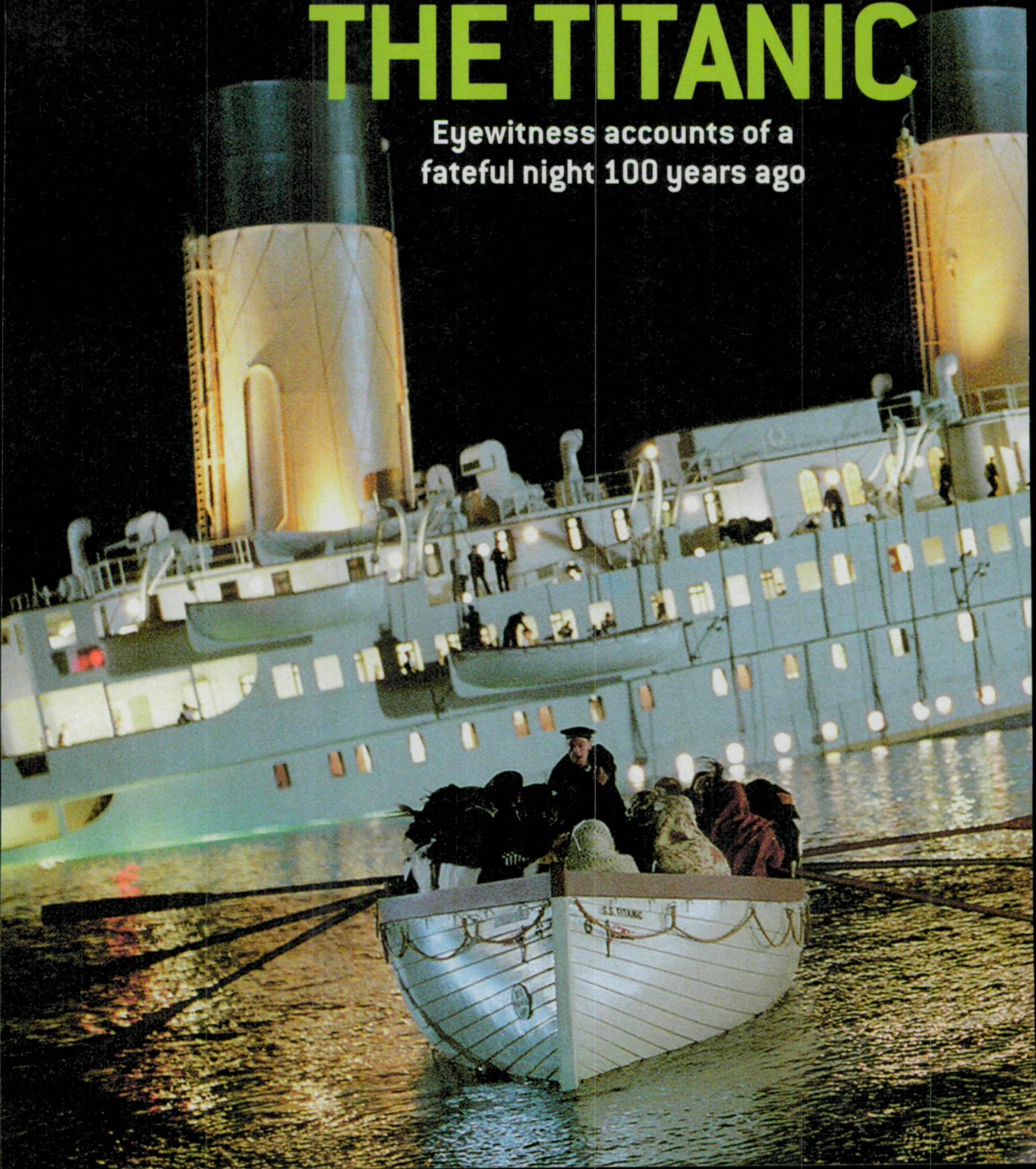


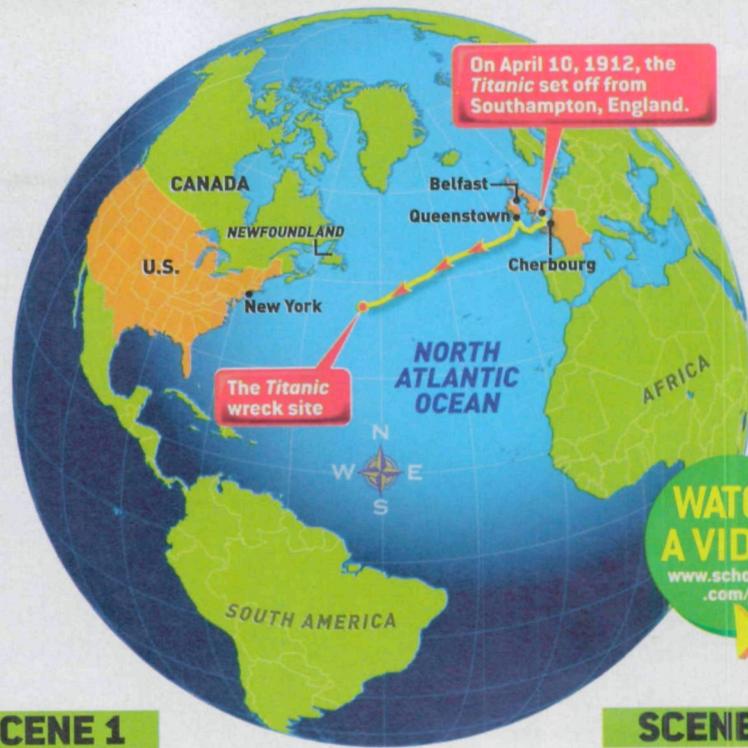
THE SINKING OF THE TITANIC

Eyewitness accounts of a fateful night 100 years ago



SURVIVORS

Passengers in a lifeboat await rescue as the *Titanic* sinks in a scene from the 1997 movie starring Leonardo DiCaprio.



SCENE 1

Narrator A: In the early-morning hours of April 15, 1912, the *Titanic* sank into the frigid waters of the North Atlantic Ocean. Of the more than 2,200 people aboard, more than 1,500 drowned or froze to death after the ship struck an iceberg.

Narrator B: It was the *Titanic's* maiden voyage. The paint on its bow was barely dry when the first passengers boarded five days earlier in Southampton, England, bound for New York.

Narrator C: The disaster shocked the world. How could the “unsinkable” *Titanic*, the most elegant and celebrated ship ever built, meet such a fate?

Narrator D: The ocean liner sank on a Monday. By that Friday, a U.S. Senate subcommittee had opened an inquiry to find out why. The British government soon began its own investigation.

Narrator E: The testimony, as well as newspaper articles, books, and eyewitness accounts, weave a complex tale of courage, cowardice, and greed. Here's what happened, in the words of the survivors.

SCENE 2

Lawrence Beesley: I stood on the deck after dinner, and the night sky was filled with stars, millions and millions of them.

Narrator A: A few hours later, about 400 miles southeast of Newfoundland, Canada, the *Titanic* struck an iceberg.

Archibald Gracie IV: I was awakened by a sudden noise on the **starboard** side. I thought we had collided with something, maybe another ship.

Margaret Brown: When I came out of my stateroom [private cabin], men were standing in the hall in their pajamas. I heard one of them say to another, “Are you going to swim in those things?”

Narrator B: Many people didn't realize how badly the the ship had been damaged and that water was gushing in below.

Brown: Women gathered along the corridors in their bathrobes. They seemed to think that nothing serious had happened.

Jack Thayer: After that first jolt, we ran up to the deck but couldn't see any ice. Still, the boat started to list [tilt]. My parents and I raced

