

Isaac's Storm: A Man, a Time, and the Deadliest Hurricane in History Study Guide

Isaac's Storm: A Man, a Time, and the Deadliest Hurricane in History by Erik Larson

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Contents

Isaac's Storm: A Man, a Time, and the Deadliest Hurricane in History Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
The Beach: September 8, 1900.....	4
Part I: The Law of Storms.....	5
Part II: The Serpent's Coil.....	8
Part III: Spectacle.....	10
Part IV: Cataclysm.....	12
Part V: Strange News.....	14
Part VI: Haunted.....	16
Characters.....	17
Objects/Places.....	22
Themes.....	24
Style.....	27
Quotes.....	29
Topics for Discussion.....	31



Plot Summary

The novel "Isaac's Storm" covers the destructive impact of the Galveston hurricane, including all of the events that lead up to the hurricane's arrival. The hurricane itself is analyzed, as well as the impact the actions of a few individuals had on the overall destruction caused by the storm.

The Galveston hurricane of 1900 was one of the most traumatic and destructive weather events of the time. However, in an odd twist, the hurricane and its destructive impact was a direct result of the thought processes at the time. The turn of the century boasted men who were swollen with pride. They were excessively proud of their advanced technology, new thought processes, and instruments that were changing lifestyles and society for the better. Everywhere you looked, there was a reason to feel proud and patriotic.

Unfortunately, the cloud of all this ego and pride was that the limitations and hindrances to problems were not analyzed. Galveston, for one, was in a race against Houston to become the most successful Texas town. Galveston was prosperous; it was pretty. However, it was located right on the coast and had geographic features that made it more like a bowl of land next to the mighty Gulf Coast, enabling flooding. These geographic features, wholly ignored by Galveston residents and meteorologists, would prove to be fatal during the days of the hurricane.

Enter a man named Isaac Cline. A meteorologist with a medical degree and a strong understanding of storms and the Law of Storms, Isaac had a high opinion of himself. He thought he was one of the best meteorologists in the area and came from a time when men thought they could control Mother Nature. There was talk of getting rid of hail with cannon shot and making it rain through well-planned forest fires. Despite its coastal position and geographic features, Cline published an article stating that a hurricane in Galveston was an impossibility.

Isaac lives in Galveston with his pregnant wife Cora and their three daughters. In addition, his brother Joseph lives and works with him at the Levy Building, recording and researching weather phenomena in the area. At the time, the Weather Bureau forbids the use of the words "hurricane" and "cyclone" and bans weather communications with Cuba, no matter how innocent they look. Isaac's superiors believe that despite their years of experience and accurate predictions, Cuba is trying to undermine the American Weather Bureau. It is their ignorance of Cuba's data that directly costs the lives of thousands in Galveston.

The story covers Isaac's actions before, during and after the hurricane, but incorporates other accounts of the hurricane from other Galveston residents as well. In this way, the story full covers the impact of the hurricane and all of its fatal destruction.



The Beach: September 8, 1900

The Beach: September 8, 1900 Summary and Analysis

The book opens during the night of September 7, 1900. Isaac Monroe Cline is experiencing odd weather phenomena and awakes to the sense that something is very wrong. Since Isaac typically sleeps soundly, it is an unusual event that he has awoken in the middle of the night. The narrator goes on to describe Isaac as a man of his time, a man who sleeps soundly through the night because his belief system is so solidly in place. Many men who meet Isaac find him initially modest and self-effacing, but upon further study would find he possessed a confidence that bordered on conceit and a hardness that made him the ideal worker.

Isaac considers himself to be a scientist and physician who happens to also study and record temperature and barometric pressures. He records this data for the U.S. Signal Corps as part of his job to help predict and monitor weather patterns in Galveston, Texas. He is an avid scholar and has studied all the major writers on the Law of Storms. He believes that he understands weather and can predict its movements.

Isaac is a reflection of his time. During the 1900's, the country was a strong, vibrant place that was swollen with pride in its attributes and its superior technology. There was talk that they could even control the weather in the future by subduing hail with cannon blasts and set forest fires ablaze to start rain showers. The beginning of the 1900's exhibited a time of limitless possibility and Isaac rode on the crest of that wave with his belief that weather and the Law of Storms could be solved and conquered.

Isaac lives in his home with his wife Cora and their three daughters: Allie May (12 years old), Rosemary (11 years old) and Esther Bellew (6 years old). Cora is pregnant. Joseph, Isaac's brother and colleague at the weather station, also lives with them. The summer of 1900 in Galveston has been one of the hottest on record and these temperatures help Isaac to study his other passion, the effect of climate on human behavior. Isaac has a degree from the University of Arkansas medical school to help study how weather affects people.

Joseph wakes Isaac again at 4 a.m. to tell him about some unusual drops in the barometric pressure. The brothers have been receiving and sending telegrams about a large tropical storm that was in the Gulf, but they believe the data they are seeing is not enough to warrant worry. Isaac gets into his horse-drawn sulky and drives to the beach. He records the speed of the waves coming to shore and finds they arrive very slowly. This slow speed indicates that an ominous weather movement is headed his way, but it was a principle that Isaac only vaguely understood. Nevertheless, he returns to his office and writes a telegram to the Central Office in Washington to let them know of the unusual weather pattern and the waves. He doesn't yet realize of the massive monster of destruction headed his way.



Part I: The Law of Storms

Part I: The Law of Storms Summary and Analysis

The narrator takes a break from Isaac and his chain of events to discuss the hurricane itself. There is still a lot of confusion about how and why a large storm will become a hurricane. Some scientists believe that all it takes for the start of a hurricane is something as simple as a butterfly flapping its wings. With this, a rush of molecules starts in motion; winds converge and the storm begins to build. As the winds collide, they produce an environment of instability. Combined with the oppressive heat, these winds begin to speed up and gain power.

Thunderstorms are created and start to dance across the sky. A large amount of air high into the atmosphere begins to circle. Water cools and condenses, releasing heat, which propels the air even higher into the atmosphere. As these thunderstorms build, they start to move to the Atlantic Ocean, and a unique wave structure begins. A large wave will be created in response to the thunderstorms, growing taller and fatter. A ship on the water will experience an aberration in the waves as a single wave will be much taller than the others, lifting the boat higher. As the weather travels, it lowers the barometric pressure and the temperature. The decreased barometric pressure indicates that a large storm is on its way.

However, scientists are not sure why some tropical storms become the destructive killers they do. Some lose their power over cold water or lose their strength by putting out too much dry air. Others, however, turn into horrible hurricanes and the exact reason for this is still not yet understood by forecasters. Although we have satellites that can track the exact movements and record still pictures of the hurricane, scientists cannot determine what makes a tropical storm turn into a hurricane.

