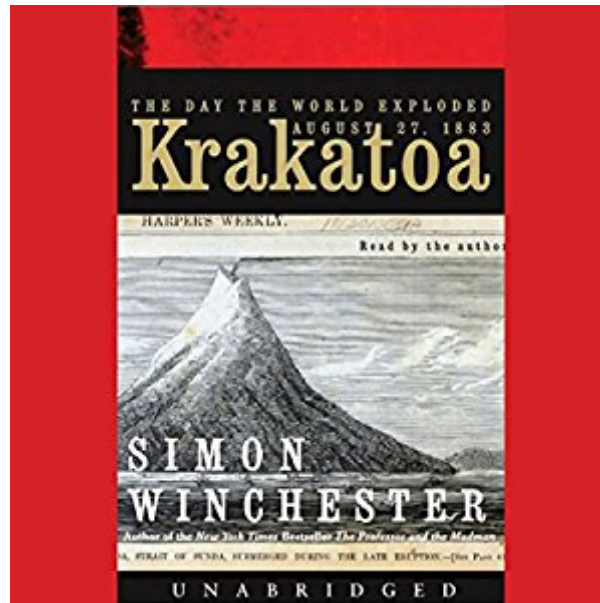


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# Krakatoa: The Day The World Exploded, August 27, 1883



## Synopsis

The legendary annihilation in 1883 of the volcano-island of Krakatoa -- the name has since become a byword for a cataclysmic disaster -- was followed by an immense tsunami that killed nearly forty thousand people. Beyond the purely physical horrors of an event that has only very recently been properly understood, the eruption changed the world in more ways than could possibly be imagined. Dust swirled round the planet for years, causing temperatures to plummet and sunsets to turn vivid with lurid and unsettling displays of light. The effects of the immense waves were felt as far away as France. Barometers in Bogota and Washington, D.C., went haywire. Bodies 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 a wave of murderous anti-Western militancy by fundamentalist Muslims in Java: one of the first outbreaks of Islamic killings anywhere. Simon Winchester's long experience in world wandering, as well as his knowledge of history and geology, gives us an entirely new perspective on this fascinating and iconic event as he brings it tellingly back to life. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 11 hours and 58 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: HarperAudio

Audible.com Release Date: January 14, 2004

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B0001DBHPI

Best Sellers Rank: #56 in Books > Science & Math > Earth Sciences > Earthquakes & Volcanoes

#102 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Asia #169 in Books > Audible Audiobooks >

Nonfiction > Nature

## Customer Reviews

By late summer of this year, 120 years will have passed since the greatest natural disaster to occur on this planet since mankind began recording history some 30,000 years ago. It was exactly 10:02 a.m. on Monday, August 27, 1883 when the small volcanic island of Krakatoa in the Sunda Strait

between Java and Sumatra blew itself out of existence with an explosion that was heard thousands of miles away and that resulted in the deaths of over 36,000 people. That eruption is believed to be the loudest sound ever heard by human ears. As Simon Winchester points out in this latest of his detailed historical-scientific investigative books, the vast majority of those 36,417 victims were killed not by the explosion itself, but by the enormous tsunami it created. This moving mountain of seawater wiped out whole towns; devastated the social and economic life of a region measured in thousands of miles; and was recorded on tide gauges as far away as France. Winchester specializes in detailed accounts that shine light into odd or forgotten corners of history. His two most recent successful efforts in that genre were *THE MAP THAT CHANGED THE WORLD* and *THE PROFESSOR AND THE MADMAN*. Now he has crafted a vividly written book of 400-plus pages about an event that was over in a matter of hours. *KRAKATOA* is certainly full of digressions that have only tangential relevance to its main subject --- but those digressions are so well researched, beautifully written and just plain interesting that they become assets rather than liabilities. The reader does not really object to the fact that the eruption doesn't begin until past the halfway point in Winchester's text.

A few volcanoes have had larger eruptions. One volcano -- also located in what is present-day Indonesia -- killed more people. But no volcano has gripped the public's imagination all over the world like Krakatoa. Simon Winchester explains that this was as much a matter of timing as it had to do with the deadly power of Krakatoa's eruption. When it exploded in 1883, the world had just been linked together by underwater cables over the previous two decades. News readers in the West were thus linked to events in the East with an immediacy they never had before. All around the world, scientists of the time were able to use this information when measuring and observing certain phenomenon in their own localities. As Winchester points out, this was significant, marking the first time that scientists had proof of the interconnectedness of the world, that the globe was not just a hodgepodge of separate regions. As some reviewers have already mentioned, perhaps the most remarkable part of the book is the chapter called "Close Encounters on the Wallace Line". Here Winchester shows how Alfred Russel Wallace's observation of distinct fauna on the Indonesian Archipelago, narrowly separated by the eponymous line that splits through the middle of the group of islands, in a way foretold the twentieth century discovery of continental plates and subduction -- the processes responsible for the volcano's terrible eruption. (Wallace himself seems to have had an intuition that geological processes were responsible for two such different groups of animals being clustered together.) After Winchester gives this context, he then moves on to the actual

eruption of Krakatoa.

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