



# Jack London - The Scarlet Plague (Illustrated)

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Jack London's post-apocalyptic vision takes place in 2072, sixty years after an uncontrollable epidemic has depopulated the planet. James Howard Smith, one of the few left alive San Francisco area, tries to impart the value of wisdom to his grandsons and as his time on Earth grows ever shorter.

By Greg Hughes on December 12, 2000

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Sixty years after a plague killed billions of people, an old man tries to convey to his three grandchildren what the world was once like so long ago.

The cultured, civilized world of mass communication and technology abruptly gave way to a primitive, savage world of cruelty and barbarism. The survivors and their descendents now live like their stone-age forebears: wearing animal skins, hunting with bows and arrows and believing in superstition.

In describing the plague's onslaught, the old man tells his grandchildren of the chaos and degradation that wiped out civilization. Money became worthless, the streets of burning cities were littered with corpses, animals grew wild as mankind lost his supremacy over nature.

The three boys have a lot of trouble understanding the words "Granser" uses, due to their lack of education. (Even the word "education" is something the boys have never heard of.) Nevertheless, the old man does the best he can, in spite of the children's limited vocabulary.

It's interesting to compare "The Scarlet Plague", which was written in 1912, to the more widely-known "Earth Abides". Both books are set in the same place. They both contain that sense of nostalgia, where old men, left over from the "lost world" yearn for a past that was more attractive.

This could well be the blueprint for life-after-the-apocalypse stories. If this story hadn't been written, there would probably never have been such books as "Earth Abides", "The Day of the Triffids", "Empty World" or "The Stand."

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