The Perfect Storm

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SEBASTIAN JUNGER

Sebastian Junger is the son of a painter and a physicist—the latter, his father, having emigrated from Dresden, Germany, during World War II. Junger received his B.A. degree in cultural anthropology from Wesleyan University. An interest in dangerous jobs prompted him to research commercial fishing, which led to his bestselling *The Perfect Storm*. Junger has contributed articles to publications such as *Vanity Fair*, and he also won a major broadcasting award for a piece on the United States's war in Afghanistan for ABC's *Nightline* in 2008. His documentary *Restrepo*, which is meant to give soldiers' perspective on life in the deadly Korengal Valley, was nominated for an Academy Award, and the related, award-winning book *War* (2010) focuses on the U.S. Army platoon alongside whom Junger spent a year gathering research. His other books include *A Death in Belmont*, which speculates on the identity of the 1960s Boston Strangler, and *Tribe* (2016), which looks at the assimilation of veterans back into society after combat. Junger is married and, in 2016, became a father at 55 when his daughter was born.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The "perfect storm" that Junger chronicles in his book has sometimes been called "The No-Name Storm" or the "Halloween Storm." It formed on October 28, 1991, and dissipated on November 2. The storm was a nor'easter (a North Atlantic cyclone) which absorbed Grace, a Category 2 hurricane, and which itself became a small hurricane before it subsided. Damage occurred from Nova Scotia all the way to Puerto Rico, costing more than $200 million, and 13 people are known to have died from storm-related accidents. Hoping to avoid confusion with Hurricane Grace, meteorologists didn't name the storm, but the nickname "the Perfect Storm," first applied by Bob Case of the National Weather Service, was later popularized by Junger's account. In the book, Junger also touches on environmental and governmental controversies surrounding commercial swordfishing. In the late 1990s, the National Marine Fisheries Service implemented a protection plan for North Atlantic swordfish, and the sale and import of the species was banned soon thereafter. As a result of this ban, the North Atlantic swordfish stock is now considered to be fully recovered from the overfishing that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Junger's *The Perfect Storm* helped revive interest in adventure-themed nonfiction, such as Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mount Everest Disaster*, which was published later the same year. Lynn Nottage's 2015 play *Sweat* and J.D. Vance's memoir *Hillbilly Elegy* (2016) are both recent works which explore the struggles of working-class people, like the fishermen in Junger's work who sometimes face cyclical poverty. Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) is famously set on a New England fishing vessel which is finally shipwrecked; like *The Perfect Storm*, it explores the theme of humanity's attempts to understand and tame unpredictable nature. Hemingway's novella *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) is another fictional account of the complicated relationship between human beings, wildlife, and the sea.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Perfect Storm: A True Story of Men Against the Sea*
- **When Published:** May 17, 1997
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Creative Nonfiction
- **Setting:** Gloucester, Massachusetts, and the Grand Banks of the North Atlantic
- **Climax:** The "perfect storm" hits the Grand Banks.
- **Antagonist:** The sea and the "perfect storm"
- **Point of View:** Third-Person Omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Oscar-Nominated. *The Perfect Storm* was adapted into a highly grossing Hollywood film in 2000, starring George Clooney as Captain Billy Tyne and Mark Wahlberg as Bobby Shatford. Mary Anne Shatford, sister of Bobby, later told the *Boston Globe* that she felt Junger's book was well-researched and an accurate depiction of the people involved, but that the film version was "too Hollywood."

Community Impact. In 1998, Sebastian Junger started The Perfect Storm Foundation, hoping to give back to the people of Gloucester whom he'd lived among while researching the book and come to greatly respect. The Foundation specifically provided educational grants to children of fishing industry workers, with the aim of providing vocational opportunities beyond the risky world of commercial fishing.

PLOT SUMMARY

In the winter of 1896, a fishing crew discovered a message in a bottle. The enclosed message was written by the crew of a Gloucester, Massachusetts, fishing boat, the *Falcon*, just before it sank in a **storm**. The writer had probably assumed it would never be found.

In Gloucester in September 1991, a man named Bobby Shatford is waking up next to his girlfriend, Chris Cotter, in a room over the Crow's Nest bar. In a few hours, he's due aboard the Andrea Gail, a swordfishing boat, for a month-long trip to the Grand Banks, a North Atlantic fishing ground. Bobby has been home for less than a week, and this morning he's hung over. While in port for brief periods, fishermen like Bobby tend to indulge, drinking heavily and partying late into the night.

Though fisherman on sword boats are sometimes considered the "high rollers of the fishing world"—these boats can bring in big money—some have more pragmatic goals. Bobby started fishing on the *Andrea Gail* recently to help pay off a child-support debt, in hopes of soon marrying Chris. The *Andrea Gail* is owned by Bob Brown and captained by Billy Tyne. On this trip, the boat will also be crewed by Bugsy Moran, David Sullivan (Sully), Dale Murphy (Murph), and Alfred Pierre. (After getting a bad feeling, a fisherman named Adam Randall walks off the job at the last minute.) After a day of last-minute provisioning, drinking, and tearful goodbyes, the men board the *Andrea Gail* for what they hope will be a lucrative trip.

Gloucester's history in the fishing industry traces back to the 1600s, especially cod and mackerel fishing. Over the past century, fishing has developed rapidly, especially with the advent of ice companies, which allow fresh fish to be quickly transported back to port instead of dried. The market for fresh fish also incentivizes faster, riskier trips and heavier competition among boats. Fishing has always been dangerous, too—the popular fishing ground of the Grand Banks is prone to heavy storms. Not only that, but fishing itself is perilous; a baiter can get accidentally hooked, for example, and pulled overboard before anyone can stop it.

Longline swordfishing became more popular in the 1960s and 1970s, and as fishing technology progressed, fish populations began to decline. In the 1980s, swordfishing began to be regulated more, and by the early 1990s, catch quotas were implemented. This meant that boats were essentially racing each other back to port before the year's quota was met and the fishing grounds were shut down for the season.

The first half of the *Andrea Gail*'s trip is fruitless, so Billy Tyne, feeling the urgency of the season's end, decides they'll try fishing off the Flemish Cap, east of Newfoundland and far away from the rest of the fleet. Finally, by mid-October, Billy begins to have better luck, and by October 24th, he's heading back to port with about 40,000 pounds of fish. For some reason, though, he chooses to cut across the tail of the Grand Banks instead of taking the more typical course between Nova Scotia and Sable Island.

Meanwhile, a sailboat called the *Satori* sets sail with owner Ray Leonard and crew Karen Stimpson and Sue Bylander. About this time, the National Weather Service begins to track an approaching convergence of storms—a hurricane from Bermuda, a Canadian cold front, and a Great Lakes nor'easter are on track to collide right over the Grand Banks. On October 28th, the last report anyone hears from Billy Tyne is, "She's comin' on boys, and she's comin' on strong." The following night, nobody can get through to the *Andrea Gail*.

A number of things could have befallen the *Andrea Gail*. She might have gotten flipped end over end by monstrous rogue waves, or she might simply have gotten inundated with water. In either case, the crew would have drowned within minutes.

By October 30th, Hurricane Grace and the Canadian high pressure system, spinning in opposite directions, have trapped the nor'easter between them, an effect called a retrograde which is only seen about once a century. Meteorologist Bob Case calls it "the perfect storm."

On October 29th, the *Satori* is getting hit badly. Karen Stimpson calls in a mayday, and the next day, a Coast Guard cutter called the *Tamaroa* arrives to make a rescue attempt. After several failed efforts, a rescue swimmer named Dave Moore helps each crew member into a lift basket dangling from a helicopter, and they all make it back to Boston alive. The same day, owner Bob Brown repeatedly fails to get through to the *Andrea Gail* and finally reports it to the Coast Guard as missing.

Around the same time, an Air Guard pararescue team—pilot Dave Ruvola, copilot Buschor, flight engineer Jim Mioli, and pararescue jumpers John Spillane and Rick Smith—is dispatched to help a sinking Japanese sailboat. They abort the perilous attempt, and, on their way back to Long Island and lacking an accurate weather forecast, they blunder directly into the massive storm. Unable to complete the necessary midair refueling in these conditions, Ruvola plans an intentional ditching. The Coast Guard airmen who'd just rescued the *Satori* crew are sent back out to help; the *Tamaroa* is also rerouted accordingly. The crew ditches in pitch darkness at 9:30 p.m.

John Spillane hits the Atlantic so hard and fast that he's knocked unconscious and wakes up badly injured. After a couple of hours, he makes his way painfully toward the strobe lights on the suits of Ruvola and Mioli, who'd also ditched successfully. With great difficulty and much danger to his own men, the *Tamaroa*'s Commander Brudnicki locates and rescues Buschor, then Ruvola, Mioli, and Spillane, who, from injuries and hypothermia, can barely hold onto the safety net. Rick Smith, however, is never found.

By nightfall on October 31st, 15 aircraft are searching desperately for the *Andrea Gail*. However, after about a week of

searching, all that's ever found are floating fuel barrels and an abandoned, unarmed EPIRB (a distress beacon) off Sable Island. Back in Gloucester, Chris Cotter and other fishermen's loved ones struggle to come to terms with the deaths—it's as if the men have simply disappeared. The following spring, Adam Randall, who'd walked off the job on the *Andrea Gail*, takes a job on a tuna longliner, the *Terri Lei*, which abruptly and mysteriously sinks off the coast of Charleston, South Carolina.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Bob Brown – Bob Brown is the owner of the Andrea Gail. Though Bob is respected as a self-made businessman, people in Gloucester have nicknamed him "Suicide Bob" because of his tendency to take risks while fishing, and he has become a controversial figure because of the risks he takes with other men's lives—even before the *Andrea Gail*, he lost crew members on the *Fair Wind* and the Hannah Boden. His wife, Susan, assists him on the business side of his work. After the **storm**, Bob writes a letter to the lost fishermen's family members, asking them to exonerate him financially.

Billy Tyne – Billy Tyne is the captain of the Andrea Gail, a role he took over from Charlie Reed. Billy is a Gloucester native. A divorced father of two, Billy is the rare fisherman who truly loves his work. His wife, Jodi, ultimately divorces him over this, sensing that the pattern of their life will always be determined by Billy's fishing. Billy has a tendency to push his limits while at sea, sometimes needing help or supplies from other boats. His final actions on the Andrea Gail are a mystery; though his radio transmissions suggest that he was aware of the **storm**, he took an unusual northwesterly route back home after doing some extra fishing on the Flemish Cap, and he didn't arm the ship's distress beacon. Linda Greenlaw recalls his last radio transmission as "She's comin' on boys, and she's comin' on strong."

Bobby Shatford – Bobby Shatford is a crew member on the Andrea Gail. Raised by his mother, Ethel, Bobby grew up in Gloucester, Massachusetts. At the time of the boat's last voyage, he is engaged to Chris Cotter. He is separated from his ex-wife and has two children from that marriage. After being taken to court for non-payment of child support, he decided to take a job on the *Andrea Gail* in order to help pay off his debts. He is prone to excessive drinking and occasional fights. He has last-minute misgivings about the trip but, needing money, he decides to go. During the **storm**, he disappears along with the rest of the crew.

Christina (Chris) Cotter – Chris Cotter is Bobby Shatford's fiancée. She is in her early 40s when *The Perfect Storm* is set. She is divorced, with three children from a previous marriage. Chris suffers great anxiety over Bobby's fishing trips and often drinks to help herself cope with his long absences. Before she knows about the **storm**, she dreams of his death.

Dale Murphy (Murph) – Murph is a crew member on the Andrea Gail. He is 30 years old and from Bradenton Beach, Florida. His ex-wife is Debra, and he dotes on his three-year-old son, Dale. Buying his son toys is one of the last things he does before setting sail on the *Andrea Gail*'s last voyage. He disappears along with the rest of the crew during the **storm**.

Alfred Pierre – Alfred Pierre is a crew member on the *Andrea Gail*. The ship's only black crew member, he was originally from Jamaica and lived in New York City. Pierre was shy and not well known around Gloucester, but seemed to be well liked. He had a girlfriend in Maine. He disappears along with the rest of the crew during the **storm**.

Linda Greenlaw – Linda is the captain of the Hannah Boden, the Andrea Gail's sister boat, which is also owned by Bob Brown. Linda is a Colby College graduate, one of the few female captains in the fishing industry, and, according to Junger, one of the best captains overall on the East Coast.

Albert Johnston – When *The Perfect Storm* is set, Johnston is the 36-year-old captain of the swordfishing boat called the *Mary T*. Johnston has been fishing since he was a teenager, monitors weather conditions closely, and is less inclined to risk-taking than some of his peers. Junger draws on some of Johnston's insights and experiences in considering what the Andrea Gail's last hours may have been like.

Karen Stimpson – Karen Stimpson is a 42-year-old experienced sailor who, with her friend Sue Bylander, is hired by Ray Leonard to crew the sailboat *Satori*'s trip to Bermuda. She fights to keep the Satori afloat before calling in a mayday, and she comes to terms with the likelihood of her death before ultimately being rescued by Dave Moore of the Coast Guard. She defends Leonard's stubbornness about being rescued, understanding his attachment to his boat.

Sue Bylander – Sue Bylander is a 38-year-old experienced sailor who, with her friend Karen Stimpson, is hired by Ray Leonard to crew the sailboat *Satori*'s trip to Bermuda. She helps Stimpson fight to keep the boat afloat and prepares a survival bag before they're forced to abandon ship and are rescued by Dave Moore.

Dave Ruvola – Dave Ruvola is an Air National Guard helicopter pilot. He pilots the H-60 helicopter which goes down after a botched refueling attempt during the **storm**. He courageously ditches the helicopter over the Atlantic and manages to survive until the *Tamaroa* arrives to rescue him and his crew, including Mioli, Spillane, and Buschor.

John Spillane – John Spillane is a highly trained Air National Guard pararescue jumper who ditches from Dave Ruvola's doomed helicopter following an aborted rescue attempt. Despite severe internal and external injuries from his jump into

the ocean, he manages to swim hours to rejoin his colleagues and is finally rescued by the *Tamaroa*.

Rick Smith – With John Spillane, Rick Smith is a highly trained Air National Guard pararescue jumper who presumably ditches from Dave Ruvola's helicopter, but his body is never recovered. He leaves behind a wife, Marianne. Rick is so renowned for his survival skills that people have a difficult time believing he could have died; it's speculated that he most likely drowned after striking the ocean and falling unconscious during the ditching.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Sebastian Junger – Sebastian Junger is the author of *The Perfect Storm*. He became interested in the **storm** after witnessing its damage firsthand and reading a newspaper report about the purported loss of the Andrea Gail.

Ethel Shatford – Ethel Shatford is Bobby Shatford's mother. She raised six children in Gloucester and has worked as the Crow's Nest's daytime bartender since 1980. She takes a motherly role toward the young fishermen and others who frequent the Crow's Nest and don't have homes or families of their own.

Bugsy Moran – Bugsy Moran is a crew member on the Andrea Gail. He has long hair and a crazy reputation in Gloucester. He disappears along with the rest of the crew during the **storm**.

Adam Randall – Adam Randall is a fisherman who backs out of the Andrea Gail's final voyage at the last minute. Sully replaces him. Randall ends up dying in the mysterious sinking of the *Terri Lei* the following spring.

David (Sully) Sullivan – Sully is a crew member on the *Andrea Gail*. He replaces Adam Randall after Randall backs out of the Andrew Gail's last voyage. He was a longtime friend of Bobby's. He disappears along with the rest of the crew during the **storm**.

Charlie Reed – Charlie Reed is the former captain of the *Andrea Gail*. Like Billy Tyne, he genuinely loved being on the ocean.

Charlie Johnson – Charlie Johnson is the captain of the swordfishing boat called the *Seneca*. He recalls feeling concerned when Billy Tyne reported to him that the Andrea Gail took a long time to recover from a rogue wave.

Tommy Barrie – Tommy Barrie is the captain of the *Allison*. His wife, Kimberly, is interviewed on the news during the **storm**.

Bob Case – Bob Case is a meteorologist who works for the National Weather Service in Boston. He is credited by Junger with initially referring to the **storm** as "the perfect storm."

Ray Leonard – Ray Leonard is the owner of the *Satori* who hires Stimpson and Bylander to crew the *Satori* during his trip to Bermuda. When the Satori goes down during the **storm**, Leonard is utterly distraught and practically has to be dragged aboard the rescue helicopter.

Graham Buschor – Graham Buschor is Dave Ruvola's copilot on the H-60 Air National Guard helicopter which goes down after a botched refueling attempt during the **storm**. Apparently the least badly injured after the ditching, Buschor is the first of the pararescue crew to be recovered by the *Tamaroa*.

Jim Mioli – Jim Mioli is an Air National Guard flight engineer on the helicopter piloted by Dave Ruvola. After the helicopter's planned ditching, Mioli manages to survive in the Atlantic despite becoming hypothermic and is finally rescued by the *Tamaroa*.

Dave Moore – Dave Moore is a Coast Guard rescue swimmer who saves the lives of Karen Stimpson, Sue Bylander, and Ray Leonard from the sinking *Satori*.

Ernie Hazard – Ernie Hazard is a machinist on Bob Brown's *Fair Wind* who cut himself adrift when the boat began to sink and survived for two days on the open sea.

Mary Anne – Mary Anne is Bobby Shatford's sister and Ethel's daughter. She's been critical of his drinking but loves Bobby dearly.

Judith Reeves – Judith Reeves is a Canadian observer aboard the *Eishin Maru* who was asked to broadcast the Japanese-speaking crew's mayday message.

Commander Brudnicki – Commander Brudnicki is the Commander of the *Tamaroa* who oversees the rescue of the pararescue crew of Ruvola, Buschor, Spillane, and Mioli from the Atlantic.

Jodi Tyne – Jodi Tyne is Billy Tyne's ex-wife, who'd divorced him over his obsession with fishing, knowing it would always dictate their lives and relationship.

Debra – Debra is Murph's ex-wife and mother of his son, Dale, Jr.

Kimberly Barrie – Kimberly Barrie is Tommy Barrie's wife. After being interviewed on the news during the **storm**, she is bombarded with calls from other worried wives.

Susan Brown – Susan Brown is Bob Brown's wife. She tells Chris Cotter when the Andrea Gail goes missing.

Marianne Smith – Marianne Smith is the widow of pararescue jumper Rick Smith, who was lost at sea during the **storm**.

TERMS

EPIRB – This acronym stands for Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon. The EPIRB is mounted on a boat's deck and, when set to the "armed" position, can be triggered by water to send a distress signal back to shore via radar.

Longliner – Longliner is another term for a sword boat or other fishing boat that sets out long lines of bait that are hauled back

daily.

Andrea Gail – The *Andrea Gail* is the Gloucester swordfishing boat, or longliner, that occupies the book's central drama. It is owned by **Bob Brown**, captained by **Billy Tyne**, and crewed by **Bobby Shatford**, **Bugsy Moran**, **Dale Murphy**, **Alfred Pierre**, and **David Sullivan**. It is sunk in the "perfect storm" of October, 1991.

