

Nuke the Whales!

by Gregory K. Carter

Corporal Smalley was in the can at the time, his fingers flipping through a three-year-old *Field and Stream* when the order came in to nuke Tonga.

“Nuke who?”

Corporal Keefocle glanced at his Casio. “Tonga.”

“Where’s that at?”

“I don’t know. You ‘bout ready?”

“In a minute.”

At 3AM, stuck inside an ICBM silo in a Lawrence, Kansas cornfield, the two had nowhere to turn but to a paperback dictionary that someone had picked up at Walgreens for ninety-eight cents.

“Tonga. The Friendly Islands,” Smalley read. “NE of New Zealand.’ We’re gonna need more than that to reprogram our computers.”

“Maybe we should call and ask for directions.”

“What, and look like a couple of dolts who don’t know their grade school geography? There’s gotta be a map here somewhere.”

The best Keefocle could do was dig out a Rand McNalley road map of Nebraska from beneath a stack of National Inquirers. Perhaps a lesser mind would’ve thrown in the towel and conceded victory to Tonga, but not Smalley. He took the Rand McNalley, opened the dictionary and began scribbling on a post-it note.

“Let’s see. Tonga NE of New Zealand. Turn to New Zealand. ‘N,’ ‘NE,’ ‘nettlesome,’ ‘neurosis,’ ‘newt,’ here: New Zealand -- SE of Australia. Right, now flip to ‘A,’ ‘au gratin...’” He paused and read. “So that’s what that stuff is. Okay... ‘augur,’ ‘auk,’ ‘Australia’ -- SE of Asia.”

Asia, then Europe, then the Atlantic, the Eastern Seaboard, Tennessee, Arkansas, on and on until he reached Nebraska – “Cornhusker State, North of Kansas.”

Smalley punched some numbers in an adding machine, yanked the paper free and held it high. “That’s it, Keefocle. According to my calculations, Tonga is somewhere near the Equator, about ninety or so degrees west longitude.”

“Uh...Smalley, uh...shouldn’t we be a little more accurate than that?”

“There’s twenty fifteen-megaton nukes in these birds, Keefocle. How accurate do you need to be?”

Not very, Keefocle had to admit. But he shivered at the thought of explaining to the Colonel how they found Tonga with a map of Nebraska.

Straight ahead SOP after that. Check canned food and bottled water, make sure yellow suits clean and pressed. Aim missiles, punch in codes, twist keys, push big red buttons. Nothing left after that but pop open the iodine tablets and wait out the Apocalypse.

But somehow Keefocle broke his key in the launcher, and it wouldn’t turn, and Smalley got mad and called Keefocle a boobeyhead, and Keefocle called Smalley a jerk and said he’d been too pushy ever since he married the Dragon Lady, and Smalley said “Well, at least she’s smaller than the Hindenburg,” and Keefocle punched Smalley in the nose, and it bled all over the microwave oven, and the oven caught fire, and by

the time the two had figured out how to turn the fire extinguisher on, Keefocle had apologized, and Smalley had accepted.

“But whatta we do now?”

Definitely not call your supervisor, Smalley realized. Botching a launch of enough megatonnage to vaporize a time zone is bound to look bad on your record. No. One had to be clever in such cases. Nuclear conflict demanded a more flexible, resourceful mind. Smalley smiled, grabbed the Yellow Pages, picked up the phone and dialed.

“You have reached Fingers Malone’s Safe and Lock Cracking. We’re open from 8AM to 6PM Monday through Friday, closed on Saturdays, Sundays and all Federal Holidays. Please leave a message at the beep and --“

It took a good two minutes before Smalley realized that he had been cursing an answering machine, and that some thug named Fingers Malone would no doubt be looking for the guy who said all those awful about his dear, departed mama.

But Smalley saved his most profane curses for the bozo who designed this maze of Rube Goldberg gadgetry – passwords, keys, locks, secret codes that changed by the hour. Surely there had to be away around it. Surely. He had even seen that in a movie once. Something about a backdoor, a hacker thing to get into the software and fire the nukes.

“Hey, Keefocle. Reckon who designed the software that runs these things?”

Keefocle shrugged. “Microsoft, probably. After all, it’s their world, Smalley, we’re just protecting it.”

At 3:38AM, Smalley placed a call to Seattle.

“Welcome to Microsoft Technical Assistance Hotline—“

“Hi, yeah, I’d like to —“

“Where do you want to go today?”

“Uh, I wanna speak to a —“

“If you are calling about problems with Windows 2000 or Windows ME, press one now. If your Windows 98 system has crashed again, press two. If you are having trouble with FrontPage 2000 web server extensions, press three. If you are experiencing recurrent sign-offs because of Internet Explorer 5.5 bugs, press four...”

Twenty-four minutes and seventy-six menu items later – perhaps Bill should debug his programs a little more thoroughly – Smalley finally arrived at where he wanted to go.

“If you would like to speak live with a software engineer, press seventy-seven.”

Smalley punched the seven twice.

“This phonenumber has performed an illegal operation and will be shut down. Press star to terminate this connection.”

“Huh? What? No, no, no! Wait! You can’t hang up! This is an emergency! Don’t you people realize that WE ARE AT WAR! A hostile foreign power has —“

“Or...”

Smalley held his breath.

“Press pound to debug.”

