

Sea Change

Nancy Kress

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In Nancy Kress's terrifying novel *Sea Change*, a famine-stricken, near-future world has turned its back on science.

In 2005, Renata's life was normal. She was a student at Yale, worried about her difficult roommate and on-again-off-again boyfriend, Jake. She dabbled in activism, jumping from cause to cause without ever finding her passion.

Still, Renata's activism made her prime recruitment material for the Org, maligned as a terrorist and bent on feeding the world (cue ominous music). She became a courier for the organization, taking data from one cell to another. Renata and the Org know that anything can be hacked: presidential elections, Wall Street, and, worst of all, the food supply.

Renata's story imparts a sense that the novel's all too possible future is already underway. Facing a food crisis dubbed the Catastrophe whose origins are shadowy but involve genetically modified crops, the Org tries to reverse the famine, using the help of now illegal GMOs. Chapters jump from 2022 to 2032, tracing their efforts.

Sharp, spare, and journalistic, the book includes matter-of-fact descriptions of the shocking details of Renata's world: lost self-driving houses, "biopharmed" drugs, collapsed world economies, and toxic ocean blooms. Everyday life remains complicated: children die, politics are complex, and marriages end. Human beings stay petty and divided. Hints of this awful reality build suspense and dread about what really happened.

The catastrophe also increases the divide between the haves and have-nots. The book hints at what happens with the Org's plans and at whether they are successful, but Renata's efforts are ultimately little more than a drop in the ocean of the world's problems.

Sea Change is a chilling speculative novel in which an apocalyptic environmental collapse leads to a future in which food is the enemy.

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