

That Sinking Feeling of Imminent Doom



The Island Will Sink
Briohny Doyle
ISBN: 9780994606808
\$29.99
299 pp
[The Lifted Brow](#) 2016

This book is a disaster and it had me from the beginning to the end. Actually, it is a collection of intertwined disasters: environmental, societal and personal; even a disastrous sinking into banality of the language portrayed, a sinking that we already see happening today in banal public utterances.

The novel is set some decades into the future in and around ‘the bay’ and in the Pacific Ocean. The island of the title is Pitcairn and it *is* sinking. Therein lies one of the disasters – it is mooted to be “potentially devastating” with “high plausibility”. It could mean the end of all life on Earth, through disturbances in the crust, with resulting tsunamis and volcanic action. It could mean the end of the planet itself. Much of the all-pervading electronic broadcast media is obsessed with it, as are the citizens.

The narrator, Max, is a film director of immersive cinema. His films are all about disasters and he is made to examine how far he wants to immerse himself in ‘real’ life, if ‘real’ even still has any meaning. His surname, Galleon, is itself reminiscent of the warships that brought disaster to so many and that sank so many other ships. It is almost as if max is sailing through life.

Max’s private life is a mess. He has no memory of his past or of his present once it has passed – he relies on ‘the archive’, which records his feelings, activities, movements and interactions; it also gives him access to his past, partially, and allows him to expunge whole sections of his recorded past. His editing of his the archive reads like the editing of a film – the author even depicts some of Max’s review of the archive in the form of a film script. The novel itself is structured in sections named after parts of a film script: Establishing Shot, Romantic Subplot, Action Sequence, Director’s Cut Ending.

The society Max lives in has been rebuilt after an environmental catastrophe. Use of resources is carefully monitored and policed. Max’s young daughter is obsessed with conservation and his son seems mostly lost to electronic gaming. His wife ... I couldn’t quite work out his wife and I am not sure the author intended me to.

Like all good futuristic or sci-fi stories, this novel is about us – us as we may already be and as we could become. It gives a glimpse into a possible human society that is different from ours, but not too different. It is not much of a stretch of the imagination to see us having to deal with similar issues to the ones Briohny Doyle dishes up out of *her* fertile imagination. This book reminds me of some of the best of Frank Herbert’s stories.

What gives *The Island Will Sink* its greatest strength is that it examines what goes on inside the main character emotionally, psychologically and existentially. It is easy enough to conjure up a fictional world but much harder to give humans inhabiting it depth and gravitas.

A first reading has given me some understanding of the society Max lives in and I know that a second reading will have me appreciate Max and his not-so-distant world a lot better. That world is finely nuanced.

This is a marvellous debut novel for Briohny Doyle and for the publisher, The Lifted Brow, which is best known for its eponymous literary journal.