Children of Men (2007)

**Cast**

* [Clive Owen](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/clive-owen)*as Theo Faron*
* [Julianne Moore](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/julianne-moore)*as Julian Taylor*
* [Michael Caine](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/michael-caine)*as Jasper*
* [Chiwetel Ejiofor](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/chiwetel-ejiofor)*as Luke*
* [Clare-Hope Ashitey](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/clare-hope-ashitey)*as Kee*
* [Pam Ferris](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/pam-ferris)*as Miriam*

**Directed by**

* [Alfonso Cuaron](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/alfonso-cuaron)

**Written by**

* [Cuaron](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/cuaron)
* [Timothy J. Sexton](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/timothy-j-sexton)

**Action, Adventure, Drama, Foreign, Science Fiction, Thriller**

**Rated R**for strong violence, language, some drug use and brief nudity

Plot Summary for  
[**Children of Men**](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0206634/)([2006](http://www.imdb.com/year/2006/)) [More at **IMDbPro**](http://pro.imdb.com/rg/plotsummary-title/tconst-pro-header-link/title/tt0206634/) »

[ad feedback](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0206634/plotsummary?ref_=tt_stry_pl)

The world's youngest citizen has just died at 18, and humankind is facing the likelihood of its own extinction. Set in and around a dystopian London fractious with violence and warring nationalistic sects, Children of Men follows the unexpected discovery of a lone pregnant woman and the desperate journey to deliver her to safety and restore faith for a future beyond those presently on Earth. *Written by* [*Production*](http://www.imdb.com/search/title?plot_author=Production&view=simple&sort=alpha)

Set in 2027, when no child has been born for 18 years and science is at loss to explain the reason, African and East European societies collapse and their dwindling populations migrate to England and other wealthy nations. In a climate of nationalistic violence, a London peace activist turned bureaucrat Theo Faron, joins forces with his revolutionary ex-wife Julian in order to save mankind by protecting a woman who has mysteriously became pregnant. *Written by* [*Ryan Devlin*](http://www.imdb.com/search/title?plot_author=Ryan%20Devlin&view=simple&sort=alpha)

"Children of Men" envisages a world one generation from now that has fallen into chaos on the heels of an infertility defect in the population. The world's youngest citizen has just died at 18, and humankind is facing the likelihood of its own extinction. Set against a backdrop of London torn apart by violence and warring nationalistic sects, "Children of Men" follows an unlikely champion of Earth's survival: Theo, a disillusioned ex-activist turned bureaucrat, who is forced to face his own demons and protect the planet's last remaining hope. *Written by* [*Anonymous*](http://www.imdb.com/search/title?plot_author=Anonymous&view=simple&sort=alpha)

World divisions, chaos and anarchy, these are the ways the world and the last remaining inhabitants are checking out. No child has been born for eighteen years. Human life and its moral self is eroding into extinction. Set in Britain in the year 2027, this is Theodore Faron finding his ghosts coming back to haunt his fruitless life, in the form of an underground band of rebels The Fishes. Unwittingly drawn into their plight, learning who can be trusted, who can be dependable, and how he must hold the most precious secret the Human race has been so longing to hear, the miracle that can change the course of Humanity; the first pregnant woman in eighteen years. On the run, he, Kee and Miriam must travel cross-country, on the run, terrified and helpless to the safe haven of the Human Project. With the help of aging hippie Jasper Palmer this horrific, dark, unconventional and uncompromising road movie is all that is left between the demise of the Human race and the birth of a new drawn. *Written by* [*Cinema\_Fan*](http://www.imdb.com/search/title?plot_author=Cinema_Fan&view=simple&sort=alpha)

