

— A NOVEL —

WEAPONS OF PEACE



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First Edition

*To all the courageous wartime medical staff
who risk or sacrifice their lives for their nations and their patients—
and the negotiators who work behind the scenes
to construct and enable the peace.*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This novel is inspired by the true stories of Leeds Castle and documented Nazi efforts to complete an atomic weapon before the Allies. Its pages include real people, places, events, scientific developments, influence dynamics, and facts from World War II. For those characters based on actual people, I've taken license to create new scenes in their lives as part of this work of fiction. You'll find brief biographies at the back of *Weapons of Peace* for many of these real-life individuals.

FACTS

In early 1943, the Allies attacked Nazi facilities in occupied Norway to slow Germany's progress in developing a nuclear weapon. Despite this and other sabotage, a number of sources now indicate that the Nazis remained far more advanced in their development of an atom bomb than most suspected at the time.

Eyewitness accounts, including one from an award-winning Italian journalist, contend that the Nazis, on three occasions, tested a nuclear device in the final months of World War II—ahead of the Allies. Such accounts had long been publicly countered by American and Russian sources—many perhaps intent on hiding their own reliance on the legion of Nazi atomic and rocket scientists who came to work for each side during the Cold War.

Indeed, word circulated among Nazi officials and in the streets of Berlin that a “wonder weapon” had finally been developed and tested—and was ready for launch.

Leeds Castle, in South East England, was built more than eight centuries ago, and is considered one of the most romantic and gorgeous ancient castles in the world.

During World War II, this castle played two secret and completely unexpected roles, ultimately helping the Allied forces win in Europe.

Lady Olive Baillie, an heiress whose wealth can be traced to American oil, steel, and tobacco in the 1800s, lovingly restored Leeds Castle and led it into battle in 1939. Today, Lady Baillie's trustees continue to oversee her remarkable contribution to English history.

Excerpts of a letter from Albert Einstein to President Franklin D. Roosevelt regarding the splitting of a uranium atom by German scientists and the potential for an unprecedented weapon.

August 2nd 1939

In the course of the last four months it has been made . . . possible to set up a nuclear chain reaction in a large mass of uranium, by which vast amounts of power and large quantities of new radium-like elements would be generated. Now it appears almost certain that this could be achieved in the immediate future.

This new phenomenon would also lead to the construction of bombs, and it is conceivable - though much less certain - that extremely powerful bombs of a new type may thus be constructed. A single bomb of this type, carried by boat and exploded in a port, might very well destroy the whole port together with some of the surrounding territory. However, such bombs might very well prove to be too heavy for transportation by air.

The United States has only very poor ores of uranium in moderate quantities. There is some good ore in Canada and the former Czechoslovakia, while the most important source of uranium is Belgian Congo. . . .

I understand that Germany has actually stopped the sale of uranium from the Czechoslovakian mines which she has taken over. That she should have taken such early action might perhaps be understood on the ground that the son of the German Under-Secretary of State, von Weizsäcker, is attached to the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut in Berlin where some of the American work on uranium is now being repeated.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "A. Einstein".

(Albert Einstein)

PART I



The Nurse

CHAPTER 1

Monday, August 21, 1944
10:55 P.M.—South East England

He edged his way down the side of the steep, sloping cliff, slipping occasionally, unable to see where he was placing his feet, shuffling through the grass and invisible rocks that poked at his legs.

Once on the beach, he looked for the hulking rock near the shoreline: the agreed-upon landmark for those meeting him. It soon came into view, a silhouette against the surf, alone—like him.

He moved through the thick salty mist, ducked low behind the rock and cupped his hands together, managing to light one of the six cigarettes he'd stashed in the pocket of his leather jacket. When he was sure the flame had taken hold, Everett Nash rose up and peered out at the water, his tall figure enveloped by the smell of smoke and rotting seaweed.

As he took a drag, he noticed the trembling in his hand. He was damp and cold, but he knew it wasn't that. He was nervous. And he was rarely nervous. It was a feeling he hated, one that went against everything he tried to teach the diplomats, generals, and politicians who sought out his counsel in London and Washington.

