

The Farther Shore

Matthew Eck

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The End of History: Author Matthew Eck's debut novel, *The Farther Shore* (Milkweed, 192 pages, hardcover, \$22.00, 978-1-57131-057-6) opens on a rooftop in blacked-out Somalia with a squad of 10th Mountain Division soldiers operating as eyes in the ground. In other words, they're directing the bombing of the city—not too close to the center, not too far from the edge.

When something, or someone trips the alarms they've left in the stairwells of the building, their descent from the building top is both physical and psychological. "I found Santiago and told him we needed to move. Then I looked down at the body. It was small for a man. Santiago bent over the figure with an unrolled compound press, the loose white ends dangling beside him. He stood and said something, but at first I couldn't hear over the ringing in my ears. Then he was screaming and it came to me in slices, getting louder, then duller, until I finally got it: "They're just kids."

It gets worse, much worse. The dead shark and its dead eye that washes up on the beach of the hospital after they've been evacuated is only one of countless lyrical images Eck uses to evoke the sense of total catastrophe that is always underfoot. A beautiful and shocking novel of war and youth.

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