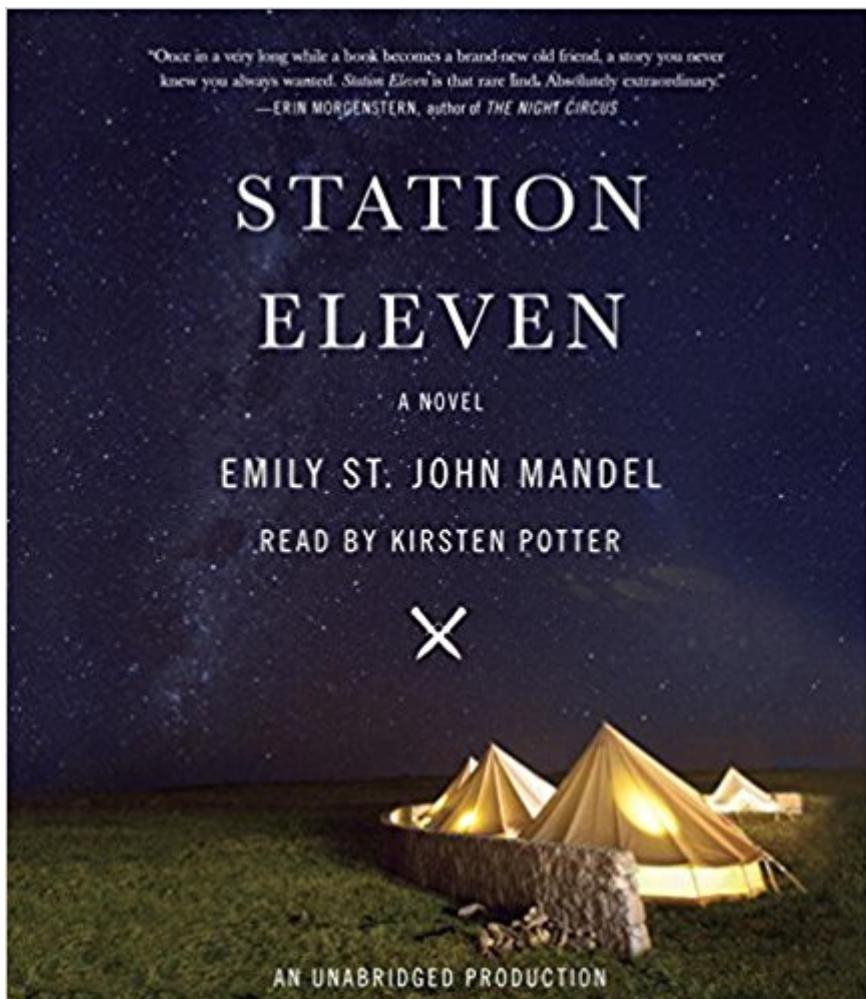


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Station Eleven: A Novel



Synopsis

2014 National Book Award FinalistA New York Times BestsellerAn audacious, darkly glittering novel set in the eerie days of civilization's collapse, Station Eleven tells the spellbinding story of a Hollywood star, his would-be savior, and a nomadic group of actors roaming the scattered outposts of the Great Lakes region, risking everything for art and humanity. One snowy night Arthur Leander, a famous actor, has a heart attack onstage during a production of King Lear. Jeevan Chaudhary, a paparazzo-turned-EMT, is in the audience and leaps to his aid. A child actress named Kirsten Raymonde watches in horror as Jeevan performs CPR, pumping Arthur's chest as the curtain drops, but Arthur is dead. That same night, as Jeevan walks home from the theater, a terrible flu begins to spread. Hospitals are flooded and Jeevan and his brother barricade themselves inside an apartment, watching out the window as cars clog the highways, gunshots ring out, and life disintegrates around them. Fifteen years later, Kirsten is an actress with the Traveling Symphony. Together, this small troupe moves between the settlements of an altered world, performing Shakespeare and music for scattered communities of survivors. Written on their caravan, and tattooed on Kirsten's arm is a line from Star Trek: "Because survival is insufficient." But when they arrive in St. Deborah by the Water, they encounter a violent prophet who digs graves for anyone who dares to leave. Spanning decades, moving back and forth in time, and vividly depicting life before and after the pandemic, this suspenseful, elegiac novel is rife with beauty. As Arthur falls in and out of love, as Jeevan watches the newscasters say their final good-byes, and as Kirsten finds herself caught in the crosshairs of the prophet, we see the strange twists of fate that connect them all. A novel of art, memory, and ambition, Station Eleven tells a story about the relationships that sustain us, the ephemeral nature of fame, and the beauty of the world as we know it.

