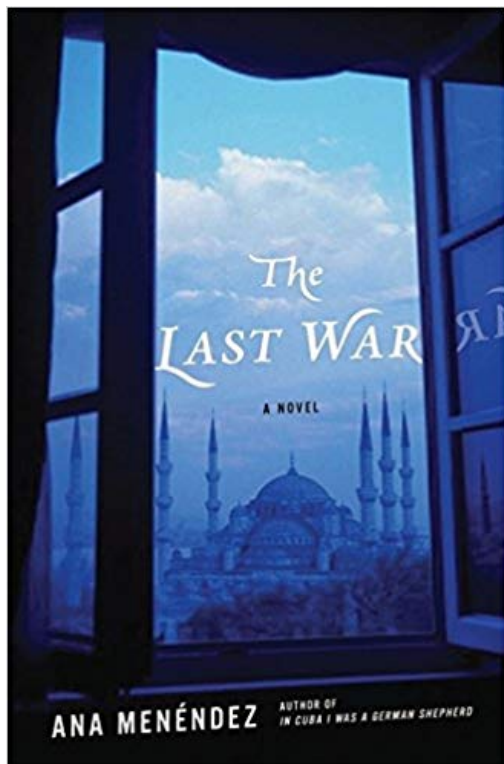
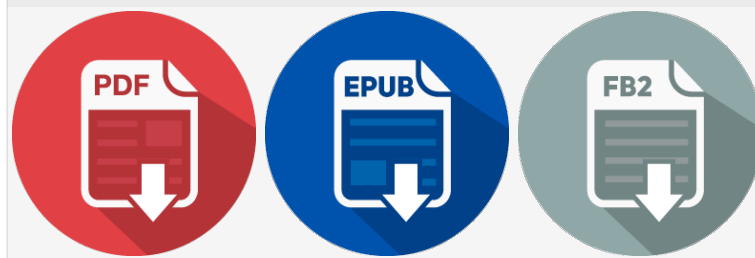


## The Last War: A Novel *by* Ana Menendez



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**Author:** Ana Menendez

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"Exquisitely crafted. . . strikingly real and heartfelt." —Denver Post

"[A] potent literary novel . . . A deft portrait of an estranged couple whose pain is veiled by the fog of war." —People

A breathtaking novel of love, war, and betrayal from the critically acclaimed author of *Loving Che* and the New York Times Notable Book, *In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd*. From the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq to the strange, shimmering streets of Istanbul, *The Last War* is a "seductive meditation" (*O, The Oprah Magazine*) on cruelty and violence, love and identity from Pushcart Prize-winning author Ana Menéndez.



## Reviews of the *The Last War: A Novel* *by* Ana Menendez

Rigiot  
4.5 stars.

In Ana Menendez's beautifully and elegantly written novel, the wars that "Flash" and her husband Brando (aka "Wonderboy") have covered become the backdrop to a domestic war dividing them in spirit even more than they are becoming divided in fact and in experience. Brando heads off to Iraq to cover yet another war and the early stages of the insurgency, chronicling the growing violence for the newspaper for which he writes. Flash, a photographer, remains in their new apartment in Istanbul, doing isolated freelance assignments (such as photographing Ottoman tombs) but mostly wandering the city and wondering what has happened to her life. "We were the war junkies: Eros and Chaos, endlessly drawn to the ragged margins where other people hated and died. It was as if we believed constant movement would deliver us finally from the disappointments of an ordinary life." War, she realizes, has been the bond between her and 'Wonderboy'. "In Sri Lanka, we lay beneath mosquito netting for the first time and listened to bombs falling in the distance. When I slipped out of bed to shoot from the window, he yelled: It's dangerous! In Kargil, the crashing was a little closer, the road that took us there more perilous. At night, the hotel windows rattled from the concussions. In Kashmir, for the first time, he said the sound of shelling just over the hills sounded beautiful, like summer."

But now Flash feels everything is slipping out of control. The technical demands of her profession have changed; she must adapt to new digital camera technologies. That's the easy part, however. She's increasingly wondering whether wandering from one conflict to the next, chronicling death and disaster, is the life she wants to live or whether she is simply being towed along in Brando's wake. Is it making her too emotionally distant, as a friend claims? Then, one day a letter arrives for Flash in Istanbul, claiming that Wonderboy is having an affair with a woman in Iraq, a letter that causes a domestic cold war to flare even as the shooting war in Iraq heats up. An emotional distance builds between the couple, one that will have unexpected consequences for everyone.

