



## **Tomorrow!**

*Philip Wylie*

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Nuclear war story centering around the atomic bombing of two fictional Midwest cities adjacent to each other in the mid-1950s; one has an effective Civil Defense program, the other does not.

## Tomorrow! Details

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Author : Philip Wylie

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## From Reader Review Tomorrow! for online ebook

### Richard Buro says

The short version first ...

One of the events which find its way into dystopic literature is the horror and destruction created by a more recent addition to the arsenal of several nations on our "little blue dot" called Earth. The class of these weapons is usually atomic or nuclear bombs. Since 1945, just about everyone has been impacted by the events that ended World War II, specifically the only use of atomic weapons in history. The devastation of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki brought to the attention of all humanity the horrific power of atomic bombs. Just nine years later, tests on remote Pacific Islands added to the terror the incredibly larger effects of thermonuclear (a.k.a. hydrogen) bombs. One such weapon detonated by Russia (then called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics [U.S.S.R.]) was sufficiently powerful enough to be seen many miles away from its point of detonation. The subject of the work being reviewed, Philip Wylie's *Tomorrow!* are the fictitious events of a large strike upon the United States of America by several groups of long-range bombers from the USSR.

Mr. Wylie does a good job of characterization for many of the individuals who inhabited the two mid-Western towns that shared a river as a common water source. The two cities, Green Prairie and River City, focused efforts on agriculture and industry with little need or desire for protection from hostile forces. The one thing that was clear was that one city took an active stance in training and supporting a local Civil Defense program which held meetings, mock needs for defense and support of each other in their relatively small population. The population of the larger of the two cities was less interested in Civil Defense and more interested in making the almighty dollar.

The time setting appears to be in the mid- to the late-1950's, where transportation in automobiles was common. A small airport supported the two communities, and there was a modest degree of communication and mutual aid and support during times of peace and prosperity. The Civil Defense established for one city was not matched by the same levels of preparedness for the unannounced, sneak attack of the USSR on America. The attack upon America was launched from bases in South America and Caribbean islands as well as from the Soviet Union. The attacks were in the form of both nuclear weapons with yields comparable to the Hiroshima bomb. There were additional weapons used in the form of biological and chemical agents.

The destruction was exacerbated by the combined effects of the blast, heat, and size of yield in the nuclear weapons. The biochemical follow-on attack was meant to provide additional confusion and human casualties adding a toxic agent to the already compromised victims of the blast, heat, radiological effects, and the confusion resulting from the large amounts of debris which made any makeshift shelters even more risky especially in the hours and days immediately after the initial strike. It was the combination of the various types of weapons that made the attack so horrific and the resulting devastation so difficult to control, organize, and provide useful help to those who would later succumb to the effects of not only nuclear and radiation exposure but also the debilitation of the individuals also assaulted by the effects of the biochemical agents from the follow-on strike. The combination of multiple weapons designed to target specifically humans with compromised immune systems and battered bodies from the initial atomic explosions and the resulting ionizing radiation that was one of the more devastating effects from their use and design.

Mr. Wylie also provides some insights into the human frailties that were extant prior to the attack. It was clear that the more urbane community was less prepared to handle the issues resulting in the aftermath of the combined attacks. The Civil Defense of the neighboring city was able to provide some limited assistance to their neighbors even though their community suffered damage at least as severe as the more urbane confines

of the larger, more developed, but less prepared of the two communities. Mr. Wylie also indicated that the two communities were able to offset their casualties by working with their neighbors. The principle result of the attack was a consolidation of efforts to help each other, and that alone made the book memorable for me. It was difficult to read about the devastation, but it was reaffirming to see the joining of the two communities in a common cause of recovery and the beginning of reconstruction of their homes and towns.

