



8.4

Peter Herson

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The New Madrid Seismic Zone is 140 miles, stretching across five states. In 1811 and 1812 enormous earthquakes erupted along this zone, effecting 24 states, creating lakes in Tennessee and causing the Mississippi River to run backward. In Peter Heron's 8.4 the New Madrid awakens, threatening the country with systematic collapse in a chillingly plausible case of history repeating itself. It's up to a team of scientists to stop the impending destruction, working against nature, time and a horrifying, human-made conspiracy.

8.4 Details

Date : Published November 1st 1999 by Jove (first published February 1st 1999)

ISBN : 9780515127133

Author : Peter Heron

Format : Paperback 460 pages

Genre : Fiction, Thriller, Science Fiction

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From Reader Review 8.4 for online ebook

Joan Horkey says

Very suspenseful. Reminded me of Michael Crichton's books.

SiennaB! says

this book was an odd mix of engaging tedium. published in the late 90's, it's very much behind the times technologically, but that isn't a huge barrier to enjoying the book. the characters use cell phones occasionally and they have laptops, but the tech is very new and a very small part of the story. the explanation of Global Positioning System gets tired after the third or fourth time, but i'll cut the author a break on that because it's new as he's writing his story.

the actual earthquake scenes and the rushing around the characters do building up to the many tense scenes in the book are very engaging. the main character is smart and capable without being Jack Reacher or Superman. as a one or two dimensional protagonist, he works, but he's never fully developed enough to carry off the side romance that the author throws in.

imo, the author doesn't develop any of the characters beyond the most basic level. some are minor enough that we don't care - others would serve the story better with more depth. overall, it seems that the science and action of the story are the author's main concern and the cast of characters he's created are mainly there to power the story.

there are some troublesome point-of-view shifts that are rather amateur for a published author, making one wonder if the editors gave it anything more than a cursory glance. the science portions of the book are too long and dry and not necessary to a lay-readers enjoyment of the story. if Mr. Hernon had spent more time on the emotions of the characters in the face of this cataclysmic event and a little less time explaining P and S waves, etc, the story would've been much more riveting.

as it stands, i enjoyed the book and read it cover to cover in a couple of days. at a couple of points towards the end, i considered putting it down because of some of the character issues i had, but i persevered. The ending was in-line with the rest of the story. Not great but not bad at all. For someone looking to get lost in a bit of climate disaster fiction, they could do much worse than reading 8.4.

Peggy says

I enjoyed this book, although there was a lot of scientific stuff I didn't understand. I had read accounts of the 1811-12 New Madrid earthquakes, so this was interesting to me. It is about the faults of New Madrid becoming active again, and setting off 3 major earthquakes, the biggest is 8.4 magnitude. This devastates most of the middle of the United States. Places like Memphis, ST. Louis, Louisville and Cincinnati are almost completely destroyed.

Scientists are afraid an even bigger quake is about to happen and part of the story is how they figure out how to stop it and carry out the plan. The characters are very good and if you don't get bogged down in the science of the prevention process, you will like this thriller. Most of it is set in Kentucky, but Indiana gets a

good mention, too.

Elizabeth says

A predictable romance in the background, but the earthquake story is interesting. The New Madrid Seismic Zone is a read thing, and caused a huge series of earthquakes in the 1800s.

Lora Shouse says

This book is the story of an earthquake. Several earthquakes. A lot of earthquakes, actually. It is what you would call a 'thriller,' and for me was particularly scary because the action is so close to home. Instead of a California earthquake, this story covers a what-might-happen scenario for a really big earthquake in the New Madrid seismic zone.

John Atkins, out on field trips while on a visit to a friend who works at the Center for Earthquake Studies at the University of Memphis, observes strange behavior in animals and strange lights in the sky and feels minor earthquake tremors. Elizabeth Holleran, who studies earthquake history by collecting archeological evidence of past earthquakes which can be used to date them receives a package from a former professor who has taken his own life (due to illness) in which he proposes a theory that indicates a major earthquake might happen in a few days. Her first reaction is to reject it as unlikely (it has to do with sunspots etc.), but when a magnitude 7.1 earthquake strikes near Mayfield, Kentucky causing extensive damage in Memphis and several other nearby cities, she takes the data and hops a plane to see if anybody is interested in checking it out.

