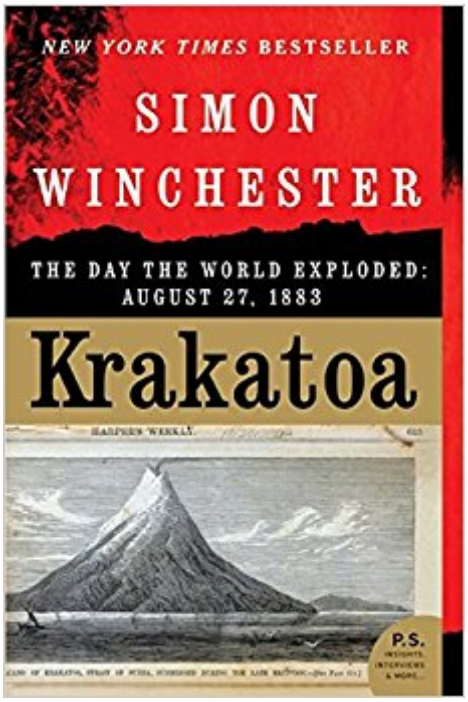
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Krakatoa: The Day The World Exploded: August 27, 1883



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Synopsis

Simon Winchester, New York Times bestselling author of The Professor and the Madman, examines the legendary annihilation in 1883 of the volcano-island of Krakatoa, which was followed by an immense tsunami that killed nearly forty thousand people. The effects of the immense waves were felt as far away as France. Barometers in BogotÃƒÂ¡ and Washington, D.C., went haywire. Bodies were washed up in Zanzibar. The sound of the island's destruction was heard in Australia and India and on islands thousands of miles away. Most significant of all -- in view of today's new political climate -- the eruption helped to trigger in Java a wave of murderous anti-Western militancy among fundamentalist Muslims, one of the first outbreaks of Islamic-inspired killings anywhere. Krakatoa gives us an entirely new perspective on this fascinating and iconic event.This P.S. edition features an extra 16 pages of insights into the book, including author interviews, recommended reading, and more.

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Customer Reviews

It may seem a stretch to connect a volcanic eruption with civil and religious unrest in Indonesia today, but Simon Winchester makes a compelling case. Krakatoa tells the frightening tale of the biggest volcanic eruption in history using a blend of gentle geology and narrative history. Krakatoa erupted at a time when technologies like the telegraph were becoming commonplace and Asian trade routes were being expanded by northern European companies. This bustling colonial backdrop provides an effective canvas for the suspense leading up to August 27th, 1883, when the nearby island of Krakatoa would violently vaporize. Winchester describes the eruption through the

eyes of its survivors, and readers will be as horrified and mesmerized as eyewitnesses were as the death toll reached nearly 40,000 (almost all of whom died from tsunamis generated by the unimaginably strong shock waves of the eruption). Ships were thrown miles inshore, endless rains of hot ash engulfed those towns not drowned by 100 foot waves, and vast rafts of pumice clogged the hot sea. The explosion was heard thousands of miles away, and the eruption's shock wave traveled around the world seven times. But the book's biggest surprise is not the riveting catalog of the volcano's effects; rather, it is Winchester's contention that the Dutch abandonment of their Indonesian colonies after the disaster left local survivors to seek comfort in radical Islam, setting the stage for a volatile future for the region. --Therese Littleton --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

An erudite, fascinating account by one of the foremost purveyors of contemporary nonfiction, this book chronicles the underlying causes, utter devastation and lasting effects of the cataclysmic 1883 eruption of the volcano island Krakatoa in what is now Indonesia. Winchester (The Professor and the Madman; The Map That Changed the World) once again demonstrates a keen knack for balancing rich and often rigorous historical detail with dramatic tension and storytelling. Rather than start with brimstone images of the fateful event itself, Winchester takes a broader approach, beginning with his own viewing of the now peaceful remains of the mountain for a second time in a span of 25 years-and being awed by how much it had grown in that time. This nod to the earth's ceaseless rejuvenation informs the entire project, and Winchester uses the first half of the text to carefully explain the discovery and methods of such geological theories as continental drift and plate tectonics. In this way, the vivid descriptions of Krakatoa's destruction that follow will resonate more completely with readers, who will come to appreciate the awesome powers that were churning beneath the surface before it gave way. And while Winchester graphically illustrates, through eyewitness reports and extant data, the human tragedy and captivating scientific aftershocks of the explosion, he is also clearly intrigued with how it was "a demonstration of the utterly confident way that the world, however badly it has been wounded, picks itself up, continues to unfold its magic and its marvels, and sets itself back on its endless trail of evolutionary progress yet again." His investigations have produced a work that is relevant to scholars and intriguing to others, who will relish it footnotes and all. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

