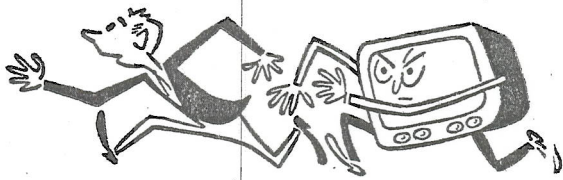


Terrence O'Flaherty



Bad Night in the Lincoln Bedroom

IF THERE IS one thing the American public understands it is The Final Shoot-Out. It has been fed to three generations of viewers in countless westerns and an endless parade of crime dramas. Late Saturday afternoon it appeared that Richard Nixon is determined to play out his drama at a faster pace than even his script writers could envision.



Eric Sevareid

Students of this classic format know that the scene which directly precedes the Shoot-Out is The Chase. And the one before that is the Show of Defiance. That's the scene where even the least suspicious players finally realize that there's Trouble in Town.

Saturday the television screens of the nation crackled and popped with the Trouble in Town sequence in which the most honorable men of the play fell away from the central character as he clutched his wheels of tape so tightly that even the most trusting viewer became suspicious and asked:

"What IS in those tapes, anyway?"

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SEVERAL YEARS ago on one of his jowl-shaking TV addresses Mr. Nixon told viewers, "I am not a dramatic person." Maybe he wasn't THEN but, baby, you should see him now! Even viewers who aren't interested in dramatics are beginning to wonder how the scenes just before the final commercial will be played.

The only worry that gnaws on the nerves of more imaginative spectators is the fear that this drama may last 90 minutes instead of an hour and that one of the final surprises will be The Grand Diversionary Tactic staged in some remote place like the sandy wastes of the Sinai Peninsula . . .

When television critics called the Fall of 1973 "The Season of Crime" no one expected that it would break out on BOTH sides of the TV set.

"It is hardly debatable any longer that this law-and-order administration has turned out to be as lawless as any on record. Perhaps it already holds the record," observed Eric Sevareid on CBS. "The Nixon Presidency will be discussed for decades, not only because of its policy judgments, good or bad, but also because of this President's judgment of other human beings. Maybe the psychologists can help the historians figure out why Mr. Nixon was attracted to these kinds of men, and why these kinds of men were attracted to Mr. Nixon. The body count is already far too high to be explained by happenstance or ill luck."

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ONE THING is certain: the cast of players is dwindling down to a precious few — two on Key Biscayne and one in Moscow plus an unofficial understudy standing in the wings without a script.

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