

★ **Earth 7**

Deb Olin Unferth

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Near the end of Earth's life span, two women make meaning in each other's uncommon company in Deb Olin Unferth's dazzling dystopian novel *Earth 7*.

From an isolated pod on the seabed, a lonely, anxious girl, Dylan, sends messages to Martians. She hopes to lure them to her with the promise of her scientist mother's DNA stores for extinct animals. But Martians are more adept at leaving the trappings of Earth behind than Dylan is. No real rescue comes.

Relocated to her mother's former desert lab in young adulthood, Dylan is still stalked by irrepressible yearning. Resisting research tasks, she becomes a custodian to the sand. Her higher-ups, sensing her deep need, send her to a pleasure resort for vacation. Though Dylan is impervious to the forced raucousness of the nightlife, she does find an answer in Melanie, whose body was made perhaps deathless for the entertainment of bygone reality television crowds. Melanie is doubtful, though, so Dylan runs. In time, Melanie chases.

Set in "the end time, when "every part of the planet is done with us: the air, the ground, the water," this is not, the wry omniscient narrator warns, your typical love story. No: this is "Bubble Boy meets Plastic Girl," an improbable pairing eking out a version of forever when not even tomorrow is guaranteed. There are other "not"s in this enthralling dystopian novel, too: there will not be aliens (though Dylan's mother is certain that she met one), there will not be last minute saves, and neither science nor imaginative reconfigurations can stop what is coming.

Still, amid the death cults and the human abscondments in the defiant dystopian novel *Earth 7*, hope is found: in tardigrades in the sand; in a "soul globule's" persistence; in messages sent across time, lighting the way to the inevitable.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (May / June 2026)

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