



The Beach

Alex Garland

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The Khao San Road, Bangkok -- first stop for the hordes of rootless young Westerners traveling in Southeast Asia. On Richard's first night there, in a low-budget guest house, a fellow traveler slashes his wrists, bequeathing to Richard a meticulously drawn map to "the Beach."

The Beach, as Richard has come to learn, is the subject of a legend among young travelers in Asia: a lagoon hidden from the sea, with white sand and coral gardens, freshwater falls surrounded by jungle, plants untouched for a thousand years. There, it is rumored, a carefully selected international few have settled in a communal Eden.

Haunted by the figure of Mr. Duck -- the name by which the Thai police have identified the dead man -- and his own obsession with Vietnam movies, Richard sets off with a young French couple to an island hidden away in an archipelago forbidden to tourists. They discover the Beach, and it is as beautiful and idyllic as it is reputed to be. Yet over time it becomes clear that Beach culture, as Richard calls it, has troubling, even deadly, undercurrents.

Spellbinding and hallucinogenic, *The Beach* by Alex Garland -- both a national bestseller and his debut -- is a highly accomplished and suspenseful novel that fixates on a generation in their twenties, who, burdened with the legacy of the preceding generation and saturated by popular culture, long for an unruined landscape, but find it difficult to experience the world firsthand.

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