

Marlborough Public Library Adult Book Club

October 10, 2023

*Sea of Tranquility* by Emily St. John Mandel

Questions abridged from:

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/692735/sea-of-tranquility-by-emily-st-john-mandel/9780593321447/readers-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. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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"?
8. 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?
9. Discuss the overlaps among religion, spirituality, the supernatural, and science in this novel. How do the characters navigate those distinctions?
10. 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?