Atmospheric Pressure

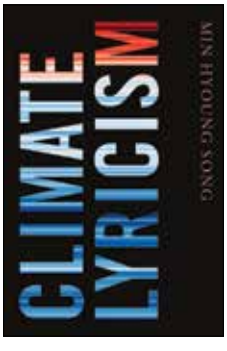
New fiction considers the implications of climate change

By Liza Monroy

In a 2021 piece for the *Los Angeles Times*, "Climate Crisis Is Here; So Is Climate Fiction. Don't You Dare Call It a Genre," novelist Lydia Millet, who often addresses environmental issues in her work, wrote that when it comes to the topic of climate change, "we don't have the luxury of genrefication, with its thrilling rejections of social reality and its reliance on satisfyingly happy endings. All that's written about these matters of survival, all that's imagined and supposed," she continued, "demands our collective attention."

Boston College English professor Min Hyoung Song, in *Climate Lyricism* (Duke Univ., Feb.), proposes that reading literature with an eye toward how such works acknowledge, allude to, or obscure the pervasiveness of the climate crisis "can make it easier to think about climate change without feeling completely powerless. We must learn to read its signs and make sense of its effects on our immediate surroundings."

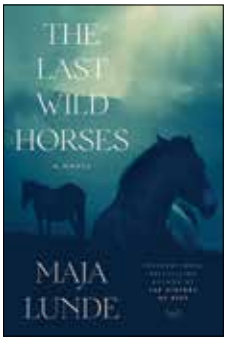
Expressing a sentiment in line with Millet's, Song says, "There's an argument to be made that all contemporary literature is now climate literature." The novels discussed here help make the case.



Future tense

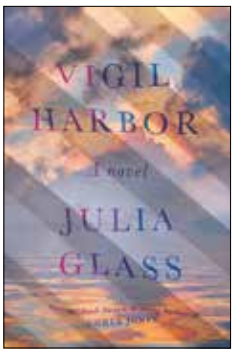
Norwegian children's author Maja Lunde's first novel for adults, *The History of Bees*, was published in the U.S. in 2017 and follows three generations of beekeepers, past, present, and future. It won the Norwegian Bookseller's Prize, was a major bestseller in Germany, and is the first volume in a planned quartet of similarly themed books. HarperVia published Lunde's follow-up, *The End of the Ocean*, in 2020, and this month is releasing *The Last Wild Horses*, which *PW*'s starred review called a "standout" that "should win her wider attention in the U.S."

The novel alternates between 1881, 1992, and 2064, when mass extinction and food shortages are the norm. "It's interesting when people call Lunde a dystopian writer," says Tara Parsons, v-p and associate publisher at HarperVia. "She's taking things that are already happening to the next level. Her writing about horses applies to a lot of animals that have gone through extinction periods."



Aquariums by J.D. Kurtness (Rare Machines, Apr.), translated from the French by Pablo Strauss, likewise connects the past to the present and future.

The story of Émeraude, a marine biologist working to save ocean ecosystems by recreating them in zoos—or, as she narrates, she seeks to "repatriate a few survivors before their world is destroyed"—is interspersed with tales of her ancestors. Kurtness, who lives in Montreal and is a member of the Innu nation, received the Indigenous Voices Award for French Prose in 2018 for her debut novel, *Of Vengeance.*



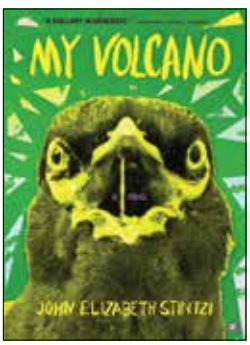
Julia Glass set her newest work, *Vigil Harbor* (Pantheon, May), in an imminent future, in a New England coastal town based on Marblehead, Mass., where she lives. "Fiction writers are imagining environmental catastrophe on a global scale, but that's not in my wheelhouse," Glass says. Instead, she focuses on the domestic—family life, affairs, divorce—amid a long pandemic, terrorist attacks, and threats of flooding.

"I wanted to write about a near future in which the volume has been turned up," she continues. "This is a town where houses are three centuries old and have withstood hurricanes, but geographical or environmental privilege won't last forever. Those of us who are lucky to live where we do, whose jobs are not terribly influenced directly by climate change, will be vulnerable to forces we don't even know. That's where I was coming from. One of the main characters is a marine biologist, trying to protect the liminal zones of the coast and surviving salt marshes—it's a losing battle. I mentioned to somebody that one of my characters was a depressed marine biologist. What marine biologist wouldn't be depressed right now?"