Mr. Wylie's writing style was eloquent and erudite. The dictionary came in handy for some of the words used which added to the understanding of what was said in the context in which it appeared. It held some commonalities with several of the other nuclear dystopic reads I have enjoyed over the last four or five years that I have been writing reviews of what I read. While I don't see close connection, this work -- Tomorrow! , I do see similarities with several similar works including:

Red Alert by Peter George,  
On the Beach by Nevil Shute,  
The Last Ship by William Brinkley,  
Alas, Babylon by Pat Frank, and  
Damnation Alley by Roger Zelazny

Recommendations:

While Tomorrow! is one of the longer works on the topic of nuclear dystopia, it includes a detailed look at two cities faced and their representative citizens faced by the result of a similar catastrophe – weapons of mass destruction used against modern urban populations. The events are similar for both cities, but the population of Green Prairie appear to fair better due to the Civil Defense preparedness activities and drills. Even when they are revisited after the atomic bombing by a biochemical attack designed to clean up those still alive after the nuclear holocaust, their training helped them cope with their dilemma while at the same time being able to provide some modicum of support for their neighbors in River City. The tale has lengthy characterizations as well as detailed descriptions of how things developed. It is clear that the settings are in the 1950's given the use of turboprop bombers, although the USSR was still using similar aircraft into the 1980's and 1990's as standoff cruise missile platforms, enabling the launch of those stand-off weapons without having to cross into United States or Canadian territories.

The story has clarity of purpose, detailed descriptions, and a mature knowledge of the effects of modern weapons systems. Its graphic detail of suffering and lingering death is probably not suitable for even middle grade students, but high school level students might find the information interesting, and the characterizations sophisticated given the original publication date. Screen readers who might not be able to handle the mature themes. It is appropriate for adult readers and excerpts might be beneficial in social studies courses at high school level and above.

I rate this one a 5 out of our usual 5-star rating scale for clarity, characterization, and detailed descriptions. The dialog is sophisticated for the time period, and it is not as laden with profanity as some other works find hard to get around, particularly those by more modern authors.

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## **Nora says**

This post apocalyptic novel is an outstanding period piece of fiction which clearly portrays the fears and prejudices of the time. Not great literature but a great read with the flavor of the mid twentieth century.

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## **Tim says**

Excerpt from the full review on my blog:

It was an era more than half our population knows only through history. It was an era in which the United States went from being the only nation possessing nuclear weapons to facing the reality that the "Godless Commies" also had them. It was an era in which the Cold War blossomed, together with fear that it could well turn into a hot -- and radioactive -- one.

Philip Wylie's 1954 novel *Tomorrow!* takes us inside that time, not only into the fears that existed but the debates over defense strategy and the need for and efficacy of the Civil Defense program. The book, re-released this month by Bison Books as part of its "Beyond Armageddon" series, can't help but show it's age, especially with references to "colored people" or using a worse epithet for the name of one area. Yet what is anachronistic today makes the era more real.

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## **Robert Morganbesser says**

### **Gruesome, if outdated**

Two cities in America, one prepared for nuclear war, one not. While this book is dated, the gruesome aftermath is not. Mobs, death, looting, rape, bravery, sacrifice. All elements of humanity after a horrific attack are represented here. Not a great novel, but worth a read.

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## **Pamela Shropshire says**

I read this book - or at least a Reader's Digest condensed version - years ago at my grandmother's house. When she died, it was one of the books that I added to my library.

It's a sort of What If? novel, featuring twin Midwest cities in the 1950s. One has an effective Civil Defense program and the other doesn't. The book covers a few days prior to and after the Soviet Union commences a nuclear attack against the US.

I remember enjoying this book a lot.

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## **Bill says**

Open Road listed this as 'children's fiction' and of course it is not. It is long, with a couple of lengthy

diatribes – one by an editor of the local popular paper and another near the end of the novel – and has numerous characters, not much of a plot for roughly the first part of the book, and a 50s vision of post-atomic warfare America.

Instead, this is more of a historic, fantasy/sci-fi novel – ‘historic’ because it is that vision that we could survive a major atomic and hydrogen bomb and missile attack and life would be fine a few years later – these were the years that kids were taught to get under their school desks to escape the harmful effects of a nuclear explosion.

We know that it silly.

TOMORROW! is one of the novel, along with Pat Frank’s ALAS, BABYLON that speculated on thermonuclear war and found it while devastating, in all probability survivable, unlike Nevil Shute’s more realistic ON THE BEACH of the same era.

That all said, this is a marvelous time piece, well written and crafted and, yes, a lot of fun to read!

