



Killer Show: The Station Nightclub Fire, America's Deadliest Rock Concert

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On February 20, 2003, the deadliest rock concert in U.S. history took place at a roadhouse called The Station in West Warwick, Rhode Island. That night, in the few minutes it takes to play a hard-rock standard, the fate of many of the unsuspecting nightclub patrons was determined with awful certainty. The blaze was ignited when pyrotechnics set off by Great White, a 1980s heavy-metal band, lit flammable polyurethane "egg crate" foam sound insulation on the club's walls. In less than 10 minutes, 96 people were dead and 200 more were injured, many catastrophically. The final death toll topped out, three months later, at the eerily unlikely round number of 100.

The story of the fire, its causes, and its legal and human aftermath is one of lives put at risk by petty economic decisions--by a band, club owners, promoters, building inspectors, and product manufacturers. Any one of those decisions, made differently, might have averted the tragedy. Together, however, they reached a fatal critical mass.

Killer Show is the first comprehensive exploration of the chain of events leading up to the fire, the conflagration itself, and the painstaking search for evidence to hold the guilty to account and obtain justice for the victims.

Anyone who has entered an entertainment venue and wondered, "Could I get out of here in a hurry?" will identify with concertgoers at The Station. Fans of disaster nonfiction and forensic thrillers will find ample elements of both genres in *Killer Show*.

Killer Show: The Station Nightclub Fire, America's Deadliest Rock Concert Details

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Missy says

I read this in a day, unable to put it down. I grew up close by and have an issue with the author characterization of the people of West Warwick being uneducated, blue collar, corrupt, metal head sorts. That is not true. West Warwick is the home of a very diverse and caring group of people. That all of Rhode Island had connections to people in the tragedy and remains heartbroken over the loss of lives and struggles of the injured is absolutely true.

Jenna Hashway says

Fantastic. A must read for anyone who cares about law, public safety or the untold stories of the victims of a horrific yet utterly preventable tragedy.

Dara S. says

This was very well researched, many ,many footnotes. Even though this story went in to technical details in some areas, it was never boring. I would have liked more personal stories, but very well done.

D'Anne says

If you've ever attended a rock concert at a hole-in-the wall venue you'll thank your lucky stars you're still alive after you read *Killer Show*. The first part of the book is well-paced and I could not put it down. Once Barylick gets into the lawsuit stuff he gets a little too wonky and seems to forget that his audience is probably not predominantly other lawyers. There are also times in the book when his tone seems off (flippant or condescending at times) considering the subject matter. But I still highly recommend this book especially to anyone who might give any serious consideration to seeing Great White in concert ever. (Spoiler alert: Jack Russell is a dick.)

Judy says

Harrowing account of the 2003 Station Nightclub fire in West Warwick, RI. If you wonder why we need strictly enforced regulations on businesses, read this book. It's as much a story of greed and stupidity as it is about a fire and its aftermath. It's not an easy read, given the subject matter, but impossible to put down. Now, whenever I'm in a restaurant or even a mall, I check for the exit signs and a sprinkler system.

Gene says

This is one of the most gripping books i've ever read. A page turner in every sense of the word. Definitely the best True Crime book of 2012!

Sidney says

I finished the book this afternoon. It was a surprisingly fast read. From Chapter 25 on I was especially engaged. I learned so much. I have a new appreciation for plaintiffs' lawyers and their work. John also helped us to recognize the good and decent people in this story. Thank you for taking this enormous risk and for giving it your all. And congratulations on winning!

Donna S says

Extremely gripping and extremely well researched account of the small steps taken by dozens of people that led to 100 people dying.

Andrew says

I dimly remember the media coverage of the Station Nightclub fire back in the winter of 2003. As a former EMT, such stories often catch my attention, leaving me wondering at the circumstances that cause such disasters. While my personal experiences are more related to dealing with the injured survivors, I have more than enough firefighter friends to fully appreciate the challenges presented by the fire itself and the incredible number of lives it took.

This book is an attempt to tell the whole story of the Station Nightclub fire, from the history of the building to the settlement of the legal actions that arose from the fire. The incredible amount of research required to compile this account is evident in the level of details (not to mention the nearly 40 pages of notes), but this isn't a dry technical report. Instead, the author has done an incredible job of bringing the story to life, evoking a wide range of emotions, from outrage at the gross disregard for safety that resulted from greed, to admiration for the strength and courage of any number of survivors.

