



Station Eleven

Emily St. John Mandel

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A National Book Award Finalist

A PEN/Faulkner Award Finalist

Kirsten Raymonde will never forget the night Arthur Leander, the famous Hollywood actor, had a heart attack on stage during a production of *King Lear*. That was the night when a devastating flu pandemic arrived in the city, and within weeks, civilization as we know it came to an end.

Twenty years later, Kirsten moves between the settlements of the altered world with a small troupe of actors and musicians. They call themselves The Traveling Symphony, and they have dedicated themselves to keeping the remnants of art and humanity alive. But when they arrive in St. Deborah by the Water, they encounter a violent prophet who will threaten the tiny band's existence. And as the story takes off, moving back and forth in time, and vividly depicting life before and after the pandemic, the strange twist of fate that connects them all will be revealed.

Station Eleven Details

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Author : Emily St. John Mandel

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From Reader Review Station Eleven for online ebook

Carol says

I don't know why it bothers me so that I thought this book was just ok. So many of my GR friends have embraced this Station Eleven and have shouted its praises from the rooftop. I struggled through the first 80 pages, didn't want to throw it under the couch, but wasn't finding myself engaged. Perhaps I should have quit while I was ahead but stubborn that I am, I carried on. It never really got better for me but I did finish. At least I won't feel left out.

Shakespeare is dead and I prefer him to remain so. That could have been part of my problem. The only character I really liked was Miranda. I love stories about pandemics but was surprised that I wasn't cheering for these characters to survive. The Traveling Symphony was a unique tool but never captured my fancy.

I certainly can't fault the writing. Creative? Perhaps. I have been as positive as I can be in regards to my feelings about Station Eleven.

Would I try another of Mandel's books? Maybe.

Jeffrey Keeten says

"Hell is the absence of the people you long for."

When the Georgia Flu sweeps around the world killing 99.6% of the population there were suddenly... a lot of people... to long for. The people missing from our lives is the hardest part. We mourn their loss, but we also have to mourn for the part of ourselves that is lost with each of their passings.

To survive is painful.

"Civilization in Year Twenty was an archipelago of small towns. These towns had fought off ferals, buried their neighbors, lived and died and suffered together in the blood-drenched years just after the collapse, survived against unspeakable odds and then only by holding together into the calm..."

I've met a few survivalists over the years. People who are obsessed with surviving the next great catastrophe. They have food, water, and weapons stockpiled. Some have even went so far as to build bunkers. Everyone of them has looked on me with pity when I admit that I might have a weeks worth of canned food in my house at any one time. They have all kinds of scenarios mapped out that will help insure their survival. They are more than willing to kill people to protect what is theirs.

They are living for the end of the world.

While they are buying bullets, bottled water, and MRGs I'm spending my money on fine wine, collectible books, and wonderful meals. I want civilization to continue to keep me in a bubble of protection so that I can continue to spend my money on culture for the rest of my days.

It so happens that the day before the world ends Arthur Leander, the famous movie actor, is playing a part in *King Lear* on the stage in Toronto. Dying is never a good thing, but when he drops from a heart attack on stage he has no idea how lucky he is. Kirsten is a child actress in the play and for a very short period of time she will think this is the worst day of her life. In the audience is Jeevan Chaudhary a paramedic trainee who leaps onto the stage and tries to the best of his abilities to save Arthur Leander's life.

Jeevan leaves the theater thinking he has finally discovered what he wants to do with his life. His revelry is interrupted by a phone call from a friend who works in the hospital. The Georgian Flu is in the states and the medical staff have no treatment options. It is killing people faster than they can initiate medical countermeasures. Now most people who get a phone call like this would dither, would maybe even go into denial for a period of time hoping for a miraculous change in the world's prognosis, but not Jeevan. He goes to the nearest supermarket and buys seven grocery carts filled with food.

The image of a man pushing seven carts through the streets of Toronto to his brother Frank's apartment will stick in my mind forever.

Believing the worst... soon enough... saved his life.