With this dystopian world ravished by war, paranoia and the frustrations of Man the Orwellian vision of Nineteen Eighty-Four, the totalitarian future is now complete and amongst us. With female fertility becoming obsolete, Man cannot reproduce, and no child has been born on the face of the planet for eighteen years. Man, and his future, is dying. Soon he shall be extinct. Theo, the beaten, downtrodden and middle-aged ex-political activist will, unwittingly, become involved in a war of an underground revolt. Here he is active once more, in the perilous journey across England's Home Counties, with a young girl, Kee, who, to Theo's bewilderment is pregnant. The first pregnant woman for more than eighteen years. This secret must be protected, at all cost, and mother and child must flee to the mysterious and enigmatic Human Project, across the seas. Their flight is a constant fight for survival. Who can be trusted? Who can keep a secret? *Written by* [*Cinema\_Fan*](http://www.imdb.com/search/title?plot_author=Cinema_Fan&view=simple&sort=alpha)

Synopsis for  
[**Children of Men**](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0206634/)([2006](http://www.imdb.com/year/2006/)) [More at **IMDbPro**](http://pro.imdb.com/rg/synopsis-title/tconst-pro-header-link/title/tt0206634/) »

The film opens on November 16th, 2027. A brief newscast reports done by newsreaders (Mishal Husain & Rob Curling) on the state of the world: women have become infertile and no children have been born for 18 years. Most of the world's societies have collapsed and in Britain, all foreigners have been declared illegal immigrants and are rounded up by British military forces to be deported. Additionally, the youngest person in the world, the Argentine Baby Diego (Juan Gabriel Yacuzzi), has been murdered by someone who he refused to give an autograph.  
  
The film's protagonist, Theo Faron (Clive Owen), has narrowly escaped being killed when the London coffee shop he frequents is bombed, an act attributed to an underground guerrilla group, the Fishes. Theo is shaken by the incident and leaves work early to visit his friend, Jasper (Michael Caine), who lives outside London. Jasper, a former political activist, now lives in seclusion in a well-hidden house with his catatonic wife, Janice (Philippa Urquhart), growing variants of cannabis.  
  
The next day Theo is captured by The Fishes and is reunited with his former wife, Julian, who leads the group. She and Theo have not seen each other for nearly 20 years after their son, Dylan, died in a flu epidemic. She first tells him that the Fishes were not responsible for the bombing of the cafe the previous day. She also asks for his help in securing transit papers; Theo's cousin, Nigel (Danny Huston), has influence within the government. Theo is able to get the papers but they specifically state that Theo himself must accompany the refugee they are meant for. Theo agrees and he joins Julian (Julianne Moore), her associate Luke (Chiwetel Ejiofor), the refugee Kee (Clare-Hope Ashitey) and her midwife, Miriam (Pam Ferris) as they drive to the southern coast of England. Along the way, they are attacked in a forested area by a large mob and Julian is killed. As they flee the scene of the attack, they are pulled over by the police. When asked for their papers, Luke kills both policemen. A small funeral is held in the forest for Julian and Luke drives them to a safe house on a farm after finding another car.  
  
At the farm, Kee, reveals to Theo that she is about eight months pregnant. She also tells Theo that Julian had told Kee that she could only trust Theo. The Fishes hold a meeting to decide what to do with Kee. They conclude, despite Theo's objections, that Kee should stay with them until the child is born. Theo thinks the pregnancy should be made public, the Fishes think that the British government would seize both Kee and the baby for their own political ends. Kee agrees to stay in the custody of the Fishes.  
  
Later that night, Theo awakens to a commotion outside. Two of the men who attacked the travelers that day have come to the safe house, one of them badly wounded. Theo discovers that the attack on the car and Julian's murder were both arranged by Luke and the Fishes, who wish to use the baby for their own ends. Theo quietly awakes Kee and Miriam and convinces them to leave with him. They steal a car and narrowly escape the farm. Theo takes them to Jasper's house. While there, Jasper promises to arrange for Kee to meet a ship called the *Tomorrow*, a vessel belonging to a group called the Human Project, a collection of scientists based in the Azores off Portugal, and dedicated to restoring human fertility. Jasper arranges for his friend, Sid, to help Kee, Miriam and Theo enter the immigrant camp at Bexhill. From there, they will make arrangements for Kee to slip into the waters near Bexhill to meet the *Tomorrow*.  
  