Georges Bank – Georges Bank is a dangerous fishing ground located about 180 miles east of Cape Cod. Frequently fished in the early days of Gloucester's fishing industry, its popularity has given way to the Grand Banks by the time of *The Perfect Storm*.

Grand Banks – The Grand Banks are a biologically rich, storm-prone fishing ground located 1200 miles from Gloucester, Massachusetts, and east of Newfoundland. The Grand Banks were the Andrea Gail's destination and the site of the storm that led to her sinking.

Hannah Boden – The *Hannah Boden* is the Andrea Gail's sister ship, which is also owned by **Bob Brown**. It's captained by **Linda Greenlaw**.

THEMES

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MONEY AND THE FISHING INDUSTRY

The Perfect Storm is a nonfiction account of fishermen and their loved ones in Gloucester, Massachusetts—a coastal town sustained for centuries by the fishing industry—in the autumn of 1991. Among other fishing boats described in the book, the *Andrea Gail* is Sebastian Junger's special focus—a small swordfishing boat that regularly goes out to sea for about 30 days at a time. As Junger describes it, the main draw of a fishing career is that even a crewman, doing menial but dangerous tasks, can make a lot of money on a single trip. This possibility is attractive to men like the crew of the *Andrea Gail* who need cash and don't see many other options in their lives. Occasionally, the risk pays off handsomely. As a result, people sometimes get caught in a cycle of big payoffs, overspending, and dead-end, dangerous work. At worst, the financial interests of ships' owners—those who often assume the least physical risk—prevail over everything else, including crew wellbeing. By exploring the various financial incentives at work in the fishing industry, Junger argues that the most vulnerable people in the industry are the ones who assume the costliest risk.

Junger suggests that, given other options, most people probably wouldn't choose to fish. There's a difference between those who fish for the love of it and those who do it primarily for the money (which, according to Junger, is most people who fish). One captain, Charlie Reed, speaks rapturously of the refreshing solitude of the wide-open ocean and the courtesy the entire town of Gloucester affords him as "Cap," but this romantic outlook isn't typical. Junger suggests that those who *aren't* well-paid skippers have a different experience: "Most deckhands have precious little affection for the business [...] fishing is a brutal, dead-end job that they try to get clear of as fast as possible. At memorial services in Gloucester people are always saying things like, 'Fishing was his life,' or 'He died doing what he loved,' but by and large those sentiments are to comfort the living. By and large, young men from Gloucester find themselves at sea because they're broke and need money fast." In other words, fishing isn't a romantic pursuit for most people—it's a risky venture undertaken by those who don't have many other options.

Fishing is a worthwhile risk for some, but there are trade-offs. For one thing, fishing is an unpredictably lucrative job: "A longliner might pull up ten or twenty swordfish on a good day, one ton of meat. The most Bob Brown [owner of both the *Andrea Gail* and its sister boat the *Hannah Boden*] has ever heard of anyone catching was five tons a day for seven days—70,000 pounds of fish. That was on the *Hannah Boden* in the mid-eighties. The lowest crew member made ten thousand dollars. That's why people fish; that's why they spend ten months a year inside seventy feet of steel plate." A haul like the *Hannah Boden*'s 35 tons doesn't happen very often. The point is, though, that it *could* happen, and it could make somebody rich quick. That tantalizing possibility is what keeps fishermen coming back to such a dangerous job season after season.

However, even an unexpected windfall can still keep fishermen in poverty. When euphoric after a successful fishing trip, fishermen are known for compulsive spending: "A swordfisherman off a month at sea is a small typhoon of cash. He cannot get rid of the stuff fast enough. He buys lottery tickets fifty at a time and passes them around the bar. If anything hits he buys fifty more plus drinks for the house. [...] The money is pushed around the bartop like dirty playing cards, and by closing time a week's worth of pay may well have been spent. For some, acting like the money means nothing is the only compensation for what it actually must mean." Junger's point is that fishermen can become trapped in a cycle of cathartic spending that lands them back in the needy position they started out in. Fishing offers a strong financial incentive, but even on the rare occasions that it pays off, it triggers other financial risks that impact those with the most to lose.

Fishing's biggest risk is loss of life—and when that happens, their family members are generally left with nothing. After the *Andrea Gail* sinks in late October's once-a-century **storm**, killing

all aboard, the fishermen's family members have to fight for any compensation: "Within weeks of the tragedy families of the dead men get a letter from Bob Brown asking them to exonerate him from responsibility. [...] For several of the bereaved [...] this is the only letter they get from Bob Brown [...] protecting himself from future legalities. [...] They see Bob 'Suicide' Brown as a businessman who has made hundreds of thousands of dollars off men like their husbands." It's never proven that Bob Brown's maintenance of the *Andrea Gail* was negligent or contributed to its loss in any way, but the bereaved receive small settlements. In any case, there is nothing to show, financial or otherwise, for the terrible risk that its crew undertook. The one who stood to gain the most financially—the boat's owner—assumes the least risk and walks away with the least harm overall, while those who assumed the most risk, and those whom they loved, pay the steepest price. Junger suggests that this is typical of the fishing industry and that there will always be people willing to assume those risks, as well as those who will exploit them. While Junger doesn't propose any solution to this inequality, he implies that to some degree it's embedded in human nature, especially in a society that's so much driven by financial profit.

DANGER, HUMAN FRAILTY, AND DEATH

In the fall of 1991, the *Andrea Gail*, along with a number of other vessels, winds up caught in a "perfect **storm**"—when a hurricane off of Bermuda, a Canadian cold front, and a Great Lakes storm all converge over the North Atlantic's Grand Banks, a popular fishing ground, at the same time. These three weather systems collide in an event only seen about once every century, imperiling every boat in their path. While this catastrophe serves as the book's central drama, it's an extreme example of the risk and danger that are always lurking in the fishing industry. Some of this danger is inherent in the task of fishing, given the constantly changing environment and the accompanying risks of working on deck. And when human factors are added in—given the limitations of human knowledge, and humans' sometimes arrogant refusal to acknowledge knowable dangers—the risk is multiplied. By emphasizing the manifold dangers of the fishing industry, Junger suggests that fishing itself is a "perfect storm" of risks and dangers that can sometimes be mitigated but can never be completely controlled.

The very nature of fishing is dangerous, given the task at hand and the unpredictable natural environment. Going into a fishing job, fishermen already know how dangerous the job is: "More people are killed on fishing boats, per capita, than in any other job in the United States. [Fisherman Albert Johnston] would be better off parachuting into forest fires or working as a cop in New York City than longlining off the Flemish Cap. [...] [Death is] there waiting for you in the middle of a storm or on the most cloudless summer day. Boom—the crew's looking the other way, the hook's got you, and suddenly you're down at the depth where swordfish feed." In other words, a person can be killed with no advance warning—even in the midst of flawless weather conditions. Even under the best of circumstances, the job is inherently deadly.

In addition, the ocean itself is perilous. No matter what precautions are taken, or how strongly built a ship might be, it's impossible to ensure that it will withstand everything the ocean might throw at it. The most soundly built ship can be flooded and sunk by what mariners call "'rogue waves' or 'freak seas.' Typically they are very steep and have an equally steep trough in front of them—a 'hole in the ocean' as some witnesses have described it. Ships cannot get their bows up fast enough, and the ensuing wave breaks their back. Maritime history is full of encounters with such waves." Technological advances can mitigate the risk of such encounters but never overcome it.

Human fallibility complicates things further, making the job even more dangerous. No matter how hard a captain might try to avoid dangerous conditions, there are too many different factors at play to be juggled perfectly. Junger explains how the *Andrea Gail* is two weeks out of sync with the rest of the New England swordfishing fleet: "Ultimately, one could blame some invisible contortion of the Gulf Stream for this: The contortion disrupts the swordfish, which adds another week or two to the trip, which places the *Andrea Gail* on the Flemish Cap when she should already be heading in. The circumstances that place a boat at a certain place at a certain time are so random that they can't even be catalogued, much less predicted, and a total of fifty or sixty more people—swordfishermen, mariners, sailors—are also converging on the storm grounds of the North Atlantic. Some of these people have been heading there, unavoidably, for months; others made a bad choice just a few days ago." A ship's fate is at the mercy of oceanographic factors, weather flukes, and human judgment calls at any given moment.

Hubris, however, is also a factor, as captains who've seen their share of dangerous conditions can fall into an attitude of denial that puts everyone at risk. Once this happens, "it's hard to know when to stop. Captains routinely overload their boats, ignore storm warnings, stow their life rafts in the wheelhouse, and disarm their emergency radio beacons. Coast Guard inspectors say that going down at sea is so unthinkable to many owner-captains that they don't even take basic precautions." This attitude, in turn, shapes the kind and level of preparations a captain will direct his crew to undertake when there's warning of, say, a big storm brewing. By the time an emergency is at hand, a negligent captain's hubris means that it might already be too late.

Ultimately, nobody knows what the *Andrea Gail*'s fate was, except that sometime on the night of October 28th, 1991, off of Canada's Sable Island, the ship encountered the heart of the

storm and was never heard from again. All that's recovered are some fuel barrels that were spotted by other fishermen on their way back to port—and an emergency beacon that was, mysteriously, never armed. This unsatisfying conclusion reinforces Junger's argument that ocean fishermen are ultimately at the mercy of larger-than-life forces that they can only attempt to control and whose power on some level remains a mystery.

FAMILY AND DOMESTIC STRIFE

Much of the drama of *The Perfect Storm* doesn't play out on the ocean but back home in the town of Gloucester, Massachusetts. Gloucester has a long history of fishermen who occupy a marginal role in the town, usually wandering in and out of bars because they don't have the time or inclination to maintain a stable home. Fishermen "find places that are second homes because a lot of them don't have real homes. […] 'It's a young man's game, a single man's game,'" as bartender and fisherman Bobby Shatford's mother, Ethel, sums it up. Those who do have conventional homes and families sometimes watch them strain and break under the tension of long months at sea. And when the worst happens and a fisherman dies at sea, the remoteness of the death means that the entire town finds closure difficult to attain. By exploring fishing's impact on those left at home, Junger argues that the fishing industry exacts a heavy societal toll by demanding that households and entire communities shoulder the fear and grief of a dangerous life at sea.

In the predominantly male world of fishing, the women left at home on the mainland face challenges of their own. Because their husbands are at sea for months at a time, fishermen's wives' lives are put on hold, and they often feel caught between their husbands' love for them and the seemingly irresistible draw of the sea: "'It was like I had one life and when he came back I had another,' says Jodi Tyne, who divorced [captain] Billy [Tyne] over it. '[…] it was never gonna change, he was never gonna quit fishin', though he said he wanted to. If he had to pick between me and the boat he picked the boat." The rhythm of a fisherman's life inevitably impacts the lives of those around him in ways that strain relationships.

When fishermen are gone, their wives, partners, or other family members are almost completely cut off from them. Fisherman's wife Kimberly Barrie describes what happens after she's interviewed on the news: "suddenly every fisherman's wife on the East coast is calling [her] to ask if she has any news about the fleet. She just repeats that she talked to her husband on the 29th, and that she could barely hear him. 'As soon as the **storms** move offshore the weather service stops tracking them,' she says. 'The fishermen's wives are left hanging, and they panic. The wives always panic.'" In the early 1990s, people are dependent on communication by telephone and the limits of television news, meaning that wives bear the ongoing strain of never knowing for sure if their husbands are okay.

Because deaths occur hundreds of miles from home, often under uncertain circumstances, it means that after a disaster occurs, it's all the more difficult for survivors to move on. Historically, the families of fishermen couldn't know if their loved ones had blown adrift somewhere and might wander back months or years later: "Missing dory crews could turn up at any time, and so there was never a point at which the families knew for sure they could grieve and get on with their lives. 'We saw a father go morning and evening to the hill-top which overlooked the ocean,' recorded the *Provincetown Advocate* after a terrible gale in 1841. 'And there seating himself, would watch for hours, scanning the distant horizon . . . for some speck on which to build a hope.'" Emotionally crushing in a day of even more limited technology, this unknowing has a modern analogue, too.

Even a modern catastrophe, like the disappearance of the *Andrea Gail*, requires people to believe, without evidence, that their loved ones are really dead. "If the men on the *Andrea Gail* had simply died, and their bodies were lying in state somewhere, their loved ones could make their goodbyes and get on with their lives. But they didn't die, they disappeared off the face of the earth and, strictly speaking, it's just a matter of faith that these men will never return […] The people of Gloucester must willfully extract these men from their lives and banish them to another world." In a way, the deaths of fishermen at sea make heavier demands on mourners than other kinds of deaths do.

As Junger summarizes, "Like a war or a great fire, the effects of a storm go rippling outward through webs of people for years, even generations. It breaches lives like coastlines and nothing is ever again the same." Gloucester is just one example of a community that's had to endure such damage not once, but over centuries. Without romanticizing their toughness or ignoring the dysfunctions that the town deals with, Junger implies that this damage inevitably shapes a community's psyche in far-reaching ways.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Throughout *The Perfect Storm*, Junger charts the growth of the North Atlantic fishing industry, which began soon after Europeans began sailing to what's now New England. This industry is continually evolving—in the design of fishing boats and gear, navigational advances, weather forecasting, and more. An advance in technology often leads to unforeseen problems in the environment or marketplace, which in turn leads to legislative or other changes shaping the industry in an ongoing cycle. Changes in technology especially affect the speed and efficiency with which fishermen do their work—and incentivize captains' decision-making in ways that can jeopardize both the natural

environment and human safety. Though Junger doesn't draw a clear conclusion about the fishing industry as a whole, he suggests that technology has always had an ambivalent impact on human lives and their natural environment, partly because technology, in turn, is more strongly driven by economic incentives than by anything else.

Technology drives the evolution of the fishing industry, in both good and bad ways, and in turn impacts the safety of fishermen themselves. Once ice companies began to proliferate in the mid-1800s, "The market for fresh fish changed fishing forever. No longer could schooner captains return home at their leisure with a hold full of salt cod; now it was all one big race. Several full schooners pulling into port at once could saturate the market and ruin the efforts of anyone following. […] Overloaded schooners built like racing sloops dashed home through fall gales […] Bad weather sank these elegant craft by the dozen, but a lot of people made a lot of money." Because the market for fresh fish, made possible by new technology, incentivized a fast return to port, captains were increasingly pressured to make unsafe decisions that endangered lives.

In the 20th century, after passing conservation legislation to stop foreign fishermen—such as huge Russian factory ships—from depleting American waters, the United States fishing industry quickly developed technology that had a similarly devastating effect. "After the passage of the Magnuson Act, American fishermen could […] set themselves up for business in quarter-million dollar steel boats. […] Better equipment resulted in such huge takes that prices dropped and fishermen had to resort to more and more devastating methods just to keep up. Draggers raked the bottom so hard that they actually levelled outcrops and filled in valleys," devastating fish habitats. As fishermen developed the capability to bring in huge catches, in other words, one of the results was environmental damage and corresponding damage to the industry itself.

One measure taken to address such environmental problems was the establishment of fishing quotas. In 1991, just before the events of the book, "the National Marine Fishery Service implemented a quota of 6.9 million pounds of dressed swordfish for U.S.-licensed sword boats, roughly two-thirds of the previous year's catch. […] as soon as the overall quota was met, the entire fishery was shut down. […] When the *Andrea Gail* left port on September 23, she was working under a quota for the first time in her life." One knock-on effect of quotas, then, was to add more pressure to fishing vessels to rush back to port with their catch before the season's quota was met. From something as rudimentary as the ability to freeze fish in the 19th century, to the unintentional side-effects of conservation efforts a century later, the industry constantly faces competing pressures. However, the most enduring one—the need to get fish to market as quickly as possible—doesn't change.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

STORMS

In the book, storms—and particularly the titular "perfect storm" of October 1991, in which the crew of the Andrea Gail and several others were lost at sea—symbolize the extreme danger and unpredictability of deep-sea fishing. The phrase "the perfect storm" can be used in a meteorological sense—literally referring to a bad storm—but it can also refer to any given situation in which several negative factors have combined, often in a way that's unlikely or unexpected. Indeed, just as the so-called perfect storm was a mix of several dangerous factors (a hurricane coming off of Bermuda, a cold front from Canada, and another storm from the Great Lakes, and jet stream irregularities), deep-sea fishing itself is a metaphorical perfect storm in its own right for several reasons. The ocean is powerful and deadly, weather conditions can be unpredictable, and human fallibility makes things even worse. No matter how experienced a captain is, it's impossible to juggle so many different factors affecting a fishing trip and to do so perfectly. On a similar note, pride and arrogance often make deep-sea fishing even more dangerous than it already is. As Bob Brown, a captain notorious for risk-taking, shows, captains often feel overconfident, overly optimistic, and overprepared. Much as the deadly storm was made up of several perfectly aligned, mutually reinforcing subsystems, the fishing industry likewise combines several parts that sustain a complex and unpredictable force: physical dangers, financial motivations, environmental risks, and technological factors, not to mention individual human strengths and weaknesses.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the W.W. Norton edition of *The Perfect Storm* published in 1997.

Georges Bank, 1896 Quotes

"On Georges Bank with our cable gone our rudder gone and leaking. Two men have been swept away and all hands have been given up as our cable is gone and our rudder is gone. The one that picks this up let it be known. God have mercy on us."

The note was from the *Falcon*, a boat that had set sail from Gloucester the year before. She hadn't been heard from since.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

In 1896, a mackerel boat that was fishing on Georges Bank, some 200 miles off the coast of Cape Cod, discovered a message in a bottle. This quote includes the text of the note enclosed in the bottle. It turned out that the note was written by a member of the *Falcon*, a fishing boat that had disappeared the previous year, in the faint hope that another human being would someday recover it and report what had become of the lost ship. Junger pointedly opens *The Perfect Storm* with this quote in order to show how dangerous the North Atlantic is to any fishing boat. Because the *Falcon* was lost almost 100 years before the *Andrea Gail*—the modern fishing boat featured in this book—the quote also suggests that over the past century, not much has changed for New England fishermen. Even if technology has advanced, in other words, a modern boat's crew is still ultimately at the mercy of the sea and the unpredictable violence of the weather—making them no better off, in that respect, than their 19th-century counterparts.

Gloucester, Mass., 1991 Quotes

❝ […] from now on his life would unfold in brutally short bursts between long stretches at sea, and all he'd have to tide him over would be photos taped to a wall and maybe a letter in a seabag. And if it was hard on the men, it was even harder on the women. "It was like I had one life and when he came back I had another," says Jodi Tyne, who divorced Billy over it. "I did it for a long time and I just got tired of it, it was never gonna change, he was never gonna quit fishin', though he said he wanted to. If he had to pick between me and the boat he picked the boat."