Kirsten also survives, by luck, by the dint of her adaptability. We find her in the future as part of a travelling theater group. They protect each other and continue to perform the plays of the greatest playwright in the history of the world to what remains of human race.

Shakespeare survives.

And so do the first and second issues of a comic book series called Dr. Eleven because Arthur Leander's ex-wife gave him copies of her artistic endeavor and he promptly pressed them into the hands of Kirsten mere hours before he breathed his last.

Arthur thought it would entertain his young friend for an hour or so. Little did he know these two comic books would crucially entertain her for decades.

The motto of the travelling dramatists is **Survival is Insufficient**. The blending of Shakespeare and a line now immortalized from Star Trek is exactly how I see the future. In fact, in my household it frequently happens now, the best of the past, blending with the best of the present, everyone must keep up. My kids, now young adults, roll their eyes every time I say "you probably need to google that".

Of course when the world has disappeared and you can entertain children with stories of cool air or warm air just coming out of the vents and they look at you like your telling science-fiction stories; it is overwhelming to think about what has been lost.

So what would I miss?

One scoop of ice cream, not a bowl full, one scoop because when you only have one scoop you shave off these small bites and savor every one of them.

Movies, I can't even imagine not having movies. For a while I could play the entire movies in my head, but we all know the images will begin to corrode over time and I'll be left with highlights. Cary Grant running across a field chased by an airplane in *North by Northwest*. The death scene of Rutger Hauer in *Blade Runner*. The scene when the king stumbles out wounded but intent on fighting the final battle in *The Thirteenth Warrior*. Fred Astaire dancing with Ginger Rogers... **in that dress...** in *Top Hat*. Marisa Mell frolicking naked in a pile of money in *Danger: Diabolik*. Marlon Brando saying I coulda been a contender in

On the Waterfront. Marilyn Monroe's skirt blowing up on the subway grate in *The Seven Year Itch*. John Wayne staring off into the distance over the back of his lathered horse thinking about what he will find in *The Searchers*. I could go on and on.

Hopefully everyone would remember different scenes so we could all remember more.

Taking a hot shower. A ritual of thinking that allows me to map out my day while luxuriating in a warm continuous spray.

For those who have their entire library on their Kindles, well you are out of luck, but for me **the Luddite**, I'd be contending with keeping bugs and moisture as far away from my books as possible. Still, books need a controlled environment to continue to be useful so it would be a world with fewer books everyday. Like the movies it may not be that long before many books would only exist in my head.

Trains, planes and automobiles. When the world collapses the world would become flat. Global trekking would be more along the lines of seeing what is going on in the next county. I would miss being able to head to Santa Fe, Chicago, or Savannah on a whim.

Until I'm there, sitting in all my odoriferous splendor under a tree reading the tattered remains of a copy of *War and Peace*, it is really hard to say what I would miss the most.

Of course the end of the world is never complete without a **PROPHET**. The troop of dramatists make a swing back through an area where a year earlier they had left two of their members. They had hoped to reconnect with them, but soon discover that they had to move on. A religious element has taken over the region led by a man who is selling the concept of "we are the light", but really he is saying he is the sun, the moon, and the stars.

As a friendly gesture he offers the troop of actors his protection if they donate one of the lovely young ladies from their company to become one of his wives.

Why does it always take so long for someone to put a bullet, an arrow, or a knife through a guy like this?

The troop politely declines his offer, but soon discover after leaving that they have a twelve year old stowaway who is frantic to escape because she is destined to become **The PROPHET**'s next wife.

Of course **THE PROPHET** is dissed and it soon becomes a chase as Kristen and her friends try to outrun the ire of a madman.

Emily St. John Mandel blends the future and the past together seamlessly around the life of Arthur Leander and how he continues to live in the mind of his young friend Kirsten. Mandel takes this moment in time, the death of Leander on stage, and spreads her tentacles of information backwards and forwards until the reader is captivated by the memories of the past and the people living in this theatrical future. This is an impressive performance from a young writer and now we have to wait to see what form her next novel will assume.

