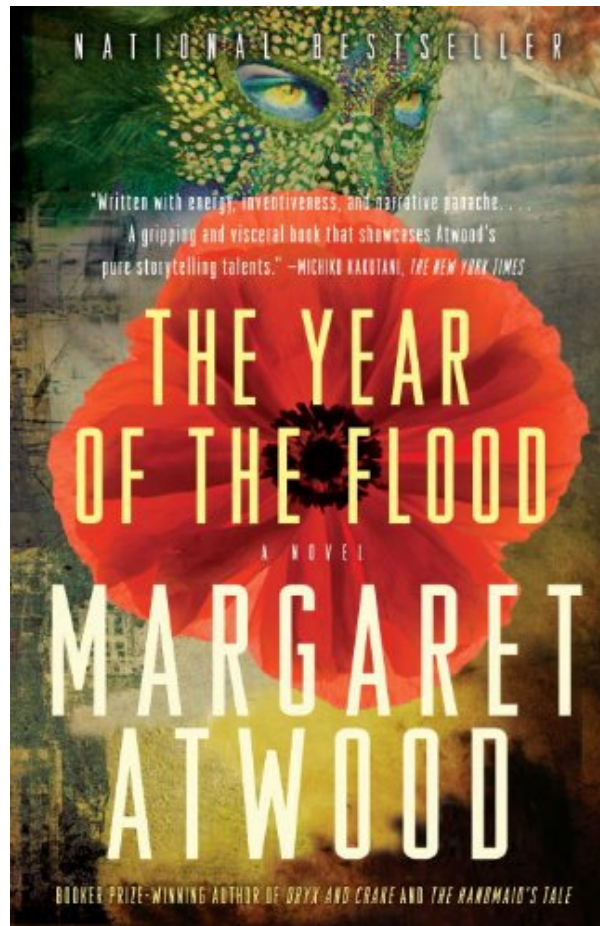
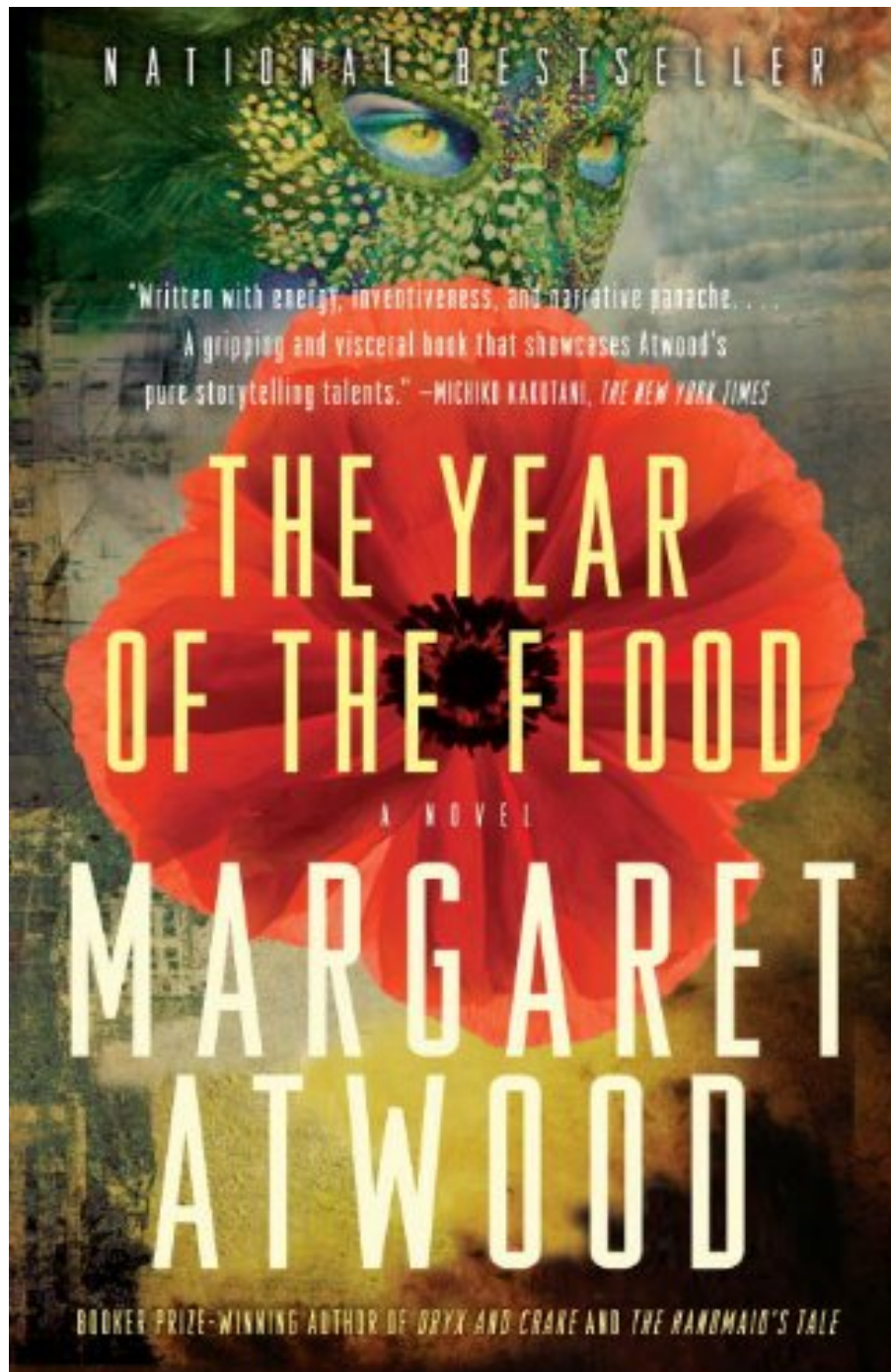