In this way, our current weather forecasting does not yet have all the answers in the same way that Isaac and his colleagues were unclear about a number of weather phenomena. The difference between today and the 1900's is that our forecasters are more humbled by these inexplicable weather events; whereas, Isaac believed in the Law of Storms and truly thought that all weather events could be explained and conquered. Isaac lived in a time resplendent with man's hubris and pride; the forecasters of today are more apt to state they simply do not know the answer. Also, the general public is far more trusting of the weather service today than it was during the 1900's. During Isaac's time, there was a great deal of mistrust and corruption in the U.S. Signal Corps as men were inept and did their jobs poorly. They could not accurately predict weather, but more importantly, many were uninterested in trying to get the weather forecast more accurate. Also, the idea of weather forecasting was seen as a black art and magic to try to predict what God might want to do with the weather on any particular day. Isaac was trying to define, predict and measure a realm that was thought to be wholly in God's hands.



Isaac was raised in Monroe County, Tennessee. He was a studious worker and would often try to get extra money by trapping animals before his daily chores on the farm started at 4 a.m. He went to Hiwassee College, where the president recommended him as a candidate to study weather patterns with the U.S. Signal Corps. Only the best men were chosen and Isaac was accepted.

Isaac went from Monroe County to Washington. He was twenty years old, and initially, the big city startled him. However, he quickly caught on and adapted to the city and his new role in the Signal Corps. At the time of his arrival, the Signal Corps were filled with corruption and the general public disdained it. With its controversial and incorrect predictions on the weather, the Signal Corps was mocked and ignored. The chief financial officer had embezzled a quarter million dollars from the department and was on the run. The Signal Corps was far from a prestigious line of work at the time.

To work for the Signal Corps, Isaac trained to be a soldier and quickly caught on to horse riding and sword play. He learned a lot about the mechanical equipment involved in weather measurement, taking apart the telegraph and learning the secret code words for the weather. Since the telegraph didn't allow much room for words, they had different words to indicate wind speed in a code language to save space. For example, "Paul diction sunk Johnson inbue hersal" would be a sample telegraph to indicate barometric pressures, temperature, wind speed, maximum temperature, dewpoint, time of recording and overall prediction for the local weather in one single sentence. The men were also taught other methods of visual communication for their studies.

Throughout his training, Isaac learned about meteorology. Weather was a national obsession and meteorology played well into this. By recording and quantifying the weather, men felt they were more in control of it rather than victims of its whim. Barometers were in private homes, as well as being possessions of mariners and scientists. Everyone wanted to know what the weather was doing.

Hurricanes had been noted since the time of Columbus's discovery, but little information was gathered about them other than the recordings of mariners who had lived through them. These mariners recorded barometric pressure, changes in temperature, visual changes in the air, etc., which the scientists used as data for their own research.

Despite learning about meteorology, Isaac was not taught anything about weather forecasting. In addition, he was told to find another pursuit besides meteorology to keep him out of trouble during the day. He would only record temperature and atmospheric changes early in the morning and late at night. The Signal Corps recognized that men needed another passion to keep them out of trouble and Isaac was sent to Little Rock, Arkansas to study how the climate shaped the behavior of locusts. Once he arrived in Arkansas, however, there were no locusts to be found so Isaac enrolled in the medical school to learn how the climate affected people.

As soon as Isaac graduated from medical school, he was transferred to Fort Concho in Abilene, Texas. It was a drastic change from the city and it was here that Isaac witnessed his first aberrant weather occurrence. One evening in mid-August, he saw a



flash flood race down a dry river bed just as a carriage was carrying people through it. Isaac estimated the water to be fifteen to twenty feet high and swallowed the carriage whole. He saw men were plunging their hands into the water to pull out fish and he did the same thing. He caught the fish that were stunned by the cold water and simultaneously froze his hands. It was August in Texas but this unusual event had occurred, which shook Isaac's belief in monotonous weather behavior. He wrote an article about the phenomena, but it was rejected by the Monthly Weather Review as being too implausible. The rejection horrified Isaac and angered him.

At the Baptist Church he attended, Isaac fell in love with the organ player, Cora May Bellew. He married her and they gave birth to their first child 8.5 months after their wedding day.

Isaac was then transferred to Galveston to take over another corrupt weather forecaster. The service needed a hero and they found it in Isaac, who promptly cleaned and organized the Galveston office to its superior standards. They consequently fired the other man in charge.

Isaac enjoyed Galveston, which was a real town instead of a growing desert community like Abilene. Galveston was pretty, prosperous and progressive and exhibited a rare harmony of spirit where different ethnic groups mixed well. Joseph came to work with Isaac in Galveston as well.

The bureau was filled with skeptics who did not think the Signal Corps were capable of doing the right job in weather forecasting. The most ardent skeptic was a man named J. Sterling Morton, the Secretary of Agriculture. Morton tightened the reigns on the Signal Corps and banished cigarettes from his members.

When Isaac is 29 and has only been in Galveston for months, he writes an article stating that it is impossible for a hurricane to strike Galveston. He said that the only way a hurricane would enter Galveston is if it broke the rules and if this happens, the storm damage will be minimal. Although a hurricane had hit Indianola and taken thousands of lives, Isaac dismisses the notion that a hurricane could enter Galveston, despite its vulnerable position on the map.



Part II: The Serpent's Coil

Part II: The Serpent's Coil Summary and Analysis

The storm continues on, entering the Caribbean Sea on August 31. As it continues to rain, the storm gets bigger rather than slowing down. It is still heading to Galveston but will deluge islands in the Caribbean and Cuba before it reaches there.

Louisa Rollfing wakes up on Saturday, September 1 to a big celebration in the house. She and her husband, August, have just paid off their piano, which gives her a feeling of permanency in their newest home. They have moved quite frequently the last few years and this final payment is a big accomplishment for her and her family. Originally from North Germany, Louisa has two children with her husband.

Bad weather is stirring in Cuba. The Signal Corps has sent an emissary to Cuba to help record weather coming from the Caribbean area. However, Moore does not trust or believe in the Cuban predictions in the area. Moore persuades the War Department in America to ban Cuban telegraph about weather events to the US, no matter how innocent they might be. This ban is utterly absurd, considering that Cuban meteorologists had pioneered the art of hurricane predictions. Moore, however, wants all hurricane predictions to come from his information and his alone. He ignores Father Vines and the Belen Observatory, which has initiated hurricane research and been extraordinarily successful. Cuba thinks the ban is inconceivable, considering their years of experience. Why shouldn't the Cubans and Americans work together in the face of a monstrous weather event like a hurricane for the benefit of both countries? Moore, however, is suspicious of them and refuses to cooperate.

