



# The Wreck of the Medusa: The Most Famous Sea Disaster of the Nineteenth Century

*Jonathan Miles*

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**The Wreck of the Medusa: The Most Famous Sea Disaster of the Nineteenth Century** Jonathan Miles  
*The Wreck of the Medusa* is Jonathan Miles's spellbinding account of the most famous shipwreck before the Titanic. Drawing on contemporaneously published accounts and journals of survivors, Miles brilliantly reconstructs the ill-fated voyage and the events that inspired Theodore Gericault's magnificent painting *The Raft of the Medusa*.

In July of 1816, the French frigate *Medusa*, bound for the Senegalese port colony of Saint Louis under the command of an incompetent royalist captain, hit a famously treacherous reef. In the chaos that ensued, the commander and a privileged few claimed the lifeboats. The rest were herded onto a makeshift raft and set adrift. Without a compass or many provisions, hit by a vicious storm the first night and exposed to sweltering heat during the following days, the group set upon each other: mayhem, mutiny, and murder ensued. When rescue arrived thirteen days later, only fifteen were alive.

Two survivors' written account of the tragedy became an international best seller that exposed far-reaching corruption in Restoration France. The scandal inspired a young artist, Theodore Gericault, whose iconic depiction of suffering and hope won first prize at the Salon of 1819 and captivated viewers in the Louvre for centuries to come.

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