

★ **My Volcano**

John Elizabeth Stintzi

Two Dollar Radio (Mar 22, 2022)

Softcover \$17.99 (330pp)

978-1-953387-16-5

The chaos of current events takes on a supernatural dimension in John Elizabeth Stintzi's novel *My Volcano*.

In the summer of 2016, all over the world, there are strange occurrences. The most spectacular event of all: a volcano sprouts in the middle of Central Park and keeps on growing, destroying large sections of New York City. But the volcano is only the start: for years, there are terrible experiences of loss, violence, grief, and predictable, preventable upheaval.

Some react to the volcano with curiosity or anger; others, like the advertisers who clutter its slopes with billboards, are cynical enough to take advantage of even the most terrible opportunities. But most, out of fear or ennui, try to live their lives as if the city were not shaking to pieces around them. These parallels to the real world are incisive and painful.

Beyond the volcano, the book's diverse cast faces problems that range from eerie to horrifying to just bizarre: people appear where they aren't supposed to be, or disappear without explanation, or merge with other forms of life. Meanwhile, more ordinary catastrophes continue apace: Black and queer people die violent deaths, relationships stagger, pollution runs rampant, and too many people struggle with loneliness and discomfort in their own bodies.

The nonlinear narrative moves back and forward and back again, showing how the characters' stories could have ended before "resetting" to explore other outcomes. Each episode stresses the interconnected nature of all: whether an individual likes it or not, their lives and actions affect not only themselves, but their friends, their neighbors, and their planet. The suggestion is sobering: while the world in *My Volcano* may proffer second chances, the real world does not.

My Volcano is a captivating novel about the consequences of letting obvious dangers fester and grow.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (March / April 2022)

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