The impact of Moore's ban from Cuban missives will be felt strongly in Galveston. If the Americans had been more apt to listen to the warnings coming from Cuba, they could have tracked the hurricane before it hit Galveston and saved thousands of lives. Instead, Moore's paranoid suspicions cut off communications that were essential to the safety of those in the path of the deadly hurricane. The ban on Cuban information is yet another example of the inflated pride and conceit of the Americans in the face of weather and its fatal consequences.

On the Wednesday before the hurricane, Captain T.P. Halsey leaves his dock, headed for the Gulf. There is nothing in the weather report that indicates a cyclone or hurricane is in his path. Even if there was one, however, it's doubtful that Halsey would have stayed home. He has experienced and survived eight cyclones so far. Besides, the Weather Bureau wasn't concerned; why should Capt. Halsey be worried if they weren't?

The weather in Galveston is quite lovely two days before the hurricane. Joseph records normal atmospheric pressure and a nice temperature of 80 degrees, a wonderful break from the oppressive heat. It won't be until many decades later that weather analysts



realize that when the weather is normal and nice days before a hurricane, the impact will be all the more destructive.

The weather aboard Captain Halsey's Louisiana, however, is not as nice. The passengers are struggling with increasing seas, circling winds and a sharp decrease in the barometric pressure. Despite the warning signals of a cyclone that Halsey must have recognized, he does not return home. The Louisiana hits the full brutal force of the hurricane, nearly sinking. Halsey estimates the wind speed at 150 miles an hour — a measurement that has never been uttered by the Weather Bureau.

Another ship nearby, the Pensacola, was commandeered by Captain J. W. Simmons. He had just as little disregard for the weather as Captain Halsey. He plans a departure from Galveston and 7:30 in the morning. As he leaves the port, he looks at the weather tower out of habit to see if a storm warning flag has been raised. Nothing is there and Simmons continues on. He does not know that two hours after his departure, Isaac will raise a conventional storm warning flag — not a hurricane flag.

Captain Simmons continues on, although the barometric pressure drops an inch in only an hour. The winds reach gale force. Simmons, however, does not turn around most likely due to his eight hundred successful voyages, his ornery temperament and the technological arrogance at his time. After all, his ship weighs two million pounds! While Halsey's boat could right herself, Simmons boat was a steamship and could not broach to the side and regain footing. Simmons and his ship was in a great deal of trouble in the face of a monster hurricane.



Part III: Spectacle

Part III: Spectacle Summary and Analysis

The Pensacola swings from her anchor in the seas, still dealing with the hurricane's brutal force. Simmons realizes that only a confluence of storms could bring an event of so much intensity. Simmons realizes now that the storm is headed directly for Galveston and there is no way to warn the residents.

Saturday morning, two men stand on the Galveston beach, unaware of the other's presence. The first is Isaac and the other is Dr. Young. He is an amateur meteorologist and sees the same measurements and wave speeds as Isaac had seen previously. He knows immediately that a cyclone is headed their way. He telegraphs his family traveling that day to visit him by train to stay in San Antonio until the storm has passed. This fast action probably saved the lives of his family.

According to Isaac, he rushed back to the station to warn them of the impending danger and raced up and down the beach to warn citizens, thus saving thousands of lives. However, most of the residents of Galveston said the storm came without warning. The Weather Bureau meanwhile was so busy trying to downplay the danger of the storm and show up the Cubans that they forgot their main purpose: to warn and protect American citizens.

The storm begins to hit the Galveston coast and the local children are delighted. They play in washtubs and homemade rafts. They played in the deluge of rain. Louise Hopkins was seven years old and raced to finish her chores to go outside to play. She lived in a boarding house with her mother since her father had passed away when she was a baby.

The adults gather at the beach to watch the spectacle, which many call "grand" and "beautiful." They watch the waves start to destroy the small shops on the Midway and crash against the rails of the trolley car. The water is now rising so fast that observers can actually see the rising increase. Meanwhile, the business men of Galveston are acting as though nothing is wrong, despite the worried remarks from their wives.

Louisa Rollfing is one of those worried wives. She hears from her children that the water is starting to tear down the bathhouses by the water. These bathhouses are strong and enormous structures. When she hears this news, she sends her son August to find his father to tell him to come home. The father, instead, tells the boy to tell Louisa she must be crazy and he will see her at dinnertime.

Downtown, the most popular cafe was Ritter's Cafe and Saloon. Many business men were having lunch there during the storm. One of the men commented that there were thirteen men in the room eating lunch and within moments, the roof fell, instantly killing five men and injuring five others. The waiter was dispatched to find a doctor, but the



waiter drowned. This chain of events is what finally brought fear to the business men of Galveston.

A train was headed to Galveston around noon as the storm hits. The train tracks are flooded and the conductor signals for a relief train to save them. By the time the relief train arrives, however, the water is over the tracks. A man named John H. Poe sees the rising water and eyes the lighthouse on the horizon, a quarter mile away. He and nine other passengers abandoned the train and started off for the lighthouse. The eighty-five other passengers remained on the train and perished in the storm.

Isaac Cline was now answering the flood of phone calls from local Galveston residents. The storm swells and magnitude was increasing, and Isaac says he warned as many people as possible about the great danger coming their way. At 2:30 p.m., Isaac sat down to warn Moore about the terrible situation and ask for his advice. Joseph took a "special observation" at the same time and wired it to the Chief in Washington. He had to negotiate with Western Union to send his message since the lines were so clogged with others sending telegraphs to family and friends.

Joseph left the office at 4:30 and made it home at 5:30. The water was waist deep according to Joseph; it was neck deep according to Isaac. There were fifty local neighborhood residents in their home, including the contractor who had built the house. They knew that the Clines' home was one of the strongest in the area. Joseph, however, urged his brother to evacuate, no matter how strong the house seemed. Isaac refused. It was a decision that ultimately cost him the life of his wife and unborn child.



Part IV: Cataclysm

Part IV: Cataclysm Summary and Analysis

August Rollfing was fighting his way back to the city. He had sat in the office to give men their paychecks, but not a single one had shown up to claim it. He went into a livery stable and sent a driver to pick up Louisa and the children and take him to his mother's house. When Louisa saw the buggy, she was ecstatic. She packed a hamper filled with clothing for everyone, but once she got into the buggy with her kids, there was no room for the hamper and she had to leave it behind. The water was too high to make it to Louisa's mother-in-law's home, however. Instead, she directed the driver to take her to her sister-in-law's home.

Dr. Young went into his house to watch the effects of the storm on Galveston. Louise Hopkins was playing with her friend Martha when the water rose to a dangerous level, the girl went inside. Her mother hauled sacks of food and goods upstairs and then started hacking holes in the parlour floor in an effort to keep the water from taking the house with it. They all went upstairs to wait out the storm.

