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When a plague wipes out most of humanity, fifteen-year-old Eric sets out to find his father. Sixty years later, Eric starts another long journey in an America that has long since quit resembling our own, but there are shadows everywhere.

Summer of the Apocalypse Details

Date : Published November 1st 2006 by Fairwood Press

ISBN : 9780974657387

Author : James Van Pelt

Format : Paperback 260 pages

Genre : Apocalyptic, Post Apocalyptic, Science Fiction, Fiction, Dystopia

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From Reader Review Summer of the Apocalypse for online ebook

Michael says

Satisfying read about a teenaged boy coming of age in the aftermath of a plague that wipes out 99% of humans. Very realistic on how various sectors would react and not overly dramatic on the horrors. The focus is on the resilience and heart of the boy as the epitome of what is worth preserving. A journey to look for his father is paralleled by another journey of him as an old man 70 years later to seek out books from the University of Colorado library. As civilization reverts to primitive agriculture and hunter-gatherer existence, he is convinced that revival of useful technology is possible and worth pursuing. Unlike his own son, who feels secure in a subsistence living in a small community, his grandson and young friend believe in his vision and accompany him on his dangerous journey. So often those who no longer value the past technological society ask, "Were humans really happy in those Gone Times?" The lead character makes us ponder that question and wonder how far we would go to preserve the good if the infrastructure all but disappears. ?

Kevin Brown says

A pleasant surprise. A much quieter look at post-apocalyptic life than usual; Van Pelt mostly avoids the roving-gangs-of-cannibals and brilliant-few-trying-to-bring-back-technology tropes. Instead, his main character - an old man who also flashes back to his younger self during the breakdown of society - is left questioning if preserving pre-fall knowledge is even worth it.

Schnaucl says

Another book I quite enjoyed. In some ways it reminded me of Cormac McCarthy's The Road in that it was an older man walking with a child (or in this case, children) across a post apocalyptic America. There were some major differences, this apocalypse was caused by plague, not nuclear bombs, and in this book there are actually other people for the characters to interact with and the author doesn't try to be new and exciting by ignoring rules of grammar and never giving the characters names (thank god). I'm glad there are more people, but it would have been nice to have a female play a part in the current part of the story (the book alternates between the current, post-apocalyptic time and the time 60ish years in the past when the plague started). Why does no one write a story about a couple of women walking across post-apocalyptic America?

This book had a lot more to say about the things we would miss if no one was around to run/produce them and I think the picture van Pelt paints of how society might look a few generations after the vast majority (90%) of humanity was wiped out. There would certainly be a faction who would think we should forget higher learning and concentrate on pure survival skills.

The explanation for the illness and stillbirths is an interesting one and makes me want to read World Without Us or watch Life After People again. (The random flying cats still make me laugh).

It was also interesting to see how elders were revered in every society mentioned in the current times. They are the keepers of the tales of the Gone Times. It stands in sharp contrast to how elders are viewed in contemporary America where they are rarely revered for being keepers of the past.

The book also made me think about the role that information would play in post-apocalyptic earth. Eric may scoff at the man who thinks books are some sort of magical totem, but the truth is, Eric basically thinks of them the same way, only he's thinking about the information inside. He clearly feels that the information in the books will raise humanity to a higher level and in that way the books become a sort of magic totem for him as well.

A very interesting book with lots to think about.

Recommended.

Topher says

I detested Cormac McCarthy's The Road. It was bland and boring and not particularly entertaining. I don't mind books that are the mental equivalent of junk food, but something that dresses itself up as LITERATURE and turns out to be hollow just pisses me off. Particularly, when it's in one of my favorite sub-genre's of scifi.

This book is nothing like that.

This book is the first one that made me think that there may not be a happy ending. There was....something revealed...in the last few pages of the book that sounded right to me, that sounded true, and that left me feeling sad. The book pulled back from that, so it has at least a semi-happy ending, but for a few minutes there, late last night, I wondered if I would give up on the entire post-apocalyptic genre entirely. It pointed out something I should have realized, having had more than a few geology courses, that really limits our options should something like that ever come to pass. And that made me wonder what I liked about the genre. I think it is the hope in the midst of tragedy.

