



TITLE INFORMATION

DIGGER

Dig or Die!

Deborah Cholette

Illus. by Davide Ortu

One Elm Books (240 pp.)

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BOOK REVIEW

In Cholette's middle-grade novel, young siblings form a plan to help neighbors during a climatological disaster.

Nick and his younger sister Lily may not know exactly what the magnetosphere is, but they learn that a large crack in it has devastating consequences: Earth's atmosphere is leaking into space, gradually dropping the level of breathable air (this level is eventually called "the Red-Line"). The people in the kids' neighborhood primarily react by sequestering in their basements and worrying about having enough water and food. With the Internet and cell phones no longer working, Lily communicates with her best friends Amy and Maya via walkie-talkies; this gives her an idea for disseminating updates on neighbors and Red-Line news coverage. Meanwhile, Nick has already dug a tunnel to the nearby ravine, employing a skill he picked from his estranged father, a backhoe operator. He and friends dig tunnels and trenches around the neighborhood to expedite sharing resources, bathrooms, and basements, but one villainous neighbor would rather just take what he wants, no matter who he hurts. The cast of Cholette's tale shines. Nick and Lily model selflessness; nearly everything they do involves helping others, even when this puts them in danger. They're also conflicted over their dad apparently abandoning them (he never returned from a New York construction project). That's one mystery that lingers for a time, along with the reason behind Nick's ex-pal Noah severing their friendship. The author fills the pages with such fun, fresh slang as "crouch-running" and "Red-Lining," a practice in which characters somehow "surf" the Red-Line. This short, concisely written novel, aptly depicting a worldwide catastrophe through the lens of one small neighborhood, ends on a satisfying and convincing note. Ortu's crisp, comic-book style illustrations feel immersive as they wrap around the text, cover multiple pages, or show above- and underground perspectives simultaneously.

Engaging adolescent heroes propel this streamlined, riveting eco-fiction.