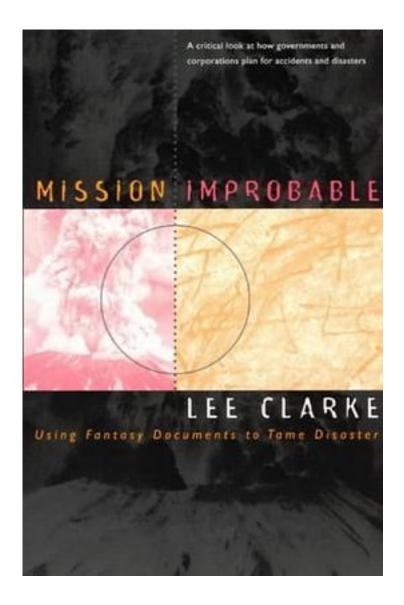
## Mission Improbable



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This text examines actual attempts to "prepare" for catastrophes and finds that the policies adopted by corporations and government agencies are fundamentally rhetorical: the plans have no chance to succeed, yet they serve both the organizations and the public as symbols of control, order and stability. These "fantasy documents" attempt to inspire confidence in organizations, but Lee Clarke suggests that they are disturbing persuasions, soothing the perception that ultimately one cannot control technological advances. For example, Clarke studies corporations' plans for cleaning up oil spills in Prince William Sound prior to the "Exxon Valdez" debacle, and he finds that the accepted strategies were not just unrealistic but completely untenable. Although different organizations were required to have a cleanup plan for huge spills in the sound, a really massive spill was unprecedented, and the accepted policy was little more than a patchwork of guesses based on (mostly unsuccessful) cleanups after smaller accidents. Clarke points out that reassuring rhetoric (under the guise of expert prediction) may have no basis in fact or truth because no such basis is attainable. In uncovering the dangers of planning when implementation is a fantasy, Clark concludes that society would be safer, smarter, and fairer if organizations could admit their limitations.

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