Matt Arnold says

excellent book

Really enjoyed this one. A real page turner that pretty much refuses to be put down. The character of Eric is fascinating when you imagine all the events if his life. Very enjoyable read.

AtomicMassUnit says

A passable post-apocalypse book. What I found interesting was that this was the first post-apocalypse story I have read where not enough truly competent people survived to at least start rebuilding civilization. (possible spoiler alert) What disturbed me about this post-apocalypse was that 60+ years down the road, the parts of civilization that were left behind have started to poison the environment and who the people who were left. Things like buried oil and gas tanks finally giving way and seeping into the ground water. Unattended nuclear reactors spewing their poisons. For some reason, the full implications have the environmental poisoning had never occurred to me, or other post-apocalyptic authors (or they have chosen to ignore certain things for the advancement of their plots/stories.) So this is what I found the most intriguing

part of this book.

Rob says

I very much enjoyed reading this book. Eric is a wonderful character and showing him as a boy and an old man really makes this book work for me. Do not expect a great epic story a world collapsing, that is not what the book aims for. Van Pelt describes the apocalypse on a personal level if you will. It's one of the better books I have read this year. *Summer of the Apocalypse* has been on my wishlist for a while. After having read it, I regret not getting it sooner.

[Full Random Comments review](#)

Farseer says

Very competent fall-of-the-civilization novel. It's structured into two parallel stories told in alternating chapters, one during the fall of human civilization due to a devastating epidemic, and another sixty years later, when stories about the civilization seem myths. The main character is the same in both threads: in the first as a teenager and in the second as an old man. Well-written, but I found it a bit depressing and joyless. I still enjoyed it, but I was just not in the right mood for it. It's not the novel's fault, to be fair.

Nadir says

This novel is well written and is more literature at some points than post-apocalyptic "thriller." That said, it has plenty of compelling, action-oriented moments, but it's not bubble-gum like other titles in the genre. The manner in which the book alternates back and forth between the main character as a teen just when pandemic hits to him as a 75-year-old trying to help the living with the knowledge of the "Gone Times" made this almost like two separate but related short stories, told at the same time.

Jim Cunningham says

"That's the way it should be," he said. "Nothing ought to look like a grave."

Apocalypse stories -- at least the good ones -- are more about people than the apocalypse. And this apocalypse story is more about people than most.

I've read quite a few apocalypse tales so far, but never one told from the point of view of a seventy-year-old man, or one told from an angst 15-year-old boy ... let alone BOTH ... and the SAME PERSON at that!

It is an odd tale -- not focused on the usual apocalypse-book stuff at all. And I'm not sure I would have this in the horror category at all -- sci-fi, I guess, and just barely, at that. This one is heavy on the apocalypse philosophy -- if it were to happen, whose feet will future generations lay the blame at, and what happens

next? Do you rebuild in the image of what had been? Or heed the warnings and do things much, much differently? And is reactionary, spiteful, knee-jerk, doing the opposite of what the “gone times” people had done,, productive or self destructive? The questions that lie just beneath the surface of every other apocalypse tale are the forefront of this one.

And this author knows where to touch you -- where the tender spots are. He really knows how to reach inside you and needle at the things that make us squirm ... and I'm not even talking about “horror” stuff or blood-and-guts; I mean the real life stuff ... like having regrets. Like messing up and not being able to take it back. It'll make you put down the book for a bit and wonder about some stupid thing you'd done, and whether it's too late for you, too.

He perfectly captures the feeling of when you wake up from dreaming you're with loved ones who are long dead and gone and you, once again, painfully, have to accept that they're dead and gone, and you mourn them all over again. (But I was JUST with them!) And it's frightening to think that those dreams will still happen to me when I'm seventy.

I regret that this book seems to be something of a one-off; I've looked at the rest of his work and nothing appeals to me. Maybe I'll just read it again someday.

Jim says

Although it is a post-apocalyptic story of a man searching for books sixty years after the plague nearly wipes out mankind, to me it is more about the survival of knowledge and coming to understand the love and bonds of family (especially father-son relationships). Told in two timelines (one that of a fifteen-year old boy struggling to survive, and finding his love; the other, a seventy-five year old man trying to convince his son and others of the importance of books and technology). I enjoyed the story, although at times it felt as if it had been written in the 1980s.

