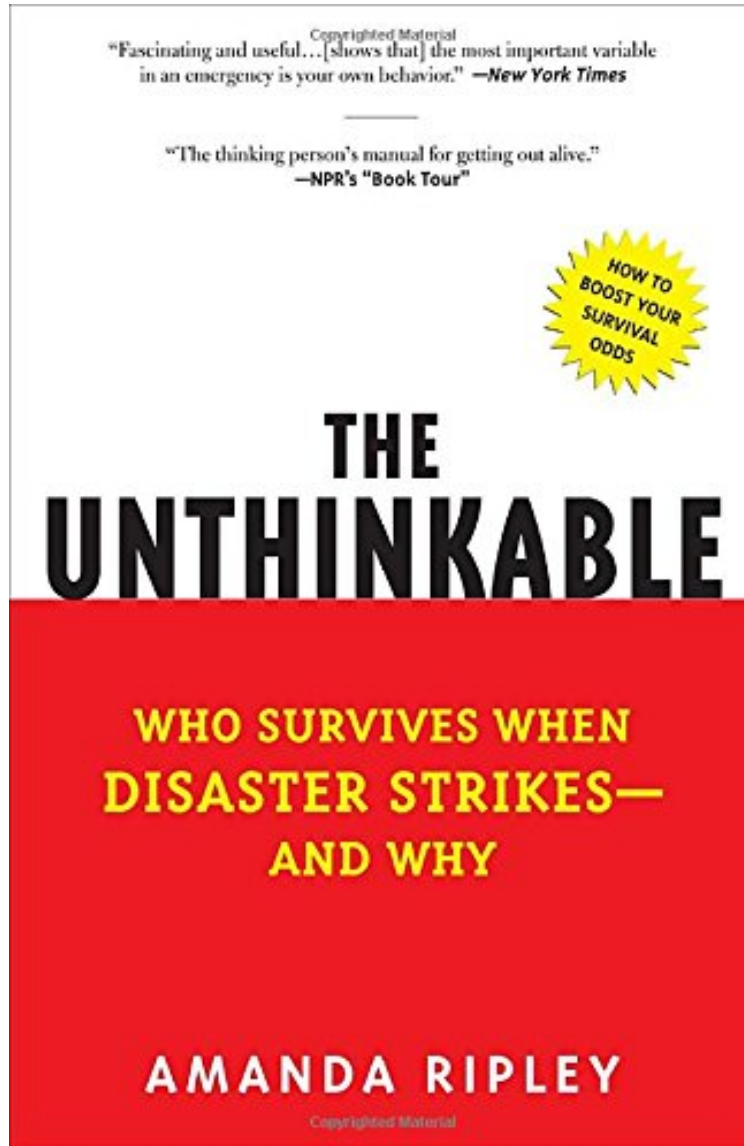


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# The Unthinkable: Who Survives When Disaster Strikes - and Why

Amanda Ripley

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**Amanda Ripley : The Unthinkable: Who Survives When Disaster Strikes - and Why** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Unthinkable: Who Survives When Disaster Strikes - and Why:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. GREAT BOOK By S. I. Short Really well written. I felt like she was talking to me as a friend. I had read about some of these disasters before, but she brought a different perspective to many of them. It makes you think about what you might do in a similar situation, and helps explain why people do

very odd things in moments of crisis. I couldn't put it down. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Surviving Disaster By George P. Burdell Very analytical and detailed...psychological divisions of human response elements during traumatic events is fascinating. Presentation of some elements was a little too detailed for me. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. "The Unthinkable" - might just be "Indispensable" when a disaster strikes.

