

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In November of 2020, after months of being stuck in a city (Washington, DC) in pandemic quarantines and lockdowns, I found myself in the middle of the Kazakh steppe. The vastness of the open space was overwhelming. This was my last trip to eastern Kazakhstan before completing this manuscript, and I felt immense gratitude for the privilege of telling the story of my land and its people.

This book was more than a decade in the making. I am fairly certain I won't do any other writing that will have the same level of professional and personal importance to me. This book has been a labor of love, and I will be forever grateful to so many who helped me in this journey.

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So many authors and books inspire me, but for this particular project, I especially drew inspiration from David Holloway's *Stalin and the Bomb: The Soviet Union and Atomic Energy, 1939–1956*, Sarah Cameron's *Hungry Steppe: Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan*, Kate Brown's *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters*, and David Hoffman's *Dead Hand: The Untold Story of the Cold War Arms Race and Its Dangerous Legacy*. Toshihiro Higuchi's *Political Fallout: Nuclear Weapons Testing and the Making of a Global Environmental Crisis* inspired me with its prose and related subject matter. Kazakhstan's writers—Medeu Sarseke with *Semipalatinskaia tragedia* [Semipalatinsk tragedy] and Kanat Kabdrakhmanov with *470 bomb v serdtsce Kazakhstana* [470 bombs in the heart of Kazakhstan]—offered invaluable contemporaneous records of events that unfolded in the region during the period of Soviet nuclear tests.

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This was as much a scholarly journey as it was a personal one. The family I was born into predetermined my desire to start writing this book and helped me find the will to finish it.

Almaty and Washington, DC

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Thirty years since the shutdown of the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Polygon