Altered landscapes

With *My Volcano* (Two Dollar Radio, Mar.), John Elizabeth Stintzi joins the ranks of authors playing with the mythic proportions of the climate crisis through fantastical imaginings. The novel's 232 micro-chapters cohere to transform "the chaotic present into a fiery, transcendent vision of the future," *PW*'s starred review said. "It's a brilliant achievement."

After a volcano sprouts in Central Park ("about ten Empire State Buildings tall"), some observers refuse to see the rupture as a real or imminent threat, even as it forces climate refugees to flee no-longer-habitable communities. Others deny its existence altogether: "Perhaps it's not a volcano, actually. Perhaps it is a landfill," one character muses. Stintzi says the allegorical, nonlinear novel aims "to show how small the world is, which is really important in thinking about climate change—everyone being under the same volcano."



Erica Ferencik uses magical realism

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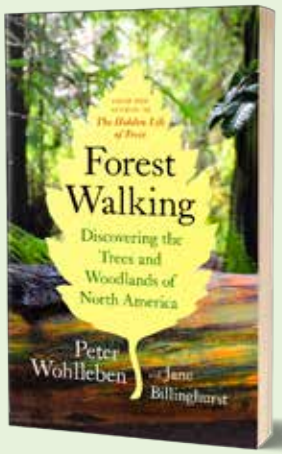

"Poetic and full of marvels."
Publisher's Weekly★

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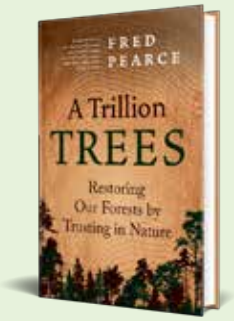

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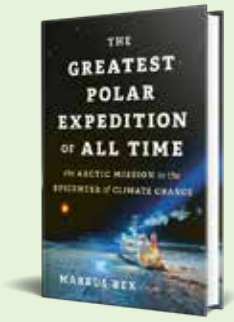

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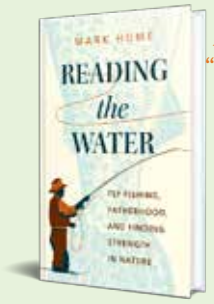

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Environmental Studies

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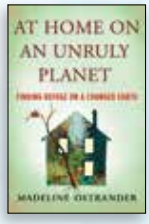
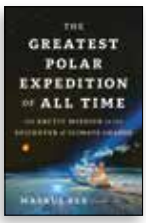


AT HOME ON AN UNRULY PLANET
Madeline Ostrander. Holt, Aug.
Environmental journalist Ostrander examines how fires, floods, monsoons, and other natural disasters drive people on climate change's front lines from their homes. In the first part of the book, she reports on communities impacted by disasters. In the second, she writes of preservation and refuge: "Sifting through all of the wreckage, putting things back in order where possible, salvaging what still has value."

FEN, BOG, AND SWAMP
Annie Proulx. Scribner, June
Proulx, whose 2016 novel *Barkskins* addressed ecological collapse, here traces the history and consequences of wetlands destruction, which is "so intimately tied to the climate crisis," she writes. Proulx's text homes in on "those special wetlands that form the peat that holds in the greenhouse gasses CO2 and methane—the fens, bogs and swamps and how humans have interacted with them over the centuries."

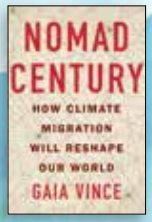
FIRE AND FLOOD
Eugene Linden. Penguin Press, Apr.
Tracking climate change from 1979 to the present, environmental journalist Linden (*The Ragged Edge of the World*) builds on the idea that the crisis is, he writes, "here and it's going to get worse, very likely far worse." Linden addresses big business's failure to take steps to reverse it and what he describes as the "narrow" path forward.



