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Preface: The sublime and the ridiculous.-Part I: Overcoming the past -- Introduction -- 1. In the shadow of war -- 2. Towards utopia -- 3. Prophets of the future -- 4. Cinema and the life of space -- Summary: Part I -- Part II: Impossible dreams -- Introduction -- 5. Artistic integrity and industrial change -- 6. A history of incompleteness -- Summary: Part II -- Part III: The marvels of ruins -- Introduction -- 7. Passion and performance -- 8. Fighting to be heard -- 9. The world on fire -- Summary: Part III -- Conclusion: "Why have I been only what I am?".

This book explores the creation and destruction of Abel Gance's most ambitious film project, and seeks to explain why his meteoric career was so nearly extinguished at the end of silent cinema. By 1929, Gance was France's most famous director. Acclaimed for his technical innovation and visual imagination, he was also admonished for the excessive length and expense of his productions. Gance's first sound film, *La Fin du Monde* (1930), was a critical and financial disaster so great that it nearly destroyed his career. But what went wrong? Gance claimed it was commercial sabotage whilst critics blamed the director's inexperience with new technology. Neither excuse is satisfactory. Based on extensive archival research, this book re-investigates the cultural background and aesthetic consequences of Gance's transition from silent filmmaking to sound cinema. *La Fin du Monde* is revealed to be only one element of an extraordinary cultural project to transform cinema into a universal religion and propagate its power through the League of Nations. From unfinished films to unrealized social revolutions, the reader is given a fascinating tour of Gance's lost cinematic utopia.