The Fishes find Jasper's hidden home, setting off the alarms. Jasper gives Theo his car and gives them an escape route - he tells them to meet a friend of his, Syd (Peter Mullan), a guard from Bexhill. From a nearby bluff, Theo watches as Jasper refuses to give the Fishes any information and is cruelly murdered by Luke. Before the Fishes arrival, Jasper had euthanized his wife.  
  
Theo drives himself and his charges to a nearby school to hide out and wait for Syd. While there, Miriam talks of her past work as a maternity nurse and the onset of female sterilization 18 years prior. Syd arrives, acting very intimidating at first, and takes the fugitives in his truck to Bexhill. As they approach the detention center, Kee goes into labor. When they arrive, Miriam, while trying to protect Kee from the guards, fakes religious mania and is taken off the bus, hooded and detained, however, her fate is not revealed. Theo and Kee manage to enter Bexhill with her pregnancy undetected and meet a woman named Marichka who takes them to a dingy room. Right after they reach the room, Kee gives birth to a girl.  
  
The next morning they are met by Marichka and Sid, who tells them about an uprising that has taken over Bexhill. The Fishes have broken into the city and the national guard have been called out to restore control. Both Syd and Marichka (Oana Pellea) are also astonished to see the baby. Syd, having seen Theo on television the night before, plans to turn Theo in for a large reward, Theo being a prime suspect from the attack on the road. With Marichka's help, they escape Syd and find a temporary haven with Marichka's people. Marichka is also supposed to take them to a boat that will get them to the *Tomorrow* in Bexhill's harbor.  
  
Theo, Marichka and Kee enter the city and are quickly found by Luke and his cohorts. They take Kee and her baby and leave Theo and Marichka to be executed by Patric (Charlie Hunman), one of Luke's lieutenants. They are able to escape when a skirmish erupts nearby. Theo goes looking for Kee, finding her in a decrepit apartment building which is under fire from the military. Theo finds Kee with Luke, who has joined the battle with the British forces outside. As Theo attempts to take Kee and the baby out, Luke opens fire in Theo's direction -- Luke is killed a few moments later. As Theo and Kee walk out of the building, everyone who sees the baby stands in awe and the fighting stops, many of them break into prayer. The two walk outside the building and begin to walk away. The fighting resumes. They find their way back to Marichka and the rowboat she's found for them and float out into Bexhill's harbor. Marichka refuses to leave with them and pushes the boat out.  
  
The two make it out to a nearby buoy which marks the rendezvous point. As they wait, two jets fly overhead and begin a bombardment of Bexhill. Kee sees blood in the bottom of the boat and panics, thinking it's hers. Theo tells her he was hit in the abdomen when Luke shot at him. Theo has just enough time to teach Kee how to burp the baby and she tells him that she'll name her after Theo's son, Dylan, because Dylan is also a girl's name. Theo loses consciousness just as the *Tomorrow* arrives. Just before the closing credits roll the sound of children laughing is heard.

**Reading 1**

[**Roger Ebert**](http://www.rogerebert.com/contributors/roger-ebert)

October 4, 2007 |

It is above all the look of "Children of Men" that stirs apprehension in the heart. Is this what we are all headed for? The film is set in 2027, when assorted natural disasters, wars and terrorist acts have rendered most of the world ungovernable, uninhabitable or anarchic. Britain stands as an island of relative order, held in line by a fearsome police state. It has been 18 years since Earth has seen the birth of a human child.

Watching "Children of Men," which creates a London in ruins, I realized after a point that the sets and art design were so well done that I took it as a real place. Often I fear it will all come to this, that the rule of law and the rights of men will be destroyed by sectarian mischief and nationalistic recklessness. Are we living in the last good times?

There is much to be said about the story of "Children of Men," directed by [Alfonso Cuaron](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/alfonso-cuaron) and based on a lesser-known novel by P.D. James, who usually writes about a detective. But the story, like the stories of "Metropolis," "[Nosferatu](http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-nosferatu-1922)" or "Escape from New York," is secondary to the visual world we are given to regard. Guerrilla fighters occupy abandoned warehouses. The homeless live in hovels. Immigrants are rounded up and penned in cages. The utilities cannot be depended upon. There are, most disturbing of all, no children. Only dogs and cats remain to be cared for and cherished.

