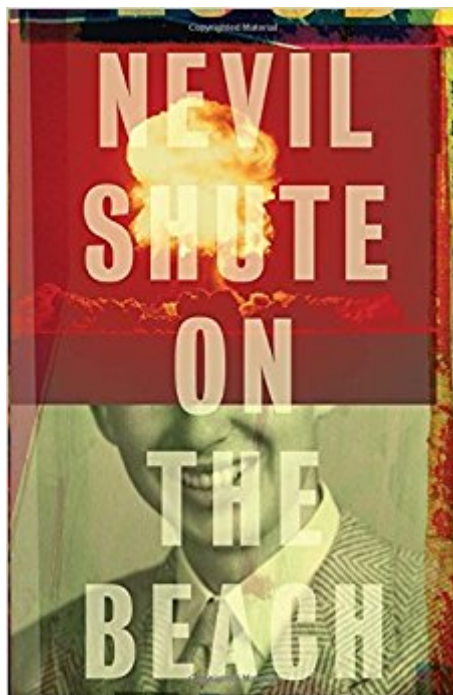


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On The Beach



Synopsis

Nevil Shute's most powerful novel is a bestseller for decades after its 1957 publication. It 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

"The most haunting evocation we have of a world dying of radiation after an atomic war." *The New York Times*
"The most shocking fiction I have read in years. What is shocking about it is both the idea and the sheer imaginative brilliance with which Mr. Shute brings it off." *San Francisco Chronicle*
"A novelist of intelligent and engaging quality, deservedly popular. . . . Nevil Shute was, in brief, the sort of novelist who genuinely touches the imagination and feeling." *The Times (London)*

Nevil Shute Norway was born in 1899 in Ealing, London. He studied Engineering Science at Balliol

College, Oxford. Following his childhood passion, he entered the fledgling aircraft industry as an aeronautical engineer working to develop airships and, later, airplanes. In his spare time he began writing and he published his first novel, *Marazan*, in 1926, using the name Nevil Shute to protect his engineering career. In 1931 he married Frances Mary Heaton and they had two daughters. During the Second World War he joined the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve where he worked on developing secret weapons. After the war he continued to write and settled in Australia where he lived until his death in 1960. His most celebrated novels include *Pied Piper* (1942), *A Town Like Alice* (1950), and *On the Beach* (1957).

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." should be embarrassed to put out this product without labeling it for what it is.

On the Beach is a post-apocalyptic story written by Nevil Shute in the 1950s, at the height of the Cold War. It is a story of people facing inevitable doom, how they cope, the values that support them, and their final pleasures. It is thoughtful and low-key, though the intensity of their is always there, boiling up and threatening to overcome them. It is at once, sad and hopeful. It is NOT *Mad Max*. The driving situation, and principal antagonist, in *On the Beach* is the aftermath of nuclear war. In a brief introduction, Mr. Shute provides the background of a nuclear war having snuffed out all life in the northern hemisphere and the radiation now moving slowly south. His story focuses on a few survivors in Melbourne, Australia who are waiting for the inevitable. How they handle that waiting drives the story. Mr Shute's prose is simple, making this book an easy read. In fact, I think it reads like a screenplay. I don't know if that was Mr. Shute's intent, but two movies were made from his book. But then, the easy prose does highlight the common lives of the characters as they face an uncommon horror. Taken that way, the writing emphasizes the story's everyday elements much as the writing in McCarthy's *The Road* emphasizes that story's bleakness. *On the Beach* is not bleak, though it is sad. The characters are depicted as was common for popular storytelling of the time: square-jawed, heroic men and brave, supporting women. Mr. Shute goes beyond these stereotypes, though, by placing them in a situation that heroics and

personal grit can't save. That point is brought out in several ways, one of which is the general cluelessness about where the nuclear war came from and why. Even the military men don't understand it. As the submarine captain says: "I'd like to read a history of this last war," said the American. "I was in it for a short time but I don't know a thing about it. Has anybody written anything?" And so the inevitability of death is aggravated by the senselessness of it. It is this theme that makes this story, in my opinion, so very relevant. A modern version of this novel would be longer. The action does span the globe in that the submarine travels far and wide over the northern hemisphere checking war damage and radiation levels. Mr. Shute abbreviates all that. Today it would probably be expanded into subplots that switched between the submarine and the folks back home in Melbourne. I can even imagine the introduction of a political aspect that could make the story a thriller. All that would be a detriment to the storytelling, however, if it took away from the dynamic of people facing the end of everything. In these days when political leaders push for war and consider nuclear exchanges "winnable," *On the Beach* makes its subtle point: common, everyday people suffer for the insane actions of their shadowy rulers. Such suffering coming from nuclear war would likely be worse than Mr. Shute imagines, but his point is well made that it is the final result of unbridled ambition and greed empowered by doomsday weapons.

I could not put this down. It captures perfectly the time in which it is set and was written, & explores with a sophisticated simplicity the very human reactions of a group of people reacting to the human race's, & therefore their own personal, final days. This was so well written, it felt so very real, like time travelling back to the early 60s in a parallel world and actually watching the story unfold as it happened. It had me from the first paragraph, and left me exhausted, deeply moved & emotionally wrung out on its last word. What more could you ask from a shining example of great 20th century literature? A necessary, very human and still incredibly relevant book. Everyone should read this. Cannot recommend highly enough!

I tremendously enjoyed this story, and wasn't bothered at all by some of the things I expected to be--it's an old book; there are definitely some period-specific dynamics around gender, relationship, social norms, etc. At the same time--it's a novel about the end of the world. That kind of weirdness just isn't that disruptive, taken in context. The writing style, though, was a bit weird for me. It felt very flatly descriptive; the language was so to-the-point as to feel rather brusque; none of the characters

seemed especially engaged with the upcoming end of life on earth. It was like a novel that got an aggressive rewrite by an author of technical manuals; it made it hard to stay connected with the story. So--really, I'd say four stars for story; two stars for execution.

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