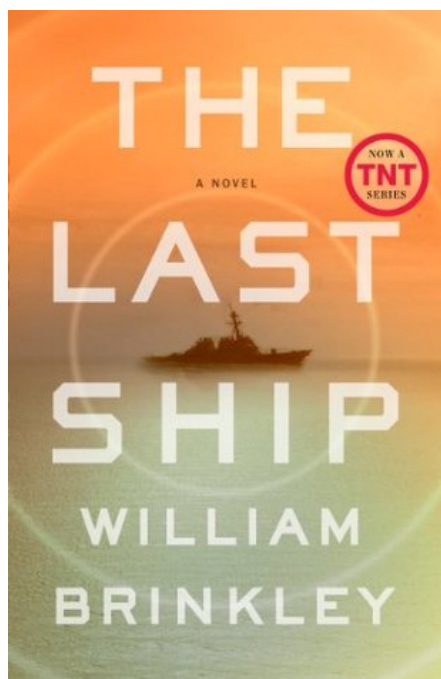




## The Last Ship

*William Brinkley*

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# The Last Ship

*William Brinkley*

## **The Last Ship** William Brinkley

“An extraordinary novel of men at war” (*The Washington Post*) and the bestselling book that inspired the TNT mini-series

The unimaginable has happened. The world has been plunged into all-out nuclear war. Sailing near the Arctic Circle, the U.S.S. Nathan James is relatively unscathed, but the future is grim and Captain Thomas is facing mutiny from the tattered remnants of his crew. With civilization in ruins, he urges those that remain—one-hundred-and-fifty-two men and twenty-six women—to pull together in search of land. Once they reach safety, however, the men and women on board realize that they are earth’s last remaining survivors—and they’ve all been exposed to radiation. When none of the women seems able to conceive, fear sets in. Will this be the end of humankind?

## **The Last Ship Details**

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Genre : Fiction, Science Fiction, Apocalyptic, Post Apocalyptic, War, Military Fiction

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## From Reader Review The Last Ship for online ebook

Aerin says

(Original review date: 3 October 2013)

Soooooooo, this book is a piece of shit! And not your garden-variety piece of shit, either, but a vomitous clusterfuck of truly offensive, misogynistic garbage.

I stuck it out for a hundred pages, and here's what I can tell you about the plot:

The narrator is the captain of a US Navy Destroyer. There has been a nuclear war; they are, as far as they know, the Last Ship. Like, in the world. The crew numbers 250 men and 32 women. And you may be thinking - wow, if this is the last of humanity, it sure is a good thing there are women aboard! You know, for repopulating, saving-the-species sorts of activities, right?

That's what I was thinking, at least. But oh my goodness, NOPE. Logic of *that* kind will get you nowhere in this book.

Let us begin, shall we, with some quotes from Chapter Two:

*When the Navy not long ago first commenced assigning a few women to ships, I felt it had to be one of those incalculable fundamental errors that seem to be made only by civilizations in decline, a lapse profound and past comprehension in most elementary morality and judgment. The idea that we should take these embodiments - harbors, repositories - of all that is gentle and of final value in life, and God and Nature's chosen instrument for the species' very survival, and place them where they would be caught up in the ancient rough-and-tumble of shipboard existence, where peril was one's daily bread, indeed where they might be maimed or slaughtered, and this act based on the concept that equality consisted in women doing exactly what men do: this seemed to me wicked to the point of malignancy, an abomination in the sight of the Lord and of pure reason, and a consummate fraud pulled off on half the human race by their own kind, abetted by a number of men masquerading as their champions.*

Note: the preceding monster paragraph consists of exactly TWO (2) sentences. Content is not the only problem with this shitshow.

This monologue then goes on to speculate that the sea itself will rise up in wrath and destroy any ships which include women, because... you know. Nature hates the ladies.

(In case you're wondering, I *did* check the copyright date after reading this - it was published in 1989. Not 1950. Not 1850.)

*However, since the deed was struck, I treated females, once they began to come aboard the Nathan James, exactly as I did the men and officers. If equality was what they wanted, equality I would give them. I was not prepared further to insult them by setting for them standards lower than those I enjoined on my other sailors.*

You, sir, are an officer AND a gentleman!! (Protip: Using the word "female" as a noun to refer to humans is an automatic FAIL.)

*She was by now Navy as much as any man. I was suddenly aware, watching her on the ladder, that she had mastered with seeming ease something I had felt, since these matters began, to be among the most difficult of feats: at once to be a Navy officer and remain a woman.*

HA HA HA FUCK YOU.

But enough about the ladies. Skipping ahead...

