

# THE RED DEMON by Andy Froemke

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**Genre:** Historical/Disaster

**Logline:** The incredible true story of a small Minnesota town's heroic battle against one of the deadliest firestorms in United States history and the lives it changed forever.



August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1894. The small, but booming lumber town of Hinckley, Minnesota sits at the crossroads of two competing railroad lines. There are churches, a newspaper, a lumber mill, and even a volunteer fire department. In 24 hours, the lives of a telegraph operator, a fire chief, a newspaperman, a reverend, two train engineers, and two siblings will change in ways none of them can fathom. The clear cutting of forests, a record drought, and a weather front will form a perfect firestorm that will reach such heights, it will block out the sun in a neighboring state and devastate everything in its path. But on this day, everything is normal. The trains are on time. The siblings go about their business delivering papers and helping neighbors. The reverend helps alleviate guilt over a personal transgression. And on the night before the Great Hinckley Fire, a group of young teens will have a dance in the home of the fire chief. Boys will walk their girls home with nervous excitement. There will be a first kiss on a porch that feels like it has the promise of forever.

September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1894. The day starts out like any other... a little smoky, but this town is used to that. A romance via telegraph is interrupted by news down the line that a fire is threatening a town in the south. As the fire marches through the virgin forests, it starts to claim victims, but it also spawns the first of many heroic actions. A woman and small child lost in the forest are rescued by a Native American

woman. As the fire merges with another fire and gathers strength, Hinckley calls out its crack firefighting unit. And for a while, they battle the blaze bravely, but then it becomes inhuman...

Residents panic. Some attempt to flee with their belongings and are overcome by the weight of their burden. Others rush to the trains seeking salvation. Backing away from Hinckley, one train will barely make it over a burning bridge to safety. The other train, nearly out of fuel, will race the fire to Skunk Lake in a desperate bid to save its passengers. Once there, it will be a much maligned African American railway porter who will risk his own life and endure unimaginable danger to save the white passengers of his coach. For those left behind in Hinckley, seeking refuge in a water-filled gravel pit, they will face sheets of flame and cyclones of fire, but will be buoyed by the physical and spiritual courage of their Reverend.

September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1894. The sun rises. The survivors of the fire find the town of Hinckley razed to the ground. Dead bodies are strewn everywhere. Along with the tragic stories of lost loved ones comes the incredible feats of survival. A bride-to-be is reunited with her groom. Two siblings separated by the fire discover their parents are dead, but find each other. In all, over 400 lives are lost to the great fire, but the survivors find in it a renewed strength and commitment to life.