CHARACTERS

LAWRENCE BEESLEY, professor at Cambridge University in England

ARCHIBALD GRACIE IV, military historian from New York City

MARGARET BROWN, American socialite and women's rights activist

JACK THAYER, American passenger in first class with his parents

ARTHUR H. ROSTRON, captain of the *Carpathia*, a British ocean liner

EVA HART, British passenger in second class with her parents

LAURA CRIBB, American passenger in third class with her father

OFFICER

WALTER NICHOLS, veteran sailor

NARRATORS A-E

All characters were real people.

WORLD HISTORY PLAY



A paperboy sells copies of the *Evening News* in London the day after the disaster. Inset: The front page of *The New York Times*.

TITANIC 2012?

That's what passengers on the *Costa Concordia* (right) feared in January, when their cruise ship hit a rock off the coast of Italy. A huge tear in the hull sent water gushing in. The ship capsized, killing more than 30 people. But thanks to the lessons of the *Titanic*, lifeboats allowed for the safe evacuation of most of the 4,500 people aboard. According to passengers, the *Titanic* theme song by Céline Dion, "My Heart Will Go On," played as the liner sank into the Mediterranean. No one knows yet what caused the accident, but the captain is under investigation for abandoning the ship.

back to our rooms and threw on our clothes. Then we fastened our life jackets and put on overcoats.

Narrator C: On the deck, amid all the confusion, Jack was separated from his parents.

Thayer: I could see my father ahead but couldn't get through because of the crowd. It was the last time I saw him.

SCENE 3

Narrator D: Arthur H. Rostron, captain of the nearby *Carpathia*, was the first to respond to the impending disaster.

Arthur H. Rostron: At 12:35 a.m. Monday, I was told of an urgent distress signal from the *Titanic*. I jumped out of bed and gave the order to turn my ship around.

WORDS TO KNOW

- **emigrate** (*v*): to move from one region or country to another
- **starboard** (*adj*): the right side of a ship or aircraft when it's facing forward

Narrator E: The *Carpathia* had been heading to Europe from New York.

