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## Masks of Moloch: Demands of Sacrifice in Speculative Fiction and Film

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**Abstract:**

Before Milton, Moloch was known in Western culture primarily as an Semitic deity who demanded the immolation of children. Milton's characterization of Moloch in *Paradise Lost* as a demon who advocates outright war against Heaven shifted the pre-Enlightenment view of Moloch by infusing him with a modern metaphorical meaning tied to warfare that previously did not exist. Over time, references to Moloch as a military motivator grew, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when massively destructive wars with high death tolls took place across the world. This era also saw the rise and refinement of modern speculative fiction. Since the late nineteenth century, a variety of writers (e.g., Alexandr Kuprin, Karel Čapek and Aldous Huxley) and directors/producers of visual media (e.g., Fritz Lang, Joss Whedon) have used variations of Moloch in both his classical sacrificial aspect and his Miltonian militaristic attitude, sometimes in combination, to comment on the complexities of contemporary social developments, in particular industrialization and large-scale warfare. This paper looks at Moloch's various incarnations in speculative works over the past century and a half and argues that the persistence of such references align with the growth of institutional power, particularly as applied to government and industry.

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