

THE BIG ONE

Oregon's heading for a major quake

A failed plan to bring nuclear power to the “earthquake-free” Northwest led instead to the discovery that our region is due for a massive temblor. The Washington Public Power Supply System (WPPSS, aka “whoops”) nuclear power project, largely failed in the 1980s, but before it crashed, it led to the research uncovering that Oregon and Washington are actually on a seismic hot spot. In *Full Rip 9.0: The Next Big Earthquake in the Pacific Northwest* (Sasquatch Books, \$23.95), *Seattle Times* reporter Sandi Doughton draws the reader into in-depth science — science that says it’s a matter of if, not when, a big quake will strike — with vivid stories of the scientists behind the data.

The tales of the researchers and their motivations make *Full Rip 9.0* more than just gloom-and-doom disaster porn type of summer read, but make no mistake, Doughton sees a disaster on its way. A mega-earthquake and tsunami are going to hit along the 750-mile Cascadia Subduction Zone fault that runs parallels to the coasts of Oregon and Washington. We know this, Doughton writes, because of sand flung far from the beach, a “ghost forest” of cedar trees, the carefully preserved records of Japan from the 1700s and the oral traditions of Native Americans, among other things.

Tom Heaton’s work for WPPSS as a young “hotshot” geologist kicks off the book. He is the first to shatter the idea that Cascadia is earthquake-free, and after building an argument showing the Big One is coming to the region, Doughton circles back around to Heaton and his current work in her discussion of how buildings in places like Seattle and Portland simply aren’t built to withstand the rocking and rolling of a subduction quake. More than half the schools in Oregon are rated at high or very high potential for collapse, and efforts to upgrade them are slow.

Doughton also details the careful work of Brian Atwater, a University of Washington geologist who studied soil in western Washington’s bays and estuaries that showed the region’s shaky history. She describes not only how he discovered the pattern of tsunamis, but also describes his old 1978 Dodge truck, which his students dubbed “the beast,” and his ancient canoe; she gives the details that make Atwater and other scientists as interesting and central to the narrative as the massive temblor they predict. While Doughton seems to seek to maintain the “objectivity” that many reporters for daily papers seek, her affection for the scientists she tags along with and her fascination for their research shine through and make the science even more engaging.

Oregon State University’s Chris Goldfinger’s research posits that the average interval separating major quakes in Cascadia is about 250 years, Doughton writes. We’ve gone more than 300 years without a big one, and we’re due. From the schools that will be shaken to the leaky tanks and Columbia Generating Station nuclear plant at Hanford that will feel the earth move, *Full Rip 9.0* is terrifying in its implications, yet an entertaining summer read. ■



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GENRE NIGHT

The Oregon Writers Collective (OWC) hosts a reading and craft discussion of “genre” writing at 7 pm Thursday, June 20, at Tsunami Books. The evening focuses on the process of four Oregon writers: Sarah Blakley-Cartwright chats about writing her *New York Times* bestselling fantasy/young adult novel *Red Riding Hood*; Ulrick Casimir talks about his mystery/ crime/ noir fiction; Arwen Spicer discusses her science fiction novels; and OWC organizer Heather Ryan discourses on her work with humor in memoir and literary nonfiction.

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