

An aerial photograph of a coastal town, likely Newport, Rhode Island, viewed from a high angle. The town is built on a peninsula, surrounded by a stone sea wall. A prominent church with a tall, dark spire is visible in the center. The ocean is visible in the background, and the sky is filled with dramatic, dark clouds. The entire image has a monochromatic blue-green tint.

ALL THE
LIGHT
WE
CANNOT
SEE

A NOVEL

ANTHONY DOERR

An aerial photograph of a coastal town, likely in France, featuring a prominent church spire and a harbor. The sky is filled with dramatic, blue-tinted clouds. The overall color palette is monochromatic, dominated by various shades of blue and teal.

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All the Light
We Cannot See

« *A Novel* »

Anthony Doerr

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For Wendy Weil

1940–2012

In August 1944 the historic walled city of Saint-Malo, the brightest jewel of the Emerald Coast of Brittany, France, was almost totally destroyed by fire. . . . Of the 865 buildings within the walls, only 182 remained standing and all were damaged to some degree.

—Philip Beck

It would not have been possible for us to take power or to use it in the ways we have without the radio.

—Joseph Goebbels

Zero

7 August 1944

Leaflets

At dusk they pour from the sky. They blow across the ramparts, turn cartwheels over rooftops, flutter into the ravines between houses. Entire streets swirl with them, flashing white against the cobbles. *Urgent message to the inhabitants of this town, they say. Depart immediately to open country.*

The tide climbs. The moon hangs small and yellow and gibbous. On the rooftops of beachfront hotels to the east, and in the gardens behind them, a half-dozen American artillery units drop incendiary rounds into the mouths of mortars.

Bombers

They cross the Channel at midnight. There are twelve and they are named for songs: *Stardust* and *Stormy Weather* and *In the Mood* and *Pistol-Packin' Mama*. The sea glides along far below, spattered with the countless chevrons of whitecaps. Soon enough, the navigators can discern the low moonlit lumps of islands ranged along the horizon.

France.

Intercoms crackle. Deliberately, almost lazily, the bombers shed altitude. Threads of red light ascend from anti-air emplacements up and down the coast. Dark, ruined ships appear, scuttled or destroyed, one with its bow shorn away, a second flickering as it burns. On an outermost island, panicked sheep run zigzagging between rocks.

Inside each airplane, a bombardier peers through an aiming window and counts to twenty. Four five six seven. To the bombardiers, the walled city on its granite headland, drawing ever closer, looks like an unholy tooth, something black and dangerous, a final abscess to be lanced away.