

## Inferno! And the Miracles of the Colorado Marshall Fire

**Tom Gormley**

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*Inferno!* is an informative blow-by-blow account of how the Marshall Fire progressed and of how the surrounding community fought back during and after the event.

Tom Gormley's *Inferno!* recounts how Colorado's devastating Marshall Fire unfolded and the heroic efforts required to stop it.

On December 30, 2021, a rare winter wildfire ripped through Boulder, Colorado, damaging and destroying thousands of buildings. Yet the Marshall Fire, as horrible and difficult to control as it was, killed only two people. Through a combination of good fortune and the brave actions of individuals from throughout the region and beyond, the community was able to survive the fire, start building back, and figure out how they could protect themselves better in the future.

The book begins with a brief overview of the affected communities, including their history as mining towns and information about how long-running coal mine fires could have started the blaze. These are crucial insights into the subject, explaining the separate events that contributed to the fire's inception and growth. But the book's commitment to sharing detailed information becomes tedious, as with its minute-by-minute replays of the firefighting and evacuation efforts—and with its mentions of unrelated events, as of authorities responding to a potential domestic disturbance. A decision to list all of the departments involved also feels unnecessary; much of the same information is included in the book's appendices. The result is an often depersonalized narrative.

More compelling is the book's coverage of individuals who lived through the fire, many of whom lost their homes and possessions in the blaze. Their contributions are touching and humanize the book, which is elsewhere overwhelmed by technical details. So, too, do the book's mentions of wonders of nature (winds kept the fire from destroying a hospital) and of human kindness (local ranchers volunteered to help evacuate horses from the danger zone) illustrate the razor's-edge difference between life and death as the fire spread. Photographs of the event show how frightening it was and how much damage it caused. An image of an empty Costco, replete with carts abandoned by fleeing shoppers, is especially poignant.

After the fire, the long work of rebuilding began. The book covers the good works of local charities (emphasizing Christian-based charities) in a late chapter, again emphasizing the human kindness and ingenuity required to overcome the crisis. Still, despite such standout moments, its presentation is too uneven throughout. Its grammatical errors are a further impediment.

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EILEEN GONZALEZ (December 23, 2022)

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