

## **The Last War: A Screenplay Depicting Optimism In A Post-Apocalyptic World**

**Michael Wenardi Gunawan<sup>1</sup>, Ribut Basuki<sup>2</sup>**

English Department, Faculty of Humanities and Creative Industries, Petra Christian University, Siwalankerto 121-131, Surabaya 60236, INDONESIA  
Email: a11200011@john.petra.ac.id<sup>1</sup>, dewey@petra.ac.id<sup>2</sup>

### **ABSTRACT**

Optimism is an important thing for many people in order to maintain world peace. More specifically, optimism can still play a major role even when the world is in a post-apocalyptic state. Therefore, this creative work has been made to show how optimism can make a big difference in the post-apocalyptic era. The creative work will use the theory of optimism by Martin Seligman in his book 'Learned Optimism'. The creative work will be in the post-apocalyptic genre, and will use the screenplay film format. The result of the making of the creative work is people will be more knowledgeable about optimism through the actions of the protagonist. In addition, more people will know about the effects of optimism through the character development of the protagonist and the ways it can make the world better at the conclusion of the creative work.

**Keywords:** Martin Seligman, Optimism, Post-Apocalyptic, Screenplay

### **INTRODUCTION**

Optimism is important for a lot of people if they want to keep the world at peace. Optimism is defined as a belief that can help people to achieve their goals and overcome any adversaries (Paulson, 2010). More specifically, optimism enforces people to take action and find a solution to their issues, rather than just wait for the inevitable. Optimism is all about people making constructive action and feeling the growth of optimism from the purposeful action even in worrying times. (Paulson, 2010). Essentially, optimism will allow people to take risks and turn them into successes.

I chose this topic because it is an important topic to discuss in the current world. For one thing, optimism is really beneficial to the health and well being of each country. It has been stated that individual-level optimism does have a positive effect on determining the individual well-being of each country, though to what extent it has varies (Baranski et al., 2020). Despite the current unstable situation of the world right now, optimism can be used as a source for countries to rely upon when it comes to rebuilding the economy and social status of each country.

A good example of this idea can be found in Indonesia. More recently, there has been quite a lot of negativity-centered news surrounding Indonesia. At the beginning of 2021 alone, there were 197 natural disasters and 1,134,854 people got infected by COVID-19 reported during that period (ANTARA, 2021). In another instance, the cases of corruption in Indonesia have recently gone up to 579 cases in 2022 (Arkyasa, 2022). In fact, watching too much negative news will "do more to add to your depression than to alleviate your feelings of helplessness" (Paulson, 2010). Therefore, it is crucial for Indonesian people to start making the country better by building up their optimism through meaningful activities.

**Gunawan; Basuki:** The Last War: A Screenplay Depicting Optimism In  
A Post-Apocalyptic World

Optimism is also needed for other countries outside of Indonesia as well. As the world is recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot of people are trying to combat the stress that comes during the pandemic. For instance, it has been discovered that older Spanish adults were more likely to possess greater resilience thanks in part to the social network, which leads to more positive feelings (Rodriguez-Gonzalez et al., 2020). From this case, it can be deduced that optimism, when combined with resilience, can facilitate the psychological and behavioral of older European adults during the pandemic (Lee, 2023). Therefore, optimism is vital for people to keep their mentality in check and be active in seeking out new opportunities.

Post-apocalyptic is a genre that is frequently explored in recent times. As a genre, post-apocalyptic allows us to reflect on the harsh realities of our present moment, on conditions that are difficult to confront head-on (Schmidt, 2014). The post-apocalyptic genre can also become a window to the present, and critique upon it (Schmidt, 2014). This genre is commonly seen in films right now, likely due to its conflict. According to Harvard senior lecturer Christopher Robichaud, due to the cinematic or fictional enjoyment in seeing people confront apocalyptic times and overcome them (Siliezar, personal communication, May 5, 2020). Films in this genre include the *Mad Max* series of films, Bong Joon-ho's *Snowpiercer*, the 1985 film *The Quiet Earth*, and many more.

I chose this genre because it provides a good counter argument with the optimism topic I chose for the thesis. Optimism could be used to prove that even in a world that has gotten more pessimistic, it can still prevail against despair. While the post-apocalyptic genre could make people even more pessimistic, optimism could be used to balance it out and become crucial in fixing the world. It also provided the inspiration for the main conflict, which is about optimism against pessimism in the end of the world. In order to make this creative work into fruition, I have chosen the screenplay format for this genre.

