

Else

Frenchman Flat

The Rise and Fall of Atomic Bombs

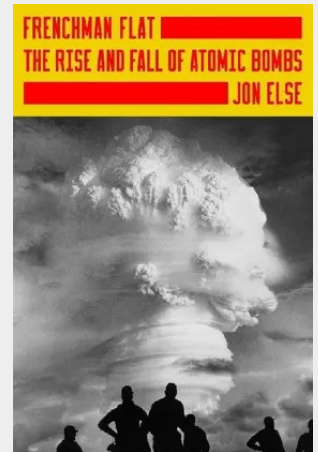
The story of a single nuclear bomb's deep origins, brief life during the Cold War, and lasting environmental and political legacies—as a fresh path to consider the entire sweep of the American nuclear enterprise. A grave reminder of the frightening truth about nuclear testing, as international norms waver. As the US and Russia let one treaty after another falter and expire, this urgent book reminds us of the price of those tests. *Frenchman Flat* recounts the science, politics, and human experience of those who developed nuclear weapons, suffered the consequences, and fought for and against arms control between the 1940s and 1990s. The throughline of this vast, complex story is a 37-kiloton atomic bomb dubbed "Priscilla" that was exploded above a custom-built mini-civilization at Frenchman Flat, Nevada, in 1957. Jon Else uses Priscilla and the bombs that preceded and followed to highlight the terrifying ways we have stockpiled and tested nuclear weapons, how near and often we came to self-annihilation, how we managed to avoid it, and what we did to the planet and to our own bodies in the process, from wartime Los Alamos to the suspension of US and Soviet nuclear testing in 1992. In the two decades after Hiroshima, a pair of dramatic stories unfolded alongside each other: the scramble to produce ever more powerful nuclear weapons, and the struggle to ban testing of those same weapons. The dramatic narrative takes in the physics of the megaton postwar bombs, the role of private industry, the near misses of the Cuban Missile Crisis and less well-known events, and the testimony of scientists, politicians, doctors, weapons developers, test-site workers, ranchers, and families downwind of test sites. This powerful and persuasive book reminds us how we have—so far—prevented nuclear war by deterrence, diplomacy, and luck. It is for the moment a success story, and a warning.

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