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The times and species have been changing at a rapid rate, and the social compact is wearing as thin as environmental stability. Adam One, the kindly leader of the God's Gardeners_a religion devoted to the melding of science and religion, as well as the preservation of all plant and animal life_has long predicted a natural disaster that will alter Earth as we know it. Now it has occurred, obliterating most human life. Two women have survived: Ren, a young trapeze dancer locked inside the high-end sex club Scales and Tails, and Toby, a God's Gardener barricaded inside a luxurious spa where many of the treatments are edible.

Have others survived? Ren's bioartist friend Amanda? Zeb, her eco-fighter stepfather? Her onetime lover, Jimmy? Or the murderous Painballers, survivors of the mutual-elimination Painball prison? Not to mention the shadowy, corrupt policing force of the ruling powers . . .

Meanwhile, gene-spliced life forms are proliferating: the lion/lamb blends, the Mo'hair sheep with human hair, the pigs with human brain tissue. As Adam One and his intrepid hemp-clad band make their way through this strange new world, Ren and Toby will have to decide on their next move. They can't stay locked away . . .

By turns dark, tender, violent, thoughtful, and uneasily hilarious, *The Year of the Flood* is Atwood at her most brilliant and inventive.

Atwood is funny and clever, such a good writer and real thinker that there's hardly any point saying that not everything in the novel works. Why should it? A high level of creativity has to let in some chaos_The flaws in *The Year of the Flood* are part of the pleasure, as they are with human beings, that species so threatened by its own impending suicide and held up here for us to look at, mourn over, laugh at and hope for. Atwood knows how to show us ourselves, but the mirror she holds up to life does more than reflect_it's like one of those mirrors made with mercury that gives us both a deepening and a distorting effect, allowing both the depths of human nature and its potential mutations. We don't know how we will evolve, or if we will evolve at all.

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The Year of the Flood isn't prophecy, but it is eerily possible.

Accomplished in equal measure as a poet, novelist, and essayist, Margaret Atwood is as much a dazzling storyteller as she is a committed feminist. Her novels and stories educate as much as they entertain, but without ever veering into dogmatism.