Patrick D'Orazio says

ordered this book based on Amazon connecting the dots: I like apocalyptic fiction and this book obviously qualifies, so they recommended it to me. Often I prefer a darker vision than the author had here, but the author's vision of the future did not disappoint. I was very glad I took a chance on this one.

You know the story if you have read the description above and the other reviews. We are introduced to Eric, both the boy and the man, who has experienced two book end journeys through the apocalypse as a boy of fifteen and a elderly man of seventy five and we are told the story of both in alternating chapters. But as Amy, a previous reviewer, mentioned this is a book about fathers and sons and the relationships that define them as much as it is about the breakdown of society and one man's journey through it. Through Eric's eyes we see the generational differences and similarities that both seperate and bind.

Eric as a teen tries to come to grips with both the world falling apart at the seams and a father who he does not completely understand. A father who is at the same time both distant and somewhat cold and yet caring and warm in his own way. Eric as a seventy five year old man is trying to come to grips with a world that is resistant to discovering ways of rebuilding and a son who he feels has never understood him and who,

perhaps, he might have failed as a child. There is hidden resentments, failed gestures, and yet a profound understanding, in the end, that what binds them all together is a love that is deep and overshadows everything else.

A good storyteller not only plunges you into a story with compelling elements and a good plot but lets you identify, on some level, with his or her characters. In this, James Van Pelt has done a terrific job, fashioning an apocalyptic vision that felt real and logical, with elements that made it feel almost profound. He has also given us characters that, for me, were identifiable and totally human. Inside of each of us, as we grow older, is both the child that we once were and the man or woman we have become, so even though we have here a man at two very different times in his life we can see that he is the same person in both instances.

This story resonates for me because Eric's quest to resurrect the old technologies is inextricably tied in with his relationships with his father, son, and grandson. A father who represents the old world and all the good it meant to him and a son who rejects not only the old tech but what it means to his father. The author deftly ties everything together and brings it to a very satisfactory conclusion. Elements of my own relationships with my father and son made this story even more potent and touching to me.

I highly recommend this book.

Giulio says

One of the best post-apocalyptic novels I have ever read. Accurate, believable, somber and adventurous at the same time. I loved the dual time-line and the focus on the generation of people born after the plague. Brilliant

Eric Shaffer says

James Van Pelt's Summer of the Apocalypse is a compelling read. Unlike some of the reviewers here, I found the dual timelines not only refreshing--since I tend to tire of unceasingly long linear plots--but I also found they were masterfully constructed to comment on each other. One chapter might end just as the same topic is raised in the next, or one might provide the answer to a question just posed in the other, or the outcome of a situation in one affects the action in the other. I believe that this is hard to do, and I admire the author's skill with plotting.

I love post-apocalypse SF for many of the same reasons mentioned by other reviewers here, but I am usually disappointed at the relentlessly human-focused tales. Yes, I know that fiction is about people, and people are the only readers of fiction, but it seems very clear to me that one exceptionally and glaringly obvious fact of a post-apocalyptic world is constantly overlooked by writers: IF we posit that 90 to 99 percent of the world's human population is absent from the planet, THEN the story must be shifted to focus a bit more on how the planet and remaining flora and fauna respond to the lack of humans.

In other words, the "life after people" books and films and documentaries that abound lately are a welcome respite for me from those works that only focus on valiant survivors, crumbling masonry, caches of canned goods, and newer, crazier, smaller tin gods with automatic weapons and the same idiotic ideas about controlling people.