At the Cline household, Isaac and Joseph argued. Joseph wanted to leave for the office building while Isaac flatly refused to leave. At one point, Isaac is watching the water when it rises four feet in four seconds. The sudden rise causes great alarm in the house, although Joseph uses it as a reason to evacuate to the center of town. Everyone in Isaac's house moves quickly to the second story, while their neighbors in single-story homes have nowhere to go.

As the storm progresses, only Cline's house is standing along with Dr. Young's home. Both Isaac and Joseph realize now that the house will fail, although Joseph believes it will be because the storm is just too powerful.

John Blagden is in the Weather Bureau office in Galveston during the storm. He reads the barometer at 28.48, which he had never seen that low before. At the time, it was the lowest barometric pressure in the United States. If the pressure reading was correct, the storm would be one of unparalleled severity. The wind speeds were recorded at 100 miles an hour before the anemometer blew away, but analysts later put the speeds to at least 120 miles per hour.

At the time, Isaac and his colleagues believed that the wind was the single most destructive element in a hurricane. They were incorrect. A tidal surge can cause more damage than sustained wind speeds. In addition, the area's geography and the angle at which the storm enters the coastline can also have a tremendous effect in the destructive potential of the hurricane. Where the high wind speeds went, however, the water followed and Galveston began to drown.



Dr. Young was still on his second story, witnessing the storm. When he heard a loud noise downstairs, he went to investigate. It was water hitting the top step of his stairs. The heavy thudding noise was his furniture floating beneath the flooring. When he opens a door of his home, the wind knocks him back against a far wall, immediately snuffing his candle. He fights his way back to the door to watch the power of the storm. He watches waves the size of elephants sweep through his neighborhood. He watches the only remaining house on the block start to pirouette and dissolve under the weight of water and wind. He knows his house is next and when it starts to go, he kicks the door out to hold onto it as a raft throughout the storm. He rides the door until he lands on some wreckage, but sees neither light nor people and assumes he is the only survivor of the storm.

Meanwhile, the Cline's house begins to shake. The house starts to slide from its foundation and Joseph, standing next to Allie May and Rosemary, are somehow flung out of the house. The rest of the inhabitants are nowhere to be found. Isaac is pushed out of the house by a large wall.

Louise Hopkins hears her sister screaming and looks to see the wall is beginning to move back and forth, as though it is breathing. Mrs. Hopkins plans to use the mattress as a raft. August Rollfing locks his shop and sets out to finally join his family. He walks to his mother's house, but gets stopped by the storm. He spends his time in a store instead until the water level is low enough for him to leave. He continues on to his mother's home, but once he gets there, Louisa and his children are not there and his mother has never seen them. He decides to go to his sister's home and along the way, passes floating corpses and horrible scenes. Once he sees Louisa and the children at his sister's house, he faints.

Isaac resurfaces in the water and somehow finds Esther, the youngest daughter. They drift. He sees three figures holding onto floating wreckage and realizes it is Joseph and his other two daughters. Their raft runs aground four blocks from where they once lived and they fall asleep, exhausted and mourning their mother.



Part V: Strange News

Part V: Strange News Summary and Analysis

A train filled with members of the military leaves from Houston headed towards Galveston. Colonel William Sterett is a writer from the Dallas News and is headed to the area to see what kind of damage has occurred in Galveston. The passengers are telling each other the rumored stories of what has happened in Galveston, but as the train pulls in, the car becomes completely silent. What they have imagined is nothing compared to the reality in Galveston.

The generals find a lifeboat and fill it with supplies and start rowing towards the bay. Sterett stays behind and walks the bay shore, surrounded on all sides by dead animals and people, scattered debris and trash. Sterett and 100 other passengers, many of them former Galveston residents, climb aboard a schooner and head towards Galveston. The scent of death overpowers them. When they glance over the side of the boat, corpses and dead faces greet them. Sterett spends the night on the boat and sleeps very uneasily.

Isaac awakes that morning to a lovely day. However, corpses are strewn everywhere along with the debris. He finds a safe place for his children and walks to the Levy Building, his office. John Blagden is gone and the instruments have been blown away. Debris is littered throughout the office. Wagons start to pass below him, limbs hanging limply from under tarpaulins. The scent of death and putrefaction is overwhelming. Even still, the authorities want to underestimate the number of bodies and want to place the number of dead at only 500 persons.

Every family has lost someone and the city has an eerie silence in it, as though the continual presence of death has silenced the living as well. Isaac cannot find Cora, but he knows she is dead. With each moment that passes, hope for a lost relative recedes and sorrow settles in.

The list of dead in the Galveston News grows longer and longer. Men are recruited at gunpoint to help with the corpses. By late afternoon after the end of the storm, the barge contains over seven hundred corpses alone. The morgues are full, so they try burial at sea, but the corpses float back to the shore. With no other options available, the authorities decide to burn the corpses to get rid of them. The death list now takes up a full page and some of the Galveston News and is closely read by every member of the town.

Help and contributions arrive from around the globe. However, the top executives at the Weather Bureau themselves did not contribute to the relief efforts. Isaac returns to work on Monday, September 17th, but he cannot get much work done without instruments. He is surrounded by devastation, and his house and all its belongings are gone. However, all he can analyze is whether he should have brought his family to the Levy



Building to save them. Joseph had been correct. Isaac had not and it had cost him dearly. It is this single fact that divides and separates the brothers, and they will spend the rest of their lives acting as though the other never existed. They will die without speaking again. The hurricane destroys their relationship.

Isaac is told to write a report of the hurricane, but he cannot separate his personal experiences from the scientific report. In a move very unlike Isaac, he mentions personal loss and destruction in his report, stating that his personal experience is too interwoven with the events of the storm to separate the one from the other. Isaac's superior, Moore, tells the Houston Post that a hurricane warning flag had been raised as early as Friday, which was a blatant lie. Moore's lie and distortion of the truth disturbs Isaac greatly. He states that a hurricane warning was never received by Galveston.

Moore continues on his own personal charade of telling a distorted version of what happened in Galveston. The media accepts the official dogma and applauds the Weather Bureau for their valiant efforts. However, no one asks the key question: If the Weather Bureau had done such a successful job, why had so many people died?

Isaac finally finds Cora's body. Its presence helps his children struggle with the loss of their mother. The News speculates that more than 6,000 bodies will be found and recovered. Isaac takes Cora's wedding ring, has it enlarged and wears it on his pinkie for the remainder of his life.



