

LEVELED BOOK • V

# Mysterious Shipwrecks

MULTI  
LEVEL  
V•Y•Z<sup>1</sup>

Written by Sean McCollum

[www.readinga-z.com](http://www.readinga-z.com)

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## Focus Question

What makes shipwrecks interesting?

## Words to Know

aground  
archaeologists  
artifacts  
capsized  
fleet  
intrigue

investigators  
navigational  
salvage  
shipwrecks  
supernatural  
treachery

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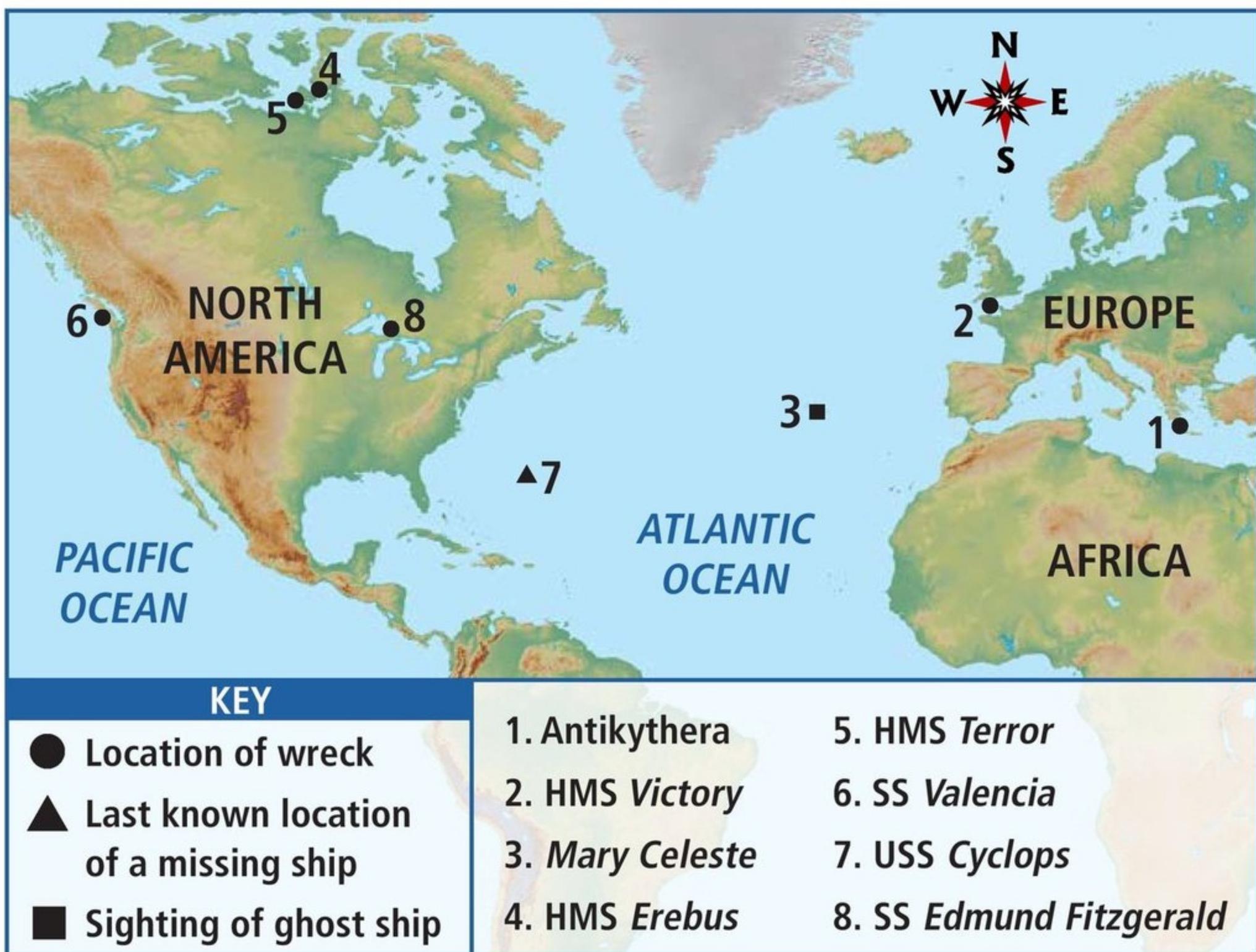
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A wreck at the bottom of the Red Sea in Jordan

## Marine Mysteries, Lost and Found

The United Nations estimates the world's coastlines and ocean floors are littered with more than three million **shipwrecks**. Marine **archaeologists** study some wrecks that date back thousands of years. Treasure hunters search for riches said to have sunk with other wrecks. In some cases, ships have simply disappeared without a trace.