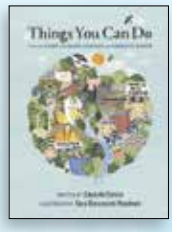
THE GREATEST POLAR EXPEDITION OF ALL TIME
Markus Rex, trans. from the German by Sarah Pybus. Greystone, May
Atmospheric scientist Rex's diary of the year he spent on the MOSAiC (Multidisciplinary Drifting Observatory for the Study of Arctic Climate) expedition details the *Polarstern* icebreaker team's studies on how the ice cycle impacts the climate system. He highlights the role of collaboration and community in both the expedition and in addressing the climate crisis.

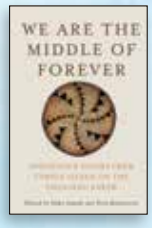
THE INTERSECTIONAL ENVIRONMENTALIST
Leah Thomas. Voracious, Mar.
Furloughed from her public relations job during the pandemic, Thomas applied her background in environmental science and policy to launch the online platform Intersectional Environmentalist, which has since grown to 411,000 Instagram followers. In the book, she discusses how "those least responsible for the climate crisis are bearing the brunt of it," explaining why civil rights are inextricable from climate activism and what steps individuals can take toward environmental justice.

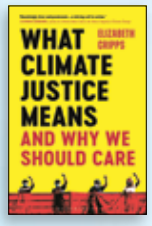
IS SCIENCE ENOUGH?
Aviva Chomsky. Beacon, Apr.
Historian Chomsky poses 40 questions as a means to discuss how social, racial, and economic justice are crucial to reversing climate change. The author "does a great job of keeping things simple while providing ample context, and her focus on justice adds urgency," *PW*'s review said, calling the book "a worthwhile contribution to the growing body of work on the ethics of climate change."



NOMAD CENTURY
Gaia Vince. Flatiron, Aug.
Over the next several decades, climate migration will displace billions of people, according to Vince, a science journalist whose previous titles include the *PW*-starred *Adventures in the Anthropocene*. Here, she explores possible solutions to what she calls a "species emergency," among them "charter cities," in which "states such as Nigeria, Bangladesh or Maldives could buy or rent land inside a large country such as Canada, Russia or Greenland, effectively gaining habitable territory" for a period of years.







THINGS YOU CAN DO

Eduardo Garcia, illus. by Sara Boccaccini Meadows. Ten Speed, Apr.

Garcia, who covers renewable energy for the online sustainability platform Treehugger, expands on the "One Thing You Can Do" column he wrote for the *New York Times*. His facts and stats mesh with Meadows's illustrations to explain complex issues such as the damage fossil fuels and greenhouse gasses cause and to suggest steps readers can take to help combat climate change—for instance, eating a climate-friendly diet (think plant-based proteins), getting to zero plastic, and traveling more sustainably.

WE ARE THE MIDDLE OF FOREVER

Edited by Dahr Jamail and Stan Rushworth. New Press, Apr.

Journalist Jamail (*The End of Ice*) and Rushworth (*Diaspora's Children*), an Indigenous elder of Cherokee descent and a teacher of Native American literature, profile Indigenous North American climate activists. The authors hope their collection of interviews will be "an aid to those looking for ideas and responses to the conditions of today," from Indigenous peoples who "have had to adapt, to persevere, to be courageous and resourceful in the face of destruction."

WHAT CLIMATE JUSTICE MEANS AND WHY WE SHOULD CARE

Elizabeth Cripps. Bloomsbury Continuum, Apr.

Philosopher Cripps, a senior lecturer in political theory at University of Edinburgh, examines various facets of the climate crisis, including the roles colonialism and entrenched racism and sexism play in climate change. She closes with a chapter titled "But What Can *I* Do?" and, in response to that question, offers data on "individual carbon-cutting," detailing how much carbon emission a person can lower by, for instance, cutting back on air travel, switching to an electric vehicle, or living car-free.

THE WORLD AS WE KNEW IT

Edited by Amy Brady and Tajja Isen. Catapult, June

In what *PW*'s starred review called "a powerful collection," 19 writers, including Omar El Akkad, Melissa Febos, and Lidia Yuknavitch, use personal brushes with climate change to punctuate larger issues. (See "The Raw Data of Someone Else's Life," p. 34, for *PW*'s q&a with Brady and Isen.) **—L.M.**