Related Characters: Jodi Tyne (speaker), Bobby Shatford, Billy Tyne

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

In describing the difficulties faced by fishermen like Bobby Shatford—going to sea for months at a time, with only a few days of rest in between—Junger also pays attention to the challenges endured by their loved ones back home, particularly wives and girlfriends. In fact, he portrays the women as shouldering the tougher burdens, in some respects. Here Junger quotes the ex-wife of the *Andrea Gail*'s captain, Billy Tyne, who explains that Billy's fishing career essentially ruined their marriage. In Jodi Tyne's opinion, when a wife competes with fishing for a husband's attention, the wife often loses out; fishing exerts a sort of unexplainable pull that she can't rival. While her husband is out working, she spends weeks alone, unsure of his welfare. And when he's home, she always lives with the knowledge that he's going back out. This quote shows how, for women like Jodi Tyne as well as Bobby Shatford's girlfriend Chris and many others, fishing isn't just a husband's or partner's job, but a burden that she must shoulder as well.

❝ Most deckhands have precious little affection for the business, though; for them, fishing is a brutal, dead-end job that they try to get clear of as fast as possible. At memorial services in Gloucester people are always saying things like, "Fishing was his life," or "He died doing what he loved," but by and large those sentiments are to comfort the living. By and large, young men from Gloucester find themselves at sea because they're broke and need money fast.

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

Junger explains that, although some men truly love fishing—especially captains like Billy Tyne, who garner community respect as well as bigger paychecks—most men just try to survive it. Fishing is a physically dangerous as well as mentally and emotionally demanding job. Junger suggests that most fishermen choose it because there's the possibility of a handsome payoff if a fishing trip goes well, not because of any inherent romance in the work. Indeed, he suggests that fishing crews bear the brunt of the risk and danger while enjoying a lesser share of the financial reward. When fishermen pay the ultimate price by dying at sea, their loved ones comfort themselves with the belief that the fisherman died enjoying the intrinsic rewards of his work. But Junger suggests that this is an illusion that people use to help themselves cope with the trauma of loss and that it's not reflective of reality. Ultimately, he argues that the fishing industry can trap vulnerable people in a dangerous life that takes a toll on families and entire communities.

For the families back home, dory-fishing gave rise to a new kind of hell. No longer was there just the grief of losing men at sea; now there was the agony of not knowing, as well. Missing dory crews could turn up at any time, and so there was never a point at which the families knew for sure they could grieve and get on with their lives. "We saw a father go morning and evening to the hill-top which overlooked the ocean," recorded the *Provincetown Advocate* after a terrible gale in 1841. "And there seating himself, would watch for hours, scanning the distant horizon . . . for some speck on which to build a hope."

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

Dory-fishing is a fishing technique that was developed in the 1800s. Codfishermen would row out from the main ship each day in small, open boats called dories. Then they would cast and haul back baited fishing lines from the dories. Dory-fishing was dangerous in all kinds of ways. For one thing, a fisherman could be thrown from the open boat by rough seas at any time. But, perhaps even more hauntingly, it was easy for a dory to drift from its mother ship in the heavy fogs that routinely covered the North Atlantic's Grand Banks. If the fishermen were lucky, their dory might drift to a spot where they could eventually find rescue—usually Newfoundland, but occasionally as far away as South America. This meant that a fisherman could make his way back home months after he'd initially gone missing—leaving his family in a state of terrible suspense from which they couldn't easily find relief, as the *Provincetown Advocate* quote illustrates. Though this quote describes events that took place in the 1840s, Junger uses it to illustrate grief that continued to haunt families in the 1990s, at the time he wrote. Though technology now allowed for more reliable communication, fishermen still died at sea in mysterious ways, meaning that their families still struggled to find closure, and that when their loved ones went to sea, they inevitably shouldered a heavy burden.

The market for fresh fish changed fishing forever. No longer could schooner captains return home at their leisure with a hold full of salt cod; now it was all one big race. Several full schooners pulling into port at once could saturate the market and ruin the efforts of anyone following. In the 1890s, one schooner had to dump 200 tons of halibut into Gloucester harbor because she'd been beaten into port by six other vessels. Overloaded schooners built like racing sloops dashed home through fall gales with every inch of canvas showing and their decks practically awash. Bad weather sank these elegant craft by the dozen, but a lot of people made a lot of money.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

This quote illustrates the impact of changing technology on the fishing industry. In the industry's earlier history, the main product was dried and salted cod, which didn't require fishermen to return to port in any particular hurry. When the advent of ice companies in the mid-1800s facilitated a market for fresh fish, however, the industry scrambled to adapt to new demand. Ice wouldn't preserve fish forever, and only so much fresh fish could be sold—meaning that boats now had to race each other back to port in order to sell off their catch before the market became overwhelmed. If they were too slow, it meant that their entire fishing trip might turn out to have been wasted, like the boat that had to dump a massive catch back into the ocean. The change in technology and market demand also meant that captains were incentivized to make foolhardy decisions—like overloading their boats despite the fact that this rendered their vessels less seaworthy in bad weather. Junger uses his historical narrative to suggest that the interplay between technological change, the market, and the unpredictability of nature has always overshadowed the fishing industry and that the challenges faced by Gloucester's swordfishing fleet in the 1990s was nothing new.

God's Country Quotes

A longliner might pull up ten or twenty swordfish on a good day, one ton of meat. The most Bob Brown has ever heard of anyone catching was five tons a day for seven days—70,000 pounds of fish. That was on the *Hannah Boden* in the mid-eighties. The lowest crew member made ten thousand dollars. That's why people fish; that's why they spend ten months a year inside seventy feet of steel plate.

Related Characters: Bob Brown

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes the attraction of swordfishing for many people. A single swordfishing trip could be incredibly lucrative, with tons of meat being hauled up each day. After the meat was sold back at port, the money would be split among the crew; though the boat owner (like Bob Brown, owner of the *Hannah Boden* and its sister boat the *Andrea Gail*) would take home the most cash, even the lowest-ranked deckhand stood to make a small fortune from such a trip. The example of the *Hannah Boden* raking in 35 tons of fish is an example of such a rewarding trip. However, it's worth noting that a catch like the *Hannah Boden*'s is the stuff of legend—Brown remembers this especially profitable trip years later, but fishing trips don't always yield exceptional results like this. Yet the possibility that they *might* be this lucrative is what draws people back to such a dangerous and demanding job year after year. Though he doesn't say so directly, Junger implies that fishing is a big gamble that can become addictive for financially vulnerable people.

The Flemish Cap Quotes

❝ Having chased out the competition, America set about constructing an industry that could scrape Georges Bank just as bare as any Russian factory ship. […] Within three years of Magnuson, the New England fleet had doubled to 1,300 boats. Better equipment resulted in such huge takes that prices dropped and fishermen had to resort to more and more devastating methods just to keep up. Draggers raked the bottom so hard that they actually levelled outcrops and filled in valleys—the very habitats where fish thrived.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

This quote provides an example of the impact of technological advancements and government interference on the fishing industry. As longline fishing became more common and successful in the 1960s and 1970s, the United States Marine Fisheries Service grew concerned about overfishing in the North Atlantic, and the depleting of the swordfish population. To combat this, the 1976 Magnuson Act extended national sovereignty 200 miles from U.S. shores, meaning that massive Russian factory ships were kicked out. However, this essentially meant that U.S. fishermen just worked harder, developing technology and methods that allowed them to overfish just as effectively in the vacuum the foreign fleets left behind. This quote illustrates the strong financial incentive that often overrides safe and environmentally conscious fishing practices, as Junger hints throughout the book. However, it's also worth noting that, in the late 1990s—after the book's publication— a government ban on commercial swordfishing resulted in the gradual repopulation of North Atlantic swordfish to healthy levels.

❝ The following year the National Marine Fishery Service implemented a quota of 6.9 million pounds of dressed swordfish for U.S.-licensed sword boats, roughly two-thirds of the previous year's catch. Every U.S.-licensed boat had to report their catch when they arrived back in port, and as soon as the overall quota was met, the entire fishery was shut down. […] The result was that not only were fishing boats now racing the season, they were racing each other. When the *Andrea Gail* left port on September 23, she was working under a quota for the first time in her life.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

Between the 1970s and 1990s, when the events of *The Perfect Storm* took place, the U.S. government took various measures to protect the waning North Atlantic swordfish population. One of the major steps included limiting how many swordfish could be caught in a single season. In 1990, this meant that the entire New England swordfishing fleet could catch just under 7 million pounds of fish in a year, but that as soon as the number was reached, the fishing grounds would be off limits to everyone for the remainder of the season. This means that the competing boats of the swordfishing fleet were, in effect, forced to race one another back to port before the year's quota was fulfilled. Near the end of the 1991 swordfishing season, the *Andrea Gail* was facing this new reality for the first time. With this example of the impact of scientific insights and government action on the fishing industry, Junger suggests that the *Andrea Gail* was operating under unprecedented pressures during its final voyage. Though he avoids straightforward

assertions throughout the book, Junger leaves the reader to draw conclusions as to whether the *Andrea Gail* took unnecessary risks in the hope of bringing in a big catch before the year's quota was met.

> More people are killed on fishing boats, per capita, than in any other job in the United States. Johnston would be better off parachuting into forest fires or working as a cop in New York City than longlining off the Flemish Cap. Johnston knows many fishermen who have died and more than he can count who have come horribly close. It's there waiting for you in the middle of a storm or on the most cloudless summer day. Boom—the crew's looking the other way, the hook's got you, and suddenly you're down at the depth where swordfish feed.

Related Characters: Albert Johnston

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 70

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the book, Junger tells the stories of other members of the Gloucester swordfishing fleet, in order to give other fishermen's perspectives on their own work as well as on the fate of the *Andrea Gail*. One of these is Albert Johnston, a career fisherman and captain of the *Mary T*. He uses Johnston as an example of a fisherman who has been around for long enough and is sufficiently established in his career that he no longer feels the need to push his luck when he's out on the ocean—in contrast, perhaps, to a captain like the Andrea Gail's *Billy Tyne*. Johnston's attitude is also shaped by the fact that he's watched plenty of friends die, or come close to it. For instance, as described here, a fisherman can get snagged on the hooks of the weighted longline and be pulled overboard faster than he can call for help. From this perspective, it takes far less than a "perfect storm" to kill a person—death could be waiting for someone on a day of seemingly perfect conditions. This quote suggests that fishing is a job in which chance and luck play a big role, and that nobody can be assured of safety at all times, no matter how carefully they assess the risk.

> The circumstances that place a boat at a certain place at a certain time are so random that they can't even be catalogued, much less predicted, and a total of fifty or sixty more people—swordfishermen, mariners, sailors—are also converging on the storm grounds of the North Atlantic. Some of these people have been heading there, unavoidably, for months; others made a bad choice just a few days ago.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

This quote sums up the huge role played by chance in the fishing industry. More than that, it suggests that there are few occupations that are shaped to such a degree both by the precision of science and the immeasurable nature of human intuition. By the end of October, meteorologists have begun to track a convergence of multiple storm fronts that's due to occur over the Grand Banks. A handful of boats will find themselves in the path of these storms. Some, sticking to their original schedule and route, will be able to dodge the worst; others, like the *Andrea Gail*, will diverge from their original plan, on a hunch that more fish could be caught elsewhere, and wind up in the storm's full fury. No matter how much technology advances, the unpredictability of quickly-changing weather forces, and the imprecision of the task of fishing, mean that a fishing trip could unfold in any number of unexpected ways, with life and death consequences.

> Around nightfall a Canadian weather map creaks out of the satellite fax. There's a hurricane off Bermuda, a cold front coming down off the Canadian Shield and a storm brewing over the Great Lakes. They're all heading for the Grand Banks. A few minutes after the fax, Linda Greenlaw calls.
>
> *Billy, you seen the chart?* she asks.
>
> *Yeah I saw it*, he says.
>
> *What do you think?*
>
> *Looks like it's gonna be wicked.*

Related Characters: Linda Greenlaw, Billy Tyne (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

This quote captures both a description of the storm that downed the *Andrea Gail* and some of Billy Tyne's last words, as remembered by fellow sword boat captain Linda Greenlaw. It shows that Billy was well aware of the conditions into which he was heading. Frustratingly, of course, it doesn't reveal much of Billy's mindset or offer any clue as to his next actions; the last hours and ultimate fate of the *Andrea Gail* remain a mystery. All that is known for sure is that a collision of three storm systems created some of the deadliest, most chaotic seas on record, and that Billy's westward path—taking him north toward Sable Island for reasons never explained to the rest of the fleet—landed him right in the midst of this so-called "perfect storm." This quote also highlights the frailty of human beings even when scientific knowledge, like storm forecasts, is available to them. There's no guarantee that people will have the information they need in sufficient time to act—or that they'll make the right choices when they do.

The Barrel of the Gun Quotes

❝ Once you're in the denial business, though, it's hard to know when to stop. Captains routinely overload their boats, ignore storm warnings, stow their life rafts in the wheelhouse, and disarm their emergency radio beacons. Coast Guard inspectors say that going down at sea is so unthinkable to many owner-captains that they don't even take basic precautions.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Junger describes some of the dynamics that influence a captain's choices when dealing with adverse conditions at sea. According to him, even a seasoned captain might make decisions that seem objectively foolish—putting himself and his crew in a much more dangerous position when a simple precaution might have been lifesaving. Not all of these questionable decisions have to do, necessarily, with the drive to preserve financial gains. Sometimes, it's just that a captain has so much confidence in his ability to guide his ship safely back to port—and has survived danger on so many past occasions—that he disregards warning signs and assumes he'll be able to overcome whatever the sea throws at him yet again. Junger implies that this might have been Billy Tyne's situation on the *Andrea Gail*. No one can ever know for sure, because so little is known of the boat's final hours. Junger's point, however, is that human frailty includes the tendency to consider oneself invincible.

❝ After talking to Barrie, Billy picks up the microphone on his single sideband and issues one last message to the fleet: *She's comin' on boys, and she's comin' on strong*. The position he'd given Linda Greenlaw on the *Hannah Boden*— 44 north, 56.4 west—is a departure from his original heading. It appears to be more the heading of a man bound for Halifax, Nova Scotia, or maybe even Louisbourg, Cape Breton Island, than Gloucester, Massachusetts. [...] Whatever the reason, Billy changes course sometime before 6 PM and neglects to tell the rest of the fleet.

Related Characters: Billy Tyne (speaker), Tommy Barrie, Linda Greenlaw

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes the last known contact with *Andrea Gail* captain Billy Tyne. Two main things are notable about it. First, Billy was clearly aware that he was heading into perilous conditions, as his path took him directly into the convergence of storms that a meteorologist would later call "the perfect storm." Second, and more mysteriously, Billy was taking a counterintuitive route home and doesn't seem to have informed anyone of this fact. It's never understood whether Billy was intending to seek port on Nova Scotia for some reason or if there was some other explanation for this northwesterly course taking him away from Gloucester. Most likely, he was simply seeking less turbulent waters. Whatever the case, this is the last time anyone knew the *Andrea Gail*'s whereabouts for sure—showing that, in the unpredictable fishing industry, human beings are often at the mercy of natural forces that overpower their best efforts to predict and control.

> With all this catastrophe in his life Murph had two choices—decide either that he was blessed or that his death was only a matter of time. He decided it was only a matter of time. When he met his wife, Debra, he told her flat-out he wasn't going to live past thirty; she married him anyway. […] And a few weeks before signing onto the *Andrea Gail*, Murph had stopped by his parents' house in Bradenton for a somewhat unsettling goodbye. His mother reminded him that he needed to keep up on his life insurance policy—which included burial coverage—and he just shrugged. Mom, I wish you'd quit worryin' about burying me, he said. I'm going to die at sea.

Related Characters: Dale Murphy (Murph) (speaker), Debra

Related Themes:

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

Andrea Gail crewman Murph, just in his 30s, has led a dangerous life so far—on previous fishing trips, he got attacked by a shark, got hooked and almost dragged to his death, and was nearly crushed to death by an errant submarine. After all this, Murph assumed that, given his chosen line of work, he wasn't destined to live very long. His assumption turns out to be correct, and his rather prophetic comments to his mother are realized as well. This is an example of a melancholy undercurrent in *The Perfect Storm*—fishing sometimes attracts men who don't have much to lose, and once they're embedded in that life, there's a heightened risk that fishermen will succumb to the ever-present dangers of the job—one that they sometimes perceive ahead of time. And when they do so, their loved ones are often hurt in the process. Families are left with their sorrow and the inadequate closure that often accompanies loss at sea, as they often don't know exactly what happened to their loved one. Junger lets this undercurrent speak for itself, suggesting that fishing takes an oversized toll on the communities of which it's part.

> In a sense Billy's no longer at the helm, the conditions are, and all he can do is react. If danger can be seen in terms of a narrowing range of choices, Billy Tyne's choices have just racheted down a notch. A week ago he could have headed in early. A day ago he could have run north like Johnston. An hour ago he could have radioed to see if there were any other vessels around. Now the electrical noise has made the VHF practically useless, and the single sideband only works for long range. These aren't mistakes so much as an inability to see into the future. No one, not even the Weather Service, knows for sure what a storm's going to do.

Related Characters: Albert Johnston, Billy Tyne

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis

This quote provides an example of the vulnerability of a fisherman at sea, especially a captain upon whom the life and death of his crew ultimately depends. If Billy Tyne had had more advance notice of the storm that was bearing down in him, he would have had more options. But after a certain point, the storm is governing Billy's choices. As conditions grow more severe than predicted, it's already too late for Billy to outrun them. But Junger's point is that fishing doesn't just require wisdom; to be really safe, it would require a kind of infallibility. Storm conditions are constantly changing, and rapidly at that, so once things get severe on the open ocean, a captain often has to make the least bad choice of those available to him—even with advanced weather technology at hand. This was Billy Tyne's situation as he sailed right into the path of the storm. It's easy for survivors to speculate why Billy didn't reroute the *Andrea Gail*, or even communicate with the rest of the fleet during his last hours. But all they can assume is that Billy made the best choices he could under unforgiving conditions.

Graveyard of the Atlantic Quotes

The crew just racks out and watches videos. Everybody acknowledged this was the worst storm they'd ever been in—you can tell by the size of the waves, the motion of the boat, the noise, the crashing. There's always a point when you realize that you're in the middle of the ocean and if anything goes wrong, that's it. You see so much bad weather that you kind of get used to it. But then you see really bad weather. And that, you never get used to.

Related Characters: Albert Johnston (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Albert Johnston, captain of the sword boat the *Mary T*, describes what typically happened when his crew faced a severe storm at sea. On one hand, the crew handles such situations as best they can by acknowledging their helplessness and effectively tuning out, like Johnston's crew watching videos. On the other hand, he suggests, there is really no "normal" in such a scenario—a person can't truly get used to the sensory onslaught and terror of a severe storm. Johnston's description gives a good example of the near helplessness human beings face in such conditions, even when they have modern technology to help them predict and endure the weather. They are also perhaps the nearest people can get to the mindsets of the men aboard the Andrea Gail, who likely faced a similar combination of resignation and fear. Rather than simply speculating, Junger incorporates the insights of other experienced captains in order to give an informed guess about what can never be known for sure.