4.50 out of 5 stars

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Jill says

It's no accident that Emily St. John Mandel opens her haunting new novel with a scene from King Lear, who ends up mad and blind but clear as a bell. One of that play's memorable lines is: "The oldest hath borne most; we that are young/Shall never see so much nor live so long."

Indeed, there is a divide between those who have borne much and those who will never see so much. In the opening pages, renowned actor Arthur Leander dies while performing King Lear. Before the week is out, the vast majority of the audience – indeed, the world – will be dead from the pandemic Georgia flu.

There are two key story lines – one before the end of civilization and one after it. The first focuses on Arthur, along with his three ex-wives, best friend Clark, and Jeevan, a one-time paparazzo and good Samaritan, who tries to save him. The other line centers on Kirstin, a young girl who witnessed Arthur's death, who is now part of a Traveling Symphony, a musical theatre troupe that roams the wasted land to bring music and Shakespeare to the limited number of people who remain...not unlike original Shakespeare actors during plague-filled days of the past.

Woven into these tales is the inspiration for the book's title. Arthur's first wife, Miranda (likely based on the character from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, who utters, "O brave new world, That has such people in't!") She is the writer and designer of a sci-fi graphic comic, with threads of what eventually happens on earth: "There are people who, after fifteen years of perpetual twilight, long only to go home, to return to Earth and beg for amnesty; to take their chances under alien rule. They live in the Undersea, an interlined network of vast fallout shelters under Station Eleven's oceans."

Station Eleven is a terrifying, haunting, and stunning book that speaks eloquently on many key themes: survival during devastating times, our ephemeral existence and the fleeting nature of fame compared to the endurance of art. Indeed, it is only our shared stories – from Shakespeare to graphic books – that ties us all together, connects us and makes us human.

After turning the last page, I sat completely still for a minute, stunned, before taking my dogs out. While outside, I was driven to tears by the beauty of the fireflies lighting up against a dark Chicago night. Station Eleven – in many ways, a psalm of appreciation for the simple things in our current existence – wields THAT sort of power. It's an amazing book and is highly recommended.

Maggie Stiefvater says

I don't know if you will like this book.

It's a very particular kind of book done very well, which is not remotely a promise that you will like it. The jacket copy is not untrue, but it also isn't helpful. Yes, this is book about the end of the world as we know it, yes, this is a book about a post-apocalyptic Shakespearean troupe, yes, this is a book about a Hollywood actor's dispiriting love life. But that doesn't tell you how the book feels — what the experience is like reading it. This is less a novel of plot and more a novel of theme, a precisely painted mural of people living in extreme circumstances. Some of the chapters take place after the apocalypse, and some take place before, but it doesn't change the tone — the characters' personal worlds are under duress in both timelines.

I take back what I said about the jacket copy being true, by the way. It says this book is "suspenseful." I think

that's an unfair and incorrect descriptor for a book that shines for other reasons. I couldn't put this book down, but that is not the same as being suspenseful. My attention was held by the sharp insights on every page, not by a headlong plunge toward the end. Like I said, it's a book of theme, not story. Station Eleven follows a few central characters faithfully enough to satisfy my need for a human thread, but it might not be enough for those who strongly prefer plot-driven novels.

Verdict: unsentimental and clear-eyed portrait of what humanity considers civilization.

Cece (ProblemsOfaBookNerd) says

Until I someday write a longer review (you never know, it could happen), I'll just say this: I sat down intending to read about 50 pages tonight and wound up reading 200. I also completely forgot the world around me existed for a few hours, and that is the highest praise I can personally give any book.

Melanie says

"Survival is insufficient".

Star Trek: Voyager

Novels whose premise strips away the world as we know it can be tricky territory. They can be innately dramatic, overwrought, didactic and riddled with Big Questions about Life and Death that leave no room for contemplation. Think Ayn Rand on her best day.

Or they can be like "Station Eleven". Quiet. Dark. Elegiac. Lit from within like a mysterious firefly. Unhurried. Steeped in small acts and evocative landscapes. Lonely. Elegant. Radiant. Heartbroken.