*He possessed that Jewishness which is quietly confident of its superiority of intellect, by the same token far too smart to let his knowledge of that fact show through, realizing that to do so throws away half its power...*

Holy shit no, okay, MOVING ALONG.

*Just because I had spent virtually my entire adult life at sea, I had known few women at all. If the word "known" be enlarged to mean the inner workings of another human being, the inner life, one could come very close to saying I had known none whatsoever. For all purposes I knew nothing about women.*

YOU DON'T SAY! Seems to me like maybe a person who has never meaningfully interacted with a member of the opposite sex in his *life* may not have the leadership skills to be promoted to CAPTAIN OF A SHIP. But what do I know, I am not a military genius.

So... yeah. *Chapter Two*, my friends.

The story then moves on as they discover an apparently uncontaminated island and go about starting to farm the land, harvest fish, and gauge their likelihood of long-term survival. But it doesn't take long for the icky specter of ladyhood to again rise up and terrorize our Captain.

Taking a walk around the island, he stumbles upon a pair of sailors, a man and a woman, talking and giggling by a stream...

*Regarded one way, it was a charming tableau, a girl and a boy kneeling at a brook, their faces wet from the tasting of it...Nothing whatsoever happened. But there was a quality in the scene itself, in the very configurations of their facing genuflected forms, a sense of something like intimacy that made something terrible strike at my heart. I moved quickly on, wanting to get away from it.*

I have no idea why this possibly-romantic-but-totally-innocent scene terrifies him so profoundly. It'd be one thing, I suppose, if the company were actively fighting a war - fraternization can complicate things and all that. BUT THEY ARE THE LAST HUMAN BEINGS ON THE PLANET. If no couples get all googly-eyed by a creekbed at some point, THERE WILL NEVER BE ANY MORE HUMAN BEINGS. What the fuck, Captain. What the fuck.

But never fear, it gets a whole lot worse. Later that night, the morale officer, a woman, comes to his cabin to give her daily report. They banter for a bit, which he seems to enjoy until he *catches* himself enjoying it, at which point he quickly re-adopts his douchey demeanor. Finally, he gets to the point that's been bothering him: "How are the women doing, Lieutenant?" Taken aback, she tells him they're doing as well as the men are doing, and that "the women will be all right, Captain." This answer, for some reason, pushes him right the fuck over the edge. Hold on to your hats for this batshittery, folks...

*This statement increased a kind of angry wariness I could feel as having appeared within myself, bringing with it suddenly a sense of danger lying just below the surface, something about it infinitely threatening. Apart from having the highest rank, she was a natural leader of the women. The women in their rigorously segregated quarters must talk over any number of things. There was nothing to keep them from talking over anything, and no man's ear ever hearing. It was not inconceivable that they might, in present circumstances, come to consider their first allegiance to themselves, to their own fraternity [sic] of womanhood. The very idea of the possible existence of such an entity, never having remotely occurred to me until this instant, was itself deeply unsettling, further, wholly inadmissible. Not only can it not be recognized, given any official standing whatsoever; nothing is more expressly, categorically forbidden aboard ship than cliques of any kind. And I could think of none more unacceptable, striking at the very functioning of the ship, than one consisting only of women; I would come down on it instantly, ruthlessly, with every force and power I possessed...*

Et fucking CETERA. Holy shit, buddy. HOLY SHIT.

They discuss the topic some more, the Captain barely reining in his terror and fury; she confides that the women feel "outnumbered" (I DO NOT BLAME THEM!) which of course further fuels his paranoid delusions. Finally, she gets up to leave, and he spouts what may be the creepiest narration I've read all year:

*She walked to the door, taking her inviolate serenity - and, it seemed, her sureness of something undefined - with her. Her body and her way of carrying it were pliant and without effort, eurythmic, a grace by second nature, as though it were something she never had to give a thought to; impossible of making an awkward movement. I could see the shimmering water of the lagoon beyond, seeming to backdrop, and to outline, her woman's figure. But I was not looking at the lagoon. I was looking first at the back of her head and the pure grain of wheat-light hair, then all down her body, slender and cool, across her seat, down her legs, the clean white smartness of the uniform seeming to enhance as it were her womanhood; whilst I did, having the eerie conviction that she knew I was doing so. Then she was gone and I sat looking out at only the unobstructed lagoon. Feeling a tremor through all my being, a dampness breaking out all over me as from a fever. In this male stronghold of ships I felt suddenly enveloped in femininity, in its impenetrable mysteries, its unknown and perhaps unknowable secrets - its snares, its traps.*

And it just goes ON, this menacing mix of lust and violence, terror and fury. And all because... women exist? On the ship? WHAT THE FUCK.

