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The Book Of The Unnamed Midwife: The Road To Nowhere, Book 1



Synopsis

Philip K. Dick Award Winner for Distinguished Science Fiction When she fell asleep, the world was doomed. When she awoke, it was dead. In the wake of a fever that decimated the earth's population - killing women and children and making childbirth deadly for the mother and infant - the midwife must pick her way through the bones of the world she once knew to find her place in this dangerous new one. Gone are the pillars of civilization. All that remains is power - and the strong who possess it. A few women like her survived, though they are scarce. Even fewer are safe from the clans of men, who, driven by fear, seek to control those remaining. To preserve her freedom, she dons men's clothing, goes by false names, and avoids as many people as possible. But as the world continues to grapple with its terrible circumstances, she'll discover a role greater than chasing a pale imitation of independence. After all, if humanity is to be reborn, someone must be its guide.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book easily makes it into my top-ten, must-read books of science fiction " or even just contemporary fiction. If you're an aficionado of the post-apocalyptic genre, interested in gender, or appreciate Margaret Atwood's chilling dystopian vision in "The Handmaid's Tale", then I highly recommend you give "The Book of the Unnamed Midwife" a try. Here's another comparison: "The Book of the Unnamed Midwife" reads a bit like "The Road", by Cormac McCarthy. If you found the spooky, dark future McCarthy describes to be your cup of tea, then you'll love this one. Be warned, however. There is one major divergence: this story is told in a far less straightforward " or

shall I even say, masculine? "A" manner than McCarthy's. Rather, "The Book of the Unnamed Midwife" is experimental, intuitive, holistic... a tale organized by a dexterous multi-tasker. Suffice it to say, you'll never get bored. You've never read anything like this. That's because Elison plays with the point of view quite a bit. Your expectations will constantly be subverted. Sometimes you're in the head of the Unnamed Midwife. Sometimes you're far in the future, looking back at an almost Biblical origin story. It never ends, never lets you rest. When I first began reading this book, and gradually realized what was going on, I took it as a challenge, something thrilling and new. Elison's games are numerous, daring, expertly done "A" and, just like some of the best literature you've ever read, many of her riddles are never quite resolved. For example, will we ever hear the true name of the Unnamed Midwife? "A" I can't spoil it for you. It's too much fun. Overall, I found this book to be the most rewarding read. The prose is consistently beautiful: often deceptively simple, and then, at times, utterly profound. The narrative races along flawlessly, its pace never faltering, but on occasion, the events of the story left me so stunned and feeling sick at heart that I had to take a moment to just breathe, and digest. Talk about a punch to the gut. This book hit me again and again, leaving me aghast. But what a heroine! I relished her triumphs. Science fiction has taken a very great step forward with this one. I don't even want to call it science fiction. Like "The Handmaid's Tale", it's something more. Allegorical? Prophetic? Whatever else it might be, "The Book of the Unnamed Midwife" is radical! Revolutionary! Just read it!

Meg Ellison's debut novel, *The Book of the Unnamed Midwife*, won the prestigious Philip K. Dick Award and was included among the Publishers Weekly Best Books of the Year, 2016, and Best Books of the Year, 2016. It's another sign that science fiction has come of age, no longer confined to a readers' ghetto. The novel is a powerful feminist story set principally in the US in the near future. An unstoppable "plague" has killed off nearly all the human race but has proven far more lethal for women and children than for men. In the aftermath of the pandemic, a registered nurse-midwife at the University of California-San Francisco (UCSF) has awakened after a weeks-long bout with the illness, only to find that her lover, a physician named Jack, has disappeared and everyone else in the hospital is dead. We never learn the midwife's name: as she staggers through the desolate world, encountering other living human beings only occasionally, she introduces herself under a series of assumed names. "The book" of the title is her diary, a searing account of her feelings and experiences in a world gone mad. A diligent diarist, she incorporates stories from others she meets along the way. Several generations later, the midwife's book represents for at least one community the only full account of the collapse that followed the plague.

In a twist reminiscent of Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the book is treated with reverence by the survivors, who are gradually building a new, matriarchal civilization. The midwife slowly makes her way, partly on foot, partly by car or bicycle, and later by snowmobile, from San Francisco through Northern California, Oregon, Idaho, and Utah. She frequently encounters violent, sex-crazed men who victimize every woman or girl within their reach, typically enslaving them. Much more rarely, she comes across a woman or a helpful man. She survives by plundering abandoned homes, avoiding the rotting corpses of the dead—“and by using the guns and rifles she manages to accumulate from time to time. (Her father had taught her to shoot.) As the months go by, remaining food, fuel, weapons, and ammunition become ever more scarce. From time to time, she joins one or two others and settles down temporarily, but those connections don't last. Later, she comes across a new phenomenon: a "hive" in which a single woman rules over a household of several or even dozens of men, doling out sexual favors at whim. Most of the small towns she visits are abandoned. The midwife chooses to avoid the cities, where greater danger lies. Eventually, after harrowing experiences that force her to kill without compunction, the midwife arrives in a peaceful and thriving community, where she takes up her practice as a nurse and midwife once again. Since the plague struck, no babies have survived birth. In fact, many of their mothers die as well. The midwife has lost hope—but prematurely so. *The Book of the Unnamed Midwife* is a rewarding read, but it's flawed. I found myself wondering who was telling the story. The tale unfolds in a series of excerpts from the midwife's book, interspersed with a third-person narrative. For much of the book, the narrative focuses only on the midwife. Then the narrative's scope widens, first to other people and other parts of the US and later to the entire planet. Perhaps it's irrational of me to expect that a contemporary novel would follow all the dictates of logic. Maybe I'm just too old.

I finished this book two days ago and I still can't stop thinking about this book. The world that Meg Elison created is terrifying. It's stunning how quickly what's left of humanity is scattered and shattered, the fabric of modern society disintegrates and the gloves come off. In this world 98% of the males and even less of the females survive; the idealistic, honorable, and naive do not survive; and most women quickly become property and few manage to escape being victims. Enter our unsung and unnamed midwife, we follow along when she awakens from near death in the middle of what seems to be an extinction type event for mankind. This novel is a tough read. In this world most of the men are violent, vicious, and brutal and the women are either victims or have iron in their souls and they endure. There are seeds of hope and Elison tells us this with the opening of the book. I especially liked how she tidied the one thread concerning Jack—even though reading it was

rather sad. I would recommend this book to most adults. The scenes aren't sugarcoated so I'd use caution in recommending it for a reader under 16.

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