Of course, everybody hopes the worst is over. But as aftershocks keep happening and seem to be getting worse, some people find Elizabeth's data worth looking at. Meanwhile, John and other seismologists are trying to get instruments out to get data on the aftershocks. But some people, instead of studying the facts, or helping with the cleanup and rescue operations, or anything else useful, turn out to be primarily engaged in covering up their own bad actions. An engineer at Kentucky Dam reports cracks in the dam. Some of the top people from the 'Seismic Safety Commission' order him to stop releasing water from the dam (apparently there has recently been a lot of rain in the area, which, aside from problems with the dam, apparently contributes to making other aspects of the earthquake problem worse, and the Tennessee River is nearly at flood stage already). They send in people to do repairs, and show up a meeting at the nearby town to put out the idea that the damage is not as bad as people have been led to believe, and is being fixed. John and Elizabeth wind up at the meeting too, and leaving with Lauren Mitchell, a local lady John has already met while checking on the reports of bizarre animal behavior, they visit the dam only to discover that the problems are much worse than people are being led to believe.

John and Elizabeth are on their way back to Memphis when another major earthquake hits. They find out later that this one was magnitude 8.4. It knocks over a freight train right in front of them. Memphis is pretty much destroyed, and there is major damage in cities from Chicago to Louisiana. Kentucky Dam is also wiped out.

But still the aftershocks don't let up, and shortly start increasing again. And eventually a proposal is made to try to defuse the next pending quake with a nuclear explosion. Understandably, nearly everybody is nervous about this.

Tension keeps mounting until almost the end. Even if this works, will John and Elizabeth make it out alive? And who else will? Or won't.

Very well written, and obviously extensively researched. I just hope this scenario remains fiction for a very long time...

CatBookMom says

This book is about what might happen if the New Madrid Fault in SE Missouri were to suffer an earthquake. It is a real geologic fault line, but it has been largely quiet since the early 1800s. It runs a long way through the center of the US, north and south right along the Mississippi River and across heavily-settled areas that are not equipped to deal with earthquakes. When it last registered a serious quake, the effects were felt as far away as Chicago and Pittsburgh.

This book will have you searching for more books about the real quake in the 1800s and its effects. I highly recommend it; the scenario in this book is fiction, but the damage could be very, very real. I don't think the US is ready to deal with a quake along this fault, any more than it was ready to deal with trying to evacuate New Orleans.

Fen says

I'm a big fan of disaster movies and, as such, I don't necessarily require a great deal of realism from the genre... but what I would like to see is, well, action. And there's way too little of it in this book. I should also add that I've had a lifelong interest in geology and seismology (having lived in a variety of geologically interesting places as a child) and even I got bored during the seemingly endless scientific explanations. They were all very nice, I'm sure, but really not what I was wanting to read in a book that was described on the cover as "a white-knuckled disaster thriller."

I found it rather distracting and a bit weird that the women in the book (and there were very few of them amid the confusingly huge cast of male characters) were nearly always referred to by their names and almost never by a pronoun. It made for a very awkward read and was completely unnecessary, due to the very limited number of women present in the first place, most of whom were never in the same location together.

I was also a bit disappointed by how much of the action took place "off-stage" only to be described later by various characters at one of the command centers.

What it really comes down to is that I was bored. So bored, I'll admit that I ended up simply skimming the last 100 pages or so, since it had honestly become a bit like slogging through dull homework.

Hilary says

What happens when the huge earthquakes that rocked the New Madrid fault 2 centuries ago happen again? That's the question founding this book. Unlike some of the disaster movies (one of which did use a similar technique at one point) this one actually seems based in real science. The scientists don't all agree, even those who have a working theory can't be certain, and in the meantime over 12,000 are injured or dead and another

earthquake seems possible...

The diagrams and maps were a good addition, particularly one near the beginning which showed the differing impact of similar-sized earthquakes in California and the lower midwest (primarily affecting Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois, and Missouri).

I'd been aware of the NMSZ but hadn't fully realized what its central location meant in terms of affected areas and potential damage.

Stephen says

San Andreas? You want a real earthquake, son, you come to Tennessee. In America's heartland lies a currently-quiescent fault, the New Madrid Seismic Zone. In the early 19th century a series of three massive earthquakes rolled the Mississippi River region, the most powerful quakes recorded in American history. In 8.4., it happens again.....but instead of scaring the coon-skin caps off of hunters and making the cows go crazy in the frontier, it devastates cities. It doesn't just give them a bad day, knocking the electricity offline and collapsing interstate bridges: it levels the area, with a preliminary death toll of over a hundred thousand.

