



We All Looked Up

By Tommy Wallach

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Four high school seniors put their hopes, hearts, and humanity on the line as an asteroid hurtles toward Earth in Tommy Wallach's *New York Times* bestselling "stunning debut" (*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review).

They always say that high school is the best time of your life.

Peter, the star basketball player at his school, is worried "they" might actually be right. Meanwhile Eliza can't wait to escape Seattle—and her reputation—and perfect-on-paper Anita wonders if admission to Princeton is worth the price of abandoning her real dreams. Andy, for his part, doesn't understand all the fuss about college and career—the future can wait.

Or can it? Because it turns out the future is hurtling through space with the potential to wipe out life on Earth. As these four seniors—along with the rest of the planet—wait to see what damage an asteroid will cause, they must abandon all thoughts of the future and decide how they're going to spend what remains of the present.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Gr 10 Up—It's spring of senior year, and four students are questioning whether they're headed for the futures they want. For Peter (the popular jock), Anita (most likely to succeed), Andy, (the slacker stoner), and Eliza (the photographer with a reputation), the pressures of school, friends, and family feel massive—until the announcement that an asteroid is on a collision course with Earth. Suddenly the future isn't so important. Wallach has created an accessible cast of realistic teens struggling with identity, family, and loyalty. Substantial language, casual sex, drugs, and occasional violence occur throughout, but it almost always feels authentic to these teens and the world they're living in; even their worst mistakes feel relatable and worthy of empathy given the world-ending circumstances. Many adult characters feel one-dimensional, but the sense of the teens' urgency to live is palpable. In following his four protagonists as their lives converge, Wallach has written a coming-of-age novel with a captivating existential twist: What is truly important at the end of the world? VERDICT Fans of gritty and apocalyptic fiction won't be disappointed.—Amy Koester, Learning Experiences Department, Skokie PL

Review

The end of the world turns into a life changing opportunity for four high school seniors. High school is all about labels. In this stunning debut set in present day Seattle, there's Peter the athlete, Andy the slacker, Anita the overachiever and Eliza the slut. Just as each notices a strange blue star in the sky one night, the president announces that the star is actually an asteroid with a path that is 66.6 percent likely to hit and destroy the Earth in two months. Told from the teens' alternating viewpoints, sometimes with cleverly overlapping details, this edgy story follows how each copes with impending doom with brilliant imagery and astounding depth. Knowing that all life will probably end in just weeks, the four teens abandon their labels and search for meaning in the time they have left. Inspired by Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*, they forge a "karass"—an unbreakable, and indeed life changing, bond—as they explore purpose, evil, faith, independence, friendship, sex and love together. In the background there is also social commentary to be gleaned as the world becomes a dangerous place and martial law becomes a farce. But just like the asteroid that dots the night sky, Wallach pierces his darkness with tenderness and humor. A thought provoking story that will bring out readers' inner philosophers. (Kirkus, *STARRED REVIEW January 15, 2015)

*“In this stunning debut...Wallach pierces his darkness with tenderness and humor. A thought provoking story that will bring out readers' inner philosophers.” (Kirkus Reviews, STARRED REVIEW)

“Tommy Wallach's *We All Looked Up* is a triumphant debut—this generation's *The Stand*. It is at once troubling, uplifting, scary, and heart wrenching, and written with so much compassion for our fragile hold on the fleeting here and now. A glorious, wonderful, completely unforgettable novel.” (Andrew Smith, author of *Winger*, *Grasshopper Jungle*, and *100 Sideways Miles*)

“The story twists in unexpected ways, making it at times chilling but also hopeful...Wallach's debut is...a literary *Breakfast Club* for a modern generation, and it will surprise readers expecting another clunky dystopian novel with its solid, realistic writing.” (Booklist)

Wallach introduces four teenagers facing an asteroid predicted to be on a disastrous collision course with earth in two months. All of them—Peter, the basketball star; Eliza, the artsy and misunderstood photographer; Andy, the marijuana soaked slacker; and Anita, the musically inclined straight A student—decide, in the course of interconnected, alternating stories, that they must use these two months to

do things differently, to make whatever time they have left more meaningful. Peter dreams of Eliza, thinking she has to be better than his catty girlfriend, Stacy, while Anita tries desperately to save herself by pursuing her music. The truth of these teenagers—of *any* teenagers—is that they are rarely as simple as their clique positions would suggest. The story twists in unexpected ways, making it at times chilling but also hopeful. There are a few moments in the interconnected stories that feel contrived, but Wallach's debut is nevertheless a literary *Breakfast Club* for a modern generation, and it will surprise readers expecting another clunky dystopian novel with its solid, realistic writing. (Booklist February 1, 2015)

“Wallach has created an accessible cast of realistic teens struggling with identity, family, and loyalty... Fans of gritty and apocalyptic fiction won't be disappointed.” (School Library Journal)

Four Seattle high school students whose lives have not intersected much are brought together by the disturbing news that an asteroid is headed for Earth with a 66.6% chance of collision that will obliterate human life. With impact expected in two months, life becomes drastically different. Food is rationed, gas prices skyrocket, satellite and cell service grind to a halt, and looting and lawlessness make the streets unsafe. Through the alternating perspectives of popular jock Peter, promiscuous Eliza, slacker Andy, and overachiever Anita, the reader sees each character grapple with the prospect of a shortened life, challenged to make the last days meaningful in a doomed world where human nature has bared its teeth.

