

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

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History. Atlantic is a biography of a tremendous space that has been central to the ambitions of explorers, scientists, and warriors, and continues profoundly to affect our character, attitudes, and dreams.

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 Q&A 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 leaguers. 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-or 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.

Simon Winchester is the acclaimed author of many books, including *The Professor and the Madman*, *The Men Who United the States*, *The Map That Changed the World*, *The Man*

Who Loved China, A Crack in the Edge of the World, and Krakatoa, all of which were New York Times bestsellers and appeared on numerous best and notable lists. In 2006, Winchester was made an officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) by Her Majesty the Queen. He resides in western Massachusetts.

Other Books

O poder inovador da diversão. Autor best-seller do New York Times "Nossa fascinação eterna e ilógica pela diversão é um dos grandes mistérios da vida... Leitura irresistível." Washington Post Um dos mais importantes pensadores da história da tecnologia, Steven Johnson recria a trajetória do entretenimento e dos passatempos que os seres humanos criaram para se divertir e sobreviver à dura luta cotidiana pela vida: jogos de azar, instrumentos musicais, ilusionismo, moda e consumo, comidas exóticas. Johnson mostra, acima de tudo, como a diversão fez muito mais do que simplesmente entreter: ela foi uma das principais responsáveis por dezenas de inovações, contribuindo diretamente para revoluções econômicas, políticas, sociais, culturais, tecnológicas e científicas que moldaram o mundo moderno. O jogo de dados, por exemplo, deu origem à teoria das probabilidades e lançou as bases da estatística. O surgimento de exuberantes e bem-decoradas lojas, com luxuosas fachadas e grandes vitrines, e o hábito de fazer compras contribuíram ativamente para a moderna realidade da industrialização. O poder inovador da diversão reúne seis capítulos sobre os temas moda e consumo, música, paladar, ilusão, jogos e espaço público. De maneira arrebatadora, o autor nos convida para uma viagem por antigas tavernas e cafés, cassinos e salões de jogos, shopping centers e grandes lojas de departamentos, e mostra que qualquer um que deseje conhecer os caminhos da tecnologia e das tendências sociais deveria prestar atenção à maneira como brincamos e nos divertimos. E quem estiver tentando entender como será o futuro irá encontrar a resposta onde quer que as pessoas estejam se divertindo mais. "O encanto da escrita de Johnson vem de sua capacidade de esclarecer ideias complexas em linguagem simples... Sua prosa é ágil, seu conhecimento, impressionante... O poder inovador da diversão é original e divertido - como deve ser, dado o assunto." The San Francisco Chronicle . Atlantic : Great Sea Battles , Heroic Discoveries , Titanic Storms, and a Vast Ocean of a Million Stories . Nova York: Harper, 2010. Wing, Carlin. "The Ball: The Object of the Game", in American Journal of Play 6:2 (2014), p.288."