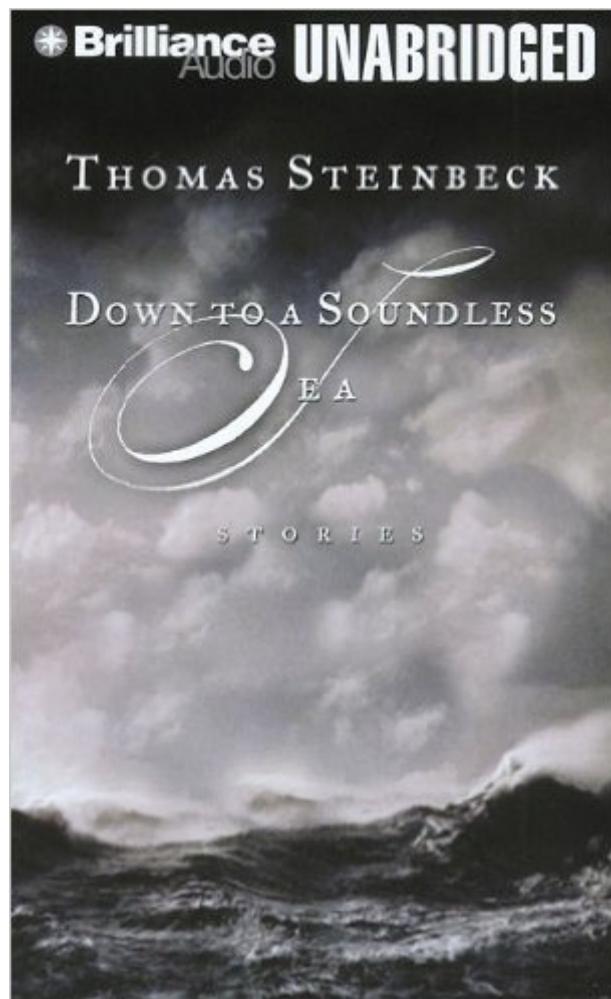


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Down To A Soundless Sea: Stories



Synopsis

Here is a fiction debut that is cause for celebration. Growing up in a family that valued the art of storytelling and the power of oral history, Thomas Steinbeck now follows in his father's footsteps with a brilliant story collection. *Down to a Soundless Sea* resonates with the rich history and culture of California, recalling vivid details of life in Monterey County from the turn of the century through the 1930s. Steinbeck accomplishes an amazing feat: His stories have the feel of classic literature, but his haunting voice, forceful narrative drive, and dazzling imagery are unmistakably his own. In seven stories, Steinbeck traces the fates and dreams of an eccentric cast of characters, from sailors and ranchers to doctors and immigrants—as each struggles to carve out a living in the often inhospitable environment of rocky cliffs, crashing surf, and rough patches of land along the California coast.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I would not want to be Thomas Steinbeck. Imagine: you spend half of your time explaining who you are, the other half explaining who you aren't, and wait for the inevitable question, "Do you write, too?" Steinbeck has blazed his own path, acquiring large if quiet success as a photojournalist, cinematographer, and screenwriter. And, yes, he does write, too. And quite well. The conundrum one encounters when approaching *DOWN TO A SOUNDLESS SEA* is approaching it on its own terms without using John Steinbeck as a reference and comparison point. Steinbeck could have

avoided at least a portion of the dilemma by writing in a specialized genre, such as science fiction or horror and thus rendered intergenerational comparisons moot. He instead meets the problem head on; the short fiction collected in DOWN TO A SOUNDLESS SEA are Steinbeck's literary transcriptions of tales he grew up hearing from his father and from others who dropped by his household. Steinbeck wisely avoids disclosing to his readers who some of these "others" were, but anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of John Steinbeck's friends and contemporaries can easily guess. The settings for these stories --- Big Sur and the California coast --- were also frequently used by Steinbeck the Father. Thomas Steinbeck, however, has found his own voice, and his own words. He passes, and surpasses the "John Smith" test: if DOWN TO A SOUNDLESS SEA was written by John Smith, it would be worth picking up, and reading. DOWN TO A SOUNDLESS SEA consists of seven stories; if there is a common thread it is one of men following dreams and remaining true to their internal vision, though not always wisely, not always successfully.

Living on the central coast adds to the richness that is this book of short stories created by the son of John Steinbeck. I'm sure that many readers will gauge what Thomas Steinbeck does here by the works of his prestigious father. But I chose to read them for the sheer enjoyment of discovering a new author who happens to live in the same area I do. I wasn't disappointed. It is worth noting that Mr. Steinbeck likes to tell his stories with narration, not dialogue. You'll find little of the latter in this collection. But what you WILL find is an anthology of stories that all take place on or near the sea (thus the title), and more readable while sitting around a campfire, giving your kids or family an earful as you read the tales aloud. They'll get a peek into the local legends around the Monterey area that will surely remain with them for years to come. The first story in this collection, 'The Night Guide', is about a young boy named Frank Post (of local Post Ranch fame) and his early heritage growing up as a half-breed Native American. When his mother (a native Rumsen Indian) goes missing during a terrible storm, young Frank is visited by a vision and shown where his mother is at. The child rescues his mother from underneath a downed tree. The boy becomes somewhat legendary because of this event. That, and he was probably 'the first child born in the high Sur under the American flag.' 'The Wool Gatherer' pays homage to Thom Steinbeck's father. Young J.E. Steinbeck Jr. works his summers as a ranch hand down in Big Sur on The Post Ranch, and on his way to the ranch one summer, John sees a legendary beast staring down at him from a high cliff vantage point. Then it vanishes. John squanders away his entire summer trying to find the creature again, but never does.

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