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Thunderstruck



Synopsis

A true story of love, murder, and the end of the world's greatest hush. In *Thunderstruck*, Erik Larson tells the interwoven stories of two men: Hawley Crippen, a very unlikely murderer, and Guglielmo Marconi, the obsessive creator of a seemingly supernatural means of communication whose lives intersect during one of the greatest criminal chases of all time. Set in Edwardian London and on the stormy coasts of Cornwall, Cape Cod, and Nova Scotia, *Thunderstruck* evokes the dynamism of those years when great shipping companies competed to build the biggest, fastest ocean liners, scientific advances dazzled the public with visions of a world transformed, and the rich outdid one another with ostentatious displays of wealth. Against this background, Marconi races against incredible odds and relentless skepticism to perfect his invention: the wireless, a prime catalyst for the emergence of the world we know today. Meanwhile, Crippen, the kindest of men, nearly commits the perfect crime. With his superb narrative skills, Erik Larson guides these parallel narratives toward a relentlessly suspenseful meeting on the waters of the North Atlantic. Along the way, he tells of a sad and tragic love affair that was described on the front pages of newspapers around the world, a chief inspector who found himself strangely sympathetic to the killer and his lover, and a driven and compelling inventor who transformed the way we communicate. *Thunderstruck* presents a vibrant portrait of an era of advances, science, and fog, inhabited by inventors, magicians, and Scotland Yard detectives, all presided over by the amiable and fun-loving Edward VII as the world slid inevitably toward the first great war of the twentieth century. Gripping from the first page, and rich with fascinating detail about the time, the people, and the new inventions that connect and divide us, *Thunderstruck* is splendid narrative history from a master of the form. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I so enjoyed *The Devil in the White City*, a book I read without any awareness of its historical importance. I've waited with anticipation for Larson's next book, but this time I came to it with some expectation. *Thunderstruck* doesn't disappoint. If you're looking for a quick and unsubstantial book, *Thunderstruck* isn't for you. I can even anticipate that some reviewers will nail Larson for the incredible amount of detail he provides, especially in those chapters dealing with Marconi. However, this is Larson's manner and in the end you're glad he provided the in-depth treatment. *Thunderstruck*, like *The Devil in the White City*, tells two stories that are inevitably intertwined. First, is Guglielmo Marconi's search for "wireless" telecommunication. Marconi wasn't a scientist. He simply had an idea. With his rudimentary understanding of electromagnetism he believed it possible to communicate over long distances without wires. He was a plodder in the best traditions of Edison. He was, of course, successful. The second story deals with Dr. H. H. Crippen and the murder of his wife, Belle. Demanding, apparently unfaithful (though the Dr. appears to have gotten around a bit), and used to spending large sums of money they couldn't afford, Belle was a weight around Crippen's neck. Along with his innocent lover and secretary, Ethel, he flees but is ultimately thwarted by Marconi's invention and a crackerjack Scotland Yard detective. The trans-Atlantic chase, reported via "wireless" communication kept the world's attention. Indeed, the only two people who didn't know they were being chased were the lovers. Written in Larson's uncompromising style using original sources, *Thunderstruck* is a wonderful vision into the early years of the twentieth century when technology promised a new world. The story is engaging, well written, organized. Larson is a master storyteller. Read the book. You'll love it.

This is two stories in one. The story of how Marconi struggled to popularize and refine radio technology by trial and error is fascinating, and the story of how mild-mannered Harley Crippen became a famous criminal is nearly as interesting, and then the stories merge in a weird but memorable way. And every bit of it is true. I have to say that Larson puts it all together beautifully. He feeds you the perfect detail at the right time. It's not so much a true crime tale as it is a tale of human nature. It has a certain inevitability without ever boring you. I bet this one will spend a long

time on the bestseller list, just like *Devil in the White City* (his previous book) did.

I enjoyed half of "Thunderstruck," but the other half of the book was a real dud. Erik Larson is one of several popular authors whose books always follow the same basic formula. In Larson's case, his books are divided into two separate plots that focus on different characters whose lives ultimately collide in an unexpected way. Also, half of Larson's book generally involve a very detailed process of some sort, while the other half revolves around a crime. When I read "The Devil in the White City," I enjoyed reading all the meticulous details about the planning and architecture of Chicago's World's Fair. However, I don't have a strong interest in science, so the entire portion of "Thunderstruck" devoted to Marconi's development of wireless communication was incredibly dull to me. I'm sure science buffs will find it much more enjoyable, but I thought that pages and pages devoted to things like the types of metals Marconi used to build antennas were incredibly dry and tedious. However, I really enjoyed the portion of "Thunderstruck" that revolved around the Crippen murder. Those chapters were much more intriguing than the Marconi parts, and I thought Larson did an excellent job of setting up the story. Also, I enjoyed the final chapters of the book where the Marconi/Crippen stories finally overlap. This book is based on actual events that I didn't know much about, and I'm eager to learn more about the Crippen case. (I won't be doing more research on Marconi, though...I'll leave that to the science students out there.) Overall, Larson is a pretty good storyteller. However, I personally only enjoyed about 50% of this book. I doubt most people will really get into the Marconi chapters unless they have a strong interest in the history and development of scientific processes.

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