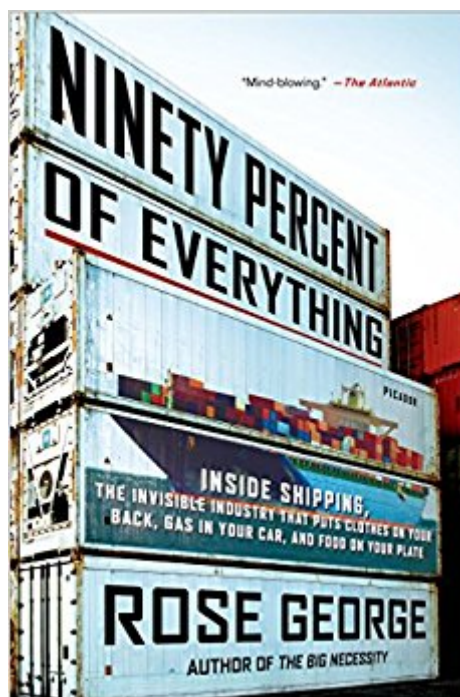


The book was found

Ninety Percent Of Everything: Inside Shipping, The Invisible Industry That Puts Clothes On Your Back, Gas In Your Car, And Food On Your Plate



Synopsis

On ship-tracking Web sites, the waters are black with dots. Each dot is a ship; each ship is laden with boxes; each box is laden with goods. In postindustrial economies, we no longer produce but buy, and so we must ship. Without shipping there would be no clothes, food, paper, or fuel. Without all those dots, the world would not work. Yet freight shipping is all but invisible. Away from public scrutiny, it revels in suspect practices, dubious operators, and a shady system of "flags of convenience." And then there are the pirates. Rose George, acclaimed chronicler of what we would rather ignore, sails from Rotterdam to Suez to Singapore on ships the length of football fields and the height of Niagara Falls; she patrols the Indian Ocean with an anti-piracy task force; she joins seafaring chaplains, and investigates the harm that ships inflict on endangered whales. Sharply informative and entertaining, *Ninety Percent of Everything* reveals the workings and perils of an unseen world that holds the key to our economy, our environment, and our very civilization.

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Customer Reviews

Though the romance is gone from seafaring life, journalist George's (*The Big Necessity: The Unmentionable World of Human Waste and Why It Matters*) multifaceted exploration of the global shipping industry gamely reintroduces an element of wonder. Nearly all goods sold worldwide are transported by container ship, which make workaday passage through the Straits of Malacca, the Suez Canal, and other channels kept in constant motion by an expanding global economy. One of George's main points is that freight shipping remains largely behind the scenes, leading to a

byzantine system of concealed ownership structures, convoluted regulations, a labor force largely drawn from developing nations, and inhumane working conditions. In a lengthy, thoughtful section, George takes to sea on the Kendal, a container ship of the Maersk shipping line, and explores these issues, and the very real threat of piracy along the Somali coast. George's work unfortunately suffers from a civilian's perspective on a closed professional fraternity. She searches for the poetry and elevated thought that informs literary accounts of a life at sea, but as one of the pragmatic crewmen notes: "For us, it is just work." 10 b&w illus. (Aug.) --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

In her debut work of nonfiction, *The Big Necessity* (2008), George profiled the generally unmentionable topic of human waste. In a similar vein, her latest work plumbs the ins and outs of the shipping industry, a subject that can more easily be discussed in polite company but somehow rarely is. It turns out shipping's virtual invisibility has as much to do with deliberate attempts by industry magnates to deflect scrutiny of unsafe working conditions and shady business dealings as it does with public indifference. In between chapters describing the voyage she took on the massive, 20-story freighter Maersk Kendal to research her book, George provides a wealth of detail about shipping's inner workings, from statistics on the amount and types of ships crossing our oceans to snapshots of the unheralded crew members who keep them running. She is also unsparing in exposing the hazards of contemporary seafaring life, including often unreported but rampant acts of piracy. George provides an engaging, much-needed, and in-depth tribute to shipping's essential role in providing worldwide goods and services. --Carl Hays --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

The title of Rose's book clues us in to her first main point: ninety percent of the food we eat and the things that fill our homes, cupboards, offices, and yards comes to us by sea. Her second point is that, even as we depend more and more on ships to bring us all that stuff, the industry has become more and more invisible. Ports have moved to deeper, more secure harbors away from cities; the goods transported by ships are hidden away in generic containers; and many ships fly "flags of convenience" that conceal who owns them leaving troubling questions about responsibility when one sinks (as two do per week) and or when a crew member dies at sea (as do two thousand per year). Rose, a self-confessed landlubber, boards a container ship for a five-week voyage to give us an inside view of it all, from ports to pirates, from storms to the solitary lives of the crew. She has to leave the ship on a few "side

trips to complete her picture (which interrupts the continuity of the voyage) and the reading is slow in spots, but, for the most part, she provides revelation after revelation on a subject I was too ignorant to know how ignorant I was.

