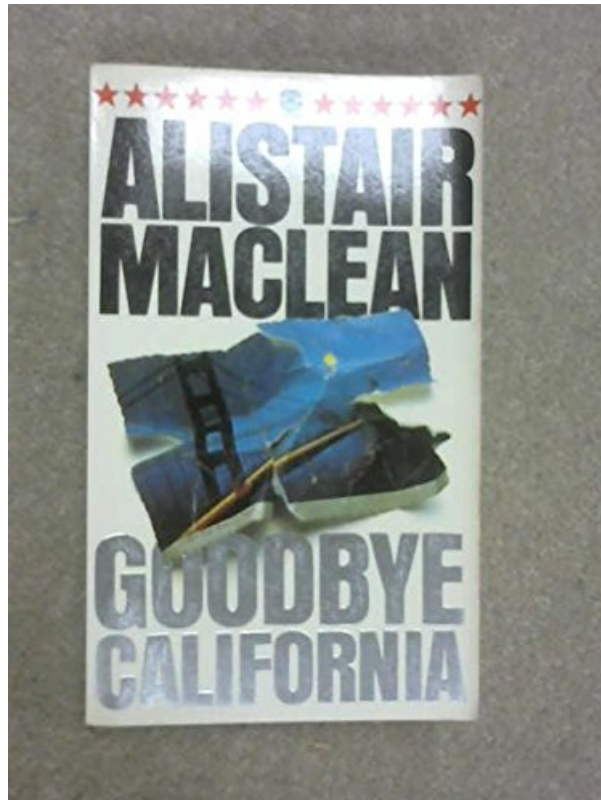
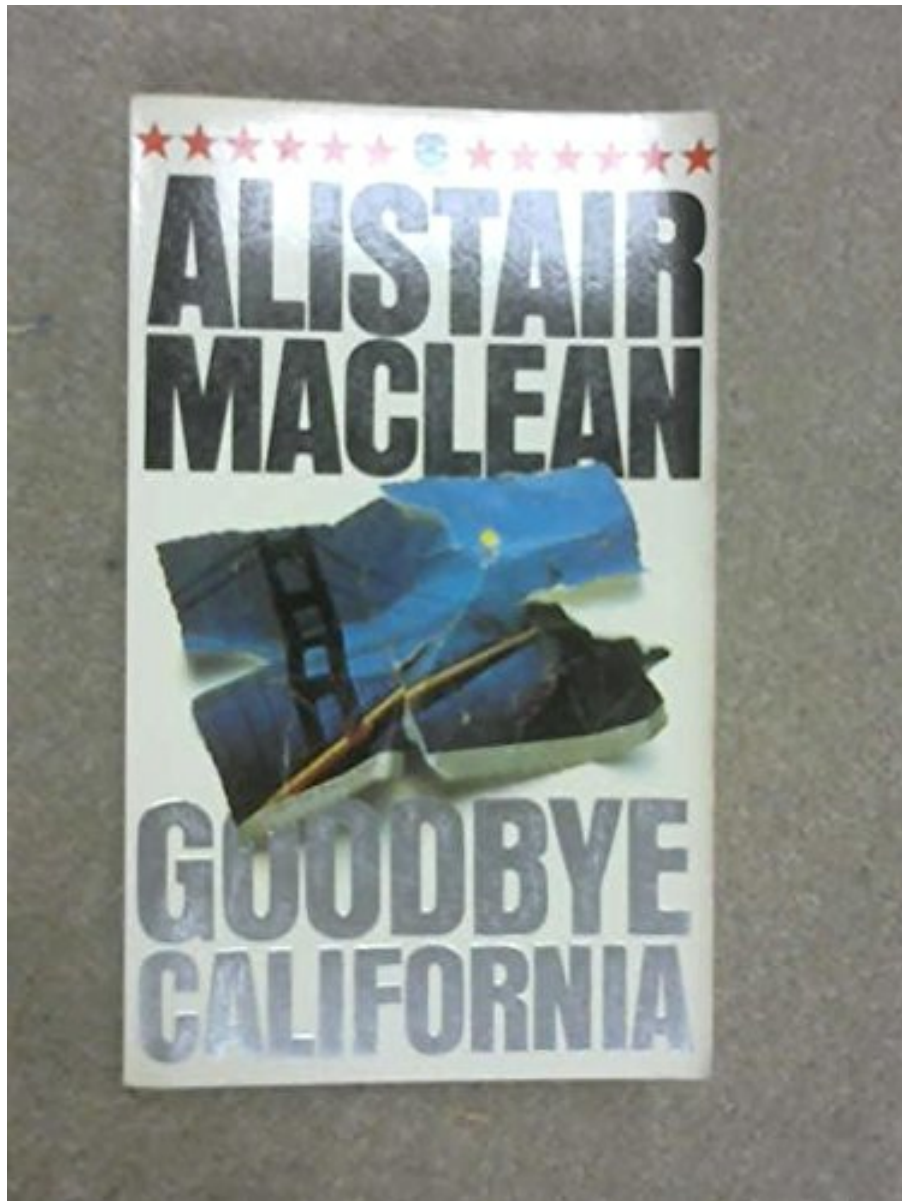


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- Sales Rank: #6007675 in Books
- Published on: 1980
- Binding: Paperback
- 256 pages

Most helpful customer reviews

14 of 16 people found the following review helpful.

