



**A FEW THOUGHTS ON
*THE BOOK OF ELI***

JOHN'S WORLDLY RAMBLINGS

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A Few Thoughts on “The Book of Eli”

As I think about “The Book of Eli” which I saw several days ago, I remain unsure whether I liked it or not. I actually find it really frustrating because if there’s one thing I can do well, it’s have an opinion.

The first fifteen minutes of the movie were difficult to watch. The world is a wasteland, it snows ash, the sun is blotted out, and our hero Denzel Washington is hunting for food and traveling west. I’ve seen movies with slow pacing before, but this movie began so awkwardly that it wasn’t just the pace that threw me. Maybe the coloring that was so washed out that the film appeared to be in black and white at times was responsible for some part of my unease. But honestly, I was literally uncomfortable, squirming in my seat as in, *Christ, Let’s get this thing moving!*

Although things started happening and the pace changed and became more tolerable, at times events and creative editing still bogged the picture down as the filmmakers both lead me to water and forced me to drink.

Our main character, who never receives a name, but you see a nametag inside his bag at one point that says "Eli," has been traveling west for thirty years, since the flash. This flash was some apocalyptic event that you have to surmise was a nuclear blast (or more probably a series of nuclear explosions since we given the impression the entire world is this way). After killing a number of thieves who attempted to ambush him, Eli makes his way to a cobbled-together town in search of water and a recharge for his battery he uses to power a first-generation iPod.

In the town we meet the leader, Carnegie, played by Gary Oldman who sounded a lot like an elderly Jack Palance. Carnegie runs his town with some help from mercenaries and a monopoly on a secret water supply. He has aspirations to expand, to start more towns, but to do so he's convinced that he needs a particular book to control the people, so he sends out illiterate raiding parties to look for one. They bring back crap like The DaVinci Code, but not the one he needs.

Eli drops off his battery at a general-type store to have it recharged and goes across the street to a bar to fill his canteen with water. In the bar he unintentionally provokes a fight with the book raiding crew by shooing a cat off the bar. Eli kills them all in self-defense and Carnegie, whose office is upstairs, takes an interest in Eli's abilities as both a killer and an intellectual (as Eli has confessed he reads daily) and makes Eli an offer to stay and become part of his crew. Carnegie isn't about to take no for an answer so he preemptively sends his blind girlfriend's daughter to bed Eli in hopes to sway his decision. (Her name is Solaris, like the car, but she's played by Mila Kunis. I like her real name better, so for my own sensibilities, she will henceforth be referred to as Mila.) Well, Eli must have just finished up before she knocked on his door because he's all "no, get out" to Mila who begs him to let her stay so Carnegie thinks she was successful. They share dinner and Eli prays before they eat.

Did I mention Eli has a book? Yeah, he has a book in his bag and is eerily protective of it. Mila found it under his sheet and he wouldn't even let her look at it; he wrapped it up in a cloth and put it away.

Anyways, the next morning Mila goes to breakfast with her mother and Carnegie where she stupidly repeats the prayer she learned the night before. Carnegie hears it and realizes that Eli has the book he's been looking for. Eli is trying to make a break for it, so he hustles over to grab his battery and on his way out the door he runs into Carnegie and his waiting crew of mercenaries. A shootout ensues and Eli kills most of Carnegie's men and Carnegie takes one in the leg. Eli leaves town and Mila follows. She tells Eli that she'll take him to the town's secret water supply if he takes her with him.

Eli fills his canteen and locks Mila up so she can't follow him. (He never agreed to her offer.) But she gets out eventually and nearly gets gang raped on her way to catch up, but Eli Robin Hood's the rapists with his bow and arrows. Naturally, she's grateful. They continue on together. Carnegie rounds up his remaining mercenaries and takes off after Eli.