Rostron: I asked the radio operator twice: "Are you absolutely sure about this message?" When he nodded, I told him to wake the engineers and crew and make all possible speed to the *Titanic*. She was in trouble.

Narrator A: By that time, *Titanic* passengers were boarding lifeboats. But there were only 20—enough to hold just half of the people aboard.

Narrator B: Seven-year-old Eva Hart was in second class with her parents. They were **emigrating** from England to Canada.

Narrator C: As panic set in, Eva's father wrapped her in a blanket and put her in a lifeboat with her mother. "Hold Mommy's hand, and be a good girl," he said. She never saw him again.

Eva Hart: I remember thinking that everything in the world was standing still as I watched the ship list into the ocean.

Narrator D: Laura Cribb, 16, and

her father were returning home in third class from a visit to England. Laura's father died that night.

Laura Cribb: I saw one officer on the second deck with his revolver in hand. He threatened to shoot any man who tried to enter a boat before every woman was cared for. He shot three.

Officer: You there, buddy, step aside or I'll blow your jaw off! Women and children first!

Narrator E: Of the 112 children aboard, 56 died—men had jumped into the boats ahead of them.

Walter Nichols: After we got in our boat, I heard the band playing hymns to calm the remaining passengers. They didn't have a chance. They were cooped up in one of the ballrooms. They were drowned like rats, every one of them.

Narrator A: Jack Thayer knew there weren't enough seats in the lifeboats for everyone. Moments before the ship sank, he leaped off the side. Somehow, he managed to grab hold of a lifeboat.

Thayer: A wireless operator was



right next to me on the boat, holding on to me. We all sang a hymn and said the Lord's Prayer. Then we waited for dawn to come. None of us could move around to keep warm because waves kept washing over us. The boat turned over, and we clung to it as best we could.

Narrator B: As Jack and the others waited to be rescued, they saw the *Titanic* tip straight up and sink.

Narrator C: Suddenly, the metal snapped, and the ship split in half.

Beesley: It was a noise no one had heard before, and no one wants to hear again. It was as if all the trunks and glass and heavy objects in an attic had been hurled down the stairs, smashing each other and everything in their way.

Narrator D: Millionaires and paupers alike were still on the ship, about to die. The difference between the two groups was evident in the tally of survivors.

Narrator E: Six out of every 10 first-class passengers made it to safety. Downstairs in third class, only one in four survived.

EPILOGUE

Narrator A: The morning of April 15, the *Carpathia* rescued more than 700 people at sea and took them to New York. There, Archibald Gracie IV began to write *The Truth About the Titanic*.

Narrator B: Since then, much more has been learned about the causes of the tragedy (see box).

Narrator C: In 1985, oceanographer Robert Ballard discovered the shipwreck of the *Titanic*.

Hart: Everyone hailed Ballard as a hero. To me, he was a grave-robber.

Narrator D: Gracie died eight months after the disaster, days after finishing his book. "Even in his last hours," *The New York Times* wrote, "the memories of the disaster did not leave him. Rather, they crowded thicker, and he was heard to say: "We must get them into the boats. We must get them all into the boats." —Suzanne McCabe

THINK ABOUT IT

Should women and children be rescued first in a disaster? Explain.

What Went Wrong?

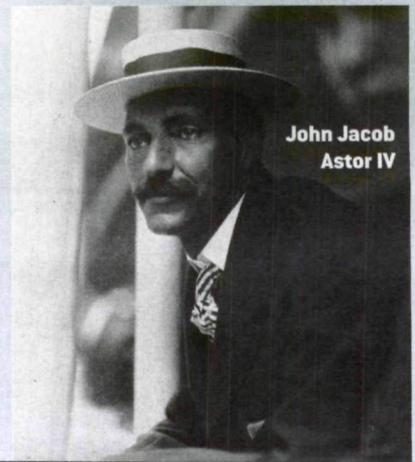
Finger-pointing and heated investigations followed in the wake of the *Titanic* disaster. Who was to blame for the loss of more than 1,500 people, including John Jacob Astor IV, then the world's richest man?

Some people said that the captain had ignored warnings about the iceberg. Others accused the White Star Line, which owned the *Titanic*, of not providing enough lifeboats.

Why weren't there more? White Star officials didn't want to mar the beauty of the ship—or scare its passengers. The officials also thought that their ship was safe enough to withstand any blows at sea. But Thomas Andrews, the director of the Belfast shipyard that built the *Titanic*, had warned them that "no ship is unsinkable."

Studies later determined that the ship's metal was more brittle than modern steel, and couldn't withstand the impact of the collision. If the ship had decreased its speed after striking the iceberg, it might have stayed afloat until help arrived. (The ship's owners had wanted to set a record for a transatlantic journey: six days at sea.)

Just two years ago, the great-granddaughter of the ship's second officer claimed that he had taken a key secret to his grave: When the iceberg was spotted, a crewman apparently misunderstood which way he'd been ordered to turn the wheel—and steered the *Titanic* directly into the iceberg.



John Jacob Astor IV