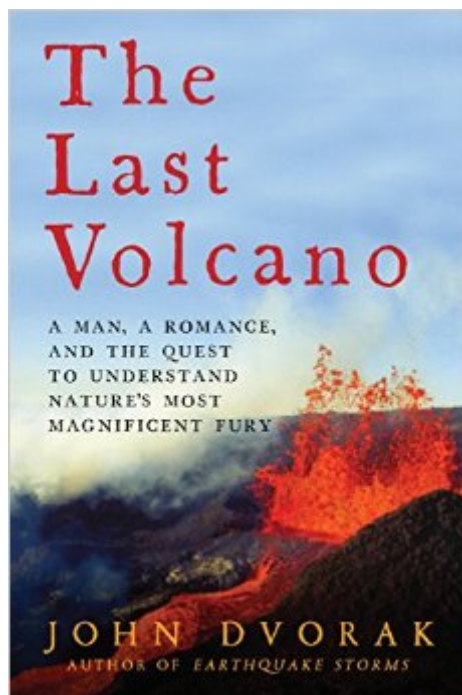


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# The Last Volcano: A Man, A Romance, And The Quest To Understand Nature's Most Magnificent Fury



## Synopsis

Ranging from Yellowstone in Wyoming to Mount Pelee in the Caribbean, from Bogoslof and Pavlov in Alaska, to Sakurajima in Japan, and, finally, to the massive volcanoes of Kilauea and Mauna Loa in HawaiiâThe Last Volcano reveals the incredible journey of a man on a mission to understand the awesome power of volcanic eruptions. Volcanoes have fascinatedâand terrifiedâpeople for ages. They have destroyed cities and ended civilizations. John Dvorak, the acclaimed author of Earthquake Storms, looks into the early scientific study of volcanoes and the life of the man who pioneered the field, Thomas Jaggar. Educated at Harvard, Jaggar went to the Caribbean after Mount Pelee exploded in 1902, killing more than 26,000 people. Witnessing the destruction and learning about the horrible deaths these people had suffered, Jaggar vowed to dedicate himself to a study of volcanoes. What followed was fifty years of global travel to eruptions in Italy, Alaska, Central America, Japan and the Pacific. In 1912, he built a small science station at the edge of a lake of molten lava at Kilauea volcano in the Hawaiian Islands, with the goal of solving the mystery of why volcanoes erupt and how they could be predicted. Jaggar found something else at Kilauea: true love. She was Isabel Maydwell, a widowed school teacher who came to Kilauea to restart her life. For more than twenty years, she and Jaggar ran the science station, living in a small house at the edge of a high cliff that overlooked the lava lake. Maydwell would quickly become one of the worldâs most astute observers of volcanic activity. Mixed with tales of myths and rituals, as well as the authorâs own experiences and insight into volcanic activity, The Last Volcano reveals the lure and romance of confronting nature in its most magnificent formâthe edge of a volcanic eruption.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

We live in a dangerous world, with natural disasters looming anywhere you might choose to live. Among the most terrifying of such threats are volcanoes, which have delivered catastrophe regularly since long before the famous explosion at Pompeii. It was not until the twentieth century that we began to understand how the huge plates bearing Earth's surface are colliding or grinding under or against each other, and how some of the resultant tears might bring magma in eruption. That we have gotten some scientific understanding of volcanoes is due in no small part to a man whom you probably never heard of, Thomas Jaggar. He deserves the tribute paid in *The Last Volcano: A Man, a Romance, and the Quest to Understand Nature's Most Magnificent Fury* (Pegasus Books) by John Dvorak, a scientist who has studied earthquakes and volcanoes for the United States Geological Survey. Jaggar's life story is the center of this book, but our current understanding of what volcanoes do was a global scientific effort, and Dvorak has encompassed smaller portraits of other scientists, accounts of experiments, and descriptions of travel to distant eruptions. It is an illuminating view of how science works. Jaggar had been born in Philadelphia in 1871, and was educated at Harvard. He was an average student, but became enthusiastic with his introduction to geology. Upon graduation, he began his pattern of field work, first within Yellowstone National Park. Jaggar was among the scientists rushed to study the effects of the explosion of Mount Pelee in 1902, although he rushed at the time was a shipboard cruise of several days. When he got there, Jaggar was reminded of Pompeii, which he had visited as a child. The citizens of Pompeii had had no warning, and neither had those of St. Pierre.

This book is about the development of the science of experimental volcanology, as seen from the point of view of the life of Thomas Jaggar, one of the pioneers in the field. I had never heard of Dr. Jaggar before reading this book, but what an amazing and adventurous life he had! After spending his summers in the American west doing geological field work and surveying for the government, he got his PhD in geology at Harvard. After teaching and doing academic research for a number of

years, he realized that his true interests were in observing geological processes in nature, rather than in the classroom or the lab. As a witness to the destruction of the town of St. Pierre by the Mt. Pelee eruption on the Caribbean island of Martinique in 1902, he decided to dedicate his life to careful scientific observations of volcanoes, not only for the sake of scientific understanding, but also as service to humanity. What he saw had motivated him to find reliable ways of predicting future eruptions, to give people time to flee. Dr. Jagger took trips all over the world to observe volcanoes: Mt. Vesuvius, Mt. Etna, Aleutian Islands volcanoes, Sakurajima volcano in Japan, and many others. But most of his time was spent on the island of Hawaii where he did extensive studies over many years of the Kilauea volcano, and its neighboring Mana Loa. There, with the help of others, Dr. Jagger was able to establish the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory on the rim of the Kilauea caldera, where he served as its first director from 1912 to 1940. Over these years Dr. Jagger practically invented the field of observational volcanology.

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