A Shock to the System

Haruki Murakami’s stories are set in Japan in the month after Kobe.

AFTER THE QUAKE

By Jeff Giles

On September 23, 1995, the 6.9 magnitude Hyogoken-Nanbu earthquake destroyed large portions of Kobe and nearby cities, killing over 6,000 people and leaving over 100,000 homeless. It was the second largest earthquake in Japan’s recorded history and had a significant impact on Japanese culture and society. The disaster was a direct inspiration for Haruki Murakami, who had previously written about earthquakes in his novel "Kafka on the Shore." This essay explores the aftermath of the quake and its impact on Murakami’s work.

Jeff Giles is a senior editor at Newsweek, where he writes about books, movies and music.