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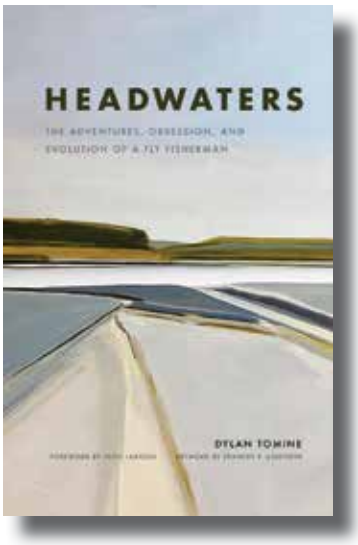

★ **Headwaters**

Dylan Tomine. Patagonia, $27.95 (256p)
ISBN 978-1-952338-07-6

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Fisherman Tomine *(Closer to the Ground)* combines incandescent personal reflections and environmental advocacy in this moving paean to fly fishing. "Fishing was never a sport... for me," Tomine writes at the outset, rather, it's "who I am." What follows is a vivid portrait of a man in pursuit of a lifelong obsession. As he relates, his "steelhead jones" had its hooks in him early, during his childhood fishing for trout in Oregon in the 1970s and, later, as a teen "too busy trying to catch my first steelhead" to notice girls. Arriving at adulthood, he recounts such adventures as catching a 90-pound giant trevally bonefish, and embarking on an expedition to the Russian Arctic—where the abundance of trout was rivaled only by the region's mosquitos. Later chapters witness his evolution from acolyte to conservationist; in one section, he memorably recalls screening the conservationist documentary *Artifishal* to a sold-out crowd in Japan, where the "culture [is] built around the eating of fish." Mixing good-natured humor with a reverence of the world around him—"It starts with the fish itself. The sleek, chrome beauty... carrying all the strength and fecundity of the sea to inland waters"—Tomine delivers a work that informs and moves in equal measure. This is sure to reel in readers. *(Apr.)*

—Publishers Weekly
December 16, 2021

Available from Ingram/PGW

Into the Woods

German forester Peter Wohlleben had an unexpected hit with *The Hidden Life of Trees*, which has sold 437,000 print copies, per NPD BookScan, since its 2016 publication. Another bestselling work of arboreal ardor, *Finding the Mother Tree* by forest ecology professor Suzanne Simard, pubbed in 2021 and has since sold 87,000 print copies. The subgenre is growing, with forthcoming books that explore the overt and subtle links between trees and climate change.

EVER GREEN

John W. Reid and Thomas E. Lovejoy. Norton, Mar.

Reid, a conservationist, and the late environmentalist Lovejoy (*Biodiversity and Climate Change*) cover the essential role that five massive forests, including the Amazon and the Congo, could play in mitigating climate change. "The authors depict the flora and fauna of these far-flung locations in vivid descriptions that chart how each species is part of a vast ecosystem," *PW*'s review noted. "This clarion call should have a spot on the shelves of climate-minded readers."

THE TREELINE

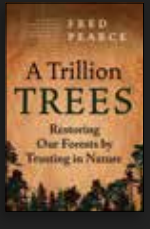
Ben Rawlence. St. Martin's, Feb.

Rawlence (*City of Thorns*) interviews ecologists across Canada, Greenland, Norway, Siberia, and elsewhere to understand why treelines in boreal forests are moving north. "Rawlence's research leads him to conclude that change is inevitable, and every person—and every tree—must adapt to survive," *PW*'s review said. "His awe at the beauty and power of trees is moving. Nature lovers and travelers alike will find this a lovely paean to a rapidly changing landscape."

TREE THIEVES

Lyndsie Bourgon. Little, Brown Spark, June

An oral historian and a journalist for the *Atlantic*, *Smithsonian*, and others, Bourgon investigates the criminal world of timber poaching and its environmental effects. From "cutting down a small Christmas tree in a park, to the large-scale devastation of entire groves," Bourgon explains how such theft intersects with the climate crisis. "When old-growth disappears," she writes, "the foundation from which it grew is destabilized, leaving landscapes more prone to flooding and landslides."



