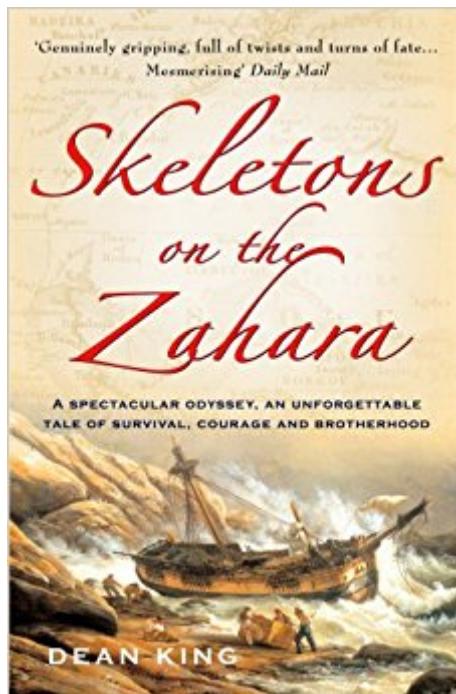


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# Skeletons On The Zahara



## Synopsis

The western Sahara is a baking hot and desolate place, home only to nomads and their camels, and to locusts, snails and thorny scrub. On 28 August 1815 the US brig Commerce was dashed against Mauritania's Cape Bojador and lost, although through bravery and quick thinking the ship's captain, James Riley, managed to lead all of his crew to safety. What followed was an extraordinary and desperate battle for survival in the face of human hostility, hunger, dehydration and despair, as the crew were captured, robbed and enslaved. They were reduced to drinking urine (their own and the camels'), flayed by the sun, crippled by walking miles across burning stones and sand. Over time James Riley and Sidi Hamet, slave and captor, came to recognise in each other men worthy of respect... Soon the ransom not only of Riley himself but also of a handful of his crew suddenly seemed possible. But Sidi Hamet had enemies of his own, and to reach safety the sailors had to overcome not only the desert but also the greed and anger of those who would keep them in captivity. *Skeletons on the Zahara* is a thrilling true story of shipwreck, adventure, and the limits of man.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Some stories are so enthralling they deserve to be retold generation after generation. The wreck in 1815 of the Connecticut merchant ship, Commerce, and the subsequent ordeal of its crew in the Sahara Desert, is one such story. With *Skeletons on the Zahara: A True Story of Survival*, Dean King refreshes the popular nineteenth-century narrative once read and admired by Henry David Thoreau, James Fenimore Cooper, and Abraham Lincoln. King's version, which actually

draws from two separate first person accounts of the Commerce's crew, offers a page-turning blend of science, history, and classic adventure. The book begins with a seeming false start: tracing the lives of two merchants from North Africa, Seid and Sidi Hamet, who lose their fortunes and almost their lives; when their massive camel caravan arrives at a desiccated oasis. King then jumps to the voyage of the Commerce under Captain Riley and his 11-man crew. After stops in New Orleans and Gibraltar, the ship falls off course en route to the Canary Islands and ultimately wrecks at the infamous Cape Bojador. After the men survive the first predations of the nomads on the shore, they meander along the coast looking for a way inland as their supplies dwindle. They subsist for days by drinking their own urine. Eventually, to their horror, they discover that they have come aground on the edge of the Sahara Desert. They submit themselves, with hopes of getting food and water, as slaves to the Oulad Bou Sbaa. After days of abuse, they are bought by Hamet, who, after his own experiences with his failed caravan (described at the novel's opening), sympathizes with the plight of the crew. Together, they set off on a hellish journey across the desert to collect a bounty for Hamet in Swearah. King embellishes this compelling narrative throughout with scientific and historical material explaining the origins of the camel, the market for English and American slaves, and the stages of dehydration. He also humanizes the Sahrawi with background on the tribes and on the lives of Hamet and Seid. This material, doled out in sufficient amounts to enrich the story without derailing it, makes *Skeletons on the Zahara* a perfectly entertaining bit of history that feels like a guilty pleasure. --Patrick O'Kelley --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

