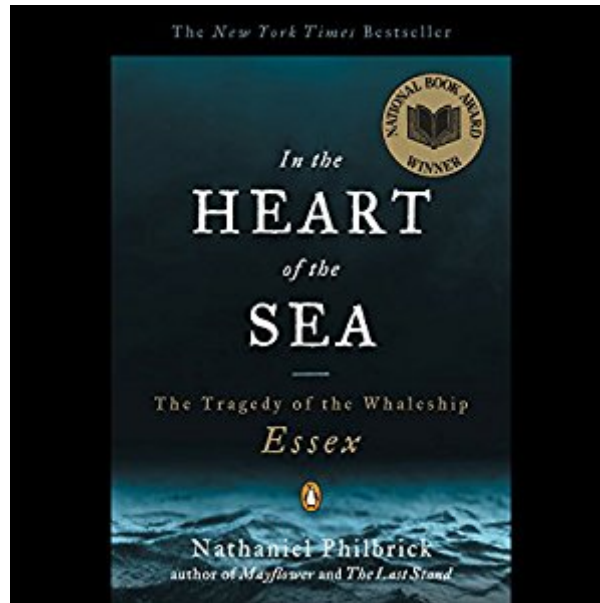


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# In The Heart Of The Sea: The Tragedy Of The Whaleship Essex



## Synopsis

From the author of the New York Times bestselling, *Valiant Ambition*, the riveting and critically acclaimed bestseller and a major motion picture starring Chris Hemsworth, directed by Ron Howard "With its huge, scarred head halfway out of the water and its tail beating the ocean into a white-water wake more than forty feet across, the whale approached the ship at twice its original speed--at least six knots. With a tremendous cracking and splintering of oak, it struck the ship just beneath the anchor secured at the cat-head on the port bow. . ." *In the Heart of the Sea* brings to new life the incredible story of the wreck of the whaleship *Essex*--an event as mythic in its own century as the Titanic disaster in ours, and the inspiration for the climax of *Moby-Dick*. In a harrowing page-turner, Nathaniel Philbrick restores this epic story to its rightful place in American history. In 1820, the 240-ton *Essex* set sail from Nantucket on a routine voyage for whales. Fifteen months later, in the farthest reaches of the South Pacific, it was repeatedly rammed and sunk by an eighty-ton bull sperm whale. Its twenty-man crew, fearing cannibals on the islands to the west, made for the 3,000-mile-distant coast of South America in three tiny boats. During ninety days at sea under horrendous conditions, the survivors clung to life as one by one, they succumbed to hunger, thirst, disease, and fear. *In the Heart of the Sea* tells perhaps the greatest sea story ever. Philbrick interweaves his account of this extraordinary ordeal of ordinary men with a wealth of whale lore and with a brilliantly detailed portrait of the lost, unique community of Nantucket whalers. Impeccably researched and beautifully told, the book delivers the ultimate portrait of man against nature, drawing on a remarkable range of archival and modern sources, including a long-lost account by the ship's cabin boy. At once a literary companion and a page-turner that speaks to the same issues of class, race, and man's relationship to nature that permeate the works of Melville, *In the Heart of the Sea* will endure as a vital work of American history. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 10 hours and 3 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Penguin Audio

Audible.com Release Date: June 20, 2005

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B000A0B9B4

Best Sellers Rank: #3 in Books > History > Americas > Mexico #4 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Latin America #9 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Nonfiction > Transportation

## Customer Reviews

There have been many great stories of survival and tragedy on the seas, and this book is one of the best of them. At one time the story of the Whaleship Essex was well known in America, but gradually that story faded into memory. Nathaniel Philbrick brings that memory back to life again with his very well written book. The main events in this book took place in the time period of 1819-1821. The Essex was based on Nantucket Island, and in the first part of the book there is a very interesting history of Nantucket and the Whaling Trade. Enough information is given so that we understand the world that the men of the Essex lived in, and the ordeal that lay before them. The Essex was believed to be a lucky ship, but that reputation of good luck would soon be overwhelmed at sea. After several months at sea, the Essex was attacked and rammed by an eighty-five foot whale. It is fascinating to read about the attack of the giant whale on the ship, and to realize that the attacking whale was the actual basis for the whale in "Moby Dick". The Essex was severely damaged and in danger of sinking after the whale attack, and the crew faced the grim prospect of a desperate journey in open boats across the Pacific Ocean. The story of their battle for survival with little food or hope of rescue will grip your heart. Terrible choices of survival had to be made, and there are graphic accounts of starvation and cannibalism in the book. This is truly the story of a great tragedy at sea, but there is also the hope and endurance that can sometimes be found even in the darkest moments. There are moments of wonder with thoughts and descriptions of whales and the ever changing sea. I recommend this book to everyone that loves the history of the Sea, and the spirit of survival against all odds.

In 1819 the whaleship Essex was rammed and sunk by a very large sperm whale. The ship sank and the crew was forced to sail across thousands of miles of the Pacific ocean fighting thirst and starvation. This was the story that inspired Melville's Moby Dick. It is absorbing, well researched, and reads like a good adventure novel, only it is true. It is elegant from start to finish and I say elegant because of its restraint. Philbrick had every chance to play this one for the bleacher seats, but didn't. We could have gotten a long saga of castaways dying of thirst and starvation with all of

the drama of a potboiler. He could have given us a day by day description of the sea trek, but instead the trek is mercifully taken up in 90 pages. (Don't fret, you will get the anxiety wobbles during this phase of the book.) Philbrick has fully researched the physiology of dying of starvation and thirst and spares us none of the details. To survive, the crew resorted to the drawing of lots, execution and cannibalism. We learn about the history, quite plentiful in fact, of survival cannibalism from the Raft of the Medusa to the Andean plane crash. It is not a book for the squeamish. It is also a book about Nantucket, whaling, men at sea, celestial navigation, maritime commerce, and more. Never are the facts crammed down us like so many notecards in the author's collection, but are deliciously laid out in the context of the story. It is not a long book, but it doesn't seem to short either. Like most good books, it made me want to learn more about the subject, in this case the fascinating history of whaling.

All too often a book telling a story may also require that the equipment or the vessel used to be described. Much less frequent is the help of illustrations to let a reader who may know little to nothing about the construction (in this case) of a Whaling Vessel, understand the explanations and gain further enjoyment from the book. A further tribute to the Author is that the detail given of the ship The Essex and the implements of the Whaling Trade were of an appropriate length. Too long and the reader would have been lost in a maze of technical jargon, too little and understanding all that happened would not have been possible. For anyone desirous of going much deeper into the History of Nantucket, or of Whaling, there are 39 pages of notes written in prose form at the end of the book. They are organized by chapter, and they are further supplemented by a Bibliography. Mr. Philbrick clearly is a man qualified to relate this tale which records one of the more miserable tales of human suffering. It would have been easy and disappointing to let this story turn into a lurid 93 day telling of decisions and actions that no person should ever be forced to make. The Author maintained a scholarly approach, together with objectivity on some points of contention/speculation, of the events and how they may or may not actually have happened. He also offers insight into how these massive creatures communicate, and how that could have played a role in the collision. The Author also relates modern day medical study and facts about what physical and emotional torments the survivors endured. I thought this was a welcome addition to the understanding of just how horrible this experience was. This is the only book I have read on the History of the Essex. The book is readable even if your knowledge of ships, like mine, is near zero. And the story told without embellishment is both terrifying and amazing. A very enjoyable book.

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