Emily St. John Mandel has written something very much akin to a perfect book. I didn't want to tell anyone about it because I felt as if it had been written for me. I wanted to tell everyone about it because it still radiates softly in the background of my days and haunts me with its delicate characters and existentialist essence.

If you have watched "The Walking Dead", you will know what I mean when I say that this extraordinary novel is another striking version of a post-apocalyptic universe where ordinary people have to *decide* for themselves what it means to be "human". Survival is insufficient because to be fully alive, one needs to make choices that define one's character and belonging in the world. The apocalypse is but a tabula rasa for the reinvention of freedom.

From the darkness, you will see incredible things arise. A Travelling Symphony. Shakespearian actors sleeping in tents. The first two volumes of a mysterious comic book. A jaded actor. A handful of airplanes glowing in the dusk. Fake snow falling on a theater stage.

An incandescent book.

Felicia says

This was a lovely, elevated apocalypse story that was very touching. The integration of acting and Hollywood world was really interesting, I'm sure even moreso to someone who isn't in "the biz." If you want a dose of great storytelling with your post-disaster wasteland fiction, this is a book for you!

Regan says

A wonderful story about the resilience of people.

Fabian says

An eclectic, wondrous literary feast, with a generous dispersal of savory anecdotes, attitudes & (grand) themes. It has all the BEST features of previous apocalyterature & road stories (the pale terror of McCarthy's "The Road", the joie de vivre/bonhomie of the band of outsiders in "The Wizard of Oz," the irresistible speed and power of "Mad Max")--it all adds up to something as interesting & bizarre as "Cloud Atlas."

"Station Eleven" is a novel that's so full of life. It desists from stumbling upon any number of apocalyptic themes--it wants to not be what it is. It chooses humanity over annihilation in such a sickeningly awesome way. Think of an overturned smashed aquarium--giant goldfish gulping for oxygen, pebbly mountains powerfully toppled--& with a nifty microscope describe all the lives of those depleting but ever-persistent microbes that struggle for their chance at existence.

Petrik says

Milestone achieved = Review #200 within one year six months of joining Goodreads!

Thought-provoking, haunting, and atmospheric.

Station Eleven is an adult post apocalyptic/dystopian novel written by Emily St. John Mandel and I'm actually quite surprised by how enjoyable it was, especially considering that I bought this book on a whim two days ago without knowing anything about it whatsoever. Those who followed my reviews should know by now that SFF is my number one favorite genre to read, that's why I always find it strange how the great standalone always came from genres I don't usually read, like this book.

Picture: *Station Eleven* by Vincent Chong

I won't be talking about the plot at all, if you want to know what's the premise of the book is about, the blurb of the book did a great job of explaining without spoiling anything, a rare case I know. Before you start reading this book, I need to remind you that this book is slow paced and highly characters driven. These characters will matter a lot in deciding your enjoyment of this book and this is in my opinion, the most important factors in this book; pretty much any book I read really, well-written characters will always be the

priority. Luckily for me, although it didn't happen immediately, I did end up enjoying all the characters' POV by the halfway point of this book. Not only were the characters written realistically, reading how they cope with the new world and how all these characters story-line converged were compelling. This is a slow paced book and even though it's a post-apocalyptic book, the majority of the story-line centered pretty much on the characters' lives before and after the collapse of civilization. However, do know that it is really rewarding to read it to the last quarter of the book. At first, it may seem like the character's story were disjointed, but believe me, every character's POV were important. Mandel took me by surprise with her talent in seamlessly connecting all the plot and characters, bringing a great style of storytelling in this atmospheric piece of work.

“Hell is the absence of the people you long for.”

