

Though the Earth Gives Way

Mark S. Johnson

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Set in the near future, Mark S. Johnson's ominous novel *Though the Earth Gives Way* imagines American life in the wake of climate disasters.

Elon—alone in a desolate, looted, and ravaged landscape with his thoughts and a shopping cart of his belongings—faces a meager and chaotic restart in the wake of destruction. He leaves Rhode Island, wandering without destination or plan, until he reaches a retreat center in Michigan. A near-silent old man welcomes him to stay. Over the next week, seven others join them: a Syrian refugee, a lesbian couple, a husband without his wife, a man and a woman scarred by violent pasts, and a juvenile delinquent.

The group adopts a semblance of order, joining forces and reinstating rituals like communal meals and sharing. Finding food and caring for their personal health becomes a full-time occupation. But while they gather food by day, they tell entertaining, probing stories at night. These nightly stories are bubbles of escape in their apocalyptic world. More than directing attention outward, the intimate confessions also reveal deep frailties—and the strength at the survivors' core. They act on this strength late in the book, as the youngest and oldest of the group bond over their anger and it erupts, forcing a turning point for the whole group.

This is a novel that ably explores what happens when actions originate from anger or forgiveness. It carves the world into camps: fighters and runners, climate change whistleblowers and deniers. In defining this recognizable, stark dichotomy, the book suggests a whole new choice for humanity.

The pathos and starkness of the dystopian novel *Though the Earth Gives Way* lay bare and give credence to real possibilities that lie ahead for human beings; the book develops extreme portraits of survivors, which are used to channel the way forward.

MARI CARLSON (January / February 2022)

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