Low Point in MacLean's work

By Duane Schermerhorn

It is a bit depressing to read the novels of Alistair MacLean written after 1971, especially for someone like me who got so much pleasure from so many of the stories he wrote before that year. After "Bear Island" (1971) each of his books becomes more turgid and perfunctory than the previous. It is not much fun to follow a great adventure story writer's decline into near self-caricature, and reading "Goodbye, California" (1978) is certainly not fun.

In his early books MacLean heightens the excitement by making the reader care about the fate of the characters. In his best books, he puts us inside the head of the protagonist (most successfully when the protagonist is the narrator), and we experience the roller-coaster ups and downs of emotion, frustration, and physical exhaustion as our hero engages in a battle of wits and endurance against a deadly enemy.

In the post-1971 books, MacLean increasingly leans on a different device to try to heighten our excitement and involvement in the story. He escalates the threat, presumably with the idea that the sheer immensity of the danger will increase our involvement in the fate of the characters. This simply doesn't work. Threat is only really meaningful if directed at specific characters we care about; increasing the destruction and number of potential victims is too impersonal - too academic, in a sense - to get us involved.

In "Goodbye California" the threat is the placement of nuclear devices on the San Andreas Fault in such a way that their detonation will cause an earthquake that will send major portions of the state into the Pacific Ocean. The narrative suffers from most of the faults of MacLean's latter novels - the story is mostly talk, very little action, with key events taking place "off camera" and later reported to our ostensible heroes. The few scenes where the protagonists actually take action - instead of jawing away in boring elaborations of how deadly the threat is - are handled in a perfunctory way, and we never have the feeling that the heroes are not in complete command of the situation. We never experience the excitement of a threat to any of them - we simply read with a lack of interest as they overcome the easily outwitted villains.

As boring as this book is, however, the worst aspect of it is the occasional borderline-fascist sentiment expressed by the author when the protagonist laments such aspects of democratic society as free speech and freedom of information because they can lead to crises like the fictional one at hand. Truly distasteful.

"Goodbye, California" ranks as one of the absolute low points in the career of a great adventure storyteller.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

MacLean a prophet? This one may qualify him.

By Jeffrey C. Reynolds

For me, reading MacLean is like a visit with an old friend. I look forward to reading his books, and this was a prime example.

Some of his books are great at being mysteries, leaving you wondering who the bad guys are, and who the good guy really is. This book does not qualify. You quickly learn who the good guys are, and you learn who the bad guys are.

This book deals with the threat of nuclear weapons setting off a massive earthquake. MacLean did plenty of research concerning the geological status of California, and he shares it in a preface.

Another thing I found interesting, though. This book was written in the late '70's, before I heard a lot about Islamic Terrorists. MacLean dealt with that before its time.

This is one book that reading the blurb took away from the story, which I regret.

One reviewer called this a low-point. I'm not sure I agree: I found this superior to later novels like "Partisans" and "Floodgate." I'm at the point, though, that I'd rather read a poor MacLean novel than not read a MacLean novel.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

One of his worst...

By H. Jin

It's no secret that Maclean's books in the 70's and 80's were far inferior to his classics from the 50's and 60's. Even allowing for that, 'Goodbye California' is a huge disappointment and one of Maclean's worst ever books. It starts out okay: a terrorist group steals some nuclear weapons, taking several hostages including the wife of cop Sergeant Ryder. Unless their demands are met, they will detonate these bombs on California's fault-lines, causing an earthquake large enough to drop California in the ocean.

It's a solid basis for a thriller, but Maclean loses the thread of the story in the first act. An extraordinary amount of the book is devoted to Ryder investigating his corrupt superiors, and also the setting up of "a non-existent Russian connection" (as Ryder finally discovers). Red-herrings are a clever plot device if handled well, but in 'Goodbye California', all it means is that the first two-thirds of the book goes almost nowhere. You could almost cut 200 pages out of this book and release it as a novella, because we learn almost nothing of interest in the first two acts. And then, the final insult: once the book eventually gets around to its third act and revealing the true plot, it turns out to be a blatant rip-off of an earlier (and FAR superior) Maclean book. In fact, several plot aspects are taken from that earlier book. Since that earlier book was a cracker and one of his best, 'Goodbye California' looks even more weak and pointless in comparison.

That's not even taking into account all the flaws common to later Maclean books: the 'talky' nature of the book as various experts outdo themselves in talking up the catastrophic consequences of a massive earthquake. The weak stereotypical characterisation. The yawn-inducing 'action' scenes where our indestructible heroes easily outwit and dispose of the baddies. The moralising on the incompetence and corruption of governments and those in authority. It's all here, sadly.

Die-hard Maclean fans will probably want to read this for completeness if nothing else, but for those new to Maclean it's definitely not the place to start. This book really has no redeeming features. It's mediocre at best in every way.

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