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Customer Reviews

An Best Book of the Month, September 2014: A flight from Russia lands in middle America, its passengers carrying a virus that explodes like a neutron bomb over the surface of the earth. In a blink, the world as we know it collapses. "No more ballgames played under floodlights," Emily St. John Mandel writes in this smart and sober homage to life's smaller pleasures, brutally erased by an apocalypse. "No more trains running under the surface of cities ... No more cities ... No more Internet ... No more avatars." Survivors become scavengers, roaming the ravaged landscape or clustering in pocket settlements, some of them welcoming, some dangerous. What's touching about the world of Station Eleven is its ode to what survived, in particular the music and plays performed for wasteland communities by a roving Shakespeare troupe, the Traveling Symphony, whose members form a wounded family of sorts. The story shifts deftly between the fraught post-apocalyptic world and, twenty years earlier, just before the apocalypse, the death of a famous actor, which has a rippling effect across the decades. It's heartbreaking to watch the troupe strive for more than mere survival. At once terrible and tender, dark and hopeful, Station Eleven is a tragically beautiful novel that both mourns and mocks the things we cherish. —Neal Thompson --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

2014 National Book Award Finalist Winner of the 2015 Arthur C. Clarke Award One of the Best Books of the Year: The Washington Post, San Francisco Chronicle, Chicago Tribune, Buzzfeed, and Entertainment Weekly, Time, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Minnesota Public Radio, The Huffington Post, BookPage, Time Out, Book Riot Praise for Station Eleven: "Deeply melancholy, but beautifully written, and wonderfully elegiac . . . A book that I will long remember, and return to." —George R. R. Martin "Station Eleven is so compelling, so fearlessly imagined, that I wouldn't have put it down for anything." —Ann Patchett "Emily St. John Mandel's fourth novel, Station Eleven, begins with a spectacular end. One night in a Toronto theater, onstage performing the role of King Lear, 51-year-old Arthur Leander has a fatal heart attack. There is barely time for people to absorb this shock when tragedy on a considerably vaster scale arrives in the form of a flu pandemic so lethal

that, within weeks, most of the world’s population has been killed . . . Mandel is an exuberant storyteller . . . Readers will be won over by her nimble interweaving of her characters’ lives and fates . . . Station Eleven is as much a mystery as it is a post-apocalyptic tale . . . Mandel is especially good at planting clues and raising the kind of plot-thickening questions that keep the reader turning pages . . . Station Eleven offers comfort and hope to those who believe, or want to believe, that doomsday can be survived, that in spite of everything people will remain good at heart, and when they start building a new world they will want what was best about the old.

• Sigrid Nunez, *New York Times* Book Review

“Last month, when the fiction finalists for the National Book Awards were announced, one stood out from the rest: *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel . . . *Station Eleven* is set in a familiar genre universe, in which a pandemic has destroyed civilization. The twist—the thing that makes *Station Eleven* National Book Award material—is that the survivors are artists . . . It’s hard to imagine a novel more perfectly suited, in both form and content, to this literary moment . . . *Station Eleven*, if we were to talk about it in our usual way, would seem like a book that combines high culture and low culture—“literary fiction” and “genre fiction.” But those categories aren’t really adequate to describe the book . . . It brings together these different fictional genres and the values—observation, feeling, erudition—to which they’re linked. . . Instead of being compressed, it blossoms.”

