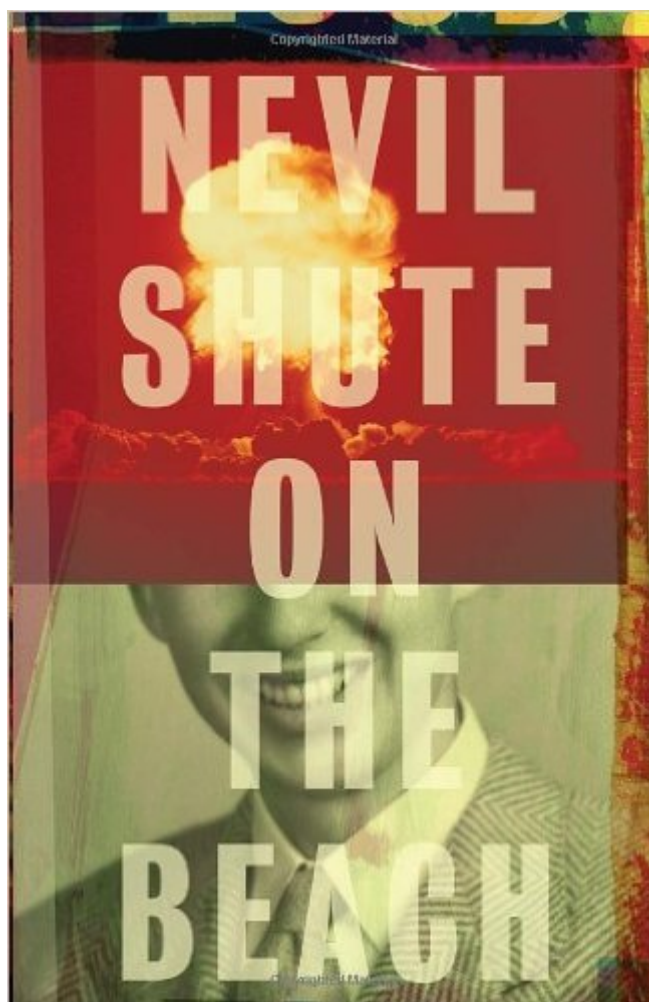


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On The Beach



Synopsis

Nevil Shute's most powerful novel "a bestseller for decades after its 1957 publication" is an unforgettable vision of a post-apocalyptic world. After a nuclear World War III has destroyed most of the globe, the few remaining survivors in southern Australia await the radioactive cloud that is heading their way and bringing certain death to everyone in its path. Among them is an American submarine captain struggling to resist the knowledge that his wife and children in the United States must be dead. Then a faint Morse code signal is picked up, transmitting from somewhere near Seattle, and Captain Towers must lead his submarine crew on a bleak tour of the ruined world in a desperate search for signs of life. Both terrifying and intensely moving, *On the Beach* is a remarkably convincing portrait of how ordinary people might face the most unimaginable nightmare.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I think most people here have already summed up this book, and there is little I can add to what they've said. I'll try anyway. *On the Beach* tells the story of the aftermath of an all-out nuclear war. The setting is Australia, one of the few places in the world to escape not only the bombs, but the deadly clouds of radioactive fallout from the war. But they'll only survive for a little while, because the global wind currents are slowly pushing the deadly fallout down to Antarctica. The Aussies only have a short time before they all come down with radiation sickness and die. The whole book is an emotional rollercoaster as the dreaded day of death looms ever closer, with absolutely nothing to prevent doom. Most people are resigned to their fate, and try and stay busy with various daily rituals in an effort to keep their sanity. The two main characters of the book are Dwight Towers, a U.S.

submarine commander who has survived the war and is in refuge in Australia, and Moira Davidson, a young Australian girl who is bitter about her fate and seeks consolation with Dwight. Other characters are introduced, such as a young couple with a baby and a scientist who likes racing cars. The reader is quickly drawn into these people's lives, and really comes to care about what happens to them. Needless to say, the ending isn't warm and cheery. I had to stop reading the book several times and take a little break to get rid of the huge lump in my throat. It is a VERY tough read at the end. If you don't get emotional, you just might be dead. There are several small points to make about the book. The author, Nevil Shute, isn't exactly the best writer in terms of grammar. There are awkward sentences and errors, and it sometimes detracts from the story. He also wrote this book in the late 1950's, and he's English, so there are words that don't make much sense today. Despite these flaws, the story is still gut wrenching and compelling. I really appreciated Shute's sense of irony. Moira first meets Dwight because she is enlisted to keep his mind off of his dead family in America. However, Moira ends up being the one who starts to break down. More irony appears when people make plans that they know they won't be alive to keep. The scene when Peter and Mary are planning their garden is a good example of this irony, and you'll groan in anguish over it. Overall, I haven't been this upset over something since I watched the film "Cutting Moments". I'm surprised more people haven't heard of this book. I gave it to my Mom to read first, and she bawled like a baby at the end. You may not bawl, but you'll certainly be affected.

"On the Beach" is one of those books that you read for the concept and the story, but not for the quality of the writing. The plot centers around the lives of a few remaining survivors of a nuclear war who live in Australia. Since the war has taken place in the northern hemisphere, Australia has largely escaped unscathed--for the moment. But as prevailing winds approach Australia, they carry lethal doses of radiation with them. The implication of this is that all of the characters in the book--in fact everyone in the world--will inevitably be extinguished. "On the Beach" has a profound psychological impact because it is devoid of the intense action that usually accompanies nuclear apocalypse films. The destruction has already occurred elsewhere and the citizens of Australia are largely going about their business knowing they will soon die. The fact that their infrastructure has not been destroyed and that all of their social apparatus is still intact makes their fate all the more sad and eerie. Although this book is set in the Cold War its outcome is still relevant and feasible today. The nuclear warheads generated by the arms race haven't gone away. The former Soviet Union is a desperate, chaotic place, and as several reviewers pointed out, more small countries are joining the nuclear club. One could say that Nuclear madness has merely transformed itself, but its danger

certainly hasn't disappeared. I think everyone should read this book to be reminded of the possible future we all face.

This copy (produced by LLC) is not in fact the actual book by Nevil Shute, but a poor abridgement of it. It clocked in at 207 pages, 23 lines per page, versus 320 pages at 33 lines per page in my 1957 edition. It reads like the book condensed for English language learners. First line, second paragraph, has gone from "He woke happy, and it was some time before his conscious senses realized and pinned down the origin of this happiness," to "He woke happy, and was not sure why." I should be embarrassed to put out this product without labeling it for what it is.

After a nuclear war, radiation slowly drifts southwards, gradually killing off humanity there as it has already been killed off in the Northern Hemisphere. The end is less than a year away, yet Australians, and a few American naval refugees seek to maintain their daily lives in the face of doom, and even send an exploratory submarine northwards. The fascination of the book is watching how people react to the inevitable doom. Many just go on plegmatically, a few pretend it will never happen. Most interesting is Moira Dawson, an Australian girl who had dreamed of visiting London and Paris, and now never will, and who seeks to live what little life is left to the fullest. She learns a lesson from a stillborn romance with Dwight Towers, the submarine commander who acts as if his wife and children are alive in Connecticut. Perhaps the limitation of this book is that most of the characters simply accept their doom, presumably having come to terms with it before the start of the book. But more of a range of viewpoints might be welcome. Could you imagine the anger and frustration of teenagers under these circumstances, in the throes of adolescence without the promise of adulthood, knowing they will never have their independence. As in most of Shute's later works, there are no villains. That is welcome when so many books have paper villains for us to vicariously hate.

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