



Dead Wake: : The Last Crossing of the Lusitania by Erik Larson | Summary & Analysis

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Dead Wake: The Last Crossing of the Lusitania by bestselling author Erik Larson offers a detailed look into the May 7, 1915 sinking of the British passenger ship the Lusitania by a German U-boat near the start of WWI. This review follows along the chronological storyline of the book, and includes special attention to the extensive detail offered by the author. The summary is followed by an analysis of the book's strengths and weaknesses.

Larson weaves this story by offering alternating views of the captain of the Lusitania, the commander of the sub that sank it, the passengers aboard the ship, British naval intelligence officers, and President Wilson. The general story line is chronological and the various perspectives alternate throughout the telling. Two central thesis are developed throughout the book. The first is that the author is sympathetic to the captain of the Lusitania who was somewhat maligned after the event by those who sought to blame the sinking of the ship on his incompetence. The second concerns the suggestion that there was deliberate negligence on the part of British intelligence and leadership who recognized strategic advantage in the ship being attacked in terms of its potential to draw Americans into the war as allies. The author uses rich archival detail to support both claims.

Larson is both an accomplished journalist and historical novelist. He has written four New York Times bestselling books on subjects ranging from serial killers to hurricanes. He has written for The Wall Street Journal and Time Magazine as a staff journalist. He has been a contributing author to The Atlantic, Harper's, and The New Yorker. His academic background includes a bachelors in Russian history, language and culture from the University of Pennsylvania, and a Masters in journalism from Columbia University.

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