Parts of what made this book unique and different from other post-apocalyptic story is the positive messages that the author conveyed. Don't get me wrong, the setting is bleak but I can't help but feel peaceful reading it. In the video game, *The Last of Us*, there is a lot of walking around, scavenging stuff, and there was this moment where the characters found a herd of giraffes; that simple moment was one of the most beautiful moments of the game. This book has that sense of atmosphere, both the bleak and the beautiful part. The literal meaning of darkness can't exist without light, same as how despair can't exist without hope, and even in the darkest of times, hope will always find a way to prevail one way or another. This book gave a feeling of melancholy and at the same time, grateful. It's poignant at times but evocatively joyful. Focusing on humanities, perseverance of art, I love how the author tells a story that centered on finding hope in the hardest of times; even after the collapse of civilization, humanity will somehow find a way to survive, for better or worse. This book also serves as a reminder that we **MUST** do something for this world other than merely surviving. There was one passage about 'sleepwalking' through life in particular that in my opinion will resonate with a lot of readers who still have no idea what they're doing with their life, especially in jobs; at least that's how it felt for me.

“Survival is insufficient.”

Mandel's prose was seductively simple and beautiful, making this book something that's worth a read when you're in need of a wake up call or some positivity in harsh times. The only minor issues I had with the book is there were a few moments in the beginning after the outbreak that were a bit boring and I thought the ending could've been much more satisfying; it ended in a way that made this book doesn't feel like a standalone.

This is pretty much all I can say about the book without spoiling anything. It's a short read—only a bit more than 300 pages long, and it's really worth your time. *Station Eleven* have won an incredible amount of awards and I'll concur that they are quite well deserved.

I would like to say thank you to everyone who always like, comment, and read my review! You guys make reviewing book even more fun! :)

*You can find **this** and the rest of my Adult Epic/High Fantasy & Sci-Fi reviews at **BookNest***

Kelly (and the Book Boar) says

Find all of my reviews at: <http://52bookminimum.blogspot.com/>

“The thing with the new world is it’s just horrifically short on elegance.”

Everyone loved this book. I’m talking **EVERYONE**. I have 1 – yep ONE – friend or person I follow on Goodreads who gave it less than 3 Stars. In order to prove how much of an idiot I am and that no one should take my opinion seriously, I will super giffify this review.

Station Eleven begins with the story of Arthur, who passes away on stage while performing *King Lear*, and of Jeevan, the man who tried to resuscitate Arthur, and of Kirsten, a child actress who was also in the play and witnesses Arthur’s death. We then do the wibbly-wobbly timey wimey thing that takes us to a dystopian future where 99.99999% of the population was eradicated by the “Georgian Flu” and where Kirsten is still an actress, only this time it is with the “Traveling Symphony” – an acting/musical troupe who travels the wastelands of the Canadian side of the Great Lakes performing Shakespeare. Then we flippy floppy back in time to hear Arthur and Jeevan’s respective life stories. The author also throws in a “second coming of the Lord” for good measure.

Everyone else talks about the crisp, beautiful writing and how they couldn’t put this book down and here I sit and have to confess that it took me three days to get through it (and I generally read a book a day).

I can agree that the story and characters were intricately woven, but my reaction to those characters and their stories????

Especially when it came to the story of the flu and the prophet. No one can ever do the end of the world/second coming better than King did with *The Stand*. I like my end of the world stories to grab me by the balls and not let go until I’ve become a complete germaphobe who is terrified to leave the house for a few days after reading ;) *Station Eleven* left me with a reaction kind of like this . . .

And for the “flowery writing”?????? The notes I made to myself look like this:

“No more diving into pools of chlorinated water lit green from below. No more ball games played out under floodlights. No more porch lights with moths fluttering on summer nights. No more trains running under the surface of cities on the dazzling power of the electric third rail. No more cities. No more films . . . No more screens shining in the half-light as people raise their phones above the crowd to take photographs of concert stages. No more concert stages lit by candy-colored halogens, no more electronica, punk, electric guitars. No more pharmaceuticals. No more certainty of surviving a scratch on one’s hand, a cut on a finger while chopping vegetables for dinner, a dog bite. No more flight. No more towns glimpsed from the sky through airplane windows . . . No more airplanes, no more requests to put your tray table in its upright and locked position . . .”

Followed by a brilliant comment by me: “SNOOZE!!!!”.

Then once in a blue moon I have something like this:

“I stood looking over my damaged home and tried to forget the sweetness of life on Earth.”

With my genius observation: “Ooooooh, I like that.”