I read apocalyptic books because I am interested in stories about the end of the world - destruction, social breakdown, isolation, disaster. I do not read apocalyptic books to get inside the head of a horrifying misogynist. I don't want to feel *angry* and *afraid* when reading for leisure. And I don't know what Brinkley's intent is here - if he is using the Captain as a mouthpiece for his own views, or if he is crafting a character study on the mindset of this particular brand of monster. Maybe the Captain will be redeemed, maybe he will be destroyed, maybe his dreadfulness will serve some yet-to-be-seen literary purpose.

But I don't actually give a fuck, because I'm not reading another 500 pages of this long-winded, disgusting diatribe. I just don't have the energy. 100 pages in and not a single DETAIL on what actually ended the world? FUCK this book.

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### Cheryl says

I just wanted them all to die so this book would finally be over.

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### Shibumi says

I have read many reviews by other readers of The Last Ship over the years and each of them stated the same thing... I loved the plot and persevered to the end in spite of the authors writing style. And just like so many before me, once I finished this book I too threw it against the wall and shouted, HA! This book did not beat me!

This is a doomsday story about the last American war ship desperately searching for safe harbor in an irradiated and burned world. It's also a morality tale about how to carry on the human race when the ratio of men to women isn't balanced. It's a phenomenal post-apocalyptic tale with great imagery and drama. A true must read for all fans of the P.A. genera.

However, I must seriously caution any reader to take heed before embarking on this bleak yet imaginative seafaring journey. First and foremost I must say that Brinkley was truly ambitious in his attempt at writing a very modern story in the voice of a very old world sea captain. At times his prose was brilliant and satisfying. Unfortunately, at other times his incessant attempt at being "literary" nearly drowned me in a sea of words. He liberally doused each page with nautical jargon, habitually digressed via flashback, lacked the ability to form a paragraph and produced impressive run on sentences. At times I found myself backtracking to re-read whole chapters in order to maintain a grasp of where and when I was in the story. Quite simply, his writing style was frustrating. One could safely say that his editor deserved to be keelhauled.

In spite of his writing style (or perhaps because of it) you should persevere. The story is that intriguing. But you have to want to read this book in order to make it to the last page. And if you do... you will be one of the few, the proud and the brave.

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## **Bryan says**

I've decided to give this book two stars rather than one, because there were a few small positives. The premise was very interesting, being the reason I picked up the book in the first place. I also quite enjoyed the plot, from a high level. If someone were to summarize the novel to me I would probably be very excited to read it.

Unfortunately, everything else about it was a disaster. The biggest problem was the first person narration. A tricky thing to pull off in most cases, this problem was compounded by the fact that the narrator is completely unlikable. He wants the best for his crew, which is admirable, but he just comes across as dumb and incompetent. Which is surprising, since the author spends the whole book trying to convince us of how capable he is.

This leads me to the other big problem with the novel. I hesitate to call it a novel, because it more closely resembles a US Navy recruitment tool. Every sailor in the book is portrayed as being brilliant but humble, assertive but open-minded, capable and hard-working; it was endlessly tiring. This can be explained as the narrators skewed perspective of his crew, but that's small comfort when you are reading through the 99th speech about how amazing "Navy Men" are. At a certain point, you can only assume that Brinkley himself really believes the crap that his leading man is spewing.

The narrator is continuously following rambling philosophical tangents, wherein Brinkley tries to make him sound intellectual, but this never works. His thoughts on women, talking about them as if they are some form of alien race, only serve to make him seem sexist. The religious angle of this story could have been interesting, but the way it is addressed just seemed forced.

The writing style is awful. Brinkley makes a Navy Captain sound like some stuck up academic trying to prove how well learned he is. At one point he quotes Milton. Enough said. The only way I made it through the book was by learning how to find the few sentences per page that actually matter, and skimming over everything else.

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## **Tyrone says**

I guess like many i picked this up because i was aware of the recent TV series but also because I'm a fan of Post-Apocalyptic novels anyway. I've also really enjoyed The Destroyermen series by Taylor Anderson and was looking forward to another book about this seemingly singular breed.

Having scanned the reviews already posted i've found that many have had the same experience i had. The book is quite clearly divided into 3 sections. The 2nd section is a recounting of the events from the brief nuclear conflict to the discovery of the island and the 3rd section follows on from the First Section which recounts events shortly after finding the Island.

Again like many i found the 2nd section to be by far the best, compelling and exciting while dealing with many of the human issues that you would expect to find given the circumstances the Crew of the USS Nathan James finds itself in.