“Yeah, yeah. That’s what I wanna do. Debug, debug!” Smalley punched the pound key.

“Your phone could be using incompatible protocols, or may be experiencing

internal circuit malfunctions, or sunspot activity could be interfering with transmission.

To correct the problem, either reconfigure your protocols, or replace one or more diodes in the input signal path of your phone, or contact the Kitt Peak Solar Observatory in Tucson, Arizona for latest information on solar activity. Contact your system administrator for further details. And thank you for using the Microsoft Technical Assistance Hotline.”

Smalley dearly hoped that that first Tongan missile would take out the entire city of Seattle – Bill Gates, Microsoft, Pearl Jam and all. Useless nerds. Weasels, the whole lot of ‘em. Only one man and one man alone could extricate a soldier from such a predicament. All Smalley needed was his phone number. Information might have it, but luckily it had been scrawled in the men’s room, back when Reagan said that thing about the “evil empire.” *For good high tech, call (843)920-7491.*

Smalley dialed.

At 3:57AM, Tom Clancy answered.

“Hummbu...”

“Hello? Hello? Mr., Mr. Clancy?”

“Hmmm...”

“Yeah, well I just wanna say that I am you’re A-1, biggest, hugeest fan in all the free world, and I’ve read every one of your books three times, and what a great honor it is to talk with you.”

“Mmmmm. Huhhhh?”

“Why just today, me and my friends were talking, and we’re saying, ‘Man, if there’s ever a question you have about high-tech military equipment, then you just call

ole Tom Clancy. Yeah, ole Tom Clancy's your man. He'll know.' Just today, we were saying that. So –“

“Huh? Wha? Wha time is it?”

“So, I was just wondering...Suppose, just suppose – this is just hypothetical, understand -- that we got into a nuclear war with uh...say, Fiji, and there's these two guys in a missile silo, and one of them breaks off a key, so the launcher won't arm, and all the locksmiths are closed. What would they do?”

Click. Hum.

“Hello? Hello?” Smalley dialed again.

“I'm sorry, Mr. Clancy, but it seems we were disconnected there. Now getting back to our little problem – hypothetical, of course. What could these guys do to launch the missiles?”

Smalley could not quite make out what sounded like a dim, muffled cry of anguish. “It's not worth it! All the fame, the money, the adoration...and then this, every night...It ain't worth it!”

“So...uh, Mr. Clancy...what would they do? Reckon. Hypothetically.”

“They'd get a gansta rapper to hot wire it!” Clang! Buzz.

I knew it! I knew it! One man and one man alone. Genius. Sheer genius.

But finding a suitable person of color in Lawrence, Kansas would not be easy, quick or safe, Smalley realized. Perhaps, however, a fitting substitute could be had just the same. Smalley grabbed his yellow suit and headed for the door. “Back in a minute, Keefocle. I'm going out for gas.”

4:12AM arrived just as Smalley reappeared with Clyde Snortcuff who had been

working graveyard at the new Amoco off I-70.

“Say, this don’t look like no generator station to me.”

“Well, it is.”

“It don’t look like one.”

“It is, I tell ya. It is.”

“Looks to me like one of ‘em nuclur missile silos.”

“Ah, yes, well. Of course it does. This power plant has been designed to look just like a missile silo.”

“How come?”

“To uh...uh...fool the Russians. Yeah, that’s it. Fool the Russians into wasting an expensive H-bomb on a strategically useless power station.”

“Oh.”

“So now, let’s see if we can’t hot wire the lau...uh, I mean, turbine.”

Clyde had the launcher humming and spitting out warnings and cautions and “sure you want to do this?”s in no time. He handed Smalley a bill for ten bucks.

Eh, Smalley thought, Cash won’t be much good in the New World Order. Why not? He handed Clyde a crisp twenty. “Keep the change. Oh, and Mr. Snortcuff...”

“Yeah?”

“Ya might wanna stop by the Food Lion sometime tonight and stock up on canned foods.”

“Why’s that?”

“Why? Uh...uh...hurricane season. Yeah, everyone should be ready for hurricane season. It’s just around the corner, you know.”

Before Snortcuff could turn around and ask, “Hurr’cuns in Kansas?” the door had closed and locked in his face. Two generators rose skyward and arched over his head with streams of orange beneath their tails. Half-an-hour later, Snortcuff had cleaned out Food Lion’s complete stock of Pork N Beans.

The world woke up the next morning to find that the Galapagos Islands had simply vanished without so much as a single sea turtle left to tell the tale. Senior Pentagon officials told the world that a Russian nuclear-powered weather balloon had crashed and did a Chernobyl on all those endangered species. The Russians swore they had nothing to do with it, but after the UN censure, the blockades and boycotts, the whole affair was swept under the same rug with the Roswell UFO and all the Grassy Knoll footage.

The next day – the Day After, shall we say? – Smalley and Keefocle found pink slips paperclipped to their time cards. A note attached to each read:

“Due to recent events, the management feels that perhaps you two would be more comfortable elsewhere. Thus, as of 4:24AM last night, consider yourselves relieved of your present duties and now reassigned to the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. Once there, you’ll be in charge of simple custodial duties – bathroom detail, floor mopping, light bulb changing and computer hard drive requisitions. Your otherwise spotless record gives us great comfort in knowing that you’ll do just fine. So best of luck in your new endeavors. Thank you, The Management.”