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For decades, Robert Ballard has pursued a dual career as a marine scientist and a pioneering discoverer, locating scores of wrecks all over the world, including the Titanic and the battleship Bismarck. In this lavishly illustrated chronicle, he uses his most exciting dives as starting points for an odyssey through time, tracing the evolution of ships and navigation from the first reed boats to the nuclear submarines of today.

Ballard tells of plunging 12,000 feet to the floor of the Atlantic and finding new life in the superheated water around active volcanoes on the Pacific Seabed. Readers join a team of technicians on the bridge of a research ship as they "fly" a state-of-the-art, unmanned submersible over the Titanic's ghostly hull.

But this book does much more than chronicle Ballard's unique experiences—it provides an illuminating history of humankind's relationship with the ocean. Along with the giants of modern undersea exploration—Cousteau, Beebe, Piccard—he introduces the storied seamen of the past, from the ancient Phoenicians to such greats as Magellan, Columbus, and Cook.