



Tribulation: A Novel of the Near Future

Thomas A. Lewis

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Set in the near future, this intellectually stimulating take on the end of civilization is made more chilling by how easily it could all happen.

Smartly written and exhaustively researched, Thomas A. Lewis's *Tribulation: A Novel of the Near Future* is reminiscent of George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides*. It follows a man who witnesses the events leading to the apocalypse in hopeful denial and tries to build a better world from its ruins.

In 2021, politician William Trent watches as Hurricane Seven destroys the industrial installations along the Mississippi River, setting off a chain of events that cripple the United States and set its population back hundreds of years. His son, Brian, an accomplished environmental journalist, warned him this day would come and, in preparation, built a compound called the Farm to keep him and his family safe. As the world collapses around him, William joins his son, grandchildren, and a group of fellow preppers at the Farm. Slowly, the group adjusts to a new way of life and struggles not to repeat the errors of the past.

Tribulation is frightening in its stark portrayal of the ills and errors of today's world—indifferent politicians, fossil fuel abuse, industrial agriculture, and climate change—that the author combines to create a domino effect leading to the apocalypse. This similarity gives the novel an eerie tone and reveals its central purpose of serving as a treatise and a warning.

In clear, unadorned writing, the author raises tough questions about human nature. Gathered at the Farm under lockdown, the group must decide whether to kill those who threaten the security of their compound. This moral dilemma is best expressed by a character named Sarah: "We've gone through all of this so we can be the best savages, and kill the most people?" *Tribulation* also makes interesting and fresh predictions about the ultimate fate of humanity following an apocalyptic event, one that gives the reader a sense of hope rather than dread, despite the horrifying consequences required to get there.

Narrator William is by far the strongest character. Humble and wise, his reaction at the start of the novel to the possibility of the apocalypse—optimistic skepticism—is representative of how most Americans would likely react to such news. But as the novel progresses, he provides an ideal model to follow, molding himself seamlessly and bravely into the new world and sagely guiding fellow members of the Farm as its respected elder.

While the novel's primary strength is the exhaustive research that supports the plot, the cold facts—descriptions of climate refugees or oil shortages—are placed above the emotions and motivations of the characters rather than blending into the fabric of the story. Attempting to convince his wife that the Farm will save their family, Brian launches into an impassioned speech about topsoil and melting glaciers. While this behavior is central to Brian's character, such dialogue nonetheless bleeds the story of its emotional punch. Additionally, the plot takes frequent tangents from the main action to describe the geographic and industrial history of the Mississippi delta, or the mechanics of a hurricane. People, their struggle to survive, and their response to hardship should be more central to an apocalyptic tale than the steps the world took to get there.

Tribulation is intellectually stimulating and raises difficult and unnerving questions. Lewis's meticulous attention to detail gives a level of suspense and reality to the novel, which will delight fans of the apocalypse genre.

SHELLEY MAE HAZEN (March 7, 2014)

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