Part VI: Haunted

Part VI: Haunted Summary and Analysis

Moore releases a report stating that the Galveston hurricane has lost its power after hitting the coastline. Now, he writes, the rain will be more of a problem than high winds. Of course, Moore is incorrect and as the hurricane continues to travel, it continues its path of destruction. It kills loggers in the Eau Claire River, nearly sinks a steamship and downs a number of telegraph lines.

Galveston tallies the final estimates of dead residents. The final count is listed in the Galveston News with 4,263 names. The town builds a seventeen foot wall, declaring it one of the greatest engineering marvels of modern times. Galveston itself struggled and as it found its feet, it lost the great race to be the most successful town in Texas. Its previously neck-and-neck fight to glory against Houston had been utterly decided in the matter of a few hours and a massive hurricane. Houston was inland, safer and more resplendent with the oil that would make it more prosperous. Galveston became a beach town for Houston residents.

Moore, meanwhile, was tired of Joseph. He lowered his salary significantly and ordered him to Puerto Rico. Despite medical ailments and a fear of the Tropics, Joseph eventually went. Moore listened to Joseph's complaints of feeble health and moved him back to the United States and slashed his salary even more. On the other hand, Moore promoted Isaac just two weeks after the severe salary cut to put Isaac in charge of the Gulf Forecast District and increased Isaac's salary from \$200 a year to \$2,000. Moore continued to release vastly incorrect weather forecasts.

Isaac was transferred to New Orleans. He believed it was a punishment for being too successful with his weather reports since Moore was obviously so incorrect. The rift that had started with the Galveston hurricane is cemented by the salary discrepancies and positions held in the Weather Bureau. Isaac, meanwhile, is less interested in the study of climate and health and is more interested in trying to figure out why the hurricane had been so deadly. He writes books on hurricanes and talks about the deadly tides involved. But most of all, Isaac analyzes if and what part of his actions were to blame for the deaths in the Galveston hurricane.

Isaac retires in 1935 and opens a small art shop in New Orleans. He never remarries and finally dies at the age of 93 in 1955. Joseph dies a week later, although neither had spoken to the other in years. Moore, on the other hand, continued to broadcast that the Galveston hurricane was a freak of nature, not to happen again. However, just 15 years later, another large hurricane hit Galveston as well as again in 1919, 1932, 1941, 1943, 1949, 1957, 1961 and 1983.



Characters

Isaac Monroe Cline

The main character of the book and the title's namesake, Isaac is the head meteorologist of the Galveston, TX area. He lives in the Galveston area with his pregnant wife Cora and his three daughters: Allie May, Rosemary and Esther Bellew. He is thirty-eight years old at the time of the hurricane and works with his brother Joseph, who is twenty-nine at the time of the storm. Together, they research and report weather actions in the Galveston area to help predict the local weather patterns.

Isaac is a strong example of the era. It is September 7, 1900 and the "can-do" spirit of the Turn of the Century men have influenced Isaac, and his behavior and thoughts mimic those of his contemporaries. The field of meteorology is new and growing; the prevailing thoughts of the time state that the advanced technology of the new century will be able to tame anything, even a natural force like a hurricane. It is in this frame of mind that Isaac deciphers the incoming weather patterns and signals that indicate a hurricane is headed towards his home and Galveston.

Isaac and Joseph grew up on a farm in Monroe County, Tennessee. Even as young as six, Isaac was a studious worker, trapping animals for extra money before his farm chores started at 4 in the morning. He eventually went to Hiwassee College, where the president of the college recommended him to work with the U.S. Signal Corps as a weather forecaster. From there, Isaac took the train to Washington, getting off at Pennsylvania Railroad Station. Isaac went to work at Fort Myer, learning how to watch the weather and the equipment used. He was not allowed to learn much about forecasting itself since the industry was so new and was still considered a dangerous and forbidden practice.

Isaac was assigned to Little Rock, Arkansas next, where he was to learn how to record temperature and barometric pressures. At the University of Arkansas medical school, Isaac was able to study the effects of climate on people and their behavior, helping to keep him busy throughout the day since he was only required to record data at 5 a.m. and 11 p.m. From Arkansas, Isaac went to Abilene, Texas to Fort Concho, where he experienced his first encounter with inexplicable weather behavior when a flash flood of frozen water rushed through the harsh desert countryside, killing a coach driver and its riders. In Abilene, Isaac also fell in love with the organ player of the Baptist Church he attended and married her. Finally, after his tenure in Abilene, Isaac was transferred to Galveston. The change was a welcome relief since Galveston was a town of substance while Abilene had been a rough town in the desert.

In a time when many members of the U.S. Signal Corps let their weather departments fall to ruin, Isaac stood apart due to his strict work ethic. He was an exceptional man among a crowd of losers in a growing, new field, and this fact enabled him to move quickly through the ranks of the U.S. Signal Corps. When Isaac was 29, he wrote an



article about the impossibility of a hurricane hitting the Galveston area. He explained the impossibility due to wind currents and the geographical structure of the Southeastern U.S.

When Isaac wakes on the night of September 7, 1900, he realizes that the weather is unusual. He studies the barometric pressure in the area and at the first light of dawn, rides to the beach. By timing the waves crashing on the shore, he realizes that a large weather system is moving to the area. However, no alarm is raised and Isaac does not make mention of the possibility a cyclone or hurricane could be on its way. It is not until much later that Isaac acknowledges a large, destructive storm is headed towards Galveston. Even with his admission, he keeps his family at his house close to the coast instead of going more inland to his office. This decision is one that most likely cost him the life of his wife and unborn child. After the hurricane, Isaac continued to stay in the Galveston area until he was transferred to New Orleans, which he believed was punishment for being too accurate with weather forecasts, which intimidated his superiors. However, after the hurricane, Isaac studied why the storm had been so deadly instead of trying to record and understand climate changes' effects on humans.

Joseph Cline

Isaac's brother and colleague at the Weather Bureau, Joseph seems to trail behind in all of Isaac's pursuits. Although it isn't clear what makes Joseph choose the same career path as Isaac, what is clear is that Joseph does not intend to stand in the shadows and let his brother take all the credit.

During an essay contest held when Isaac and Joseph live in Galveston, Isaac comes in 4th place, but Joseph's name is never mentioned as a contender by the local Galveston News. In fact, he does not place in the contest at all, which infuriates him. Joseph's name is regularly at the top of the charts for weather recordings and measurements and he believes he is one of the best meteorologists in the country. Nevertheless, Joseph does not get any credit. In fact, the title of the book is called "Isaac's Storm," which again doesn't acknowledge the role that Joseph played through the weather event.