The novel is a genuine science fiction tale, as most of the viewpoint characters are seismologists who are frantically trying to figure out what's happening; as they argue between themselves and attempt to convince the authorities that the worst is yet to come, the reader is treated to not only explanations of tectonic geology, but graphics that give some idea of what is happening below -- illustrating the different kinds of faults, for instance. Key to the drama is the fact that New Madrid activity doesn't consist of one big quake with minor aftershocks, but that its powerful tectonic activity erupts in clusters. The characters spend most of the book in mortal danger: if they're not fleeing the consequences of the quakes, like floods in Kentucky after a dam collapses, or urban riots as people raid stores for supplies, they're actively courting it by crossing rivers transacted by the faults, rappelling into open breaks in the Earth's surface, or probing deep into abandoned mines to collect data. There's even a little outbreak of civil war at the end, when the President decides the best thing to do is stick an A-bomb in the Earth's innards and blow it up, and the Kentucky governor realizes the White House is out of its ever-lovin' mind.

8.4 leads with science, and follows with disaster thrills. The endgame is bonkers, frankly, but maybe it's hard to sell 20th century readers on the idea that not everything can be solutioned or bombed away.

ChrisGA says

More scientific explanation than I could follow but still this was good suspense thriller.

Mark says

The first half was good, great action, good suspense building, but the last half is dragging. There were also

some other problems with the book, particularly the villain. I could not figure out his motives for being a villain. There didn't seem to be any payoff for doing the bad things he did. He was just in there to provide an antagonist. It totally broke my suspension of disbelief.

Zora says

3.5 Stars, but I called it 3. To address first the issue of how much science is in here--just enough, and it's well researched and explained. If you've taken a community college or low-end state university freshman geology survey course, you'll know it all. If you live in Coastal California, you'll probably know it all already, too. And if you don't know it all, it's well-explained in the book. There are even maps, charts, and diagrams, which I thought was a cool addition.

This is a competently written, formulaic natural disaster novel. Good Scientists see what's wrong and try to tell Bad Scientist who doesn't want to warn the public. In the meantime we follow nice Average Jill through her nice salt-of-the-earth life and see how she reacts when the quakes come. Unlike in some tamer disaster novels, Hernon does not shrink away from the reality that often, when things go bad, people go bad. They steal, price-gouge, loot, riot and kill for little reason.

The problems with this novel were, to me, two: Bad Scientist has no reason for being bad. At one point (very minor spoiler alert) there are five gigantic cracks in a crucial dam and he tells the people living downriver that everything is okiedokie. Huh? What's the motivation there? He's written to be a foil, but not to be well motivated, an irksome (to quote rifftrax) "Foily McAntagonist." And the other problem is I don't buy the solution at the end. Indeed, I don't buy "solutions" to volcanoes, earthquakes, hurricanes, and other inevitable forces of nature. You can build better, you can obey evacuation orders, but Mother Nature will out.

J.D. says

Not sure how to review this book. At times I thought "4 stars" and other times I thought "2 stars" so it ended up with 3 stars :) It all boils down to being a very good book in need of a lot of editing. I live near the NMSZ so the story line was interesting in that it's scary such a huge earthquake took place near here. It was a fun read in "a disaster movie" way. The problem for me was the continuity. It switched back and forth between characters in different places and at the same time went back and forth in time. It would start out today at 11:00 am, go to today at 9:00 a.m., move up to today at 4:30 pm then back to today at 11:30. A lot of that was to give different people's perspectives on certain earthquakes; where they were, what they were doing and their view of it, but it got very tiring and confusing after a few quakes and aftershocks. Still, I finished the book and could recommend it if you are interested in earthquakes the New Madrid Fault Line.

A~ says

Spoilers

I am taking a point off of the top because the book gave away the ending in the acknowledgments. It says right there that the thoughts of using a nuclear device to stop an earthquake has been discussed in real life. Well it wasn't a shock then when one showed up at the end.

Cons

The spoiler at the beginning of the book

The obvious sacrifice-Wow we have a group going into the mine shaft one of them is 70 years old and has cancer that is coming back, I wonder who is going to be the one who has to stay behind when the automatic detonators don't work.....

Too much detail involved in explaining earthquakes along with muddy pictures.

No resolution with the main antagonist.

pro's

Giving the bad guy a reason as to why they acted so stupidly in the beginning.

A pretty deep story.

Amy Webster-Bo says

good decription of the world when an earthquake that's that big hits a major fault line