The *Andrea Gail* crew, all experienced fishermen, are probably trying to shrug it off as just another storm—they've been through this before, they'll go through it again, and at least they're not puking. Billy's undoubtedly working too hard at the helm to give drowning much thought. Ernie Hazard claims it was the last thing on his mind. "There was no conversation, just real business-like," he says of going down off Georges Bank. "You know, 'Let's just get this thing done.'" [...]

Be that as it may, certain realities still must come crashing in. At some point Tyne, Shatford, Sullivan, Moran, Murphy, and Pierre must realize there's no way off this boat.

Related Characters: Ernie Hazard (speaker), Alfred Pierre, Dale Murphy (Murph), Bugsy Moran, David (Sully) Sullivan, Bobby Shatford, Billy Tyne

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

Ernie Hazard, a fisherman on another of Bob Brown's boats, the *Fair Wind*, nearly died after his boat sank in the dangerous waters off Cape Cod known as Georges Bank. He ultimately survived by catching a life raft and drifting around the North Atlantic for days. Though it's the perspective of just one man, Hazard's experience gives another angle on what the men aboard the *Andrea Gail* might have gone through in their final hours. Fishermen would be used to working together to overcome problems encountered at sea, and most of the fishermen aboard the *Andrea Gail* would have faced their share of hazardous conditions before. When the Andrea Gail hit stormy waters, the men's reactions might have been much the same as Hazard's—instinctively tackling another set of problems in hopes of survival. As Junger points out with this quote, human nature is complex, and the fear and vulnerability on a sinking ship might be matched only by a calm, steadfast rising to the occasion.

In the old days it was known that most shipwrecks on Sable occurred because of errors in navigation; the westerly current was so strong that it could throw boats off by sixty to a hundred miles. If Billy has lost his electronics—his GPS, radar, and loran—he's effectively back in the old days. He'd have a chart of the Grand Banks on the chart table and would be estimating his position based on compass heading, forward speed, and wind conditions. This is called dead reckoning. Maybe the currents and the storm winds push Billy farther west than he realizes, and he gets into the shallows around Sable. [...] Or maybe their steering's gone and, like the *Eishin Maru*, they're just careening westward on the weather.

Related Characters: Billy Tyne

Related Themes:

Page Number: 134

Explanation and Analysis

Around the time that the storm hit, Billy Tyne was heading toward the remote, barren Sable Island, for reasons that no one is entirely sure of. The waters around Sable Island are notoriously difficult and dangerous to navigate. Because other boats were having trouble contacting the *Andrea Gail* by this time, it's also speculated that Billy had lost electrical power on the boat at this point in the storm. If that was the case, then Billy's peril was doubled—he wouldn't have had access to any of the navigation technology to which he was accustomed. While Billy was an experienced mariner and would have been able to navigate by dead reckoning, this would have been a significant obstacle under high-pressure circumstances. Even though the *Andrea Gail*'s fate is a matter of speculation, this quote brings out the vulnerability he and his crew undoubtedly experienced. Whether he was thrown back on 19th-century navigational techniques, or just fighting the deadly currents, Billy was at the mercy of his natural environment to an extremity that few people have experienced, and fewer have lived to describe.

The Zero-Moment Point Quotes

Whether the Andrea Gail rolls, pitch-poles, or gets driven down, she winds up, one way or another, in a position from which she cannot recover. [...] The transition from crisis to catastrophe is fast, probably under a minute, or someone would've tripped the EPIRB. [...] There's no time to put on survival suits or grab a life vest; the boat's moving through the most extreme motion of her life and there isn't even time to shout.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 140

Explanation and Analysis

Nobody knows what caused the *Andrea Gail* to go down, and this passage highlights how there are a number of possibilities. She could have gotten rolled over by a rogue wave, or she could have experienced what's known as "pitch-poling"—literally getting flipped end over end by the action of the waves. Perhaps the most likely possibility is that she simply got inundated by water. No matter which of these catastrophes occurred, they produced what's known as the "zero-moment point," from which a boat can't regain her bearings. The fact that the boat's EPIRB—an electronic distress bulletin—was never activated suggests that conditions deteriorated so quickly that the boat was overcome before anyone aboard had a chance to take countermeasures. This is fairly likely because, though boats rarely sink, it typically occurs rapidly once the process begins. This quote underscores the *Andrea Gail*'s helplessness against the century's worst storm; it's possible that the doomed crew had little warning of the end.

The body could be likened to a crew that resorts to increasingly desperate measures to keep their vessel afloat. Eventually the last wire has shorted out, the last bit of decking has settled under the water. Tyne, Pierre, Sullivan, Moran, Murphy, and Shatford are dead.

Related Characters: David (Sully) Sullivan, Alfred Pierre, Dale Murphy (Murph), Bugsy Moran, Bobby Shatford, Billy Tyne

Related Themes:

Page Number: 146

Explanation and Analysis

Though nobody knows the exact circumstances of the *Andrea Gail*'s sinking, Junger takes time to describe the process of drowning in order to give a sense of the men's final moments. In the vast majority of drowning cases, a person's lungs become filled with water, their bloodstream can no longer get oxygen, and their heartbeat becomes erratic until it ceases altogether. Even after this point, though, the brain remains alive, the central nervous system fighting to circulate messages. In an attempt to preserve oxygen and prolong the person's life, the brain slows down

the body's metabolic processes. Depending on the water temperature, a person might unconsciously cling to life for 15 or 20 minutes before brain activity ceases entirely, and the individual dies. Junger draws a comparison between a drowning person and a crew's efforts to keep a sinking boat afloat. In both cases, there are fewer and fewer options available, but life keeps fighting to assert itself until there is no hope left.

The World of the Living Quotes

"By October 30th, the Sable Island storm is firmly imbedded between the remnants of Hurricane Grace and the Canadian high. [...] These two systems function like huge gears that catch the storm between their teeth and extrude it westward. This is called a retrograde; it's an act of meteorological defiance that might happen in a major storm only every hundred years or so. [...] Meteorologists see perfection in strange things, and the meshing of three completely independent weather systems to form a hundred-year event is one of them. My God, thought Case, this is the perfect storm.

Related Characters: Bob Case (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes the weather phenomenon after which the book is named: the so-called "perfect storm." Even if one doesn't fully understand the scientific forces at work, it's easy enough to understand why this storm was a once-a-century event. In addition to the alignment of three separate storm systems, the storm's westward trajectory was highly unusual. Normally, weather systems are swept eastward by the jet stream, but the sheer force of Hurricane Grace helped force this storm from the North Atlantic back toward New England—catching the *Andrea Gail* and a few other unfortunate sailors in its path before crashing into the coast. Meteorologist Bob Case described it as "perfect" in the sense that one could hardly have designed such an alignment, yet it occurred in a freak natural event. Because the convergence of storms didn't receive another name, it was colloquially referred to as "the perfect storm" (or simply the Halloween storm) for some time thereafter.

"I was in a corner and I covered myself with soft things," says Stimpson, "and with a flashlight I took about ten minutes and wrote some goodbyes and stuck it in a ziplock bag and put it in my clothing. That was the lowest point. [...] But it's a strange thing. There was no sentiment there, no time for fear. [...] It was a grim sense of reality, a scrambling to figure out what to do next, a determination to stay alive and keep other people alive, and an awareness of the dark noisy slamming of the boat. But it wasn't a terror beyond words. I just had an overwhelming sense of knowing we weren't going to make it."

Related Characters: Ray Leonard, Sue Bylander, Karen Stimpson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

As he describes the experiences of other storm-tossed boats for comparison with the *Andrea Gail*, Junger focuses particularly on the *Satori*, a sailboat belonging to Ray Leonard and crewed by part-time sailors Karen Stimpson and Sue Bylander. Here Stimpson recalls the moment she realized that she wasn't likely to make it off the Satori alive; she'd just called in a mayday, and Bylander realized that the life raft had blown away, meaning they couldn't abandon ship if they wanted to. Even at what she describes as her lowest point, Stimpson's drive for survival was the most striking thing about this moment. Even as she wrote down her goodbyes, the determination to do whatever possible to stay alive is what stuck out to her in retrospect. This suggests that even in the most deadly moments of a person's life, an awareness of the goodness of life—and the desire to hang onto it—stands out as much as the awareness of one's mortality. Perhaps this realism and hope remained with the doomed men on the *Andrea Gail*, too.

"When I got up into the helicopter I remember everyone looking in my and Sue's faces to make sure we were okay," says Stimpson. "I remember the intensity, it really struck me. [...] They'd take us by the shoulders and look us in the eyes and say, 'I'm so glad you're alive, we were with you last night, we prayed for you. [...] When you're on the rescuing side you're very aware of life and death, and when you're on the rescued side, you just have a sort of numb awareness. At some point I stopped seeing the risk clearly, and it just became an amalgam of experience and observation."

Related Characters: Ray Leonard, Sue Bylander, Karen

Stimpson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Karen Stimpson gives another perspective on her near-death experience of escaping the sinking *Satori*. She describes the experience of jumping overboard and being helped by a rescue swimmer into a helicopter's lift basket, and then seeing the emotional reactions of her rescuers once she was safely aboard. By this time, after hours of tension and wondering if there was any realistic hope of rescue, Stimpson was no longer filled with fear. Instead, she took in the experience with a kind of detachment that contrasted with the charged emotions of the rescue crew. Though Stimpson later felt profound gratitude for her survival as well as recalling the traumatic memories of the ordeal, her "numb awareness" seems to have been an asset at the time—a survival tool rather like the "let's get it done" attitude that Ernie Hazard describes his crew exhibiting when they were sinking off Georges Bank. It shows the resilience and strength of human beings even in the face of death.

Into the Abyss Quotes

❝ A reporter from News Channel Five calls Tommie Barrie's wife, Kimberly, and asks her about the *Allison*. Kimberly answers that she talked to her husband the night before by single sideband and that, although she could barely hear him, he seemed to be fine. Channel Five broadcasts that tidbit on the evening news, and suddenly every fisherman's wife on the East coast is calling Kimberly Barrie to ask if she has any news about the fleet. She just repeats that she talked to her husband on the 29th, and that she could barely hear him. "As soon as the storms move offshore the weather service stops tracking them," she says "The fishermen's wives are left hanging, and they panic. The wives always panic."

Related Characters: Kimberly Barrie (speaker), Tommy Barrie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 170

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes what happened when the news media started to get wind of the possibility that a Gloucester boat may have gone down at sea. When Kimberly Barrie appeared on the news about a brief call with her husband, she was soon bombarded with calls from anxious fellow wives desperate for information. It's another example of the tremendous strain carried by fishermen's loved ones—spending a large amount of their time waiting and wondering. From a historical perspective, this quote also serves as a kind of retrospective on a world before internet access was common. In the early 1990s, it was much harder for a spouse to stay in contact with a loved one at sea, so television news was often the only way to track what might be happening out at sea—but of course the news didn't typically cover offshore weather. It's easy to see how a wife would be "left hanging" and prone to panic.

The Dreams of the Dead Quotes

❝ And then, on the afternoon of November 5th, an EPIRB washes up on Sable Island. […] Like the bottled note thrown overboard from the schooner *Falcon* a century ago, the odds of something as small as an EPIRB winding up in human hands are absurdly small. And the odds of Billy Tyne disarming his EPIRB—there's no reason to, it wouldn't even save batteries—are even smaller. Bob Brown, Linda Greenlaw, Charlie Reed, no one who knows Billy can explain it.

Related Characters: Charlie Reed, Linda Greenlaw, Bob Brown, Billy Tyne

Related Themes:

Page Number: 211

Explanation and Analysis

This quote, describing one of the few scattered remnants of the *Andrea Gail* to wash ashore, helps bring *The Perfect Storm* full circle. At the beginning of the book, Junger described the discovery of the *Falcon*'s message in a bottle, flung into the sea at the last desperate moment. At the end, the *Andrea Gail*'s electronic beacon is found. Ironically, however, the EPIRB is, if anything, less revealing of the truth. When the bottle was found, the enclosed message at least told something of the *Falcon*'s fate; the EPIRB, by contrast, only heightens the mystery, raising the question of why it wasn't armed by the boat's crew. The bemusement surrounding its discovery suggests that in some ways, modern technology can't answer every question, leaving people as frustratedly ignorant as they began. This is one of the undercurrents of *The Perfect Storm*—that no matter how time and technology advance, human beings ultimately remain at the mercy of

forces much bigger than they are.

If the men on the *Andrea Gail* had simply died, and their bodies were lying in state somewhere, their loved ones could make their goodbyes and get on with their lives. But they didn't die, they disappeared off the face of the earth and, strictly speaking, it's just a matter of faith that these men will never return. Such faith takes work, it takes effort. The people of Gloucester must willfully extract these men from their lives and banish them to another world.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 213

Explanation and Analysis

This quotes describes the struggle of those who lost loved ones on the *Andrea Gail*. Because the men's bodies were never recovered, and it was impossible to learn for sure what became of them, their families' grief was complicated. Their survivors must make an active effort, without concrete evidence, to internalize that the men will never come back. This sums up the theme of family strife explored throughout the book—Junger's argument that families and whole communities bear just as much a burden as those who face physical risks at sea. Thus this quote also hearkens back to the experience of the 19th-century father who repeatedly overlooked the sea, hoping for the reappearance of the son who'd gotten washed off the dory boat—because he could never know for sure that his son wasn't rescued, he was unable to accept the loss and grieve fully. Again, Junger hints that in some ways, human beings' life and death struggles have not greatly changed over the years.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

FOREWORD

In writing *The Perfect Storm*, Sebastian Junger wanted to create a piece of fact-based journalism. At the same time, he didn't want to bury the narrative underneath excessive technical details or uncertain conjectures. Ultimately, because he couldn't know for certain what happened aboard the Andrea Gail, he interviewed people who'd survived similar situations.

The Perfect Storm *is a piece of journalistic nonfiction. Though Junger doesn't explicitly name the fate of fishing boat* Andrea Gail *at this point—he will allow dramatic tension to build throughout the narrative—it's clear from the beginning that the story will involve a fight for survival and, ultimately, loss of human life.*

Because of Junger's attempt to incorporate various kinds of sources into his research, it's important to pay attention to the way different sources are attributed. Direct quotes were recorded in formal interviews; dialogue *without* quotation marks is based on the recollections of survivors; quotes in italics are from radio conversations or from published material.

Junger's concern for source attribution demonstrates his concern for the factual nature of his narrative. He attempts to signal for the reader that some material might be more reliable or unbiased than others. When investigating events which some of the primary characters did not survive to relate, some degree of speculation is unavoidable.

By collecting a variety of material, Junger hopes to provide a sufficiently complete account of what's ultimately an unknowable event. He also notes that by titling the book *The Perfect Storm*, he uses the word "perfect" in a meteorological sense, meaning no disrespect to the dead or their survivors. Junger's fascination with this story began when he watched 30-foot ocean swells hitting Massachusetts' Cape Ann. The next day, he read about a Gloucester boat that was believed to have been lost at sea. Without even realizing it, he had begun to research *The Perfect Storm*.

The colloquial phrase "the perfect storm" refers to a state of affairs in which various negative factors have collided. The use of the phrase in a meteorological sense—referring to a particularly violent storm--seems to date back at least to the 19th century. In the book, Junger implicitly uses the phrase in both senses, suggesting that the incentives and dangers of deep-sea fishing make it a "perfect storm" in itself.

GEORGES BANK, 1896

In the winter of 1896, on the dangerous fishing grounds known as Georges Bank, the crew of a fishing boat discovered a message in a bottle. The note was from the crew of the *Falcon*, a Gloucester boat that had been lost the year before. The note said that the *Falcon*'s cable and rudder had been destroyed in a **storm** and that the crew had given up. The writer of the note had then tossed the bottle overboard, probably figuring it would never be found.

Junger's use of this historical anecdote anticipates some of the ideas that will be explored throughout the book—especially the deadly nature of fishing, which pits fragile human beings against the unpredictable forces of ocean and weather. The century-old story of the Falcon *hints that the men of the Andrea Gail will face a similar fate.*

GLOUCESTER, MASS., 1991

In Gloucester, a soft rain is falling. Seagulls are calling, boats are creaking, and dockworkers are shouting. In the Crow's Nest, overlooking Rose Marine and the State Fish Pier, Bobby Shatford is asleep. He has a black eye. Next to him sleeps his girlfriend, Christina Cotter, a blonde woman in her early 40s.

The peace of this scene contrasts with the tragedy of the previous chapter. It also immerses readers from the start in the details of a particular place and time. Besides introducing characters, it raises questions about their relationship—namely, who gave Shatford a black eye?

Bobby Shatford, along with five siblings, was raised in Gloucester by his mother, Ethel. The daughter of a fisherman, Ethel works as a bartender at the Crow's Nest. All her sons have worked as fishermen at one time or another.

Gloucester evidently has a long heritage of fishing, one that's been passed down within the Shatford family for at least three generations.

Bobby wakes up around eight o'clock. In a few hours, he's supposed to be on the Andrea Gail, a swordfishing boat, for a month-long trip to the Grand Banks. When Chris finally wakes up, she notices Bobby's eye and wonders how she did that.

This passage hints that there is domestic violence going on in Bobby and Chris's relationship, as Chris instinctively knows it was her doing.

Eventually, the two make their way to the front entrance of the Crow's Nest. Inside they find Bobby's shipmate Bugsy Moran blearily drinking a beer. The three decide to drive to a nearby diner for sandwiches, plus getting sunglasses to help with their hangovers. Later, they pick up a third crewmember, Dale Murphy, or "Murph." The four go shopping for last-minute trip supplies and a cartful of toys for Murph's young son. Then they wind up drinking at another bar, where Bobby's sister, Mary Anne, stops by. She's been mad at Bobby lately because of his drinking, but when Bobby tells her he loves her, she's caught off guard.

Drinking seems to be a big part of Gloucester's fishing culture and an obvious problem in Bobby's life. Though Junger doesn't say so directly, he suggests that drinking is a way of coping with the dangers of fishing and the strain of frequent separation from loved ones. This suggests, in turn, that fishing is a high-stakes job that places a particular toll on families and perhaps whole communities.


Chris Cotter never thought she'd set foot in the Crow's Nest, but thanks to her friend Mary Anne, she found herself becoming a regular. One day at the bar, she noticed Bobby staring at her. A month later, they hooked up on New Year's Eve, and pretty soon they were spending all of their time together. At that time, Bobby was living in one of the rooms above the Crow's Nest and fishing to help pay off a child-support debt. Bobby and Chris wanted to get married, but Bobby needed money first. He decided to take a job on the Andrea Gail, a lucrative sword boat captained by a family friend, Billy Tyne. Tyne, in turn, had taken over the boat from its previous captain, Charlie Reed.