Screenplays have been used by filmmakers to express their themes and stories in visual media forms. The screenplay is "a story told with pictures, in dialogue and description, and placed within the context of dramatic structure" (Field, 2005). Essentially, screenplay offers an opportunity for writers to create a meaningful story through dialogue and description and translate it into actual movies. I chose this form for a couple of reasons. The first one is that the screenplay format offers distinct descriptions that presents concentrated and well-executed images of story (Boon, 2008). This will be crucial to my creative work, as a large part of it will be showcasing the setting and characters of my creative work. The second is that screenplays could allow a new voice that has something different to say, as well as a fresh and individual way of saying that voice (Costello, 2011).

My screenplay is a post-apocalyptic story where optimism can triumph over bleakness. The story will be set in an era where World War III reduced the world into a wasteland. A small group of soldiers, led by Sarah, found a lone alien that got injured after a fight with their organisation, DOMITAR. From there, they must fight the organisation while also making peace with the aliens as well for the world. At the same time, Sarah struggles to determine whether her optimism is enough to convince the aliens that the world is worth rebuilding again.

## **THE THEORY OF OPTIMISM AND PESSIMISM**

I want to use optimism and pessimism as the basis of proving the purpose of this creative work. Optimism is often generally put into the category of psychology. More specifically, optimism is part of the positive psychology concept. Martin Seligman, an American psychologist, is often considered the father of Optimism theory and the positive psychology concept as well. Seligman is also the author of *Learned Optimism*, a book that is about

explaining the concept as a way to recognize and tackle every person's negative views (Moore, 2019). Essentially, he explains that the optimism theory is all about not learning to say positive things, but more on what one thinks when they fail with the help of "non-negative thinking" (Seligman, 2006, pp. 15).

To understand optimism better, it is crucial to address its opposite, pessimism. People who adopt this thinking will assume that whenever something bad happens, they will see this as undermining everything they have done, and of their own fault as well (pp. 4). This is in contrast to optimistic people, who believe that bad events are just temporary setbacks to overcome. Studies show that pessimistic people often give up more easily and are more likely to suffer depression as well (pp. 4). Pessimism can even show up through speech to people that do not believe they have this mindset. (pp. 4).

### CONCEPT OF THE CREATIVE WORK

The screenplay will use the post-apocalyptic genre. The post-apocalyptic genre is all about reflecting on the harshness of the present, while also facing conditions that are difficult to confront head-on (Schmidt, 2014). This genre is usually set in the not-to-distant future, and it is either caused by an invasion or a biological disaster. There have been a lot of post-apocalyptic movies released in the past half century, which includes the *Mad Max* series of films, *Snowpiercer* (Joon-ho, 2014), *The Quiet Earth* (Murphy, 1985), and more. With that in mind, this genre would provide a good counterbalance towards optimism, as it symbolizes just how important optimism is in the current world. The work takes place in A.V. 0005, where aliens have successfully invaded the earth and only one percent of the population within the world remained. The screenplay will focus on how the protagonists will try to negotiate peacefully with the aliens in order to restore the world, based on their optimism that it is possible for humans and aliens to make peace with one another. However, they also need to contend with the last remaining organization on the planet, who are pessimistic that the planet is already ruined and the aliens should be exterminated for their crimes.

In order to write this screenplay properly, I will use the 'show, don't tell' technique and Motif in this screenplay. These elements would allow the audience to understand the message better, as well as developing the setting and characters a lot deeper. For starters, I am going to use "show, don't tell", as it is the best way to showcase the setting and characters in a more meaningful light. This technique was initially conceived by famous playwright Anton Chekhov. He explains this technique as "one must seize on small details, grouping them so that when the reader closes his eyes he gets a picture" (Cited in Yarmolinsky, 1954). One of the ways to use this technique is by giving detailed descriptions to each scene without using a lot of dialogue. This would not only result in better worldbuilding, but also explains the consequences of each character's actions towards the plot. A good example of this can be found in the *Mad Max* series, where each film spent a lot of time showing the setting and how the characters behave, making the world feel alive and justify the actions each character makes. All of this would play a role in the screenplay, as it would give the setting more depth and also help develop the characters as well.

