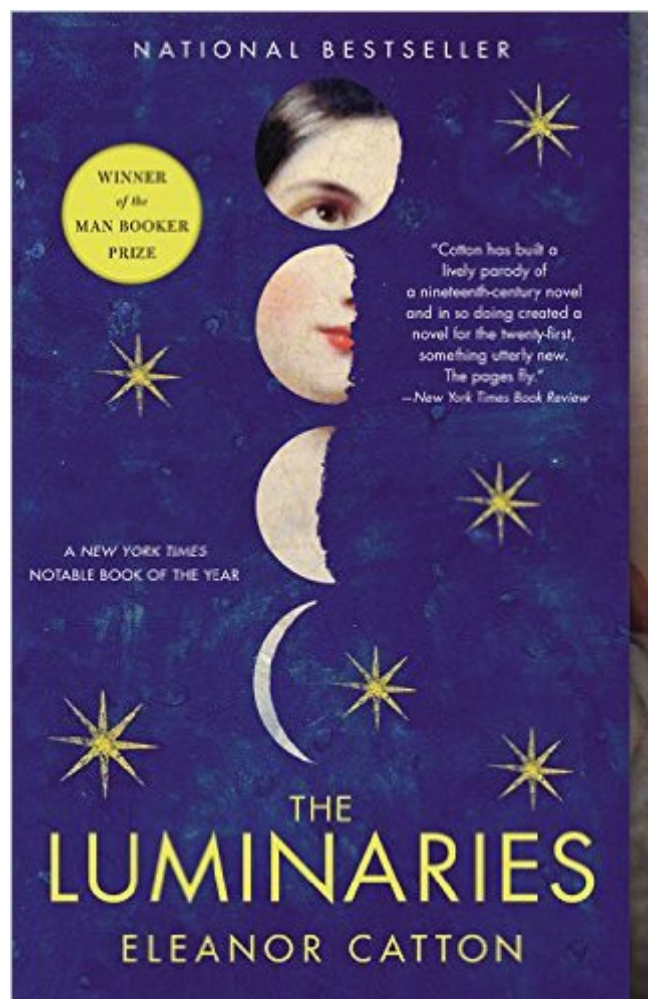


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The Luminaries



Synopsis

The bestselling, Man Booker Prize-winning novel hailed as "a true achievement. Catton has built a lively parody of a 19th-century novel, and in so doing created a novel for the 21st, something utterly new. The pages fly."--New York Times Book Review It is 1866, and Walter Moody has come to stake his claim in New Zealand's booming gold rush. On the stormy night of his arrival, he stumbles across a tense gathering of 12 local men who have met in secret to discuss a series of unexplained events: a wealthy man has vanished, a prostitute has tried to end her life, and an enormous cache of gold has been discovered in the home of a luckless drunk. Moody is soon drawn into a network of fates and fortunes that is as complex and exquisitely ornate as the night sky. Richly evoking a mid-nineteenth-century world of shipping, banking, and gold rush boom and bust, **THE LUMINARIES** is at once a fiendishly clever ghost story, a gripping page-turner, and a thrilling novelistic achievement. It richly confirms that Eleanor Catton is one of the brightest stars in the international literary firmament.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This astonishing historical novel opens in Hokitika, New Zealand in 1866, a gold mining town along the West Coast of the South Island. Founded two years previously, Hokitika is in the midst of a population boom, as prospectors, hoteliers and other businessmen have flocked there after news of its vast riches and promise of easy wealth has reached people living within and outside of New Zealand. One of those men is Walter Moody, a young Englishman who is trained in law but seeks gold to provide him with material comfort and the start of a new life. He arrives in town after a

harrowing and emotionally distressing voyage at sea, and after he checks in at a local hotel he proceeds to its smoking room, where he hopes to unwind with a pipe and a stiff drink. Upon his arrival he notices that 12 men are already there, who appear to be from different backgrounds but also seem to have gathered in secret for a particular reason. The atmosphere in the room is tense and troubled upon his entry, but in his agitated state Moody doesn't sense that he has disturbed them. He is approached by one of the men, while the others appear to direct their attention toward their conversation, and after slowly gaining their confidence the men begin to share their intertwined stories with Moody, and the reason for their confidential meeting. The story is centered around several mysterious and apparently interconnected occurrences that took place two weeks previously on a single night, including the death of a hermit in a shack overlooking town, the disappearance of a young man who has struck it rich in a gold mine, and the apparent near suicide of the town's most alluring prostitute.

Twelve men meet at the Crown Hotel in Hokitika, New Zealand, in January, 1866. A thirteenth, Walter Moody, an educated man from Edinburgh who has come here to find his fortune in gold, walks in. As it unfolds, the interlocking stories and shifting narrative perspectives of the twelve--now thirteen--men bring forth a mystery that all are trying to solve, including Walter Moody, who has just gotten off the Godspeed ship with secrets of his own that intertwine with the other men's concerns. This is not an important book. There is no magnificent theme, no moral thicket, no people to emancipate, no countries to defend, no subtext to unravel, and no sizable payoff. Its weightiness is physical, coming in at 832 pages. And yet, it is one of the most marvelous and poised books that I have read. Although I didn't care for the meandering rambling books of Wilkie Collins, I am reminded here of his style, but Catton is so much more controlled, and possesses the modern day perspective in which to peer back. I felt a warmth and a shiver at each passing chapter, set during the last days of the New Zealand gold rush. Catton hooked me in in this Victorian tale of a piratical captain; a Maori gemstone hunter; Chinese diggers (or "hatters"); the search for "colour" (gold); a cache of hidden gold; sances; opium; fraud; ruthless betrayal; infidelity; a politician; a prostitute; a Jewish newspaperman; a gaoler; shipping news; shady finance; a ghostly presence; a missing man; a dead man; and a spirited romance. And there's more between Dunedin and Hokitika to titillate the adventurous reader. Primarily, THE LUMINARIES is an action-adventure, sprawling detective story, superbly plotted, where the Crown Hotel men try to solve it, while sharing secrets and shame of their own.

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