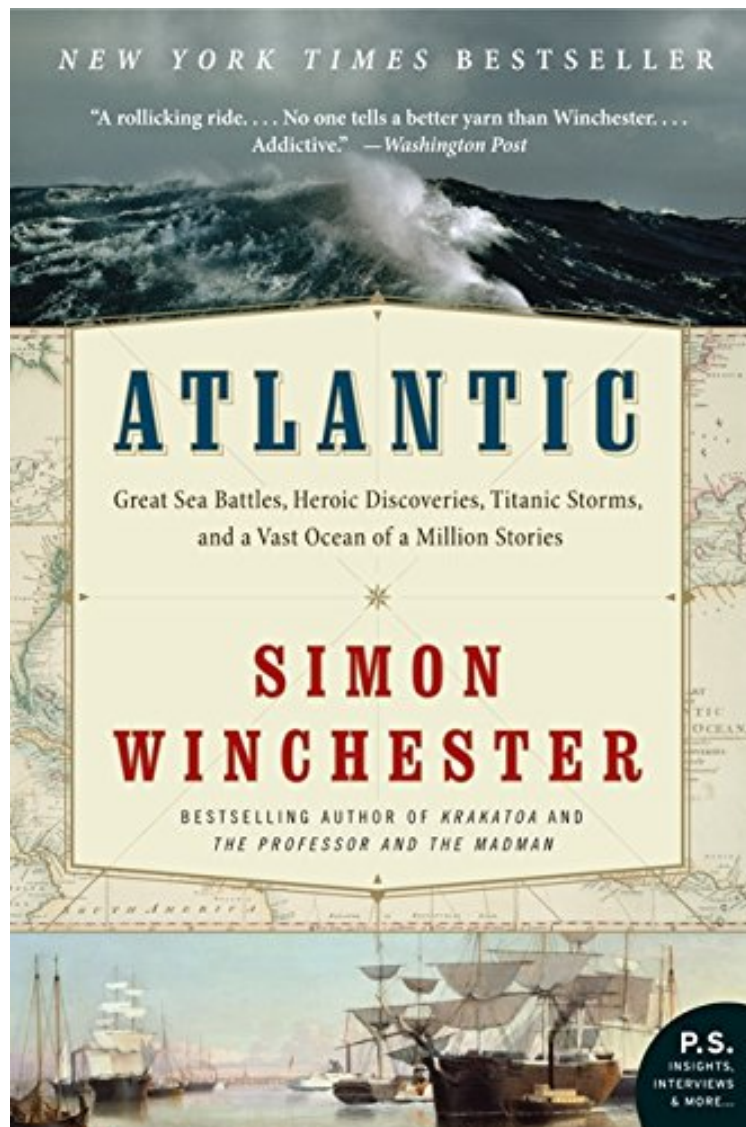


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Atlantic: Great Sea Battles, Heroic Discoveries, Titanic Storms, and a Vast Ocean of a Million Stories

Simon Winchester

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Simon Winchester : Atlantic: Great Sea Battles, Heroic Discoveries, Titanic Storms, and a Vast Ocean of a Million Stories before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Atlantic: Great Sea Battles, Heroic Discoveries, Titanic Storms, and a Vast Ocean of a Million Stories:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A Biography of an Ocean By John R. Lindermuth "One cannot but