Eli and Mila happen upon a ramshackle house in the middle of nowhere with an eccentric elderly couple living there. Although the couple is hospitable toward their guests, Eli and Mila get a strange feeling and come to the conclusion that the couple lures people in only to eat them. As Mila and Eli go to leave, they find Carnegie and his crew have assembled outside. The old man and woman reveal a large stockpile of weaponry hidden in their couch. A gunfight takes place where the elderly couple and several of Carnegie's men are killed. To end the standoff, Eli throws his book out the window, Carnegie grabs the book and kidnaps Mila and they take off. Eli takes a bullet in the gut.

On their way back to town, Mila successfully hijacks the car she is riding in, dispatches the mercenaries in it and drives back toward the old couple's house. Carnegie makes the decision to let her go as they would not have enough gas to get her and get back to town.

Mila makes it back to the house, but Eli is gone. She finds him a ways down the road still heading west. Carnegie arrives back to his town and rushes the book inside and calls for the store keeper who charged Eli's battery to pick the book's lock. Meanwhile, Eli and Mila make it to the Golden Gate Bridge and then begin to row to Alcatraz. Gunmen on the island tell them to turn back, but Eli tells them he has a copy of the King James Bible. Eli and Mila are allowed on the island where they are given a tour by Malcolm McDowell and he explains the community there is dedicated to preserving knowledge from before the flash. They have a printing press and an extensive collection of books, but are without a Bible. Eli tells him to get writing paper, lots of it. Eli tells Malcolm to write down precisely what he says and he begins to recite the Bible that he has been reading every day for thirty years.

Meanwhile Carnegie sends the shopkeeper away as soon as the lock is picked and opens the Bible. At this point, they should have spliced in the clip from "The Fifth Element" where Zorg opens the box and his laughter turns to tears as he says, "They're not here," because the Bible is in Braille. Suck on that, Oldman. Eli is blind, as is revealed in a close up of his eyes as he continues his recitation. Carnegie calls in his girlfriend, Mila's mother, who is also blind and tells her to read the book. She asks where her daughter is and doesn't like the answer. She refuses to read the book and tells Carnegie that he will die soon because she can smell his leg is septic before she walks out.

Stacks and stacks of handwritten paper infer Eli has finished reciting the entire Bible, he dies and is buried on Alcatraz, the Alcatraz Press begins printing Bibles, and although Mila has been offered sanctuary on the island, she decides to go back for her mother alone with Eli's weapons.

Oh, **spoiler alert**: If you don't want the movie's plot spoiled for you, you should not have read that or what follows.

Here are some of my issues with the movie.

So, Mila looked really good. She was the only one in the movie that was relatively clean with nice looking hair and teeth. Granted, it's a minor issue.

Eli tells us that shortly after the flash he found the Bible and began walking west because a voice (God) told him to. Let's assume his journey began in northern Maine and we know his destination was San Francisco. A straight shot between the two locations is about 3300 miles. He would need to have walked a third of a mile each day for thirty years to get there. My point is, although I have little doubt this is a reference to the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for forty years, it's just unrealistic. I know he's blind so it probably took him some time to get his bearings straight (not to mention to learn Braille with no help), so let's assume he wandered aimlessly for ten years before he realized the sun rises in the east. He still would have had to only walk less than half a mile a day to reach San Francisco in the remaining twenty years. It's possible he got caught up somewhere, but he was on a mission from God, so that's pretty doubtful. He wasn't spreading the Word; in fact, he went out of his way to avoid people. Maybe he was imprisoned somewhere for many years, but there's no mention of that (although he had some awful scars on his back, but they looked more like burn scars than if he had been whipped).

I don't have a problem with Eli's blindness and him doing all his other Superman stuff. I believe someone could memorize the entire Bible in thirty years. I'll also give you that Eli's other senses were heightened enough where he could hold his own in a gunfight against several trained mercenaries - I haven't seen "Daredevil" but it's kind of the same thing, I think. I have a feeling if you went back and carefully looked at each scene where he killed someone, either they would have shot first or they made some noise to give away their position. Eli stumbled into things every now and then in the movie; it made sense at the end when you found out he was blind, but despite these literal stumbles, his blindness wasn't a hindrance to his survival, yet it somehow took him thirty years to travel across the country.

