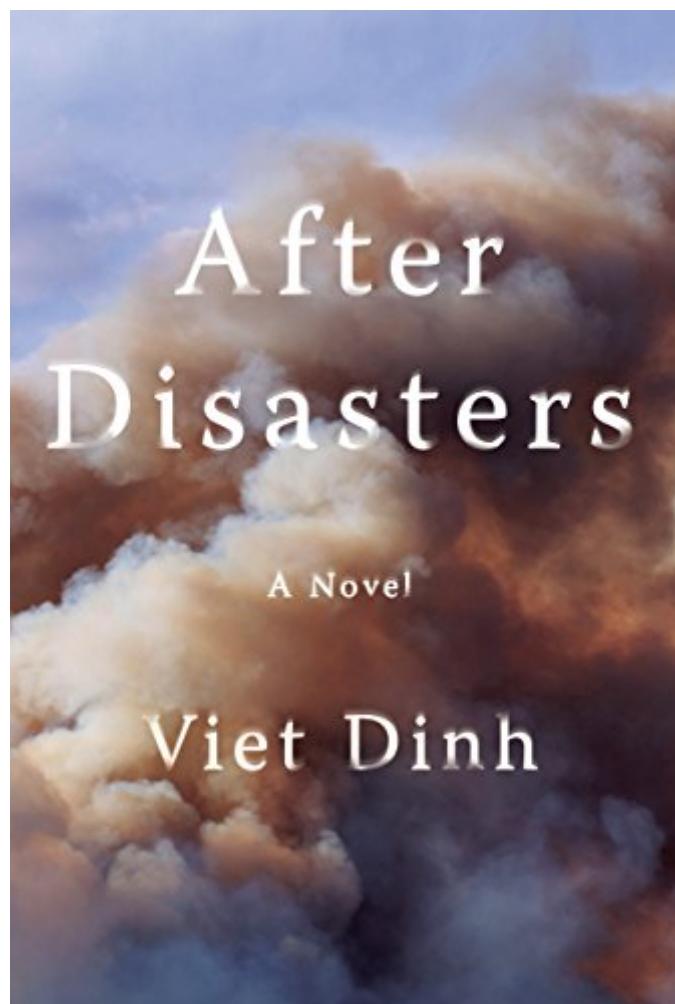


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After Disasters



Synopsis

One of The Millions™'s most anticipated books for the second half of 2016. Beautifully and hauntingly written, *After Disasters* is told through the eyes of four people in the wake of a life-shattering earthquake in India. An intricate story of love and loss weaves together the emotional and intimate narratives of Ted, a pharmaceutical salesman turned member of the Disaster Assistance Response Team; his colleague Piotr, who still carries with him the scars of the Bosnia conflict; Andy, a young firefighter eager to prove his worth; and Dev, a doctor on the ground racing against time and dwindling resources. Through time and place, hope and tragedy, love and lust, these four men put their lives at risk in a country where danger lurks everywhere.

O. Henry Prize-winning author Viet Dinh takes us on a moving and evocative journey through an India set with smoky funeral pyres, winding rivers that hold prayers and the deceased, and the rubble of Gujarat, a crumbling place wavering between life and death. As the four men fight to impose order on an increasingly chaotic city, where looting and threats of violence become more severe, they realize the first lives they save might be their own.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Having (luckily) never lived through a natural disaster with such massive repercussions, I could not put this book down as we followed four men and their narratives of physical and emotional struggle. Grand in scope, *After Disasters* follows four men after a catastrophic earthquake: HIV doctor Dev, firefighter Andy, aid worker Piotr, and pharma rep Ted. The author Viet Dinh has a talent for phrasing in the face of emotional turmoil. Dev is the first person you meet. An Indian doctor who runs an HIV/AIDS clinic, he has recently married and is desperately trying to help his home country rise from the medical disasters around. When the earthquake strikes, he is dragged into the chaos. Andy is a young firefighter from the UK with something to prove. These passages involved the harrowing task of searching for survivors in the crushed rubble, described often as looking for miracles. Piotr is an American aid worker with a penchant for Chopin who recently switched to disaster relief after doing some time in combat zones, where he met his wife/translator Rana and also suffered losses. Lastly Ted is an American pharmaceutical rep turned humanitarian worker. As the most lost of the four, he tries to find himself in the face of disaster while ghosts from his past reappear. Above all, this is a very male book in that it explores multiple sides of masculinity with the backdrop of the earthquake. Of the four protagonists, each seems to capture a different side: from the physical task of lifting someone out of debris to the daunting task of marriage to forbidden sexuality that connects two men. As a woman, I appreciated the exploration of male friendships and brotherhood while was also blown away by the devastation and unimaginable scale of a disaster like this earthquake. Would handily recommend, and glad I chose it as my First book.

I have no idea how the author was inspired to write a novel about those who respond to international disasters as a professional career, but the concept is brilliant. We are often riveted by the human dramas that unfold in the wake of these traumatic events, but other than our concern for the health of the first responders to 9-11 (as inadequate as that has been), we really don't think about those who pick up their "go bags" over and over again to head out to some distant location to once again confront massive human trauma. This novel takes us inside the lives of some of those people, veterans and novices, as they face those traumas in front of them as well as those they carry along with them to complicate an already impossibly complicated situation. This is hell on earth, but it is here we find the best of the spirit of love and compassion that I still have to think is the hallmark of our humanity. This is one of the best novels I've read recently. I highly recommend it.

This is a raw and gritty story set in the aftermath of an earthquake in India. The characters are

foreign rescue workers, who arrive to supply aid after a natural disaster. The characters are well developed and all have their different reasons for why they've joined agencies providing disaster relief. It is a literary work, which does keep the pace of the story a bit more slow than I'm used to, but I think it's well-suited for this story, and the sheer magnitude of what it feels like to provide disaster relief really came shining through. Nicely done!

I read a lot and never review but this bothered me in a couple of ways that I thought worthwhile for someone to hear before purchasing. I was disappointed that the review was inaccurate in describing the subject material--I was looking forward to the exploration of characters' feelings in disaster relief situations. It was much more centered on the repressed sexuality of the characters. Also, the approximately four main characters all seemed to speak with the same voice and were so similar that I had to make special effort to figure out which one was being followed in any given chapter.

I really liked the parts of the book which dealt with the disaster relief teams' work in trying to help the victims of an earthquake in India. The plight of the earthquake victims and the logistical problems facing the aid workers was very interesting. Where the book lost me was in its character development. The four characters who were pushed to the foreground were not clearly drawn. Three of them were gay men involved in a love triangle and I really had a hard time trying to figure out how the author thought their relationships contributed in any way to the story. I was expecting back stories on each of the men, but not random sex scenes. I was reminded of some Bollywood movies I have seen in which, in the middle of a battle scene, everyone suddenly breaks out into a musical performance. I felt that the author got lost in the development of this book. The ending felt so contrived: It was as if the author was just trying desperately to get to an end - any end.

There are several places in the book that describe situations a disaster recovery group might encounter. Those are very interesting. The rest (most) of the book is devoted to the four main character's inner thoughts, which are described rather than written with emotion. I never could form an attachment with any of the characters and there was not enough written about India or the earthquake itself to hold my interest. I did finish the book but gained little insight into what the author was trying to say. Would not recommend to anyone.

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