Bobby has a history of domestic and financial instability. Junger suggests that in such situations, fishing can seem like an attractive get-rich-quick scheme. On the surface, it appears to be a straightforward way of solving one's personal problems—but as the book will go on to show, it also serves to entrench and perpetuate those problems.


Sword boats, also called longliners, are baited at intervals and then hauled back daily for 10 or 20 days. Sword boats follow the swordfish population to the North Atlantic's Grand Banks in the summer and to the Caribbean in the winter. These boats can bring in big money, and the fishermen who crew them are "the high rollers of the fishing world," as Junger describes them. All Bobby Shatford wants, though, is to put in a year's worth of trips on the Andrea Gail so that he can hopefully earn enough to pay off his debts.

While fishermen on longliners might bring in a lot of money, not everyone who pursues swordfishing is interested in the money for its own sake. In fact, by focusing on Bobby Shatford, Junger suggests that a situation like his—being in dire financial straits and looking for a quick, temporary solution—is fairly typical.

During Bobby's first trip on the Andrea Gail, which left in August 1991, Chris spent a lot of time sitting in her car at the wharf, watching nervously for his return. When they were finally reunited at the Crow's Nest, Chris says she must have spent about 20 minutes in Bobby's arms, her legs wrapped around his waist. Bobby then recited, word for word, a card that Chris had hidden in his seabag before he left.

Fishing clearly takes a big toll on the loved ones left at home. Chris knows Bobby's work is dangerous, and his absence monopolizes her life in his absence. Their passionate reunion underscores this fact.

On the August 1991 trip, the Andrea Gail caught 15 tons of swordfish, which they sold for $136,812. The boat's owner, Bob Brown, first deducted the expenses for things like fuel, tackle, bait, and repairs, then took home about half of what was left. The remainder was divided among the crew, with the biggest sum going to captain Billy Tyne. Because he had the least seniority, Bobby got one of the smaller shares of $4,537.

These statistics, even though the numbers would look different 30 years later, do show just how lucrative a single fishing trip could be in 1991. They also show that owners (who did the least physical labor) and captains took home much more money than those who did the bulk of the labor on a fishing trip.

After a late night, the crew had to spend the day following their return hauling out the fish and ice, scrubbing the Andrea Gail's decks, and stowing the gear. That night, the fishermen were paid half of what they were owed, and the partying resumed. Over the coming week, the men were expected to show up each day for work—primarily boat maintenance—but Bobby, still exhausted from the last trip and dreading the next one, often crawled back into bed in the morning. And if the fishing life was hard on the fishermen, it may have been harder on the women left at home. For example, Billy Tyne's ex-wife, Jodi Tyne, felt that Billy would always choose his boat over her and that the pattern of their life would never change, so she divorced him.

The physical, mental, and emotional toll of fishing is such that, upon getting home, fishermen tend to let off steam through drinking and celebrating. This lifestyle is one of extremes and takes a toll on more than the fishermen themselves; it puts a heavy strain on their spouses and family members, who spend months waiting and worrying about their loved ones' safety. Sometimes, this strain ends up being too much for a relationship, as Jodi highlights here.

Unlike many fishermen, Billy Tyne really loved his job, as did his predecessor on the Andrea Gail, Charlie Reed. Charlie loved the solitude aboard ship, the closeness to nature, and the respect of people in town, greeting him with "Hi, Cap." Deckhands usually have a different experience, though. Their work is brutal and mind-numbing, and it's generally a dead-end job that people take when they need money fast.

Despite outlier experiences like Billy Tyne's and Charlie Reed's (which seems to be unusually romantic), most fishermen view their work as just a job—often one they resort to when something's gone wrong in their life, like needing money.

While in port, often for as little as six days at a time, fishermen tend to indulge. Flush with cash, they buy lottery tickets and round after round of drinks for everyone at the bar—sometimes spending a week's worth of cash in one night. Chris recalls how much everyone drank before the Andrea Gail's last voyage. She and Bobby had gotten physically violent on their final night together, which she says was because of the alcohol. She can't believe she sent him off to sea with a black eye.

Despite their urgent need for money, some fishermen cope with the stress of their lives through excessive celebratory spending—implicitly locking themselves into a cycle of poverty and debt. Chris's sparing remarks about the violence suggest that stress manifests in the lives of fishermen and their loved ones in many maladaptive ways.

Junger likens the Crow's Nest to the inn where Ishmael stays at the beginning of *Moby Dick*—a place where a down-and-out fisherman can find a safe harbor. Such places are second homes, because fishermen often don't have real ones—especially the younger ones who tend to crew longline boats. Ethel Shatford takes on a motherly role toward such men. She's never lived more than half a mile from the Crow's Nest; some of Gloucester's residents have never left the town. Gloucester has seen its share of problems, like an epidemic of heroin addiction and, at the end of the 1980s, the collapse of the Georges Bank ecosystem, which adversely affected the town's economy.

Young fishermen's lives are often marked by a degree of rootlessness. This domestic instability might explain why fishermen spend and party so recklessly during periods ashore. It also seems that the young fishermen's lifestyle reflects, and perhaps helps reinforce, dysfunctional elements of life in Gloucester as a whole. Environmental degradation even plays a role—overfishing damages the fishing grounds, which in turn impacts the wellbeing of the town.

Ethel has worked at the Crow's Nest since 1980. Some people end up staying for years. For fishermen, truckers, and friends, the upstairs rooms have low rates, and the Crow's Nest cashes checks, accepts mail, and even screens phone calls for fishermen who need it. Everyone knows each other, and fights rarely break out there.

The Crow's Nest (and the maternal Ethel) fulfills the fishermen's need for a semblance of domestic stability and family normalcy, in both practical and emotional ways.

Fishing in Gloucester has always been a deadly business. In the 1600s, fishermen ventured up the coast in open boats. Over time, fishing vessels evolved to include sturdier masts and shelter for the crew. These boats anchored in the deep-sea fishing grounds each spring, and each man was paid according to how many fish he hauled up on two lead-weighted lines. Sometimes they'd fish for a couple of months at a time—since the fish were typically dried, there was no hurry to get back to port. Sometimes captains would load up their holds until the boat's decks were almost underwater—which was extremely dangerous in bad weather.

Having set the scene in 1990s Gloucester, Junger now shifts to a consideration of its centuries-old relationship with the fishing industry. By establishing this context, Junger shows that even as technology has changed over time, fishing has always been a dangerous and high-stakes pursuit—and, anticipating later developments, that captains have often been willing to push the limits of safety for the sake of bringing in a big haul.

By the late 1700s, 1/6th of New England's fishing fleet was based in Gloucester. By the time of the American Revolution, New England's codfishing industry was worth over a million dollars a year. The Treaty of Paris included the provision that American fishermen could fish in Canadian waters and dry their fish on the remote beaches of Nova Scotia and Labrador. The best cod was then shipped to Spain and Portugal, the average-grade cod was sold back home, and the worst-quality cod was used to feed West Indian slaves—traded for goods like rum, molasses, and sugar. Gloucester's fishing heyday was in the 1880s, by which time the port housed a fleet of up to 500 fishing schooners.

Here, Junger gives a historical narrative of Gloucester's fishing industry. These details illustrate how important fishing was not just to Gloucester's development and culture but to that of the United States more broadly. The Treaty of Paris was the official diplomatic ending of the French and Indian War, or Seven Years' War. The fishing industry was even implicated in the international slave trade. In other words, fishing played a significant role in country's political and cultural history.

In the 1800s, a Massachusetts fisherman developed a "jig" (lure) which proved irresistible to mackerel, allowing Gloucester fishermen to enrich themselves in this industry as well. By midcentury, a type of net called the purse seine was invented, replacing the mackerel jig. Codfishermen invented a similar technology called tub trawling. This technology was more efficient, but it also proved to be deadlier for fishermen. The fishermen rowed out from the main ship each day in small open boats called dories. In bad weather, men could easily be thrown from their dories into the water. In one instance in November 1880, two men were thrown from their dory on the Grand Banks. While both managed to scramble back into the boat, one of them only survived by clinging to the barbed steel of the trawl line, mangling his hand in the process. After recovering from a faint, he nevertheless insisted on hauling in the rest of his line before returning to the schooner.

Fishing-related technology is ever-evolving. As it develops, said technology inevitably has a human impact as well. This has been especially true in the development of tub trawling and the use of open dory boats, which required fishermen to risk far greater exposure to sea and storm. The possibility of a lucrative payoff from fishing, in other words, has always carried significant risks to life and limb. Junger implies, too, that the possibility of monetary gain has sometimes incentivized excessive physical risk.

Worse could befall a fisherman on the Grand Banks, though. Because of the meeting of the warm Gulf Stream and chilly Canadian currents in this area, the Grand Banks is prone to severe fog. Every year or so, a dory might go adrift in the fog, and, if he made landfall, a frostbitten fisherman might spend days—or longer—wandering a deserted coast in search of rescue. Occasionally fishermen were blown as far as South America or all the way across the Atlantic. This meant that for families back home, there wasn't necessarily a clear endpoint to their grief. A missing dory fisherman had no way to communicate with home, and he could turn up in Gloucester at any time.

The example of a dory going adrift in the fog anticipates similar modern-day risks. While there's much greater reliability in ship-to-shore communications today, the possibility of disappearance or death at sea is still a risk, and it might still leave families uncertain and grieving. This is an example of the limitations of technology as well as the burden shouldered by families and communities of fishermen.

Back in the present, Chris and Bobby eat lunch and wind up, with Bugsy, drinking beer at the apartment of Chris's friend Thea. Then Bobby and Bugsy make a run for hotdogs for the trip, and as she watches the men load provisions onto the boat, Chris thinks about the future she and Bobby have planned. She's going to use part of Bobby's check from the last trip to secure an apartment for the two of them, she's got two jobs lined up, and even with Bobby being away a lot, she figures they'll get by. Interrupting Chris's thoughts, another guy named Sully approaches Chris's car, saying he's just replaced a man who backed out.

Junger's historical digression both provides context and conveys the magnitude of the danger that fishermen face even in the present—heightening the tension as the crew of the Andrea Gail *go about their preparations for the next trip. Chris's dependence on Bobby's success underscores the role of fishing in the community and in family life.*

The Andrea Gail is 72 feet long and was built in Florida in 1978. She has an angled bow and a pilothouse up front, which is on top of an elevated deck called the whaleback. Besides life preservers, survival suits, and life rafts, she also has something called an EPIRB on board—an Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon. She's also outfitted with an ice machine, 40 miles of fishing line, and room for tons of baitfish. The *Andrea Gail* is a good boat. The only comparable sword boat in Gloucester's harbor is the Hannah Boden, which is captained by a woman named Linda Greenlaw. Linda's one of the only female captains out there and has a reputation as one of the best of all captains on the East Coast. Both the *Hannah Boden* and the *Andrea Gail* are owned by Bob Brown.

The Andrea Gail*'s specifications suggest that the boat is seaworthy, well equipped not just for fishing but for facing dangers at sea. In other words, there aren't obvious reasons to suspect that the* Andrea Gail *will have a difficult voyage. Throughout, Junger also emphasizes the roles women play in the fishing industry and in the events of the book. Though women like Greenlaw are rare, Junger shows that they occupy a prominent and respected role within the community.*

The Andrea Gail's latest trip is off to a bad start. Its crew has been drinking a lot, the men are fighting, and no one wants to head back out. In fact, several of the men keep changing their minds about whether they're going at all. This morning, one guy named Adam Randall left his position on the boat with no explanation. Though Randall had been out of work for three months, he looked over the *Andrea Gail* this morning, got a strange feeling, and drove off. Sully, or David Sullivan, is called in to replace him. Sully and Murph are sent to the Cape Ann Market to buy $4,000 worth of groceries to supply a month's voyage.

The strains of life on a fishing boat are clear—the men are reluctant to face another month at sea, and they cope by drinking and taking out their anger, frustration, and unease on one another. Randall's sudden departure from the trip and Sully's quick replacement suggest that there's lots of turnover in this dangerous, demanding industry—and that it often comes down to personal instincts.

On the voyage out, 20 tons of ice keep bait and groceries cold and then keep swordfish fresh on the way back. Ice makes modern commercial fishing possible. In the 1800s, fishermen salt-dried their catch, but in the 1840s, the advent of railroads meant that food could be transported much faster than before. To take advantage of this development, ice companies began to proliferate, cutting and selling chunks of pond ice to sell to schooners.

Ice is a good example of the way that emerging technology has the capacity to change an entire industry. In this case, the possibility of preserving fresh fish changed the market and its demands, which consequently altered the nature of a fisherman's job.

Now that there was a market for fresh fish, the industry changed dramatically. Rather than taking their time drying their catch, fishermen now raced back to port. This was critical because, if a boat were beaten to port by several other, fuller vessels, the slower boat might have to dump her entire catch, the market having already been saturated. This situation meant that overloaded boats rushed home even through heavy **storm**s and were sometimes sunk. Yet those who survived stood to make a lot of money. One hundred fifty years later, boats are still rushing to shore, whether they have their own ice machines or, like their 19th-century forebears, buy their ice in bulk from a local company.

The technological shift incentivized speed—which, in turn, made the job potentially more dangerous. Under such competitive conditions, a captain might decide that it was worth chancing severe storms with a heavy load for a shot at making more money. Technology, financial incentives, and human judgment calls combine to intensify the risks involved.

In addition to Cape Pond Ice, Gloucester's waterfront is home to many other businesses, like Gloucester Marine Railways, which touches up damaged boats between trips. The Andrea Gail has been worked on there, though her most recent major renovations took place in St. Augustine, Florida. On that occasion, about 10 tons of "steel, fuel, and machinery" were added, resulting in a subtle shift in the boat's center of gravity. This meant that the *Andrea Gail* sits a little deeper in the water and recovers from big waves more slowly. At the same time, she's now better equipped to remain at sea for up to six weeks at a time.

The Andrea Gail*'s architecture is a good example of the trade-offs involved in modern fishing. The same equipment that sustains the boat for longer periods at a time might also imperil her in a big storm. Safety, in other words, isn't a zero-sum game; it involves calculating and balancing different risks given the best information one has at the time.*

GOD'S COUNTRY

By midafternoon, the Andrea Gail is ready to go. Bobby and Chris drive back to Chris's friend Thea's for a few hours of privacy. At five, Sully calls from the Crow's Nest to tell Bobby it's time to go. At the bar, things are grim. Ethel is crying, and all the men are reluctant to leave their loved ones. Gradually, with several still voicing reluctance and misgivings, the men pry themselves away from the crowd. Despite lingering premonitions, everyone drinks a final round and walks out of the Crow's Nest. Bobby and Chris hold onto each other in the front seat of Chris's car. Bobby's trying not to cry; he doesn't want to go, but he needs the money. Finally, he tells Chris he loves her and walks down to the boat.

Now that Junger has given historical, cultural, and technological context concerning Gloucester's fishing industry, he returns to the Andrea Gail*'s present. The last hours before the Andrea Gail's departure illustrate the strain put on families, and indeed on fishermen themselves—no one is eager to go on another long trip, especially with vague foreboding in several people's minds. Danger and death are never far from fishermen's minds.*

Europeans, especially Portuguese, began codfishing off the North Atlantic's Grand Banks in the 16th century. Codfish was easy to transport because it could be salted and dried, and codfishing quickly became a lucrative trade. Massachusetts' Cape Ann was first visited by a European in 1605, when the French explorer Samuel de Champlain made his way there; 20 years later, a group from Dorchester, England, attempted unsuccessfully to establish a fishing village there. A few settlers stayed on, banded together with some outcasts from the Puritan colony at Plymouth, and founded a new colony called Gloucester.

Gloucester's history revolves around fishing. As risky as the fishing trade has always been, its profits have proven life-sustaining for generations. For many people, in other words, the financial and societal benefits of the industry's success have been considered by many to be worth the risk.

By 1631, the Gloucester settlement was well underway. Because it was sustained by fishing, the town seemed to attract younger men who weren't interested in the more sedate farming lifestyle that took hold in other parts of New England. Gloucester fishermen quickly developed a reputation for wildness. They probably lived recklessly because of the risks of their profession—a couple of hundred men died at sea each year. As of the 1990s, in fact, around 10,000 Gloucestermen are believed to have died at sea.

Gloucester's roots in the fishing industry have resulted in marked cultural differences that distinguish the town from much of the rest of New England. Junger suggests that the risks and unknowns of the fishermen's life made such men less disposed to settle down. He also suggests that Gloucester's losses over the years have been traumatic and destabilizing for the community as a whole.


The Grand Banks, a major North Atlantic fishing ground, are especially dangerous. That's because the spot is situated in an infamous **storm** track. When low pressure systems develop over the Great Lakes or Cape Hatteras, they follow the jet stream out into the ocean and cross directly over the Grand Banks. Even more dangerous is Georges Bank, a spot located 180 miles east of Cape Cod. Georges Bank is home to strange currents and fast tides. Fishermen often spoke of having bad dreams and uneasy feelings there.

When places like the Grand Banks and Georges Bank develop perilous reputations, they can, in turn, have a negative psychological effect on sailors. Concrete dangers, in other words, can become even more hazardous psychologically, causing already dangerous conditions to snowball.

Over time, the draw of plentiful fish overcame people's dread of Georges Bank. When people turned complacent, though, the Bank grew deadly. If a **storm** blew in, the many ships anchored around Georges Bank could collide, become entangled, and run aground in the shallow seas. Nowadays, fewer boats fish Georges Bank; most of them make the week-long journey to the Grand Banks instead, 1200 miles away. The cold Labrador Current creates the perfect environment for sea life to proliferate.

The possibility of a good catch could overcome people's fears, but human carelessness always takes a toll in unpredictable conditions—a constant risk in fishing. The Grand Banks are located on the North American continental shelf, just off of Newfoundland, and they are one of the world's richest habitats for marine wildlife.

During the journey to the Grand Banks and back, the crew generally sleeps, because once they reach the fishing grounds, they work 20-hour days for two or three weeks straight. They also spend a lot of time maintaining and repairing their gear so that nothing will prevent them from catching as much as possible as quickly as possible. They take turns standing watch at the helm.

A typical fishing trip is a study in contrasts. Fishermen might endure long stretches of inactivity, broken up by hectic, unremitting toil—a taxing combination in itself.

Billy Tyne didn't intend to become a fisherman. He came from a relatively well-off Gloucester family and hoped to become a psychologist. Eventually, though, he dropped out of school and wandered into fishing on a relative's suggestion. His wife, Jodi, says that "it was all over" at that point—men who try fishing and love it can never be happy doing anything else. Billy's first fishing trip was on the *Andrea Gail*, and he quickly proved to be good at it. Even after Billy's newfound obsession with fishing broke up his marriage, he kept doing it. When Charlie Reed stepped down as the *Andrea Gail*'s captain, Bob Brown, offered Billy the role.

Junger moves from a general discussion of fishing to a specific fisherman's story. Billy Tyne is an outlier—fishing was not just a job for him but a genuine passion, even though it resulted in the breakup of his marriage. Jodi's feelings are, implicitly, not unusual; the unique risks and benefits of fishing sometimes mean that a fisherman's loved ones lose out.