I thought the 3rd section was also decent but almost gave up in disgust about two thirds of the way through when something truly shocking happens. The reason for the disgust was because it just seemed so unnecessary and almost no explanation for it was given for the totally unjustified/ uncharacteristic actions. Anyway i gritted my teeth carried on and the author does go some way to explaining the event in a somewhat

off-hand way just before the novel ended. It was enough to ameliorate the worst of how i felt at the time it happened.

That just leaves the first section. I've read enough novels with non-linear storytelling to know i don't have an issue with that particular device. The novel is written from the first person perspective of the Ship's Captain. I never really warmed to him and that is obviously a problem when everything is recounted from that character's perspective. When that character seems to spend almost the entire of the first section in painful introspection, to have swallowed a thesaurus and to be seemingly incapable of thinking in short sentences then i have a real problem. Because we don't know the crew, or the issues they have faced and i simply did not feel that my empathy had been earned and had little patience with mostly of the overblown introspection that felt simply self-indulgent. The book almost lost me before i got to a place where i could enjoy the story being told.

It is a mark of how good the 2nd section is that this receives 3 stars!

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## Matt says

The journalist Ron Rosenbaum coined the term “nuke porn” (or so he claims) in a 1970 article for Harper's called *The Subterranean World of the Bomb*. It's a phrase he uses in his writings to describe just about every artistic rendering of nuclear warfare, from *Dr. Strangelove* on down. Now, Rosenbaum knows a lot about the atomic bomb, about the strategies and consequences of nuclear war. That is undeniable. I'm not quite sure, however, that his not-all-that-clever phrasemaking is accurate, or even helpful. When I think of porn (which between you and me is a lot), I think of something that is exploitative, sensationalistic, geared towards satisfying our lower instincts. Yet Rosenbaum uses the term broadly to encompass serious, sober-minded, and message-driven movies and books alike. A film like *The Day After* or a novel like *On the Beach* can be described a lot of ways, but crass entertainment is not one of them. Under Rosenbaum's rubric, they're all lumped in together.

That does not hold true for William Brinkley's *The Last Ship*.

*The Last Ship* is nuke porn.

In fact, it nearly veers over the line into “porn” as the word is used in its more familiar sense. This novel is a strange brew. Two-thirds of it is ponderous portentousness; and one-third is terrible erotic fiction. Taken together, it's one of the weirder hybrids I've read. This makes it impossible to recommend, and at the same time, impossible (for me) to hate. There is something almost audacious in the scope of its intent and ambition.

The story is simple enough, as tends to be the case in post-apocalyptic fiction. The guided missile destroyer U.S.S. *Nathan James* is on patrol in the Barents Sea when she is given the order to launch her nuclear-tipped cruise missiles at the Soviet city of Orel. Without a moment's reflection, the *James* carries out her mission, launches her missiles, and then flees to the North Sea. Suddenly, communication with U.S. Navy Command is interrupted. The *James* is unable to contact the outside world. A trip up to Thames to a smoke-shrouded London gives good indication that World War III has begun and ended. For reasons that are unexplained – and strangely unexplored – the *James* alone has survived.

The journey that follows is a harrowing evocation of a bomb-blasted and irradiated world. A ruined Gibraltar. Poisoned survivors all along the Amalfi Coast. A yacht turned into a ship of ghosts by a neutron

bomb. The long, cold, dark journey through a nuclear winter. This is a novel with a particular skill for creating ghastly and lasting images. The novel is at its best when simply observing the altered universe beyond the decks of the ship.

Along with the obvious, the ship's crew faces myriad other obstacles from the obvious (supply shortages; existential despair) to the melodramatic (the threat of mutiny; a serial killer). In a plotline ripped shamelessly from Neville Shute's *On the Beach*, the *James* is able to pick up an ambiguous message from National Command Authority, giving some hope that parts of the United States are still habitable. There's also a Soviet submarine shadowing them.

Oh, and did I mention the women?

The *James* has a mixed crew of 152 men and 26 women. This fact is mentioned early and often, as though we don't all know where this is going. That's right: this is a novel that not only imagines the end of mankind, but also how it might begin anew.

Like I said above, this is a book I liked. Nearly loved. It's a bit insane. But there are times I dig insane.

The chief factor in enjoying or hating *The Last Ship* is your ability to go along with Brinkley's writing style. Because this is a stylized book. Often, the intriguing plot is obscured by Brinkley's verbiage. *The Last Ship* is intensely overwritten, filled with allusion, metaphor, and boldly purple prose. There are sentences here that seem reverse-engineered from ornate Victorian novels. A Tom Clancy techno-thriller as filtered through 19th century prose-structuring. It appears that Brinkley chose a lot of his words by thumbing through old ACT study guides. (Generally, you shouldn't ever use the word flocculent to describe the clouds. Brinkley does. On multiple occasions). At times the verbose posturing almost feels parodic. In fact, accepting the book along these terms is what allowed me to enjoy it. It occurred to me that *The Last Ship* is like a gonzo version of *Moby Dick*. Same insufferable first-person narrator. Same references to literature, the classics, and the Bible. Same endless philosophizing. Same mystical belief in the power of the sea. In case the similarities are not enough, Brinkley helpfully includes a character named Melville.

