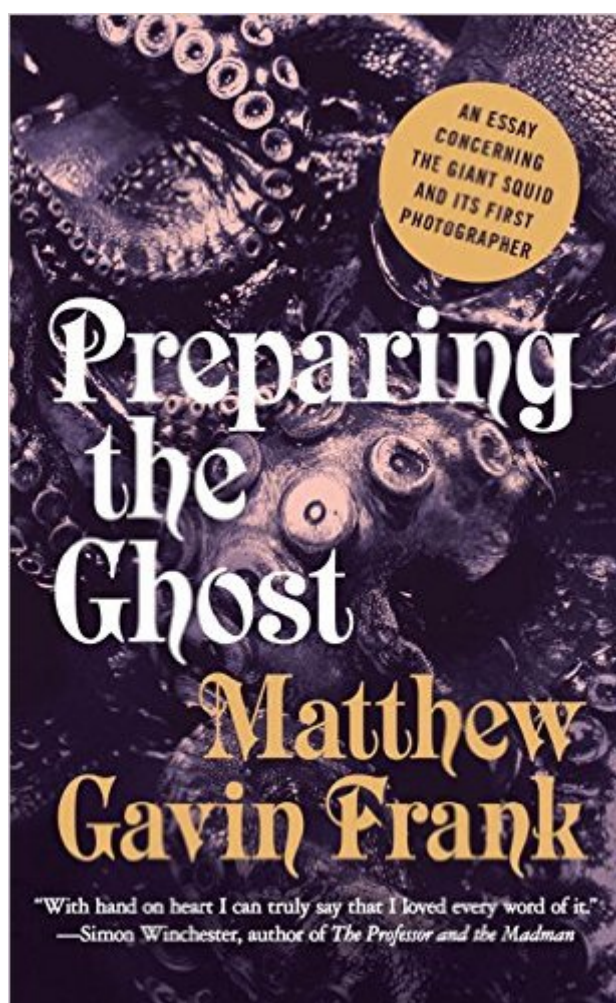


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Preparing The Ghost: An Essay Concerning The Giant Squid And Its First Photographer



Synopsis

A Shelf Awareness Best Book of 2014 Memory, mythology, and obsession collide in this strikingly original and enigmatic account of the first man to photograph a giant squid. Moses Harvey was the eccentric Newfoundland reverend and amateur naturalist who first photographed the near-mythic giant squid in 1874, draping it over a shower curtain rod to display its magnitude. In *Preparing the Ghost*, what begins as Moses's story becomes much more, as fellow squid-enthusiast Matthew Gavin Frank boldly winds his narrative tentacles around history, creative nonfiction, science, memoir, and meditations about the interrelated nature of them all. In a full-hearted, lyrical style reminiscent of Geoff Dyer, Frank weaves in playful forays about his research trip to Moses's Newfoundland home, Frank's own childhood and family history, and a catalog of bizarre facts and lists that recall Melville's story of obsession with another deep-sea dwelling leviathan. Though Frank is armed with impressive research, what he can't know about Harvey he fictionalizes, quite explicitly, as a way of both illuminating the scene and exploring his central theme: the big, beautiful human impulse to obsess. 15 drawings

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Now for the R! Up we go! Attach! Descend! Pay out the line! Whoa! Attach! Good! Up you go! Repeat! Attach! Descend! Pay out line. Whoa, girl! Steady now! Attach! Climb! Attach! Over to the right! Pay out line! Attach! Now right and down and swing that loop and around and around! Now in to the left! Attach! Climb! Repeat! O.K.! Easy, keep those lines together! Now, then, out and down

for the leg of the R! Pay out line! Whoa! Attach! Ascend! Repeat! Good girl!"That's Charlotte in E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web* narrating her acrobatic writing process. You can almost see the little gray spider leaping, twirling, jumping. Creating a miracle of language. Something that's intricate and fragile at once. A thing puzzling and wondrous. I've been carrying a book around in my book bag that is just as strange and beautiful as a dewy spiderweb. Matthew Gavin Frank's *Preparing the Ghost*, a 282-page meditation on the giant squid, Moses Harvey (the first man to photograph it), monomaniacal obsession (think Captain Ahab chasing a *Moby-Dick* with tentacles), death by chocolate ice cream, a fatal Chicago heat wave, a grandfather's saxophone legacy, and an *Insectarium*. Listed like this, these topics seem like dots of paint on a pointilist canvas. But, stepping back, and back, and back, the book becomes an impressionist landscape of our deepest passions. Frank does not lay out his story easily. Like Charlotte the spider, he plays out his lines slowly, weaving his threads together. The reader gets passages of prose poetry mixed with lists of arcane fact. The result is a blend of reality and myth that questions the very fabric of narrative: Myth as quite possible.

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