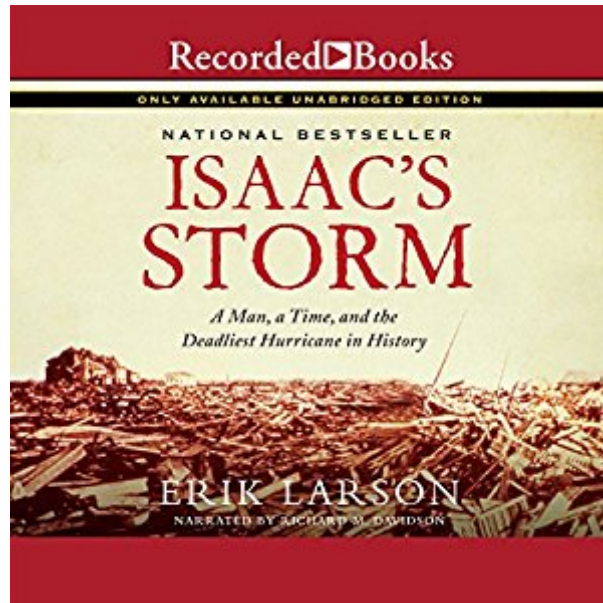


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Isaac's Storm: A Man, A Time, And The Deadliest Hurricane In History



Synopsis

Erik Larson is a regular contributor to national magazines including Time, The Atlantic, and Harper's. Filled with images as powerful as the hurricane it describes, Isaac's Storm immediately swept onto best seller lists across the country. In 1900, Isaac Monroe Cline was in charge of the Galveston station of the US Weather Bureau. He was a knowledgeable, seasoned weatherman who considered himself a scientist. When he heard the deep thudding of waves on Galveston's beach in the early morning of September 8, however, Cline refused to be alarmed. The city had been hit by bad weather before. But by the time this storm had moved across Galveston, at least 6,000 - probably closer to 10,000 - people were dead, and Cline would never look at hurricanes the same way again. Based on a wealth of primary sources, Erik Larson's unforgettable work will haunt you long after the final sentence. Narrator Richard M. Davidson infuses each chapter with added intensity.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I've been a meteorologist for 20 years. Trained by Dr Bill Gray, I've walked in the eye of three hurricanes and flown in the eye of one. One recent book interest has been adventure stories including THE PERFECT STORM, INTO THIN AIR, ENDURANCE, etc. I had shyed away from ISSAC'S STORM because I couldn't imagine what Larson could tell me I didn't already know about the 1900 disaster at Galveston. I shouldn't have waited. Even the most seasoned weather geek will learn from this book. Like Carl Sagan, Larson has a knack for putting complex concepts in layman terms. I took away new simple descriptions of tropical meteorological concepts. However, that is not

the genius of this book. Erik Larson did a wonderful job piecing together thousands of bits of information and crafting it all into a gripping read. What's missing? Photographs. Like SHIP OF GOLD IN THE DEEP BLUE SEA, this book is screaming for a companion book of photos. Eric said he waded through over 4,000; 250 of the best would make a super addition to this treatise. Rick Taylor, vorticity@aol.com

Are there other folks out there who enjoy reading true accounts of someone else's misfortune, especially if that misfortunate involves a titanic, unstoppable force of nature? A few, really good examples of this true-life disaster genre that I've read over the years are: "The Earth Shook - The Sky Burned" (San Francisco Earthquake); "The Coming Plague" (newly emerging diseases); "Great Lakes Shipwrecks and Survivals" (doomed on Lake Superior, etc.); "Rats, Lice, and History" (a biography of typhus); and "Isaac's Storm" (the Galveston hurricane of 1900). Erik Larson's book on the deadliest hurricane in history has two main focal points: the hurricane itself; and the human drama of Isaac Cline, the Galveston meteorologist who failed to predict the intensity of the storm. The book meanders through occasional dry stretches of Isaac's pre-storm biography, and through the history of the U.S. Weather Bureau (they were interesting, but not nearly as interesting as the storm), but once it focuses on the events of September 8, 1900 and beyond, I wasn't able to set "Isaac's Storm" down. Especially compelling are the eerie descriptions of what it's like to sail through the eye of a hurricane, and of course the narrative (from the viewpoints of several survivors) of what it was like to be in Galveston before, during, and after the storm. If you are afraid of storms or of water, you might not want to read this book because Erik Larson puts you right there when the storm debris is caving in the side of your house, or when the "tide suddenly rises fully four feet at one bound".

Larsen's book is a true account of not only the physical damage a severe hurricane can bring but also how human error (read: stubbornness) can cause just as much damage. "Isaac's Storm" chronicles the Galveston hurricane of 1900. Larsen ably follows the path of the hurricane and the paths of the survivors and non-survivors. I enjoyed Larsen's description of the anatomy of a storm, tracing one from the west coast of Africa to possible destruction on the other side of the Atlantic. As I read, I feared the description would get too scientific to follow. Larsen gently leads through the stages of the storm and takes time to explain what is happening and why. Equally fascinating is the pride the people of 1900 exhibit. Consider: 1) A storm would never cross the Gulf of Mexico and strike Galveston. 2) The U.S. Weather Bureau was convinced that Cubans could not forecast a

hurricane and caught off all weather warnings from Cuba. 3) Only Washington could declare the storm a "hurricane". The local forecaster (who was dealing with the wind, rain, etc.) could not. I found this book enjoyable, historical and a little chilling. I may have also learned a little more about all of us.

I went in to work sleepy-eyed quite a few mornings because I'm a slow reader and did not want to put this one down. It's a very clever combination of distilled eye-witness accounts, scientific and historical fact, memoirs and conjecture. I did not find the lack of photographs to be a problem, because the author portrays images wonderfully with words. The narrative builds gradually, like a good suspense novel; in the end, the horror of the event is very much evident in the narrative and the memories of those who survived the hurricane of 1900. The story has essentially the same fascination as that of the Titanic. Disaster occurred, and much of it could have been averted had human beings behaved differently. The difference is that this story has not been told repeatedly and does not focus on prominent citizens of the nation. Isaac's Storm, in the right hands, would make a terrific movie. In many ways, this book succeeds in taking the reader back to the year 1900. History at its best.

Overall this was an engaging account of a huge human disaster. The author manages to relate the failings and arrogance of the meteorologists who supposedly were responsible for tracking this storm. Their ability to allow their own sense of importance to overshadow scientific objectivity is unforgivable. The accounts of the human losses and acts of heroism are extremely moving; the description of workers finding the orphans buried in sand tied together with clothesline was particularly upsetting. The book itself is well written but for my taste was rather thin on the science alongside the human story. In the earlier chapters, there are sections devoted to the storm itself, but these disappear as the account develops. Most surprising is the lack of inclusion of any photographs from the time. This, and the lack of a decent map, leaves the reader unable to fully comprehend the aftermath of the storm.

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