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Arthur C Clarke award goes to 'elegy for the hyper-globalised present'

Station Eleven by Emily St John Mandel, which follows a troupe of actors across a devastated America, praised by judges for transcending the post-apocalypse genre



'If you write literary fiction that's set partly in the future, you're apparently a sci-fi writer' ... Emily St John Mandel.
Photograph: Ulf Andersen/Getty Images

Guardian staff

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Station Eleven, Emily St John Mandel's haunting tale of a global pandemic that wipes out civilisation, has won this year's [Arthur C Clarke award](#) for science fiction.

The novel interweaves a story set in Year Twenty after the "Georgia Flu" has killed almost all humanity with flashbacks to the final days of civilisation. By focusing on a troupe of travelling actors and musicians bringing Shakespeare to America's isolated survivors in the aftermath of disaster, Mandel explores the power of memory and the human need for art and culture.

Chair of the judges, Andrew M Butler, said: "While many post-apocalypse novels focus on the survival of humanity, Station Eleven focuses instead on the survival of our culture, with the novel becoming an elegy for the hyper-globalised present."

Station Eleven review – Emily St John

Mandel's gripping apocalypse drama

A flu pandemic wipes out 99% of humanity in this much-tipped novel about memory, art and survival, writes **Justine Jordan**

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Praise has been building for the Canadian author's fourth novel, which was [longlisted for the Baileys](#) women's prize in the UK as well as being a [finalist for the National Book Awards](#) in the US. After the NBA announcement, Mandel [told the Washington Post](#) that she has seen her novel categorised as literary fiction, speculative fiction, dystopian fiction and sci-fi. "If you write literary fiction that's set partly in the future, you're apparently a sci-fi writer ... I think of it as being more of a story about what remains after we lose everything and the importance of art in our lives."

The book also found a high-profile fan in George RR Martin, who [backed it for America's top SF prize](#), the Hugos, saying: "One could, I suppose, call it a post-apocalypse novel, and it is that, but all the usual tropes of that sub-genre are missing here ... It's a deeply melancholy novel, but beautifully written, and wonderfully elegiac."

The post-apocalypse genre is well-trodden ground, as Mandel playfully signals early in the novel when she notes that "Jeevan's understanding of disaster preparedness was based entirely on action movies, but on the other hand, he'd seen a lot of action movies." Her travelling actors are SF fans too, borrowing their motto from Star Trek: "Because survival is insufficient."

Award director Tom Hunter told the Guardian: "Diversity in genre is *the* big topic right now. For us diversity means starting with as broad a range of voices and books as possible so we can pick a shortlist that we think really is the best science fiction literature of the year.

"This year, we received over 100 submissions from 36 publishing imprints, our second-highest ever. One of the reasons for this continuing growth is the rise in submissions, and recognition of the award from more mainstream publishing houses – and of course the attraction of science fiction and fantasy stories to an ever-growing fanbase. Publishers know that the barriers between genres are coming down. The Geek Pound will seek out great new books, no matter where they happen to be shelved."

Past winners of the award, which this year comes with a cheque for £2,015, include Margaret Atwood, China Miéville, Neal Stephenson and most recently Ann Leckie. The judging panel was made up of Duncan Lawie and Nicholas Whyte of the British Science Fiction Association, Sarah Brown and Lesley Hall of the Science [Fiction](#) Foundation, and Leila Abu El Hawa from Sci-Fi London film festival.