• Joshua Rothman, *The New Yorker*
“Emily St. John Mandel’s tender and lovely new novel, *Station Eleven* . . . miraculously reads like equal parts page-turner and poem . . . One of her great feats is that the story feels spun rather than plotted, with seamless shifts in time and characters. . . . Because survival is insufficient, reads a line taken from *Star Trek* spray painted on the Traveling Symphony’s lead wagon. The genius of Mandel’s fourth novel . . . is that she lives up to those words. This is not a story of crisis and survival. It’s one of art and family and memory and community and the awful courage it takes to look upon the world with fresh and hopeful eyes.”
• Karen Valby, *Entertainment Weekly*
“Spine-tingling . . . Ingenious . . . Ms. Mandel gives the book some extra drama by positioning some of her characters near the brink of self-discovery as disaster approaches. The plague hits so fast that it takes them all by surprise . . . Ms. Mandel is able to tap into the poignancy of lives cut short at a terrible time—or, in one case, of a life that goes on long after wrongs could be righted.”
• Janet Maslin, *The New York Times*
“In *Station Eleven* , by Emily St. John Mandel, the Georgia Flu becomes airborne the night Arthur Leander dies during his

performance as King Lear. Within months, all airplanes are grounded, cars run out of gas and electricity flickers out as most of the world's population dies. The details of Arthur's life before the flu and what happens afterward to his friends, wives and lovers create a surprisingly beautiful story of human relationships amid such devastation. Among the survivors are Kirsten, a child actor at the time of Arthur's death who lives with no memory of what happened to her the first year after the flu . . . A gorgeous retelling of Lear unfolds through Arthur's flashbacks and Kirsten's attempt to stay alive.

Nancy Hightower, *The Washington Post* "My book of the year is *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel. I chose this book, because it surprised me. I've read a number of post-apocalyptic novels over the years and most of them are decidedly ungenerous toward humans and their brutishness. *Station Eleven* has their same sense of danger and difficulty, but still reads as more of a love letter acknowledging all those things we would most miss and all those things we would still have."

Karen Joy Fowler, author of *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* "I get slightly angry when I finish any good book . . . I'm miffed that I'm not reading it anymore, and that I'll never be able to read it again for the first time. The last good book I read was Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven*. . . . Daniel Handler, aka Lemony Snicket, . . . Even if you think dystopian fiction is not your thing, I urge you to give this marvelous novel a try. The plot revolves around a pandemic that shatters the world as we know it into isolated settlements and the Traveling Symphony, a roving band of actors and musicians who remind those who survived the catastrophe about hope and humanity. The questions raised by this emotional and thoughtful story . . . why does my life matter? what distinguishes living from surviving? . . . will stay with you long after the satisfying conclusion."

Doborah Harkness, author of *The Book of Life* "Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* sensitively explores the dynamics of . . . a theater troupe called the Traveling Symphony whose musicians and actors perform Shakespeare for small communities around the Great Lakes. Ms. Mandel . . . writ[es] with cool intelligence and poised understatement. Her real interest is in examining friendships and love affairs and the durable consolations of art."

Sam Sacks, *The Wall Street Journal* "This book isn't exactly a feel-good romp, but for a post-apocalyptic novel, *Station Eleven* comes remarkably close . . . Emily St. John Mandel delivers a beautifully observed walk through her book's 21st century world, as seen by characters who are grappling with what they've lost and what remains. While I was reading it, I kept putting the book down, looking around me, and thinking, 'Everything is a miracle.'