I also have a bunch of highlights with notes to myself like: “**Explain?**” . . . “**Will she explain??**” . . . “**Are they EVER going to explain this????**” Guess what? The answer is NOPE.

Then there’s more of this:

“Consider the snow globe. Consider the mind that invented those miniature storms, the factory worker who turned sheets of plastic into white flakes of snow . . . consider the white gloves on the hands of the woman who inserted the snow globes into boxes to be packed into larger boxes, crates, shipping containers. Consider the card games played belowdecks in the evenings on the ship carrying the containers across the ocean . . . Consider the signature on the shipping manifest when the ship reached port . . .”

And my reaction of: “SOOOOOOOOO BORING!”

I didn’t like it . . . but everyone else did, so I say give it a shot. And if you end up disagreeing with my opinion???

Ha! Just kidding. If you want an actual review that gives a well-stated counterpoint to this one (and uses words instead of pictures to do so), check out Kaora’s.

Mary ~Ravager of Tomes~ says

Actual Rating: 4.5 Stars

“We traveled so far and your friendship meant everything. It was difficult, but there were moments of beauty. Everything ends. I am not afraid.”

Station Eleven is a book that sat hovering in my peripheral vision for a couple of years. I promised myself I would read it in 2017, and I'm really glad I finally did.

The book begins with the end.

The end of actor, Arthur Leander, and the end of the world in the form of a fast-acting flu-like virus. From that point on, the story criss-crosses between the past & future following two main story lines. The first details a small web of people, all of whom are connected via their relationship to Arthur before the global collapse. The second follows a nomad group of Shakespearean performers after the virus has wiped out 99% of Earth's population.

When I first started this book, I was held back by my own expectations. I thought the story would focus more on bloody virus victims or perilous survival tales. For a moment, I thought the book wasn't going to live up to the genre, **but then suddenly it was transcending it.**

I should've known when I saw so many 5-star reviews that I wasn't about to be treated to a stereotypical, post-apocalyptic story. More than anything, **this is a story about the nature of humanity.**

Resilient but fragile, beautiful but terrifying; the brightest & the darkest parts of being human are what we are left with when crisis strips away everything in between.

One of my favorite aspects of the book is the **exploration of different types of destruction.**

In the past sequences, we read about a group of people who are suffering in a variety of different ways; their situations have a thread of commonality in that they all could be labeled as "self-destructive." In the present, characters deal with the aftermath of a much larger & unstoppable form of destruction by way of the virus.

Infidelity. Abuse. Smoking. Dishonesty. Cults. Regardless of time frame, Mandel's characters partake in a what feels like an **unavoidable cycle of destruction.** The relevance of this cycle is intensified as you become familiar with each character & slowly realize how they are connected, even across the span of decades.

But alongside this theme of **breaking down** is also the theme of **rising from the ashes.** The power of intention & how the action of one can ripple outward to touch an unseen number of people.

One of the main characters, Miranda Carroll, authors a comic from which Station Eleven takes its name. The comic has an enduring presence in both the past & present story lines, and is used as a subtle tool of foreshadowing, which I found rather creative.

Another notable quality is the writing style. **It's both elegant & succinct.** Mandel manages to convey a wide range of emotion & meaning in a relatively short amount of space. The book itself is only 336 pages long, but on every page is a beautifully written sentiment.

This book will suit people who enjoyed *The Last of Us* or *The Girl with All the Gifts*. Stories that contain superbly written characters & eloquent conclusions about what it means to survive when it feels like fate has other plans for you.

This review and other reviews of mine can be found on Book Nest!

Rick Riordan says

Adult speculative fiction

Even since reading *The Stand* by Stephen King when I was a kid, I've had a soft spot for apocalyptic plagues

that wipe out humanity. Er . . . I mean in fiction, of course. Station Eleven is in that vein.

The Georgia Flu sweeps across the world, killing most of humanity. St. John-Mandel, using beautiful prose and poignant characterization, follows the lives of various survivors, tracing how their lives intersect in a group of entertainers called the Traveling Symphony. The thread that connects their stories is Arthur Leander, an aging Hollywood star who – on the same night that the plague began destroying civilization – was trying to reboot his career when he died on stage in Toronto during King Lear. We jump back and forth in time, watching how his life influenced what will happen to our band of survivors.

