

### ***The Shadow of War: A Novel of the Cuban Missile Crisis by Jeff Shaara***

This novel attracted me for two reasons. I am a strong fan of Jeff Shaara's writing style and I can't remember reading a book set during the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. When I read Shaara previously, I was very impressed by how immediate he made the depictions of battles of the Civil War, especially how well he captured the experience of each side, both North and South, which further adds to the suspense and tension. Shaara's books set during WW II and the Korean Conflict are also quite well-done. Yet this account is a bit different for me, as I could so well picture the American culture of the early Sixties – I was in grade school, and this was America as I first experienced it.

President Kennedy and his brother Bobby, his Attorney General, had a dangerous yet delicate situation facing them. The CIA uncovered evidence that the Soviet Union, headed by Nikita Khrushchev, had quietly been moving nuclear missiles to install in Cuba, a few very short miles from Miami and within range of many of the cities of the United States. At the height of Cold War tensions, this would change the fragile balance of power – and have catastrophic consequences in the midterm election only a few short weeks away, if this development could somehow be blamed on the young President and his party.

The novel helped me understand Khrushchev's probable strategy, as well as the fine line he has to walk to balance his power against hardliners in his own Communist Party. So much is on the line for him as well as for the Kennedys. I was struck by how the book emphasizes that the "adults in the room," both American and Russian, are swayed by their love for their own children and dismayed by the thought of the world the innocent might inherit – or perhaps never experience, if this nuclear struggle gets out of control, as it so easily could.

Shaara does a masterful job presenting a balance of both sides, with a side story of a Cuban immigrant family living in Florida whose father understands enough behind the evening newscasts and media speculation to be terrified for what it could very well mean for him and his family. This was the closest the world came, so far, to WW III and a nuclear showdown. This is an all-too-timely read, as talk of nuclear confrontation has resurfaced in the Ukrainian War and in the current conflict between Israel and Hamas, with Russia's President Putin and Arab nations growing more furious by the day.