Ã¢ ¸Ã ¸ NPR.org Ã¢ ¸Ã“[A] complete post-apocalyptic world is rendered in Emily St. John MandelÃ¢ ¸Ã„¢s Station Eleven, in which a hyper-virulent flu wipes out the majority of the earthÃ¢ ¸Ã„¢s population and the surviving one percent band into self-governing pods. Think of a more hopeful and female-informed rendering of Cormac McCarthyÃ¢ ¸Ã„¢s The Road . . . MandelÃ¢ ¸Ã„¢s novel feels taut and assured... By having a pre- and post-pandemic split screen, she is able to ask questions about artistic creation, fame, and faith against the backgrounds of plenty and scarcity. There is the page-turning plot and compelling characters, but more importantly in a novel that engages with social issues are the questionsÃ¢ ¸Ã• not answered but asked.Ã¢ ¸Ã•Ã¢ ¸Ã• Rob Spillman, Guernica Ã¢ ¸Ã“So impressive . . . Station Eleven is terrifying, reminding us of how paper-thin the achievements of civilization are. But itÃ¢ ¸Ã„¢s also surprisinglyÃ¢ ¸Ã• and quietlyÃ¢ ¸Ã• beautiful . . . As Emily Dickinson knew and as Mandel reminds us, thereÃ¢ ¸Ã„¢s a sumptuousness in destitution, a painful beauty in loss . . . A superb novel. Unlike most postapocalyptic works, it leaves us not fearful for the end of the world but appreciative of the grace of everyday existence.Ã¢ ¸Ã•Ã¢ ¸Ã•Ã¢ ¸Ã Anthony Domestic, San Francisco Chronicle"Darkly lyrical . . . An appreciation of art, love and the triumph of the human spirit . . . Mandel effortlessly moves between time periods . . . The book is full of beautiful set pieces and landscapes; big, bustling cities before and during the outbreak, an eerily peaceful Malaysian seashore, and an all-but-abandoned Midwest airport-turned museum that becomes an all important setting for the last third of the book . . .Ã¢ ¸Ã Mandel ties up all the loose ends in a smooth and moving way, giving humanity to all her charactersÃ¢ ¸Ã• both in a world that you might recognize as the one we all live in today (and perhaps take for granted) and a post-apocalyptic world without electricity, smartphones and the Internet. Station ElevenÃ¢ ¸Ã is a truly haunting book, one that is hard to put down and a pleasure to read."Ã¢ ¸Ã•Ã¢ ¸Ã Doug Knoop, TheÃ¢ ¸Ã Seattle Times"MandelÃ¢ ¸Ã„¢s spectacular, unmissable new novel is set in a near-future dystopia, after mostÃ¢ ¸Ã• seriously, 99.99 percentÃ¢ ¸Ã• of the worldÃ¢ ¸Ã„¢s population is killed suddenly and swiftly by a flu pandemic. (Have fun riding the subway after this one!) The perspective shifts between a handful of survivors, all connected to a famous actor who died onstage just before the collapse. A literary page-turner, impeccably paced, which celebrates the world lost while posing questions about art, fame, and what endures after everything, and everyone, is gone."Ã¢ ¸Ã•Ã¢ ¸Ã Amanda Bullock, Vulture"Haunting and riveting . . .Ã¢ ¸Ã In several moving passages, Mandel's characters look back with similar longing toward the receding pre-plague world, remembering all the things they'd once taken for grantedÃ¢ ¸Ã• from the Internet to eating an orangeÃ¢ ¸Ã . . .Ã¢ ¸Ã It's not just the residents of Mandel's post-collapse world who need to forge stronger connections and