By GirlScoutDad After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, I long wondered if we were investing too much money and effort in technology and too little effort in training and educating people to mentally and psychologically adapt to disasters of all sorts including both natural disasters and terrorist threats. This book brilliantly addresses this question through a series of in-depth, individual survival stories supplemented by summaries of findings by brain scientists and social psychologists. The survivor stories are numerous and quite detailed. They include stories of a World Trade Center 9/11 survivor, a US Ambassador held hostage in a violent embassy takeover in Bogota, a survivor of the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting spree, as well as stories of plane crash survivors, maritime catastrophes, and Hurricane Katrina flood victims. I read survivor stories on a regular basis for personal and professional reasons, yet I found the narratives in this book intensely vivid and gripping, and learned new things from many of them. In fact, some of the stories sent chills down my spine or nearly moved me to tears. Amanda Ripley, identified as a senior Time correspondent, is a great story-teller and her journalistic genre - with its up close and in the moment style - serves well to bring dynamic intensity to the survivor narratives. Parenthetically, I had to wonder if the title "The Unthinkable" was an intentional pun on the ironic moniker applied to the Titanic, "The Unsinkable." The research is also impressive and above all, always engaging and readable. Ripley's thesis is that individuals go through three mental stages in sequence when disaster strikes, she labels the stages: Denial, Deliberation, and Decision. She discusses each stage in detail and how to move most quickly and effectively into the Decision stage. She also includes outstanding chapters on panic, on the "freeze" response, and on heroes - what is heroism, who becomes a hero, and why. Her investigation of resilience and how to become more resilient is also a very thoughtful and worthwhile exploration of this important but nebulous and poorly understood psychological construct. I would recommend this book as a very inspiring and worthwhile read for audiences at almost any level of experience or expertise; it compares very favorably to numerous other books I have read on the topic of response to mass disasters and terrorist acts. There are many surprises along the way, as her stories illustrate that courage, endurance, resilience and even heroism come from ordinary people of vastly differing age, education, ethnic, and other demographic backgrounds, suggesting that we can all improve at helping ourselves and others survive catastrophe by learning from others who've been through hell and back.

Discover how human beings react to danger and what makes the difference between life and death. Today, nine out of ten Americans live in places at significant risk of earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, terrorism, or other disasters. Tomorrow, some of us will have to make split-second choices to save ourselves and our families. How will we react? What will it feel like? Will we be heroes or victims? In her quest to answer these questions, award-winning journalist Amanda Ripley traces human responses to some of recent history's epic disasters, from the explosion of the Mont Blanc munitions ship in 1917 - one of the biggest explosions before the invention of the atomic bomb - to the journeys of the 15,000 people who found their way out of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. To understand the science behind the stories, Ripley turns to leading brain scientists, trauma psychologists, and other disaster experts. She even has her own brain examined by military researchers and experiences, through realistic simulations, what it might be like to survive a plane crash into the ocean or to escape a raging fire. Ripley comes back with precious wisdom about the surprising humanity of crowds, the elegance of the brain's fear circuits, and the stunning inadequacy of many of our evolutionary responses. Most unexpectedly, she discovers the brain's ability to do much, much better with just a little help.

From Publishers Weekly Ripley, an award-winning writer on homeland security for Time, offers a compelling look at instinct and disaster response as she explores the psychology of fear and how it can save or destroy us. Surprisingly, she reports, mass panic is rare, and an understanding of the dynamics of crowds can help prevent a stampede, while a well-trained crew can get passengers quickly but calmly off a crashed plane. Using interviews with survivors of hotel fires, hostage situations, plane crashes and, 9/11, Ripley takes readers through the three stages of reaction to calamity: disbelief, deliberation and action. The average person slows down, spending valuable minutes to gather belongings and check in with others. The human tendency to stay in groups can make evacuation take much longer than experts estimate. Official policy based on inaccurate assumptions can also put people in danger; even after 9/11, Ripley says, the requirement for evacuation drills on office buildings is inadequate. Ripley's in-depth look at the psychology of disaster response, alongside survivors' accounts, makes for gripping reading, sure to raise debate as well as our awareness of a life-and-death issue. 8 pages of color photos. (June) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. "A fascinating and useful new book. The New York Times The thinking persons manual for getting out alive. NPR" Ripley is a voyeur on a mission... Her conviction: We all stand a better chance of surviving a disaster if we understood what happens to our little gray cells when things get ugly.... Spiced with surprising factoids, this book might save your life one day. Bloomberg News The Unthinkable is part study of the

