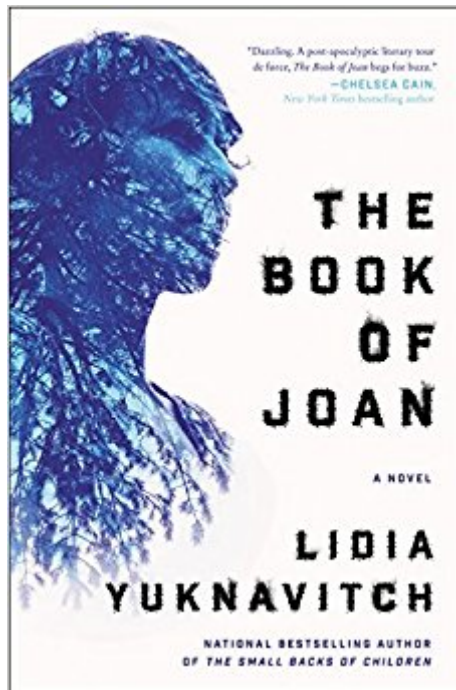




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The Book Of Joan: A Novel



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—*Jeff VanderMeer*, New York Times Book Review (cover review)
"Stunning. . . . Yuknavitch understands that our collective narrative can either destroy or redeem us, and the outcome depends not just on who's telling it, but also on who's listening."
—*O, The Oprah Magazine*
"[A] searing fusion of literary fiction and reimagined history and science-fiction thriller and eco-fantasy. . . . Yuknavitch is a bold and ecstatic writer."
—*NPR Books*
"[*The Book of Joan*] offers a wealth of pathos, with plenty of resonant excruciations and some disturbing meditations on humanity's place in creation . . . [It] concludes in a bold and satisfying apotheosis like some legend out of *The Golden Bough* and reaffirms that even amid utter devastation and ruin, hope can still blossom."
—*Washington Post*
The bestselling author of *The Small Backs of Children* offers a vision of our near-extinction and a heroine—a reimagined Joan of Arc—poised to save a world ravaged by war, violence, and greed, and forever change history, in this provocative new novel. In the near future, world wars have transformed the earth into a battleground. Fleeing the unending violence and the planet's now-radioactive surface, humans have regrouped to a mysterious platform known as CIEL, hovering over their erstwhile home. The changed world has turned evolution on its head: the surviving humans have become sexless, hairless, pale-white creatures floating in isolation, inscribing stories upon their skin. Out of the ranks of the endless wars rises Jean de Men, a charismatic and bloodthirsty cult leader who turns CIEL into a quasi-corporate police state. A group of rebels unite to dismantle his iron rule—galvanized by the heroic song of Joan, a child-warrior who possesses a mysterious force that lives within her and communes with the earth. When de Men and his armies turn Joan into a martyr, the consequences are astonishing. And no one—not the rebels, Jean de Men, or even Joan herself—can foresee the way her story and unique gift will forge the destiny of an

entire world for generations. A riveting tale of destruction and love found in the direst of places—•even at the extreme end of post-human experience—•Lidia Yuknavitch—•s The Book of Joan raises questions about what it means to be human, the fluidity of sex and gender, and the role of art as a means for survival.

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Customer Reviews

“In this brilliant and incendiary new novel, mixing realism and fabulism, Earth, circa 2049, has been devastated by global warming and war; the wealthy live on a suborbital complex ruled by a billionaire celebrity turned dictator.” (New York Times Book Review, Editor’s Choice) “Stunning.... Yuknavitch understands that our collective narrative can either destroy or redeem us, and the outcome depends not just on who’s telling it, but also on who’s listening.” (O, The Oprah Magazine) “[A] searing fusion of literary fiction and reimagined history and science-fiction thriller and eco-fantasy...Yuknavitch is a bold and ecstatic writer, wallowing in sex and filth and decay and violence and nature and love with equal relish.” (NPR Books) “This ambitious novel encompasses a wide canvas to spin a captivating commentary on the hubris of humanity. An interesting blend of posthuman literary body politics and paranormal ecological transmutation; highly recommended.” (Library Journal, starred review) “Lidia Yuknavitch is skilled at writing poetically about the human body, and about nature, so this book—her first foray into science fiction—makes sense. It’s a retelling of the story of Joan of Arc, but in a world ravaged by radiation, and with few land-based survivors.” (Huffington Post, 17 Spine-Tingling New Books for Fans of

