



Doomsday Men: The Real Dr. Strangelove and the Dream of the Superweapon

By P. D. Smith

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This is the gripping, untold story of the doomsday bomb—the ultimate weapon of mass destruction. In 1950, Hungarian-born scientist Leo Szilard made a dramatic announcement on American radio: science was on the verge of creating a doomsday bomb. For the first time in history, mankind realized that he had within his grasp a truly God-like power, the ability to destroy life itself. The shockwave from this statement reverberated across the following decade and beyond.

If detonated, Szilard's doomsday device—a huge cobalt-clad H-bomb—would pollute the atmosphere with radioactivity and end all life on earth. The scientific creators of such apocalyptic weapons had transformed the laws of nature into instruments of mass destruction and for many people in the Cold War there was little to distinguish real scientists from that "fictional master of megadeath," Stanley Kubrick's Dr. Strangelove. Indeed, as PD Smith's chilling account shows, the dream of the superweapon begins in popular culture. This is a story that cannot be told without the iconic films and fictions that portray our deadly fascination with superweapons, from H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* to Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* and Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*.

Although scientists admitted it was possible to build the cobalt bomb, no superpower would admit to having created one. However, it remained a terrifying possibility, striking fear into the hearts of people around the world. The story of the cobalt bomb is an unwritten chapter of the Cold War, but now PD Smith reveals the personalities behind this feared technology and shows how the scientists responsible for the twentieth century's most terrible weapons grew up in a culture dreaming of superweapons and Wellsian utopias. He argues that, in the end, the doomsday machine became the ultimate symbol of humanity's deepest fears about the science of destruction.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Weaving together biography, science and art, Smith has created a compelling history of physics in the 20th century, focusing on the long-lasting search for ever more destructive weapons—from the development of chemical warfare in World War I Germany through the arms race of the Cold War.

Explaining "why some of the most gifted and idealistic men of the twentieth century spent so much effort trying to destroy the planet," Smith's dynamic, riveting narrative reveals details of people, places and events that are rarely covered in textbooks, bringing to life not just scientists like Robert Oppenheimer and Leo Szilard, but the horrors of chemical and atomic warfare. Time and again, "it seemed that a giant leap forward for science also meant a step backward for mankind," and contemporary film and fiction echoed this sentiment with "clear signs... of genuine resentment towards scientists for betraying the high ideals of their profession and, indeed, the best interests of humanity." Ironically, the goal of many of these scientists was peace, not war: "Many scientists were convinced that the terrible reality of atomic superweapons would force nations to resolve their disputes and work for world peace." Captivating and thoroughly referenced, this chronicle should interest a wide audience, from science and history buffs to armchair politicians.

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Review

"An impassioned account of everything from the discovery of radioactivity to plans for a Doomsday Device (yes, there really were such plans) from an author who feels that to the generations growing up who see the Cold War only as something in history books, the true horror of nuclear weapons has been forgotten... Doomsday Men is ... important, and, depressingly, there is a need for it – people, [especially younger people than me,] ought to read it". – John Gribbin, *The Literary Review*

"Superb... The research is impressive, but it's his eye for revealing anecdotes and his ability to distil it all into lively prose that makes this a real pleasure to read." - *Sunday Business Post*

"Doomsday Men doesn't just deal with thermonuclear destruction. It's a meticulous account of weapons of mass destruction and the science and scientists behind them. Indeed, it is two books for the price of one, because it is also a cultural disquisition. Smith scours fiction for visions of death rays and lurid imaginings of Armageddon to show how writers often preceded or influenced scientists. ... always readable and entertaining ... Smith deserves some sort of award for value for money". – Tibor Fischer, *Daily Telegraph*

"...he puts the nuclear age into a new context, engagingly and even excitingly". - *Financial Times*

"Smith entertainingly takes on Dr. Doom and his colleagues, setting them in popular culture as scientific messiahs and madmen." – *Times* (London)

"A chillingly compelling history of chemical, biological and atomic superweapons...."

About the Author

P.D. Smith is an independent researcher and writer. He has taught at University College London where he is an Honorary Research Fellow in the Science and Technology Studies Department. He regularly reviews books for the *Guardian*, and has written for the *Independent*, the *Financial Times* and the *Times Literary Supplement* among other journals. His previous books are *Metaphor and Materiality: German Literature and the World-View of Science 1780-1955* and a biography of Einstein. He lives in Hampshire.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jamey Ainsworth:

Here thing why this kind of Domsday Men: The Real Dr. Strangelove and the Dream of the Superweapon are different and dependable to be yours. First of all reading through a book is good nevertheless it depends in the content of the usb ports which is the content is as yummy as food or not. Domsday Men: The Real Dr. Strangelove and the Dream of the Superweapon giving you information deeper since different ways, you can find any e-book out there but there is no guide that similar with Domsday Men: The Real Dr. Strangelove and the Dream of the Superweapon. It gives you thrill looking at journey, its open up your own personal eyes about the thing in which happened in the world which is possibly can be happened around you. You can easily bring everywhere like in park your car, café, or even in your method home by train. In case you are having difficulties in bringing the imprinted book maybe the form of Domsday Men: The Real Dr. Strangelove and the Dream of the Superweapon in e-book can be your option.

Douglas Elem:

Reading a publication tends to be new life style in this particular era globalization. With reading through you can get a lot of information that will give you benefit in your life. With book everyone in this world can certainly share their idea. Guides can also inspire a lot of people. Lots of author can inspire their particular reader with their story or their experience. Not only the story that share in the publications. But also they write about the ability about something that you need case in point. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your young ones, there are many kinds of book which exist now. The authors these days always try to improve their talent in writing, they also doing some investigation before they write to the book. One of them is this Domsday Men: The Real Dr. Strangelove and the Dream of the Superweapon.

Millie Goodman:

This Domsday Men: The Real Dr. Strangelove and the Dream of the Superweapon is great guide for you because the content which can be full of information for you who always deal with world and still have to make decision every minute. That book reveal it facts accurately using great organize word or we can state no rambling sentences inside it. So if you are read that hurriedly you can have whole info in it. Doesn't mean it only offers you straight forward sentences but difficult core information with splendid delivering sentences. Having Domsday Men: The Real Dr. Strangelove and the Dream of the Superweapon in your hand like finding the world in your arm, data in it is not ridiculous 1. We can say that no reserve that offer you world with ten or fifteen moment right but this publication already do that. So , it is good reading book. Hello Mr. and Mrs. busy do you still doubt that will?

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