# THE YEAR OF THE FLOOD BY MARGARET ATWOOD



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Margaret Atwood on The Year of the Flood

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When *Oryx and Crake* came out, it seemed to many like science fiction--way out there, too weird to be possible--but in the three years that passed before I began writing *The Year of the Flood*, the perceived gap between that supposedly unreal future and the harsh one we might very well live through was narrowing fast. What is happening to our world? What can we do to reverse the damage? How long have we got? And, most importantly--what kind of "we"? In other words, what kind of people might undertake the challenge? Dedicated ones--they'd have to be. And unless you believe our planet is worth saving, why bother?

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Most helpful customer reviews

246 of 260 people found the following review helpful.

Margaret Atwood makes me want to stick my head in the sand...

By Susan Tunis

I know that sounds bad, but her dystopian visions are so profoundly disturbing, I find they influence my thinking forever after. Say what you will—her nightmares are not easy to dismiss!

Readers of 2003's *Oryx and Crake* will recognize the world of *The Year of the Flood*. Neither a prequel nor a sequel, the latter is more of a companion novel. It's set in the same world, covering roughly the same time span. Whereas *Oryx and Crake* was a post-apocalyptic narrative told from Jimmy's point of view, here the narrators are Toby and Ren. Jimmy, *Oryx*, and *Crake* make appearances in this novel, and readers of both books will discover minor characters from the former novel are major characters in the latter. In short, the two are intertwined, but may be read in any order. It is not necessary to have read *Oryx and Crake* first, though ultimately reading them both is an immensely satisfying experience, shedding light on many aspects of the story being told.

Now to the story...Toby and Ren have both spent significant portions of their lives involved with a fringe religious group called God's Gardeners. Ren was brought to the ascetic group as a child by her mother. Toby found her way there out of desperation in adulthood. Each has professed disbelief in the tenets of the religion, but the pacifistic and environmental teachings have become deeply ingrained in both. At the opening of the novel, it is Year Twenty-Five in the God's Gardeners' calendar; the Year of the Waterless Flood.