As the film opens, the TV news reports that the world's youngest person has been stabbed to death in Buenos Aires, because he declined to give an autograph. Theo Faron ([Clive Owen](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/clive-owen)), the film's hero, watches the news in a cafe and then leaves with his paper cup in his hand. Seconds later, a bomb destroys the cafe. This is essential: Faron is terrified. He crouches and fear freezes his face. This will not be like action pictures where the hero never seems to fear death.

Britain, as the last functioning nation, has closed its borders, and is engaged in a war between the establishment and a band of rebels who support immigrant rights. Faron is kidnapped by this group, headed by Julian Taylor ([Julianne Moore](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/julianne-moore)), who was once his lover; they lost a child.

Her associate, Luke ([Chiwetel Ejiofor](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/chiwetel-ejiofor), in another unexpected character), backs her up with muscle and wisdom. Interestingly, there seems to be no racial prejudice in this Britain; they don't care what color you are, as long as you were on board before they pulled up the rope. Julian's group wants Faron's influence to get travel papers for Kee ([Clare-Hope Ashitey](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/clare-hope-ashitey)), so the young woman can be smuggled out of the country and to refuge in a rumored safe haven. Kee is a key to the future; the movie's advertising tells you why, but I will not.

The center of the film involves the journey toward the coast, which Faron and Kee undertake with Julian, Luke and Miriam ([Pam Ferris](http://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/pam-ferris)), who is both watchdog and nurse. Along the way, they are pursued by Homeland Security troops, and there is a chase scene with one of the most sudden and violent moments I have ever seen in a film. Not all of the chases in all of the Bournes equal this one, shot in a single take by one camera, for impact.

Here again, the action scenes seem rooted in sweat and desperation. Too many action scenes look like slick choreography, but Cuaron and Owen get the scent of fear and death, and nobody does anything that is particularly impossible. Small details: Even in the midst of a firefight, dogs scamper in the streets. Faron's hand reaches out to touch and reassure the nearest animal, and I was reminded of Jack London's belief that dogs (not cats so much) see us as their gods. Apparently sterility affects only humans on Earth; when we are gone, will the dogs still tirelessly search for us?

I have been using Hitchcock's term "MacGuffin" too much lately, but there are times when only it will do. The lack of children and the possibility of children are the MacGuffins in "Children of Men," inspiring all the action, but the movie significantly never tells us why children stopped being born, or how they might become possible again. The children-as-MacGuffin is simply a dramatic device to avoid actual politics while showing how the world is slipping away from civility and co-existence. The film is not really about children; it is about men and women, and civilization, and the way that fear can be used to justify a police state.

I admire that plot decision. I would have felt let down if the movie had a more decisive outcome; it is about the struggle, not the victor, and the climax in my opinion is open-ended. The performances are crucial, because all of these characters have so completely internalized their world that they make it palpable, and themselves utterly convincing.

Cuaron fulfills the promise of futuristic fiction; characters do not wear strange costumes or visit the moon, and the cities are not plastic hallucinations, but look just like today, except tired and shabby. Here is certainly a world ending not with a bang but a whimper, and the film serves as a cautionary warning. The only thing we will have to fea

Reading 2

Peter Bradshaw: The Guardian

What will the end of the world look like? As shabby and nasty as the way it looks here is my guess. This explosively violent future-nightmare thriller, directed by Alfonso Cuarón and adapted from the novel by PD James, has simply the most extraordinary look of any movie around: a stunningly convincing realisation of a Beirut-ised London in the year 2027, in which terrorist bombs have become as dreary and commonplace as cancer.