If you're a fan of the TV series *The Last Ship* or books like *The Stand*, you may enjoy the premise and the way St. John-Mandel evokes a world without the trappings of modern civilization. The end of the novel hints at mysteries yet to solve for our heroes. I hope this means a sequel is in the works . . .

Violet wells says

I wanted and expected to enjoy this novel more than I did. There's much that's gripping and clever but it was spoiled for me by a sloppiness in its construction, most notably an excess of half-baked and obfuscating characters. Was this novel rushed to cash in on the Hunger Games pandemic? At times it comes across as a novel written with heart but equally it can seem sketchy and only half imagined. Also should be said that it karokes most other successful dystopian novels of recent times, most obviously, and by turns, *Cloud Atlas*, *The Road*, *The Hunger Games* and *Dog Star*.

Primary weakness of this novel is its characters. Too many and sometimes not only incidental to the story but clumsily obtrusive. The novel has as its fulcrum two events – a performance of *King Lear* immediately before the pandemic arrives, when Arthur Leander has a fatal heart attack on stage and a dinner party when Miranda, Arthur's first wife and the creator of the Station Eleven comic, first realises her husband is betraying her. The most unwanted character in the book, Jeevan is present at both of these events, first as a paparazzo, then as a training paramedic. A preposterous coincidence (preparing us, in some way, for the tapestry of preposterous coincidences that follow and have to be accepted if the novel is going to work) that might have been a brilliant stroke of mischievous humour if Jeevan had any other role to play in the novel. But he doesn't. Mandel simply uses him to dramatise the immediate aftermath of the epidemic. But she has half a dozen other characters who could easily have performed this function. In fact it would have given the Travelling Symphony more body had she used Kirsten here, the orchestra's principle character. As it is the Symphony remains a sketched idea that flits in and out of the book with little more body than reflected light. Kirsten is another character who for me didn't work at all. She seems like a photocopy of the heroine of *The Hunger Games* – never even remotely convincing as a warrior child with her knife throwing expertise. Conveniently we're not told what happened to her to justify her transition from innocent child to stalker/warrior.

Everyone in the novel is a custodian – another example of characters with cloned purposes. Kirsten is the custodian of the Station Eleven comic but so too is Arthur's son; Arthur's son is also the custodian of religious fervour, Arthur's best friend is the custodian of the novel's museum, the Travelling Symphony is the custodian of culture and another pointless character called Francois starts a newspaper and so becomes the custodian of the written word (the interviews with Kirsten don't work at all except to make the *Cloud Atlas* shoplifting more apparent) So everyone's representing something and as a result, with the exception of Miranda, the creator and, to a lesser extent, Arthur, the actor, don't ever come alive in their own right.

Triumphs: Mandel, in essence, is an admirable storyteller. And the fluid shape of the novel is great. Its flashbacking roving archaeological momentum almost like the act of nostalgia itself – the novel is obsessively nostalgic, most successfully through the imagery of the comics, least successfully when nostalgia is constantly the subject of conversation.

Best character by a country mile is the Station Eleven comic and its creator Miranda. The comic book is cleverly used as a kind of portal between the before and after – and here the nostalgia theme is at its most poignant. Whenever the comic was the novel's focal point it really held my interest. Shame that it was cluttered with so many other cloned and conflicting narratives. I couldn't help feeling, if only someone had prompted Mandel to do one final draft. Hew the thing into a more polished form and think out some of the elements that weren't thoroughly thought out. As commercial storytelling it's a good novel, as literature it doesn't cut it for me. More a collection of catchy pop songs than a moving cello sonata.

karen says

Of all of them there at the bar that night, the bartender was the one who survived the longest. He died three weeks later on the road out of the city.

