Booker Prize 2026: M. John Harrison, 81, becomes the oldest winner

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News

British author M. John Harrison, 81, won the 2026 Booker Prize for his novel 'The End of Everything'. The award, worth £50,000, was announced at Old Billingsgate, London, on 9 November 2026. He is the oldest winner in the prize's history; the record was earlier held by Margaret Atwood, who was 79 when she jointly won in 2019. A judging panel chaired by historian Mary Beard chose it from 163 books. Set on the Kent coast in a near-future Britain, the story follows beachcomber Phillip Tennent in the aftermath of an unexplained catastrophe. Jury chair Mary Beard called him the first Booker winner to have emerged from the science fiction world; he was himself a Booker judge in 2022.

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Winner	M. John Harrison (Michael John Harrison, b. 1945), UK
Novel	The End of Everything – Serpent's Tail
Announced	9 Nov 2026, Old Billingsgate, London
Prize	£50,000 to winner; £2,500 to each shortlisted author
Record	Oldest winner (81); earlier Margaret Atwood (79, 2019)

Point	Details
Jury chair	Mary Beard (historian); 163 books considered
Other shortlisted	Marlon James, Luke Kennard, Rebecca Perry, Elizabeth Strout, Douglas Stuart
Earlier awards	Arthur C. Clarke Award (Nova Swing, 2007); Goldsmiths Prize (2020)

Background

- Booker history: Begun in 1969; the first winner was P.H. Newby ('Something to Answer For'). It is given to novels written in English and published in the UK or Ireland; since 2014 writers of any nationality are eligible. The prize, £5,000 at first, is now £50,000. The youngest winner is Eleanor Catton (28, 2013).
- Indian links: Salman Rushdie – 'Midnight's Children' (1981; later the 'Booker of Bookers'), Arundhati Roy – 'The God of Small Things' (1997), Kiran Desai – 'The Inheritance of Loss' (2006; at 35 – then the youngest woman winner), Aravind Adiga – 'The White Tiger' (2008; a debut novel).
- International Booker Prize: For books translated into English; since 2016 the money is shared equally by author and translator. Geetanjali Shree – 'Tomb of Sand' (2022, Hindi, translated by Daisy Rockwell) – the first Hindi book to win. Banu Mushtaq – 'Heart Lamp' (2025, Kannada short stories, translated by Deepa Bhasthi).
- Genre: Harrison edited the books pages of the science fiction magazine 'New Worlds' in 1969–78; the 'Viriconium' series and 'Light' are among his best-known works. A Booker for a writer from science fiction is seen as a landmark for the genre.

Tamil Nadu link: Aravind Adiga, the 2008 Booker winner, was born in Chennai (then Madras) in 1974. 'Pyre', Aniruddhan Vasudevan's English translation of Namakkal-district Tamil writer Perumal Murugan's novel 'Pookuzhi', was the first Tamil book on the International Booker longlist (2023).

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

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What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Winner: M. John Harrison (Michael John Harrison, b. 1945), UK; Novel: The End of Everything – Serpent's Tail; Announced: 9 Nov 2026, Old Billingsgate, London; Prize: £50,000 to winner; £2,500 to each shortlisted author.

What is the background to this news?

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Practice questions (with answers)

1. Before M. John Harrison (81), who was the Booker's oldest winner, having won at 79?

A) Margaret Atwood

B) Hilary Mantel

C) Kazuo Ishiguro

D) J.M. Coetzee

Answer: A – Explanation: Margaret Atwood (Canada) – 'The Testaments', 2019 (jointly with Bernardine Evaristo); she also won in 2000.

2. Who wrote 'The God of Small Things', winner of the 1997 Booker Prize?

A) Kiran Desai

B) Arundhati Roy

C) Anita Desai

D) Jhumpa Lahiri

Answer: B – Explanation: Arundhati Roy – set in Aymanam village, Keralam; her debut novel. Anita Desai was shortlisted but never won.

3. For which novel did Chennai-born Aravind Adiga win the 2008 Booker Prize?

A) The Inheritance of Loss

B) Midnight's Children

C) The White Tiger

D) The Glass Palace

Answer: C – Explanation: 'The White Tiger' – his debut novel. 'The Inheritance of Loss' – Kiran Desai (2006); 'Midnight's Children' – Rushdie (1981).

4. In which language was Banu Mushtaq's 'Heart Lamp', the 2025 International Booker winner, originally written?

A) Tamil

B) Malayalam

C) Kannada

D) Telugu

Answer: C – Explanation: Kannada – translated by Deepa Bhasthi; the first short-story collection to win. In 2022, Geetanjali Shree's Hindi 'Tomb of Sand' won.

5. 'Pyre', the first Tamil book on the International Booker longlist (2023), translates which Perumal Murugan novel?

A) Pookuzhi

B) Madhorubagan

C) Poonachi

D) Koolamaadhari

Answer: A – Explanation: 'Pookuzhi' – about an inter-caste marriage; translated by Aniruddhan Vasudevan. Perumal Murugan hails from Namakkal district.

Sources: The National; ANI via Babushahi; IBTimes UK; DT Next; The Booker Prizes; Outlook (Pyre, 2023); Outlook (Adiga, 2008). © Shanmugam IAS Academy.