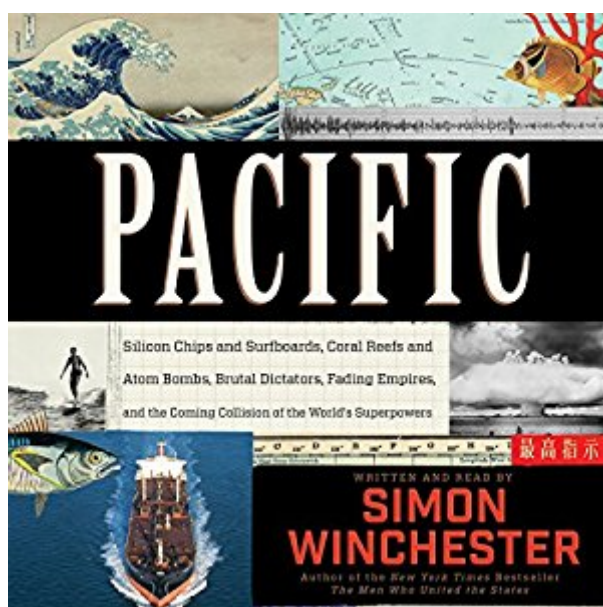


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Pacific: Silicon Chips And Surfboards, Coral Reefs And Atom Bombs, Brutal Dictators, Fading Empires, And The Coming Collision Of The World's Superpowers



Synopsis

Following his acclaimed *Atlantic* and *The Men Who United the States*, New York Times best-selling author Simon Winchester offers an enthralling biography of the Pacific Ocean and its role in the modern world, exploring our relationship with this imposing force of nature. As the Mediterranean shaped the classical world and the Atlantic connected Europe to the New World, the Pacific Ocean defines our tomorrow. With China on the rise, so, too, are the American cities of the West Coast, including Seattle, San Francisco, and the long cluster of towns down the Silicon Valley. Today the Pacific is ascendant. Its geological history has long transformed us - tremendous earthquakes, volcanoes, and tsunamis - but its human history, from a Western perspective, is quite young, beginning with Magellan's 16th-century circumnavigation. It is a natural wonder whose most fascinating history is currently being made. In telling the story of the Pacific, Simon Winchester takes us from the Bering Strait to Cape Horn, from the Yangtze River to the Panama Canal, and to the many small islands and archipelagos that lie in between. He observes the fall of a dictator in Manila, visits aboriginals in Northern Queensland, and is jailed in Tierra del Fuego, the land at the end of the world. His journey encompasses a trip down the Alaska Highway, a stop at the isolated Pitcairn Islands, a trek across South Korea, and a glimpse of its mysterious northern neighbor. Winchester's personal experience is vast and his storytelling second to none. And his historical understanding of the region is formidable, making *Pacific* a paean to this magnificent sea of beauty, myth, and imagination that is transforming our lives.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Simon Winchester is a wonderful writer -- an expert user of the English language. I love to read him just for the writing. Beyond that, not so much. This book is a collection of stories or essays about political, scientific, social and ecological issues that touch the Pacific region. E.g., the development of the transistor radio in Japan by what's now called Sony Corp., America's atomic and hydrogen bomb testing, volcanic eruptions, China's increasing interest in control of the South China Sea, the USS Pueblo affair, surfing, how world weather patterns are driven by the Pacific region, and more. Most of this a well-read person of a certain age will already know about, but pick up some interesting details and have a refresher course. However, it's all very superficial, and I kept asking myself, "Is this really right? There must be more to it." And finally, factual errors. I kept thinking, "I need to check that out." Then on pages 424-425 Winchester places Des Moines, Iowa, USA, on the Mississippi River, which it is not, and both Hannibal, Missouri, and Des Moines south of St. Louis, Missouri, which they are not. I did not have to look that up. Don't publishers (Harper, in this case) use fact checkers any more?