My grandmother came from a seafaring family on the coast of Ireland, and as a little boy I heard countless tales of men at sea (women didn't go to sea except as passengers in her day). Seafaring life sounded dangerous yet fascinating. My relatives in Ireland continued going to sea, but I realize that fewer did so in each succeeding generation, and this book explains why. Most ships fly "flags of convenience" from countries that have little to do with the ship or crew itself. The crews can come from anywhere, and the ownership of ships is often buried in layers of charters and corporate fronts. The author goes on a trip from Britain to Singapore on a Maersk ship with a British master and an international crew. We get to know the master, who is at the end of his career, and many of his crew members. She details just how monotonous the trip is, and how dangerous it is as the ship goes around the Horn of Africa. Rather than let us suffer through a dreary accounting of that voyage, she digresses into stories about various aspects of the shipping industry. The author tells us about ships that sink, ships that are abandoned when it's no longer profitable to run them (along with their unfortunate crews), the abuses that come along with the Flag of Convenience system, and mostly the difficulty of going to sea. The shipping business has changed greatly from my great grandfather's time. In his day, there were still sailing ships, and ships under power burned coal. The crew sizes were much larger, and cargo loading and unloading was done by hand. A ship might be in port for weeks while its cargo was unloaded and new cargo loaded. The author explains how today ships have much smaller crews. With containerization loading and unloading takes hours instead of days or weeks. The city docks in port cities are closed, and now the ships pull up to container ports far away from the centers of the cities. The crews get little or no shore leave, so basically they spend months confined to the ship with no release from the monotony. I found the book fascinating, but I was disappointed to see that seafaring life isn't what it was in my great grandfather's time. In some ways it has improved (seamen aren't locked in chains or shanghaied like they were in his day), but in other ways it has gotten worse. Being a seafarer has never been easy, and the author effectively conveys this message. However, I always thought being a merchant seaman would be an adventurous life, but that era apparently has passed. I find that very sad.

More of a travel / social commentary book. Not a great deal on the inner workings of the shipping and intermodal industry as it relates to the complexity of moving from A to B. I was hoping for much

more. I enjoyed the author's writing style and found the information on pirates and whales interesting but not what I was hoping to learn.

Rose George's book shows us a small slice of what the shipping world is like. George experiences first hand a tiny sample of life on a ship and looks into the lives of some of the characters she meets along the way. Her account includes a bit about piracy, working conditions, economic inequality, environmental issues, and everyday life on a ship. I think her insight is valuable, especially for those wholly unfamiliar with the shipping industry. Could it be more complete? Sure. I think that the shipping industry is so huge and complex that to deep dive into each of its facets would result in an unreadable mess. George is a journalist and her writing style makes for an easy, enjoyable read. If you are interested in the shipping industry, you'll enjoy the book.

Ninety percent of everything we use comes from overseas; this isn't new information. But the realities of pirate waters, flag states, and working conditions were shockingly so. The author does a good job of weaving together the differences between the merchant navies of the early twentieth century and the life of a modern seafarer. I had no idea just how wild the sea still is, how free from regulation and responsibility shipowners now are. The book is long and the transitions between some of its elements seem awkward, but I'm not sure there's a better way to accomplish her goals in this narrative. Using a nearly retired sea captain's reminiscences to tie together past and present humanize what could otherwise be a mountain of dry facts.

The book is an interesting "slice of life" story with lots of factoids and anecdotes mixed into the narrative. It still falls into a category of books which seek to scold the shipping or cruise industry by way of presenting an expose of negative reality. (see "Cruise Ship Blues" for a prime example of clear agendas thinly masked behind claims of objective research and original discovery.) However I would not say that was so much the intent as the result with this book. There is much to be said that is negative and that is simply what you learn reading the book. But if there was an interest in building sympathy for those working in the industry the book does not achieve that. Rather it simply paints a picture of yet another part of society that has evolved greatly in the last century and has heroes and villains on all sides. You are left with a simple reminder that no society has risen without there being an underclass and that there are no "perfect worlds" in which it can be otherwise.

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