

11/22/63: A Novel



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Synopsis

Now in trade paperback, acclaimed author and Master of Horror Stephen King's #1 bestselling time travel novel, winner of the 2011 Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Best Mystery/Thriller and praised by USA TODAY as "extraordinary." •WINNER OF THE 2012 LOS ANGELES TIMES BOOK PRIZE In Stephen King's "most ambitious and accomplished" (NPR) and "extraordinary" (USA TODAY) #1 New York Times bestselling novel, time travel has never been so believable. Or so terrifying. Dallas, 11/22/63: Three shots ring out. President John F. Kennedy is dead. Life can turn on a dime "or stumble into the extraordinary, as it does for Jake Epping, a high school English teacher in a Maine town. While grading essays by his GED students, Jake reads a gruesome, enthralling piece penned by janitor Harry Dunning: fifty years ago, Harry somehow survived his father's sledgehammer slaughter of his entire family. Jake is blown away...but an even more bizarre secret comes to light when Jake's friend Al, owner of the local diner, enlists Jake to take over the mission that has become his obsession "to prevent the Kennedy assassination. How? By stepping through a portal in the diner's storeroom, and into the era of Ike and Elvis, of big American cars, sock hops, and cigarette smoke... Finding himself in warmhearted Jodie, Texas, Jake begins a new life. But all turns in the road lead to a troubled loner named Lee Harvey Oswald. The course of history is about to be rewritten...and become heart-stoppingly suspenseful.

Book Information

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Science Fiction > Time Travel

Customer Reviews

"11/22/63", Stephen King's latest, might just be his greatest. Seriously. At least as far as "mainstream" fiction or "literature" goes. Yes, it is built around a well-used SF trope, time travel, but really, the portal to the past that Jake Epping is shown in the back of an aluminum diner is only the launch mechanism for this fantastic journey. There are no monsters here, at least none that aren't human, and little or no horror in the supernatural sense that King's constant readers have come to know, love and expect. Even SK's other "straight" fiction, "Misery", "Dolores Claiborne" and "The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon" come to mind, had elements of the supernatural and/or flat-out horror. Not this time. But that doesn't mean that 11/22/63 is boring. Quite the contrary. Although it might seem that it would be tough to build suspense around a conclusion that seems to be inevitable, this turns out not to be the case. Big time. I just finished playing hooky from work for a day when I read the last 400 pages non-stop (except for a couple of bathroom breaks), because I just couldn't stop. I just kept pressing the advance button on my Kindle. The adjective that first comes to mind in describing 11/22/63 among SK's oeuvre is, oddly enough, "mature". I have read every novel and anthology that King has published, plus a large number of single short stories, starting with "Carrie" in a borrowed paperback back in the late 1970s. I have never before thought of describing his work in any of them, many good, some great and a few clunkers (some of which I have reviewed as such), as mature. But that is the first, best word that comes to mind in describing 11/22/63. There were others too; exciting, romantic, bittersweet and, as with all SK's stuff, well-written. Lee Harvey Oswald and the Kennedy assassination were obviously very well-researched, clear from the details in the text even before one gets to the afterword that describes some of the sources and methods used. The lead-up to the day of the assassination is described in great detail, along with Oswald's relationship to his family and associates, all matters of historical record (at least according to the sources cited by SK, with which most of the readers who did not like the novel disagreed emphatically). But I should point out that the facts concerning the Kennedy assassination are actually not the main focus of the novel. The world of 1958-1963 is described in wonderful detail, through the eyes of Jake as he gradually sheds his early 21st century armored shell and falls in love with a small Texas town and Sadie, its new young librarian. Their love story is the centerpiece of the novel and is told with great depth, sensitivity and believability. I'm old enough to have experienced lots of the stuff that Jake encounters in 1958 (albeit as a child) and it jives with and jogs my recollections and induces a feeling of longing for older, simpler times. For King's "Constant Readers", there are easter egg cameos from "It" and "The Langoliers" that I recognized. Knowing SK, there may well be others. The ending is not predictable (if you say you saw it all coming you are either lying or should be a best-selling novelist) and is surprisingly satisfying. To those who say King

doesn't know how to end his novels, I say, read this one. Very Highly Recommended for all (even those who think they know but don't "like" Stephen King). J.M. Tepper

