



Wreck of the Medusa: The Tragic Story of the Death Raft

By Alexander McKee

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"Wreck of the Medusa" is the same book, only retitled, as one called "Death Raft."

In July, 1816, a French frigate ran aground on a sandbar forty miles off the coast of Africa. Forced to abandon ship, 150 men and women embarked on an overloaded makeshift raft. After twelve days of riots, mutiny, murder, and, ultimately, cannibalism, only *fifteen* were alive.

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"One of the grisliest of sea epics...a first-rate piece of work."-*Newsweek*

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"Impossible to put down."-*Kirkus Reviews*

"Weird and tragic...a spellbinding drama that made its mark on history."-*Publishers Weekly*

"The most horrible sea tragedy of the century."-*Business Week*

"If anything makes that soccer team's ordeal in the Andes seem tame, this story does."-*Chicago Daily News*

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Editorial Review

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In July 1816, a year after Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, a French ship bound for the colony of Senegal foundered off the West African coast. Aboard were some 400 men, women, and children, some aristocrats, some Republicans, and all at the mercy of an incompetent captain who, a tribunal later found, had alienated his battle-tested officers and favored a shockingly incompetent and untried navigator.

That captain, writes Alexander McKee in this forceful work of historical reconstruction, did not wait to see the results of his incompetence; he abandoned his crew and set off on a longboat for the Senegalese shore. Other officers and crewmen left on the remaining lifeboats, taking most of the ship's provisions and leaving more than 150 passengers to brave the open sea on a raft. Within a few days, most of those castaways had been burned to death by the sun, providing food for the survivors. When rescuers arrived, they found only "fifteen men, almost naked, faces and bodies blotched and disfigured by the scorching sun"--a sight that would soon be reported to a horrified world.

McKee writes not only of the fate of the *Medusa* and its unfortunate passengers, but also of other terrible shipwrecks and kindred incidents. Along the way, he looks at the making of Géricault's celebrated painting *The Wreck of the Medusa*, the effect of exposure and dehydration on the human body, and assorted questions of bravery and cowardice. His book makes for a vivid, highly readable--if sometimes repugnant--tale of disaster and terror. --Gregory McNamee

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