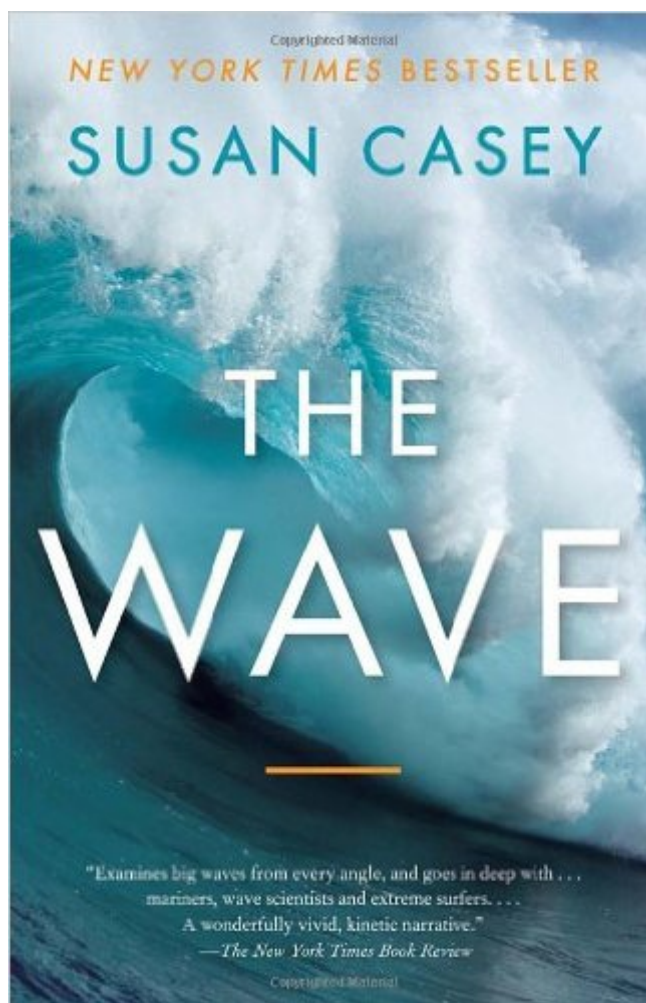


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The Wave: In Pursuit Of The Rogues, Freaks, And Giants Of The Ocean



Synopsis

A New York Times Notable Book A San Francisco Chronicle Best Book of the Year In her astonishing new book Susan Casey captures colossal, ship-swallowing waves, and the surfers and scientists who seek them out. For legendary surfer Laird Hamilton, hundred foot waves represent the ultimate challenge. As Susan Casey travels the globe, hunting these monsters of the ocean with Hamilton's crew, she witnesses first-hand the life or death stakes, the glory, and the mystery of impossibly mammoth waves. Yet for the scientists who study them, these waves represent something truly scary brewing in the planet's waters. With inexorable verve, *The Wave* brilliantly portrays human beings confronting nature at its most ferocious.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Susan Casey's *THE WAVE* features an introduction that would be right at home in a Tom Clancy thriller. Following the headline "57.5 (deg) N, 12.7 (deg) W, 175 MILES OFF THE COAST OF SCOTLAND... FEBRUARY 8, 2000," she launches into sixteen pages of prose describing a handful of shipping disasters. Have you ever been on an ocean liner where half the passengers were turning green with nausea as the ship pitched and rolled in 25-foot swells? That's nothing. Dead calm by comparison. Monster waves, the height of a ten-story office building (and taller) have taken ships --big, huge ships-- and pounded, pummeled, and overturned them, split them in half and buried them forever along with everyone aboard under thousands of tons of water, and it happens with a frequency that you can't begin to imagine. I read those first pages, and by the time I got to Chapter one, I was electrified. This was going to be a page-turner of the first order. Only it wasn't. As it turns

out, Casey's THE WAVE is about 1/3 "The Discovery Channel" and 2/3rds "ESPN's Gnarliest, Awesomest, Surfin' of the Century." Don't get me wrong. It's not that I have anything against people who surf. In fact, there was a fair amount of the surfing story that I found simply fascinating (and until reading this book, I knew NOTHING about.) Case in point: Cortes Bank. This is an area in the Pacific Ocean about 115 miles off the coast of San Diego. As it happens, there is a submerged, underwater chain of islands there, and when the large Pacific swells --beefed up by storm fronts-- hit the shallow water... well, surf's up, dude, in a majorly-tasty way. Casey's description of her six-hour trip out to this isolated area in a rather small boat with a band of some of the best surfers on the planet looking to ride 100-foot waves was astounding. I had no clue that surfing was anything but a near-the-shore sport. But my issue with the book --and the reason I've given it just three stars-- is the amount of ink she devotes to the surfers, their injuries, their families, their gear, their homes, the award ceremonies... well, you get the picture. The sections of the book that I was expecting --where she writes about the science of the waves, both what we understand, and that which remains (at this point) well beyond our ability to figure out, are very well written. I really like her writing style, and enjoyed her 2006 book about the Farallon Islands, "The Devil's Teeth" a little bit more than THE WAVE, if only because the subject was a touch more 'focused'. - Jonathan Sabin