Motif also contributed a lot to the screenplay as well. Motif is best described as recurring thematic elements, where it is described as "any significant repeated element in a film, such as an object, a color, a place, a person, a sound, or even a character trait (Bordwell & Thompson, cited in Hunter & Smith, 2013). This would play a major role in the screenplay, as a recurring theme of it is how the optimism held by the protagonists that humans and aliens can rebuild the world together is in conflict with the cynical attitude of the organization towards the

**Gunawan; Basuki:** The Last War: A Screenplay Depicting Optimism In  
A Post-Apocalyptic World

aliens. This will be repeated until the protagonist, along with the resistance group and her alien friend, finally show the organization's chairman that they can work together with the aliens after they defeat him. The ending of the screenplay, where humans and aliens have made a peace treaty at the site of their base, is the culmination of the motif about optimism against pessimism throughout this screenplay.

In addition, I also took major inspiration from the *Mad Max* series of films by George Miller (Miller, 1979, 1981, 1985, 2015). Specifically, I look upon the latter three films as those are the ones that influenced the post-apocalyptic genre. These films would follow Max, the main protagonist, as he helps several communities at transporting essential things, such as oil in the second film. What is interesting about these films is that it focuses not on Max himself, but the world and community around him as they try to survive as best as they can in a world that is ravaged by a worldwide oil crisis. This is all being told with as little dialogue as possible, as the visuals are used to showcase the world these characters live in. This is a prime example of the 'show, don't tell' technique, and that is what I am going to be using to depict my work by showcasing the struggle between the humans, aliens, and the protagonists in a world that is filled with hatred towards one another.

Of course, my creative work will differ greatly from the *Mad Max* franchise. Firstly, I will be using giant robots as a replacement for the cars used in the franchise. The films are famous for showcasing some of the best car chases in film history, with complex cinematography and choreography. While I will implement these techniques, I will instead use giant robots as it could lead to more flexible fight sequences and as part of a motif of the war between humans and aliens. Secondly the message of my creative work is a lot different compared to the franchise. *Mad Max* is about trying to survive in a world that is ravaged by violent people, while my creative work will be about how optimism can lead to peace between two differing sides to rebuild the world together. Finally, the setting would be quite a contrast compared to the series. Whereas *Mad Max* would depict Australian outback and industrial sites, my work will be set in a pseudo future setting with robots and modern technologies such as weapons. These three would make my work unique enough to stand out within the post-apocalyptic genre, and I hope that it will inspire a lot of people to rebuild their optimism and do something for the greater good of this world.

### **Premise And Creative Principle**

The premise of this creative work:

In a post-World War III infested earth, a woman, along with a group of rebels, and an estranged alien, come into blows with the organization they used to work with over whether or not they should make peace with the reigning aliens and rebuild the world together, with both sides having different attitudes regarding the aliens themselves.

The Creative Principle of this work:

Through this creative work, I want to show that optimism can be the solution to any problems, even when it is after the end of the world. I also want to show what the world would look like after a World War with the aliens, and how hard it would be for humanity to live in the alien-dominated period using the Bali setting.

### **Logline And Pitch**

The logline for my creative work goes like this:

SARAH and her group use their optimism that humans and aliens can make peace with one another to the test, as they are fending off the organization they used to work with and convince the aliens to work together with humans to rebuild the world.

Meanwhile, my pitch would look like this:

- a. SARAH (25), a soldier of an organization called DOMITAR, which has been in a war with aliens ever since a misunderstanding with the latter cause World War III that sends the world to a near-apocalyptic state many years ago, wants to confront the aliens on whether they actually murdered her loved ones or were also victims of World War III.
- b. Sarah is caught in a triangle among alien rulers, DOMITAR, and rebels; as a member of the DOMITAR, Sarah and her group rescues a wounded alien named AMICA (22). This forces them to escape from DOMITAR since DOMITAR is against aliens, and they would later join the rebels to fight both the alien rulers and DOMITAR. It happens that the rebels, who are actually against the ruthlessness of DOMITAR, have a clash with the DOMITAR. Just as the rebels are losing the battle, the aliens rescue them. Knowing that the rebels are good towards AMICA, the aliens do not kill them and instead help them fight DOMITAR.
- c. In the end, Sarah learns to dispute her own hatred towards aliens and makes peace with the aliens after getting to know their true intentions, as well as managing to defeat DOMITAR.

