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What is disaster architecture? How should we humans build to not only survive but also live in disastrous times? Should we fortify ourselves behind technological castle walls in the urban jungle? Hide in caves deep in the forest or high on a mountaintop? Escape into space and settle on other planets?

Those questions are the focal point of Jacob Lillemose's novel *Architecture Zero*.

The novel follows the main character, the middle-aged academic Jacob Lillemose, on a journey to the Institute for Built Environments in a deserted area of the state of Montana in America. He has been invited by the institute's founder, the enigmatic Walon Bartok, and without knowing much about the institute and its research, he has said yes because he sees the journey as an opportunity to escape his frustrating life in the academic world and the feeling of having created his career on a false self-image. At the secret institute, he is introduced to Bartok's monstrous vision "Architecture Zero," partly through archive material, partly through conversations with Bartok himself. It is a deeply fascinating vision, and just the opening to a new world that he sought. But slowly his sense of reality begins to dissolve into a series of visions and dreams as he struggles with recurring headaches. Eventually he does not know what to believe and mean, but then Bartok invites him inside the depths of his vision and introduces him to new kind of planetary disaster architecture that exceeds his wildest imagination.

Architecture Zero is a disaster novel about a world where humans must protect themselves against each other. A world plagued by pandemics and social unrest. A world in which disasters are the new normal. The novel unfolds in a twilight zone between research and fiction and mixes documentary material and popular learning cultural references in a form that transverses genres and realities. It is equal parts architectural history, eco-criticism, film analysis, horror, social diagnosis and autofiction.

Jacob Lillemose (b. 1974) is a curator at the Medical Museion in Copenhagen and curator of the Danish pavilion at the 2022 Venice Biennial. From 2014 to 2017, he was the director of the exhibition space X AND BEYOND as part of the interdisciplinary research project Changing Disasters at the University of Copenhagen. *Architecture Zero* is his debut novel.

Architecture Zero

Jacob Lillemose

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For interviews and press photos contact
the publisher: Karsten Wind Meyhoff
kwm@twm.dk