hang one's head in shame and abject frustration. We pollute the sea, we plunder the sea, we disdain the sea, we dishonor the sea that appears like a mere expanse of hammered pewter as we fly over it in our air-polluting planes--forgetting or ignoring all the while that the sea is the source of all the life on earth, the wellspring of us all."That environmental theme pops up quite a bit in the narrative of Simon Winchester's "Atlantic: Great Sea Battles, Heroic Discoveries, Titanic storms, and a Vast Ocean of a Million Stories." Winchester set out to write a book explaining all there is to know about the Atlantic, which he considers to be our most important ocean. An overwhelming task and one might doubt it's even possible. He may not have succeeded in his initial goal but he comes as close as anyone in writing a biography of our ocean. He explains how the ocean was born, how people living on its shores reacted to it and how, most importantly, it has influenced the development of the civilized world. To do this, he tells tales of man's first attempts to go out on the water, pirates, naval battles, the development of sea-going commerce and other topics. He also includes numerous anecdotes from his personal experience with the ocean. He fears for our future if we don't change and start treating our environment like a home and not a garbage pit. I'm not opposed to space exploration. It has resulted in many benefits for mankind. Still, I wish just a portion of the money and the interest could be directed toward oceanography. This is the planet on which we live. I have no desire to go live on a barren rock where there's no other forms of life.

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Well worth the effort if you skip the pretentious stuff. By Radio Writer In my lifetime, the number of books I have failed to finish number less than the fingers of one hand. Ones where I skip large sections are even fewer. I almost did not finish this book! Early on Winchester gets bogged down in lengthy, over detailed, uninteresting commentary about the Atlantic and the arts. YAWN! I also was a bit put off by his "show off intellectualism" by insisting on throwing in \$10,000 words for no good reason. Being a retired journalist, I never used them with an audience ... so I wonder if he did when he was supposedly a journalist. Having said that, after skipping that major section, Winchester redeemed himself when he started examining the early explorers of the Atlantic, and he continued an intriguing account from that point until the final pages of the book.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. More interesting when read with Robert Kaplan's Monsoon. By Jaylia A thorough and leisurely accounting of the Atlantic from its creation 195 million years ago, when the supercontinent Pangaea began to break apart, to its eventual demise millions of years in the future, when the continents will have coalesced again. Despite the book's broad scope most of the focus is on the ocean's history with humans, beginning 164,000 years ago in South Africa where humans first lived by the sea, eating shellfish, honing blades and decorating themselves with ocher. From there the story continues on through the exciting early days of exploration when sailors first dared to leave the relative calm of the Mediterranean. Eventually the book describes the current state of the Atlantic which means, of course, overfishing, pollution, and global warming. One bright spot towards the end of the book is the 1986 discovery of Prochlorococcus, a tiny oceanic microorganism that supplies as much as 20% of the world's oxygen. Obviously it would be very bad if anything happened to these vital but previously unknown little creatures. Fortunately they seem to like warm water so rather than being harmed by global warming they may actually lessen some of its damaging effects. Like any reader, certain parts of the book were more enjoyable to me than others. I was less interested in Winchester's accounts of his own adventures and emotions, but some of the history and science was fascinating. I read Winchester's Atlantic at the same time as I was reading Monsoon, a recent book by Robert D. Kaplan about the Indian Ocean, and I highly recommend looking at both of them. Both books make cases for the global importance of their body of water. Both authors traveled extensively in the areas they write about. Each book covers history and there is some interesting overlap, for instance the Portuguese explorers show up in both accounts. Monsoon spends more time than Atlantic on current culture and politics, with full chapters on many of the countries lining the Indian Ocean including Oman, the coastal areas of Pakistan and India, Sri Lanka, Burma, Indonesia, Zanzibar and China.

"Variably genial, cautionary, lyrical, admonitory, terrifying, horrifying and inspiring A lifetime of thought, travel, reading, imagination and memory inform this affecting account." Kirkus Reviews (starred review) Blending history and anecdote, geography and reminiscence, science and exposition, New York Times bestselling author Simon Winchester tells the breathtaking saga of the Atlantic Ocean. A gifted storyteller and consummate historian, Winchester sets the great blue sea's epic narrative against the backdrop of mankind's intellectual evolution, telling not only the story of an ocean, but the story of civilization. Fans of Winchester's Krakatoa, The Man Who Loved China, and The Professor and the Madman will love this masterful, penetrating, and resonant tale of humanity finding its way across the ocean of history.

