



Empty World

John Christopher

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When a deadly virus kills off most of the world's population, a teenaged boy tries to survive in a seemingly empty England.

(John Christopher is one of several pseudonyms used by British author Christopher Samuel Youd.)

Empty World Details

Date : Published 1977 by Dutton

ISBN : 9780435122454

Author : John Christopher

Format : Paperback 134 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Young Adult, Apocalyptic, Post Apocalyptic, Fiction, Dystopia

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From Reader Review *Empty World* for online ebook

Carie says

I read this book when I was a teenager and I have thought of it often since. It has haunted me, but I couldn't remember the name of the book or the author. I spent a lot of time researching before tracking the book down and finding out that it was out of print. I finally obtained a copy from ebay and was excited to read it again.

I found this book to be just as disturbing and thought-provoking as I remembered it. What an eerie, haunting book! Very short (134 pgs.), it imparts a lot, but leaves you wanting more and wishing you knew what happened next, but almost dreading to know. The ending is unsettling, but so interesting. I love the exploration of character, morals, loss, and survival.

I would highly recommend the book, if you can get a hold of a copy and don't mind feeling a little disturbed and unsettled.

Laura says

Empty World is another post-apocalyptic children's novel by John Christopher. Neil Miller is left orphaned as the lone survivor in a car accident that kills his entire family. As he adjusts to his new life with his grandparents, a terrible plague sweeps the world, killing off just about the entire population. Neil, who survives the plague, is left in an empty, silent world. Neil deals with the everyday needs of survival as well as the loneliness of being alone in the world as he presses on, searching for other survivors.

Even before the plague sweeps through the plot, this is a bleak novel. The orphaning of Neil, before the plague, is brutally sad. As the plague becomes a major element in the story, the book becomes morbidly fascinating as Christopher describes, in crushing detail, the end of the world as we know it. Everything—the plague, the decay, Neil's emotional state, the will to survive—is described with fascinating realism throughout the book, making it a compelling and quick read.

I would recommend this book to tweens and younger teens looking for a quick read that is realistically dark and frightening. Not for those seeking fantasy or action-based adventure, but I think readers who enjoyed books like *The Giver*, not to mention Christopher's other novels, will find this book to be an enjoyable, thought-provoking read.

Keri (JD) says

I found this book with no cover re-bound TAPED to the underside of a shelf in my school library. I was in a dark place in my life and this book brought me the light and hope at the end of the tunnel I needed.

Kirsty says

Well, that was horrifying. Glad I didn't read this as a child as it would have given me nightmares.

Lee Osborne says

This is a book my wife read as a child, and I read it myself after we got together - as a lover of apocalyptic fiction, I loved it, and I felt it was time for another read after I just read "The Death of Grass".

Apparently this is one of no less than eleven post-apocalyptic novels John Christopher wrote for the young adult market, so I'm certainly keen to find and read more. This one is about a boy called Neil Miller, who has to go and live with his grandparents in a sleepy village after the rest of his family die in a car accident. Shortly after this, a disease known as the Calcutta Plague sweeps across the world, causing premature aging and death - only the young are spared.

The only-the-young-survive trope seems done to death in YA post-apocalyptic fiction and it feels like bit of a contrived plot device sometimes, but I can forgive it here. I've only read two of Christopher's novels, but he's a master of the type of writing I love. This is a short book I ploughed through very quickly, and not a huge amount really happens, but it's absolutely dripping with atmosphere and some haunting images that will live with you. They're beautifully described in simple, concise prose - there's nothing there that doesn't need to be, it all just builds up powerful pictures as you read.

Neil leaves his grandparents' home and ends up in London, where he comes across a few survivors. It would be a bit spoilery to go into too much detail about what happens when he meets them, but his interactions with them are beautifully described, and the (small) cast of characters feels very credible. There's only one dramatic incident really, right at the end, and the ending is quite abrupt but full of possibility.

The book was written in 1977, and it feels somewhat more contemporary than "The Death of Grass", from 21 years earlier, but it's still quite old-fashioned in places. You'd do yourself a favour in remembering that as you read - I get the impression that Christopher's attitude towards women was somewhat unenlightened. It's a minor criticism, though - if you enjoy an atmospheric, haunting and memorable read, there's a lot to love here.

Mads Kamp says

Where has this little gem been hiding? Just spent a day off listening to it and I must say I enjoyed it a lot. The author lands somewhere among John Wyndham and Richard Matheson in both style and plot. But it sets itself apart by being more of a YA-book and is simple and yet enthralling.

The main character is well written and contains all the aspects of a 15-year old. Interesting that most of his problems come through the interaction with others rather than when he is on his own.