Dystopia)“Joan [of Arc] offers herself as the perfect figure for Yuknavitch’s new novel. Translated into a dystopian future, this New Joan of Dirt serves as emblem for all the stalwart commoners in whose crushing defeat lies a kind of inviolate spiritual victory. . . . [The Book of Joan] offers a wealth of pathos, with plenty of resonant excruciations and some disturbing meditations on humanity’s place in creation . . . [It] concludes in a bold and satisfying apotheosis like some legend out of The Golden Bough and reaffirms that even amid utter devastation and ruin, hope can still blossom.” (Washington Post)“While delivering an entirely new world and also putting forth a powerful treatise on the way we live now, The Book of Joan is one of those dystopian novels that you can’t help thinking might be too eerily real to be just fiction.” (Newsweek)“While delivering an entirely new world and also putting forth a powerful treatise on the way we live now, The Book of Joan is one of those dystopian novels that you can’t help thinking might be too eerily real to be just fiction.” (USA Today, Best New Book Releases of April 18)“In a new kind of world, we need a new kind of hero and a reimagined Joan of Arc from Yuknavitch seems like just the thing.” (The Millions, Most Anticipated Books for April)“The Book of Joan is ferocious and indelible, grappling with what it means to love in the midst of violence; and how we transform fury, agony, and history into art. It is huge in its scope, moving seamlessly, quantumly, between dirt and cosmos, and through the wormholes of nonlinear time.” (Electric Literature)“Breathtaking, embattled, and consuming. Startling and badass. Subversive. Eviscerating. Terrifying and hopeful...Written in the tradition of all great science fiction, The Book of Joan reminds readers of the profound power even one lone voice can have in inspiring a revolution, influencing freedom and justice for generations to come.” (Bustle)“Yuknavitch has emerged as a trailblazing literary voice that spans genres and dives deep into themes of gender, sexuality, art, violence, and transcendence.” (Suleika Jaouad, Lenny Letter)“A dystopian story of power that questions what it means to be human.” (Real Simple)“The heart-stopping climax will surprise readers of this dystopian tale that ponders the meanings of gender, sex, love, and life.” (Booklist)“A sci-fi, dystopic retelling of the Joan of Arc story, Yuknavitch’s latest feels particularly essential at this moment in history. But then, every time we read something by the immensely talented Yuknavitch, it feels particularly essential.” (Nylon Magazine)“Riveting, ravishing, and crazy deep, The Book of Joan is as ferociously intelligent as it is heart-wrenchingly humane, as generous as it is relentless, as irresistible as it is important. In other words, it’s classic Lidia Yuknavitch: genius.” (Cheryl Strayed, New York Times bestselling author of Wild)“Lidia Yuknavitch is a writer

who, with each ever more triumphant book, creates a new language with which she writes the audacious stories only she can tell. The Book of Joan is a raucous celebration, a searing condemnation, and fiercely imaginative retelling of Joan of Arc's transcendent life. (Roxane Gay, New York Times bestselling author of Bad Feminist and An Untamed State)

"Reading The Book of Joan is a meditation on art and sex and war. My brain is full-bloomed. Get ready, it's glorious. (Amber Tamblyn, author of Dark Sparkler)

"Dazzling. A post-apocalyptic literary tour de force, The Book of Joan begs for buzz. There is so much here that is transgressive and badass and nifty and transformational. Here is a Katniss Everdeen for grown-ups. (Chelsea Cain, New York Times bestselling author of Let Me Go, Kill You Twice and The Night Season)

"Lidia Yuknavitch's The Book of Joan inscribes whatever blank canvasses it finds-space, skin, alabaster hallways, holding cells called Liberty Rooms-to tell the story of the vital and violent Joan. As with Dora, the price for entry into Yuknavitch's world is corporeal. Her narrators demand we shed all fear of the body and step into a new literary nakedness. The Book of Joan is graffiti in white ink. It is where experimentalism meets the dirty earth and gets saved. (Vanessa Veselka, author of Zazen)

"Lidia Yuknavitch's new book has left me throttled and close to speechless. Speculative doesn't begin to describe this sexy, imaginative and thoroughly original work. Atwood, LeGuin and Lessing come to mind, but Yuknavitch's sensibility, which includes her casual ability to completely blow your mind, is all her own. (Karen Karbo, New York Times bestselling author of Julia Child Rules and How Georgia Became O'Keeffe)

In the near future, world wars have transformed the earth into a battleground. Fleeing the unending violence and the planet's now-radioactive surface, humans have regrouped to a mysterious platform known as CIEL, hovering over their erstwhile home. The changed world has turned evolution on its head: the surviving humans have become sexless, hairless, pale-white creatures floating in isolation, inscribing stories upon their skin. Out of the ranks of the endless wars rises Jean de Men, a charismatic and bloodthirsty cult leader who turns CIEL into a quasi-corporate police state. A group of rebels unites to dismantle his iron rule galvanized by the heroic song of Joan, a child-warrior who possesses a mysterious force that lives within her and communes with the earth. When de Men and his armies turn Joan into a martyr, the consequences are astonishing. And no one—not the rebels, Jean de Men, nor even Joan herself—can foresee the way her story and unique gift will forge the destiny of an entire world for generations. A riveting tale of destruction and love found in the direst of places—even at the extreme end of

post-human experience – the extraordinarily gifted Lidia Yuknavitch has written a fierce heroine like no other. *The Book of Joan* is an explosive work of fiction that considers what it means to be human, the fluidity of sex and gender, and the urgency of art as a means for survival.