## Synopsis

SARAH is a soldier of an organization called DOMITAR, which has been in a war with aliens ever since a misunderstanding with the latter destroyed the world to a near-apocalyptic state through nuclear-driven World War III. Ever since her family and friends got killed during the nuclear war, she wants to confront the aliens on whether they did kill them or were just casualties of the war. That all changed when she encountered a wounded alien, and decided to rescue him with her group. This forces Sarah and her friends to escape from the organization with the help of their new alien friend. After trundling around in the desert, a resistance group rescues them and agrees to help them fight DOMITAR. From there, Sarah learns to build her optimism and builds a good relationship with AMICA. However, a failed invasion at DOMITAR's headquarters destroyed the rebellion group, while Sarah and a few others would join them if not for the aliens to rescue them. After getting to know the aliens on their intentions on earth, she forgave them and worked together to bring DOMITAR down. In the end, she manages to defeat DOMITAR and make peace with the aliens, ensuring the world is safe for the rebuild.

## Characters

### Main Characters

- Sarah Adhrista  
Age: 25 years old  
Sarah is an Indonesian young woman from Jakarta and an employee at DOMITAR. She usually has black short hair and wears glasses at work, as well as wearing military clothes at work. She is pessimistic about the prospect of the world after World War III and the aliens coming into the world. However, she gradually becomes optimistic after befriending AMICA. She is straightforward in her job, but loves to communicate with her teammates on her passion for music. Ever since she lost her parents and friends in the alien invasion, she is always very revenge-fueled towards them and looking to eliminate them as part of the organization's goals.
- AMICA

**Gunawan; Basuki:** The Last War: A Screenplay Depicting Optimism In  
A Post-Apocalyptic World

Age: 22 years old (alien-years)

AMICA is one of the younger aliens, being conceived after World War III and before the DOMITAR war started. Unlike his compatriots, he is optimistic that aliens could somehow apologize to humans for invading their world in order to find their new ecosystem. He is quite cheerful and energetic whenever he talks to his friends. He also likes to build machines as well, often using whatever stuff he could find on earth on his daily trip to make his dream robot. He is denied by his parents and leaders to help the humans with his robot, but he is not giving up easily. In short, he wants to convince the aliens that humanity can coexist with the aliens and stop fighting with each other to make a peace treaty towards them.

### Supporting Characters

- Emma Kowlinski

Age: 32 years old

Emma is a woman from London who is vacationing in Bali when World War III happens. In order to survive, she leads a resistance against DOMITAR for their war against the aliens. She usually wore rugged clothes, as well as having a ponytail black hair. Emma is very rough at the outset due to her traumatic past, but her resistance soldiers know her as a nice person deep down. Ever since befriending AMICA during one of her journeys, she wanted to communicate with the aliens more to understand their beliefs. In addition, she despises DOMITAR for waging war against the aliens without knowing their intentions.

- Yiga Egrevski

Age: 49 years old

As a former U.S. Army sergeant from Alabama, Yiga is stationed in Bali to help with the Indonesian military. He is initially an optimistic family man that welcomes the aliens when the latter first land on earth. After the humans misunderstand the aliens and cause World War III against one another, Yiga has turned into a far more pessimistic person. Not to mention that his family and friends die during the war, causing him to be paranoid and create DOMITAR to defend himself and his colleagues. When the aliens resurface in Bali, he sees it as an additional threat to his army and forgo his respect towards the aliens just to defend himself from being exterminated. As a former U.S. Army sergeant, he is surprisingly strong at his age and prefers to dominate his opponents.

### Conflict

I would be using two types of conflict for my creative work. The first one is Man vs Self, and it is about the inner struggles that are about “To be one's own antagonist is of great distress to most and can result in incredible storytelling if done correctly.” (Lefkowitz, 2018). The second one will be Man vs Society, which arises when man stands against a man-made institution or practices, such as slavery, bullying, etc (Morell, 2009, cited in Folarin, 2013). Both types will have a role in the work, but Man vs Society will be much more important since the whole plot revolves around the fight between Sarah and her group against the organization over whether or not aliens are worth making peace and rebuilding the world together.

### CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this creative work is to show how optimism can still be vital despite the seemingly insurmountable odds.. Firstly, the screenplay shows that optimism can be obtained through learned helplessness. Secondly, my main character Sarah would later use the disputation model of optimism as a guide towards her decision to forgive the aliens and help them to make peace with the aliens. Finally, the two methods would lead even pessimistic persons to become optimistic and change the world for the better. All of these elements are best shown with Sarah becoming a more optimistic person thanks to her friendship with AMICA, which allows her to reconcile with the aliens and beat DOMITAR. These elements would help my screenplay to serve as an exploration of how optimism can triumph over despair after the apocalyptic World War III.

I have learnt so many new things during the making of my creative work. I gain an understanding of how optimism is actually deeper than it looks through research. It is also where I first study on the theory of optimism according to Martin Seligman from his book, which contributes greatly to my creative work. I also become more proficient in writing screenplays thanks to my experiences working on this creative work. Last but not least, I learn to be receptive towards constructive criticism and willing to improve upon myself.