To me, the real downside to *The Last Ship* is Brinkley's choice to utilize a first-person narrator. I strongly dislike the first-person, and I say this with full understanding that many of the world's great novels are told this way. The style is simply too constricting for my taste. An author goes to great lengths to create a fictional world, and then he or she makes you look at it through a single pair of eyes. It's almost frustrating.

That is especially the case here. The aftermath of a cataclysmic nuclear war is bound to engender a diversity of feeling. But in *The Last Ship*, we only get one perspective. And that perspective is of the singularly incurious and emotionally flat captain. This is a guy who will ruminate on the ocean for pages (in very Ishmael-like fashion), but never gives a fully formed thought about what caused the all-out exchange of nukes in the first place. He is entirely uninterested in going back to America, and is puzzlingly indifferent to the possible destruction of everything he ever knew, of every place he ever went, of every person he ever met.

There is also the captain/narrator's teeth-grating treatment of the women. No, he's not a sexist. No, he's not a misogynist. To the contrary, he is written as relatively enlightened, circa 1988 (the year of the book's publication). The captain/narrator is constantly extolling the virtues of his female crewmembers. This is done, however, in a tone of absolute surprise and wonderment. *These women we've got...They're so capable. It's almost like they're fully functioning human beings!* It's hard to tell whether the softly patronizing tenor of the narration is supposed to be one of the captain's character traits (the old patriarchal sea dog) or runs much deeper. In any event, the "complications" that arise from the existence of the women is a recurring leit motif. No wonder the captain can't spare a moment to ruminate on the destruction of his homeland. He's got to figure out the impenetrable female species!

I suppose that's a good enough segue to the sex.

Yes, the sex. I'm devoting this paragraph to the resoundingly, hilariously bad sex scenes. Up until the sex, Brinkley's prose styling is imitative of Melville and the King James Bible. During the sex, he maintains this style, but adds in some graphic language and terrible similes. Do you remember your first day in creative writing class? Do you remember how your teacher told you that when writing a sex scene, you should never compare the smell of a woman's you-know-what to the sea? Well, Brinkley takes that rule and fires a 200-kiloton Tomahawk Land Attack Missile-Nuclear right into it.

This is my second time through *The Last Ship*. I first read it when I was a teenager, back when I barely knew what the captain and his girlfriend were doing in the final third of the novel. This time around, I listened to it as an audio book. It's narrated by Christopher Lane, who does a remarkable job. His professionalism and talent did wonders in lifting the material. As far as I know, he kept a straight face from cover to cover, which is more than I could have accomplished. Lane is so accomplished that he even kept my wife's attention while on a recent road trip. This says something, because post-nuclear war novels fall pretty far down her list of things she wants to listen to. (Which is fair enough, I suppose).

As I wrap this up, I'm still not sure if I'm being way too hard on *The Last Ship* or way too easy. There are so many things about it that feel are objectively bad. Still, I can't deny the fact that I absolutely enjoyed the crap out of it. Sometimes my enjoyment stemmed from Brinkley's preposterous literary pretensions. At other times, though, it derived from the powerful execution of his vision. He writes some pretty bad sex; he also delivers some damn good set-pieces.

Post-apocalyptic fiction is a robust but slightly disreputable sub-genre. Part of the reason we read is to catch a glimpse of the great train-wreck of fallen humanity. It's an act of rubbernecking. Some part of our lizard brain *wants* to see how the world would look after it has blown itself up. There is also something deeper at work. An exploration of the profound frailty of humanity. For all its excesses, this is something that Brinkley takes seriously. Then again, I might just have a real weakness for low brow sex scenes.

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## Jim says

This ranks as the most entertaining book I believe I have ever read. Brinkley gets the narrator Captain's thought processes perfect. How to resolve the nightmarish position in which this ship has now found itself, maintaining discipline and turning to the job most obviously at hand, how to preserve mankind, and civilization in a post apocalyptic world, all with the presence of a Russian submarine in apparent pursuit, is done with imagination and a thoroughly fast paced page turner. In its own way, it answers a lot of questions about "what if" with basic and central ideas as to "what happens now?" should the final war ever happen. What society takes over, who leads it, and how are decisions to be made? All of this is answered in sensitive and well thought out ways. This book screamed for a sequel, which was not published before Brinkley's death in 1993. If the notes for that book still exist, the family should do its best to get it written and published. I own my own copy of this book and I find myself rereading it every other year or so. It can still be found in some libraries and used book stores, and I found a copy at Amazon.com for a gift to a retired Navy friend a few years ago. Do yourself a favor and get it for yourself.

