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PAPERBACK!

From the author of the #1 *New York Times* nonfiction bestseller *The Devil in the White City* comes a true story of love, murder, invention, and the end of the world's "great hush."

"Larson is a marvelous writer...superb at creating characters with a few short strokes."

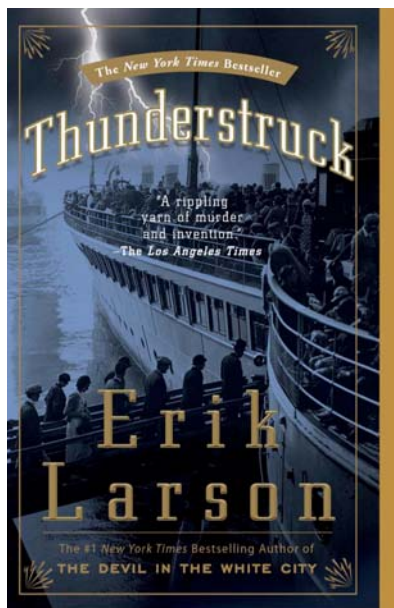
—*The New York Times Book Review*

"Larson's gift for rendering an historical era with vibrant tactility and filling it with surprising personalities makes **THUNDERSTRUCK** an irresistible tale."

—*The Washington Post Book World*

"Larson has created an intense, intelligent page-turner."

—*Atlanta Journal Constitution*



With his book *The Devil in the White City* still riding high on bestseller lists, National Book Award finalist Erik Larson set out to find another real-life story that would provide a vehicle for capturing the fullest sense possible of a time and a place. The suspenseful, evocative result is **THUNDERSTRUCK**, which brings to life a rich dream of the Edwardian age as well as a criminal case that at one time was literally the talk of the globe.

THUNDERSTRUCK enmeshes the parallel narratives of two men: Dr. Hawley Harvey Crippen (a mild-mannered murderer who, as Raymond Chandler wrote in a letter to a friend, "You can't help liking") and Guglielmo Marconi, whose obsessive quest to invent and perfect the wireless would eventually change the world. Though the two men never met, their fates were inextricably linked; when their paths crossed, it made front-page news worldwide, bringing about the downfall of one of them and furthering the ascension of the other.

Larson conducts a prodigious amount of research for each of his books, and **THUNDERSTRUCK** is no exception. In this case his efforts took him to London, Munich, Rome, Nova Scotia, Cape Cod, and Michigan; to broaden his understanding of Marconi and his roots, he studied Italian for two years. "My goal is not really to convey information, though certainly anyone doing a Ph.D. can cite my books with absolute confidence," says Larson. "Rather, my intent is to create a historical experience. What I most want to do is produce a kind of historical trance—to cause readers to sink deeply into the past, to smell it, hear it, maybe taste it, and remain there until the last page, the kind of effect novelists always hope to conjure. In nonfiction, this requires detail, detail, and more detail, and long hours in obscure and far-flung archives."

The backdrop for **THUNDERSTRUCK** is the Edwardian era, a time described by many as a golden age, opulent and carefree—the last sunny time before World War I began. Edward VII ruled the British empire, assuring his subjects that duty was important, but so too was fun. Scientific discoveries held mass appeal and were demonstrated before awed crowds with circus-like theatricality; the fact that previously invisible phenomena (particularly in the realm of electricity

and magnetism) could seemingly be coaxed from the mists added to the mystery and amazement of it all. In this era of wonder Marconi invented the wireless, which met with considerable resistance; communicating without wires over distances beyond the reach of sight was seen as supernatural, more in the realm of ghost-hunters and psychics than science. Despite the prevailing belief that such a feat would be impossible, Marconi undertook a secret quest to send a message all the way across the Atlantic, reasoning that if he did so the world would realize that his invention was not just a novelty of limited practical value, but a major technological accomplishment. The open sea was the ultimate example of a place where wires could not reach; to board a ship for passage meant complete removal from everything going on in the world

While Marconi toiled against a Dickensian array of obstacles, the kind, soft-spoken Dr. Crippen fell in love with his young secretary and decided that something had to be done about his shrewish, cheating wife, whom he had put up with for two decades. As his feelings for Ethel Le Neve grew more serious, he longed to escape his marriage. Suddenly, his wish seemed granted: His wife, Belle, ran off with her own secret lover, or so Crippen claimed. But when Chief Inspector Walter Dew began making inquiries, Crippen and his unsuspecting mistress decided to leave Britain for a new life in America and secretly boarded the SS *Montrose*, a transatlantic liner, for what would prove to be one of the most memorable voyages in history. In choosing to flee Europe on the *Montrose*, Crippen inadvertently placed himself on a ship with the latest wireless apparatus, which the ship's captain used to notify Scotland Yard that the murderer they sought was, in fact, on board. The great chase that ensued helped advance the evolution of a technology we today take utterly for granted.

Thanks to the relentless determination of Marconi, the world was able to learn of events occurring in the middle of the ocean as they unfolded, a feat hitherto impossible. With Crippen's onboard movements being transmitted from one wireless operator to another, his final moments as a free man were international front-page news; the whole world knew he was the subject of a transatlantic chase—except, of course, for Crippen himself. Police, jurists and editors all agreed that if not for Marconi's invention, Crippen would have escaped.

With a cast of colorful and captivating characters including a manipulative fallen opera star, a young couple in love and on the run, a charming and steadfast ship's captain, a brilliant young forensic scientist, a chief inspector famous for his role in the Jack the Ripper investigation, and a driven genius inventor, **THUNDERSTRUCK** is Larson's best book yet.



About the Author

ERIK LARSON is the author of five books, including the critically acclaimed *New York Times* bestsellers *Isaac's Storm* and *The Devil in the White City*, which was a #1 *New York Times* bestseller in both hardcover and paperback, a nonfiction finalist for the National Book Award, and a winner of the Edgar Award for fact-crime writing. He is a former writer for *The Wall Street Journal* and *Time*. Larson lives in Seattle with his wife, three daughters, and a golden retriever named Molly.

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