live for more than mere survival. So do we all."• Mike Fischer, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel"Emily St. John Mandel's fourth novel is, flat-out, one of the best things I've read on the ability of art to endure in a good long while. It's about the ways that civilization is kept alive in a world devastated by a plague, sure, but it's also about the way artists live, about the way people live, about flawed relationships and creative pursuits and how the unlikeliest of connections can bring transcendence."• Tobias Carroll, Electric Literature"Though it centers on civilization's collapse in the aftermath of a devastating flu, this mesmerizing novel isn't just apocalyptic fantasy—it's also an intricately layered character study of human life itself. Jumping back and forth between the decades before and after the pandemic, the narrative interlaces several individuals' stories, encompassing a universe of emotions and ultimately delivering a view of life that's both chilling and jubilant."• People Magazine "If you're planning to write a post-apocalyptic novel, you're going to have to breathe some new life into it. Emily St. John Mandel does that with her new book, *Station Eleven* . . . The story is told through several characters, including an A-list actor, his ex-wives, a religious prophet and the Traveling Symphony, a ragtag group of Shakespearean actors and musicians who travel to settlements performing for the survivors. Each bring a unique perspective to life, relationships and what it means to live in a world returned to the dark ages . . . Mandel doesn't put the emphasis on the apocalypse itself (the chaos, the scavenging, the scientists trying to find a cure), but instead shows the effects it has on humanity. Despite the state of the world, people find reasons to continue . . . *Station Eleven* will change the post-apocalyptic genre. While most writers tend to be bleak and clichéd, Mandel chooses to be optimistic and imaginative. This isn't a story about survival, it's a story about living."• Andrew Blom, The Boston Herald"A novel that carries a magnificent depth . . . We get to see something that is so difficult to show or feel—the way small moments in time link together. And how these moments add up to a life . . . Her best yet. It feels as though she took the experience earned from her previous writing and braided it together to make one gleaming strand . . . An epic book."• Claire Cameron, The Globe and Mail" I've been a fan of Emily St. John Mandel ever since her first novel . . . she's a stunningly beautiful writer whose complex, flawed, and well-drawn characters linger with you long after you set her books down . . . With the release of *Station Eleven*—a big, brilliant, ambitious, genre-bending novel that follows a traveling troupe of Shakespearean actors roaming a postapocalyptic world—she's poised for blockbuster success. Effortlessly combining her

flawless craftsmanship, rich insights, and compelling characters with big-budget visions of the end of the world, *Station Eleven* is hands-down one of my favorite books of the year. *Guardian* • *Independent* • *Sarah McCarry*, *Tor.com* • *Station Eleven* is a complex, eerie novel about the years before and after a pandemic that eliminates most of humanity, save for a troupe of actors and a few traumatized witnesses. *Mandel*'s novel weaves together a post-apocalyptic reckoning, the life of an actor, and the thoughts of the man who tries to save him. It's an ambitious premise, but what glues the parts together is *Mandel*'s vivid, addictive language. It's easy to see why she'd claim this novel as her most prized: *Station Eleven* is a triumph of narrative and prose, a beautifully arranged work about art, society, and what's great about the world we live in now. *Guardian* • *Independent* • *Claire Luchette*, *Bustle* • *An ambitious and addictive novel.* *Guardian* • *Independent* • *Sarah Hughes*, *Guardian* • *Mandel* deviates from the usual and creates what is possibly the most captivating and thought-provoking post-apocalyptic novel you will ever read . . . *Beautiful writing . . . An assured handle on human emotions and relationships . . . Though not without tension and a sense of horror, *Station Eleven* rises above the bleakness of the usual post-apocalyptic novels because its central concept is one so rarely offered in the genre* *hope.* *Independent* • *The Independent (UK)* • *A beautiful and unsettling book, the action moves between the old and new world, drawing connections between the characters and their pasts and showing the sweetness of life as we know it now and the value of friendship, love and art over all the vehicles, screens and remote controls that have been rendered obsolete. Mandel's skill in portraying her post-apocalyptic world makes her fictional creation seem a terrifyingly real possibility. Apocalyptic stories once offered the reader a scary view of an alternative reality and the opportunity, on putting the book down, to look around gratefully at the real world. This is a book to make its reader mourn the life we still lead and the privileges we still enjoy.* *Sunday Express* • *Independent* • *Alison Flood*, *Observer* • *Haunting and riveting . . . Mandel*

will repeatedly remind us in this book, it's people rather than machines that make the world spin . . . In several moving passages, Mandel's characters look back with similar longing toward the receding pre-plague world, remembering all the things they'd once taken for granted . . . In a move that's sure to draw comparisons with Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, Mandel periodically travels backward in time, allowing us to see how blind and selfish such characters were, back in the day when they had so much and lived so small . . . As a result, *Station Eleven* comes to seem less like a spaceship reflecting how we'll live our dystopian future than a way of thinking about how and where we're traveling here and now. It's not just the residents of Mandel's post-collapse world who need to forge stronger connections and live for more than mere survival. So do we all. •

Mike Fischer, *Knoxville News-Sentinel* • "Post-apocalyptic scenarios are rarely positive . . . but Mandel's book embraces a different view while still depicting how difficult living would be in a desolate world." •

Molly Driscoll, *Christian Science Monitor* Editors • Pick "Enormous scope and an ambitious time-jumping structure, " *Station Eleven* paints its post-apocalyptic world in both bold brushstrokes and tiny points of background detail. As the conflicts of one era illuminate another, a small group of interrelated characters witnesses the collapse of the current historical age and staggers through the first faltering steps of the next . . . [A] powerfully absorbing tale of survival in a quarantined airport and on the dangerous roads between improvised settlements, protected by actors and musicians trained for gunfights.