science of reaction to extreme fear, part indictment of the US governments response to the terrorist threat, part call to arms....The end result is a fascinating book....Despite its title and its subject matter, *The Unthinkable* is an optimistic The Times of LondonEngrossing and lucid...An absorbing study of the psychology and physiology of panic, heroism, and trauma...Facing the truth about the human capacity for risk and disaster turns out to be a lot less scary than staying in the dark. O, The Oprah Magazine"This is a book with a purpose, meant to change things."Rob Hardy, The Commercial DispatchAmanda Ripley takes us on a sometimes stunning, sometimes sobering journey through disaster, using great stories and respected science to show why some prevail and others do not. *The Unthinkable* isnt merely a book about disaster; its a book about survival maybe yours. Gavin de Becker, author of the New York Times bestseller *The Gift of Fear*With *The Unthinkable*, Amanda Ripley succeeds in two different ways. First, she covers, with great clarity and accuracy, the science of how the body and mind respond to crisis. In the process, she prescribes certain actions that will increase the chances of surviving a disaster. But its the second aspect, the stories, that makes the book so compelling. These tales leave your viscera enflamed because they compel two questions: What would it feel like to go through that? and Would I do the right thing and survive? This is an irresistible book.Robert M. Sapolsky, John A. and Cynthia Fry Gunn Professor of Biological Sciences and Professor of Neurology and Neurological Sciences at Stanford University*The Unthinkable* is the most magnificent account of a survivors mind that I have ever read. It has helped me know and accept some of my reactions during my 72 day ordeal in the Andes. I can now understand how fear motivated me, and how denial also played a part. This book will help those whove never faced disaster to understand their own behavior and be prepared should their luck run out one day.Nando Parrado, New York Times bestselling author of *Miracle in the Andes**The Unthinkable* reveals why, under the same circumstances, some people caught up in a disastersurvive and others do not. Why some are hopelessly immobilized by fear and crippled by panic, and others are filled with strength, endurance, reactionsand the other intrinsic stuff of which Homeric heroes are made. How can we ensure which we will be? In her well-crafted prose, Amanda Ripley shows us all how to prepare to meet danger andincrease our chances of surviving the unthinkable. Bruce Henderson, New York Times bestselling author of *Down to the Sea and True North*When a disaster occurs we invariably learn the "what" of the event -- how many died, how many survived. Amanda Ripleys riveting *The Unthinkable* provides genuine insight into the "why" behind the numbers. This remarkable book will not only change your life, it could very well save it.Gregg Olsen, New York Times bestselling author of *The Deep Dark: Disaster and Redemption in Americas Richest Silver Mine*Ever fantasize about what you would do in a disaster? How would you survive? How would you behave? After interviewing survivors of the World Trade Center attack, Amanda Ripley sifted through amazing tales of survivors from other disasters and mined various sociological, psychological, and neurological studies. Her insights are absolutely fascinating, and they could come in handy one day.Walter Isaacson, author of the New York Times bestsellers *Einstein: His Life and Universe* and *Benjamin Franklin: A Life*, and Vice-Chairman of the Louisiana Recovery Authority"Rich in information about the subconscious ways we face danger. In the event that someday you face a sudden life or death situation, reading this book will increase the odds that the outcome will be life."David Ropeik, author of *Risk!: A Practical Guide for Deciding Whats Really Safe and Whats Really Dangerous in the World Around You*Reading *The Unthinkable* will be life-changing. We live in an age of anxiety that has too many of us rocked back on our heels. Once youve feasted on the rich insights and wisdom of this remarkable book, youll be standing tall again. While our politicians and media have been keen to exploit and fan our worst fears, Amanda Ripley makes clear that individually and collectively we can meet head-on the hazards that periodically befall us. We need not be afraid!Stephen Flynn, Senior Fellow for National Security Studies, Council on Foreign Relations, and author of *The Edge of Disaster: Rebuilding a Resilient Nation**The Unthinkable* is a fascinating, in-depth look at human behavior under extreme pressure. Its gut-wrenching stories span the full spectrum of action under duress, from panic to heroism. Not only is this book fast-paced and engrossing, its illuminating. Michael Tougas, author of *Fatal Forecast: An Incredible True Tale of Disaster and Survival at Sea*Amanda Ripley has written a smart, poignant account about the dramas of the existential moment in this new century. She is a provocative voice of a new generation of writers and thinkers whose grasp of daily events and global disaster is piquant, engrossing, and syncretic. Above all, she makes sense of life today in an entirely entertaining andaccessibleway-- all with a brimming dollop of optimism. If you ever wondered, What would I do if the unthinkable happened to me, you hold the answer in your hands.Doug Stanton, author of the New York Times bestseller *In Harms Way: The Sinking of the USS Indianapolis and the Extraordinary Story of Its Survivors* "A must read. We need books like this to help us understand the world in which we live.Nassim Nicholas Taleb, author *The Black Swan* and *Foiled By Randomness*From the Hardcover edition.About the AuthorAMANDA RIPLEY is a senior writer for Time magazine.