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## David Hakamaki says

Oh my Lord, is the author long-winded. There are very few books that I need to stop reading. This is one of them. The author takes 2 pages to cover what should be covered in 1/2 page. Yes, it is that long winded. Overall, a good premise and a good story for the first 1/4 of the book (before I just lost patience and threw it down). The author seemed to have a dictionary at his desk to determine alternative words, just so his diatribe didn't have to use similar utterance. His discourse meandered through the thought process of his characters and discussed their motivations for every activity. (you get my meaning yet??) Holy hell, this was like taking English 201 with a prof simultaneously strung out on speed and quaaludes, who drank four pots of coffee and is fighting a raging bout with OCD. Give it a rest, man -- we just want to read something for fun. So, if you suffer from interminable insomnia, go ahead and grab this sucker. If you are spending 10-15 years in the can for B&E and need a long winded book, grab this masterpiece. If you want to enjoy your free moments in life, then run the F@ away and grab something else.

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### John Wiltshire says

I am bemused by this book. I want to like it. It has a really interesting premise--the crew of a US warship carrying nuclear missiles survives a nuclear cataclysm and finds an island to survive on. One hundred plus men and some twenty plus women. You can see the interesting scenarios developing. BUT, and this really is a big but...what the heck is this author trying to achieve with his weird impersonation of Herman Melville? If I wanted to read an eighteenth century rip-roaring salty tale of the sea, I would. All in the first person narration of the captain of this *sophisticated warship*, I swear I keep expecting him to come out with "heave ho, me hearties" "splice the main spinnaker, Mr Hornblower" (no, I have no idea what that means either). Not only this, but he spends a vast amount of time having strange internal meditations on the beauty of nature--not wrong in itself but a little odd given the circumstances. Now, I'll take all this back and be contrite if this is a set up for a fabulous twist that the nuclear war has sent them all back in time... but I fear this is not the case.

I'll update if I can stick it out. Reading shouldn't be painful, should it?

\* \* \*

Damn, just as I was about give up on this, the author takes us back to before the nuclear war and to the Arctic sea and for a chapter I was spellbound by the intensity of his ability to describe a tumultuous, raging storm in that terrible place and then to contrast that wildness of nature with the slow, deliberate discipline required when their orders to launch are received. They have now just sailed up the Thames and discovered England 'gone'. And yet the captain is quietly sanguine about his launching of the '12 angels' the Tomahawk missiles which he sent to a town in Russia. That he did his duty, his job.

I'm all over the place with my feelings about this book. I discovered the author was born in 1917, which might explain a lot of the feel and tone of the writing. He was a naval captain in a different era, so he clearly knows his stuff, but is projecting this knowledge forward to a time and very different situation (nuclear warships and women aboard). I know a fair bit about women in the military and I can say hand on heart that they don't, by and large, behave as these women do on this ship. Neither do men. Human beings are human beings, despite military discipline, and everything that occurs in civvy street between men and women working together occurs in the military too, only with more alcohol, fitter bodies and more access to each other (we sleep where we work). The whole premise of this book-- that they only start to see a problem with the 26 women when they realise they are the last women in the world and they are the last men-- is ludicrous. There would have been multiple pairings off and relationships and orgies and engagements and harassments and pregnancies, and everything in between these, long before they limp to the tropical (Eden-esque) island. I'm sticking it out, hoping the island will descend into Lord of the Flies mayhem.

I'll continue to update..

\* \* \*

Not only have I given this book five stars, I highly recommend it to anyone who is interested in post-apocalyptic fiction. It's a must read. I haven't been so disturbed by a book for a very long time. This novel

captures the hopelessness of *On the Beach* in a similar way that novel did. If you can get over the verbose, weird language it's mostly written in, *The Last Ship* is a spellbinding, horrific tale. Make of it what you will, but I really wished there had been no women amongst these last representatives of the human race--no chance for the species to continue. I'm profoundly moved by this book, but possibly not for the reasons the author wanted me to be.

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## **Jim says**

During the Spring and Summer of 2014 I watched a cable TV series entitled *THE LAST SHIP* (ISBN 978-0142181836, trade paperback, \$17.00). I thought the title was familiar and looked in my bookcase. There was the book by WILLIAM BRINKLEY. I realized I had bought the book about 25 years ago but had not gotten around to reading it. I am almost sorry that I did.