Much of my reading lately has been working against my expectations, sometimes in a good way and sometimes not. As a general rule, I love post-apocalyptic novels. My last few forays in the genre, however, have been disappointments. Unfortunately, I have to add *The Book of Joan* to that list. It must be said that much of this may be laid to a matter of taste. In particular, I tend to enjoy hard science fiction. In general, I like to see the connection between this world and that of the novel. I want to see how we got from here to there. Ms. Yuknavitch's novel (much like Jeff Vandermeer's *Bourne*, which also didn't do much for me) is more fantasy overlaid with the trappings of science fiction. It is rare for me to be able to get on board with this situation unless I really connect to the world-creation, which I didn't in this case. The setting of the CIEL platform hovering above a ravaged Earth siphoning off any remaining resources via skylines to the surface is excellent. The plot as a riff on the Joan of Arc story is a good one. What didn't work for me were the characters. I found it very difficult to connect to the impossible occupants of CIEL – neuter & white, disfiguring themselves with skin grafts and tattoos. The only "real" humans left are the wanderers on the surface but we only truly get to know Joan and her friend, Leone, and Joan with her essentially magical powers is as much a cipher as her companion who we don't get to know well enough to understand why Joan loves her so much. I know enough to understand that some people may find this setting and these characters very appealing. For some readers, the themes of a ravaged earth and its destroyers and saviors may be enough. I, however, am looking for something different.

The Book of Joan by Lidia Yuknavitch is a highly recommended literary post-apocalyptic reimagined Joan of Arc story. It is 2049. The Earth is a burned-out, lifeless husk due to world wars, global geological catastrophes, and solar flares. Wealthy humans, or what they have evolved into, are living on CIEL, a suborbital complex hovering above the Earth. Humans are currently all sexless, hairless, and completely white. Christine Pizan, 49, remembers life on earth before CIEL, but now she resembles the other inhabitants. The residents of CIEL are not allowed to live past age 50, to save resources. They also practice body modification and cover themselves in scars and skin grafts. Christine specializes in skin stories, an electrosurgical branding of words on skin grafts. On

her body, Christine is telling the story of Joan of Dark, a child and echo-terrorist who had a mysterious power and communicated directly with the Earth. When Christine dies, Joan's story, as branded/written on her skin, will continue. Joan fought against Jean de Men for the Earth. He is a charismatic and bloodthirsty cult leader who waged war against Joan and currently rules CIEL as a quasi-corporate police state. De Men turned Joan into a martyr, putting her execution on display - but her story is not over. Christine is planning a rebellion with others to seize control from de Men and she also learns that Joan is still alive on Earth. She is also hoping she can save her beloved friend, Trinculo. This speculative fiction novel is told in three books, the first narrative is through Christine's point-of-view, the second is Joan's story, and the third concludes the story. The writing is incredible - literary, poetic. Yuknavitch is a wordsmith who delights in language and the passion and horror words can communicate. The Book of Joan is firmly a feminist point-of-view and confronts the questions of sexuality, love, and the fluidity of genders, along with the need to rebel against tyrannical leaders with no compassion or humanity. It begs the question: What does it mean to be human? To love? I delighted in some of the wording Yuknavitch used in The Book of Joan. While the poetic, literary, and lyrical wording was extraordinary, and is its own literary achievement, the actual plot needed a little bit of clarification, additional explanation, more story. No one will question the quality of the writing; it is the context that became perplexing at times. In some ways this novel is almost too ambitious for the goals set before it. In the end I took great delight in the writing but felt dissatisfied by the actual flow of the narrative. While the characters are developed and there is change and growth, the notion of character development doesn't seem to directly apply to The Book of Joan - except for Joan. The Book of Joan is highly recommended, but for a specific audience. If you like literary novels with a science fiction setting and take delight in words and their usage, it's a good choice. If you like a good epic, post-apocalyptic science fiction story, you might feel let down by the lack of a fluid, well-appointed plot. Disclosure: My review copy was courtesy of HarperCollins.

Second of all, be forewarned: contrary to what seems to have puzzled many previous reviewers, this is NOT the sequel to *Romancing the Stone: The Ride: The Book*. Believe me, it may seem to be dropping subtle hints to this effect, attempting to trick you into thinking that at any moment the whole thing might slip off in that general direction like a monstrous slide of muddy water. But, and I do mean but, make sure to pay close attention: there are definite signs that unmistakably make the story not a follow-up to this very sequel. And firstly, we're not even dealing with the same Joan here; while Ms. Wilder is clearly more apt to being a rather-marooned American traveler busy trying to not get shot at by Michael Douglas, the Joan Of This Book is quite somewhat of a different animal.

altogether. More like a female remake of the male version of a female Tom Cruise. But taller. And if that isn't enough to set things apart to an excruciatingly obvious degree, just wait until the end. You'll easily be as pleased as Zolo right before the alligator bites off his hand.

If you are looking for a superb piece of fiction with a multitude of lines and layers giving it a literary feel and intriguing prognostication about our current political landscape, this book is for you! If you want smart and intentional word choices and unimaginable story twists that rely on the readers intelligence and willingness to suspend disbelief for the point of the story, this book is for you. If you want a feminist's deconstruction on what it means to inhabit a body whose primary purpose is commodification, this book is definitely for you. If you are looking for comic book plot points or an action packed mindless romp, you might want to look elsewhere. And that's really ok.

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