Although they are close and live together with Isaac's family before the hurricane, the storm will tear them swiftly apart. Most likely, years of resentment had been building in Joseph long before the hurricane arrived. No doubt it would be frustrating to be seen as an inferior contributor to weather forecasting and meteorology when you worked as hard as your older brother, who took all the credit. Isaac and Joseph might have worked together, but they were not partners. Isaac was Joseph's superior in life and in his career choice.

As the hurricane is approaching, Joseph tells Isaac that they should evacuate and move the family to the Levy Building. Isaac refuses. Perhaps Isaac refuses because of appearances or pride, but the bottom line is that he refuses and dismisses Joseph's analysis. Most likely, this is not the first time that Isaac has ignored and refused Joseph's request. However, Joseph is ultimately correct in his analysis and suggestion.



In fact, had Isaac listened to his brother, he might have saved his pregnant wife and unborn child.

After the hurricane, the rift between Joseph and Isaac continues. Maybe Joseph realizes that his thoughts, analysis and gut reactions are worth paying attention to and Isaac's continual refusal to look at his brother as an equal destroys the brothers' relationship. Regardless, by the time Joseph is reassigned to Puerto Rico, their relationship is dismal. By the time the brothers pass away in 1955, they have not spoken to each other in years or acknowledged each other's presence.

Willis L. Moore

Initially one of Isaac's colleagues and friends in the Weather Bureau, Moore plays an integral role in the circumstances surrounding the Galveston hurricane. Moore had also contributed to the contest that Joseph and Isaac had entered. He is chosen to take control of the weather observations in Cuba. At the time of his appointment, he has over two decades of experience in the U.S. Signal Corps and Weather Bureau.

When Moore takes over the department, he is far more strict than his predecessor. He cleans up the department and institutes rigid requirements for the weather meteorologists, which is a move desperately needed for a bureau that is filled with less-than-stellar employees who are corrupt and lazy. He requires practice observations for all meteorologists in areas outside their local area. He wants to create a competitive tension among his forecasters and brags that more members of the Weather Bureau ended up in the insane asylum more than any other department.

For all of the benefits that Moore brings to the Weather Bureau, he is consumed with paranoid thoughts. He believes that Cuba, the nation that founded hurricane predictions, delivers errant predictions and reports so consistently that he argues for their transmissions to be banned in the United States. Cuba has Father Vines and the Belen Observatory, which has been working on hurricane observations for years, but Moore is convinced that they are trying to undermine the Weather Bureau and their predictions are based on fantasy, poetry and hunches. He wants only statistical data.

The ban of Cuban communications severely influences the impact of the Galveston hurricane on the community. Much of the damage of the hurricane was because no one in Galveston was aware the hurricane was headed their way. Moore forbid the department from using the word "hurricane" or "cyclone" in an effort to avoid unnecessary hysteria. Perhaps if Moore didn't use the words "hurricane" and "cyclone," the weather events would not occur. Instead, because of his poor reporting and intentional avoidance of the experienced Cuban missives, Galveston residents stood directly in the path of a destructive hurricane that took many of their lives.



Louisa Rollfing

One of the Galveston residents, Louisa helps to provide a different perspective into what happened to the average family throughout the hurricane. Through her communications with August and quick thinking, she was able to save her family.

John Blagden

One of Isaac and Joseph's colleagues, John is in the Levy Building throughout the hurricane. Blagden records the then-lowest barometric pressure ever seen during the hurricane. Although the instruments blow away, Blagden himself remains safe and healthy. When the rest of the town is in disarray and Isaac is lost with personal problems, Blagden helps to keep the office in top shape for future weather measurements.

Father Vines and the Belen Observatory

Father Vines was a Cuban priest who dedicated his life to the study of hurricanes. His experience and research helped Cubans to better predict these deadly weather events. After he died, his legacy continued to help provide more accurate weather predictions for Cubans.

Captain T. P. Halsey

One of the captains aboard a ship during the hurricane, Halsey commandeered the Louisiana and was headed directly for the path of the hurricane. His steamship survives the hurricane, but his arrogance and stubbornness symbolizes many sea captains at the time who believed a mere hurricane should not stop their schedule of sailing.

Dr. Samuel O. Young

Dr. Young is the secretary of the Cotton Exchange. However, more importantly, Dr. Young is an amateur meteorologist who provides an apt counterpart to the more serious and professional meteorologist, Isaac. Although they do not know one another, they provide an interesting counterpart to each other throughout the storm. Both doctors try to ride out the storm in their houses but lose when the homes collapse. Dr. Young is one of those rare individuals who believes that storms are sources of entertainments for humans given by God. For this reason, he rides out the storm with awe rather than fear.

Father Gangoite

Father Vines' replacement in Cuba, Father Gangoite tries to convince Moore to work with him on hurricane predictions. After Moore dismisses him and the hurricane



Gangoite predicts destroys Galveston, Father Gangoite tries to reconcile their differences for future communications to no avail.

Louisa Hopkins

A child at the time of the storm, Louisa provides a child's perspective during the hurricane. Her family is all saved, but lose their house and thus their livelihood, which makes their mom mourn. She gives her account of what it was like to be a child and play in the rising flood, as well as the confusion when she sees her mother chop holes in the parlour floor.



Objects/Places

Galveston, Texas

The scene of the hurricane and location of the major events in the novel. Galveston's location is important to the storm due to its unique geographic setting. In essence, Galveston's geographic features contribute as much to the destruction during the hurricane as the storm itself.

The Levy Building

Where Joseph and Isaac work in Galveston, the Levy building is farther inland than the Cline home. If Isaac had taken his family here during the storm, they might have been more protected.

Barometer

The barometers throughout the novel play an important role in weather tracking. Each of them records atmospheric pressure, but they are also the best warning signals that a catastrophic weather event is about to occur. In the middle of the hurricane, John Blagden records the then-lowest barometric pressure to date.

The Belen Observatory

Cubans have been studying and researching hurricane phenomena for much longer than Americans. Father Vines and the Belen Observatory dedicated their lives to the study of hurricanes. It is their invaluable experience that will be scoffed at and ignored by the Weather Bureau — at the expense of many lives in Galveston.

The Rollfing Piano

A symbol of stability and security for the Rollfing family, this musical instrument is finally paid off just one week before the destructive Galveston hurricane occurs. Although August Rollfing promises to find his wife Louisa a piano teacher, the piano and the Rollfing home will be destroyed in the hurricane and all sense of stability will be lost for the family.



Abilene, Texas

The town where Cora and Isaac meet, this town is an important step in Isaac's meteorology career because it awakens him to the prospect of freakish weather behavior in nature.

The Law of Storms

This concept is one of the largest points of hubris for meteorologists at the turn of the century. Many publications are written on it, but the very thought that weather events can be conquered and succumbed to the will of man is one of the thought processes that clouds the judgments of the meteorologists dealing with the Galveston hurricane forecasts.