Mandel has imagined this world in full, and her ambition and imagination on display here are admirable." • Emily Choate, *Chapter 16* "Audacious . . . A group of actors and musicians stumble upon each other and now roam the region between Toronto and Chicago as the Traveling Symphony, performing Shakespeare . . . " *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, • "Romeo and Juliet" . . . for small settlements they find in the wilderness. Their existence alone provides the novel with a strange beauty, even hope, as one actress notes how these plays survived a bubonic plague centuries ago . . . *Station Eleven* is blessedly free of moralizing, or even much violence. If anything, it's a book about gratitude, about life right now, if we can live to look back on it." • Kim Ode, *Minneapolis Star Tribune* "Station Eleven . . . I couldn't resist . . . You should read it, too . . . It'll make you marvel at the world as we know it . . . [and] remind you the people who drive you the most crazy are perhaps also the ones you don't want to live without." • Mary Pauline

Lowry, *Huffington Post Books Blog* • "Never has a book convinced me more of society's looming demise than Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven*, an apocalyptic novel about a world just like our own that, much as our own might, dissolves after a new

strain of influenza eradicates 99 percent of the human population. A soul-quaking premise, and a story that, I must warn, should not be read in a grubby airport surrounded by potential carriers of Ācā ¬Ā| whatever disease, take your pick . . . Mandel displays the impressive skill of evoking both terror and empathy . . . She has exuded talent for years . . . There is such glory in humanity, in what we, through every plague and every age, continue to create Ācā ¬â • like this book Ācā ¬â • and in what we are capable of sustaining.Ācā ¬Ā• Ācā ¬â • Tiffany Gibert, Ā LA Review of Books" Mandel comes by a now-common genre mash-up, highbrow dystopia, honestly, following three small-press literary thrillers. By focusing on a Shakespeare troupe roving a post-pandemic world of sparse communities, she brings a hard-focus humanity to the form. Repeated flashbacks to the life of an early flu victim, a Hollywood actor who dies onstage in the character of Lear, provide both comic relief and the pathos of a beautifully frivolous world gone by." Ācā ¬â • Boris Kachka's Ā 8 Books You Need To Read This September, Ā Vulture Ā Ācā ¬Ā"Disappear inside the exquisite post-apocalyptic world of Emily St. John MandelĀcā ¬â,,cs Ā Station Eleven Ā and youĀcā ¬â,,cll resurface with a greater appreciation for the art and culture we daily take for granted. With fearless imagination, Mandel recounts the peripatetic adventures of an eccentric band of artists, musicians, playwrights, and actors as they traverse the worldĀcā ¬â,,cs dreary landscape attempting to keep culture and art alive in the aftermath of a devastating disease that has wiped out much of civilization . . . Strange, poetic, thrilling, and grim all at once, Ā Station Eleven Ā is a prismatic tale about survival, unexpected coincidences, and the significance of art and its oft under-appreciated beauty.Ā Ā Ācā ¬Ā• Ācā ¬â • September 2014Ācā ¬â,,cs Best Books, Ā BustleĀcā ¬Ā" The most buzzed-about novel of the season.Ācā ¬â • Ācā ¬â • Ā Stephan Lee, Ā Entertainment Weekly" In this unforgettable, haunting, and almost hallucinatory portrait of life at the edge, those who remain struggle to retain their basic humanity and make connections with the vanished world through art, memory, and remnants of popular culture . . . a brilliantly constructed, highly literary, postapocalyptic page-turner." Ācā ¬â • Lauren Gilbert, Library Journal Ā (starred)" This fast-paced novel details life before and after a flu wipes out 99 percent of the earth's population . . . As the characters reflect on what gives life meaning in a desolate, postapocalyptic world, readers will be inspired to do the same." Ācā ¬â • Real SimpleĀcā ¬Ā" Once in a very long while a book becomes a brand new old friend, a story you never knew you always wanted. Station Eleven is that rare find that feels familiar and extraordinary at the same time, expertly weaving together future and present and past, death and life and Shakespeare. This is truly something special.Ācā ¬Ā• Ācā ¬â • Erin Morgenstern, author of The Night Circus" Station Eleven is a magnificent, compulsive novel that cleverly turns the notion of a

