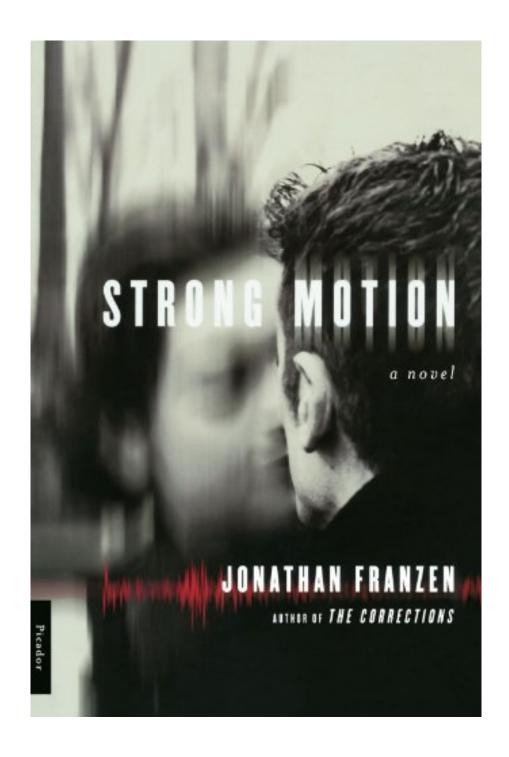


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Louis Holland arrives in Boston in a spring of ecological upheaval (a rash of earthquakes on the North Shore) and odd luck: the first one kills his grandmother. Louis tries to maintain his independence, but falls in love with a Harvard seismologist whose discoveries about the earthquakes' cause complicate everything.

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Most helpful customer reviews

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

An excellent if dated book.

By Wenn Schon

An excellent if dated book, takes place around 1900. Lots to think about and very well written. Could have used some serious editing though to remove or cut down rambling philosophical sections. Never would have thought that anyone could do so much with the idea of earthquakes around Boston.

16 of 19 people found the following review helpful.

Does the earth move for you?

By William Whyte

Great things about this novel include:

- The central idea -- both the concept of earthquakes in the Boston area, and the concept of how they might have been caused.
- The writing -- full of brilliant images, razor-sharp observation, and humanity. Franzen is the only novelist I know whose characters have the real-life habit of ending sentences with "so", as in "Well, he's coming in tomorrow, so." Other reviewers have commented on the raccoon sequence, which is affecting and unforgettable.
- The setting -- if Boston were destroyed in an earthquake, you could reconstruct it from the description given in the book.
- The social conscience -- in particular, the sequence about the effects of the settlers on New England stands out
- And the gutsiness of having a character who's a militant anti-abortionist with a heart of gold.

The weaknesses:

- The main characters aren't entirely likeable. This applies particularly to the female characters; Louis's mother Melanie is an ogre, his sister Eileen is a spoiled idiot, his Texan girlfriend Lauren is just an

annoyance. Even Renee, the main female character, is curiously static; Louis develops far more as the book goes on.

- It's such a big, ambitious book, and yet a small number of main characters are linked into all the plots. In particular, it seems contrived that Eileen's boyfriend Peter has a direct family link into the vast conspiracy. The weaknesses -- in particular, the events leading up to Louis and Renee's separation halfway through the book -- made me so impatient that I actually gave up reading it for a while. But I'm very glad I returned to it. A lot of the most memorable passages are in the second half, there's a great sense of gathering apocalypse and all the pleasures of a well-constructed thriller, and it ends on an emotional high that prefigures, but doesn't quite match, that at the end of The Corrections. Definitely worth a read, particularly if (by sheer coincidence) you live on the same street as the hero...

35 of 38 people found the following review helpful.

Better than The Corrections

By F. T. Litz

I picked up Strong Motion after enjoying Franzen's The Corrections. The story lines in this novel are more complexly layered than those in The Corrections, but also more tightly organized. Most notably, in stark contrast to The Corrections, Franzen does not send us off to the Baltics to experience needless side stories. Every overlapping and interwoven piece of text is important to the rest of the novel.

Brief decriptions of the plot do not do the book justice, because they come off as unbelievable, even gimmicky. While Franzen does take bold risks with this story and his characters, this novel is so well crafted that I did not even pause to consider whether a particular plot twist was plausible. Like all good fiction, the unreal becomes real as the story unfolds.

With rich, conflicted characters and smart, penetrating observations of American society, Franzen's Strong Motion is a master work. It is easy to see why there was such a buzz around the release of The Corrections: Franzen is one of the best contemporary American literary fiction has to offer.

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