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Tragedy at Sea: the Sinking of the Titanic

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

David Long writes non-fiction, the kind of books he would like to read himself, he says, for adults and for children. He has produced a few books for Barrington Stoke now, and this will be a useful addition to a school library or to that huge number of people fascinated by the story of the Titanic.

He sets the scene, explaining about the urge to build bigger and better ships, and how the shipbuilders had to modify their ways of working, gives a lot of detail about the people making this exciting maiden voyage, from the rich and famous to poor emigrants seeking a better life, and mentions the incident, almost a smaller disaster, that happened in Southampton Docks the day before the fatal sailing. There is some information about icebergs and the damage they can do, but a crucial issue was the fact that warnings about a big one in the area were being ignored as the radio operator was sending the innovative 'Marconigrams', telegrams, from the richer passengers to their friends and families on shore at the moment the ship hit the iceberg much too fast.

It's page 51 before we get to the chapter 'Disaster Strikes', and then it all happens very quickly. The fact that there were not enough lifeboats for everyone on board meant that the 'women and children first' policy operated, so that families were separated, and there had been no safety drill, so nobody really knew what to do. Some lifeboats left with space for more people, and the White Star Line's managing director, Joseph Bruce Ismay, managed to get away, which caused fury among the survivors and the families of those who had died. After all, Captain Smith had nobly gone down with his ship, as was expected. Lessons were learnt from the disaster, however, and the drills and safety precautions on all ships are now much more stringent.

David Long makes this an exciting story, even though most people know what happened, and there is some fascinating detail, well-illustrated by Stefano Tambellini. The drawing of the various levels of cabin is telling: the luxury suite is at the top with crew to wait on the passengers, then business class is in the middle, and poorer people had bunk beds at the bottom. Sketches of the various types of people needed to maintain the ship and look after its passengers add an extra level to the tragedy, as most of them died. On Barrington Stoke's familiar cream-coloured paper and in a clear font, this book is well worth adding to a collection.

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