A TRILLION TREES

Fred Pearce. Greystone, May

Journalist Pearce (*When the Rivers Run Dry)* weaves first-person adventure narrative with climate science, traveling to China, Guyana, Kenya, Paraguay, and beyond to show how, when it comes to forests, "we mess with their life-support systems at our peril." He writes that leaving forests alone, rather than actively reforesting, may be a better solution. "Given the chance, nature will do much of the work." —**L.M.**

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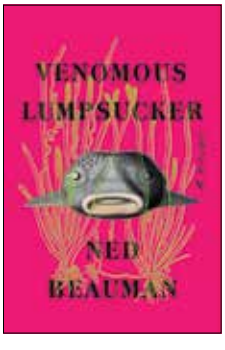
to comment on the climate crisis in *Girl in Ice* (Scout, Mar.). Val Chesterfield, a linguist grappling with her twin brother's suicide, ventures to the Arctic on a mission to communicate with a girl thawed alive from a glacier. "Trenchant details about catastrophic climate change bolster a creative plot featuring authentic characters, particularly the anxious, flawed Val," *PW*'s starred review said, concluding that "Ferencik outdoes Michael Crichton in the convincing way she mixes emotion and science."

Set in the 2030s, *Venomous Lumpsucker* by Ned Beauman (Soho, July) forecasts a compromised future of floating cities and toxic wastelands. After a mining company destroys the habitat of the world's most intelligent fish—the venomous lumpsucker—environmental impact coordinator Mark Halyard enters the orbit of extinction industry scientist Karin Resaint, who uses DNA sequencing to bring back species. Mark Doten, executive editor and v-p at Soho Press, says the "darkly humorous novel" shows where we're headed "if runaway capitalism continues unchecked, and if we continue to respond to climate change and other forms of global destruction with largely ineffectual market-based solutions."



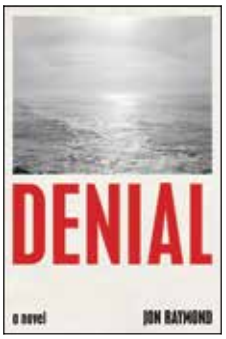
In *One Potato* by Tyler McMahon

(Keylight, Apr.), GMO spuds grown in a fictional South American country are blamed for the bizarre and absurd genetic anomalies showing up in children. The book critiques genetic modification, monoculture, and the ways in which environmental factors contribute to sociopolitical collapse, especially in developing nations. "This singular, monolithic food system was built for the 20th century, not the 21st, and isn't very flexible," McMahon says. "It's directly involved in climate change."

The political climate

While many factors contribute to climate change, says Jon Raymond, author of *Denial* (S&S, Aug.), it's not necessarily a case of good guys vs. bad. "The simple moral lines of the last few years have gotten really exhausting," he says. "Climate change is not something that allows for easy feelings of virtue or judgment."

His novel begins in 2052, 20 years after the Upheavals—a movement that led to the end of fossil fuels—and the Toronto Trials, in which powerful oil executives and lobbyists were imprisoned for the environmental damage they caused.



Journalist John Henry hears that a fugitive of these "crimes against life" trials, Robert Cave, has been spotted in Guadalajara, Mexico. Henry's trip to Guadalajara to expose Cave, who's wanted for a host of environmentally destructive business interests, instead leads to a surprising connection.

Canadian farmer and environmental activist Aric McBay's first novel, *Kraken Calling* (Seven Stories, June), is a speculative look at how climate change might lead to violence. In 2051, the environment is ruined to the point where, McBay writes, a "haze of charcoal smoke" hanging in the air constitutes a "beautiful morning." (Or, as one character wonders, "How the hell did we let things get this bad?")

Seven Stories Press founder and publisher Dan Simon, who edited the novel, says McBay has captured "a North American country where the deteriorating climate situation stresses the government and the government terrorizes its own citizens to keep things under control." Story lines bounce between the 2020s and the early 2050s, so that "a generation of revolutionaries in the first part can look back at themselves from the

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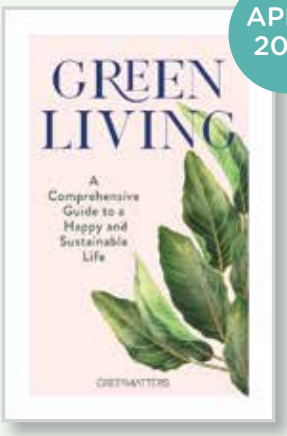

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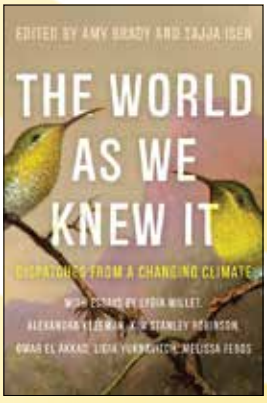
"The Raw Data of Someone Else's Life"

PW talks with Amy Brady and Tajja Isen

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Tajja Isen

Tajja Isen, editor-in-chief at Catapult, met Amy Brady, executive director of the nonprofit environmental magazine *Orion*, when Isen edited Brady's first essay for Catapult, "Encountering Beauty and the Effects of Climate Change in Acadia National Park." They're now coeditors of an anthology of essays on everyday experiences with climate change, *The World as We Knew It* (Catapult, June). Here, they discuss their collaboration, which *PW*'s starred review called "a poignant ode to a changing planet."