Every shipwreck holds some kind of mystery. The mystery that captures people's curiosity the most is this: what really sent the ship to its doom? Stories of shipwrecks are often full of danger, death, sunken treasure, and **intrigue**. Clues can help us solve mysteries, but in most cases, the clues to a ship's fate remain hidden for years—and sometimes forever.

## Mystery of Antiquity

In 1900, divers found a partly buried shipwreck near the Greek island of Antikythera (an-ti-ki-THEER-uh). No one knew how it got there, but Greek archaeologists soon realized the more interesting question was *when* it got there.

Divers brought **artifacts** to the surface, and researchers learned that the ship was more than



A piece of the world's oldest computer, known as the Antikythera Mechanism, is displayed in a museum in Athens.

two thousand years old. One discovery has been described as the oldest known computer—a device that used gears to figure out exact positions of the stars and planets. Research teams are still studying the wreck.

## The Richest Wreck

In 1708, a British warship sent the Spanish galleon *San José* to the bottom of the sea, along with gold and emeralds intended to fund Spain's war against Great Britain. For three hundred years, the wreck's whereabouts remained a mystery—until recently. A salvage company and several countries have battled for the right to the ship's treasure since its discovery. In 2015, it was estimated to be worth as much as \$16 billion, making it the most valuable shipwreck in the world.



HMS *Victory* sails through turbulent seas in a painting by Thomas Butterworth.

### Long Lost *Victory*

Launched in 1738, HMS *Victory* was the finest ship in Great Britain's navy. In early October 1744, the *Victory* was leading its **fleet** back to Britain when they were caught in a fierce storm in the English Channel. The *Victory* became separated from the other ships and disappeared along with some 1,150 men.

That night, locals on nearby islands heard the booming of cannons—a cry for help. The seas were too dangerous for any attempt at rescue. Days later, some wreckage from the vessel washed up on the shores of the islands, but the rest of the ship was nowhere to be found.

In 2008, a marine **salvage** company located the *Victory*'s remains. Today, the world's oldest naval ship still in commission bears the name of HMS *Victory*.

## The Fraidy-Cat of *Empress of Ireland*

Emmy was considered the ship's cat on the *Empress of Ireland*. The day before the ship sailed from Canada, Emmy fled the vessel two times. Her bad behavior was viewed as a bad sign. The next day, the *Empress of Ireland* struck another ship and sank in just fourteen minutes. More than one thousand people died, making it the deadliest wreck in Canadian history.

## Ghost Ship: *Mary Celeste*

Some lost ships experience a fate more mysterious than sinking to the bottom of the sea. On November 7, 1872, the cargo ship *Mary Celeste* set sail from New York, bound for Italy. The vessel had a crew of seven, plus the captain and his family.

One month later, a British ship spotted a vessel drifting in the Atlantic Ocean. It was the *Mary Celeste*, but a boarding party found no one on

the ship. The **navigational** equipment and a lifeboat were missing, but there were no signs of struggle. All cargo and gear were left behind. The last entry



in the captain's log did not point to anything out of the ordinary. The captain, his family, and the crew were never seen again. The intrigue has led to many fictionalized tales of the mystery of the *Mary Celeste*, usually including **treachery**, murder, and even sea monsters.



A painting of HMS *Erebus* stuck in the ice by François Etienne Musin

## The Long Hunt for HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror*

In 1845, the British navy launched the Franklin Expedition to search for a shortcut for shipping between Europe and Asia.

The expedition included 129 men on two ships—HMS *Terror* and HMS *Erebus*. On July 26, 1845, two whaling ships spotted *Terror* and *Erebus* in Canada's Baffin Bay. Then two years passed with no word from the expedition's commander. People feared for the safety of the explorers.

Search and rescue ships eventually discovered deserted gear, graves, and notes left behind by desperate crew on uninhabited islands. The



A diver explores the remains of the *Erebus*.

two ships had been trapped in ice in September 1846, and the commander of the expedition died the following June. For two years, the men—sick and dying—waited for their ships to break free from the ice.

Finally, in April 1848, the remaining men attempted a desperate hike south to reach the Canadian mainland. In 1855, local Inuit told **investigators** about a group of men from Europe who had starved to death along the coast. Signs showed that the men had turned to cannibalism to try to survive.