First things first. The Wave was fun to read because Casey is a very solid writer. She knows how to put a sentence, paragraph, and tale together. Technically, her writing is near impeccable; it's a pleasure to read a galley proof and see almost no errors, compared to so many authors who apparently can't write ten words without needing spellcheck and an editor. So from that standpoint, this was one of the best advance copies I've seen of anything over the past few years. I haven't read Casey's other book, about sharks, nor have I read her as editor of Oprah's O Magazine (I have trouble picking up a publication that has its owner on the cover every issue, who also named it after herself). After reading The Wave, I might just check out Casey's other writing, as she understands what good scribbling is all about. She always keeps things moving, rarely bogging down in arcane detail even when discussing the science of climatology, waves, etc, and has a fine eye for the telling fact. Perhaps too fine, but we'll get to that in a minute. What's best about The Wave is the overall scope; Casey links how the earth's weather is changing to how waves are growing, and there's no denying the stats: there is a clear correlation. She visits various scientists and marine salvage folks and shares their stories; they all agree that we're seeing the oceans get nuttier, and it's only just beginning. Enter our hero! Laird "Larry" Hamilton, big wave rider extraordinaire. In this book he comes off as very humble, very brave, and very wise. You root for him at every turn on every wave

and it's clear that Casey has quite a rapport with the guy. She always seems to be at his house, near the infamous Jaws/Pe'ahi, a Maui big wave break, chatting with Larry and Curly and Moe. Just kidding. These guys are no stooges; they've almost perfected the art of tow-in surfing, which is the only way to catch a 50 footer or above---paddling in is too slow. But towing is still very controversial to many, and Casey pretty much skips that argument altogether, a telling omission. We're taken to some of the world's best big breaks, like Todos and Cortes and even Jaws' big sister Egypt, which never breaks unless it's almost 100 feet high and provides the highlight of the book, a wild day where Laird and his tow partner almost get killed, and when they realize maybe it's not worth dying to catch the biggest waves. (The fact that Laird went out again at 80-foot Egypt that same session certainly dispels any doubts; this guy definitely does live for the really hairy waves.) That chapter, and the scene where Laird takes Casey on a jet ski down the face of Jaws, offer some visceral thrills for the reader, and are part of why this book is fun. Even if its title should really be *The Wave: Kingdom Of Laird*. Which brings me to some thoughts we're unlikely to hear much about when this book hits the stands. [If you're not a surfer or are just curious if *The Wave* is good, no need to go further. Enjoy the book, it's a fine read.] As a surfer, though sadly landlocked, I've followed Hamilton's exploits on occasion since I first read about him in the '90s. When his infamous Teahupoo monster wave was on the cover of *Surfer* mag in 2000, I remember standing at my mailbox in true awe at the insanely malevolent lip above his head. That thing could easily vaporize anybody. From that point on Laird became the Ultimate Big Wave Surfer, TM, and suddenly he was everywhere. But here's what's most interesting about LH: he disdains surf contests, for many good reasons, and is seen as the Pure Surfer. Seeking the biggest, baddest, bestest waves on the planet, he has jettisoned the crass commercialism of the surf world to live on his own ethereal plane of Ultimate Waveness. Except for those American Express commercials. And that Oxbow stuff. And his own brand of products. And...well, you know, a guy's got to make a living, right? Fair enough. But here's the problem: so do other guys. There's a scene in *The Wave* where Laird, with his faithful reporter tagging along, gives some grief to Sean Collins, who started the website *Surfline*, whereby anybody can see where the best waves will be on the planet. Laird feels that's cheating, and not everybody should get that knowledge. Just like many feel that tow-in surfing---which Laird, Buzzy Kerbox and Darrick Doerner pioneered in the '90s---is completely wrong, with its gas fumes and noise and pollution of Mother Ocean, and its disrespect towards paddle-in surfers. But you see, when Laird does it, it's pure. Sorry, Pure TM. Just as *Surfline* isn't pure. And contests aren't. And maybe they're not, fair enough. But you know what? It's time Hamilton realized that while he may be a better surfer than the rest, and thus deserving of more respect out there, he's not the only surfer,

