

Extract 2: Meet the President

"Mr President?"

"Yes, Victor?"

"Erm, they're readying Airforce 1 for you sir"

"What on earth are they doin' that for, victor?"

The president was sat in the Oval office, finishing one or two pieces of work before he turned in for the night. He liked to work there, even though it wasn't his favourite room or the most cosy, mainly because it meant people always knew where to find him in a crisis. Although he wasn't given to freely admitting it, President Donald Carter liked a good crisis.

"erm sir, they're readying your jet and colonel Alfrojee will be on board to brief you fully."

Victor was the president's favourite aide and general toady. Favourite, mainly because he told the president how it was in words that the President could easily understand. Although a well educated man, victor Price had a rare gift for the vernacular, which meant he was invaluable to his boss in the rarefied and somewhat pretentious atmosphere of the Whitehouse.

"Well, dammit Victor, what's happened now?"

The little red phone on the president desk was ringing. This was unusual, because it meant that one of his peers in another nation felt the urgent need to attract his attention about something. Little red phones would be ringin' all over, he supposed.

"Victor, could you get that for me, boy?"

"uh, sir I would suggest that...."

"Just do it will you?"

Victor moved with no small degree of urgency towards the phone, picked it up. The president felt no small surge of adrenaline judder down his spine as his aide did so. Yep, this sure looked like a crisis. A crisis always played well with the electorate. Victor was struggling with the person on the other end of the line.

"Er, yes. Yes no I'm not the president. Of course. Yes he is here. Uh yes, yes sir."

He held the phone out to his commander in chief, at arm's length like a toddler presenting a gift.

"It's for you sir, it's the president of China"

"ah right boy, hand it over, there"

The president frowned as he attempted to decipher the heavily accented voice on the other end of the line. He frowned more as the voice expressed, in increasing broken and frantic English, its extraordinary concern at what the glorious nation's seismologists had interpreted as a small ground level nuclear detonation in the Nevada desert 20 minutes previously.

"Uh there must be some error with your equipment there, your excellency"

The president of the people's republic assured the president there was no error. Victor looked uncomfortable, and motioned for the president to wind up the call.

“Well, I assure you that I appreciate your concerns, and we will be communicating in due course the exact nature of events. I must go now, your excellency, as you can imagine I have rather... pressing matters to attend to.....”

Professionals that both men were, they went straight to the nearest television set. CNN reports were replete with amateur camera footage of nuclear explosions, and what looked to be live footage of a mushroom cloud. A real mushroom cloud. This was perhaps overkill in the crisis department. The president went to his quarters to gather his family and a change of clothes. On his way out he saw that the little red phones were ringing again. This time he answered himself.

“Good evening Donald, I hate to disturb you at this time of night, but I have a feeling I might be asked some rather awkward questions in the house today, and I felt it my duty really to ask the question – what on earth is going on over there?”

Roger Precinct was the Prime Minister of Great Britain, and in truth Donald always felt a little inadequate in his company, for Roger was widely considered a towering intellect. By the standards of politicians anyway.

“Hey, Roger, I would love to tell you, but I’m just on my way to a briefing to find out. You’ll know as soon as I do, buddy!”

And with that he hung up and stepped into the lift to the roof, with his family and staff, making for the helicopter which would deliver them to Air Force 1.