

★ Land Sickness

Nikolaj Schultz

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The climate crisis is a global problem, with every individual playing a role: Nikolaj Schultz confronts this conundrum in his lovely, essay-length book *Land Sickness*.

In beautiful prose that makes everyday moments seem profound, Schultz describes his life as a series of climate-related decisions. The ventilator he uses to sleep emits carbon dioxide; his trips to the grocery store lead to choices about whether to buy food wrapped in plastic or grown in ways that degrade soil. Despite his concern about climate change, he writes, “it seems that I exist *from others*, like a spider in a web, sustaining myself by catching and feeding off them.” These problems lead to sleepless nights spent weighing the impact of his lifestyle against a future that will only become more complicated.

Schultz also covers his travels to the French island of Porquerolles, where consistent waves of tourists looking for an idyllic retreat end up eroding the exact beaches for which people visit. It’s a process of “reverse alchemy”; Schultz observes as it turns “silver to filth.” He is beset at all points by his inability to evade hard choices; at one point, he likens his travels to Dante Alighieri’s, seeing the eternal damage of his decisions. His book blends these real fears with literary turns of phrase, rendering each scene and person encountered in great detail. Each conversation that Schultz has on the island carries the weight of the changing landscape, and each hot evening portends a future in which such humidity is no longer noteworthy.

Land Sickness is an ecological essay that raises important questions about what it means to live in a time of growing catastrophe and to navigate that situation.

JEFF FLEISCHER (May / June 2023)

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