With the terrifying possibility of an apocalyptic ending for humankind and the philosophical and ethical challenges that this brings, *We All Looked Up* offers much food for thought: What would you do if you were given a limited number of days on Earth? Each of the major characters, having lived life for others, examines past choices and recognizes the need to change course. Readers, in turn, will be challenged to question what matters in their own lives. This compelling, well written narrative, which offers sometimes raw insight into human motivation and behavior, will have readers racing to the final pages and pondering its ideas long after. —Cathy Fiebelkorn. (VOYA, *STARRED REVIEW February 2015)

“This compelling, well written narrative, which offers sometimes raw insight into human motivation and behavior, will have readers racing to the final pages and pondering its ideas long after.” (VOYA, STARRED REVIEW)

An asteroid named Ardor is on course to destroy the world. As four Seattle teenagers count down the weeks until impact, they wrestle with the meaning of their lives and their possible deaths. Peter, a basketball golden boy, must decide if he should save his sister from her nihilistic boyfriend and whether true love is worth ignoring the status quo. Eliza, a photographer with an unseemly reputation, negotiates her father's cancer diagnosis, her mother's abandonment, and the need to chronicle the chaos erupting around her, while finding herself drawn to Peter. Rounding out the story's rotating voices are Anita, a straight A student who just wants to sing, and Andy, a slacker who must decide where his loyalties lie and how to handle his dangerous friends. Debut novelist Wallach increases the tension among characters throughout, ending in a shocking climax that resonates with religious symbolism. Stark scenes alternating between anarchy and police states are counterbalanced by deepening emotional ties and ethical dilemmas, creating a novel that asks far bigger questions than it answers. (Publishers Weekly, *STARRED REVIEW January 26, 2015)

It's spring of senior year, and four students are questioning whether they're headed for the futures they want. For Peter (the popular jock), Anita (most likely to succeed), Andy, (the slacker stoner), and Eliza (the photographer with a reputation), the pressures of school, friends, and family feel massive—until the announcement that an asteroid is on a collision course with Earth. Suddenly the future isn't so important. Wallach has created an accessible cast of realistic teens struggling with identity, family, and loyalty. Substantial language, casual sex, drugs, and occasional violence occur throughout, but it almost always feels

authentic to these teens and the world they're living in; even their worst mistakes feel relatable and worthy of empathy given the world ending circumstances. Many adult characters feel one dimensional, but the sense of the teens' urgency to live is palpable. In following his four protagonists as their lives converge, Wallach has written a coming of age novel with a captivating existential twist: What is truly important at the end of the world? VERDICT Fans of gritty and apocalyptic fiction won't be disappointed.—Amy Koester, *Learning Experiences Department, Skokie PL* (School Library Journal February 2015)

"Debut novelist Wallach increases the tension among characters throughout, ending in a shocking climax that resonates with religious symbolism." (Publishers Weekly, STARRED REVIEW)

WALLACH, TOMMY *We All Looked Up*. Simon, 2015 [384p] Trade ed. ISBN 978 1 4814 1877 5 \$17.99?E book ed. ISBN 978 1 4814 1879 9 \$10.99?Reviewed from galleys

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If there were a 66.6% chance of the world ending in two months, would you change anything? In this novel, four teens tackle that question when the Earth is faced with a rapidly approaching asteroid that is much more likely to hit than miss. Each of the protagonists (the story alternates among the teens' viewpoints) had a social label before all this happened, but high school hierarchies crumble under the threat of world annihilation, and the teens are suddenly freed to create themselves anew. While the individual stories are sometimes unevenly told, the story really isn't about the single teens; this novel is much more of a big picture glimpse into their whole lives (friends, enemies, families, etc.) and how people orbit around and bump into one another in evolving ways, particularly during a crisis. **It's a dark novel, particularly as things fall apart and stop working (many people abandon even important posts to be with their loved ones), but Wallach uses black humor, sharp literary references (Vonnegut gets some attention, for example), and startlingly beautiful moments of true kindness to balance the dismal aspects.** Long after the details of these particular teens have faded, the question of what one might do in that situation will likely provoke contemplation or discussion. Pair this with Wallenfels' novel about the apocalypse via alien invasion, *Pod* (BCCB 5/10), for a broader exploration of the ways the world might end and what heroism and villainy may emerge when it does. AS (The Children's Bulletin)

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About the Author

Tommy Wallach is a Brooklyn based musician and novelist. He is the author of *Thanks for the Trouble* and the *New York Times* bestselling *We All Looked Up*, which has been translated into more than a dozen languages. His fiction and nonfiction have appeared in *McSweeney's*, *Tin House*, *Wired*, *Salon*, and other magazines. As a musician, he has put out an EP with Decca Records, as well as two independent releases, including *We All Looked Up: The Album*, a companion record to his first novel. He is a 2015 MacDowell Fellow and a finalist for the Children's Choice Book Award. Grok more at TommyWallach.com.

Users Review

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