The story primarily follows the crew of a U.S. Navy nuclear powered, missile carrying, destroyer during and following a nuclear holocaust circa 1985. Nevil Shute had produced a similar story, *ON THE BEACH*, in the 1950s that I had read. That book is a FIVE STAR book. Perhaps that is one of the reasons I did not read *THE LAST SHIP* until now.

The premise of the book is that a war of "mutually assured destruction" leaves the world in an apocalyptic state. If there are more survivors, other than the crew of the "Nathan James", they are few and far between. On its voyage of trying to find them, the *Nathan James* comes across a Russian submarine. The "Pushkin" is designed to operate in Arctic conditions. The two ships meet in the Mediterranean Sea where the two captains agree to help each other. The "Nathan James" needs nuclear fuel, the "Pushkin" needs food and the crews of both need a place live. The 600+ pages of this book tells what happens to the crew members of the two ships over a two year span. The story is great, the characters are believable and the end is a surprise.

So why did I not give the book 5 stars? Whoever the editor was did a lousy job. There were sentences so long as to be utterly confusing and very hard to read. It took me about a month of 2 and 3 hours days of reading to finish. I usually read two books a week. I counted several sentences with over 150 words in them. Ugh! The author liked to use words I had never seen in a book when a more user-friendly would have sufficed. The Captain of the "Nathan James" waxes philosophic for pages on end to the detriment of the story.

It is not a book that I can recommend except to devout readers of naval fiction.

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## **Paul Finch says**

Lots of things happen in this book. The problem is that they occur with no build up, are related in as mind numbingly tedious a parade of pretentious twaddle as I've ever read, and then are over before they have a chance to start. Then, it's on to the next event, which will be equally devoid of any excitement, wit, charm or relatable characters. Repeat until the author just gets bored and decides to stop (there is no real conclusion).

One of, if not *\*the\** worst book I've ever read. Avoid.

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## Michael Havens says

I have to admit that William Brinkley's 'The Last Ship' is hard to rate. If I were to have discretion, I would rate this hovering between three and four stars, but to be liberal, I'll give it a four. There is something ambitious as literature in this work of apocalypse. The story of the un-named commander of the destroyer, the Nathan James, has been described as a type of 'Heart of Darkness' of Joseph Conrad fame. The Nathan James, the seemingly only ship besides a Russian submarine, the Pushkin, to survive a nuclear holocaust, takes an understandingly painful and tortuous journey in an attempt to find a new home amidst the now contaminated world of hydrogen radiation. What he relates to the reader is a travel diary of sorts to the plight of the crew, which runs the gambit between food and fuel shortages, relations between male and female crew (the book, written in 1988, foresees a greater role of women in the military, only about a decade behind the reality), of which the Nathan James has been constructed for the inclusion of both genders, insanity, mutiny, and even serial killings. In a sense, the Nathan James, a mass killer in its own right, contains in one ship the whole issues that plague present day Earth, our own ship in the galaxy. There is even a Jesuit priest, who represents not only religion, but also a logical challenge and companionship for the captain's ideas and strategy towards the well being of the community of sailors under him. In the end, it is not only a new island that is found that could possibly safely be inhabited by the crew, but also could be a place where a population growth can occur, through the controversial means of polygamy. It shows convincingly that those who survive nuclear holocaust suffer as great, and perhaps morally greater, than those who die as a result of radiation poisoning.

All of this is done in an admirably literary style, but here is also its problematic aspect as well. Brinkley tries to be literary, and I do admire him for it. But it doesn't quite hit the mark. It is close, but with chapters that by and large begin with numerous and long narrations of life and thinking among the crew, which worked in the earlier chapters, but begins to bog down the work as it goes along. Also problematic is the overuse of vocabulary, feeling as if Brinkley overused a Thesaurus. We know and understand that the captain is of some academic acumen, aware and even quoting from history and literature. But, Brinkley includes such vocabulary in his internal thinking, while he is supposedly writing this as a journal to someone, as he references some sort of outside reader, as if hoping that someone other than himself reads it. This proves awkward and clunky as a narrative, and not only slows down the reading, but makes it less easy to come to terms with Thomas (the last name is all that we are given the narrator) as a man character wise, which is rescued somewhat by the interactions in the dialogues with his crew.

This is a good work as a testament to the ultimate holocaust, as between Selman's, the captain's utility science officer, with his cold and calculating, and yet not impersonal readings of radiation levels, to the challenges and burden the women find themselves in in facing their part in either continuing the human race, or being instruments in its extinction, to the Jesuits and even the captain's struggles and philosophical/spiritual conflicts of facing the uncertain and un-variable possibility that they and a crew of about a hundred Russian sailors may be the only ones left on the planet. The only wish is that the narrative strategy would have had more variance and unobstructive vocabulary.