The plot here isn't one that will satisfy a reader looking for dramatic events and larger-than-life characters. It's essentially a book revolving around Flash and her introspection, written in the first person. But for the most part it's nuanced and thoughtful, to the point where at times the reader begins to wonder, along with Flash, what is reality and what may be stress-induced hallucinations or delusions. There are a couple of bumpy spots that prevented me from awarding this startlingly-good novel a fifth star. Its final section feels rushed and abrupt, with the two major plot twists that feel a bit contrived. The other is some of the dialogue, particularly that of Flash's 'friend', Alexandra. The ornate writing is appropriate for Flash's stream of consciousness, but less so for dialogue like this, when Alexandra confronts her with her shortcomings: "Take one Flash, average-looking woman, icy in her own way. Falls in love with dashing, gorgeous, remote Boy Wonder. He, a master of words; she, involved with the surface of things, with small frozen moments, disconnected story lines." Or, later, "'Life--a genuine life--is about fighting the dulling influence of adaptation.'" It's beautiful writing, but unconvincing and unnatural dialogue.

That said, this is still a gem of a novel, replete with some of the most beautiful language I've read in many months, as well as witty observations ("an American-style supermarket was just the thing to restore a sense of order and optimism"). It's a story of different kinds of domestic conflict and personal/internal conflict set against a larger and unseen violent war.

Recommended to readers who value powerful characters and language and who is looking for a novel jam-packed with ideas and images rather than dramatic action.

Hono

Not nearly enough has been written about the courage exhibited by those who are sent to war-torn countries to provide the rest of us accounts of what is actually happening or has happened in these places. I want to write a different type of "review" because I know, although not well, the author who is very much missed as a columnist at The Miami Herald. So I also know that this novel is based

upon her own experiences, not as a war correspondent because, to my knowledge, she was not. But as the wife of a New York Times journalist, Dexter Filkins, who spent the first few years of the horror inflicted upon the Iraqi people. This is a poignant novel, told from the point of view of Flash, the woman married to another journalist and tells the story not only of the war but of what happens to relationships when circumstances change the path a married couple thought they would be traveling together. Ana is a remarkable writer, and it shines through in this novel.

Thorgaginn

The Last War is an extraordinarily searing book. It is set against the background of war and while it illuminates that, it also takes us deep into the nuances of isolation, marriage, friendship and ambivalence. While this is a book about foreign correspondents, it will also be deeply familiar to those who have "merely" traveled in the land of marriage. Or fought with themselves over whether or not to take the exciting fork in the road, or the one that might be safer. The Last War is a spare book of 225 pages - and yet in those pages it explains much of the core of human nature.

Delirium

Beautifully written but sad and with a wistful, unresolved feeling. Two war junkies grow apart, and the photographer (wife) half is, as ever, "the last to know" until she receives a mysterious letter. As I understand it, the plot is loosely based on real events.

Rexfire

I loved this book, but first I want to say that readers who prefer a story with a definite plot, especially a chronological plot, may not care for the style of this book. It's not a novel of the wars going on in the Middle East, although that is the setting. If that is what you are looking for, there are other books, fiction and nonfiction, you will like better. The main character is a photojournalist, not a writer. This distinction is made several times and is important. Her husband is a journalist in Iraq, and friends and colleagues are journalists that have been in India, Afghanistan, Iraq, and currently Istanbul since 9/11. These people are Americans and Europeans.

In photography (one of my hobbies, not my profession like the narrator's) it's really themes that are important and this is why I think they take precedence over plot in this book. Certainly war is one theme and all the destruction it causes to societies, as well as personal losses. Another is loneliness. Flash, the narrator, is still in Istanbul, while her husband is in harm's way in Baghdad. A third is the experience of being a foreigner in another part of the world, especially during a war, and how the population of the other country sees one. How much you miss by not knowing the language (Turkish is so vastly different from English that an American would really be up against a wall). Foreigners can be made fools of or walk into danger without knowing it. The foreigners' world (if any of you read details of the Green Zone) is seen as artificial by the native population, with good reason. The fact that the book is seen through the eyes of a photographer also helps create the setting. Istanbul (and I've only seen pictures) is supposed to be a really beautiful city, half in Europe and half in Asia. Even the airport Amsterdam-Schiphol (where I have been many times) is well-drawn for the reader.

The writing is also beautiful. This author has won prizes. The story does have several surprise twists at the end. I'd recommend this book, with the caution above, that you expect imagery and theme over plot.

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