This book can be viewed as three parts. The first five chapters set the stage, describing the nightclub and its history. We learn about the installation of inappropriate sound-proofing materials, the physical layout of the building and the questionable results of any number of fire and safety inspections. Chapters 6-18 deal with the events immediately leading up to the Great White concert of February 20, 2003 and the fire itself. We learn the stories of some of the victims and how they came to be in the building that night. Barylick pulls no punches as he graphically describes the horror of the fire as it almost literally explodes through the building. It is almost impossible to imagine how quickly this fire spread, killing most of its victims within just a couple of minutes of ignition. The remainder of the book describes the aftermath: Identifying the victims, the investigations and the criminal and civil litigations that attempted to resolve the legal responsibilities for this tragedy.

As with any disaster of this nature, there are lessons to be learned. In this case, it appears that an unfortunately confluence of circumstances combined to create an incredible deadly fire. It seems likely that the removal of any of the factors (even just one) might have prevented the tragedy, or at least greatly minimized its impact. The author's evaluation of the possible lessons to be learned is both insightful and heartfelt. This book should serve as a cautionary tale of the potential consequences when safety takes a backseat to greed and when the public servants tasked with enforcing safety rules fail to properly do their jobs.

Fishface says

This was an excellent, at times devastating read. Like *Fire in the Grove: The Coconut Grove Tragedy and Its Aftermath* and *The Perfect Storm: A True Story of Men Against the Sea*, the text effectively tacked back and forth between the science of the disaster, the surrounding circumstances, the experiences of the less-central people involved, and the minute-by-minute personal stories of the people who went through it. You never got that far from the horror of the fire, but the author didn't keep you there for so long at a stretch that you started to get numb. I didn't give it a full 5 stars only because at times it did bog down, a just bit, when the author was discussing all the machinations involved in the massive, complex personal-injury suit that followed the Station disaster. If you loved *Triangle: The Fire That Changed America*, you'll love this one.

Lois says

Make sure you pick this one up...it is a staggeringly accurate account of the nightclub fire in RI which cost a hundred lives.

Kate says

To most Americans, the Station nightclub fire was a blip on the disaster radar of 2003. To Rhode Islanders, it was a very personal tragedy, something that touched almost everyone in one way or another. It's hard to convey that to those who aren't from RI. It's hard to make people understand the interconnectedness of a state that is so small and close-knit, where many families have been living for generations. It is nearly impossible to convey the personal and public devastation of the Station nightclub fire.

The Station nightclub fire, to most Americans, was a passing headline on CNN, a moment when the smallest state was in the public eye for a while. For those affected, the aftermath has been long, drawn out, and has provided few answers and little closure. It is hard to make people who didn't experience it understand that; it's hard to make people who are not personally connected to this fire understand the conflicting feelings that arose throughout the legal proceedings (which, outside of the Providence Journal, received extremely limited press).

This book addresses all of these issues in clear black and white. While the book was very difficult at times, it was also an important book for me to read. The first half of the book covers the story of the Station that I already knew: the frantic phone calls on the morning of February 21, the long hours of waiting at Rhode Island Hospital, the maps of the nightclub and the locations that were most deadly, the collective mourning that went on for the rest of that year. It perfectly captured the insular nature of Rhode Island and of the effect

that the fire had both in the immediate and in the long term.

The second half covers the story of the fire that I did not know. At the time the proceedings were going on, I largely ignored them for sanity's sake. Although this was an infuriating part of the book to read, I think it is the most important part of the book. The legal proceedings that came out of the fire are covered in exacting detail by the author (an attorney who was connected to the case), and although you can feel the righteous anger, the bias in his words, everything is true. Baryllick did his homework - the bibliography and citations are extensive and excruciatingly detailed, which adds credulity to a story that many will find outrageous in every sense of the word.

I would recommend this book wholeheartedly to anyone who is interested in learning more about this disaster, about Rhode Island history, or about how the Station nightclub disaster affected fire safety law as we now know it ten years later.

Tiger Gray says

The Station Nightclub fire is one of the most horrifying tragedies to take place in the United States. A fire started by sheer incompetence at best, that in under ninety seconds consumed the building and with it, over ninety lives.

But what is amazing about this book is how it details the fact that the fire wasn't just a regrettable, heart wrenching mistake but the result of corruption, laziness, and greed. The building eventually known simply as The Station went through several transformations, with each successive owner cutting a new corner. The owners at the time of the fire, the Derderian brothers, were notorious for paying their workers under the table, making those workers get through their shifts in the blistering cold with no heater because it was too expensive to run, and various other crimes brought on by extreme cheapness.

But the Derderian brothers can't shoulder the blame alone. Their neighbor, a man who had the misfortune of living in a house next to a nightclub, constantly complained about noise. When the Derderians visited to try to work something out, the neighbor sold them sound proofing foam that the company claimed was fire resistant. None of this was true. They put it up over the old cheap foam the first owner had affixed to the walls, ignoring suggestions from others that they buy actual fire resistant foam. So not only are the Derderians cheap, their neighbor is in essence a con man profiting off the sale of dangerous foam (funny note: one of the brothers was a news anchor who at one point referred to this type of foam as "solid gasoline" in a safety special).