Ã¢ "kinder, gentler timeÃ¢ " on its head. And, oh, the pleasure of falling down the rabbit hole of MandelÃ¢ 's imagination -- a dark, shimmering place rich in alarmingly real detail and peopled with such human, such very appealing characters." Ã¢ " Liza Klaussmann, author of *Tigers in Red Weather*"Her best, most ambitious work yet. Post-apocalyptic tales are all the rage this season, but MandelÃ¢ 's intricate plotting and deftness with drawing character makes this novel of interlinked tales stand out as a beguiling read. Beginning with the onslaught of the deadly Georgian flu and the death of a famous actor onstage, and advancing twenty years into the future to a traveling troupe of Shakespearean actors who perform for the few remaining survivors, the novel sits with darkness while searching for the beauty in art and human connection."

Ã¢ " MostÃ¢ Anticipated: The Great Second-Half 2014 Book Preview, The MillionsÃ¢ "Ambitious, magnificent . . . MandelÃ¢ 's vision is not only achingly beautiful but startlinglyÃ¢ plausile, exposing the fragile beauty of the world we inhabit. In the burgeoning postapocalyptic literary genre, MandelÃ¢ 's transcendent, haunting novel deserves a place alongside *The Road*, *The Passage*, and *The Dog Stars*.Ã¢ " Kristine Huntley, Booklist (starred)Ã¢ "[An] ambitious take on a post-apocalyptic world where some strive to preserve art, culture and kindness . . . Think of Cormac McCarthy seesawing with Joan Didion . . . Mandel spins a satisfying web of coincidence and kismet . . . Magnetic . . . a breakout novel."Ã¢ " Kirkus (starred)Ã¢ "Station Eleven is the kind of book that speaks to dozens of the readers in me--the Hollywood devotee, the comic book fan, the cult junkie, the love lover, the disaster tourist. It is a brilliant novel, and Emily St. John Mandel is astonishing.Ã¢ "Ã¢ " Emma Straub, author of *The Vacationers*Ã¢ "Ã¢ "Station Eleven is a firework of a novel. Elegantly constructed and packed with explosive beauty, it's full of life and humanity and the aftershock of memory.Ã¢ "Ã¢ " Lauren Beukes, author of *The Shining Girls*Ã¢ "Ã¢ "Disturbing, inventive and exciting, *Station Eleven* left me wistful for a world where I still live.Ã¢ "Ã¢ " Jessie Burton, author of *The Miniaturist* "A unique departure from which to examine civilization's wreckage . . . [a] wild fusion of celebrity gossip and grim future . . . Mandel's examination of the connections between individuals with disparate destinies makes a case for the worth of even a single life."Ã¢ " Publishers WeeklyFrom the Hardcover edition.

This is a beautiful, haunting novel about the end of the world as we know it (thanks to something called the Georgia flu, which wipes out 99% of the world's population in mere days). The story jumps back and forth between the time before and after "the collapse," and the narration rotates

