

Emmie and Roger: A Thermonuclear Romance

Richard S. Greeley

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A radioactive romance is set in a meticulously detailed Cold War narrative.

In *Emmie and Roger: A Thermonuclear Romance*, the title characters meet under difficult circumstances during the Cold War. The power of war to impact lives is evident, as the two struggle amid nuclear experimentation and the constant threat of harm in Richard S. Greeley's historical novel.

Greeley has the credentials to write a book about the nuclear threat during the Cold War. He is a retired nuclear expert who developed a nuclear bomb detection system, which was tested on an island in the Pacific Ocean in 1962. He was also involved in assisting the US Air Force during the Cuban Missile Crisis. This book and the character of Roger are, by his own admission, semiautobiographical.

Because Greeley is so knowledgeable, the story occasionally gets bogged down in detail. Much of the military terminology seems cumbersome and foreign to the lay reader, slowing down the pace of the story: "Willie, on the other hand, one of Secretary of Defense (Sec Def) McNamara's whiz kids in the Office of the Director, Defense Research and Engineering (ODDR&E), knew his way around the Pentagon." Those who revel in military history may have a different opinion about the level of detail, however.

A good portion of the beginning of the book is taken up with character history, a great deal of which is not necessary for character development. Because the book is so short, this makes the story itself feel undeveloped and more like a short story than a novel. Also, there are parallel experiences detailed in Roger and Emmie's initial arrival on the islands, with each making comments regarding the plane, the seats, and the environment as they disembark. While this shows the two in sync, it becomes repetitive rather than helpful in establishing character.

The historical setting is well done and adds a great deal of interest to the story. The romance between Emmie and Roger is set to a backdrop of nuclear testing on an island that has already seen its share of radiation. Greeley addresses the local rise in cancer rates and what island natives feel about the bomb testing.

The tension of the time is well-communicated, giving the feeling of what the United States would have done if the Soviet Union had acted on its nuclear capabilities. Greeley indicates in his preface that he was present on Palmyra Island, and he did witness "visible flashes of light from the nuclear bursts four hundred miles away."

This book will be devoured by those interested in the history of the early 1960s, particularly during the Cuban Missile Crisis. While there is romance in the story, the main focus of *Emmie and Roger* is on nuclear testing and its impact on all involved—everyone on earth.

LYNN EVARTS (February 25, 2014)

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