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The Stand



Synopsis

This is the way the world ends: with a nanosecond of computer error in a Defense Department laboratory and a million casual contacts that form the links in a chain letter of death. And here is the bleak new world of the day after: a world stripped of its institutions and emptied of 99 percent of its people. A world in which a handful of panicky survivors choose sides - or are chosen. A world in which good rides on the frail shoulders of the 108-year-old Mother Abigail - and the worst nightmares of evil are embodied in a man with a lethal smile and unspeakable powers: Randall Flagg, the dark man. In 1978 Stephen King published *The Stand*, the novel that is now considered to be one of his finest works. But as it was first published, *The Stand* was incomplete, since more than 150,000 words had been cut from the original manuscript. Now Stephen King's apocalyptic vision of a world blasted by plague and embroiled in an elemental struggle between good and evil has been restored to its entirety. *The Stand: The Complete and Uncut Edition* includes more than 500 pages of material previously deleted, along with new material that King added as he reworked the manuscript for a new generation. It gives us new characters and endows familiar ones with new depths. It has a new beginning and a new ending. What emerges is a gripping work with the scope and moral complexity of a true epic. For hundreds of thousands of fans who read or listened to *The Stand* in its original version and wanted more, this new edition is Stephen King's gift. And those who are hearing *The Stand* for the first time will discover a triumphant and eerily plausible work of the imagination that takes on the issues that will determine our survival.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Before I get to the meat of my review, I feel I should provide a little bit of perspective. First, I am not a die-hard Stephen King fan. In fact, aside from "The Stand", I have only read collections of his short stories, so I can assure you my review isn't the rabid defense of an overly loyal admirer. Second, I am not a fan of horror and I wouldn't classify "The Stand" as such. Finally, I am a big fan of the "apocalyptic fiction" genre, and I believe I have a pretty good basis for my evaluation of this novel. That said, "The Stand" is an incredible novel; perhaps one of the best I have ever read, by any author or in any genre. The story is predicated on the accidental release of a "super-flu" that wipes out 99% of the humans on the planet. The survivors find themselves drawn into a battle between good and evil that will determine the future of the entire planet. As one might expect, a novel with such an ambitious plot and of such prodigious length touches upon numerous themes. In order to simplify my review, I am going to break down the novel's strengths into the following categories, and then consider them one at a time: world-building, plot, characters and themes. First is world-building. In most apocalyptic fiction, one (if not both) of two things will be true: 1. The characters stay in one place or 2. The action picks up after the disaster. An example of the first is "Earth Abides" and of the latter "On the Beach". There's nothing wrong with either plot device, but in "The Stand" King injects a remarkable level of detail into his novel by covering the super-flu from start to finish. The novel starts at the very beginning of the outbreak, and many key plot lines are developed before the epidemic ever rears its head. King charts the breakdown and eventual destruction of civilization, and then offers a short, but remarkable, picture of the survivors in the immediate days after the flu has run its course. He makes the subtle observation that many survivors would die in a second wave of suicides, accidents and depression that would weed out many of those unequipped for an empty world. Finally, as the story progresses, King makes remarkable (but not overbearing) predictions about how nature would reshape the U.S. in the absence of man. Second to consider is the plot. As I alluded to earlier, King has used the emptied United States as a battleground between good and evil. Soon after the flu has run its course, the survivors begin having dreams about an old woman (Mother Abigail) who seems to be marshalling the forces of good, and a malign presence (Randall Flagg) who is gathering those who would serve him and his ends. Insofar as the reader knows, the choice is clear-cut, irrevocable and mandatory. It is very much a "are you with us or against us" type of situation. That said, much of the book is devoted to the characters traveling across country to Boulder or Las Vegas (guess which side is where), no mean feat in a world without mass transit, hotels, etc. In fact, King's writing is so effective, the novel would be fascinating if the characters did nothing but travel around and attempt