and other riders want and maybe even deserve the big waves too. And the magazine covers. And the videos. And the movies. And the American Express commercials. And the book written by Oprah's go-to writer gal, which when you really look at it is a long, very well-done puff piece on Laird Hamilton, posing as a scientific inquiry into the world of waves. Which it also is...but it always seems to come back to Laird. So why not call this book Laird: The Super Mega Master (And His Big Waves, Etc)? Well, that would be so crass. And maybe a little too transparent. Hey, it fooled me. One of the reasons I picked this up was Laird, but I also wanted to hear what the real wave experts think. And they confirm what many of us were talking about 20 years ago: the waves are getting bigger due to climate change, and there'll be some awesome tubes the size of houses out there, ever bigger. So it's only logical that guys like Laird and Doerner should be stoked, and studied. Wait a minute...who? Another weird thing about this book is Darrick Doerner's very peripheral status. He's barely mentioned, even though he was Laird's original long-time tow-in partner. Even though he was catching monsters when Larry was a kid (including a 1988 Waimea wave still considered one of the all-time great paddle-in (ie real surfing, non-TM) waves). Even though true waterman Doerner is seen by many in Hawaii as Laird's predecessor and teacher, in many ways. So why is Darrick barely mentioned? Good question. Just like Buzzy; he and Laird had a falling out and now it's all about Kalama and Lickle here. But if this book is really about big waves, Doerner merits far more time and respect. And where is Eddie Aikau?! Come on. He deserves at least a paragraph, if not a chapter. Same with Jeff Clark, who surfed the insanely hairy Maverick's alone for 15 years, probably the greatest big wave feat that ever will be. You'd think that Casey, whose comfort in and respect for the water adds much credence to her writing here, would give those guys the space they very definitely earned. Finishing *The Wave*, I decided to check out Laird's website, which I've never done. And guess what? It was only there and in linked articles that I found many fascinating facts skipped over in *The Wave*. Like, Casey lived with the Hamiltons on Maui for five years (never once mentioned in the book...why? Seems germane. Maybe too much so?). Like, Laird's site sells a bumpersticker, Blame Laird, a weirdly ironic theft of a sticker popular on many cars at many breaks now. He's being blamed for costing plenty of surfers endless waves by popularizing the stand-up paddleboard, wherein you stand on the board way outside the break and get ALL the best waves. It used to be the old longboarders way outside who peevied folks inside...now they too are mad at the stand-ups. So it goes. So Blame Laird. But also make sure to check out Laird's new line of....you guessed it, stand up paddleboards! Yes, the ads are all over his website, but Casey never mentions in the book that LH has this product on sale, but she does talk about him stand-up surfing and plugs it as a genuine Hawaiian thang, and ain't it cool, etc. Hmmmm. Perhaps Casey is head of O due to a

very skillful way with product placement along with her literary skills? And Laird's website's front page now has various articles about...this book! It wasn't until I read those articles that I saw very clearly that *The Wave* was practically commissioned by Laird, or perhaps his wife Gabby. Her own line of products is on his site as well, and she just wrote a gushing piece on she and Laird hobnobbing with the rich in the Hamptons while promoting...*The Wave*! Wait, are we still talking about Laird Hamilton, hater of surf contests and all that is phony in the surf world? Can't be. But it gets better, or worse, or something. Laird is also now sponsored by, try not to laugh...Chanel! Yes, the perfume folks, now hawking watches. Clearly from Gabby's starstruck article ("Laird sat next to super famous artist/New York scenester Julian Schabel at dinner!"), she is all about leveraging the Hamilton brand, and Laird is being dragged along. Or rather, towed, into the modern world's Greatest Wave of all: Selling Yourself. The pictures of Laird at that party for this book show him almost cringing, and who can blame him? This whole PR exercise can't be his doing (one hopes, but one wonders...). One also hopes that he soon pulls out of this ever-bigger monster wave, with a thousand logos across its face and all sorts of bumpy shelves on the way down to the trough of Eternal Product Placement, where there is naught but a crashing, crushing lip; that's one wave you can't bail on once you're in its brutally gnarly closeout barrel, bruddah. Sure, LH has to make cash for his family (always the ultimate excuse for selling anything), but he can't simultaneously hate on Sean Collins, other tow-in surfers, and the surf world in general for following his lead. Especially when he's making all this money selling himself as Mr. Ultimate Big Wave Surfer in TV commercials and books and movies. Pick one or the other, Laird. You're the purist, or you're the sell-out like everyone else. You can't be both...and you ain't. *The Wave* and its glitzy parties and no doubt upcoming Oprah tie-ins are no better than any surf contest or gaggle of tow-in noobs at Jaws on that rare huge day every three years...they're just somewhat more subtle. Judge not lest thee be judged. You may have started it, but you can't have it all to yourself while cashing in as well. (Just like you can't preach about the purity of Mother Ocean and then jet ski into waves while spewing gas all over your mother). So now, along with his t-shirts, movies, bumperstickers, hats, paddleboards, vitamins, watches, credit cards, etc etc etc etc, Laird has a book, *The Wave*. It's a very well-disguised, well-written, intelligent product placement, and it tricked me up until I went to Laird's website. Kudos to all concerned for the subtlety. But in the end this book *The Wave* is yet another all too crisp meta-ironic piece of modern culture, a warning of the dangers that modern human life has unleashed on the planet, while also being the kind of well-crafted consumer-culture advertisement that has led to the selfish earth-trashing behavior that may have caused all these freaks of nature in the first place. Oh well. It fooled me and I had fun while it lasted. And that's what

matters. Isn't it?

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