

**Simon Winchester . . . *A Crack in the Edge of the World.*
Harper Collins, 2005**

Earthquakes, volcanoes, tsunamis are all as inevitable a part of the earth's story as sunrise and sunset are a part of the quotidian routine, the only signal difference being the rhythm and the pitiless irregularity of their occurrence. One day this place of mountains, lakes, and rivers will break and explode. New volcanoes will thrust out of the earth, produce even more rock, and lay it down on top of whatever monuments humans may have imprudently chosen to place in the way.

All that humans do, and everywhere that humans inhabit, is for the moment only--like the cherry blossoms in a Japanese springtime that are exquisite simply by virtue of their very impermanence. Geology, particularly the dramatic New Geology one sees in a place like Yellowstone, or on the Denali, or on the great San Andreas Fault, serves as an ever-present reminder of this--of the fragility of humankind, the evanescent nature of even our most impressive achievements.

It serves as a reminder that it is only by the planet's consent that places like the mountains of Montana and Wyoming exist, and only by the planet's consent that all towns and all cities--New Madrid, Charleston, Anchorage, Banda Aceh and San Francisco -- survive for as long as they do. It is a reminder, too, that this consent is a privilege and one that may be snatched away suddenly, and without any warning at all.

