

# THE UNINHABITABLE EARTH: LIFE AFTER WARNING

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## BOOK REVIEW

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‘Climate change is fast, much faster than it seems we have the capacity to recognize and acknowledge; but it is also long, almost longer than we can truly imagine.’<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to debates concerning the destruction of our planet, there is no shortage of information in relation to Climate Change. Usually, discussions about Climate Change are focused on the same things: how humanity is affecting (or some may argue: not affecting) planet Earth and what we can do as a species to stop it. In continuation to his 2017 New York Post article in 2017<sup>2</sup>, ‘The Uninhabitable Earth’, he focuses on the consequences of our

choices in vivid and terrifying detail to make the reader see beyond the now.

Wallace-Wells is an editor at the New York Post<sup>3</sup> who most commonly writes about the future of humanity, science, and technology. Although, his most popular work, *The Uninhabitable Earth*, does highlight that the focal point behind Climate Change is not the purpose in this novel. Despite this, Wallace-Wells spends the first section of his novel named ‘Cascades’ discussing the science and history of Climate Change, along with discussions and the denial that goes along with it.

If you are looking for a book that focuses purely on the event itself and avoids any sort of political stance, this is not the book for you. This is not a novel about how we can fix the damage we create but simply a Wake-up call for what will happen should our actions not change. It seeks to hold ‘us’ – the readers as well as humanity – accountable and places blame where it feels necessary.

During the book's opening section ‘Cascades’, Wallace-Wells sets the tone of the book by immediately telling us that things are ‘much worse than you think’<sup>4</sup> planting a sense of doom in the reader. He writes in depth about the various ‘Elements of Chaos’<sup>5</sup> that are rapidly occurring due to human interference. From ‘Heat Death’ and ‘Wildfire’ to ‘Economic Collapse’ and ‘Climate Conflict’, the list of problems

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<sup>1</sup> David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warning* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2019) p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> David Wallace-Wells, ‘The Uninhabitable Earth’ in *New York Magazine*, 2017 <<https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/07/climate-change-earth-too-hot-for-humans.html>> [Accessed 10 November 2022].

<sup>3</sup> National Fellow, ‘David Wallace-Wells’ in *New America*, 2019 <<https://www.newamerica.org/our-people/david-wallace-wells/>> [Accessed 10 November 2022].

<sup>4</sup> Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth*, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth*, p. 5.

seems daunting – no doubt the desired effect for the choice of topic. Wallace-Wells seems to want to shock his readers into understanding the severity of the situation and to stop sitting on the fence. ‘A state of half-ignorance and half-indifference is a much more pervasive climate sickness than true denial or true fatalism.’<sup>6</sup>

*The Uninhabitable Earth* is clever in its execution in that Wallace-Wells discusses a future that impacts *everyone*. Even those who are apathetic towards nature will still feel the consequences of how the Earth is changing. Wallace-Wells ensures in his various explanations that readers know that no one is safe from the long-term impact of Climate Change. The entire novel is a little bleak and a reader may have to put it down a couple of times and come back to it due to its nihilistic nature. Of course, the lack of science when discussing Climate Change, except for the short mention in ‘Cascades’, can lead to dubious readers. An unhelpful aspect is that Wallace-Wells repeats the same point multiple times in what could have been a single sentence. It might have been to drive a point home. The repetitiveness, however, does not have its desired effect.

*The Uninhabitable Earth* is not a book that offers any sort of comfort or answer to the horrors it presents, it just simply lays them out for readers to understand and fear. While this short novel does offer some rare hopeful notes, it seems to have been written as call for arms against ignorance and another stark reminder for those who agree with David Wallace-Wells.

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<sup>6</sup> Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth*, p. 53.