A Tale of Two Bombs [1]

The year is 1964. America and Russia are in the midst of a cold war and nuclear proliferation. The possibility of nuclear war is on almost everyone's mind. The questions are asked, "Could we start a war by accident?" and "Once in motion, could we stop such a war?" In 1964 two films were made that attempted to answer that question, in very different ways.
The more serious of the two, "Failsafe [2]" stars Henry Fonda as the President of the United States when "the go code" is accidently sent to a bomber group whose mission is to bomb strategic locations in Russia with nuclear weapons. Once beyond the failsafe point the group cannot be called back. Can the President and the Soviet Chairman avoid war and destruction? 'Failsafe [3]" is not an easy movie to watch, even today, the drama is tense and the solution, while better than all out nuclear war is not really much of an improvement. You might also want to check out the live television production of "Failsafe [4]" staring George Clooney.
The second film is "Dr. Strangelove; or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb [5]." Starring Peter Sellers in three different roles, along with George C. Scott and Slim Pickens the film starts with a bomber group being sent the "go code" by a paranoid general who then cuts off his base and the bomber group from all outside communication. The plot is additionally complicated by the fact that the Russians have just activated a doomsday device. One nuclear bomb exploded in Russia would set up a chain reaction destroying all life on earth. The drama is just as tense as that in failsafe, but overlaid with enough humor to keep you from becoming depressed by the very real possibilities of what is happening. The characters are "over the top" funny, but not beyond believability. I will admit sadly, that I know people who are just as over the top in real life.
Both movies examine the paranoia and fear that was "The Cold War" and nuclear proliferation in the 1960's. The world has changed a great deal since these films were made, yet neither of these films have lost their impact. The players may have changed, but even today we find ourselves asking the question "What if...?" The answers given in these films will give you something to think about.

Posted by Keith C. on April 19, 2013
Blogs:
Sights and Sounds [5]
Information, Answers & Reviews [6]
Reviews Subjects:
Adventure [7]
Comedy [8]
Drama [9]
DVD [10]
Humor [11]
Movies [12]

Links
[1] https://mcpl.info/blogs/sights-and-sounds/tale-two-bombs
[2] http://mcpl.monroe.lib.in.us/search/searchresults.aspx?ctx=1.1033.0.0.7&type=Keyword&term=failsafe%20henry%20fonda&by=KW&sort=RELEVANCE&limit=TOM=*&query=&page=0
[3] http://mcpl.monroe.lib.in.us/search/searchresults.aspx?ctx=1.1033.0.0.7&type=Keyword&term=fail%20safe%20george%20clooney&by=KW&sort=RELEVANCE&limit=TOM=*&query=&page=0
[4] http://mcpl.monroe.lib.in.us/search/searchresults.aspx?ctx=1.1033.0.0.7&type=Keyword&term=Dr.%20Strangelove,%20or,%20how&by=KW&sort=RELEVANCE&limit=TOM=*&query=&page=0
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[7] https://mcpl.info/category/reviews-subjects/adventure

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