



★ **...and Other Disasters**

Malka Older

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If home is where the heart is, Malka Older's science fiction collection *...and Other Disasters* finds it in a "dappled world" where darkness and light play with abandon. In this engrossing work, the heart survives its "twinned urge to leave and pining to return"—an addiction that "might yet prove fatal"—by the narrowest margin.

Seven anchor stories explore humanity through politics, borders, ecocide, alien contact, and technology. Interspersed between these are ten unique passages that impart parallel stories of their own: seven are linked and catalog the US's ongoing evolution and dissolution, while the remaining three capture the textures of crumbling edifices, including the nation-state and the living elements of the planet, as they return to the earth.

Older's stories reject monoculture on every level. Her polyvalent characters are completely themselves, exploring human identity, capacity, and potential without centering whiteness, too often the default in science fiction. In "The Rupture," human beings return to Earth from an extraterrestrial colony on Sebrang, darker and more petite than terrestrial people. A family mourns the loss of an *abuela* to the border wall that springs up overnight, trapping people inside in "The Divided." In "Tear Tracks," success means hiding the complications of struggle and poverty in order to succeed, only to discover, in another world, that suffering would be enough to make someone president. The collection has no loyalty to narrative or national imperialism.

The stories of *...and Other Disasters* ask tough questions and envision answers that encompass not just a hypothetical future, but the present's trouble extrapolated to a nadir. If the people at the center of these stories go dark, it's in the hope that better decisions will arise. After all, "unreal people and events and technologies change the world all the time."

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (November / December 2019)

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