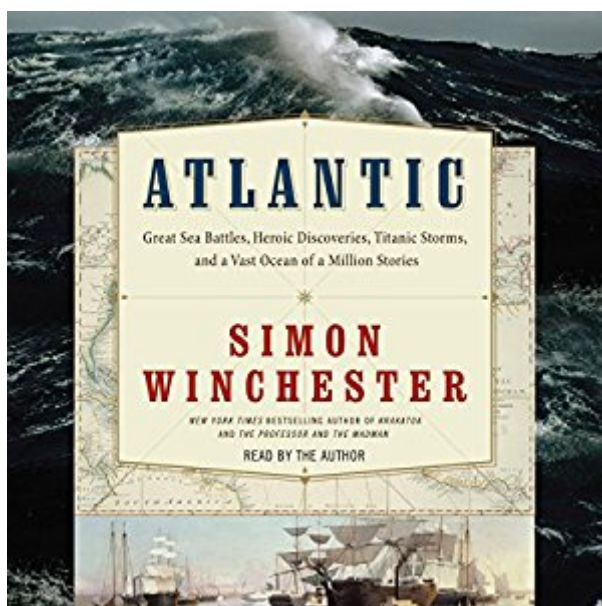


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Atlantic: Great Sea Battles, Heroic Discoveries, Titanic Storms, and A Vast Ocean Of A Million Stories



Synopsis

From best-selling author Simon Winchester comes the immense and thrilling story of the world's most mysterious and breathtaking natural wonder: the Atlantic Ocean. *Atlantic* is a biography of a tremendous space that has been central to the ambitions of explorers, scientists, and warriors, and continues to affect profoundly our character, attitudes, and dreams. Spanning the ocean's story, from its geological origins to the age of exploration, from World War II battles to today's struggles with pollution and over-fishing, Winchester's narrative is epic, intimate, and awe inspiring. Until a thousand years ago, few humans ventured into the Atlantic or imagined traversing its vast infinity. But once the first daring mariners successfully navigated to its far shores - whether they were Vikings, the Irish, the Basques, John Cabot, or Christopher Columbus in the north, or the Portuguese and the Spanish in the south - the Atlantic swiftly evolved in the world's growing consciousness of itself as an enclosed body of water. Soon it became the fulcrum of Western civilization. More than a mere history, *Atlantic* is an unforgettable journey of unprecedented scope by one of the most gifted writers in the English language.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"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.

Simon Winchester's book on the Atlantic falls into the pitfalls of modern journalism in my opinion. While the first half-ish of his book is more factual and a story about the ocean the second half is where the desire to be a modern journalist comes in. His desire to preach to you about the nature of the environment, politics, and other concerns about the Atlantic got old very quick. I miss the day's of reading books where you are told a story, and not preached too about how one political philosophy is evil or just a continual effort to impress the reader with how great the author is. I did give the book a four because that is how delightful I felt the beginning of the book was. He is obviously a good writer, but he just has to realize his whole audience isn't looking to be outraged and have a call to action based on someone's personal opinion.

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.

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.

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