

Darkness to Light: A Utopia/Dystopia Novel

David H. Maring

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Darkness to Light is a future-set science fiction novel wherein society has crumbled, but God's faithful remain.

In David H. Maring's edgy science fiction novel *Darkness to Light*, a contemporary man enters an exciting postapocalyptic world in which women are in charge and he's just extra baggage.

On a trip to gather supplies, Beth discovers John, an older man in cryostasis. John's eventual reawakening disrupts her society, called Paradise. Here, his expectations about gender and status have been reversed: men are either enslaved, kept docile, or used on sperm production farms and killed before they can cause trouble.

Beth takes charge of John, asking him to write down all he can remember from his time. But Beth is only a bit player in her community, whose ruling council of women hopes to create a utopia free from common points of contention, including sex and relationships. John is intrigued at first; he adapts, even realizing that his time is limited in this new space. When his neighbor, a fellow historian, disappears, he begins to plan his escape. Beyond Beth's group, he meets Christian people whose faith puts them at odds with Paradise. A clash of civilizations comes to seem inevitable.

The book's worldbuilding is accomplished, in part, via Beth reading a portion of her deceased grandmother's diary; it describes some of Paradise's hidden history. What follows is a predictable, if entertaining, struggle to free the sperm "donors" and allow Beth and her compatriots the chance to escape from the bondage of their civilization. With its future at stake, Paradise is revealed to be—counter to its leaders' claims—a place where gender divisions and relationships have run amok and where the lust for power and position corrupts men and women in equal fashion.

The prose is clear and swift, moving between brief scenes at a pleasant pace. But the story is also underdeveloped: John is positioned as a prototypical everyman whose sense of justice drives him to action, while the book's secondary characters are addressed only in passing, with the limited details of their names, short physical descriptions, and notes on who they are sleeping with used to define them. Together, they are pushed toward a dramatic clash between the new Christians and those who seek to plunge the world into further chaos. However, the closing chapters, which depict expanded warfare, bring the novel to a repetitive close.

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JEREMIAH ROOD (August 31, 2023)

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