No one does dystopian satire like the English and this story is in a recognisably vernacular tradition, though owing as much to John Wyndham as George Orwell. It actually reminded me of bygone television chillers such as Barry Hines's Threads and the 1970s classic Survivors, with their distinctive and now unfashionably high-minded determination to confront the worst outcomes imaginable. It is, perhaps, odd that Cuarón sticks with the 1992 novel's reluctance to predict the internet, and media-watchers will be intrigued to see that in 2027 the London Evening Standard has evidently seen off web and freesheet competition to stay in its monopoly pole position on the capital's sandbagged streets. But despite the stylisations and grandiloquent drama, there is something just so grimly and grittily plausible about the awful world conjured up here, and the full-on urban warfare scenes really are electrifying. Clive Owen stars as Theo, a former radical protester, who in defeated middle age has become an alcoholic and low-ranking employee of a government department: a miserable guy in a miserable world. Pollution has rendered humanity infertile. The world's youngest person is all of 18 years old and there is a global malaise of disorder and despair, which our right little, tight little island is toughing out, offering its citizens free suicide pills with the Shakespearean brand-name of Quietus. Britain's relative calm and prosperity have attracted waves of illegal immigrants; it is the responsibility of the UK's Homeland Security department to pen them into vast mesh-fenced internment camps, the biggest of which is a gigantic caged shanty-town in Bexhill - a very English Guantanamo-on-Sea.

Theo's world is further shattered when he is abducted by a terrorist group called the Fishes, led by his former lover Julian (Julianne Moore), an unrepentant activist who inveigles him into helping her smuggle one of their number out of the country. This is Kee (Claire-Hope Ashitey), a terrified young woman with a sensational secret, whom the terrorists want to use for their own ends. Kee looks to Theo for help - a very unpromising hero, who is hardly less scared than she is. But Theo recovers some of his idealism and even romanticism in protecting her.

Cuarón's movie has softened the blow of James's book just a little, but the cinema screen here is like an opened window on to a world of Arctic fear and despair. His script is a little cumbersome occasionally: some characters are required to deliver awkward set-piece speeches with bullets whistling past their nose. So much else is outstanding, though. The hard, flat, cold images recorded by cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki - reporting back from the futureworld of decay dreamt up by production designers Jim Clay and Geoffrey Kirkland - are stunning. Cuarón's gun battle between the terrorists and the army is a bravura piece of work, deploying a very scary sort of first-person shooter graphics; incredibly, it turns Bexhill into a Middle East warzone, like the strange Vietnam of Kubrick's Full Metal Jacket - famously filmed in the surreal moonscape of London's undeveloped Docklands. And the first terrorist detonation hit like a punch in the solar plexus. There are witty and shrewd small parts for Michael Caine, as the ageing hippy ganja dealer who hooks Theo and Kee up with a counter-cultural support network, Peter Mullan as the psychotic border guard and Danny Huston as Nigel, the elegantly despairing apparatchik who salvages great works of art from the philistine mob.

One of the cleverest touches is the ancient, manky sweatshirt Theo wears -advertising the London Olympics of 2012. To us, it is a symbol of London's last-ever demonstration of untroubled national rejoicing, when this country was awarded the Games, before that mood was cruelly shattered by the 7/7 bombings. Now London 2012 is Theo's veteran-badge of despair, and a memento of his lost career in political dissent.

So what would happen to us all, psychologically, if the end of the world was at hand? Danny Huston's mandarin tells Theo that he personally gets by from day to day by simply not thinking about what is happening, and his stunned, bleak acquiescence in the creeping horror of global death is symptomatic of the vast spiritual sterility which ushered in the catastrophe in the first place.

Freaky chiliastic cults start springing up: the Renouncers and Repenters - whose frenzied self-laceration reminded me a little of Roy Andersson's millennial fantasy Songs from the Second Floor, in which a little girl is sacrificed to stave off the last judgment. But what Cuarón's film suggests is that despair and disgust would manifest themselves overwhelmingly in tyranny. A mass, irrational longing for punishment would gather; checks and restraints on the political classes' natural tendency towards repression would be removed, and our energy to resist the agencies of the state would be eroded. All of these ideas make a very grim backdrop to an excellent thriller. Cuarón has created the thinking person's action movie.