through various characters' points of view. Though the premise (plague apocalypse) sounds sci-fi, Station Eleven is light on the science and heavy on the philosophy. It's definitely much more about how the apocalypse affects humanity and civilization than it is about the details of the apocalypse. If you're familiar with survivalist stories like S.M. Stirling's Emberverse series, this is basically the inverse of that. The author isn't concerned with where people are getting their food and fresh water twenty years post-apocalypse. She's more into the tragic beauty of a fleet of jumbo jets that haven't flown in decades lined up neatly on a runway in the falling snow. That brings us to one of the main themes of this tale, "survival is insufficient." Taken from a Star Trek episode, the phrase is the motto of the Traveling Symphony, a ragtag band of musicians and actors who roam what's left of the Midwest, playing classical music and performing Shakespeare. The ability to create and appreciate art, they believe, is essential to our humanity. It's what takes us beyond mere survival and makes us something more than animals. I loved this part of the book, how the little settlements of people living in Walmarts and gas stations would rush out to hear Beethoven, tears streaming down their faces. This is one of my favorite angles of post-apocalyptic fiction - once we've figured out how to survive, how do we learn to LIVE again? What exactly is it that makes us human? How do we go about redefining humanity, rebuilding civilization? The author also touches on the enduring power of art and storytelling, and the ways in which stories connect us all. Beyond the Beethoven and the Shakespeare, there's a comic book called Station Eleven that features prominently (and also gives the novel its name). It was written, somewhat randomly, by the first wife of a very famous Hollywood actor. She wrote the comic for herself and published only two copies, which end up in the hands of two of the main characters post-apocalypse. The comics have a profound impact on both characters (so the obscure art of the obscure ex-wife endures because art is forever, while the Hollywood actor is forgotten because who cares about Hollywood after the end of the world). The stories of the two characters in possession of the comics are mostly separate, though absolutely intertwined - as are ALL of the characters' stories. One of the most amazing aspects of this novel is how all of the characters are connected, both pre- and post-collapse. I kept waiting for many of them to cross paths and realize their connection, their shared stories. Some did, and some didn't - the latter bothered me at first, until I realized that's the way the world works. We're all woven into the same giant tapestry, whether we see the individual threads or not. That, along with King Lear and Beethoven's 9th and unheard-of graphic novels about being stranded in space, is the beauty of humankind.

This isn't a straight forward narrative. It jumps around from character to character and time to time,

and while all the strands are loosely connected, some of them are just so boring. There's a lot to keep track of and a lot of characters, and while the story isn't hard to follow because of that, it makes you wish that there was more space to develop certain characters who had a lot of potential but who didn't get much book time because there were so many other characters that needed to be addressed. If the book had told one person's story (preferably Kristen's or Clark's), then it would have been a much more interesting and MUCH more engaging book. What could have been a great story lost its potential and fell flat. There are only a couple interesting chapters and no real plot to the book as a whole. It's a story whose main purpose is to say "See what I did there? See how these are connected?" and make you go "oh cool" for a moment before coming off of a very temporary high and wanting much more substance. As soon as the story introduces a cool narrative or something resembling plot, it switches perspective and goes back to something far less interesting and that seed of plot never gets fully developed. Ultimately, I think the lack of plot is what killed this book for me.

Purchased because of several good reviews I'd seen in various publications. Novel is a blend of science fiction, adventure and romance, which was seamlessly written and beautifully narrated by ESJM. The story unfolds around a population decimating epidemic, giving equal time to the months before the pandemic, the event, and the aftermath, but cleverly jumping between the three instead of using a chronological format to relate the story. Often the use of this type of storytelling is confusing at first, sometimes to the point the reader gives up. Recently I read a young adult novel called "Code Name Verity", which had won numerous prestigious awards, was highly thought of, came with rave reviews, and try as I might, I could not get past Chapter 3, it was so confusing in the way it jumped back and forth between locations, characters, years, countries, I gave up (I went back to it later after having read an introduction and description of the novel and spent 5 hours reading it front to back, SUPER BOOK, IF YOU HAVENT READ IT, YOU SHOULD) . The way the story unfolds out-of-order in this novel is what makes the book a compelling and provocative read, written using current colloquial verbiage and terminology which immediately hooks the audience, with such familiarity it seems as if the story is taking place somewhere you've been, the people are like people you know, the surroundings and landmarks are familiar, but the tale being told is like nothing you can imagine, a glimpse of a shocking brutal future. Excellent. Worth the price, would buy again. A+

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