

The background of the book cover is a monochromatic, teal-toned aerial photograph of a coastal city. A prominent church spire rises from the city center. The city is situated along a coastline, with the ocean visible in the foreground and background. The sky is filled with dramatic, layered clouds. The title text is overlaid on the upper portion of the image.

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A NOVEL

ANTHONY DOERR

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All the Light We Cannot See

« *A Novel* »

Anthony Doerr

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New York London Toronto Sydney New Delhi

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.