How did the anthology come about?

Brady: I've been in the climate storytelling and communications space for a long time, and I noticed most climate storytelling was happening in the form of novels or scientific research. A lot of it focused on larger disasters—wildfires, sea level rise—which makes sense, as those are catastrophic. But in my personal life I was noticing it in small ways.

Isen: I loved working on Amy's essay. In 2018, when she was traveling through Toronto, we met up and got on really well. When she told me about the anthology idea a few months later, I said I'd love to get involved in any capacity. She said, "Do you want to coedit?" And I jumped at the chance.

How did you choose pieces for inclusion?

Brady: I had a concern at the outset—that turned out not to be worth worrying about—that too many of the essays would cover similar ground. Reaching out to people of different backgrounds and nationalities helped to create a breadth of experience on the page. We had to think about not just the logic of each individual essay but how they would hold together as a collection.

Isen: We talk in the intro about bringing the planetary to the personal. With those constraints, essays treat the scope and scale very differently, whether it's one's relationship with one's own house and land like in Lydia Millet's piece or Gabrielle Bellot's essay about a particular species of lionfish. I'm proud of the variety of focal points.

What's it been like to work on this book during the pandemic?

Brady: When Covid erupted in the United States partway through the editing of this book, that changed the process. Our writers began addressing the pandemic in subsequent revisions, making links between the pandemic and the climate crisis. Many focused on how both were impacting marginalized communities first and hardest.

Isen: We were together in documenting this time we were all living through. The pandemic rears its head in various capacities across the collection. When you edit a personal essay you're carefully handling the raw data of someone else's life; the scale of what everyone was going through is metabolized in the book in cathartic ways.

What has working on this book taught you?

Brady: I look at anthologies differently now; I hadn't thought before about an anthology as a tool for communicating the need for collective action. So many people speaking to such a large issue in beautiful ways made me think about how anthologies are communities—a way of signaling to the world that this subject matters.

Isen: Editing this book changed my relationship to the natural world. As I was working on the essays I had a visceral longing to be outside exploring spaces and landscapes. I wanted to take more opportunities to experience the world as we knew it, before a lot of these places have irrevocably changed or disappeared. Personal experience can be used as a way to illuminate broader phenomena, and convey urgency—and perhaps action—to its eventual readers.

—L.M.

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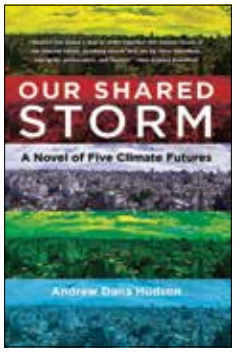
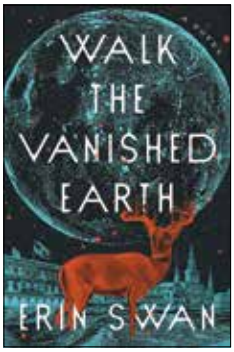
second part and see what it was that made them stop short of transforming their society when they had the chance."





The five interlinked novelettes of *Our Shared Storm* (Fordham Univ., Mar.) by Andrew Dana Hudson, a sustainability researcher and fellow at Arizona State University's Center for Science and the Imagination, are "part science communication, part futurist call to action," *PW*'s review said. Though some may find that the "swaths of technical exposition and an academic introduction and afterword explaining the real climate modeling behind the fiction integrate awkwardly," the review concluded that Hudson "skillfully grounds the poignant iterating structure with thoughtful worldbuilding, well-balanced prose, and a keen sense of human motivation."