Even though it took Eli thirty years to get to San Francisco, and that is a long ass time, it's not enough time to make this story truly make sense.

First, let's talk about the logistics of destroying every Bible in the world. In the movie they state all Bibles were destroyed after the flash. Clearly not every Bible was, but they got enough to the point where a guy who's extremely dedicated in finding one can't get his hands on it. First, how would you go about destroying every Bible? You'd have to go to every house (I'm not a religious fellow and I have two), to every room in every hotel and motel, to every church, to every bookstore and you still wouldn't get them all. And consider how long it would take to plan and accomplish this, not to mention how many people it would take. Not to

mention the resistance to the very idea, let alone the actual act of destroying all Bibles. Plus, where does it end? Think about all the books written *about* the Bible and all those books with Bible verses. I imagine pretty much every Bible verse is quoted and attributed somewhere. How many books in the Bible are printed separately? In addition to my two Bibles, I have the book of Psalms all by itself.

They just matter-of-factly state all Bibles were destroyed. What about opposition? Wars would have been fought, and those wars would go on for more than thirty years. One thing I do know: people don't want you to take away their God. You think an apocalyptic event like nuclear war (my guess about what happened – it was never specified) is going to shake people's faith? Some, yes. Not all. You'd probably have more people turn to religion after that.

The 1960 book [A Canticle for Leibowitz](#) by Walter M. Miller Jr. is about an Earth that has been devastated by nuclear war. The war was started as a backlash against scientific progress, especially the creation of nuclear weapons. Mobs killed learned people and destroyed any book they could find. This continued and eventually killed anyone who could read. Despite this, there were people who made it their mission to preserve knowledge by hiding books. The first part of the story doesn't begin until six hundred years after the war during a Dark Age in a monastery started by the eponymous Leibowitz that still preserves and tries to understand his memorabilia. One of the monks finds a fallout shelter in the desert and some papers inside that includes a grocery list. Once it is determined they belonged to Leibowitz, the papers are brought to the monastery as holy relics. In the second part, six hundred years after the first, the Dark Age is ending and a monk is trying to make a light bulb work. In the third part, another six hundred years after the second part, humanity has again progressed scientifically where they have nuclear weapons and now interplanetary space travel. Naturally, a nuclear war is expected soon.

Alfred Bester's 1956 book [The Stars My Destination](#) takes place in the 25th century. The book isn't explicitly about religion although it is mentioned that religion has been outlawed. Despite this, people still gather in their basements to practice Christianity. The point I'm trying to make is there's just not enough time for religion to have become so out of favor with the vast majority of the population to the point where Bibles are so rare. And even if Bibles were scarce, there are still plenty of people who existed pre-flash, so the knowledge should still be there. Even if all Bibles were destroyed, the Ten Commandments would still be known. How many stories do you know from the Bible just because it's part of common knowledge?

The Bible: the easy answer. By this I mean, for most of the movie, you're left to surmise that it's a Bible that Eli has. But you don't really see it until near the end. Obviously if you saw it too closely you would see that it was in Braille before it's revealed he is blind, but they show Eli taking it out, opening it, "reading" it in low light, putting it away, hiding it, and so forth. Was that a cross on the cover? It was out of sight so fast, I couldn't be sure. At one point I was

convinced that it was going to turn out to be some other book. Obviously, no, it was indeed the Bible. Besides, not enough time had really passed for such an important book to be anything other than the Bible. What Color is Your Parachute? wouldn't have had quite the same impact. In A Canticle for Leibowitz a grocery list is worthy of being illuminated and in The Stars My Destination Bibles aren't available. These stories take place several hundred years from now, so even though it's implausible, enough time has passed to make it seem possible.

The movie isn't really about the Bible as a book; it's about the message in the Book. As long as you have the message, you don't need the Book, but since not everyone can memorize two thousand pages, it's a good idea to have a Book. I could be wrong, but makes the movie an eighty million dollar statement, and a pretty simplistic one - not to say that's a bad thing. I'm still not sure I liked it.

John