Simon Winchester's "Pacific: Silicon Chips and Surfboards, Coral Reefs and Atom Bombs, Brutal Dictators, Fading Empires, and the Coming Collision of the World's Superpowers" signals via its title that this companion book is radically different from the same author's book on the Atlantic Ocean. That earlier study, published in 2010, opened hundreds of million years ago with the formation of the world's oceans and continents, the first movement of ancient man down to life by the seashore, and the early navigation of blue waters. In contrast, as Winchester explains in an author's note, the start line for "Pacific" is 1 January 1950, the dawn of the thermonuclear age and the first of ten events chosen for the subject matter of the book's ten chapters. As is typical in Winchester's books, "Pacific" benefits from fine, and occasionally even poetic, prose. Its organization, however, is more than a bit puzzling, for creating a list of ten events provides no guarantee of thematic relevance. In this case, the book moves back and forth from a concentration on the ocean itself and countries that sometimes just happen to be located in the Pacific basin. In "Atlantic," Winchester's organizing theme was Shakespeare's Seven Ages of Man, which paralleled the book's chronological flow and mankind's progressive mastery of the Atlantic. Less successful is Winchester's use here of the event-driven hook which gives the impression that "Pacific" is a compilation of ten separately conceived and delivered lectures. Chapter 1 addresses the thermonuclear age, but then follow a study of Japan's development of radio technology and the pleasures of a laid-back lifestyle in Hawaii. Chapter 4 returns to a country focus, in this instance the paranoid regime of North Korea.

Then it is on to three chapters that look at Hong Kong, long but no-longer a British outpost, storms in southern Pacific climes, and Australia. Chapter 8 deals with deep-sea exploration and the Pacific's volcanoes and plate tectonics, material that plays to Winchester's Oxford University training in geology. Chapter 9 concerns environmental problems, while Chapter 10, the most timely of all in a strategic sense, addresses the dangerous, largely Chinese-driven competition for expanded control of territorial waters. In summing up, my preference would have been to have learned even more about the Pacific as a platform for mineral exploitation and earth science study and as a stage for Law of the Sea issues. Some other readers may instead welcome the greater attention that Winchester pays throughout the book to country studies, and for them "Pacific" as presented may well be a standout achievement.

The information in this book is invaluable. I bought it on my kindle, but this is the kind of book one should have as a reference, though of course I can go back, but its just harder on the kindle. So much good information about areas of the Pacific I had never thought about, as well as the power of that huge body of water!

I don't start a Winchester sea story unless I know I will be able to finish it. PACIFIC combines stories of discovery and beauty with those of war, defilement of nature, and existing and evolving threats to the world as we know it. He concludes with the question "why can't we all get along?" That is a good question indeed for anyone who has a few minutes to think about it on any beach in the world.

Often we think of the Pacific Ocean as an ocean conquered by Western civilization, but as Simon Winchester shows in this book, westerners really don't fully understand the nature of the ocean, but only look at it as something to be conquered. In a number of chapters he described how western nations essentially ruined many islands and their people though atomic testing; have been responsible for the destruction of the Great Barrier Reef by pollution and the outcomes of climate change; and have been unwilling to allow the actual nations around the ocean to participate in the governance of the ocean (as evidenced by the conflict today between the US and the Peoples Republic of China. As an epilogue though, he tells the story of the Hokule'a, the Hawaiian voyaging canoe, launched in the first 70s, and now making its way around the world, showing us that we under estimated the knowledge of the Polynesian sailors who navigated the high seas without any of the instruments now found on all sailing vessels. An intriguing book that brings a new perspective on the Pacific Ocean

This is a an outstanding book, which in this readers opinion was clearly not created to be a concise and detailed history. The subjects covered would take multiple volumes to do so. It does however, briefly cover multiple events in which America took a pivotal role. Whether we like it or not, we have perpetrated irreparable damage to the environment with nuclear testing in areas in the Pacific. Its upsetting to think that native peoples were permanently displaced, for all time from their ancestral island homes. I'd recommend this book enthusiastically to anyone interested in our far reach and as perhaps an introduction to more detailed reading on the many subjects mentioned in this book.

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