In 2014, a ship equipped with sonar, a system that locates objects underwater, found the wreck of the *Erebus*, well preserved in 12 meters (40 ft.) of Arctic waters. Its partner ship was missing until September 2016, when the preserved remains of the HMS *Terror* were found at the bottom of a bay off King William Island.

## Terror on the Rocks: SS *Valencia*

The SS *Valencia* was one of the most terrifying shipwrecks of all. In January 1906, the passenger steamer was on its way to Seattle when it ran **aground** near Vancouver Island. Pounding waves trapped the ship and made rescue difficult.

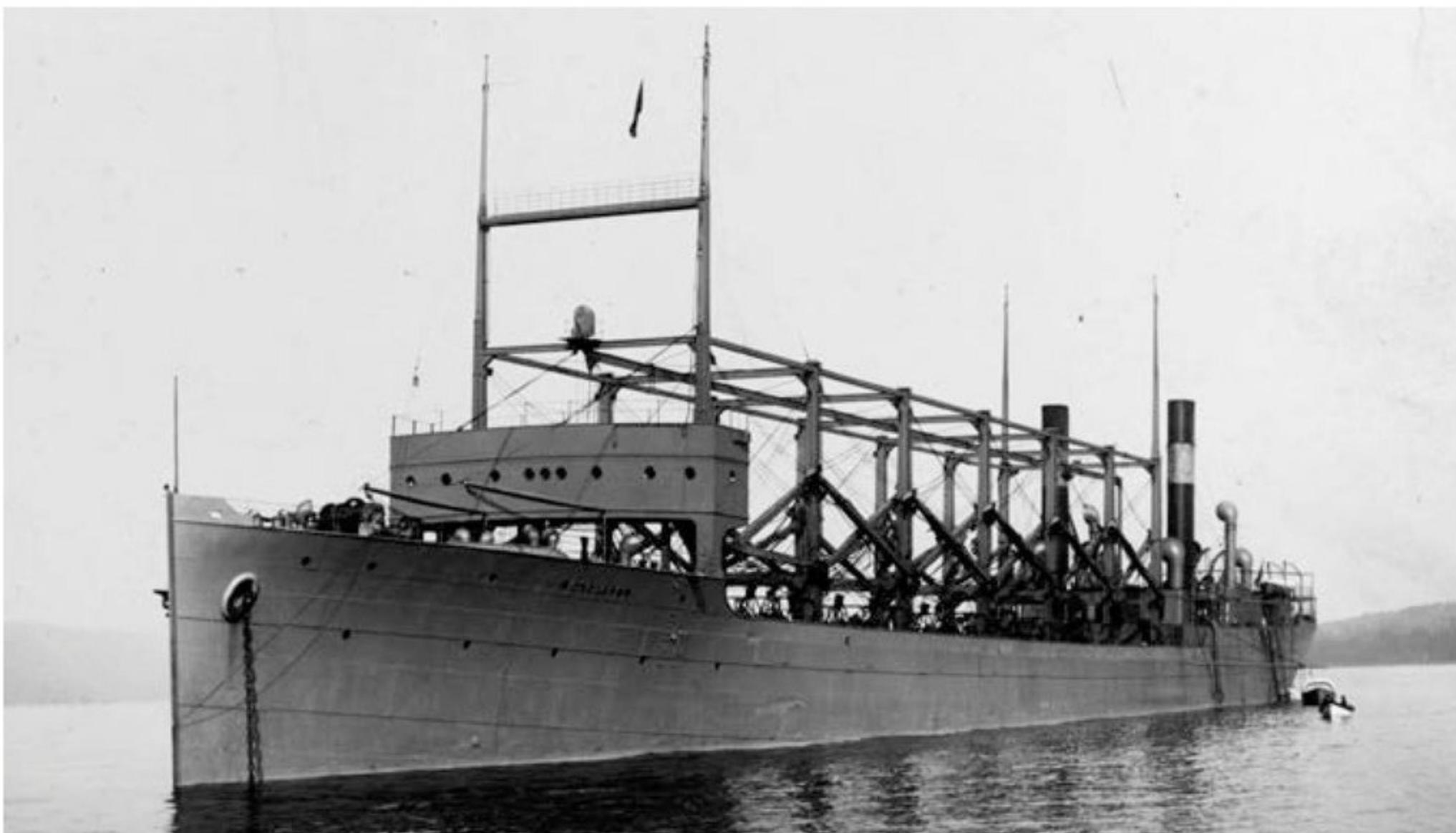


*Valencia* leaves San Francisco eight years before the ship's tragic sinking.

