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by Paul Johnson

The only thing we know for sure about earthquakes is that one will happen again, somewhere on the planet, very soon. Earthquakes pose a vital yet puzzling set of research questions that have confounded scientists for decades, but new ways of looking at seismic information and innovative laboratory experiments are offering tantalizing clues to what triggers earthquakes—and when.

Millions of earthquakes shake the globe every year, the ground suddenly lurching in response to movements of the tectonic plates that form Earth's crust. These plates jostle over, under, and against each other as they shift around the globe. All that shoving and grinding builds up stress along faults—fractures or breaks in the rock of the crust—until something has to give: an earthquake.

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