When the American cargo ship Commerce ran aground on the northwestern shores of Africa in 1815 along with its crew of 12 Connecticut-based sailors, the misfortunes that befell them came fast and hard, from enslavement to reality-bending bouts of dehydration. King's aggressively researched account of the crew's once-famous ordeal reads like historical fiction, with unbelievable stories of the seamen's endurance of heat stroke, starvation and cruelty by their Saharan slavers. King (Patrick O'Brian: *A Life Revealed*), who went to Africa and, on camel and foot, retraced parts of the sailors' journey, succeeds brilliantly at making the now familiar landscape seem as imposing and new as it must have been to the sailors. Every dromedary step thuds out from the pages with its punishing awkwardness, and each drop of brackish found water reprieves and tortures with its perpetual insufficiency. King's leisurely prose style rounds out the drama with well-parceled-out bits of context, such as the haggling barter culture of the Saharan nomadic Arabs and the geological history of Western Africa's coastline. Zahara (King's use of older and/or phonetic spellings helps evoke the foreignness of the time and place) impresses with its pacing, thoroughness and empathy.

for the plight of a dozen sailors heaved smack-hard into an unknown tribalism. By the time the surviving crew members make it back to their side of civilization, reader and protagonist alike are challenged by new ways of understanding culture clash, slavery and the place of Islam in the social fabric of desert-dwelling peoples. Maps, illus. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

This is a fascinating historical epic adventure. The narrative is punctuated with historical asides deftly inserted by the author to provide perspective on the circumstances of the characters without disrupting the flow of the story. A great read. However, the process of converting the book to a Kindle file is flawed. Words are periodically omitted with the substitution of "note 1." Apparently the transposed work has not been proof read. This same problem exists in other Kindle books I have read and should be noted and corrected by . That is why I am rating this Kindle edition only four stars.

A story that puts any Indiana Jones adventure to shame. *Skeletons on the Zahara* is an exciting and grisly read, detailing the horrific ordeal of Captain James Riley and his eleven-man crew after they shipwreck off the coast of Africa in the early 1800s. The loss of their boat is the least of the crew's worries, however, when they're sold into slavery and descend into a sun-scorched nightmare of desperation and death. King's writing brings the story to life in all its gruesome barbarity, doing a stellar job in conveying the men's physical suffering. What they go through is nothing short of hellacious. The book fires on all cylinders thanks to the story and King's writing. The author actually traveled to Africa and followed in Riley's footsteps to get a better understanding of what the men went through. This first-hand experience reveals itself in King's descriptions of the merciless landscape. For lovers of history and adventure, *Skeletons on the Zahara* is a must . . .

Spectacular true survival story! Add this book to my list of favorites, which includes *In the Kingdom of Ice*, *Endurance*, and *In the Heart of the Sea*. The author does this story justice in every respect. I felt the men's thirst and hunger, I felt their almost intolerable pain and depression, but I could also feel their undeniable will to live, whatever it took. Just an amazing journey into a world of barbarians, deathly hot (and cold) desert sands, and the minds of captured shipwrecked sailors who faced death on a daily basis for days on end. Don't miss this one!

Horrifying and Amazing! I couldn't stop reading it. It's amazing what people can survive and that they can continue to hope despite the impossible odds against them. I like the way the author, Dean King, compares James Riley's story with the memoir written by Archibald Robbins. Yes, I agree with the person who said it is hard to follow the maps on the Kindle. Kindle books still have a lot of improving to do. But, I still found it to be a fantastic book!

Life as a near death experience beyond belief but very real. This story has been told and read many times through the generations. Abraham Lincoln mentioned the effect that it had on him.

Clear and compelling story with brilliant descriptions of Sahara desert, camels, food, hardships endured, attitudes of its nomadic peoples and tribal rivalry. Historically informative regarding religious persecution and lack of acceptance or understanding between Muslim and Christian which is still practiced today. An inspiring narrative from a compassionate man whose integrity and humanity made life for these shipwrecked sailors almost endurable. Excellent true story. Being familiar with certain places mentioned in this book e.g. Tamraght, Agadir, Marrakech made it all the more interesting. Loved descriptions of landscapes, skies, weather, wadi's etc.

A really good read. Astonishing details of capture and enslavement on the Sahara and how the horrible treatment endured by the captured white seamen effected the quest for emancipation of black slaves in America. Essential reading for American History buffs.

If you are interested in leadership/ survival, this is a must read book. Leadership principles are complemented by exploring the lives of leaders who exemplified sustained purpose through the most gruesome adversity. It's really about character.

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