By September 26th or 27th, the Andrea Gail has made it to the "Tail" of the Grand Banks, about 300 miles off the coast of Newfoundland. Here plentiful swordfish can be found—fearsome fish that are capable of slashing not only other fish, but boats and fishermen themselves. The swordfish has a bony "sword" that extends from its upper jaw, is four or five feet long, and dangerously sharp. The fish itself is about 500 pounds. These fish spawn in the Caribbean and head for the waters off of eastern Canada in the summer. They feed in deep waters during the day and work their way to the surface at night.

Considering that the Andrea Gail*'s mission revolves around swordfish, they play a relatively small role in the story—but the fish themselves present special perils, too.*

Baiting is a dangerous job. A huge spool of fishing line crosses diagonally across the deck. Baiters stand on deck and impale pieces of squid and mackerel on hooks on shorter lines called gangions, snap the gangions onto the ship's mainline, and throw the whole line into the water. If the hook catches the baiter somehow, he could easily go over the side of the boat along with the gangion. It takes about four hours to set out 30 miles of fishing line. Radio transmitters are occasionally attached to the line as well, to help the captain locate any gear that drifts away. All told, this equipment represents around $20,000 worth of gear, and a captain might risk his fishermen's lives to get it back, even in a **storm**.

Here, Junger describes some of the riskiest aspects of the work of fishing. One of the biggest risks is simply that a fisherman could accidentally get pulled over the side too quickly to be recovered and drown. Another is that fishing gear is expensive, and a captain might go to great lengths to avoid losing it. Again, besides the inherent dangers of the work, there are monetary incentives that can prompt greater risk-taking, too.


Each morning, the men are awakened by a blast on the ship's airhorn long before dawn, and they haul back the line that was baited and set out the night before. A crewman called the hauler has the stressful job of unclipping a gangion from the line every few seconds. When he senses the weight of a swordfish on the line, he slows down the line, and two men prepare to hook the fish, drag it aboard, and sometimes harpoon it, if it's still alive. Then the swordfish are gutted and thrown into the ice-filled hold. On a good day, a crew might haul up 10 or 20 swordfish—that's one ton of meat. Bob Brown remembers one Hannah Boden trip in the mid-80s which yielded five tons a day for an entire week—a payoff of $10,000 for the lowest-ranked crew member.

Bob Brown's story of the Hannah Boden*'s big haul is a good example of both the attraction and risk of fishing. It's easy to see how fishermen would be willing to undertake a risky trip for the sake of a possible payoff like this. At the same time, the* Hannah Boden*'s big haul is memorable precisely because it's a relative rarity. In other words, every trip is a gamble.*


Fishing trips aren't always that lucrative, however, and setting out bait is a skill that requires awareness of currents and knowledge of feeding habits. Even with that skill, any trip could be a bust. Captains must also keep track of the positions they fish and how many fish they catch in order to show that they're adhering to regulations and to help marine biologists assess conditions.

Fishing is a complicated job—there's more to it than just setting out and hauling back bait. It requires a detailed awareness of one's environment and a willingness to adhere to regulations, too—showing that science plays a role in the industry as well as technology.

During the end of September and the beginning of October, the Andrea Gail fishermen repeatedly set out and haul back their gear. On the horizon, they can occasionally see a boat called the *Mary T*, captained by Albert Johnston. The *Mary T* heads back to port on October 7th and arrives at Fairhaven, Massachusetts, on the 12th. After unloading his catch, Johnston starts outfitting the *Mary T* to head out again—it's getting late in the fishing season, and the faster he can turn the boat around, the better.

These events epitomize life on a fishing boat—on an everyday scale, the repetition of baiting and hauling back the line and, on a larger scale, bringing in one's catch and turning things around as quickly as possible in order to squeeze another trip out of the season. In a way, the mundane nature of the tasks obscures the big risks involved.

Around this time, the Andrea Gail, still on the Grand Banks, gets slammed by a rogue wave while the crew is hauling in their gear. The wave is about 30 feet high and throws the boat over on her side. It takes a long time for the boat to right herself. That night, Billy Tyne radios a friend, Charlie Johnson, whose *Seneca* has stopped at a Newfoundland port, to tell him about the wave. Charlie recalls feeling concerned that the boat went over so easily, especially with tons of fish in its hold. It doesn't sound right to him, but he doesn't say anything at the time.

The unusually large wave shows the Andrea Gail*'s vulnerability. Charlie Johnson is concerned because a ship as sound as this one, especially with the weight of fish in its hold, presumably should have stood up to the wave better, and the incident was apparently concerning enough for Billy to mention, too—a foreshadowing of later events.*

The Andrea Gail spends another week fishing off the Grand Banks's Tail, but the trip is shaping up to be a bust. Around the middle of October, they haul in their gear and steam to an area called the Flemish Cap, setting them well away from the rest of the swordfishing fleet. The vessel is on the edge of the usual fishing grounds, and the weather is cold and raw. All everyone wants to do is to finish up and go home.

The Flemish Cap is an area northeast of the Grand Banks, about 350 miles east of Newfoundland. Billy's poor catch (and resulting poor financial takeaway) motivates him to strike out to less familiar ground that separates him from the rest of the fleet. Though he intends it to bring their trip to a close, ironically it ends up endangering them—something he couldn't have predicted.

THE FLEMISH CAP

In New England, swordfishing began in the early 1800s, when fishermen harpooned the fish from small sailboats. In the 1960s, longline boats began to have success, though through most of the 1970s, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration banned the sale of swordfish because of what were then considered to be unacceptable concentrations of mercury in the fish. In 1978, the FDA relaxed these standards. By this time, technological advances like satellite navigation and monofilament (making possible the setting out of up to 30 or 40 miles of fishing line) had been introduced into fishing more broadly.

Given New England's long maritime history, swordfishing's history is relatively short. Technological developments have allowed it to advance relatively quickly, though it has also been subject to comparatively rigorous government controls. Thus swordfishing is an especially good example of the impact of science, technology, and other external influences on the broader industry.

Up to this time, fishing hadn't been strongly regulated, but in the 1980s, the National Marine Fisheries Service grew concerned about the use of mile-long nets and their impact on the swordfishing population. The Fisheries Services solicited comments from fishermen, many of whom suggested that swordfish counts were inaccurate to begin with. Sportsfishermen and commercial fishermen mistrusted one another's methods, and nobody trusted the government. In the end, the Service began requiring swordfishermen to register their boats, which increasing numbers scrambled to do.

The changing fortunes of swordfishing demonstrate the interplay between environmental concerns, government implementation of environmental controls, and the opinions of fishermen themselves, who often chafe at restrictions imposed from afar. It's another example of how financial, scientific, and technological concerns readily collide in this industry.

All sorts of fish populations did appear to decline in the latter part of the 20th century, largely in response to advances in technology. Russian factory ships, which could stay at sea for months at a time and process their catch as they went, were frequent culprits. In response to such overfishing, in 1976 Congress passed something called the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act, which extended national sovereignty 200 miles into the ocean. But, meanwhile, the American fleet had developed technology to rival the Russians, the fleet size doubled, prices dropped, and American fishermen resorted to more and more habitat-damaging habits.

The Magnuson Act is a good example of the unforeseen effects of such legislation. While its intention was to put a stop to overfishing, the ultimate effect was that Americans developed technology that was just as destructive as the Russian technology that had been pushed out of their waters. While technology has a devastating effect on the environment, in other words, external controls can just motivate still more damaging innovations.

By 1990, the swordfish population had crashed, and quotas were instituted for the North Atlantic—a limit of 2/3 the previous year's catch. Each boat had to report its catch when it arrived back in port, and as soon as the quota was met, the fishery was shut down for the year. This meant that boats were racing each other back to port as the season declined. In the fall of 1991, the Andrea Gail was fishing under a quota for the first time.

Finally, limiting the amount of fish allowed to be caught was seen to be the only effective method to prevent overfishing—though this, too, inspired competition and haste among the swordfishing fleet. It's worth noting that in the late 90s, swordfishing was banned altogether, and that the swordfish population has rebounded to healthy levels.

Albert Johnston is back on the fishing grounds by October 17th, the *Mary T* situated farther south and closer to the Gulf Stream than the Andrea Gail. Johnston, now 36, has been fishing since he was a teenager. Established in the business, he's beginning to relax more and take fewer risks. Fishing is the most dangerous job in the United States, and danger can await a fisherman even on a cloudless day—if a hook catches him when nobody's looking, he can be gone within seconds. And if a boat gets slammed in stormy seas when it's too far out—as has happened to Johnston's friends—then there's no point in calling the Coast Guard.

Johnston is an example of a fisherman who has been successful enough that he no longer feels the need to push limits to the same degree as some of his peers in the business. He's well aware that even a seasoned fisherman can be killed when conditions appear to be perfectly favorable. In other words, fishing is inherently an unpredictable, risky business.

So far, Billy Tyne hasn't even caught enough fish to cover his expenses for this trip. Billy tells Linda Greenlaw that he's going to need more fuel. Billy has a reputation for testing limits this way; Linda has bailed him out before. The Hannah Boden and Andrea Gail rendezvous south of the Flemish Cap—a dangerous maneuver—and Linda pumps fuel into the *Andrea Gail*'s tanks. (Boats help each other out this way all the time; it's far less expensive than stopping for repairs or supplies in Newfoundland.) Unfortunately, Billy has other problems—his ice machine isn't producing enough, his fish quality is dropping, and he can only make up that loss by catching more. He needs to do it in a hurry—they've already been at sea for three weeks.

Billy has run into a cascade of problems on this trip—running low on supplies, dealing with malfunctions, and worst of all, he just hasn't caught enough. Linda's remarks suggest that Billy has a habit of pushing his luck. The implication is that, while this might help him make potentially lucrative decisions like venturing out further for more fish, it might also obscure his judgment at times and put his crew in danger.

One of the features of a boat that's crucial in a **storm** is its ability to clear its decks. A boat's deck contains gaps called scuppers (normally blocked with scupper plates, meant to be removed in dangerous weather) that permit water to drain. This is an especially crucial aspect of boat design because, if a boat's deck becomes swamped, the boat quickly loses steerage and finds itself in severe danger. Thus it's vital that, if a rogue wave overwhelms the deck, the scuppers be able to drain the water before another wave hits. For every boat, there is a "degree of roll" from which that boat can no longer recover. When a boat is rolled by a wave, it is being pushed downward by gravity (the weight of the boat and everything on it) and upward by buoyancy (all the enclosed air trying to rise) at the same time. The "righting moment" is the moment when a boat regains an even keel. The "zero-moment" point is when a boat's decks have gone past vertical, and its center of gravity falls outside its center of buoyancy. At this point, the boat can no longer right herself.

Building on the idea of risk and balance he's just been discussing with regard to Billy's decision-making, Junger explains some of the scientific concepts behind a boat's ability to stay afloat. One of the biggest risks a boat faces is being rolled over by a wave and unable to recover. The "righting moment" is crucial for a boat's ability to right itself; the "zero-moment point" is what every boat is designed to avoid.

Generally, the more trouble a boat gets in, the more trouble she's likely to get into. When a boat gets partially flooded, it sits lower in the water and gets rolled by the waves for longer; steerage is correspondingly more difficult. If things get bad enough, a boat will turn broadside, meaning that it's exposed to the waves' full force, and a devastating influx of water can occur. While boats seldom sink, when it *does* happen, it tends to happen very fast.

When a boat gets inundated with water, things can go downhill very quickly, and the worse things get, the less likely the boat is to recover its even keel. Danger can overwhelm a boat extremely fast.

Each boat has what's called a stability profile. Its stability profile is determined during a dockside test in which a 5,000-pound weight is placed on a boat's deck, and the angle of its heel is run through a mathematical formula to determine that boat's righting moment. But even once a boat's stability profile is known, many factors can affect it—extra gear loaded on the deck, use of different types of netting, etc. Because of these variable factors, boats under 79 feet long aren't required to be tested for their stability profile. The Andrea Gail is 72 feet long and never underwent stability testing—making her quite typical.

There's a safety test available to help determine a boat's ability to regain an even keel, but the Andrea Gail never underwent this—and that is no unusual in the industry, simply because conditions aboard a boat vary so much. In other words, nobody knows the Andrea Gail's stability profile, but this fact wouldn't be viewed as negligence by most captains or fishermen.

Indeed, although no major issues were ever reported when the Andrea Gail was inspected and assessed on various occasions, there were plenty of things that might concern a captain like Billy Tyne. For instance, the *Andrea Gail* had a boxy shape, and its wheelhouse was set forward, affecting the vessel's balance. And its most recent alterations, such as its icemaker and fuel oil drums, added much more weight, affecting its center of gravity.

The modifications and improvements undergone by a fishing boat can affect its stability, minutely yet critically, and such things wouldn't necessarily raise any concern in a typical inspection. At the time, in other words, there were plenty of safety loopholes that wouldn't have raised any eyebrows.

Bob Brown believed that his boat was sound. In Gloucester, though, people seem less sure about Bob Brown. They acknowledge that he's a successful self-built businessman and a hard worker. At the same time, he's known for taking crazy risks, like fishing solo in open boats all winter long in order to feed his family. And in 1980, while lobster fishing with a crew off Georges Bank, his boat, the *Fair Wind*, foundered in a winter **storm**, and one crewman, Ernie Hazard, almost died of exposure after cutting himself adrift in a lifeboat. Another crewman drifted away to his death. On another occasion on the Hannah Boden, Brown lost another man. Bob began to get a reputation as "Suicide" Brown.

Junger's description of Bob Brown suggests that some of the same traits that make Brown such a successful fisherman are the same ones that compel him to take excessive risks, endangering the lives of others in the process—another example of the fine line between success and disaster that often characterizes the fishing industry.

Around October 18th, Billy Tyne finally begins to get some better luck with fishing, making up for the bad weeks. Albert Johnston recalls that by October 24th, Billy was starting to head back toward port with about 40,000 pounds of fish, and that he sounded happy. Because he was heading back while many other boats were heading out, he'd be one of the only boats in port with a load of fish and would likely get a good price. He's out of sync with the rest of the fleet, though, and the reasons for this are complex. Anything from a quirk in the Gulf Stream (affecting fish patterns and keeping Billy out by the Flemish Cap for longer than expected) to any number of other unpredictable factors mean that a group of about 50 or 60 people are on the North Atlantic's **storm** grounds during the last week of October.

Though things finally begin to turn around for Billy Tyne, he's in a different spot than he'd planned to be at this time in the season—an example of the unpredictable nature of fishing and the dangers one can be exposed to due to manifold interconnecting factors. Some of these have to do with weather patterns and others with fallible human calculations. In other words, while a captain might believe he controls his own fate, there are always multiple factors at play. Even science can't measure them all.

In early September, a sailor named Ray Leonard hires two experienced sailors—Karen Stimpson, who's 42, and Sue Bylander, who's 38—to crew his boat, the *Satori*, which he's sailing to Bermuda. As they set sail on October 26th, Stimpson asks Leonard about a **storm** front she's heard about. Leonard isn't concerned—he figures they can always tuck into the Cape Cod Canal if things get rough. Looking back, Stimpson regrets putting her trust in somebody else to make that decision.

Junger weaves another vessel's fate into his narrative. For comparison, the Satori *isn't a fishing vessel, and it has a much smaller crew, suggesting that it will be even more vulnerable in the face of the coming storm. Stimpson's comment builds a sense of tension about what's going to happen.*

On October 24th, Billy Tyne charts his course for home. For some reason, he chooses not to take the relatively protected channel between Sable Island and Nova Scotia. Instead, he decides to cut across the Grand Banks's Tail and then head due west to Gloucester once he's clear of Sable Island. It should take about a week. As of the afternoon of October 27th, the weather is looking fair. That night, however, a weather report comes through the fax. A hurricane is coming off of Bermuda, a cold front from Canada, and another **storm** from the Great Lakes—all on course to converge on the Grand Banks. Linda Greenlaw calls Billy to ask him what he thinks. Billy says it looks like it's going to be "wicked."

Billy's decision is one of the enduring mysteries concerning the Andrea Gail—why would he have chosen a relatively unprotected path home? Presumably, if he had known about the approaching convergence of storms before he made that decision, he might have chosen differently. But human decisions, besides being inhibited by things like stubbornness and greed, are likewise subject to the limitations of science and technology.

THE BARREL OF THE GUN

In the swordfishing business, denial isn't uncommon. Captains often overload their boats and ignore **storm** warnings. Coast Guard inspectors say that the idea of sinking is unthinkable to many captains, so they don't even take precautions. But the Andrea Gail is too far from home to summon the Coast Guard anyway. While it's very likely that Billy told his crew about the coming **storm**, nobody knows what precautions they took. Among other things, though, they would likely have secured the hatches, removed the scupper plates, and tied down anything loose.

Junger hints that denial might have been a factor in Billy's decisions concerning the Andrea Gail's voyage home, though of course nobody can know this for sure. In fact, denial can give way to outright hubris at times—when a captain has survived a lot, he finds it difficult to imagine anything else happening. In its own way, this is another example of human frailty.

The next morning, the seas are calm, but the winds are shifting to the southeast, which is usually an indication that bad weather is approaching. Billy receives another fax warning him that Hurricane Grace is accelerating straight toward Sable Island from Bermuda. The various boats of the swordfishing fleet deliberate about what to do; Albert Johnston heads to the colder, calmer seas of the Labrador current, and others stay put. Billy, with the *Andrea Gail* full of fish and a malfunctioning icemaker, decides to continue heading for home. Tommy Barrie, captain of a ship called the *Allison*, says that 90 percent of captains would have done the same.

Weighing his options, Billy makes the fateful decision to continue heading home. Tommy Barrie's reaction underscores the fact that this was an entirely defensible position in other captains' eyes. Captains simply weigh the risks and act on the best information they have available, in other words. It's only particularly cautious captains, like Albert Johnston, who chose otherwise in this situation.

At the National Weather Service office in Boston, meteorologist Bob Case is monitoring a slowly spinning front that's moving eastward from the Great Lakes, gathering itself on the border between layers of warm and cold air. In a hurricane, by contrast, a line of squalls begins to rotate faster and faster around a warm-water disturbance, sucking in more and more air, until an "eye" is formed. Right now, late-season Hurricane Grace is barreling toward the Grand Banks. Normally, this hurricane would make landfall over the Carolinas, but the Great Lakes cold front is blocking it, forcing it northward. All of this is ultimately orchestrated by the jet stream, "a river of cold upper-level air" that pulls storms eastward, creating atmospheric irregularities called anticyclones. When these collide with storm fronts like the one moving off the Great Lakes, they form a "nor'easter." Science can't reliably predict exactly when nor'easters will form.

An extremely rare convergence of events is underway. In short, a cold front, a hurricane, and jet stream irregularities forming a nor'easter are crashing together in a rare collision of atmospheric conditions that could hardly have been predicted long in advance. This is what will later be nicknamed "the perfect storm."

