



Narratives of the Wreck of the Whale-Ship Essex

Owen Chase

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In 1819, the American whaler *Essex* was sailing deep into the great equatorial hunting grounds of the Pacific when it was destroyed by a maddened sperm whale. By all reports, the 85-foot whale deliberately rammed the ship twice and sank it. The incident, which occurred in the same year that Herman Melville was born, became a primary source of inspiration for *Moby-Dick*. Indeed, much of the detail and color in the final chapter of Melville's work is drawn directly from these three eyewitness accounts. The book also served as the basis for the 2015 movie *In the Heart of the Sea*, directed by Ron Howard and starring Chris Hemsworth. The harrowing events are described in detail by the first mate, Owen Chase, and corroborated in all essentials by both the captain, George Pollard, and the second mate, Thomas Chappel. Although the ship sank quickly after the attack, the horror lingered for months, and ended in cannibalism as the survivors drifted helplessly in small boats across thousands of miles of open sea.

These three narratives are reprinted from a rare limited edition. An introduction traces the incorporation of the real-life incident into Melville's fictional re-creation, and twelve beautiful wood engravings add a further note of drama.

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