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Almighty: Courage, Resistance, And Existential Peril In The Nuclear Age



Synopsis

****A Washington Post "Notable Nonfiction Book of 2016"***** ON A TRANQUIL SUMMER NIGHT in July 2012, a trio of peace activists infiltrated the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Nicknamed the "Fort Knox of Uranium," Y-12 was supposedly one of the most secure sites in the world, a bastion of warhead parts and hundreds of tons of highly enriched uranium—enough to power thousands of nuclear bombs. The three activists—a house painter, a Vietnam War veteran, and an 82-year-old Catholic nun—penetrated the complex's exterior with alarming ease; their strongest tools were two pairs of bolt cutters and three hammers. Once inside, these pacifists hung protest banners, spray-painted biblical messages, and streaked the walls with human blood. Then they waited to be arrested. WITH THE BREAK-IN and their symbolic actions, the activists hoped to draw attention to a costly military-industrial complex that stockpiles deadly nukes. But they also triggered a political and legal firestorm of urgent and troubling questions. What if they had been terrorists? Why do the United States and Russia continue to possess enough nuclear weaponry to destroy the world several times over? IN ALMIGHTY, WASHINGTON POST REPORTER Dan Zak answers these questions by reexamining America's love-hate relationship to the bomb, from the race to achieve atomic power before the Nazis did to the solemn 70th anniversary of Hiroshima. At a time of concern about proliferation in such nations as Iran and North Korea, the U.S. arsenal is plagued by its own security problems. This life-or-death quandary is unraveled in Zak's eye-opening account, with a cast that includes the biophysicist who first educated the public on atomic energy, the prophet who predicted the creation of Oak Ridge, the generations of activists propelled into resistance by their faith, and the Washington bureaucrats and diplomats who are trying to keep the world safe. Part historical adventure, part courtroom drama, part moral thriller, Almighty reshapes the accepted narratives surrounding nuclear weapons and shows that our greatest modern-day threat remains a power we discovered long ago.

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Customer Reviews

This book chronicles the evolution of nuclear weapons in the U.S. while profiling the peace activism, highlighting the role and ineptitude of our government in managing our weapons programs, and placing both of these within historical and international contexts. The story is well told, and I learned a lot of new things often lost in the weeds in the usual political science literature I read. Everyone in the U.S. should read this book!

As someone who lives in the community where this occurred, I found this to be a very fascinating read. Zak's research and presentation are comprehensive, but certainly challenge the dominant narrative inculcated in Oak Ridgers and many Americans alike. Given how far we tend to tilt politically, a counter-perspective may be long overdue. Almighty is an excellent read that I highly recommend.

This book was truly eye-opening -- both in its description of the raw power that nuclear weapons possess, and the lengths certain people will go to remind the rest of us of these dangers. The weaknesses in our own security that "an 80-year-old nun, a Vietnam veteran, and a housepainter" exposed with a late-night break in was not just a huge wake up call for the management of the Y-12 facility, but perhaps more so for people (like me) who, reading this book now: didn't even know this facility existed, hadn't thought much about nuclear proliferation within our own borders beyond the

end of the Cold War, or are curious about the grey area between treason and civil protest/whistle-blowing -- all the more topical in the age of Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning, and Julian Assange. Most importantly, Dan Zak's thorough yet riveting story-weaving of the three radical (or perhaps not?) individuals responsible for sparking this debate is an absolute pleasure from start to finish. A must read!

I've never given two toots about nuclear weapons. Almighty changed that. A page turner has never taught me so much. Impeccably and impressively researched, there's a human story here that serves as an exciting prism through which I can now understand the issues nuclear weapons have wrought. I am terrified and enlightened. The nun's story grabbed hold of me - there's also a beautifully told examination of the Catholic Worker movement as peace activists I previously knew nothing about. I love how Mr. Dan Zak explored the humanity of the nun, the vet, and the drifter in a way that disallows the reader to dismiss them as fringe activists. He made them and their cause accessible to me and I am better for it. I am much better equipped to ask the right questions whenever the future of humanity comes up.

This remarkably researched and beautifully written book could not have come at a better time. As the world considers the possibility of another war between a nuclear power and one aspiring to the same, Dan Zak provides us with a well-crafted narrative - steeped in history and biography - about a courageous band of protesters as a way to examine our nuclear-suffused culture. This book is a must read for anyone interested in American history, nuclear weapons, or moral courage.

This is a beautifully written book about a highly disturbing topic. I had to read it in measured doses, as it was a great deal to contemplate. Dan Zak is a gifted and talented reporter and his skills jump right off the page at you. The bravery of the three "ordinary" people who did extraordinary things in this book completely took my breath away throughout. This is a very important book, and a must read. This is what real writing and real reporting is.

good to remember this side of nuclear weapons, especially with the craziness going on now

An extremely great read of Sister Meagan, Greg's, and Michael's embarrassing the nuclear weapons complex. I highly recommend this book.

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