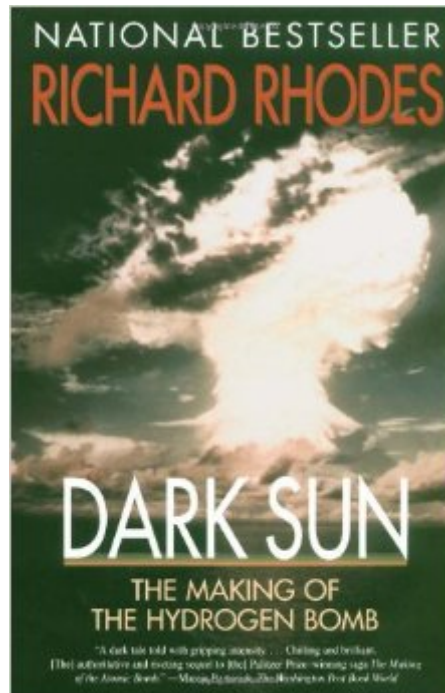


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Dark Sun: The Making Of The Hydrogen Bomb



Synopsis

Here, for the first time, in a brilliant, panoramic portrait by the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, is the definitive, often shocking story of the politics and the science behind the development of the hydrogen bomb and the birth of the Cold War. Based on secret files in the United States and the former Soviet Union, this monumental work of history discloses how and why the United States decided to create the bomb that would dominate world politics for more than forty years.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Rhodes' "The Making of the Atomic Bomb" is my favorite nonfiction book. I hesitated to read this one for several years only because of reviews that slammed the book for dwelling too much on Soviet espionage and atomic bomb development and not enough on the actual physics of thermonuclear weapons design. The criticism is accurate inasmuch as this book is much less about physics than its predecessor. "The Making of the Atomic Bomb" took the reader through the major breakthroughs of atomic physics, the relationships between the most influential scientists of the twentieth century, and finally how all of these brilliant individuals influenced, directly or indirectly, the Manhattan Engineering Dist. and allied atomic bomb research. The story of *Dark Sun* is much different. "The Making of the Atomic Bomb" told the story of scientists and nations coming together to defeat the Axis powers. "Dark Sun" tells the story of how weapons of mass destruction polarized scientists, nations, military sects, and political mindsets (Edward Teller and E.O. Lawrence's pro-thermonuclear deterrence and Oppenheimer's international control camps, Soviets vs. Western

powers, etc.). It is this polarization that is the primary concern of Rhodes. Having covered the issue of nuclear fission in his previous book, all that is left scientifically is the fusion of the light elements, the use of radiation implosion, and some other admittedly difficult engineering breakthroughs necessary to sustain a thermonuclear reaction. The result was merely to boost weapons already designed for mass industrial bombing to even more terrifying megaton proportions.

Dark Sun: The Making of the Hydrogen Bomb is a fascinating historical work that reads almost like a novel; perhaps a particularly technical Clancy novel, but a novel nevertheless. It targets a general audience and balances the consequent need for clarity with depth and technical detail, and with great success. Rhodes starts by taking us through America's Manhattan Project, a subject he dealt with in depth in his earlier book, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*. This time he focuses on the political elements of the project and with Soviet espionage. Klaus Fuchs is a major character in *Dark Sun*; in *TMAB*, which deals in much more depth with the scientific and technical problems behind atom bomb development, Fuchs has only a minor role. Here the scene switches back and forth between the U.S. and the USSR, where Igor Kurchatov takes charge of the Soviet nuclear program under secret police head Lavrenti Beria. The early focus on espionage and Soviet work is important in this book; the subtitle, *The Making of the Hydrogen Bomb*, refers to the political impetus behind the bomb, not the scientific and technical issues. There were formidable technical difficulties in the design of the first hydrogen bomb, but nothing that would warrant the same in-depth examination of basic science that appears in the earlier book. It becomes clear in the course of *Dark Sun* that the making of thermonuclear weapons was driven by politics, not military need or science (not to minimize the role of politics in atomic bomb development, but that was also the result of extravagantly brilliant scientists pursuing basic and often unexpected research in physics).

The Pulitzer Prize-winning treatise "*The Making of the Atomic Bomb*" (1987) was the well-deserved claim-to-fame for American journalist and historian Richard Rhodes. The deservedly eminent nuclear pundit's follow-up book, *Dark Sun* (1995), attempts to provide an accurate historical account of the hydrogen bomb's development. The book is written for a non-expert audience, yet still provides enough technical information to give the reader a basic understanding of nuclear technology without inducing a migraine headache. *Dark Sun* aims to elucidate the technical achievement, political chicanery, and ethical controversy surrounding the production of thermonuclear weapons. In the first section of the book, Rhodes uses declassified U.S. archive documents to trace the historical development of the hydrogen bomb from the discovery of fission to

the first thermonuclear detonation in 1952. Rhodes does not focus on the ethical dilemmas per se; nonetheless, three of them feature prominently throughout the book. The first of those questions is probably the most obvious: given their indiscriminate and immensely destructive nature, should these weapons ever have been developed in the first place? Repeating a similar discussion from "The Making of the Atomic Bomb" (almost verbatim) he recounts the Scientists' understandably conflicted feelings. But Rhodes makes no effort to disguise his obvious disdain for both Edward Teller and his brainchild, believing the bomb's only function to be committing "omnicide". The second portion of Dark Sun deals with the Soviet's nuclear espionage program, whose roots extend back to World War II.

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