The lack of widespread panic when 99% of the world's population dies is also interesting and I guess it can only be accredited to an England long ago.

John Christopher could have written this as a horror story, but instead chooses to make the loneliness give you the thrills.

Well done.

Read it!

J.E. Anckorn says

Great concept, ending so abrupt I thought it was a printing error, but typical of the era it was written in.

Rebecca McNutt says

Eye-opening, moving and profoundly frightening, this post-apocalyptic scenario from the eyes of a young boy is expertly written and definitely worth reading.

roi says

3.5 stars for Empty World!

I'm quite tired so I'm just going to bullet point a few thoughts:

- Very scary to read about something that could potentially happen in reality at any point
 - Makes me appreciate time with my family much more
 - Very easy to read and fall in step with- makes you feel as though you're actually in the story and makes turning countless pages easy
 - Got straight into the action within the first few pages- made it easy to keep reading
 - Easily flowing descriptions- not too heavy but enough to make you stop every now and then to say "man, this is horrible." The thought of some of the things happening haunted me.
 - However, I did remember that when it read this for the first time I was a little disappointed but I couldn't remember why. I remember why now. The ending. It just feels very rushed and inconclusive. I feel as though there could have been many better endings to have for this novel, yet I was left feeling as though some pages had been ripped out of my book, which made me feel a bit flat.
 - But aside from that, a good read.
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Ben says

I'm realising that post-apocalypse fiction is a guilty pleasure of mine. I just love it. I came across another one here.

In 1966, British sci-fi author John Christopher turned to sci-fi for adolescents. The most famous product of that decision was the Tripods trilogy, adapted for TV by the BBC in the 1980s. Empty World (1977), is just as good, a post-apocalyptic novel akin to Christopher's The Death of Grass (1956), but with children as the main characters.

For a book aimed at children, it's incredibly dark. It starts with a car accident that kills a boy's whole family and leaves him the only survivor, continues with his loneliness in living with his grandparents and then with almost everybody else in the world dying of a plague that kills all the adults and leaves only a very few

children.

But it's his family's death that prepare Neil emotionally for what's to come. Another boy that Neil finds has gone mad. Another hangs himself. But Neil's strength sees him through and, finally, he shows compassion to another who has done him great wrong but who is weaker than himself.

I've found this novel as a 38-year-old but it would have blown me away as a child.

Nina Cooper says

This is an easy and short read, and nevertheless I needed a moment to figure out what it is that makes Empty World somehow pretty disturbing. On the one hand it is the description of the consequences of a disaster that kills almost everybody but the protagonist -Neil- and a few others. The way he sees how his grandparents die, the streets become empty and civilization breaks down is pretty gloomy. Neil more or less comes to terms with all that, sometimes he is maybe accepting his fate too easily, but somehow he goes on adapting to a completely different life. When he finally meets others, new challenges come up, and the way John Christopher creates all this definitely makes the book worth reading. 5 out of 5 stars.

Janet Jay says

Really disappointing. Now I know that children-in-dystopian-future books have boomed since this book's publication, but STILL. This seemed less like a book than... not quite a thought experiment but a story in the least flattering sense: a plot made up on the spot and stretched out until the kid goes to sleep. I didn't feel this was a sculpted work with somewhere to go; it was just a mishmash of fairly cliché end-of-the-world-survival schtick. The beginning has little to do with the middle and neither have almost anything to do with the end.

Layla says

Loved this book as an 11 year old, and decided to give it a revisit. Definitely did not remember how dark this book was, jeez.. Pretty sure the main character is already suffering from PTSD prior to the apocalyptic plague which wipes out most of the world's population, allowing him the emotional disconnect to deal with the unfolding shitstorm, (really, this poor kid does not get a break..) Meanwhile, my 11 year old self spent a great deal of time happily dreaming about how awesome it would be to be able to live in a giant bookshop, (Waterstones @ Piccadilly was my preferred choice), and never be bothered by anyone ever again.

Tanya Turner says

So, I've given this four stars, but also put it on 'never again' shelf.... That's because this was the first book to give me nightmares and lead to a long lasting distrust of apocalyptic fiction. I can admire the skills and effectiveness of the writing while having no desire to read it again. And it is effective writing, I still remember having to have the radio on at all times to reassure myself that I wasn't living in an 'empty world'. If you like bleak stories that start with nearly everyone dying that you'll probably like this. Very much not

my thing.

Yak says

Really meant for teenagers, this describes a plague and its aftermath for the few survivors (children, of course). It seemed to be rollicking along and then it just... ended. Sometimes books are too long, but this one could've used more of everything.
