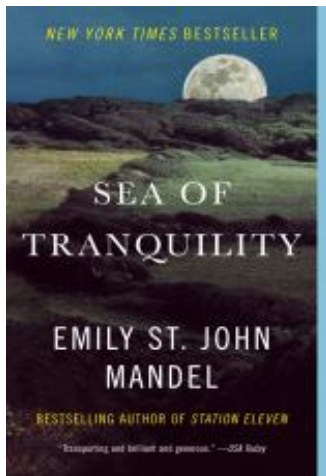


Sea of Tranquility

by Emily St. John Mandel



About the Book

The award-winning, bestselling author of *STATION ELEVEN* and *THE GLASS HOTEL* returns with a novel of art, time, love and plague that takes the reader from Vancouver Island in 1912 to a dark colony on the moon 500 years later, unfurling a story of humanity across centuries and space.

Edwin St. Andrew is 18 years old when he crosses the Atlantic by steamship, exiled from polite society following an ill-conceived diatribe at a dinner party. He enters the forest, spellbound by the beauty of the Canadian wilderness, and suddenly hears the notes of a violin echoing in an airship terminal --- an experience that shocks him to his core.

Two centuries later, a famous writer named Olive Llewellyn is on a book tour. She's traveling all over Earth, but her home is the second moon colony, a place of white stone, spired towers and artificial beauty. Within the text of Olive's bestselling pandemic novel lies a strange passage: a man plays his violin for change in the echoing corridor of an airship terminal as the trees of a forest rise around him.

When Gaspary-Jacques Roberts, a detective in the black-skied Night City, is hired to investigate an anomaly in the North American wilderness, he uncovers a series of lives upended: the exiled son of an earl driven to madness, a writer trapped far from home as a pandemic ravages Earth, and a childhood friend from the Night City who, like Gaspary himself, has glimpsed the chance to do something extraordinary that will disrupt the timeline of the universe.

A virtuoso performance that is as human and tender as it is intellectually playful, *SEA OF TRANQUILITY* is a novel of time travel and metaphysics that precisely captures the reality of our current moment.

Discussion Guide

1. What are some of the defining characteristics of society in each of the different time periods/centuries during which

the novel takes place? What about how people live, work and interact stays the same over time in this depiction of our future, and what changes?

2. Did you identify most with any of the main characters in the novel --- Edwin, Mirella, Gaspéry or Olive? What about their story resonated with you?

3. Does the novel offer a clear explanation with regards to Vincent's role in making the video clip from the forest?

4. If you were in Gaspéry's shoes, would you have changed the past to save Olive and help Edwin? How do you think he felt about the consequences of his decisions? Did you think he did the right thing, despite the agreements of his training?

5. If you were in Olive's shoes, would you have gone back home at Gaspéry's warning? What suffering and gratitude did she feel from having changed her fate?

6. Between Olive's book *Marienbad* and the violin video, which piece of art holds more of the story together? How does the prescience of one and the ambiguity of the other affect those who encounter the pieces?

7. In one of her lectures, Olive posits an alternative to the egotistic fear of our own demise: "What if it always *is* the end of the world?" (p. 190). In what ways does the book reaffirm that idea, especially through the ability to interfere with time?

8. How do the characters who live on the moon colonies feel about Earth? And what role does the moon play for those on Earth, especially Gaspéry? How are the two "homes" for humans oppressive and/or abundant?

9. After returning from war, Edwin notes about his mother: "It wasn't her fault that the world she'd grown up in had ceased to exist" (p. 218). For which other characters is this true?

10. In what ways do colonization and its many variations stretch their influence through time in the novel? Is one form seen as more righteous or justified than others in different periods?

11. Have you ever had a feeling of being "transported" in time, or an out-of-body/déjà vu experience? How do the novel's descriptions of such moments --- the flashes of light, the auras of sound, etc. --- line up with your own memories or feelings?

12. The sections of the book set in the future depict a world of simulation that is being talked about more in real-life scientific and philosophical circles. How does this novel's depiction of a possibly simulated world align with your imagination of it? What do you make of the idea that "A life lived in a simulation is still a life" (p. 246)? Would you change anything about your life now if you knew it wasn't "real"?

13. Edwin's brother's friend, Thomas, offers a view of the world where mankind is meant to tame nature for the sake of civilization. How does that viewpoint play out in the novel?

14. Discuss the overlaps among religion, spirituality, the supernatural and science in this novel. How do the characters

navigate those distinctions?

15. What do all of the encounters with the video clip and violin have in common? What does that snippet of art do for the people who receive it, even without seeking it?

16. Both Emily St. John Mandel's novel STATION ELEVEN and this novel deal with a global pandemic. In what ways do the two pandemics differ? In what ways are they similar? How do you think Mandel's writing was affected by actually living through a global pandemic?

Author Bio

Emily St. John Mandel's five previous novels include THE GLASS HOTEL and STATION ELEVEN, which was a finalist for a National Book Award and the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, has been translated into 35 languages, and is the basis for the HBO Max series by the same name. She lives in New York City with her husband and daughter.

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