.com Product Description Blending history and anecdote, geography and reminiscence, science and exposition, the New York Times bestselling author of Krakatoa tells the breathtaking saga of the magnificent Atlantic Ocean, setting it against the backdrop of mankind's intellectual evolution. Until a thousand years ago, no humans ventured into the Atlantic or imagined traversing its vast infinity. But once the first daring mariners successfully navigated to far shores whether it was the Vikings, the Irish, the Chinese, Christopher Columbus in the north, or the Portuguese and the Spanish in the south the Atlantic evolved in the world's growing consciousness of itself as an enclosed body of water

bounded by the Americas to the West, and by Europe and Africa to the East. Atlantic is a biography of this immense space, of a sea which has defined and determined so much about the lives of the millions who live beside or near its tens of thousands of miles of coast. The Atlantic has been central to the ambitions of explorers, scientists and warriors, and it continues to affect our character, attitudes, and dreams. Poets to potentates, seers to sailors, fishermen to foresters all have a relationship with this great body of blue-green sea and regard her as friend or foe, adversary or ally, depending on circumstance or fortune. Simon Winchester chronicles that relationship, making the Atlantic come vividly alive. Spanning from the earth's geological origins to the age of exploration, World War II battles to modern pollution, his narrative is epic and awe-inspiring. A QA with Author Simon Winchester

Q: Writing a biography of a massive subject like the Atlantic Ocean is audacious and seemingly daunting. What inspired you to write the book, how long did it take you, and what did your research entail? Winchester: It occurred to me one afternoon while, for the umpteenth time, I was crossing the pond on a flight between London and New York, that we took the waters below us far too much for granted. I thought back to the first crossing I had ever made, back in 1963, on a ship and the romance of the ocean as I saw it then and I decided that it could be very interesting to look into the role the Atlantic has played in humankind's history. I spent the next eighteen months travelling, going everywhere from the Faroes and Iceland in the north, to Tristan da Cunha and Patagonia in the south. The book itself took eight months to write, four to edit.

Q: What was the most unusual or fascinating fact you discovered while researching and writing Atlantic? Winchester: I remain intrigued by the thought that the State of Israel was in effect born as a result of a lack of cordite in the Royal Navy's ammunition stores during the Battle of the Atlantic in 1916. A White Russian biologist, Chaim Weizmann, at the time a professor at the University of Manchester, worked out how to solve this problem, and when the British government of the time offered to reward him for his game-changing invention, he declined asking only for Arthur Balfour to make his famous Declaration of 1917, which led to the formation of Israel.

Q: Why is the Atlantic significant in the development of Western civilization? Is there one important thing about the ocean we should know but do not? Winchester: The first true parliamentary democracy was founded in the Atlantic, in Iceland in the tenth century and the concept spread rapidly through northern Europe. It was then followed in short order by the establishment of a similarly organized network of traders and trade routes, the so-called Hanseatic leagues. That two such crucial aspects of modern human civilization—government and trade—are based still today on principles laid down beside the Atlantic Ocean is a fact little remembered by most and when I found the story out, it astonished and delighted me.

Q: You are a sailor yourself. Have you sailed the Atlantic? What was the experience like? Winchester: I have sailed the entire Indian Ocean; and I have sailed a little in the South Atlantic undertaking the voyage in a tiny (30ft) steel gaff-rigged schooner. But while I had few major problems sailing between the coasts of India and South Africa, once I had rounded the bend, as it were, and passed into the Atlantic, everything changed: the sea became very rough and (a particular problem in a steel yacht) very cold. And so I abandoned the Atlantic attempt a decision that gives me ever greater respect today for the ocean itself, and for those sailors who are brave and determined enough to sail it. (In my defense since 16 year olds now make the journey I should point out that I went out without radio or radar, and with only a sextant as a navigation aid. GPS and e-mail make modern yachting a somewhat less arduous business. But the inescapable fact that I wiped out troubles me still. A bit.)