The powerful leaders who hired him to do their bidding deemed most of his assignments important. But Nash knew this starless night's undertaking was the start of something different.

A dog's howl caught him off guard. It came from somewhere beyond the top of the cliff, where half a dozen homes had scattered themselves, but was loud and sudden enough to cause him to swing around. When a second howl confirmed that the dog wasn't an immediate threat, he slowly turned his eyes back toward the ocean, sucking in another warm breath of courage.

They were late.

Emma ran the iron over her white dress one more time, tears welling up in her light-blue eyes. She stood barefoot, wearing only her brassiere and underwear. On the bed nearby lay her white stockings, garters, and small white headpiece, which would be pinned to her shoulder-length blond hair to keep it neat and in place.

Ironing her dress was the last of her preparations, and the task had proved challenging. She pressed more firmly with each pass of her hand, her knuckles clenched. Why must I be the one to do this? She needed this dress to be perfect, her suit of armor in these strange times; it made her feel strong, hopeful, confident, as if she could do anything the following day. Take it off, and she felt small, unsure of herself, and even dirty, as she did now.

Twice, Emma had reheated the iron, and still a large crease on the front of the dress—the dress she had dreamed of wearing since childhood—refused to disappear. *Just like the mistakes I've made.*

Two tears slipped down either side of her slender nose, landing on the wrinkled ridge. Emma stopped, yanked at the shimmering cloth, and launched it at the bed. She sank to the cold stone floor and began to sob, her body so racked with remorse and fatigue that she questioned whether she'd ever be able to rise again. She glanced around with guilt, concerned that she might wake the guard in the room beside hers—however unlikely that was, given the castle's thick walls.

After several minutes, she managed a few controlled deep breaths and pushed herself up from the floor, ashamed at her weakness. So many others in her nation had suffered so much more. Yet she wondered if they suffered in the ways she did: every single day, a prisoner of this fortress, chained to her sins, forced to smile gracefully at every turn, barely making it to her room at night.

Into a huge wardrobe, Emma placed her dress and other belongings, exchanging them for a laced white nightgown, which she pulled over her slim shoulders. She moved back to the bed and climbed between linen sheets, heated earlier by a metal pan full of dying coals spirited from

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the fireplace, the acrid scent of the embers still hovering and somehow comforting to her.

She reached under the bed, as she did every night, locating the Bible she'd tucked away there. From inside the old book's battered leather cover she withdrew a yellowed photograph. She stared at it, smiling, remembering the moment, then kissed it and returned the image to its sanctuary. *Sleep tight, my love.*

As her tears dried, Emma said a prayer, asking for sleep and salvation. She turned on her side, toward the bedside lamp, and with a flick of her finger plunged the cavernous room into darkness.

Nash scanned the water from behind the rock.

Still nothing.

He cursed out loud, wondering what might have gone wrong, checking his watch again. They were half an hour late. And in wartime tardiness usually didn't end well.

He crossed his arms as a shield against the unexpectedly cold August air, a deep chill burrowing into his aging but still athletic limbs. He couldn't panic. His training wouldn't allow for that. But he could be concerned, and with good reason. *We need to make the other side of the Channel before the skies lighten or we'll all be as good as dead.*

If they missed this black night's veiled offering for crossing into Holland, they'd likely have to wait another month for the same logistics, lighting, and weather conditions to fall into place, or try sooner but with a much higher risk of being shot to pieces by patrolling Nazis.

While German troops continued their relentless pursuit of enemies across the European continent, Allied intelligence reports had Germany's leader spending more time in or near Berlin, licking his nation's wounds while his rumored blond mistress licked his. But as 1944 limped into its closing months, and a weakened Germany found itself vulnerable to mounting counterattacks, it appeared that the führer was in no mood for compromise. On the contrary, and known only to a handful of people—including Nash—Adolf Hitler was poised to be more dangerous than ever before.

