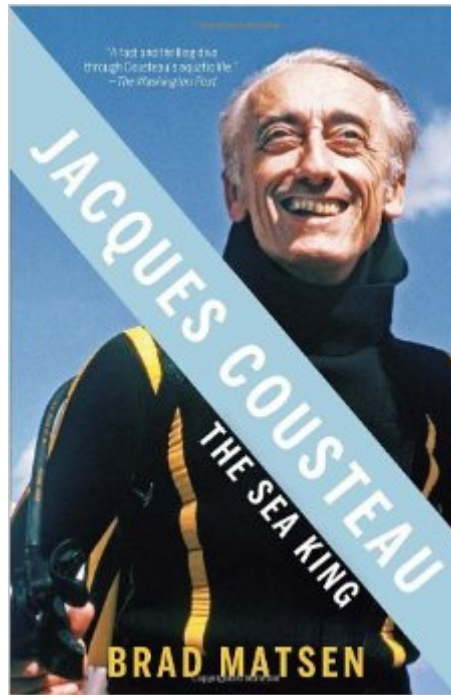


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Jacques Cousteau: The Sea King



Synopsis

An unprecedented and masterfully told biography of Jacques Cousteau that reveals for the first time the fascinating and compelling individual behind this famous television personality. Inventor of the aqualung and fearless scuba diver, Jacques Cousteau opened up the ocean to a mass audience for the first time. Here, with the cooperation of many of the subjects' closest confidants and family, Brad Matsen makes clear the full picture of his remarkable life, showing the father, military man, inventor, entrepreneur, and adventurer behind the public face. Vividly conveying the people, the science, and the lure of the sea that shaped Cousteau's life, Matsen paints a luminous portrait of a man who profoundly changed the way we live on our planet.

Book Information

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (October 5, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0307275426

ISBN-13: 978-0307275424

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.6 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars See all reviews (13 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

To cut to the chase, *Sea King* is a wonderful fast-paced, very entertaining read, a lively unauthorized, carefully researched biography of a 20th Century world icon, warts and all, skillfully told by arguably the best author on marine topics writing today (Matsen's two most recent books: *Descent* and *Titanic's Last Secrets*, both terrific). With Cousteau, the author had his work cut out. The man was a complex, formidable personality: inventor, self-taught scientist, filmmaker, adventurer, explorer, visionary, charmer, canny marketer, environmentalist, and celebrated world citizen. With his pitch-perfect narrative voice, Matsen delivers in spades, revealing Cousteau was also a bit of a con, self-absorbed, not a little sociopathic, a tireless ladies man (reportedly he slept with 10,000 women), and oh so French. He also had a secret life: a second family with a devoted

mistress who bore him children and who following his death, emerged as the controversial controller of the Cousteau estate. What surprised me is that Cousteau's life story is only now being told—amazing considering Cousteau's decades-long celebrity and profound impact on both scuba diving and the conservation movement. Matsen plunges in with gusto. It's all here: the invention of the double-stage regulator (replete with near fatal experiments), the breakthrough documentary *The Silent World*, behind-the-scenes tales of the *Calypso* voyages (groupies and all), the tragic death of Cousteau's son Philippe, Cousteau's quirky successful partnership with media mogul Ted Turner, the meteoric success of the Cousteau Society and its long messy public unraveling. Great stuff, all of it.

I grew up watching Jacques Cousteau on TV. He was a forerunner in the movement to protect our seas and our planet, and he was always entertaining as a filmmaker and storyteller. I can still hear his voice-overs in my head. The appearance of "The Sea King" had me excited. I wanted to find out more about this man's life, his family, career, secrets, and more of the playful and dangerous experiences from his colorful life. The book starts at a snail pace. We wade through page after page of dry facts, told with little imagination or style. This reads like a textbook on the inventor of the Aqua-Lung, lacking that spark of storytelling prowess that infused Cousteau's own work. I plugged away, skimming well-researched but tedious details about the early efforts to perfect the Aqua-Lung. In between, I caught a few glimpses of Cousteau's background, including the conflict in the family due to his brother's collaboration with Nazis during WWII. After the first few chapters, the book picks up a bit, giving us insights into the emergence of the *Calypso* ship—thanks to an heir of the Guinness Beer empire—and Ted Turner's part in helping the Cousteau Society press on in the changing times. It's sad to read how "Happy Days" and "Laverne and Shirley" (fun shows, in their own rights) pushed Cousteau's groundbreaking work into obscurity. Nevertheless, the man's face remained one of the most recognizable in the world until the late 1980's, and his impact is hard to measure. The author gives only snippets of Cousteau's personal life, only peeks at his philandering ways, his family struggles, and his reactions to tragedy. I'm sure this was intentional, to protect the family legacy, but it only blurs the three-dimensional complexity of a man so many admired.

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