From the beginning, the group's prophet-like leader had preached that a "waterless flood" was coming to wipe out humanity. In addition to their dogmatic environmentalism, the group believed in preparing for this flood with survival skills and food caches called "Ararats." The predicted day has come in the form of a global pandemic. Society has broken down completely. From their respective places of isolation, each woman wonders if she may be the last human left and struggles to survive in this altered world.

As everyone knows, there's nothing like apocalypse to make a person introspective. As each woman reflects upon the ups and downs of her life with the Gardeners and beyond, the reader gradually gleans a fuller picture of the world these women lived in, their individual and joint histories, what led to cataclysm, and what has ultimately happened to the world.

As one might expect from Atwood, *The Year of the Flood* is a beautiful telling of an ugly story. And what a story it is! In addition to being very much a novel of ideas, it is an utterly un-put-downable page-turner! It's a quick read, with short chapters and lots of white space on the pages. The novel flies by. The ending is satisfying and unsatisfying at once. It sheds some light on *Oryx and Crake's* enigmatic conclusion and completes this arc of the story, but leaves this reader very much hoping for a final volume of this rumored trilogy.

74 of 80 people found the following review helpful.

Waiting for Pandemic

By M. Feldman

In Margaret Atwood's three compelling and quite different visions of an apocalyptic future, some things never change. There are always the powerful corporations intent on obtaining profit from every human desire: the Soul Scrolls of "The Handmaid's Tale," which turn prayer into a commodity; the Secretburger franchises of "The Year of the Flood," which dispense cheap burgers of dubious provenance. The environment is always degraded, resulting in a precipitous drop in the birth rate ("The Handmaid's Tale") and the terrifying daily thunderstorms of "The Year of the Flood." In all three stories, there is an Orwellian social structure: a tiny elite intent both on holding power at all costs and on a comfortable, even luxurious, life style; a larger group of terrified, obedient mid-level party/corporate functionaries; and a vast underclass that lives in squalor and in violence--the "pleeblands" of her newest novel. And, most important to all three dystopias, there are cold, brutal men with the most up to date weapons "who make sure--successfully, until the global pandemics in both "Oryx and Crake" and "The Year of the Flood" nearly destroy the human race--that everyone is terrorized and that power remains with the corporate elites.

Thus, it's quite amazing that her newest dystopia is so different, so inventive, and so convincing, even though elements of "The Year of the Flood" overlap with those in "Oryx and Crake" and the novels are set in parallel, time-wise, with a male protagonist in "Oryx" and two female protagonists, Toby and Ren, in "Flood." Completely original and central to "Flood" is the made-up religion (complete with made-up hymns) of Gods Gardeners, led by its fatherly chief composer, sermonizer, and philosopher, Adam One. He's a wonderful pastiche, equally earnest and ridiculous--straight out of the pages of "Mother Earth News." The characterizations of the rest of the Gardeners, the numbered Adams and Eves, are equally tender, as they tend their bees and mushrooms and the rooftop garden and patiently store away supplies in hidden "Ararats" for the calamity they know is coming. Unlike Orwell's degraded masses, these proles are full of hope. Don't miss this newest Atwood. She can put a plot together better than just about anyone, and the coalescing threads of this one kept me reading until midnight as the world came to an-----well, not exactly, and not in the way you might think. Apocalypse, as constructed by Atwood, is never predictable, always astonishing, and certainly not impossible.

80 of 92 people found the following review helpful.

I'm in the minority but....

By Holly

I'm definitely in the minority here, but I didn't love this novel. I didn't hate it either and I did finish it, but it didn't grab hold of me like some books do. I read "Handmaid's Tale" many, many years ago and it's one of those books I held on to ever since. I didn't feel the same way about this one.