That said, here are some wonders that make Van Pelt's Summer of the Apocalypse exceptional:

- 1) Van Pelt focuses on the shape of the landscape after our passing, the fires, the floods, the vandalism of sulky dying humans, the horrible deaths and frantic adaptations of domestic animals, the weird weather. He focuses on a local landscape, and that electrifies the fiction with verisimilitude. If you've lived in Colorado, or if you can read a map, the travels of Eric, Rabbit, and Dodge are utterly traceable. You could take that walk yourself today--if you weren't arrested for trespassing every quarter of a mile. So that's wonder one: landscape becomes a major character because without the technology that allows us to ignore where we are (by focusing on where we WANT to be), where we are absolutely determines WHO we are and WHAT HAPPENS to us. This point is foregrounded, as it should be.
- 2) Unlike most science fiction writers, who, as much as I love them, are focused nearly exclusively on the future, technology, outer space, and inventions that are fascinating but ludicrous, James Van Pelt knows the planet, this planet. You may recall that we are but one species among many, but James Van Pelt KNOWS the species that are around us, understands their actual behavior and depicts that. In fact, his knowledge of the environment makes both possible and beautifully plausible the closing moment of the book, which if readers have the good sense to notice it, reveals the true and permanent shift that humans in a post-apocalyptic world must make not only to survive but to well and truly live on an Earth we will no longer be able to pretend that we rule. To prepare for that moment, I recommend that readers take a long walk in a grassy field and learn what the song of a meadowlark actually SOUNDS like. It will make your experience of the novel's closing infinitely richer. Wonder two: Van Pelt knows where he is and applies that knowledge in a tale that is made better by that knowledge.
- 3) Eric, the main character, is truly a representative of the American culture as it stands today. He knows nothing of what civilization actually is or means until he's lost it (and even then, he remains mistaken about much of its value), and he has a talismanic attraction to books, as if they are the source of knowledge. Van Pelt reveals to us through Eric that books are not the source of knowledge, and that is a very useful lesson for most of us, especially when we're reading science fiction. Knowledge, as far as I can tell, is experience refined with careful reflection and continued experimentation. Mellowed with age, knowledge can even become wisdom, but just knowing facts and information is not enough, and Van Pelt allows that idea to shine through his fiction. New situations require new knowledge. Wonder three: this novel does not propose the "same old, same old."
- 4) Simple post-apocalyptic fiction that assumes that all we need is to get our machines up and running again is just disappointing. As with revolutionaries who believe that things will be much better once THEY are in control, there are too many people who believe the world would be a much better place if 99% of all the OTHER people were just gone. The machines are not the point, and Van Pelt reveals that. Eric stumbles on his realization mainly because the author knows the planet so well. The first lesson of humans who live in a place is that we must start where we are. Van Pelt brings this lesson home to Eric and his readers. In a "new" post-apocalyptic world, the machines left behind will not be that useful. If the survivors develop new machines, so be it, but those machines will be necessary to living in the place where the inhabitants are. Wonder four: the machines that make us what we are today will not make us what we are tomorrow.
- 5) Simple post-apocalyptic fiction simply assumes that humans will survive and will go on to raise civilization again. Van Pelt makes it clear that that possibility is a small one and suggests that, very delicately. Species that suffer a catastrophic environmental event rarely completely recover. Most die out immediately; others stagger on for decades or centuries; some very few mutate to find or fit new niches. I admire Van Pelt's novel for applying the scientific likelihood, as repellent as that outcome might be to his all-too-human readers (this is, after all, SCIENCE fiction), instead of the unlikely literary and reassuring

childhood conceit of “. . . and they lived happily ever after.” Wonder five: a world without humans is a very distinct and statistical likelihood, in spite of our naive, self-centered optimism. After all, if I recall correctly, sharks, cockroaches, and opossums (imagine that!) have been around for three hundred million years; humans (in an arguably recognizable form) have been around from 500,000 (for perspective, that’s half a million) to 40,000 (that’s less than a twentieth of a million) years. Another sobering fact is that nearly all of the species ever resident on Earth are extinct now. Since I come to science fiction to experience wonder, it’s nice to see truths so fundamental and deep acknowledged.

Clearly, this novel made me think, and that is the main reason I read science fiction. I recommend you read *Summer of the Apocalypse* for that reason. Contrary the escapes we seek and the work we avoid, this novel will make you think. That’s probably good for all of us.

Rob says

I enjoyed this book very much, The end of the world could happen any time now and it is great to pick up some great ideas if you happen to be one of the .00005 percent that survives, after all unless you happen to have already checked out your survival books from the library you may not have much time to read them during the end. Seems like a safe tip is, don't go in front of the loud end of guns, or continue to honk your horn in a traffic jam that is being shot up. This was a good read .