I enjoyed reading it. However, there are some clear scientific errors in the figures and figure

captions (e.g., location/name of some cities; offshore Vancouver is referred to as Northwestern Pacific, instead of northeastern; thickness of oceanic/continental crust).I have been using this book as a textbook for my class (introductory scientific English class) at a Japanese university over the past three years, but I had to clarify these errors to students every time we encounter such an error while reading together. Before clarification, I ask students if they have spot any mistakes in the figure, caption, paragraph, and so on. Toward the end of the semester, students are getting better at spotting these errors (they are earth-science major, so the content itself is easy for them but translating/understanding long English sentences correctly are the major problem for Japanese students). We do not discuss grammatical errors or get deep into the controversial topics, though, where it is difficult for undergraduate students to judge the statement is scientifically correct or factual enough.Among the scientific community, after the publication of this book, there have also been many changes regarding the scenario of how the eruption/explosion of Krakatoa and consequent pyroclastic flow/surge and tsunamis occurred in August 1883. It is even more dramatic than the book describes (even though the author appeared in BBC's (2006) documentary film `Krakatoa - the Last Days' with updated info, and some volcanologists believe that the tsunamis created by Krakatoa were so high that the seabed around Krakatoa was exposed to the atmosphere:[...]Others believe that the colorful sky in the painting "the Scream" by Edvard Munch (1893) reflects his observation of extraordinarily red and orange sky at sunset caused by the fine volcanic ash and aerosol brought to the air by the Krakatoa's 1883 eruption.I do hope Simon Winchester will write and publish an updated version of Krakatoa with these new discoveries as well as citations of similar volcanic disasters with vivid graphic descriptions which the author is exquisite at.

Simon Winchester is the highly acclaimed writer of intriguing tales of scientific discovery, geology, biology, and history, well known for The Map That Changed the World, The Professor and The Madman, and The Fracture Zone. Here he tells us the generally forgotten story of the explosion of the Indonesian volcano Krakatoa in 1883, although in Winchester's typical fashion he ties it to pre-historic events, and gives us a full accounting of the impact on culture, government, colonialism, and religion.I have read most of the Winchester books on forgotten events and people but this one may be the best. Winchester is a former foreign correspondent so he has been everywhere, even noticing first-hand that Krakatoa was more prominent in the 1990's than it had been on an earlier trip in the 1970's. It turns out the powerful forces which cause volcanic eruptions do not disappear but merely become less ominous and observable.1883 was near the end of the Colonial era,

although the Dutch managed to hold on until even after they were defeated in WWII. It was also the first time that the world had become one audience for broadcast news, due to the laying of transoceanic cables into remote areas. Everyone in the West grabbed newspapers to follow the incredible events in Indonesia. In fact the incredible events themselves were observable in most of the world. Many saw the impacts on tides, barometric pressure, atmospheric visibility, and even bodies washing up on shore.Winchester's real skill in placing an event in context, and then telling us how it changed the world. By any measure, Krakatoa was the greatest volcanic eruption ever. The bad day at Mt. St. Helen's of my own youth (the week I graduated high school in 1980 so I only learned about it later) was a piker by comparison. Winchester is a trained geologist so the science is easily presented. He does a nice job with putting catastrophic events onto the colonial stage. His hypothesis is that the carnage and destruction led to the early demise of the Dutch governors and the rapid rise of Islam in the region. He makes the political case better than the religious and this is my only criticism. I wanted to learn more about the connection of Krakatoa to Islam but I will need to find another book as this subject is not covered in detail.All in all a very entertaining book even for someone like me who does not really understand geology and has never been to Indonesia. As always Winchester writes with humor (the footnotes should be edited into a monologue for late night comedians), compassion, and typical British understatement. No aspect of the eruption is excluded, the final section on how it was turned into bad movies and highly inaccurate technical reports is a classic.

The story of Krakatoa fascinates us over 130 after its eruption and does so for good reason. Volcanoes and earthquakes are potent reminders of how little influence we truly have in the face of the forces that govern our home planet. If a volcano decides to erupt, all any of us can do is to get the hell away as quickly as possible. Besides that, their effects are quite wide ranging. I was over 1,000 miles away from Mount St. Helens but it's ash pitted the finish of a new car I had bought scarcely two weeks before. Compared to Krakatoa, Mount St. Helens was a firecracker.Winchester's book covers the history of the region, especially as a Dutch colony and gives a good working description of plate tectonics and the history of that discovery. As a technophile I found that quite interesting. Overall, the book is good, but I won't say perfect. At times it seemed to be a bit slow paced and there were a few times I wondered why the author had chosen to spend so much effort on points that probably needed little coverage. Overall, nonetheless, it was an interesting read

Simon Winchester's style takes concentration to read. He's no lightweight, and the fact he is British makes the focus that much more important for those of us who don't use the King's good English every day. However, if you're not against engaging your mind when you read, Winchester builds the most interesting cases, often on geologic topics, and this is one of my favorites. Bought this, actually to re-read it. This is a sturdy paperback and of that size that fits your hands well. If after centuries of printing, publishers would just learn to leave a wider gutter in the middle of the paperback, reading pages of light might never have gotten their start in the first place...

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