Set in a future time period (year unspecified), the earth has largely been decimated - many animal species are extinct, there are deserts where none existed before and the human population has largely segregated itself into subgroups that have very little interaction between them. With this situation, a pandemic (the waterless flood) takes place which wipes out most of the human race. The novel follows two primary characters, both female, as they try to survive in this post-apocalyptic era. Both women share their stories via memories of what their lives were like prior to the pandemic. It took me a long time to read this book since I wasn't totally involved and I think that is for three basic reasons:

- 1) I never really cared about the characters. They went through lots of horrific events and yet I just didn't seem to get emotionally involved with them
- 2) By the end of the book, there were too many coincidences where things just fell neatly into place. It just seemed too tidy for me.
- 3) The names of the animals and future inventions were too "cutsy" and rather than seeming clever, just seemed over-done.

Again, I didn't hate the book and I'm glad I read it, but it won't be something I re-read in the future.

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(Photo © George Whiteside)

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Signature Reviewed by Marcel Theroux In her 2002 speculative novel, *Oryx and Crake*, Margaret Atwood depicted a dystopic planet tumbling toward apocalypse. The world she envisaged was in the throes of catastrophic climate change, its wealthy inhabitants dwelling in sterile secure compounds, its poor ones in the dangerous pleeblands of decaying inner cities. Mass extinctions had taken place, while genetic experiments had populated the planet with strange new breeds of animal: liobams, Mo'Hairs, rakunks. At the end of the book, we left its central character, Jimmy, in the aftermath of a devastating man-made plague, as he wondered whether to befriend or attack a ragged band of strangers. The novel seemed complete, closing on a moment of suspense, as though Atwood was content simply to hint at the direction life would now take. In her profoundly imagined new book, *The Year of the Flood*, she revisits that same world and its catastrophe. Like *Oryx and Crake*, *Year of the Flood* begins just after the catastrophe and then tracks back in time over the corrupt and degenerate world that preceded it. But while the first novel focused on the privileged elite in the compounds and the morally bankrupt corporations, *The Year of the Flood* depicts more of the world of the plebs, an edgy no-man's land inhabited by criminals, sex workers, dropouts and the few individuals who are trying to resist the grip of the corporations. The novel centers on the lives of Ren and Toby, female members of a fundamentalist sect of Christian environmentalists, the God's Gardeners. Led by the charismatic Adam One, whose sermons and eco-hymns punctuate the narrative, the God's Gardeners are preparing for life after the prophesied Waterless Flood. Atwood plays some of their religion for laughs: their hymns have a comically bouncing, churchy rhythm, and we learn that both Ren and Toby have been drawn toward the sect for nonreligious reasons. Yet the gentleness and benignity of the Gardeners is a source of hope as well as humor. As absurd as some of their beliefs appear, Atwood seems to be suggesting that they're a better option than the naked materialism of the corporations. This is a gutsy and expansive novel, rich with ideas and conceits, but overall it's more optimistic than *Oryx and Crake*. Its characters have a compassion and energy lacking in Jimmy, the wounded and floating lothario at the previous novel's center. Each novel can be enjoyed independently of the other, but what's perhaps most impressive is the degree of connection between them. Together, they form halves of a single epic. Characters

intersect. Plots overlap. Even the tiniest details tessellate into an intricate whole. In the final pages, we catch up with Jimmy once more, as he waits to encounter the strangers. This time around, Atwood commits herself to a dramatic and hopeful denouement that's in keeping with this novel's spirit of redemption. Marcel Theroux's most recent novel, *Far North*, was published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux in June.

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From *The New Yorker*

In her new novel, Atwood returns to the post-apocalyptic mode of her 2003 book, “*Oryx and Crake*,” with the story of two women isolated as a genetically engineered plague destroys mankind. Both women have been members of God’s Gardeners, an eco-cult that has long prophesied retribution for society’s apathy and selfishness, and while they wait for signs of life from the outside they spend their days remembering past loves and not-quite-healed wounds. Atwood’s gallows humor is appealing—one of the women joins the cult in order to escape the abusive manager of a human-meat burger joint—and her complex characterization allows the novel’s environmental, Biblical, and sociological themes to intertwine seamlessly.

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