



Inviting Disaster: Lessons From the Edge of Technology

By James R. Chiles

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Combining captivating storytelling with eye-opening findings, *Inviting Disaster* delves inside some of history's worst catastrophes in order to show how increasingly "smart" systems leave us wide open to human tragedy.

Weaving a dramatic narrative that explains how breakdowns in these systems result in such disasters as the chain reaction crash of the Air France Concorde to the meltdown at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Station, Chiles vividly demonstrates how the battle between man and machine may be escalating beyond manageable limits -- and why we all have a stake in its outcome.

Included in this edition is a special introduction providing a behind-the-scenes look at the World Trade Center catastrophe. Combining firsthand accounts of employees' escapes with an in-depth look at the structural reasons behind the towers' collapse, Chiles addresses the question, Were the towers "two tall heroes" or structures with a fatal flaw?

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Inviting Disaster, by technology and history writer James R. Chiles, is an unusual book: it appeals to the macabre desires that keep us riveted to highway accidents, while knowledgeably discoursing on the often preventable mistakes that caused them. At its heart are colorful stories behind more than 50 of the most infamous catastrophes that periodically chilled the advance of the industrial age. There are both those well remembered (the 1986 Challenger explosion, for example) and those now largely forgotten (a 1937 gas explosion at a Texas school that killed 298). But along with lively depictions of these deadly devastations and white-knuckle calamities--the U.S. battleship Maine, Apollo 13, and Three Mile Island among them--Chiles offers an informed analysis of the unfortunate chain of events that brought them about. And by grouping like incidents to show how fatal "system fractures" eventually developed through a combination of human error and mechanical malfunction, he also suggests how we might sidestep such tragedies in the future. In so, doing he fashions these spectacular accounts of failed planes, trains, ships, bridges, dams, factories, and other conveyances and facilities into a cautionary tale about technological progress. --*Howard Rothman*

From Publishers Weekly

Despite the specter of the Titanic, the oil rig Ocean Ranger was called "unsinkable" until one fateful night in the North Atlantic in 1982. Failing to anticipate that the vessel could list significantly to one side, its builders left open some five-foot-long holes on top of its corner supports, which filled with water during a terrible storm and led to the deaths of all 84 crew members. Chiles treats readers to a laundry list of such disasters from Bhopal to Chernobyl that arose from mistakes, panic or hubris. The result is a parade of dramatic stories about people who are simply unable to think in critical situations: "imagine having to take the most difficult final exam of your life while somebody is lobbing tear-gas grenades at you... when you are also suffering a major migraine headache and violent food poisoning." In some cases, he suggests proactive measures (e.g., when on a plane, note the number the rows to the exit, in case there's a snafu involving blinding smoke). In a book that is much more than a litany of disaster and tips on survival, Chiles also offers fascinating, detailed analyses of "system fractures" chains of events yielding catastrophes. Despite the depressing subject matter, the book is ultimately hopeful, recounting numerous acts of foresight or bravery in the face of bureaucratic opposition that saved many lives. (Aug. 31)

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From Library Journal

Anyone who's been caught in a traffic jam caused by an accident can attest to what seems to be a universal fascination with disaster. While an engaging topic does not guarantee a good book, this volume on the conflicts between machines and humans is accessible and free of excessive technical jargon. This is not a Luddite's call for a return to the days before complicated technology but a careful examination of various disasters such as Chernobyl, Three Mile Island, the Space Shuttle, and an assortment of industrial and airline accidents and how they might have been prevented. While not all accidents can be avoided, Chiles shows how a large number of them could have been. Chiles contributes regularly to Smithsonian magazine, Audubon, and Air & Space, and the level and style of writing exhibited in these publications is maintained in this text. Highly recommended for academic and public libraries. James Olson, Northeastern Illinois Univ. Lib., Chicago

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Tara Scribner:

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Randy Caldera:

Reading a book tends to be new life style on this era globalization. With examining you can get a lot of information which will give you benefit in your life. Together with book everyone in this world can easily share their idea. Guides can also inspire a lot of people. Many author can inspire their own reader with their story or maybe their experience. Not only the storyplot that share in the guides. But also they write about the knowledge about something that you need case in point. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your kids, there are many kinds of book that exist now. The authors on this planet always try to improve their talent in writing, they also doing some analysis before they write for their book. One of them is this Inviting Disaster: Lessons From the Edge of Technology.

Kyle Reese:

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