Most lifeboats **capsized** in the powerful seas, tossing people into

freezing water where they drowned. About thirty-six hours after the stranding, people onshore watched as a huge wave swept over the upper deck, where dozens of passengers were holding on for their lives. In total, only 37 out of 136 passengers lived.

Most of the mysteries of the *Valencia*'s sinking came later and inspired **supernatural** tales. In 1910, newspapers reported that sailors had seen a ghostly *Valencia* sailing near the site of the wreck. A rumor also spread that a lifeboat filled with skeletons had been found in a nearby cave, though there was no proof. Then, twenty-seven years after the disaster, one of *Valencia*'s lifeboats was discovered in a nearby bay. Its nameplate is now displayed in a museum in British Columbia.



The disappearance of USS *Cyclops*, pictured above, remains the largest loss of life in U.S. naval history in an event not directly related to combat.

### Gone without a Trace: USS *Cyclops*

During World War I, the USS *Cyclops*, a U.S. Navy supply ship, picked up a heavy load of ore in Brazil. The captain reported that an engine needed repairs and was not operational. He was told to get it fixed once he reached the United States. On February 22, 1918, the ship left Brazil for Baltimore with 309 crew members.

The *Cyclops* disappeared somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean, and not one piece of wreckage has ever been found. At the time, some people guessed that a German submarine had sunk the ship. Some naval officials wondered if the captain, who had been born in Germany, might have secretly handed the ship over to the enemy, though there was no proof of that.



Some ships have been sunk intentionally in the Bermuda Triangle to create artificial reefs, promoting sea life in the area.

Others note that the ship disappeared in the Bermuda Triangle, an area in the Atlantic Ocean that is believed to swallow ships. Most naval experts think the ship was unstable because it was overloaded and did not have full engine power. They say it may have been caught in a fierce storm that took place on March 10, which could have capsized the ship.

## The Bermuda Triangle

The Bermuda Triangle is an area of the Atlantic Ocean. Its corners are marked approximately by Bermuda, Puerto Rico, and the tip of Florida.



According to legend, a high number of unexplained disappearances of ships and aircraft occur there, leading to rumors of supernatural powers sinking or snatching ships. However, researchers have determined that ships are no more likely to disappear there than in other busy shipping areas.



The *Edmund Fitzgerald* was over 213 meters (700 ft.) long, bow to stern. It was the largest and longest vessel ever built on the Great Lakes.

### **There and Gone: SS *Edmund Fitzgerald***

*SS Edmund Fitzgerald* left Superior, Wisconsin, on November 9, 1975, loaded with iron ore. A storm was forecast, but the ship's captain was not worried.

On the afternoon of November 10, the U.S. Coast Guard warned all ships to seek shelter. The *Edmund Fitzgerald* headed for Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin. At about 7:00 p.m., the captain reported the ship was taking on water but stated over the radio, "We are holding our own."



Coast Guard officers inspect life rings recovered from the wreck of *Edmund Fitzgerald*.