Then you have the fire inspector, who kept upping the capacity of the building until a whopping four hundred and four people were allowed inside a space where each human had less than five feet of room to stand. When The Station was a restaurant, the capacity was under two hundred.

And then there are the pyrotechnics. The club approved them, the band Great White shot them off, and both parties knew or should have known that they were illegal without an inspection. But because the type of pyro used was cheap, and because the Derderians wanted to rile up the crowd, they were used. Once the super heated metal shavings hit the foam, the place went up with such swift, ravenous flames that mere seconds could mean the difference between life and death.

Another note I thought was interesting was Jack Russel (leader of Great White) claiming he kept going back in to the blaze to rescue people, but kept getting "pulled out." This reminded me of people claiming to have survived 9/11 when they did nothing of the sort. I wonder what the psychological components of these false

claims are. Something I should read about next, perhaps.

This is an illuminating, infuriating book and is a great look at the corruption of a small town. I recommend it. It is also written by one of the lawyers involved after the fact and includes interesting legal wranglings set out in plain language.

Jane says

The only bad thing I can say about this book is that it was too short. I started getting upset that it was going to end when I was about halfway done.

I have been obsessed with the Station Fire since I heard the author interviewed on NPR. I kept thinking about it and reading stuff on the internet about it and finally I read a review by a survivor that said, "When people ask me what happened, I am going to direct them to this book from now on." So I decided to take her advice.

This book has got to be the most exhaustive, well-written, precise account of all that happened in that fire and explains how in the hell a building could be engulfed in flames in like two minutes (TWO MINUTES!). It is heartbreaking and ghastly in parts, but the author carefully avoids exhausting the reader with horror by going back and forth between the human side and the technical side. I never thought I would be transfixed by a chapter about how skin and burns work. Or how fire and smoke kill. You think you know, but you don't.

Great book. I can't recommend it highly enough.

Claire says

I won this book in a First Read giveaway on Goodreads. I entered the giveaway because I thought this book looked interesting, and right up my alley. I have to say that this book was actually really disappointing.

So this book is a non-fiction account of The Station fire, which took place in a Rhode Island night club and killed 100 people while injuring hundreds more. Barylick's account of the actual fire is riveting, everything else... well not so much.

Barylick is actually one of the lawyers that prosecuted over 40 defendants over the night club fire, so its obvious he has a bias. Frankly, I don't blame him. He was close up and personal with the victims of this horrendous event, so its natural that in his book about the fire, he would sympathize with the victims. The thing is, he is blatantly biased. When you're writing a non-fiction book, you try to be as unbiased as possible, right? Well apparently Barylick didn't get that memo. He frequently calls out various people involved in the fire (understandable from his perspective, but still) and expresses disgust and anger (among other things.) If he had written a memoir of his experiences as a prosecutor, then this bias and emotion would have been expected and understandable, but this is a non-fiction account of an event and not the place for Barylick to express his anger.

Barylick is also extremely dramatic. His use of foreshadowing actually annoying. He constantly uses phrases like "Little did he know..." and "She could never have guessed..." It started to get tiring. He also includes little puns and jokes that not only seem incredibly out of place for a book on a tragedy like this, but are so cheesy. Frankly, it seems like Barylick thought to himself "I've been waiting to use this one for so long! I'm so clever!" while he chuckled with barely contain glee, as he typed his puns.

The author's an attorney! We get an inside scoop on the legal proceedings that took place after the fire! He'll explain everything so we can understand it!

Just kidding, Barylick will fill the second half of the book with legal jargon and will champion his part in the litigation while almost completely ignoring important people like the victims. We get it John, you're a hero. Now could you maybe stop telling us about your detective work and tell us how this patron of the club you focused on so much is doing? Oh you have an epilogue for that? Oh more than half of that epilogue focuses on your opinions about fire safety and greedy businessmen? Okay.

So that's a lot of issues I have with this book, but it wasn't all bad. The first half, when Barylick describes the circumstances leading up to the fire, the victims of the fire and the fire itself is really well written (despite Barylick's obnoxious dramatics.) I just wished that he had focused less on the legal repercussions of the fire and more on the people. I'm aware that as a lawyer for the prosecution, Barylick would of course have more insight and interest in that part of it, but it shouldn't take up half the book.

Overall, not a terrible book, but the author should have written a memoir instead. And his editor should have caught his terrible dramatics, obvious bias and bad jokes.

By the way, don't read this if you're afraid of dying in a fire. Or don't want to be afraid of dying in a fire, because I now am.

3/5 stars

Book review blog:<http://thebookgirlblog.wordpress.com/>
