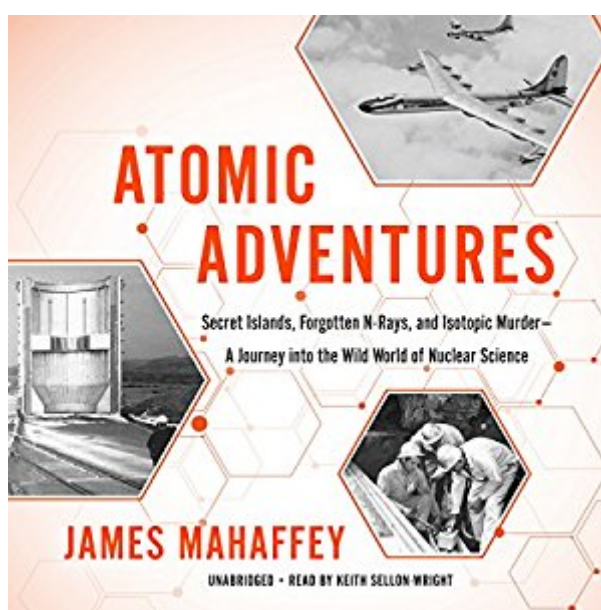


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Atomic Adventures: Secret Islands, Forgotten N-Rays, And Isotopic Murder - A Journey Into The Wild World Of Nuclear Science



Synopsis

Whether you are a scientist or a poet, pro-nuclear energy or staunch opponent, conspiracy theorist or pragmatist, James Mahaffey's books have served to open up the world of nuclear science like never before. With clear explanations of some of the most complex scientific endeavors in history, Mahaffey's new book looks back at the atom's wild, secretive past and then toward its potentially bright future. Mahaffey unearths lost reactors on far-flung Pacific islands and trees that were exposed to active fission that changed gender or bloomed in the dead of winter. He explains why we have nuclear submarines but not nuclear aircraft and why cold fusion doesn't exist. And who knew that radiation counting was once a fashionable trend? Though parts of the nuclear history might seem like a fiction mash-up where cowboys somehow got a hold of a reactor, Mahaffey's vivid prose holds the listener in thrall of the infectious energy of scientific curiosity and ingenuity that may one day hold the key to solving our energy crisis or sending us to Mars.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Dr. Mahaffey's latest book is characteristically witty, insightful, wide-ranging and entertaining. Atomic Adventures has enough captivating stories to supply the material for a dozen Hollywood screenplays. If you haven't read Dr. Mahaffey's prior works, you should know that he is a gifted writer. He is least as skilled as Richard Rhodes (The Making of the Atomic Bomb) in explaining nuclear science to laymen in a way that is clear without being condescending. Dr. Mahffey provides the perfect amount of technical information. The reader

will obtain an excellent understanding of nuclear technology without being bored by arcane details. This is the most entertaining book in the trilogy. You need not have read the prior two books in order to appreciate this brilliant account of some of the most exhilarating episodes in the history of nuclear technology.

In this immensely captivating book, the author recounts various events, projects, technical developments, ideas, experiments, etc., that have seen the light of day, to varying degrees and in various ways, at some time or other during the nuclear age. In some of them, the author himself was actively involved. Some of these schemes were well thought out and have yet to be validated while others turned out to be tremendous flops for different reasons. I have enjoyed this book very much, as I have the author's prior books. The prose is lively, authoritative, detailed, often witty, occasionally humorous and quite engaging. The author pulls very few punches when describing technical details throughout the book. Some terms are briefly explained but, mostly, assumptions are made about the reader's basic knowledge in nuclear science and technology and about assorted instruments used in the various projects. Consequently, although there is much history in the stories described that they can be enjoyed by everyone, I believe that readers with a science/physics/technical background as well as those who are serious science enthusiasts are likely to be at an advantage in being able to glean the most out of this most engrossing book.

Mahaffey is a good writer, and has an eye for oddball anecdotes. He gets carried away with the details sometimes, and the text can be technically dense. I like his discursive-techie voice. He's fond of tiny-print footnotes; some have a hidden nugget or two. I'm the intended audience, and the book (mostly) clicked for me. If I were you, I'd skim the antique N-ray stuff (Introduction) very lightly, especially if you're already familiar with this fine demo of Feynman's maxim that "the easiest person to fool is yourself." Chapter 1 relates Ronald Richter's fusion-power boondoggle in Argentina, which he sold to Juan Peron as a vanity project. Richter burned through the equivalent of \$300 million in today's money in 4 years! (1948-52). Basis was a laboratory curiosity for inducing a bit of fusion with a powerful electric arc. You do get some fusion that way (probably), but zero chance to commercialize it. Of course, nothing else has worked, either, after many billions spent, and practical fusion power is still "40 years away".... Chapter 2. More misguided projects, per Mahaffey. He pans the "Star Wars" ABM project, pitched by Edward Teller -- but admits it scared the hell out of the Soviets, and likely

contributed to the collapse of the USSR. Next, nuclear-powered aircraft! Ideas that were, well, unlikely to succeed. You will learn more about the Georgia Nuclear Aircraft Lab than you will want to know. Skim for cool anecdotes. Cold fusion (Ch.3 et al.): Mahaffey & colleagues were the first Americans to "confirm" Pons & Fleischmann's 1989 "discovery." Sadly, this was the result of haste, and an odd malfunction of their neutron detectors. Probably something similar happened in the P&F experiments. Cold fusion, very unlikely when announced, is now dead, dead, dead. Cold War, WW2: "It's a good thing we won the war. If we hadn't, I'd be hanged as a war criminal" -- Gen. Curtis LeMay, quoted by Mahaffey. I posted a couple of quotes at Goodreads, where you can get a quick idea of the flavor of the book. Rest of the book is worth reading, but I started skimming. Always a chance of a nugget, or a chuckle: the Chechen guerrilla who stole a super-powerful cobalt-60 source: "he was dead in 30 minutes," the record so far. Happy reading--Peter D. Tillman

This is science for the layman. But someone with an interest and prior exposure to science both nuclear and general will enjoy this with a clearer understanding. Containing stories of nuclear and atomic adventures (some including the author) this book is a discourse with wit about the Japanese nearly creating the A bomb in WWII and nuclear engines for planes and space travel as well as cold fusion and n-rays. This book has some historical stories about atoms and atomic mis-adventures that have never been revealed.

This book, a gift from the author, is perhaps the most entertaining of his three published books. Fascinating accounts of attempted development of a nuclear powered airplane engine, attempts by Japan to develop an atomic bomb in WWII, and a nuclear powered rocket to mars are among the many stories that were once top secret and are now told with the author's amazing sense of humor. The author's account of his misadventures in confirming cold fusion is worth the price of the book alone. An entertaining and highly informative book that I'm glad to have read. You will be too.

Have now read two of his books including this one. He has a very easy to read and humorous style. His greatest strength is an ability to explain highly technical issues in a manner that is understandable but not overly simplified. I find most of his accounts to be fascinating.

An incredible collection of atom related incidents, of which I had never heard. A wonderful read and some amazing history.

Full of information spiked with Dr. Mahaffey's dry humor. Plus, the best explanation of quantum physics for a layman ever.

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