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Disasters can strike at any time. From the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius to Hurricane Katrina, floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, hurricanes and other natural disasters have caused tremendous loss of life, human suffering, and environmental catastrophe. The complex technological and social changes of the last few centuries have not only intensified the impact of such natural disasters, but have added new introduced new reasons to be concerned - plane crashes, bombings, industrial accidents, genocides. Calling some disasters natural and others man-made downplays the important interrelationship between the event and human actions. Human actions - or inactions - can catapult a natural phenomenon into a deadly catastrophe. Likewise, nature can be terribly disrupted by events that are created by humans.

Encyclopedia of Disasters covers over 180 of the most important disasters in history. Arranged chronologically, the encyclopedia includes entries on those disasters that have had the greatest historical, environmental, and cultural impact: The eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, which destroyed the towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum; the London Fire of 1666, which flattened much of London and allowed the rebuilding of the city; the influenza epidemic of 1918, which killed millions; the 1964 Prince William Sound earthquake in Alaska, which caused death and destruction as far away as Hawaii; the worst nuclear power plant accident in Chernobyl, Ukraine, in 1964, that has rendered the surrounding landscape uninhabitable; and the 2004 earthquake that created a tsunami that killed thousands in Sumatra. Each entry includes a list of readings for additional research, and the encyclopedia is illustrated with numerous photos and line illustrations that show the destruction and despair caused by these disasters.

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