

## THINGS TO COME 1936

Influential early Sci-fi film  
Sky captain and the world of tomorrow.

World Communications  
Wings over the World

based on H. G. Wells' novel "The Shape of Things to Come". T

- Shows a helicopter several years before [Igor Sikorsky](#) developed the first real-life model.
- The part of Theotocopulos was originally filmed with [Ernest Thesiger](#) in the role. The scenes were re-shot with Sir [Cedric Hardwicke](#) because the producers wanted a better-known actor with more "marquee value".
- Music recorded at The Scala Theatre, Charlotte Street, London, England UK

This early sci-fi masterwork by Herbert George Wells with music by Arthur Bliss is a powerful piece of film-making. Adapted from Wells' somewhat different work by the author, it presents a look at the human future with the subject of periods of war as versus periods of 'peace'. The structure is that after a contrasted-pair of episodes of normalcy and gathering clouds of war, the script allows the war to happen. Two families, the Cabells and the Passworthys disagree about what may happen; Passworthy takes a hopeful view of civilization's "automatic" progress; Cabell is the thinker, the doubter. Their city Everytown--obviously London--becomes wrecked by a war featuring tanks, a magnificent war march by Bliss, and the end of civilization. The second portion finds people living in the wreckage of what had been the city under a "Boss", played with bravura by Ralph Richardson, whose woman, lovely Margaretta Scott, is as fascinating a dreamer as he is a concrete-bound dictator type. He is trying to rebuild old WWI airplanes so he can attack a nearby hill tribe to complete his petty

kingdom; a young scientist complains about having his work continually interrupted demands for planes--etc.--everlastingly; this is Wells' comment on war versus progress. The survivors are subject to a plague called "The Wandering Sickness" also. Enter a modern flying machine piloted by the Cabell of the first section of the film, now part of Wings Over the World, an International Scientists' Coalition, who are planning to end warfare forever. This flight-suited modernist has fascinating conversations with the Boss and his woman, their attraction being evident; then Boss sends up his aircraft against them, the Scientists come with huge numbers of planes and drop the "Gas of Peace" onto the ruins of Everytown. Only the Boss dies, fighting too hard against the pacifying. The film then shows ore being mined and by slow steps being made into the girders of a magnificent new futuristic city of towers. In section three, a future Cabell argues with a future Passworthy over the morality of human science. Passworthy wonders if they have a right to send men to the Moon; Cabell champions man's right to advancement and the need to expand his horizons. The son of Passworthy and Cabell's daughter, are the astronauts being sent. Theotocopulos, a religious-minded Luddite, makes a fiery speech on a huge screen in the city's Forum and leads an attack on the 'space gun' that is to fire the new rocket free of Earth's gravity. The climax of the plot is the firing of the space gun successfully; the denouement and ending is a speech by Cabell praising worth and science that is universally considered to be the most profound defense of the mind ever penned. "It is all the universe--or nothing!" Cabell tells Passworthy. "Which shall it be?" As Cabell, Raymond Massey gives perhaps his greatest screen performance; he is thoughtful, compassionate, and reasonable, a true scientist. As the rabble-rouser who wants to end the Age of Science, Cedric Hardwicke is perfect and powerful. Edward Chapman playing Passworthy does admirably impersonating the voice of convention and fear. The storyline is logical, frequently beautiful and always interesting. Given the near-extinction of mankind, the idea of a civilization run by rebuilders scientists is rendered plausible and

credible to the viewer. This is a triumph for the director, William Cameron Menzies, for Bliss and for all concerned. Listen to the dialogue with someone you love; within its constructed limits, this is a thinking man's drama debating two possible human futures-- progress or its reactionary opposite.