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## Lori L (She Treads Softly) says

The Last Ship by William Brinkley is a post-nuclear-apocalyptic novel which focuses on the survival of the crew of the destroyer Nathan James. Although, surprisingly, the actual actions of the crew are secondary to the incessant, introspective, ponderous narrative by the ship's captain. Many of the captain's reflections concern how much more wonderful sailors are, in every respect, when compared to other people. I guess it's good sailors are, perhaps, the only known survivors, huh? Someone did need a good editor for The Last Ship. I concur with the sentiments expressed by Publishers Weekly: "Perhaps the most surprising thing about this apocalyptic novel of the sea is that Brinkley has been able to spin so slender a plot to so great a length - more than 500 pages." Or, more precisely for my copy, 616 pages - of small type.

It soon became clear that the key for reading *The Last Ship* was not to savor every word (as one does when reading a truly great author, where it is clear that every word was carefully chosen), but to quickly skim over many sections of the captain's verbosity, while looking for some forward movement of the plot. Oh, and the captain repeats information too - just in case you missed something. (Kudos to the great vocabulary, even though at times reading it felt like I was at a cocktail party stuck listening to some pretentious jerk talking just to show off. See the last quote, chosen because it was actually a typical sentence.) There was also a rather graphic sex scene late in the novel that felt like an unnecessary addition and was totally out of place. Actually, trying for no spoilers here, the arrangement with the women was totally unrealistic. It would have behooved Brinkley to, perhaps, talk with some real women about it rather than relying on his imagination.

Although this is asking a lot of a reader, set the writing aside and the actual plot is decent. We don't get enough information about what started the war, but the premise that only one ship has survived is intriguing. The dilemma is in whether or not I would recommend this book to others. You might enjoy *The Last Ship* if you like post-apocalyptic fiction and at the same time are not intimidated by an author's excessive use of a large vocabulary (not always correctly used), and pages of complicated sentences. Recommended for the plot, so-so for the author's writing

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### **Chris Dietzel says**

It took me a while to become invested in this book because much of the first third of the story contains information dumps on naval procedures and protocol that didn't interest me. The rest of the book makes up for the slow beginning, however. By the end of the book, I was fully engrossed in what was happening and wanted the story to continue.

On a side note: Brinkley has an odd author quirk of using the word 'brutal' to describe everything. Thoughts, words, actions, ideas, etc. are all variously described as brutal, and the author uses the word hundreds of times throughout the book. If you drank a shot each time you came across the word 'brutal' you'd never make it through to the last page.

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### **Michael Pang says**

I really, really wanted to like this book.

Post-apocalyptic survival story aboard a U.S. Navy guided missile destroyer, right up my alley; however, I just couldn't get into the writing style.

Pros:

The author knows his stuff when it comes to the U.S. Navy and personnel. Great insight into the mind of a ship captain under extraordinary circumstances. A warship navigating a post-nuclear war: encountering remote islands, scavenging wasteland coasts, survivalist, modern warships, etc.

Cons:

Writing style: Lengthy chapters without a single bit of dialogue. Chapters with little to no dialogue. If you have a 20 page chapter where 2 men literally sit across from each other, you would expect to have more than 1/2 a page of quoted dialogue. Example: "We should report back to Norway." Ensues: 19.5 pages of observations, inner monologue, flashbacks, description--what the people of Norway are like, the architecture of Norway, weather of Norway, the holidays of Norway, the time a sailor got drunk while on shore leave in

Norway, the disciplinary proceedings about said sailor, the one time the captain picked a purple flower while in Norway. You get the point, the level of detail and the way it is presented can be a bit tedious.

Also, it is a little dated when it comes to the treatment of women in the U.S. Navy. Back in the 1980's when this book was published, I understand that was a big deal; however, in accordance to the writing style noted above, it comes across as a bit much. E.g., 12 of us ate dinner, "2 of them were woman who sat together"; entire sections where the captain speaks to the ship's chaplain about the morality of women serving on a ship. Literally, you can't move a single chapter without the point being made that there were women serving on the ship.

I found myself skimming and skimming to find the occasional conversation or nuggets of interest to me; however, in the end it was just a chore.

If you like the premise of the book (which I thought was very interesting) give this book a try. If you find the writing style doesn't suit you after the first 100 pages, you mine as well give up because it doesn't change (actually it gets worse as the author dives into more detail after the initial "hook" chapters).

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