Stephen King started publishing books around roughly the same time I started reading them. It was the mid 70s, and I was a precocious young thing. I was fearless, and man I loved what he was writing! I haven't read nearly all of his novels in the decades since, but enough to have a pretty good familiarity with the universe that his works share. Now entering my more fearful middle age, I can tell you there is, oddly, something deeply comforting about submerging myself again in his rich, folksy world where heroes ARE heroic, all stories come full circle, and pretty much all nagging questions are eventually put to rest. The hero of 11/22/63 is Jake Epping, and early on in this novel he is presented with something inconceivable, a sort of wormhole in time. It leads from 2011 Maine to September 9, 1958. You can visit the past for as long as you like--years even--but when you return to the present it's always exactly two minutes later. Every subsequent visit is a "reset." You can change the past (and consequently the present), but as Jake learns, "the past is obdurate." It resists. There's more to the set-up, of course, but that's all you really need to know. Because with this portal to the past, Jake is set on a mission that would probably be the goal of most every person of a certain age--to stop the Kennedy assassination. I don't think it resonates quite so strongly with those of us who weren't around to remember Camelot, but, sure, 11/22/63 was one of the most pivotal days in this nation's history. It's a day that surely scarred the psyche of every American who remembers it. For long-time readers like myself, there are some wonderful Easter eggs to be found in 11/22/63, tying back to past novels, and probably to future ones as well. It's amazing how King does that. Characters I haven't seen for decades make cameo appearances and gosh it's great to see them. If Mr. King has one skill above all, it's the ability to breathe life into his characters. No wonder they live on long after their stories end. And it's not just the characters that feel like old friends, it's merely inhabiting the King-verse with its familiar town names, attitudes, and themes. Like I said, comforting. So, if it's not obvious already, I loved this novel from start to finish! Heck, I read 849 pages in less than 48 hours. But Mr. King might have written this one just for me. I have a thing for time travel stories. In fact, 11/22/63 has several similarities with an old favorite I recently re-read: *Replay*, by Ken Grimwood. The ideas of this novel are pretty compelling, and it's not surprising that others have explored them. Reading the two so close together made for an interesting counterpoint, and did disservice to neither. Thirty-seven years and several dozen novels after his first, Stephen King is still finding new stories to tell in inventive ways. Yes, those familiar echoes are there, but somehow Mr. King is keeping his prolific output fresh. 11/22/63 is a blast from

the past. I'm glad I got to travel there with this dear old friend.

I first read about this book a few months ago. While I am a fan of Stephen King, I'm not a huge fan. I don't typically buy his books the day they are released, but when I read the premise for this one I just thought that it was a really neat idea and I couldn't wait for it to be released so that I could read it. Then I got a little nervous about it. From the time I read the teaser I thought that there were so many interesting directions that someone could take this story, but what if it tanks? That's always the pitfall of a really neat idea... what if it fails to really bloom like you think it could? But this is Stephen King. For my review, I'd like to establish that I was born almost 7 years after JFK died. I am not a JFK scholar and I did not read this book trying to hyper-analyze the historical accuracy of the book. I took it as a fictional exploration of a historical event produced not to answer any historical questions but just to entertain and provoke thought. I feel it was very successful on both points. My fears that Stephen King was going to take a great idea and go nowhere with it were definitely unfounded. He also works in all his usual Stephen King "givens"... the story starts in Maine. We even get to "visit" a couple of characters from other Stephen King books and the town of Derry, though the majority of the book is set in Texas of course. On the whole I usually review books based on how well spent I feel my time was in reading it and I am in no way disappointed in this one. If you buy the book I hope you enjoy it as much as I did and thank you for taking the time to read my review.

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