Telegraph

A highly-important piece of equipment, the telegraph is what Isaac, Joseph and other meteorologists use to relay their weather measurements. When the Galveston hurricane occurs and no communication is sent for days, the initial thought is that telegraph poles are down. When the lack of communication continues, they send in soldiers for relief.

The Cline Home

The Cline family and roughly 50 other neighbors choose to ride out the storm in the Cline household. With the contractor who built the house among them, these residents believe they will be safest in the Cline home. They are all, unfortunately, wrong.

Anemometer

An important weather instrument, the anemometer measures wind speeds. At that time, it could record speeds as high as 100 miles per hour, although before the Galveston hurricane, these speeds had never been recorded.



Themes

The Americans versus the Cubans

One of the biggest influences contributing to the death of thousands of Galveston residents had little to do with the weather itself. Instead, it had to do with the pride and assumptions of the Americans in light of the Cubans.

Moore is one of the weather forecasters assigned to Cuba to record and measure weather phenomena. However, Father Vines of Cuba and his established Belen Observatory have been studying Caribbean weather patterns and predicting hurricanes for years. Rather than work with Father Vines and the Belen Observatory, Moore has an antagonistic approach to the institution.

Moore sees the Cubans as dark poets, more concerned with hunches and assumptions than the hard and fast numerical data the Americans study. He believes the Cubans issue hurricane warnings too quickly, causing paranoia and hysteria in areas when it could be avoided. The Americans and Moore in particular do not want to issue possible hurricane warnings unless they are wholly certain that one exists. And of course, the word "hurricane" itself is forbidden to be used while discussing weather forecasting for fear that the word could cause mass hysteria in American cities in the path of the hurricane. Rather than forewarn the American citizens, he would prefer to avoid the problem by refusing to mention the word "hurricane" as though not mentioning the word will prevent the weather phenomena from occurring.

The Cubans take the opposite approach. Their careful studies and "hunches" have accurately predicted more hurricanes and theoretically saved the lives of their citizens. Americans, on the other hand, almost want to wish the possibility of a hurricane away, which puts the Galveston residents in grave danger. If the Americans had been more open to the idea of communicating and working with the Cubans, the Galveston hurricane of 1900 might have been better predicted and more people would have evacuated. These residents would not have been dancing and swimming in the rising flood waters but instead would have seen the rising flood waters as the ominous sign it was — a dangerous and threatening hurricane headed directly for them.

Moore bans all weather communications from Cuba to the US, no matter how innocent those weather communications might seem. Moore is paranoid and suspicious and his dismissal of the Cubans, their knowledge and most importantly, the experienced individuals at the Belen Observatory ultimately cost the lives of the Galveston residents. In fact, as the hurricane is traveling directly towards Galveston, Moore and his colleagues are spending their time writing a report about how incorrect Cuba is with their predictions rather than studying and warning the Galveston residents to evacuate. This report will be highly ironic when it is revealed that Cuba had been trying to warn America about the monster hurricane at the same time they are writing a report about how wrong Cubans are with their hurricane predictions.



Freak Behavior in Nature

During an age where men are conquering a number of industries, the weather is a likely and obvious choice for submission. However, Larson gives indications that the weather will not be tamed early in his narration of Isaac Cline's career.

The first incident happens when Isaac is in Abilene. During a flash flood, he witnesses a twelve-foot high wall of water careening down a previously-dry riverbed. The riverbed was often used as a crossing area for stagecoaches and at the very time the stagecoach with three passengers is at the zenith of the riverbed, the water rushes at them. Rescuing the passengers is impossible and their bodies are recovered three days later.

Meanwhile, Isaac witnesses rushing water that is freezing cold. It is August in Texas and the temperature is hot and humid. Yet the water rushing by him is so cold it has stunned the fish and men are plucking them out of the water without problem. Isaac reaches into the water to grab a stunned fish and freezes his hands, yet keeps the fish. This bizarre weather event influences him so greatly he attempts to publish an article on the phenomena. Instead of welcoming his unique data and perspective, the publication rejects him as portraying event too unreal. The voices of his time immediately silence the bizarre and extreme weather phenomena in the same way that the voices of authority will forbid the use of the words "hurricane" or "cyclone" later in his career at Galveston. Despite the fact that the flash flood occurred, it is pushed aside and ignored.

The freak nature of hurricanes themselves are analyzed and discussed in the book. In particular, the amount of rainfall that can occur during a hurricane is amazing. For example, during Hurricane Camille, birds in the trees inhaled so much water, they drowned. Rainfall records of 56" + were recorded in past hurricanes.

Even the actual transformation of a hurricane from a tropical storm is a process that is unclear to meteorologists today. However, despite being surrounded by this cloud of uncertainty, the meteorologists of Isaac's time severely underestimated a hurricane's potential. After all, not many meteorologists today would risk their careers by publishing an article on the impossibility of a hurricane hitting any part of the world — especially a coastal community like Galveston. But Isaac, truly a product of his era, published just such an article at the tender age of 29, after only a few years in the industry. The article and its conclusions are indicative of a time when freakish weather behavior was ignored, unacknowledged and dismissed due to the hubris of men thinking they could overcome even Mother Nature.

The Impact of Ego and Hubris of Galveston

Ego plays a large role in the Galveston hurricane and its residents. Ego itself is an encouraged and sustained concept at the turn of the century. The men of the time are filled with large notions and the world swells with pride. Americans in particular boast

new technologies and ways of thinking that are changing their world and lifestyles. They are not allowing themselves to be limited by ideas previously thought impossible.

While this ego brings great change and advances to society at large, it plays a negative role as well. Tackling a large problem is always admirable, but understanding the true power and inherent limitations to that problem are important steps as well. For the meteorologists during Isaac's time, they did not appreciate the power of the weather. Instead, they attempted to explain the inexplicable and publish thoughts they termed the Law of Storms. Note that they did not refer to these guesses and research as a "Theory of Storms." These men moved straight to the certain and called their publishings a Law of Storms.

The meteorologists during Isaac's time — in particular his superior Moore — put their own careers before the lives they were supposed to save. Moore had forbidden the use of the word "hurricane" and "cyclone" in weather predictions so as to avoid hysteria and paranoia. However, his avoidance of these words did not stop Mother Nature from sending a hurricane to Galveston. Because the weather forecasts were so reluctant to use these words, men like Captain Simmons and Captain Halsey took their ships directly into the path of one of the most destructive hurricanes of their time.

