



Thoughts from Linda:

Nuclear War
A Scenario

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Imagine that you only have six minutes of your life left. What would you do with it?

What *could* you do with it? According to the first link that appeared after my Google search, it only takes five seconds, on average, for a text message to be delivered. You could easily combine messages to your loved ones, all at once, with a remaining 5 minutes and 55 seconds to catch the end of that Yellowstone episode you were just re-watching.

What can you do in six minutes? Make a cup of coffee. Check social media—Complete 20 pushups. You could gaze out the window and admire the world unfolding around you, in which 1500 babies will be born. You could breathe three thousand six hundred seconds.

If you happen to be the President of the United States, you could find yourself in a situation where you had to make a decision that would determine life on our planet...and just have 6 minutes to do it!

That is the time from when a President is informed of some nuclear launch until she/he must decide on an American response. This is the kind of decision that President Ronald Reagan termed "totally irrational" and moved him to fight for the reduction of nuclear weapons. However, the threat is even greater now than it was during Reagan's era, and this book shows us just how vulnerable we all are to an accident, a misinterpretation, or an actual irrational act by some other power or rogue state that decides to send a nuclear weapon into action.

This incredible book tells the story of just how we, on the planet, are interconnected so tightly and so rigidly to a set of protocols that we may not be able to stop the action to prevent the destruction of our planet in the case of any nuclear sign or perceived sign of aggression. It is as if we are all in a play, and the parts are scripted, and there is very little opportunity to change or alter the script, much less stop the play itself.

It is a frightening story and a most important one.

I discovered this book while listening to one of my favorite podcasts, *Hardcore History*, with Dan Carlin. He interviewed the author, Annie Jacobson, in a most intriguing one-hour conversation about the book, her research, and many shocking aspects revealed in this 2024 Best Seller.

I have since read this book two times. It is a 'fast read' and a page-turner, and I could not stop thinking about it afterward. My second read was just as interesting as the first, and I could read it more slowly, contemplating more along the way.

It is indeed horrifying.

She tells the story through a fictional scenario-writing device completely based on facts. She drew on interviews of over 100 individuals in the research for the book and is an expert investigative journalist and author herself, having written six other books related to the military-industrial complex. Those interviewed included Presidential advisors, Cabinet members, nuclear weapons engineers, scientists, soldiers, airmen, special operators, Secret Service members, emergency management experts, intelligence analysts, civil servants, and others who have been involved with nuclear weaponry over previous decades. Her exhaustive notes at the end of the book well document the interviewees and their specific on-the-record quotes.

The scenario she created has North Korea launching a surprise nuclear ICBM toward Washington D.C, which was followed not long after by another launch from a submarine aimed at the Diablo Canyon Nuclear power plant in California. After the first section, entitled *The Buildup (or How We Got Here)*, the story itself takes part in three sections, each part covering 24 minutes. The book's final section is *The Next 24 Months and Beyond (or Where We Are Headed after a Nuclear Exchange.)*

The entire story takes 72 minutes. This scenario does not have a happy ending.

You will learn what happens in the first second after a nuclear launch. She describes how a car-sized sensor from the US Defense Department's SBIRS ("sibbers") satellite system spots the fire from a missile's hot rocket exhaust through a cloud cover. This happens within a few tenths of a second after ignition. SBIRS is the name of a group of satellites synchronized with the earth's rotation, so it 'lingers' as if suspended over likely enemies and their potential sites monitoring a wide area for a nuclear launch. These sensors are so powerful they can see a single lighted match from 200 miles away.

You will see just what happens in the first 15 seconds from a launch until American jets take off in Colorado from Buckley Space Force Base, which is home to Space Delta 4, the missile-warning unit that operates our defense satellites in space as well as ground-based early warning radars around the world. These jets validate the threat and communicate with NORAD, NORTHCOM, and STRATCOM, all of which you will learn about in this book.

Once launched, an ICBM cannot be recalled.

You will learn about the Clear Space Force Station in Alaska as they are the first radar sites to see the incoming missile, which takes about 8 minutes in this scenario. She describes, in great detail, what happens minute by minute in places like the Cheyenne Mountain Complex in Colorado in the North American Aerospace Defense Command and the US Strategic Command (STRATCOM) in Nebraska, a 916,000 square foot complex of bunkers, command centers, medical facilities, dining halls, sleep quarters, power stations, tunnels and more. This \$1.3 billion facility is buried several stories underground and houses more than 3,500 people, all of them alerted within the first minute of the potential strike.

While many of the processes are top secret, she shares several of her interviews with key players, such as retired General George Lee Butler, who commanded the US nuclear forces from 1991 to 1994, who summed up his responsibility by saying, "Should our warning systems detect an attack on the United States...my role was to advise the President that we were under attack; to characterize it in terms of the type and number of weapons and their targets; to advise him/her of the options as portrayed in the nuclear war plan; to elicit an execution order; and promptly transmit it to the operational forces to ensure their timely launch, survival and delivery of their weapons."

This is an inside view into the 'script' that is still in place today.

The scenario goes into significant detail and unfolds like a fictional mystery, except we know this is based on reality. By the end of the story, based on a misinterpretation, Russia also launched hundreds of missiles at the US. To make things worse, the North Koreans detonated an EMP (electromagnetic pulse) from a satellite that it had been hiding 300 miles above Omaha, Nebraska.

You'll get an education on EMP, as she notes, "An electromagnetic pulse weapon detonated in the ionosphere does not harm people, animals, or plants on the ground. It is silent. In space, there is no atmosphere to produce sound. An EMP weapon causes no structural damage. For the millions of Americans sheltered inside the basements of their homes, had nuclear bombs not just destroyed Washington D.C. and Diablo Canyon, the situation might seem like just another power outage at first."

But this is different, very different. "The super-EMP delivers a shockwave so powerful that industrial-strength surge suppressors and lightning arresters designed to block high-voltage spikes are rendered useless all at once. SCADA systems go down. SCADA refers to the Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition. This computer-based, human-interfaced control system gathers and analyzes information on industrial equipment across America's critical infrastructure sectors. It delivers information to people in these sectors, allowing them to do their jobs."

With this system down, the entire country goes down. In short, the book ends with a nuclear and electrical Armageddon, in which very few survive.

The last chapter takes us through the days immediately after the destruction of almost everything on the planet and into the mechanics of a 'nuclear winter.'

As Jacobson notes in her *Acknowledgments*, "Nuclear war is insane. Every person I interviewed for this book knows this. Every person. The whole premise of using nuclear weapons is madness. It is irrational. And yet here we are. Russian President Vladimir Putin recently said that he is "not bluffing" about the possibility of using weapons of mass destruction. North Korea recently accused the US of having "a sinister intention to provoke a nuclear war." We all sit on the razor's edge. What if deterrence fails?"

"Humanity is just one misunderstanding, one miscalculation away from nuclear annihilation," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in the fall of 2022. He continued, "This is madness, and we must reverse course."

She concludes by sharing her hopes that the much-needed conversations may lead to a transformation of ideas about nuclear weapons.

She concludes by saying, "The fundamental idea behind this book is to demonstrate, in appalling detail, just how horrifying nuclear war would be."

I can say that she accomplishes this goal! It is a scary book to consume and yet a most important one for everyone to understand. Let us hope that this book and other recent events will have some positive impact on global leaders.

I highly recommend this book.