on the night the world begins to end, a man has a heart attack and dies onstage while performing the lead role in *king lear*. considering that shortly after this, the georgia flu will have killed off 99% of the population and changed the world as we know it forever, it seems unlikely that he would be remembered among so many millions dead. but that's the kind of book this is. the story of the people who have touched our lives in unexpected ways, an echoing world in which *Hell is the absence of the people you long for*, where the little things - or the memories of them - matter the most.

arthur leander is a famous hollywood actor with three ex-wives, a son he never sees, a lover, a friend who knew him when, and various people to whom he has been kind, careless, or otherwise meaningful, including a little girl who watches him die beside her onstage, and the paparazzo turned paramedic who tried to save his life.

twenty years later, pieces of arthur still remain in the wasteland - in the memories of survivors, in his blood, in the provenance of talismanic objects, and in the ripple effect of events he set in motion when he was still alive. this is a multiple POV novel that jumps back and forth in time, from arthur's rise to fame and the stories of those he loved and lost along the way, to the stories of the survivors, finding and creating meaning in the ashes.

Kirsten and August walked mostly in silence. A deer crossed the road ahead and paused to look at them before it vanished into the trees. The beauty of this world where almost everyone was gone. If hell is other people, what is a world with almost no people in it?

kirsten is the little girl who was onstage with arthur when he died, and is now a grown woman touring the wasteland with a group of musicians and actors known as "the traveling symphony", bringing entertainment to the scattered settlements. she has a tattoo on her arm with a quote from a remembered *star trek* episode: *Because survival is insufficient*, and this is one of the major preoccupations of the novel - the importance of art and a shared cultural history to those who remain. whether it is the objects collected in the "museum of civilization," the persistence of shakespeare, the significance of portions of a tattered comic book (from which this novel draws its name) in the hands of two different characters who will take from it wildly different meanings, or even the memory of *star trek*, these are the things that connect those who are left. it is the tenacity of what remains, what endures, and what can still be done with it - the clinging to what makes us human - to what matters in the aftermath, and to what binds us together.

that's not to say this is a gentle apocalypse solely concerned with maintaining cultural heritage. there are dangers everywhere in a world without pharmaceuticals or technology, a world in which a lack of codified behavior can make a man believe he is a prophet, and to give his dark vision free reign.

it's a stunner, straight up. and between this and *california*, it's a great time to be a woman writing lit-dystopias. i have read oh-so-many post-apocalyptic novels, but mandel managed to show me something new. she writes a complicated, multivoiced story in the fragments we are allowed to see - the slices of experience from both before and after the cataclysm, where a dinner party scene is just as interesting and fraught with tension as anything from the early days of the disease, and there are so many unforgettable jewels of moments: jeevan and his wheelchair-bound brother trying to wait out the plague, a quarantined plane on the edge of the tarmac, the memory of oranges.

she has such a strong, wonderful voice and has created tender and sympathetic characters who may be deeply flawed, but are the very personification(s) of the stubbornness of humanity.

one of the things that surprised me is that more wasn't made of the *king lear* parallels. i mean arthur had three wives, lear had three daughters - and since there are so many references to shakespeare throughout, both overt and oblique (one of arthur's wives is named miranda, another is elizabeth(ian), one of the section titles is *a midsummer night's dream*, the georgia flu is somewhat analogous to the black plague of shakespeare's time) i feel like it would have given the novel another layer of ka-pow to have developed the theme even further. but no - one of arthur's wives doesn't even appear in the book except a brief mention that she *existed*. and - jeez - would it have killed mandel to have given v. a chapter??? you know we want to know more about that situation!!

but these are just minor quibbles over an incredibly intelligent and gripping novel. and we can still have a little fun with names here, exclusive of shakespeare - if we play a little free-association game with most-notably-named, "arthur leander" roughly translates into "king of tragic lovers." which is apt.

two quick notes: if you don't want a very popular four-year-old book that - yes, i know, i probably should have read already - spoiled for you, don't read the acknowledgments. because- yeah. oops. that was me.

and if the graphic novel that plays such an important role in this book is NOT picked up by someone and published as a companion book, it will be a huge missed opportunity. because we want it. bad.

come to my blog!
