

Schism

Britt Holewinski

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This teen dystopia undertakes a fascinating, character-driven examination of human nature.

Schism by Britt Holewinski is a fast-paced, compelling dystopia set in a world where everyone over the age of thirteen has been killed by a virus.

Andy, Charlie, and Morgan were vacationing in Bermuda when the virus struck. For five years, they managed to survive on the island, but when Morgan is brutally attacked, the group decides to risk a voyage back to what was the United States. They arrive safely enough but quickly discover that life there is even more dangerous. When they meet Ben and Jim, cousins who are fleeing the East Coast and the corrupt society that has been created there, the groups join together and decide to head west.

As they travel around the country they discover others living alone or in small communities, some even managing to return to a life similar to what they all once knew. When a chance encounter with two young men searching for Ben and Jim reveals that Sean Taylor, the self-appointed leader of a large area in and around New York, is continuing to experiment with the virus that killed the adults, the group decides to head back to the East Coast to try and stop him.

Schism is both entertaining and thought provoking. Characters and the relationships that they develop drive the plot, and the desperation, longing, and hope that these characters feel as they search for home will resonate for many. The author includes detailed character backgrounds that lend depth and believability. There are lovely descriptions of the landscape that Andy and her friends travel through: "The lush foliage of Tennessee thinned out as they moved west beyond the Mississippi."

There is also meticulous detail about survival in a world where society no longer functions: "Over the years, the chemical in the plastic broke down and contaminated the water, making it undrinkable. Glass-bottled water was like gold, and finding any left was rare." These components make the story a pleasure to read. Below the surface of the story, however, is a much deeper examination of human nature—whether humans are selfish survivalists or socially dependent and peace seeking—and this makes the book truly fascinating.

Young adults who enjoy post-apocalyptic fantasy will find fresh ideas, relatable characters, and an enjoyable story in *Schism*. This is the first book in a planned series and though the story reaches a satisfying conclusion, the future that awaits Andy and her friends is full of uncertainty, creating a sense of anticipation, even longing, for the next installment.

CATHERINE THURESON (April 19, 2016)

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