

The Coolest Man In the Room

P. Hi, Bob. Sit down—sit down. I guess you've heard—

H. Right. Somebody pressed the button—some (expletive deleted) mess this is. Kissinger the (unintelligible) called and says the Russians have just sent up their—

P. That's right.

D. I'm afraid, Sir—

H. Yep.

P. Who is this (expletive removed) Liddy, anyway? He had the button?

D. When he asked Mitchell for access to the button Mitchell just laughed and puffed and said—Oh, hell, if it makes him happy—

P. Right—

H. Really?

P. On this I think we have to buy time, to minimize—

D. We have 15 minutes. It was just eight minutes ago Liddy pressed—

P. What is it? Moscow, Leningrad—how the hell—

H. Henry says 35 cities and all the Russian military bases. Figure about 60 per cent destruction of the entire—

P. Uh, huh.

D. Right.

P. Well, I've got Brezhnev on a short leash but I'm not certain that Kosygin will—

H. He is kind of buzzy, stupid.

D. Retaliation may be a problem.

P. What?

D. They are against us.

P. Oh?

H. Henry says 30 per cent of their missiles might get through. Most of the East Coast would go, which we could live with. But—

P. So ridiculous.

H. World War III could put a dent in the détente.

D. We could re-call the planes and missiles but Strachan has shredded the fail-safe code, which from a cold legal standpoint is probably—

P. Destruction of government property?

D. At least that.

P. (Expletive deleted). So your options are—We could fight it out but the Chinese might move in and pick up the pieces and we would—

H. Look like dopes.

P. And in effect, look like—Now the other line, however, if you take the line that they attacked first. You could consider that scenario. Strachan knows?

D. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee will hold hearings, you can (expletive deleted) bet on that. Strachan would be called. And Liddy painted his name on one of the missiles before he pressed the button.

P. Oh, nuclear holocaust would a hard rap to prove.

D. Uh, huh.

P. Is there any way we can keep the missiles from landing until after the '74 elections?

H. I asked Henry that. There was a pause—

P. He is such a dumb—

H. And he said no, we have 15 minutes. By now it must be down to six or eight.

P. (Expletive removed). (Door opens.)

Z. Hi! Just got a call from CBS. They're asking about some damn World War III story that is going around. Now isn't that just . . . totally irresponsible? What should I indicate?

Mr. Lipez is a columnist for the Amherst Record and the Boston Herald American. This article first appeared in The Progressive.

P. Get the name of the reporter who called. We will get him good after this doomsday thing blows over.

D. I am keeping a list.

P. Make a general statement saying—how, say this very bizarre mushroom cloud thing, if it appears at all, is deplorable but that nobody now employed by the White House will have been involved. It was some misguided guys over at CREEP, isn't it?

Z. Oh, The Post called too. Asked if a guy called Liddy works here. His name was spotted by a Pan Am pilot on some unidentified flying object that also had an American flag on it.

H. This is a problem.

P. Oh, uh—oh, ah—well—(Door closes.)

P. Now we have to take a look at our options. Let me say this—

D. You might put it on a national security grounds basis.

P. National security. Liddy had to press the button for national security . . .

D. Then the question is, why didn't you do it?

P. Because I was busy with—what?

D. Watergate.

D. I think we could get by on that.

P. That is true. With the Watergate cover-up unraveling I didn't have time to—

P. Congratulations, John. The way you have handled all this, it seems to me, has been very skillful.

D. Nothing is going to come crashing down on us to our surprise.

P. Well, shall we head for the bomb shelter?

H. Right.

P. Somebody get Bebe.

H. Sure.