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### **Pamela says**

I'm usually first in line for any disaster, dystopian, or apocalyptic novel out there but this one was a little dull. It was written in the early '50's but that shouldn't be the answer. I've read several from that time period that were really good. The problem here was the first half. It was a total screed and the author went on and on and on about how lax and indifferent the American public was to the dangers facing them from the Communists and the possibilities of nuclear war. Not only did he, as the narrator, lecture; he also had one of his characters, a newspaper editor dictate about a ten page editorial on civil defense and standing up to our enemies. All I could do was wonder what possible paper he thought would publish this thing. There was also a strong taint of misanthropy in the first half, at least. Actually, I thought his characters were pretty realistic and mostly nice people.

The second half was better. Once the disasters start occurring, Wylie pretty accurately depicted the way people would react. For his time, he got the war scenarios fairly accurate also, although I doubt we were ever as ignorant of what the Russians were doing as he makes it seem. Then all of a sudden, the war is over and within two years, things are rebounding nicely. I guess maybe in 1954, nobody but the true experts really had all the facts.

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### **Olivia "Don't Blame Me I Voted for Hillary" says**

First-rate look at nuclear attack on two Midwestern cities, one of which had prepared for such an attack, one which hadn't. The book was published in 1954 but in light of the fact that Americans have elected a president who cannot be trusted anywhere near the nuclear button it is not dated.

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### **CarrieLynn Reinhard says**

The first half of the book reads like a soap opera, with the concerns of atomic war with the Soviet Union as a

background issue -- one that characters and the author break through the soap opera to pontificate on. We learn about the various characters, their relations with each other, their foibles and weaknesses, and where they stand on this whole Civilian Defense thing. It feels like a soap opera, with characters that are so made to be too flawed or too ideal as to not be real. This build-up of the characters lets you know who is going to die or be scarred come the apocalypse. And the apocalypse comes, suddenly, during Christmas -- during the height of mass consumption, which the author had previously railed against. And when it comes, the description is so exacting as to be terrifying. And so detailed and realistic as to be unsettling, gross, and a book-shutter -- there were some scenes when I had to stop and get the image out of my head. But these scenes were also quite out of character with the rest of the book, which had never gone to great length to describe the people. I could barely tell you what the main characters looked like, but I can tell you what strangers looked like after the bomb dropped. Most likely this was done for effect of the parable the author was attempting: the characters were characterizations, embodiments of his idea of what constitutes proper and improper behavior, and the scenes of death and injury are meant to shock us into agree with this view. But that means at the end, his message appeared to be highly un-pacifist, with mass destructing being a remedy for the blights of modern life and the potential for creating a better, freer, more at peace world.

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### **Jim says**

Interesting read. Basically, a morality tale about the advantages of having an active Civil Defense program. Twin cities, divided by a river, are nuked by the Russians. One city has a Civil Defense program, the other - does not.

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### **Andy Phillips says**

This book was a bit of a let down, to be honest. I was expecting a story of how a nuclear strike on a fairly typical city would affect a cross-section of its citizens. Instead I got a very long introduction to the event and a fairly brief description of the actual attack and its immediate effects.

This book is basically an advert for civil defence. The story features two cities located either side of a river in the middle of the US. One city prepares well for a nuclear attack and the other doesn't at all. We are introduced to loads of characters, but the focus is on two families who live next door to one another. The first two thirds of the book describes their backgrounds, various relationships and the cities is quite a lot of detail. Sadly, I wasn't really that interested in a lot of it, and it becomes fairly irrelevant once the bombs start going off. The last third of the book is a lot more exciting but it could have more or less stood alone with less than half of the scene setting.

The book feels very outdated now through the language used, but also through the relatively minor effects of the bomb. Most nuclear weapons are much more destructive than the once described, and I can't believe that everything would be sorted out as easily as it appears to be. Still, not a terrible book if you're a fan of disaster/apocalyptic fiction novels, but not terribly exciting either.

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### **Mmyoung says**

One wonders to what degree this book may have had a influence on Red Alert (itself an inspiration for Dr.

Strangelove.) A fascinating insight into the level of racism in the United States in 1954, not only directed towards African-Americans but also towards "foreign" immigrants (those from Poland, Greece and various countries other than England and France.