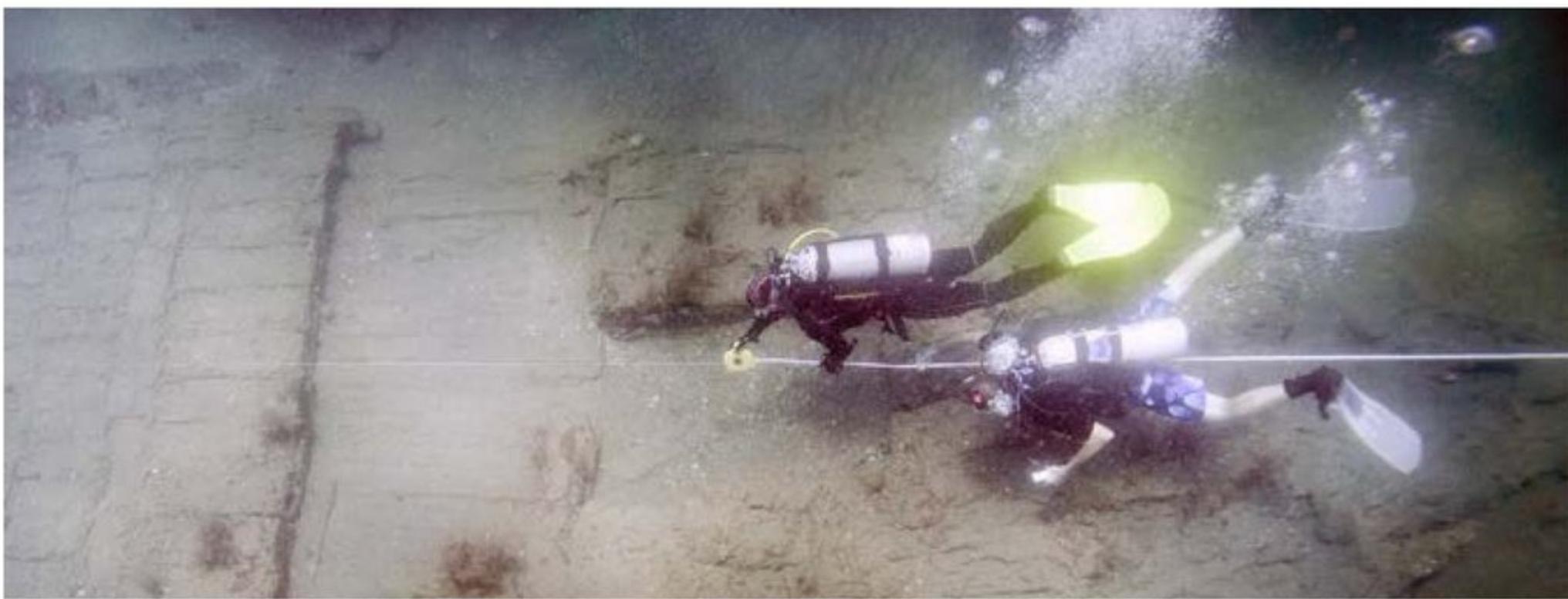
Minutes later, the ship was gone. It no longer appeared on radar. No lifeboats were launched.

None of the twenty-nine crew members were found. Days later, the wreck was located on the lake floor. The ship had been snapped in half. Investigators suspect a series of three rogue waves may have sunk the ship so quickly there was no time even to make a distress call.



## Freak Waves

Researchers suspect “rogue waves” for some unexplained shipping disasters. What makes these waves so dangerous is their unpredictability, size, and power. A rogue wave comes out of nowhere and is much bigger than the waves around it. It is created by a powerful combination of strong water currents and high winds, usually far out at sea. The sudden jump in wave size can flip large freighters.



Divers measure a shipwreck discovered in 2011 that dates back to the seventeenth century.

## The Sea Keeps Many Secrets

Sailing the seas is a great adventure. Part of any true adventure, though, is the element of danger—and the sea has plenty of it. The oceans stretch vast distances, weather can turn suddenly savage, and dangerous reefs and rocks hide along coastlines.

Modern equipment makes shipping safer than ever, but dozens of shipwrecks still claim the lives of about two thousand people every year. Working on a ship remains one of the world's most dangerous jobs. Sailors entrust their lives to their knowledge, skills, and the ships they serve on, but sometimes, they are left to depend on only their luck.

Every shipwreck leaves behind mysteries. Some of these mysteries can be explored and eventually explained. Much of the time, though, the sea's secrets are never brought to light.

## Glossary

<b>aground</b> ( <i>adv.</i> )	on or onto the shore or bottom of a body of water (p. 10)
<b>archaeologists</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	scientists who study the remains of ancient cultures (p. 4)
<b>artifacts</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	objects made or used by humans long ago (p. 5)
<b>capsized</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	turned over in the water so that an object's bottom or side was facing up (p. 10)
<b>fleet</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a group of ships or vehicles traveling together that are under the same command (p. 6)
<b>intrigue</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a mysterious, secret, or interesting quality (p. 4)
<b>investigators</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	people who carry out detailed examinations in order to determine the facts about something (p. 9)
<b>navigational</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	relating to steering a course toward a destination (p. 7)
<b>salvage</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	property that is saved from damage or destruction; the recovery of a wrecked ship or its cargo (p. 6)
<b>shipwrecks</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	sunken or destroyed ships (p. 4)
<b>supernatural</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	of or relating to something that can't be explained by science or the laws of nature (p. 10)
<b>treachery</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	an act of betrayal or dishonesty (p. 7)

# Mysterious Shipwrecks

A *Reading A-Z Level V Leveled Book*  
Word Count: 1,335

## Connections

### Writing and Art

Investigate more about a ship from the book. Draw a diagram of the ship. Write an essay about it, including when it was used, what it was used for, and your ideas about what happened to it.

### Social Studies

Choose at least four ships from the book. On a map, locate their starting points and intended destinations, tracing the route each one may have taken. If it is known, identify where the ships wrecked.

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