I have a number of future plans involving my creative work. The first one is that I hope to adapt my screenplay into a live-action film someday. The second one is that I also want to use this creative work as a springboard for being able to write more post-apocalyptic films. The last one is I would like to encourage more directors and screenwriters to make films that heavily focus on optimism. Hopefully, my creative work will be an inspiration for future filmmakers as well.

I do have some suggestions for future writers when it comes to optimism and the post-apocalyptic genre. First, it is important to understand optimism as a surprisingly complex psychology for their work. Next, I would like for them to focus on characterization as that is very important in any work that focuses on psychological aspects. Then I would like to suggest to future writers not to focus too much on worldbuilding, as well as balancing action and character drama. Finally, I want to share my experiences as an amateur screenwriter to help up and coming writers. Hopefully, they can understand my suggestions and learn from them to improve their writing and make better creative works.

## REFERENCES

- ANTARA. (2021, February 6). *Indonesia enters 2021 with “abnormal” natural disasters*. ANTARA. <https://en.antaranews.com/news/167468/indonesia-enters-2021-with-abnormal-natural-disasters>
- Arkyasa, M. (2023, July 18). *Corruption in Indonesia intensified to 579 cases in 2022*. Indonesia Business Post. <https://indonesiabusinesspost.com/insider/corruption-in-indonesia-intensified-to-579-cases-in-2022/>
- Boon, K.A. (2008). *The Screenplay, Imagism, And Modern Aesthetics*. Literature/Film Quarterly, 36(4), 259-271. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43797491>
- Chekhov, A. (n.d.). Cited in Yarmonlinsky, A. (1954). *The Unknown Chekhov: Stories and Other Writings Hitherto Untranslated by Anton Chekhov*. Noonday Press, New York, p. 14.

**Gunawan; Basuki:** The Last War: A Screenplay Depicting Optimism In  
A Post-Apocalyptic World

- Costello, J. (2011). *Writing A Screenplay*. Pocket Essentials.
- Folarin, S. (2013). *Types And Causes Of Conflict*. Readings In Peace And Conflict Studies. CORE. <https://core.ac.uk/pdf/32224691.pdf>
- Gonzalez, R.R., Facal, D., Martinez-Santos, A., & Crego-Gandoy, M. (2020, December 3). *Psychological, Social and Health-Related Challenges in Spanish Older Adults During the Lockdown of the COVID-19 First Wave*. *Front. Psychiatry*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2020.588949>
- Hunter, S. & Smith, S. (2013). *Thematic and Lexical Repetition In A Contemporary Screenplay*. *Open Journal Of Modern Linguistics*, 3(1), 2. <http://www.scirp.org/journal/ojml>
- Joon-ho, B. (Director). (2013). *Snowpiercer* [Film]. CJ Entertainment.
- Lefkowitz, K.A. (2018, April 2). *Script Classics: Conflict at the Core—Four Types of Conflict*. *Writer's Digest*. <https://www.writersdigest.com/write-better-fiction/script-classics-conflict-core-four-types-conflict>.
- Miller, G. (Director). (1979). *Mad Max* [Film]. Kennedy Miller Productions.
- Miller, G. (Director). (1981). *Mad Max 2* [Film]. Kennedy Miller Productions.
- Miller, G. (Director). (1985). *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* [Film]. Kennedy Miller Productions.
- Miller, G. (Director). (2015). *Mad Max Fury Road* [Film]. Kennedy Miller Productions.
- Moore, C. (2019, December 30). *Learned Optimism: Is Martin Seligman's Glass Half Full?*. *PositivePsychology*. <https://positivepsychology.com/learned-optimism/>
- Murphy, G. (Director). (1985). *The Quiet Earth* [Film]. Mirage Films.
- Paulson, T. L. (2010). *The Optimism Advantage: 50 Simple Truths to Transform Your Attitudes and Actions Into Results*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Schmidt, C. (2014, November 19). *Why are Dystopian Films on the Rise Again?*. *JSTOR Daily*. <https://daily.jstor.org/why-are-dystopian-films-on-the-rise-again/>
- Seligman, M. (2007). *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*. Vintage Books.
- Siliezar, J. (2020, May 5). *Why so many of us are watching films like 'Outbreak'*. *The Harvard Gazette*. <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/05/apocalyptic-movies-show-what-we-worry-about-most/>