

***Forget the Bomb;***  
***Or, How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love Nuclear Secrets***

*By Robert MacManus*

Every now and then you get a second chance in life—a chance to take it all back and start over.

This was not one of those times.

A few years ago when I was fresh out of collage, I didn't know what to do with my life. My friend Bob was in the same boat.

Here was the sign we saw on the street:

WORK FOR THE GOVERNMENT—PROTECT DEMOCRACY—MAKE BIG MONEY  
AT HOME!

We dialed the number.

The man said that if we met a few minimum qualifications, we would have a dream job, complete with prestige, respect, power, influence, the women would swoon, etc., etc., etc.

We wanted it.

On Monday we went to an office in the suburbs. We wore our best suits, fresh haircuts, and eager smiles.

The place looked typical enough. Desks, chairs, computers, etc. A stern-looking older lady wrote our names down on a clipboard.

There was one peculiar thing about his office, however. Instead of the usual motivational posters you find in offices (you know the ones with pictures of eagles and

athletes touting slogans like “Every thousand-mile journey begins with single step,” or “If you will it, it is no dream,” or “Yes, your life really does have meaning, so stop whining and get back to work,” that sort of thing), this place was covered with pictures of nuclear weapons exploding over the desert, nuclear weapons exploding over the sea, nuclear weapons exploding over mid-sized Japanese cities—that sort of thing.

Bob didn't seem to think this was at all unusual.

A man with horn-rim glasses told us we made a great decision and that, despite what he read in the papers, not all of our generation were unmotivated losers, with long-hair and vintage clothes.

Then he explained:

“I suppose you're wondering why I've called you here today?,” he asked.

Yes, yes we were wondering.

“Well,” he said, “I want to explain to you boys about an exciting career opportunity. One that puts you in the center of the most exciting work done today—vital to our democracy.”

Bob and I were definitely interested.

“That work is the inventorying of our nation's nuclear secrets.” He went on, “since the end of the Cold War—You boys know what the Cold War was, don't you?”

I remember reading about the Cold War. It had to do with us not liking either the Vietnamese or communism. I remember we had lots of nuclear bombs to stop the Russians, who were bent on our destruction.

Of course, we told the man that we know all about the Cold War. (Actually Bob said that. I was too distracted by the picture on the wall of a bunch of big ships

exploding out of the water and flying through the air with the blast of a nuclear explosion right behind them.)

The encyclopedia had two things to say about the Cold War:

COLD WAR—A war of words between East and West. While no shots need be fired, the stockpile of a capacity to destroy all life on Earth is essential.

And;

COLD WAR, ENDING—During the Cold War, the East and West each wanted to be in charge. They were convinced that the world was a very small place, so one of them had to go. Resultantly, they built and collected all the bombs they could, so that each side might be able to blow each other up should things get too cramped.

Then one day, the East and the West discovered that the world was a much bigger place than either had originally surmised. There was, in fact, plenty of room for them both. One of the sides also decided that it didn't want to be in charge after all, as being in charge of a planet is an expensive proposition. So they gave up on the business of blowing each other up and pursued other means of self-entertainment—mainly drugs and the stock market. But they forgot that the network of bombs they had built was still there, along with the network of bunkers and think tanks that built the bombs, as well as the network of bunkers and think tanks that supported the bomb-supporting network of bunkers and think tanks. So all the bright boys they had working in these networks, still under the assumption that there's something to this idea of blowing up other nations, kept on building bombs and thinking about how to use them.

Everyday they would get together in the staff lounge and talk about all the new ideas for bombs they might have had the previous day. Once every few weeks or so one

of the bright boys would come up with a particularly daring plan for building a very particular kind of bomb or for blowing up something in particular and they would all get very exciting. This went on, day after day, year after year, while the nations they worked for slowly forgot all about them.

Long story short, we got the job. One month later I found myself in the middle of the largest warehouse I had ever seen—stacked to the rafters with nuclear secrets.

“What about working at home?,” I demanded. “Shut up and start counting,” Bob ordered.

Three months later, after having counted Three-hundred and twenty-five thousand, one-hundred and sixty-five nuclear secrets, I had had enough. I was sick of nuclear secrets. I didn’t care about the money. I didn’t care about the prestige. I didn’t care about the women swooning. I wanted out.

“Bob,” I said, “I want out.”

“No-can-do, my friend,” Bob casually replied. “We’re only just getting started on these nuclear secrets. We’ll be here for years at this rate.”

It’s very difficult to describe what happened next. I remember I was just about to tell Bob exactly what he could do with his nuclear secrets, when we were enveloped in a golden light. A booming voice sounded “PUT YOUR PENCILS DOWN AND STEP AWAY FROM YOUR CLIPBOARDS!”

A steamy gas filled the room, and everything went dark.

I have only sketchy memories of what happened next. We were shuffled by men in dark suits into dark vans, and driven to a dark place. Then we were sitting in a waiting room.

A man in horn-rimmed glasses was there (a different man than the first one).

"I suppose you're wondering why I've brought you here today?," the man asked.

Yes, yes, we were wondering.

"It has to do with all those nuclear secrets you've been counting."

Here was the thing: It seems that, sometime during the late 60s, the government had collected so many nuclear secrets that the secrets started to form a mind of their own. Rudimentary at first, by the time the Cold War ended the Great Mind of Nuclear Secrets had grown so intelligent that it had developed its own self-preservation instinct. Now whenever the government tried to reduce the number of nuclear secrets, the Great Mind would overpower whatever hapless dimwits they sent into that warehouse and spit them out.

We had been the government's last hope. They had been trying for years to count the nuclear secrets so they could determine how to control the Mind.

The man wrote down our statements, stamped "Top Secret" at the top of each page, and filed them away. He made us sign non-disclosure agreements.

The was about to send us home when were enveloped in a golden light. A steamy gas filled the room, and everything went dark.

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It's a good life counting nuclear secrets. I have power, prestige, job security, and the women swoon. I hope the nuclear secrets go on forever, and I'm sure they will.

2000, MacManus