Q: How do today's giant cruise ships compare to their predecessors like the Queen Mary or the Titanic? Have we lost something fundamental in how we experience the ocean with modernization? Winchester: I detest the big cruise ships of today, immense Vegas style monstrosities filled with amusements specifically designed so it seems utterly to detach the passenger from the realities of the ocean he is crossing (and to make even more money for the shipowners, of course). One surely goes to sea to experience the sea, it seems to me and if you are in a gigantic floating play-center, and one that barely moves with the waves, then why not just stay home, and in doing so burn less fuel and pollute the world a little less?

Q: Is it possible for 21st century humans to regain a sense of awe and respect for this magnificent natural wonder? What might it take for us to do so? Winchester: It is my fond hope that just a few good people who may read and like this book will stop for a moment, and perhaps then begin to think about and regard the ocean in a different way. And then maybe go down to the shore and look at it, and consider some of its wonders. And then, most importantly, tell the next generation that this body of water, like all the great oceanic bodies of water on the planet, is a rare and precious entity deserving of our care and our respect. I realize this may be no more than wishful thinking: but after writing this book I have come to feel a very powerful connection with the Atlantic Ocean, and I so very much want others to look at it in the same way.

Q: How does the Atlantic compare to other oceans? What makes it special/unique? Winchester: Of the world's great oceans the Atlantic is not the biggest; it is not the prettiest; it is not the most benign. But it does possess the greatest concentration of the marker-events of human history. And if, as seems unarguable, the Mediterranean could once fairly be said to have been the inland sea of classical civilization, then surely the Atlantic Ocean, by virtue of this huge concentration of ideas, events, inventions and developments, has become, and unarguably also, the inland sea of modern civilization. No other ocean comes close to filling this role which is why the Atlantic rises, head and shoulders, above all of its taller, prettier and calmer maritime cousins. From Publishers Weekly Winchester, bestselling author of *The Professor and the Madman*, returns to the natural world with his epic new book, a "biography" of the Atlantic Ocean, from its origins 370 million years ago through the population of its shores by humanity and their interactions with it. He sees

the Atlantic as the vital ingredient in the blooming of Western civilization. He scrutinizes the early explorations from the Vikings and Norsemen through Columbus, detailing the perils of the open sea. With his excellent research and engrossing anecdotes about the ocean as "a living thing," Winchester spotlights its inspiration on poets, painters, and writers in its majestic beauty. Although he does not neglect the chief tragedies of the Atlantic, like the slave trade and the maritime battles, Winchester occasionally flits beelike from scene to scene, and the facts become lost in a blur. Maybe this is the price for such a monumental undertaking. Nevertheless, Winchester's sea saga is necessary reading for those who want to understand the planet better, even as, he notes, our waters are rapidly changing from pollution, overfishing, and climate change. 44 bw illus.; 4 maps. (Nov.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved.

From BooklistOf all of Winchester's amazingly educational and entertaining books, a list that includes the best-selling *The Map That Changed the World* (2001) and *Krakatoa* (2003), his latest one is perhaps the most unique and the most creative in its approach. It is presented as a biography of an ocean! It is as if he is telling the life story of the Atlantic, and, indeed, as we learn from one of the most wondrous facts presented here, oceans actually do have life spans they have their beginnings and their endings. The Atlantic, as we are told, was born 10 million years ago by the continental split between Africa and South America, and its death will occur some 170 million years from now. The geological history of this vast body of water is partnered with the human story of habitation around it, and travel over it, because in Winchester's view, the Atlantic has functioned as the inland sea of Western civilization. His coverage of aspects of human involvement with this ocean is lively and extensive, with topics ranging from the Atlantic as represented in the arts to the effects of climate change and overfishing and from immigration patterns to the use of the ocean's waters for warfare. **HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY:** Winchester's latest is bound to follow his previous books onto best-seller lists, and this one should be promoted as one of his best. --Brad Hooper