The author doesn't even vaguely handwave in the direction of the effects a nuclear war between the Soviet Union and the United States would have on the latter's neighbours and clearly considers massive levels of death of the inhabitants of the countries bordering the Soviet Union to be acceptable collateral damage. Neither does the author seem to imagine that the "happy" ending, such as it is, would result in the United States becoming at best a pariah among all nation states not involved in the initial war.

That said, the book contains one of the best descriptions of what exactly happens at ground zero of a nuclear blast I have ever read.

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## Tony says

TOMORROW! (1963). Philip Wylie. \*\*\*\*.

A recurring theme in Wylie's writings is the nuclear doomsday, and this novel is another prime example. After setting the stage by introducing us to several families in two small towns in the mid-west, Green Prairie and River City, the author gets down to business. It seems that one town has taken CD (in those days, CD only stood for civil defense; there were no such things as certificates of deposit or compact disks) seriously, while its sister city – across the river – has taken a cavalier attitude: "It can't happen here." As you might guess, it happens, and America is attacked by the evil Russians, and we get to see the results of preparedness vs. unpreparedness. We also get to see the ensuing effects of mob rule in the countryside when many of our major cities are destroyed. Of course there is retribution, but of a level that has to be beyond the reader's comprehension. Wylie has put together a good story that we view as science fiction today, but had lots of readers upset back in the day. Recommended.

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## Amy Sturgis says

This rates somewhere between 3.5 and 4 stars for me.

I am a fan of Philip Wylie's deeply humane and thoughtful science fiction. His *The Disappearance* is a particular favorite of mine, and *When Worlds Collide* and its sequel are justly famous. *Tomorrow!* is a solid and compelling slice-of-1950s-life/apocalyptic story focusing on the twin towns of Green Prairie and River City before, during, and after atomic war.

The University of Nebraska Press provides an excellent description of the novel, so I won't try to reinvent the wheel:

**"*Tomorrow!* is a story of average, nice Americans living in the neighboring cities of Green Prairie and River City in Middle America. It is—until the sudden blitz—the story of the girl next door and her boyfriend; of the accountant who saw what was coming, and the rich old lady who didn't; of engaging young kids, babies, "hoods," a bank official who "borrowed" from a customer's account.**

**"Then, at the height of the Christmas shopping season, Condition Red is sounded, and this down-to-**

earth story of America's Main Street becomes a shattering, vivid experience of the nightmare that human beings have cooked up for themselves.

**"Tomorrow! can be read as a novel of pure suspense—if you dare. It is a thriller in which the apocalyptic technology of today is superimposed on the future. But the novel is also designed to show Philip Wylie's conclusions about America's dangerous vulnerability to dread, hysteria, and panic, as well as his recommendations about what must be done."**

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## Chris says

Tomorrow! is the tale of two cities: "Green Prairie" which has a vigorous Civil Defense program, and its neighbor "River City" which turns up its nose at nonsense taxpayer expenses like Civil Defense. We see these two towns -- and their levels of preparedness for a nuclear attack -- through the Conner family and their neighbors, an everyman Midwestern American family who are very active in Civil Defense... until the local robber-baron heiress Minerva Sloan starts to slander it in her paper, incensed that a practice drill of some 40,000 volunteers (!) got her stuck in traffic for hours. The first 70% of the novel depicts slice-of-life melodrama, particularly the love-triangle between young architect/USAF officer Chuck Conner, his neighbor Lenore, and Kit Sloan, snotty son of billionaire Minerva. With a surprise Soviet nuclear attack, the book changes tone, and the full horrors of atomic war are unleashed on the twin cities...

Tomorrow! is an interesting look back at the 1950s, especially since so much of the novel is about living in the looming shadow of atomic war. The science is dated, more optimistic than realistic, and elements of the plot feel quaint today. So are many other "atomic war" novels from the era, so I can't fault Wylie in the slightest; I think it adds to the time-capsule feel of the story, giving a good idea of the expectations and fears of the era. It's a somewhat realistic portrayal of life in the 1950s that just so happens to be a post-apocalyptic novel, and a reasonably entertaining one at that. I don't think it will replace some of the all-time post-apocalyptic classics, but I think it will be of some interest to any reader who's interested in that genre.

Full review found [here](#).

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