The ban of Cuban missives is yet another example of pride for the meteorologists. If they had been able to receive and analyze the tracking of the hurricane as it left Cuba, American meteorologists might have foreseen the devastation headed their way and evacuated more people. Instead, Moore wanted all communications about weather events and predictions to come from himself to further his own reputation. He saw the Cubans only as potential threats and ignored their data, rather than working with them for the good of the American citizens. A large reason why so many Galveston residents died is directly a result of Moore's paranoia and pride.

Had meteorologists performed their job with its original intention — to better protect and warn residents — they would have been more liberal with the words "hurricane" and "cyclone." Since these words were never used, captains and residents alike had little fear of the weather event. It was as though everyone was closing their eyes and pretending such a weather event did not exist rather than evacuating and taking steps to reduce its potential damage.

Isaac's own hubris most likely cost him his pregnant wife. Joseph analyzed the situation and had a better appreciation of what the storm was capable. However, for the man that had published an article that a hurricane could not hit Galveston, Isaac could not ignore his pride enough to admit the hurricane was upon them and that their house would not survive it. If he had evacuated his family as Joseph had suggested, he might have saved lives.

Style

Perspective

The perspective of the story changes throughout the novel, but the voice of the narrator remains the same. However, a big reason why this book is so successful is the number of angles it takes as the storm progresses. In addition, the scene and environment, including important geographic details, are fully discussed from each perspective in the story.

From the beginning, the reader gets thrust into the hours leading up to the destructive storm at Galveston and can immediately see the decision-making process that will change or destroy the lives of thousands of people. As the story progresses, the narrator gives readers Issac Clines' full background to help us better understand the man who is in charge of helping or hurting so many residents. Sprinkled throughout this history is the history of the Galveston hurricane itself. Larson depicts how a hurricane begins and how hurricanes have influenced our global history.

As the storm approaches, the narrator relays the stories of other Galveston residents like Louisa Rallfing and Louise Hopkins. From these stories, the reader gets a better understanding of what it was like to be a resident, unaware that the hurricane was headed their way. Louise discusses the situation from her perspective of a child, while Louisa is a mother and homemaker with an obstinate husband who refuses to acknowledge that she and her children are in a dangerous situation with the weather. The changing perspective of the different stories helps to flesh out the hurricane story more from start to finish.

Tone

The tone of the story is very analytical. The narrator uses scientific concepts to describe the creation of the hurricane, including air currents and cloud formations.

While describing Isaac and the other residents in town, there are a few times in the story when the narrator removes himself from the story to analyze the situation. There is one section in particular that stands out on page 181 when Larson writes: "Whom do you save? ... And if you saved none, what then? How do you go on?" This particular section is a break in the steady tone from the narrative. These thoughts were no doubt prevalent on the minds of parents throughout the storm, but for the narrator, it is an unusual break in the storytelling.

Structure

There are six main sections of the book. Within each of these sections, there are a number of smaller chapters. Each chapter depicts a different story of a character or the

hurricane formation itself. These chapters combine to create the section as the storm progresses. There is a prologue called The Beach prior to the sections which helps to set the scene of the story.



Quotes

"...the portrait suggests vanity, that Isaac saw himself as something bigger than a mere recorder of rainfall and temperature. He was a scientist, not some farmer who gaged the weather by aches in a rheumatoid knee." *The Beach*, p. 4

"The nation in 1900 was swollen with pride and technological confidence." *The Beach*, p. 5

"The north wind brought Isaac the perfume of a waking city: the clean, almost minty, smell of freshly cut lumber from the Hildenbrand planing mill; coffee from the bulk roasters in the alley between Mechanic and Market; and always, everywhere, the scent of horses." *The Beach*, p.15

"The system, he told Congress, helped explain why Weather Bureau employees had to be committed to insane asylums more often than employees of any other federal agency. He said this with pride." Chapter 1, p. 73

"Thus, he argued, hurricanes could not as a rule strike Texas." Chapter 1, p. 80

"It would be impossible, he wrote, for any cyclone to create a storm wave which could materially injure the city." Chapter 1, p.84

"Camille's rain fell with such ferocity it was said to have filled the overhead nostrils of birds and drowned them from the trees." Chapter 2, p.85

"Moore instituted the ban on Cuban weather telegrams and halted all direct transmission of West Indies storm reports from the bureau's Havana office to its New Orleans station." Chapter 2, p. 105

"Stockman and the observers in his network took special pains to avoid using the word 'hurricane,' except when absolutely necessary or when stipulating that a particular storm was 'not' a hurricane. They took what might be called a behavioralist approach to storms." Chapter 2, p. 106

"The Cubans wrote of hunches and believes, sunsets and foreboding. Where the Americans saw numbers, the Cubans saw poetry. Dark poetry, perhaps — the works of Poe and Baudelaire — but poetry all the same." Chapter 2, p.107

"The Weather Bureau's reluctance to use words like 'hurricane' and 'cyclone' inadvertently reinforced the bravado of sea captains like Halsey." Chapter 2, p.109

"Smoke from her stack blew forward over the starboard rail in a long black smudge that flurried cinder upon the sea. Captain Halsey ordered the decks cleared and the hatches sealed, but the thought of turning back did not occur to him." Chapter 2, p.117



"Why he did not run can never be known, but it is likely his failure to do so was the product of those eight hundred previous voyages, his own ornery temperament, and the technological arrogance of the time — hell, the Pensacola was made of steel and weighed two million pounds." Chapter 2, p.128

"If Simmons was right, then Galveston lay directly in the great storm's path. It would arrive, he knew, without warning, and there was nothing he could do to sound the alarm." Chapter 3, p.139

"The first 'intimation' of the true extent of the disaster, Benjamin recalled, 'came when the body of a child floated into the station.'" Chapter 3, p.163



Topics for Discussion

What impact did the prevailing thoughts of the Turn of the Century have on the weather forecasters? If these men had not been so certain of their technology and invincible research, measurements and equipment, could there have been a different outcome for the Galveston inhabitants? How did the hubris of the age contribute to the number of deaths in the Galveston hurricane? Name two people whose hubris lost lives during the Galveston hurricane.

Name some "freakish" weather behavior that Isaac witnessed. How did this unusual weather behavior influence him?

Many people in Galveston were wholly ignorant before the hurricane. Name some ways the people in Galveston were ignorant and how they could have been saved if they were educated in various ways, including the strength of their homes, what a hurricane is, the dangers of flooding, etc.

How do different people react during the hurricane? How does their decision making affect their lives?

Americans regularly ignored Cuba's warnings about weather. What impact did this have on the Galveston area?

Describe the relationship between Isaac and Joseph. How were their differences highlighted in the face of the storm?

Describe the current situation with hurricane warnings and our current weather technology. Why do you think that people are much more likely to react to weather forecasting now versus weather forecasting at the turn of the century?