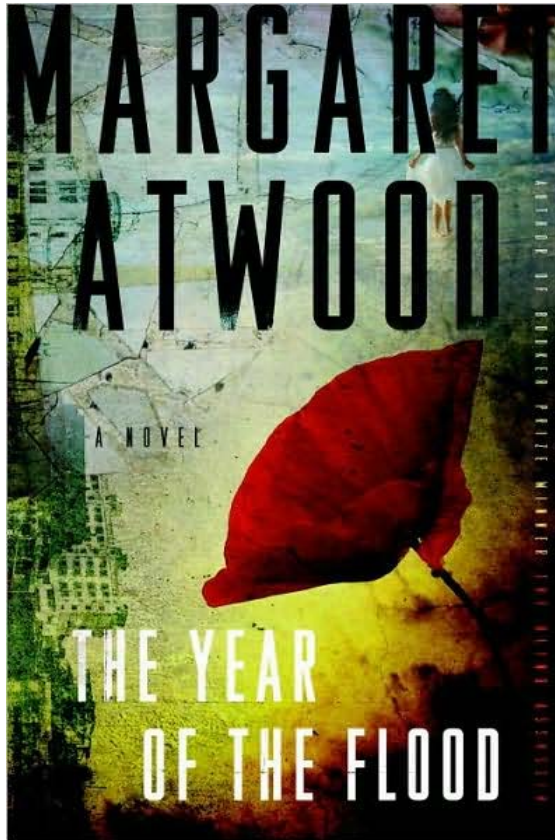


The Year of the Flood
By Margaret Atwood, 2009

Review by Stephen Carter



Imagine a world in which corporate hegemony is complete, in which an ignorant and propagandized populace is satiated with ersatz fatty foods, plastic baubles, and bio-engineered sex-toy idols. Imagine that police and correctional facilities are operated for profit, and televised as a violent and deadly reality game show called *Painball*, in which the most violent offender earns early release. Imagine a world in which a technological elite leads pampered lives behind walled compounds, fearful of the proletarian violence in the surrounding high-rise mall-slums.

Sounds about like life on the mainland, doesn't it? Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel is a convincing portrait of an urban lifestyle which is only slightly extrapolated beyond current social trends. The protagonists are Ren, Amanda, and Toby, a gaggle of young vegan/punk mall-rat girls, who find an urban refuge in a hippie, rooftop gardening, Gaian religious commune, which during the course of the novel burgeons

into a resistance movement pitted against corporate totalitarianism. The corrupted civilization crumbles when a viral pandemic sweeps the land. By hiding in a quarantined and barricaded health spa, Ren and Toby survive to emerge into a strangely mutated Eden, where dayglow orange, mohair sheep graze, and pigs possess human intelligence. Atwood elaborates this post apocalyptic bio-engineered world in another novel, *Oryx and Crake*.

These tough, resourceful youngsters sifting through the detritus of consumer culture reminded me of my own children when they were that age. Reality is perhaps not quite as bleak as my (then) teenage children thought, and the dystopians depict. But books like Orwell's *1984*, and Atwood's *Year of the Flood* serve as cautionary tales against society's near misses. Let's not go there.

Library Note: *Year of the Flood* is available in Fiction "F ATW," as an audiobook, "TC ATW," and as an eBook through Overdrive Washington Anytime Library.