Rituals of Hope

Before writing *Here Lies* (Grove, Mar.), says Oliva Clare Friedman, who grew up in Baton Rouge and teaches creative writing at the University of Southern Mississippi, "I was thinking a lot about storm surges and more frequent hurricanes." The novel envisions 2042 Louisiana: the state's graveyards are closed, burials banned, and cremations mandated. "Mechanical arms ushered bodies through the ovens," narrates protagonist Alma, who is seeking her mother's ashes. "When our cemeteries were taken, we lost the ritual of loving our dead."

Friedman focuses on people rather than on the environmental disaster itself. "This novel is about grief and mourning," she says. "I think about it as being cathartic and hopeful." *PW*'s review noted that the author is light on the dystopian details, "a gamble that pays off by leaving room to show how her characters cling to an old-time sense of 'kicking and living,' as Alma puts it, in the face of catastrophic changes."

Erin Swan's *Walk the Vanished Earth* (Viking, June) spans seven generations, beginning on the Kansas prairie in 1873 where Samson hunts buffalo, brimming with hope for what bounty the land will bring. Two hundred years later, in a colony on Mars, Samson's half-human, half-alien descendant Moon is distantly aware of Earth, now entirely underwater, and considering whether to become a mother and help the human race populate a new planet. Told in diaries and histories in addition to straightforward narrative, the novel's patchwork depicts planetary collapse and humankind's interconnectedness over centuries.

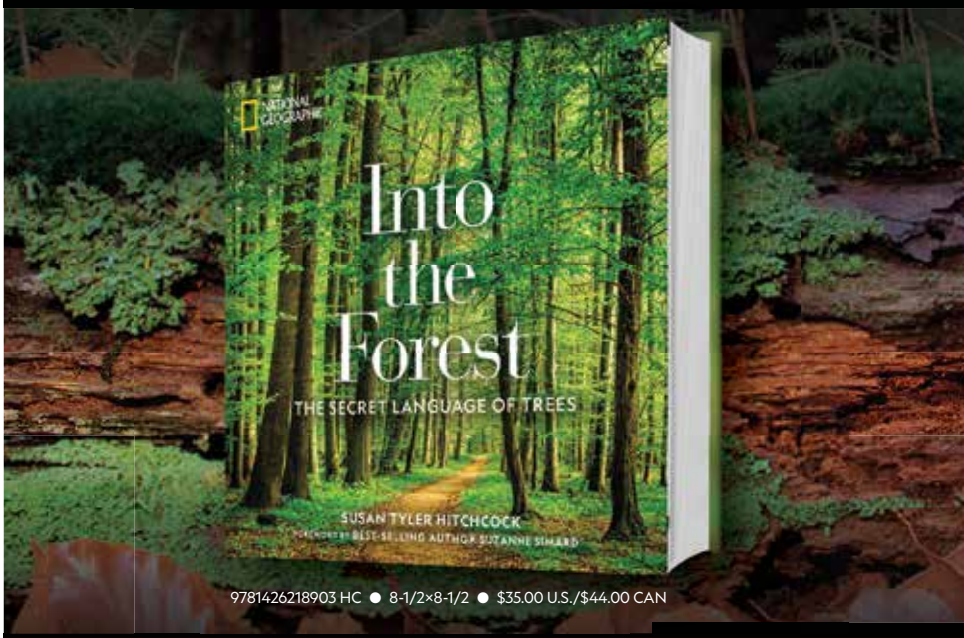
In *Eleutheria* by Allegra Hyde (Vintage, Mar.), Willa Marks deems herself "too wise for cynicism" and flees her conspiracy theorist parents in Boston for the island of Eleutheria. There, the inhabitants of utopian Camp Hope are "modern pilgrims," Hyde writes—"environmental devotees who'd heard the call for revolution" and view climate change as "enemy number one." *PW*'s review praised the novel's "exquisite prose and keen insights into the limits of idealism and activism," calling it "a worthy entry into the growing field of environmental fiction."

Hyde says she was interested in possibilities of "how people might try to come together, and what it takes to have society mobilized on a mass scale to take on this crisis." She, like other authors and editors we spoke with, hopes readers emerge with a sense of understanding that "even if it's not your city being flooded, we are all in this together—past, present, and future." ■

Liza Monroy's books include the essay collection Seeing as Your Shoes Are Soon to Be on Fire *(Soft Skull).*

"This just may be the most beautiful and evocative book ever to celebrate the wonder of the forests that are the very fabric of our lives."

—WADE DAVIS, author of *The Serpent and The Rainbow*



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