to reestablish society. The second, metaphysical, layer just makes it all the more interesting. Thirdly, we have the characters to consider; I'll won't name names or speak in specifics to avoid ruining the plot, but there are a few general points worth mentioning. To start, the cast of characters in "The Stand" rivals that of "Lord of the Rings", and King handles it every bit as well as Tolkien. One might expect that a novel with a story this complex would skimp on character development, but the opposite is actually true. King took a huge idea (good vs. evil) and reduced it to a human element that the reader could digest. His characters show an incredible range of emotion, and even their flaws serve to enhance the reader's view of them. They struggle and fail and are rarely sure of themselves, in other words, they are human. As such, their actions take on a level of realism that is astonishing. Finally, we come to the themes of the book. The way I see it there are three: the dualistic nature of good and evil, redemption and hope. The first is the most obvious, King correctly points out that good cannot be appreciated or striven for in the absence of bad. We can strive to limit the effects of evil, but it will never be overcome, as King sees greed and hate as intrinsic to the human condition in general, and civilization specifically. The second theme, of redemption, is subtler and offsets the first. King does not paint anyone as irretrievably lost, and along the same lines, he considers how good intentions are frequently misdirected through ignorance and fear. King seems to believe that given the opportunity and support, anyone can salvage their lives. Which brings us to the final theme of hope. As the novel ends, the reader knows that evil has not been vanquished, but also that it can never triumph because within its very nature are the seeds of its destruction. Over time, evil empires have gained power because they have torn down their enemies (see Nazi Germany), but as the saying goes, live by the sword, die by the sword. There is always hope, because evil cannot win. There are so many other points to touch on, I could write indefinitely, but what it all comes down to is this: if you're looking for a novel that will entertain you even as it makes you think, "The Stand" is for you. Enjoy!

The Stand, in my opinion, marks Stephen King's progression from horror to literature. Consistently voted fans' favorite King novel ever since its initial publication in 1978 (although I personally consider the novel to be his finest work), The Stand delivers an archetypal conflict pitting good against evil against a backdrop of civilization itself. In this extraordinary novel, King fully unleashes the horrors previously contained in the microcosms of an extraordinary person (Carrie), a single town ('Salem's Lot), and a haunted hotel far removed from civilization (The Shining). This is how the world ends: with a human-engineered superflu which escapes containment in the form of a terrified guard who unwittingly spreads death over a wide swath of southwestern America in his bid to escape

infection. Captain Trips, they call it - until they die, and people die in droves within a matter of days. In almost no time at all, well over 99% of the American population have suffered an agonizing death. Those that are left all alone begin to dream: comforting visions of an ancient black lady called Mother Abigail in Nebraska rising up alongside nightmares of a faceless man out west. Many find their way to Las Vegas to serve under Randall Flag, the Walking Dude of their night visions, but many others flock to Mother Abigail in Nebraska and eventually Boulder, Colorado. As the citizens of the Boulder Free Zone attempt to reform society and make a new life for themselves, they are forced to come to terms with the fact that they are caught up in a struggle defined by their spiritual leader in religious terms. They must destroy Flagg or be destroyed by him - in a word, they must make their stand. I could not begin to describe the dozens of richly drawn characters King gives life to in these pages. They are ordinary people called to do extraordinary things in a world reeking of death and fear. Some are not up to the challenge, and betrayal has awful consequences in this new reality - to the betrayer as well as the betrayed. These are real human beings, flaws and all; there is good to be found even among those serving the greatest of evils, and at the same time, the good guys don't always behave in ways you think they should. Nick Andros, Nadine Cross, Larry Underwood, Glen Bateman, Stu Redman, Harold Lauder, Mother Abigail, Tom Cullen, Randall Flagg, Trash Can Man - these are characters you will never forget. I must admit the climax of the great struggle just doesn't seem to be all it might be, but the first 1000 pages of this novel are so good that even Stephen King could hardly be expected to top what he had already accomplished in the framing of this ultimate conflict. I find it slightly odd that religion plays such a small part in this visionary apocalypse. As far as Mother Abigail and, eventually, the novel's heroes are concerned, this is a religious fight between the imps of Satan and the servants of God, but you won't find any theology apart from a few misplaced references to Revelations by frightened characters, and no preacher of any faith seems to have survived the superflu outbreak itself. I wouldn't call this a scary novel, but it certainly does have its moments - best exemplified by one character's journey through a dark tunnel surrounded by invisible but very dead and decaying bodies caught in an eternal traffic jam. The real horror, of course, is the all-pervasive atmosphere of a world decimated by man's self-imposed destruction. Death is literally everywhere these characters turn - in the silent houses and cars all around them, in the streets upon which they travel, in the terrifying nightmares they have of the Walking Dude, and even in the future they try to avoid thinking about, as no one knows whether the superflu will kill the children yet to be born. I found the sections dealing with the reconstitution of a society of some sort to be the most interesting aspect of the novel - will it be like the old society, will it repeat the mistakes of the last one, etc. This is also a story of personal

redemption, as the novels' heroes must overcome their pasts and/or their human weaknesses and handicaps in order to make their stand. When the deaf-mute Nick tells Mother Abigail that he does not believe in God, she tells him that it doesn't matter because God believes in him - that is a truly empowering message. There is an intriguing philosophical undercurrent to this novel that applies both eloquently and meaningfully to the human condition. The Stand is modern literature, a direct descendant of such epics as The Iliad and The Odyssey, and you will learn something about yourself when you read this masterpiece of contemporary literature.

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