The nor'easter is first detected on October 26th, moving across Canada, Maine, and the Bay of Fundy. Early on October 28th, a gale rages north of Sable Island, and it's strengthening as it moves southeast in Billy Tyne's direction. Just short of his current position is a data buoy, which registers no activity through most of the day. At two o'clock that afternoon, however, it suddenly registers higher seas and gusting winds. Shortly thereafter, a hurricane warning is faxed to the fleet. In a deceptively calm sea, Billy is heading straight into a weather nightmare. At 7 p.m., the **storm** hits.

The nor'easter is detected after the Andrea Gail is already headed home. Conditions change very abruptly and without apparent warning, showing how much a vessel is at the mercy of much bigger scientific forces that even modern technology can't always predict.

When the Andrea Gail moves into the **storm**, the change would have been as dramatic as if a person had stepped from one room into another. The wind would have been screaming through the rigging, eventually increasing to 104 miles an hour. (Fishermen have often been able to gauge a storm's strength by the sound the wind makes; Linda Greenlaw said that she once heard hundred-mile-per-hour winds producing "a deep tonal vibration like a church organ," but without any melody.) Meanwhile, the waves grow bigger and bigger—up to 70 feet high.

The precise details experienced by the Andrea Gail *can't be known for sure, but Junger speculates on some of them based on wind and wave conditions witnessed by other fishermen. Regardless of the exact details, what the boat's crew experienced was undoubtedly frightening and likely unprecedented in their personal experience.*


After receiving the latest weather report, Tommy Barrie calls Billy. He's 600 miles to the east of the Andrea Gail and is wondering if he should set out bait that night. He asks Billy how the weather is looking. Billy reports that the winds are blowing between 50 and 80 knots at that point, with 30-foot seas. A short time later, he speaks to the whole fleet over the single-sideband radio: "She's comin' on boys, and she's comin' on strong." At that point, his position indicates that he's heading toward Nova Scotia—meaning that he's changed course without notifying the rest of the fleet. But nobody is concerned except for Linda Greenlaw, who thinks that Billy's last transmission sounded scared.

The contrast between Tommy's and Billy's conditions shows how suddenly and starkly things can change at sea. The last words anyone knows Billy to have said (also preserved in the film version of the book) indicate that he knew what he was getting into. The reason for his course change, though, remains a mystery.

By this point, the **storm** is impacting New England, too. The *Satori* is off Cape Cod by this time, but Leonard continues to insist that they needn't worry. On the Monday morning of their voyage, they're in the midst of a full gale. After a brief respite, Tuesday finds Leonard, Stimpson, and Bylander taking turns at the helm, clipped into a safety line to avoid getting swept overboard while steering. Stimpson begins to worry, for the first time in her life, whether she might actually die at sea.

The storm's severity and breadth is shown by the fact that the Satori is already facing dangerous seas, though it's hundreds of miles away. Ray Leonard is another example of the kind of denial that can overtake even a seasoned captain.

Nobody knows exactly what would have been happening on the Andrea Gail at this time. Charlie Reed imagines the crew staying huddled belowdecks, reading books. He figures it would have been "an awful frightening ride," with giant waves simply dropping out from under the boat. Of the *Andrea Gail* crew, Murph had likely had the closest brushes with death in the past: getting bitten by a mako shark, getting hooked and dragged off the boat, and almost getting crushed to death when a British submarine collided with his boat. After all this, Murph resigned himself to the likelihood that he would die at sea—a belief he matter-of-factly shared with his parents and his wife, Debra.

People have various ways of coping with danger and the possibility of death, whether it involves trying to quietly distract oneself, as storm-tossed crews often did, or facing it frankly, as Murph was inclined to do. Murph's string of near-death experiences seem to have forced him to come to terms with his mortality, and he tried to get his family accustomed to the possibility, too.

By ten o'clock on Monday night, Billy was likely facing 45-foot waves every 8 to 9 seconds, having to constantly fight to keep the boat from rolling over. At this point, he must have decided to "bring his boat around" to face the waves head-on—a frightening maneuver that would have involved facing the waves broadside for about 30 seconds, a huge rollover risk. The significance of such a move is that it would mean, at this point, the *Andrea Gail* was just trying to survive. In other words, Billy's options were narrowing.

This section constitutes speculation on Junger's part, based on his research into what other captains would have done in these circumstances. No matter what, it's likely that, by this point, Billy's actions were being governed by how the storm was developing; his main option was to react accordingly, trying to keep his crew alive.

Around 11 o'clock that night, Tommy Barrie calls Billy to ask him about weather conditions, but he doesn't get a response. Then, he can't get through at all—which suggests that the *Andrea Gail* is in serious trouble, whether that means her antennas are lost, that she's sunk, or that her crew is frantically trying to avoid sinking. Barrie guesses it must be the antennas, but that also means the *Andrea Gail* would have lost her GPS and radio, effectively putting the ship back into the 19th century.

At this point, people begin to seriously worry about the Andrea Gail*'s fate. The loss of her antennas would have made the boat even more vulnerable—showing that even modern technology is fragile. Against a natural phenomenon of this magnitude, Billy was as defenseless, in effect, as a sailor in the 1800s.*

GRAVEYARD OF THE ATLANTIC

Junger quotes Albert Johnston saying that he was the first of the fleet to know how bad conditions were going to get. After hearing the weather forecast, there wasn't time to get to land, so instead Johnston headed for colder, denser water—the waves wouldn't get as big there. Meanwhile, most of his crew hunkered down to watch TV, sensing this was the worst **storm** they'd ever faced. "There's always a point," Johnston says, "when you realize that you're in the middle of the ocean and if anything goes wrong, that's it."

Junger turns to other captains who faced the storm for insight into what Billy may have faced at the same time. Johnston, of the Mary T, *just made the best decision available to him—but as he points out, such a storm simply comes down to the frailty of humanity against the power of nature.*

While Johnston and the *Mary T* manage to stay north of the very worst, conditions south of Sable Island are off the charts. A weather buoy records winds at 80 miles per hour and waves as high as 100 feet—among the highest ever recorded anywhere. According to Junger, scientists don't entirely understand how such enormous waves work. Wave height is a function of how hard and for how long the wind blows, as well as "fetch"—the amount of open water available. In other words, waves on Lake Michigan will never get as big as waves on the open ocean.

As the worst storm of the century, this one was among the worst on record and would have presented conditions only considered theoretically before. Science can measure the details of such storms, but it can't necessarily explain how such extreme conditions occur.

All waves begin as little ripples, or capillary waves, on the surface of the water. These ripples allow the wind to "catch" on the water, and the harder the wind blows, the bigger the waves start to get. (Even if the wind stopped, the waves would continue to fall into the trough that preceded them—these are called swells.) As wind speed increases, wave energy rises not linearly, but to the fourth power. In other words, seas generated by 40-knot winds aren't twice as violent as seas generated by 20-knot winds, but *17 times* as violent. Further, as the waves get higher, they also get steeper, and they tend to collapse under their own weight, displacing huge amounts of water. When a boat is in a breaking wave, it will either get flipped over by the wave, or the wave will break on the boat, threatening to inundate it.

Junger also notes that, as of his writing in 1997, wave heights had been on the rise, and that this could be due to stricter environmental laws—oil in the water makes it harder for winds to "grip" the sea, so cleaner water would make for larger waves—or to global warming trends, bringing more severe storms with them. Whatever the reason, these enormous waves can have a devastating impact on the safety of boats—which shows the importance of understanding the science behind storms and the behavior of the sea.

Ships are built to withstand what's called 25-year stress, meaning the worst conditions a ship will likely face in 25 years. But this is simply a guess made by naval architects; ships can and do encounter conditions that exceed their stress rating. Waves that exceed this rating are called "non-negotiable waves" or "rogue waves." Such waves are generally steep, with a huge trough in front of them, or a "hole in the ocean." When a ship is caught in a rogue wave and can't get its bow up fast enough, the ship's back will be broken.

To a certain extent, even scientificallyinformed safety is a guessing game. Shipbuilders can make an educated guess about the conditions a boat will face and its ability to withstand them, but they simply can't predict those conditions with absolute certainty. Like ships' captains, architects make the best decisions they can with the limited information they have.

If a rogue wave blows out the windows of a boat's wheelhouse, the boat's wiring can become soaked, or else the boat can fill up with water very quickly. In such a scenario, crew members might be sent onto the deck with plywood to board up the window—a terribly dangerous task in stormy conditions. Aside from that, there isn't much to do but keep heading into the **storm** and radio for help. If Billy had simply said "mayday" into a Coast Guard-monitored channel, a rescue plane would have been dispatched immediately, and other boats would have tried to converge on the Andrea Gail to help. But the Coast Guard is never called, suggesting that the *Andrea Gail*'s radios are out by this point in the storm. Billy could also have tripped the switch on his EPIRB, but he never does—suggesting that "he's hopeful about their chances right up until [...] they have no chance at all."

In a storm with these conditions, there weren't very many options for the crew. Given the lack of communication with other boats, and the absence of evidence that Billy gave off any kind of distress message, it makes sense to conclude that the Andrea Gail *was quickly overwhelmed by the storm and had little opportunity to call for help.*

It's hard to guess how the men on the *Andrea Gail* might have reacted to the realization that they were likely going down at sea. Another fisherman, Ernie Hazard, recalls that when his boat sank off Georges Bank, he and his crew were too busy trying to survive to dwell on the possibility of dying. The same would probably have been true for the crew of the *Andrea Gail*—though it's easy to imagine that Bobby Shatford, especially, would have recalled his misgivings and how close he came to skipping the trip altogether.

Ernie Hazard's experience suggests that endangered fishermen often deal with danger as just another set of problems to be solved; whatever happened, the men of the Andrea Gail *might not have had time to process the reality that they were dying. This possibility seems never to have been too far from fishermen's minds, though, as Bobby's early premonitions suggest.*

Although it's impossible to know what was happening aboard the *Andrea Gail* at this time, the *Eishin Maru*, a Japanese longliner, was likely facing similar conditions. About 200 miles southwest, the *Eishin Maru* was struck by a huge wave a little past 8 p.m. on the night of October 29th. A Canadian observer named Judith Reeves was aboard the *Eishin Maru* when this wave blew out a window. Even though the boat was twice the length of the *Andrea Gail*, its decks were buried by waves. Just before dawn the next morning, the boat's electronics are blown out by another rogue wave.

Given that the Eishin Maru *was twice the* Andrea Gail*'s length, its frightening experiences can offer a sobering insight into what the much smaller vessel might have endured.*

Because Reeves is the only person aboard the *Eishin Maru* who can speak English, she's summoned to the radio room to speak to the ship's agent about the damage they've sustained. The Coast Guard cuts in to ask if they need rescue, and the Japanese radio operator points to a sentence in his English phrase book: "We are helpless and drifting. Please render all assistance." That's when Reeves realizes that the ship is going down, and that with the hatches battened down, she's probably never getting out.

Though Reeves's testimony is obviously evidence that she survived, her experience, like that of the Mary T *and other vessels caught in the storm, testifies to the trapped and helpless mindset a person in a sinking ship might have.*

At this time, Billy is probably a bit south-southwest of Sable Island, which is essentially a 20-mile-long sandbar, historically uninhabited except for a scattering of lighthouses and a herd of wild horses. Ships have often sought shelter on its beaches, only to get battered to death by waves off its coast. It's typically shrouded in fog because of the convergence of the Gulf Stream and the Labrador Current. Five thousand people are believed to have drowned in the island's shallows. Those who survived would sometimes spend months camped out on the island, awaiting better weather and a rescue ship.

The conditions on this remote Canadian island, especially the difficulty of safely navigating in its shallows, meant that it was just as likely to be a death trap as a refuge in a storm. It's unclear why Billy would have purposefully drawn near to it.

Nowadays, there are just two lighthouses, a Coast Guard station, and a weather station on Sable Island. It's notoriously difficult to navigate around Sable because of the currents, and if his electronics are down, then Billy Tyne would be trying to navigate by chart, compass, and wind conditions (a process known as "dead reckoning"). It's possible that he strays into the deadly shallows around Sable, or else loses steering altogether and is at the mercy of the weather, much like the *Eishin Maru*. Nobody knows for sure what happens—only that, around midnight on October 28th, "something catastrophic happens aboard the *Andrea Gail*."

Though Billy was an experienced mariner and would almost certainly have known how to navigate by old-fashioned dead reckoning, it would have been difficult to do under pressure—especially in order to save one's ship in the midst of the worst storm conditions on record. Again, it's just speculation that this took place—the only thing that's certain is that the Andrea Gail *ran into deadly peril around this location.*

THE ZERO-MOMENT POINT

In a breaking wave, it's possible for a ship to be "pitch-poled"—for the bow to be caught in the wave's crest and the entire boat flipped end over end. Or, a boat can be simply driven under by waves, water pouring into the cabin and making it impossible for the crew to escape. Pitch-poling is the "better" possibility, because air is trapped in the hold and keeps the boat afloat, giving the crew a chance to escape. By late evening on October 28th, either of these things could have befallen the *Andrea Gail*. In either case, if the crew is still alive, they're probably just trying to survive the night.

Junger speculates about the emergencies (essentially, either flipping or flooding) that might have brought the Andrea Gail *to its end—the more common disasters that can befall a ship in extreme conditions.*

Ernie Hazard remembers surviving a late November **storm** on the *Fair Wind*. He felt the boat flipping over and then found himself upside down in an air pocket. He dove into the pilothouse in search of light, found the space flooded, and realized that his only options were to swim or die. He simply had to make a choice. He doesn't understand why, but he chose to swim, popping out a window and making his way to a life raft.

Ernie Hazard is an example of a fisherman who survived pitch-poling. Even in this case, his survival seems to have had as much to do with personal initiative as with the favorability of conditions. His experience suggests that split-second decision-making can be a big factor in whether a sinking fisherman lives or dies.

No matter whether the Andrea Gail pitch-poles or founders, she reaches what's called the "zero-moment point"—a position from which she can't recover. Reaching this "point of no return" happens very quickly; there wouldn't even be time for crew members to grab a life vest before the boat would be inundated with water and the electrical system would short out.

Very likely, the Andrea Gail *would have reached its "zero-moment point" before anyone had much chance to assess conditions, make decisions, or ponder their fate.*

If the boat got inundated with water, the men aboard the Andrea Gail probably weren't as fortunate as Ernie Hazard. They would have had, at most, a minute's worth of air in their lungs, and by that point, their brains would have triggered an involuntary last breath underwater. Most people are still conscious at this point. About 10 percent of people die without any water in their lungs—the muscles around the larynx contract at the touch of water, and the person suffocates. In 90 percent of people, however, water floods the lungs, and oxygen no longer makes it to the blood. The suffering only lasts for a minute or two; soon, the drowning person is unconscious. His metabolic rate will slow down as his central nervous system makes a final attempt to keep him alive, but each man's brain activity will get slower and slower until, within 15 to 20 minutes, it stops entirely, and he dies.

Rather like a boat in a storm, a drowning person reaches a "zero-moment point," too, as the brain finally runs out of oxygen after the body makes several attempts to sustain life. Junger's description of the drowning process isn't meant to dwell on the men's death in a morbid way; rather, he seems to draw an intentional parallel between the fate of the ship and the fate of the men inside. With rare exceptions like Ernie Hazard, the survival of the men depends on the survival of their ship.

THE WORLD OF THE LIVING

Albert Johnston gets hit by the **storm** a few hours after the Andrea Gail did, but the center of the Sable Island storm skirts back toward the coast of Newfoundland, probably sparing his life. He keeps fighting northward so as to avoid the Gulf Stream. Having closely monitored the weather, Johnston isn't surprised when Hurricane Grace slams into the Sable Island storm on the evening of October 29th. By October 30th, the Sable Island storm is stuck between the hurricane and the Canadian high pressure system. The two outer systems are spinning in opposite directions "like huge gears that catch the storm between their teeth." The effect is called a retrograde, and it's only seen about once a century. Watching all this come together back in Boston, Bob Case thinks, "this is the perfect storm."

Junger implies that Johnston's careful monitoring of the weather—perhaps greater than average for a captain—played a role in sparing his life. Most captains were likely too busy fighting to survive to be aware of the extreme forces coming together in the North Atlantic, and probably no one understood what a rarity was taking place besides meteorologists like Bob Case. By "perfect" storm, Case means that forces like this seldom align so neatly in nature.

Most of the swordfishing fleet escapes the worst of the **storm** because they're farther out, while those closer to shore are hit badly. One of them is the *Satori*. In spite of Ray Leonard's insistence, the storm only worsens. Karen Stimpson clips herself into a safety line and fights to control the boat. Sue Bylander begins putting together a survival bag in case they have to abandon ship, but soon she looks outside and discovers that the life raft has been blown away. At her lowest point, Stimpson writes down some goodbyes and stows them in a Ziploc bag. She believes they're not going to make it.

Because the retrograde storm is moving toward the coast (in contrast to most storms, which are swept eastward by the jet stream), those closer in are getting hit harder. On the Satori, *another near-death experience unfolds. Stimpson and Bylander realize that they likely have no escape, and unlike most, Stimpson has time to contemplate her goodbyes—a "luxury" that the* Andrea Gail *crew might not have had.*

At 11:15 p.m. on October 29th, Stimpson, with Leonard's sullen permission, calls in a mayday. The information is relayed to the Boston-based Coast Guard, and a cutter called the *Tamaroa*, along with a Falcon jet, head out into the **storm**. The *Satori* crew have no idea if they've been heard until, half an hour later, the jet appears through the clouds and begins talking with Bylander over the radio. Stimpson feels as if she's "rejoined the world of the living." The *Tamaroa* won't be there for 12 hours, so the Falcon pilot coaches the women through the night as they fight to keep the boat afloat. Leonard stays slumped in his bunk, privately deciding he's going to go down with his ship.

After resigning themselves to the likelihood of death—and feeling isolated in the midst of the storm-- the sudden appearance of the Falcon jet was a shock for the women. Satori *owner Leonard, meanwhile, has a different response to the catastrophe than his crew does. He identifies himself so much with his ship that he can't even face the idea of possible survival.*

Eventually, the next morning, two life rafts are dropped from an H-3 helicopter, but the rafts explode when they hit the water. The *Satori* crew now has to wait for the *Tamaroa*'s arrival. Meanwhile, the Coast Guard grants a "manifestly unsafe" designation for the Satori so that Leonard can be forced off the sinking vessel. The *Tamaroa* finally arrives in the afternoon, and it's crucial that a rescue take place before dark falls in a few hours. When the *Tamaroa* sends a motorized life raft with survival suits for the *Satori* crew, the *Satori* punctures the raft—meaning that now the *rescuers* need rescuing.

Rescue is not a straightforward operation—and not just because some, like Leonard, aren't even sure they desire saving. The ocean conditions are dicey for the rescuers themselves, and the sinking boat poses a threat as well. At this point, it's not yet certain that the Satori crew will make it.