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According to Nash's own highly placed source inside the Nazi regime—whose identity only he knew and whom he planned to see again soon—Hitler's scientists had constructed a weapon that would release enormous amounts of energy by splitting billions of uranium atoms as part of a chain reaction. The Nazis called their weapon a “disintegration bomb.” With it, the führer could wrap Germany's flag around the face of the globe, suffocating his remaining rivals.

Hitler's men had beaten the U.S. in the race to develop the world's first atomic bomb.

Just the credible threat of such a weapon might be enough to turn the tide of war back in Germany's favor, this time irreversibly. Nash had a matter of months—six, at most, he'd been told.

He shivered.

Can I outmaneuver someone I helped create?

He doubted it. But he knew that he had to try.

A light cut through the darkness ahead.

They were here.

The powerful small boat peeked out from the water. Sylvia Munroe would be on board, along with two of her colleagues, agents he hadn't yet met. He looked forward to seeing Munroe again, though their time together would be brief, much briefer and in entirely different circumstances than the last time he met her over dinner in London. All three agents would know it was imperative that he reach Holland quickly, but nothing more. Only seven people in the world knew his mission, including Britain's prime minister, Winston Churchill, and his own leader, President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Nash waited. The boat flashed its beacon light three times. Only then did he step out from behind the rock that sheltered him, revolver in hand. He moved sideways and slightly forward, his boots sinking into the sand as he prepared to speak from some thirty yards away.

“What kind of night is this?” he asked.

“It is a night worthy of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*,” came the scripted reply from one of the deep voices on board.

Nash relaxed. “And where is the hound?” he asked, slipping the gun

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back into his jacket pocket as he quickened his pace toward the boat, whose occupants were still almost invisible to him. He thought he could decipher Munroe's outline in the fog.

"The hound is here," she called, rising to her feet.

She was off script. In disbelief, Nash spun around and took two strides back toward the safety of the rock. Someone shouted in German. A shot rang out. He braced himself. A body crashed into the oncoming waves. *Oh, my God—Munroe.*

A distant bark responded to the noise.

He knew the next bullet would be coming for him. He had to get back behind the rock. The wet sand sucked at his boots, making it hard to move nimbly. More shouting from the boat. More barking from beyond the cliff.

A 9-mm Parabellum bullet ripped through Nash's skin. The force of it sent him reeling as a burning sensation tore across his lower back, the bullet missing his spine by inches, exploding into his kidney, and coming to rest inside his abdominal wall.

The dog's barking became frantic and a light went on in one of the houses overlooking the bluff. A man started yelling through his window. In less than a minute, he would be out with a shotgun to protect his home and his nation.

A second bullet hit the side of Nash's head, sending blood through his dark hair and toward his contorted face.

Nash's only thought was the rock; he had to get behind it.

"Holen Sie ihn!" a voice commanded.

The splash of feet behind him. *Damn.* Nash swerved and lurched forward, trying not to stray too far from a direct line to his only hope of refuge. A bullet ricocheted off the rock. *Thank God.*

The reprieve was brief.

The next bullet was already on its way. This one tore through his side, above his right hip. He swore loudly but kept moving. His pursuer was well trained. As Nash dived for cover, another bullet penetrated his skin, this time splintering a portion of his tibia six inches below his right kneecap.

He rolled to his side and fumbled for his handgun, straining to see his assailant through the blood in his eyes. Nash fired, hitting him in the

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shoulder, knocking him off his feet. *Take that, you bastard.* His next shot missed. His pursuer rose, once more moving into Nash's line of sight.

Nash was probably dying, but he wasn't going to let the turncoat who killed Munroe get away. As Nash's head began spinning, he fired one last round. The killer, at most ten yards away, collapsed on the ground. Nash smiled briefly, dropping his head onto the sand, then grimaced as he looked up at the ceiling of fog hanging over the ocean, realizing the worst: his mission was over before it had even begun. He was the only one on the Allied side with the skills and the contacts to carry it out. His death would likely result in the deaths of tens of millions—and the misery of countless others.

Everett Nash said a prayer, closed his eyes, and lost consciousness.

Seconds later, something blew up the bottom half of the cliff behind him, followed by a series of explosions to the west.