The God of the Lighthouses" while Kee's name is a homophone for "chi" (also can be pronounced CHEE) which means the energy or force of life itself.

When Miriam is taken off the bus in the refugee camp you can hear the song "Arbeit Macht Frei" by The Libertines. "Arbeit macht frei," meaning "Work shall set you free," was written above the entrance at Auschwitz, one of the major Nazi Concentration Camps.

Almost every shot contains an animal, usually a dog.

Alfonso Cuarón said in one interview that he wanted to shoot this film like *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) rather than *Blade Runner* (1982), almost like a documentary about something that happened back in 2024.

When Miriam is taken off the bus at Bexhill, the camera pans by several cages with prisoners inside. One of them is the infamous "hooded man" from the Abu Ghraib prison torture pictures. He is seen in the exact pose as the real pictures.

When Owen enters the dining room in Battersea power station, the large black and white mural behind him is Pablo Picasso's "Guernica." The same image is drawn on the wall of the tunnel which Theo and Kee use to escape in the rowboat. The painting was Picasso's reaction to the Nazi bombing of Guernica, Spain during the Spanish Civil War, which killed an estimated 1,600 civilians.

"Shantih, shantih, shantih," which Miriam says over Julian's dead body, Jasper says when he finds out Kee is pregnant, and appears at the very end of the credits, is the final line of T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland," a poem that deals with the theme of infertility in the post-World War I world. Originally from the Upanishads, it roughly translates to "the peace that passes understanding."

Given the story of this film (a baby representing a new hope for humanity) there are not surprisingly many references to the story of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph from the Christian Bible. Theo (whose name is the Greek root meaning "God") first sees that Kee is pregnant in a barn, among farm animals, a reference to Jesus' birth in a manger. When Theo sees her pregnancy, he swears, "Jesus Christ!" Kee jokes that she is a virgin, a reference to the Christian belief that Mary was a virgin before, during, and after her pregnancy. Theo is seen washing or soaking his feet several times during the movie; there are several references to Jesus or saints washing their feet or having them washed in the Christian Bible, and foot washing is a ritual in some Christian denominations and in Islam. The name of the 'Fishes' group is also a Christian reference. In fact, the 'fish' was one of the very first symbols in Christian art. Fish, in Greek, is spelled "IXTHYS" which served as an acronym for "Iesous Xhristos Theou Hyios Soter": I (esous = Jesus) X (ristos = Christ) TH (eou = God's) Y (ios = Son) S (oter = Saviour)

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Source: <https://sites.google.com/a/depauw.edu/children-of-men/home>

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