Next, the H-3 helicopter tries dispatching a rescue swimmer named Dave Moore, who's never undertaken a major rescue job before. Moore jumps 10 feet down from the helicopter, landing in the lukewarm waters of the Gulf Stream, and swims up and down the massive waves before deciding there's no way he can catch the *Satori* in these conditions—he's hauled back up to the helicopter in a lift basket. The Coast Guard tries a different approach—having the *Satori* crew put on their survival suits and jump into the sea. Then Moore will swim over to them and help each crew member into a lift basket. This is their last shot.

The situation of the Satori *crew is as dire as it gets—they will have to abandon their ship in order to have a realistic hope of rescue. Even though the inclusion of this story makes it clear that the Satori crew likely survived, it helps illustrate the extremity of the storm, as well as how unlikely a rescue of the* Andrea Gail *would likely have been. Not unlike fishing, rescue efforts involve on-the-spot decision-making and responsiveness to conditions.*

When the *Satori* crew prepares to abandon ship, Leonard is so distraught he punches himself in the head. But gradually all three crew members work up their nerve to leap into the ocean. Stimpson recalls that when Dave reached them, he said, "'Hi, I'm Dave Moore, your rescue swimmer, how are you' [...] It was very cordial." Once each person is loaded into the basket, they're aboard the helicopter within a matter of seconds. Leonard takes the longest because he's so upset he practically has to be lifted into the basket. No sooner has this been achieved than Moore has to venture back out to save the Coast Guard rescuers.

The rescue brings a range of emotions—Leonard still can't cope with the reality of what's happening, while Dave Moore's calmness and courtesy stand out against the dire situation they're in.

Stimpson remembers the intense, sincere concern of the Coast Guard rescue team, but she also recalls that by the time she collapsed into a seat on the helicopter, she was almost delirious from lack of sleep. She hallucinates off and on during the journey back to Boston. After they arrive at the Cape Cod Air Station and change into dry clothes, Stimpson wanders around talking to reporters, too wired from everything that's happened to fall asleep. She tells a reporter that Leonard didn't want to leave the *Satori* because it was his home, his whole life. Not much later, the Coast Guardsmen are abruptly summoned—another water rescue is needed.

Stimpson tries to come to terms with her survival—her rescue has been a physically overwhelming experience, and it seems her emotions haven't yet caught up. Yet she is compassionate toward Leonard, whose grief overwhelms his gratitude at having been rescued. Meanwhile, the storm continues to wreak havoc.

INTO THE ABYSS

Early on the morning of October 30th, long before she knows anything is the matter, Chris Cotter has a nightmare about Bobby. Later that day, Susan Brown, Bob Brown's wife, drops by her apartment. She seems uncomfortable. Finally, she tells Chris that they're having trouble reaching the Andrea Gail. Chris is shocked, and she immediately senses that Bobby is dead. She rushes to the Crow's Nest, where Ethel and Bobby's sisters have already begun to assume the worst about the *Andrea Gail*'s fate. Everyone starts drinking heavily.

Back home, there's not yet any sign of the storm, but Chris is constantly attuned to the dangers Bobby is facing. Everyone copes with the strain of unknowing by drinking. In a town that has lost thousands at sea, there's an almost ritual feel to their communal grief and resignation.

Bob Brown tries to reach his boats all day. That night, he finally gets through to the Hannah Boden; Linda Greenlaw hasn't heard from Billy in a couple of days and is worried. Bob reports the Andrea Gail as missing to the Coast Guard in Boston. Without any kind of distress call or EPIRB signal, there's no way to know for certain that something has gone disastrously wrong. However, the news media picks up on the situation and interviews *Allison* captain Tommy Barrie's wife, Kimberly. Soon, fishermen's wives all over the East Coast are calling Kimberly for any tidbit she can share.

At this point, it's impossible for those on shore to know what's happening on the open ocean—all they know is how much they don't know. This is highlighted by the news interview—all Kimberly Barrie is able to share is that she spoke to her husband briefly, but in a world (early 1990s) before internet communication was common, her short interview is all that fellow fishermen's wives have to hang onto.

That night, the sword fleet captains confer over the radio and speculate about where the Andrea Gail may have drifted. Bob Brown also alerts the Canadian Coast Guard, and soon, half a dozen vessels near Sable Island are trying to establish communications with the *Andrea Gail*, but no one succeeds. Adam Randall hears a news report about the missing vessel and realizes that his premonitions about the trip may have been well founded.

By the time it's clearly established that the Andrea Gail *is missing, there isn't much that the rest of the fleet or rescuers can do beyond speculate and hope. And for Randall, who nearly wound up on the vessel but walked away at the last moment because of his gut feeling, it's a strange combination of gratitude and fear.*

Meanwhile, the Air National Guard is facing a crisis. A Japanese sailboat has gone down beyond the Coast Guard's helicopter reach, so an Air Guard H-60 helicopter—which can be refueled in midair—must intervene. Pilot Dave Ruvola, copilot Buschor, flight engineer Jim Mioli, and pararescue jumpers John Spillane and Rick Smith prepare for the attempt. Pararescue jumpers (PJs) train for more than 18 months, and the training process has a dropout rate of more than 90 percent. PJs know how to parachute, survive in various terrain, resist interrogation, and escape blindfolded from a submerged helicopter. They've also mastered rescue skills, military training, and how to freefall from the troposphere into combat zones. After arriving on the scene of the struggling sailboat, Ruvola and his team determine that it's too risky to try a rescue; the stranded captain would just be imperiled further by the attempt. (He's later saved by a Romanian ship.)

Meanwhile, another rescue is coming together—this one even more perilous than the Satori *rescue. Junger provides background on pararescue training in order to give a sense of just how skilled the PJs were at survival—and thus how extreme the conditions that were about to imperil them. The PJs, in other words, are trained for just about every type of rescue scenario imaginable, yet in the storm of the century, they're just as much at nature's mercy as anyone else.*

Later, it is determined that adequate weather information was not made available to Ruvola's helicopter. If they had been in contact with New Jersey's McGuire Air Force Base, which typically faxed weather reports to Ruvola's headquarters at Suffolk Air Base, they would have known that a westward diversion is needed in order to avoid severe weather. But McGuire doesn't even know that there's a helicopter in the air. So Ruvola is flying back to base assuming that he has nothing to worry about beyond his next refueling attempt.

Sometimes, even for those best equipped to survive in extreme conditions, survival comes down to having the needed information at hand—and Ruvola's team doesn't. This oversight is about to leave him flying straight into disaster, suggesting that technology is only useful when people have the foresight to implement it properly.

In fact, Ruvola is heading into a rain band 50 miles wide and 80 miles long, with 70-knot winds and zero visibility. Just before Ruvola lines up with the tanker plane for his next refueling, he hits such strong headwinds that he can scarcely control the aircraft. Soon, it feels like he's "getting batted around the sky," and there's little hope of lining up on the tanker safely, though he makes 20 or 30 attempts. He can barely even see its lights ahead of him. Finally, he loses sight of the entire C-130 in the dense clouds and realizes that their best hope is to plan for an intentional ditching before they run out of fuel. Ruvola informs his crew.

As the rescue of the Satori *already demonstrated, when faced with such extreme conditions, rescuers can very quickly find themselves in the position of needing to be rescued. Since the helicopter depends on refueling in order to stay aloft, and the storm has made this all but impossible, it soon becomes clear that Ruvola's team won't make it home in one piece. It's another instance of technology being at the mercy of conditions.*

Hearing this, John Spillane realizes he might be facing his own death. As a rescue jumper, he understands just how dire these conditions are. The helicopter broadcasts a mayday and contacts the *Tamaroa*, 15 miles northeast, for help. That's when the Coast Guard airmen, who'd just been chatting with Karen Stimpson in Boston, prepare to embark on another rescue.

From a failed rescue attempt, the rescuers now face conditions in which they are unlikely to be found. Because of their experience in rescue, they probably understand the danger of their situation much better than most.

At 9:28 p.m., Ruvola emerges from the clouds and hovers 200 feet above the ocean. He and his crew go through the ditching checklist they've practiced many times, but things go wrong—Mioli is so busy finding the life raft he doesn't have time to put on his survival suit, and Ruvola is too absorbed in his work to remember to eject his door. Ruvola will have to stay on the helicopter after the others jump, to make sure it doesn't crash on top of them. At 9:30, one of the engines flames out, so Ruvola yells at his crew to bail out. Ruvola's copilot, Buschor, Smith and Spillane work up their nerves and jump into the ocean; Mioli initially decides to take his chances aboard the helicopter. When Spillane jumps, it's so dark that he doesn't even know when he's going to hit the water, and then he loses consciousness.

Even for the most experienced rescuers, a real-life emergency is different from training—any number of things can go wrong, things that might mean the difference between life and death. The extreme conditions of this "perfect storm" make things unpredictably dangerous, and human error and limitation add to the fear and confusion.


John Spillane grew up in New York City and joined the Air Force at 17, training as a combat diver, joining the Air National Guard, and finally going through PJ school. After a few years working for the police department and studying geology, he finally decided to work for the Guard full-time. When Spillane jumps into the Atlantic, he hits the water at about 50 mph—breaking bones in his arm, one of his legs, and several ribs. He also ruptures one of his kidneys and bruises his pancreas. When he regains consciousness, he doesn't remember any of this happening—he just instinctively starts swimming.

Junger gives some of Spillane's background in order to underscore just how experienced he is; it's unlikely that anyone else is as well prepared to jump into a heaving ocean—yet even Spillane is battered and disoriented by the experience. The only thing that saves him is that his training kicks in—an advantage that most people don't have.

When Spillane reaches the life raft pushed out by Mioli and clings to its side, memories start flooding back—as well as awareness of great pain. Moments later the raft gets flipped and pulled away by the wind, leaving Spillane stranded and grasping a nylon bag of blankets. He realizes he's very likely about to die at sea and thinks sadly of his pregnant wife at home. It's so dark that he can't even see the waves that repeatedly submerge him, and the wind keeps flinging so much water that he repeatedly vomits seawater. After an hour, he sees the strobe lights from other survival suits and, in obedience to his training, makes his way painfully toward them. Eventually, after a couple hours, he reaches Ruvola and Mioli. They are roped together, and Mioli is barely conscious. Ruvola had managed to extract himself from the helicopter just after it crashed.

Spillane initially resigns himself to dying at sea, but his training primes him to seek strength in numbers—an instinct that probably saves his life, despite debilitating injuries that would probably have meant the end for anyone else.

Minutes after the helicopter ditching is reported, rescue units all over the East Coast mobilize. A Falcon jet and H-3 helicopter are launched from Cape Cod, a Navy jet, the *Tamaroa*, and a Coast Guard cutter called the *Spencer* are all dispatched. Eventually, after hours of meticulous scanning, the Falcon pilot spots the strobes on four survival suits. He radios the position to the H-3 rescue helicopter whose pilot, despite the extreme conditions, tries lowering his rescue basket, but the basket keeps getting battered by the waves. The helicopter hovers until the *Tamaroa* comes into view.

At this point, some of the same personnel that assisted at the Satori rescue are now converging on the downed rescue swimmers. Things aren't looking hopeful for Spillane and the others—even with all these resources at their disposal, the storm's power dwarfs human capacities.

The *Tamaroa* comes upon Ruvola's copilot Buschor first, apart from the others, and since a rescue swimmer can't be safely deployed, they scream at him to swim for his life. After a desperate effort, Buschor reaches the ship's safety net and is hauled aboard. He's been in the water for over four hours, and his body temperature has dropped to 94 degrees. This rescue alone took half an hour, but Commander Brudnicki makes the difficult decision to go after the remaining men, knowing it puts his own crew at even greater risk, and that no one would have criticized him for deciding differently.

In these conditions, even a Coast Guard cutter is imperiled by the dangerous seas, and Commander Brudnicki would have been regarded as well within his rights to refuse any further rescue attempt. His determination to save the men suggests that even though human will alone isn't sufficient against the storm, it can make the difference between life and death.

When the *Tamaroa* reaches the three other survivors, it's clear that these men won't have the strength to swim. They catch the safety net, but a wave yanks it out of their hands. Spillane catches it on a second attempt, sensing this is his last chance, and is finally hauled aboard, in great pain. Ruvola finally catches the net and screams at Mioli, who is hypothermic and barely has any strength left, that he has to give this everything he's got. The *Tamaroa* crew grip the net and any part of Ruvola and Mioli that they can grab and agonizingly pull them aboard the heaving *Tamaroa*.

The conditions are so extreme that even pararescue jumpers, who specialize in the world's most dangerous scenarios, are almost too injured and hypothermic to assist in their own rescue; they're dependent on the Tamaroa crew to save their lives.

Even with the four men safely aboard and receiving medical treatment, the mission isn't yet over—they still need to find Rick Smith. Nine aircraft are committed to the search. Smith is one of the greatest rescue swimmers anyone has ever seen, and they're sure he'll pull through.

After all this, the last member of the pararescue crew, Smith, hasn't been located. He's so renowned for his skill that nobody believes he'll actually succumb—showing that even against such odds, people are inclined to be optimistic (or perhaps in denial) about human abilities.

THE DREAMS OF THE DEAD

By the time Gloucester knows that its fleet is in trouble, about three quarters of a million square miles are under gale-force conditions, and by the morning of October 31st, the storm has stalled off Long Island, its winds raking across Gloucester. At first, on this mildly sunny morning, there's no other indication of the coming **storm** than the huge swells echoing along the coast. By midafternoon, though, hurricane-force winds are slamming into the town, flooding beaches, breaching sea walls, and tearing up sections of road. Hundreds of homes are destroyed, a few of them swept out to sea.

The mild morning belies the terrifying force that's about to slam into Gloucester itself. The storm's encroachment on human civilization makes it appear even fiercer; before, its destruction was relatively contained by the open ocean. The damage symbolizes the ongoing wreckage the storm is creating in human lives.

By nightfall on the 31st, the Coast Guard is dealing with two search-and-rescue missions: for the Andrea Gail and for Rick Smith. Just before evening, a plane spots emergency green dye in the water, which was possibly released by Smith, and there appears to be a dark shape in the center of the dye. The plane drops rescue supplies, and other planes and the *Tamaroa* begin converging on the spot. It's later clarified, though, that what the pilot probably saw was not a person but a life raft, and that the dye was released by a Coast Guardsmen marking a spot.

The Coast Guard continues to devote its resources to the improbable recovery of a small fishing vessel and a single rescue swimmer. The amount of resources poured into the search shows the inclination of human beings to hope, even in the face of the most discouraging odds.

By the morning of November 1st, conditions are finally beginning to calm down, and John Spillane is evacuated by helicopter for an emergency blood transfusion. The search for Rick Smith continues. Even if Smith could survive for several days at sea, he would eventually die of dehydration. When the *Tamaroa* makes port on Long Island, Rick Smith's wife, Marianne, tells the PJ supervisor that if they haven't found Rick by now, she believes he is dead. She hasn't slept in days and is nursing a three-week-old baby. After nine days, the Coast Guard finally suspends the search. The most likely explanation is that he was knocked unconscious when he jumped and subsequently drowned.

The death of Rick Smith, one of the best pararescue jumpers in the field, helps convey the strength of this storm. From the rescues Junger has described, it's clear that some degree of human skill and courage was needed in order to survive—and yet, it wasn't enough; to some degree, luck made a difference, too. Against a storm of this magnitude, everyone is relatively helpless.

Meanwhile, 15 aircraft are still searching for the Andrea Gail. On November 1st, Albert Johnston is heading home on the *Mary T* when he drives through a bunch of blue fuel barrels with *AG* marked on the side—a bad sign. A few days later, the Coast Guard finds the *Andrea Gail*'s propane tank and radio beacon near Sable Island. Finally, on November 5th, the *Andrea Gail*'s EPIRB washes up on Sable Island. It's switched off, which nobody can explain. Almost two weeks after the *Andrea Gail* was first reported missing, the search is called off.

Ominously, contact is finally made with the Andrea Gail, for the first time in days—yet only scattered remnants remain. The mystery of the disarmed distress beacon suggests that the ship's fate will never be fully understood.

Chris Cotter visited the Gloucester pier a lot, fighting off morbid thoughts about Bobby's last moments. A memorial service is held for the entire crew a few days later, followed by a weekend-long wake that drifts between the Crow's Nest and people's homes. The men just disappeared—saying goodbye to them takes a special effort. Murph's three-year-old son, Dale, Jr., dreams of his father months later and can't grasp his mother's explanation that his dad is "fishing in heaven."

The loved ones of the Andrea Gail *crew struggle to internalize their losses because they lack material evidence of the men's deaths. This is the book's ultimate example of the strain placed on families and communities by the fishing industry; even death occurs at a distance, leaving families guessing and perhaps, on some level, still faintly hoping.*

Weeks later, family members receive a letter from Bob Brown asking them to exonerate him from any responsibility—the Andrea Gail, he claims, was fully seaworthy. Several of the bereaved decide to sue Brown, but a deposition only proves that the *Andrea Gail* was altered and tested to the same degree that most fishing vessels are—that is, it wasn't overseen by a marine architect, but was nevertheless considered to be in "top of the line" condition. In the end, the case is settled out of court.

In the end, loved ones' desire for a semblance of justice and closure collides with the cold realities of the industry. The Andrea Gail *had demonstrable weaknesses, but these fell completely within industry standards, meaning that Brown can't be held responsible.*

Junger observes that "the effects of a **storm** go rippling outward" in people's lives for years after the fact. Judith Reeves recalls falling into a depression after surviving her ordeal on the *Eishin Maru*. A psychic on Long Island claims that Rick Smith is still alive, prompting a renewal of the search, but Marianne Smith finally accepts the loss and goes back to school to become a lawyer. A freighter called the *Gold Bond Conveyor* is the only ship to be caught in both "The Perfect Storm" and a horrific nor'easter, 18 months later, that nearly challenges the Halloween gale's status as the storm of the century; 33 men abandon ship and are never seen again.

The storm had an impact far beyond the physical. The stories of Reeves and Smith are just two examples of psychological repercussions that were probably common among survivors of the storm. The fate of the Gold Bond Conveyor further emphasizes the impersonal, unpredictable cruelty of such forces.

The following spring, Adam Randall takes a job on a tuna longliner called the *Terri Lei*. One morning east of Charleston, South Carolina, the *Terri Lei* is hauling in its gear in choppy seas. An EPIRB distress signal is soon picked up by the Charleston Coast Guard. It doesn't seem like conditions are severe, and no other boats are in trouble. Still, the Coast Guard duly responds—and all they find is a life raft and some scattered gear. Nobody escaped the *Terri Lei* alive.

Junger closes The Perfect Storm *with a chilling coincidence that underscores the frailty of human beings against the sea. Adam Randall had walked away from the* Andrea Gail *the year before—yet the best of human instincts are fallible, and in the fishing industry, death lurks where it is least expected.*

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