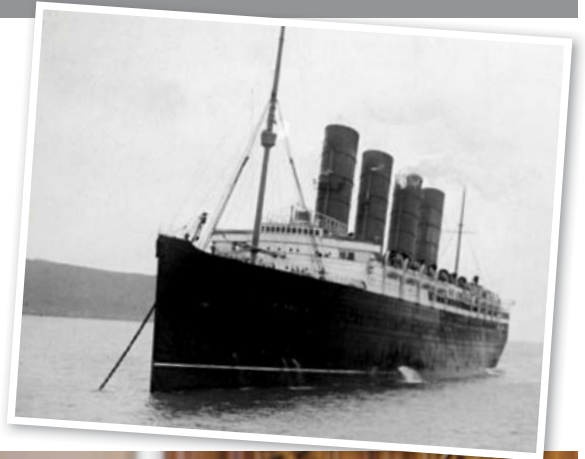


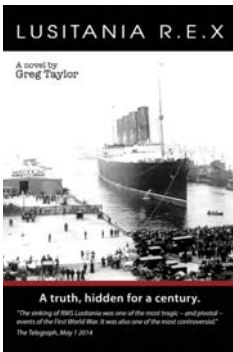
MARITIME FICTION

'A way inside their heads'



The German attack on the Cunard liner Lusitania 100 years ago proved to be a pivotal event in the First World War. Now the story of its loss has been re-imagined by a novelist who presents a new theory about the decision to target the passengership...

2015 will see the centenary of the sinking of the Lusitania, a British-flagged liner which succumbed to a torpedo attack by a German submarine in the First World War. The incident is seen as significant because it presaged the widespread changes in the practice of warfare during the 20th century — changes which increasingly saw 'enemy' civilians become fair game as military targets. At the time, though, the American people were said to have been so shocked at the attack on a passenger ship carrying innocent women and children that the incident prompted the neutral USA to join the war on the side of the Allies.



Disasters evoke powerful, if contrary, emotions: horror, fascination, sympathy — and wondering how well we would do. Unfortunately, the names of victims blur, it being hard in non-fiction to take us inside people's heads during a panic. Novels — think of Joseph Conrad's Lord Jim — tend to do it better.
The Economist, 18 April 2012

The analysis of events these days tends to be more nuanced, not least because the Americans did not actually become involved in combat until the Axis powers threatened them more directly in 1917. And some feel that the Lusitania was a legitimate military target by any standards, given the likelihood that she had been carrying US-made ammunition and/or weaponry destined for use by British forces.

added dimension to the story. And in terms of what happened during the sinking, I noticed interesting parallels with the modern Costa Concordia disaster, where the list of the ship made it difficult for the passengers and crew to reach and board the lifeboats.

This is Greg Taylor's first foray into novel-writing, but he was well-placed to tackle the subject matter, thanks to his history degree from Yale and a knowledge of the world of high finance gained from his work as an asset manager. 'I've always been fascinated by the Lusitania,' he says, 'and I thought about writing a straight history book, but then I was inspired to give the story a fictional treatment by something I once read about the ship in the Economist magazine.'

Author Greg Taylor has come up with an even stronger theory about why the Lusitania could have been a target, and in a new novel, *Lusitania R.E.X.* he cleverly weaves together fact and fiction to make a plausible case that the vessel could have been carrying secret rocket technology — the forerunner to the V1 and V2 'flying bombs' of the Second World War and of all human space exploration.

Mr Taylor kept the inspirational quote, and even reproduces it in the opening pages of *Lusitania R.E.X.*

It's a good yarn in the Dan Brown vein, with glamorous settings, wartime peril, political machinations, millionaires, aristocrats and royalty, and a generous helping of sex and romance. The effort to develop the rocket technology and keep it out of the wrong hands is given added spice by the involvement of a secret society, Yale University's Skull and Bones fraternity.



'I've always thought the Lusitania was more intriguing than the Titanic,' Mr Taylor told the Telegraph. 'There are the same extremes of wealth onboard — which I try and show in the book — but the wartime situation gives an

of course, even a fictionalised account of real events needs to have a sound historical foundation, and before starting his story, Mr Taylor read everything about the Lusitania that he could get his hands on — spending large amounts of time in the Imperial War Museum archives and the New York City public library. He found out the names of the passengers in First Class, and, on studying them further, noticed that more than one had been associated with the Skull and Bones society. This led him to find out more about the fraternity (which he had been vaguely aware of during his own years at Yale University), and it transpired that its members tended to be extremely rich and well-connected — perfect characters for a plot-driven thriller.

The billionaire Skull and Bones member Alfred Vanderbilt particularly caught the author's eye, as he seemed at first to be a spoilt heir to a fortune who had achieved little of note. Yet he was said to have given his lifebelt to another passenger when the Lusitania was sinking, at the expense of his own life. Greg Taylor therefore decided to make this character central to his novel, following his journey from playboy to hero. He hypothesised that Vanderbilt could have matured thanks to his involvement in the rocket technology project, developing a belief that it could help to end the war and pave the way for peaceful space exploration.

To find out more, you will — in the tried and tested way — have to read the book, which is available now as an e-book and is due to be released in paperback next month.

Lusitania R.E.X.
 By Greg Taylor
 Filament Publishing
 £12.95 on Amazon Kindle



Author Greg Taylor reads from *Lusitania R.E.X.* at the book's London launch. Picture: Alex Conte Photography

Telegraph poetry competition: the merchant marine in wartime


The subject of merchant shipping in wartime is rich and complex, and novels like *Lusitania R.E.X.* don't pretend to tell the whole story. We are inviting Telegraph readers to fill in the gaps by exploring the experiences of merchant seafarers involved in conflict, and any take on this is welcome — whether it's to do with the convoys of the First and Second World Wars, or perhaps the supply ships for the Falklands or the Gulf.

Please send in your poem about the merchant marine in wartime to: The editor, Nautilus Telegraph, 162 The Shrubberies, George Lane, London E18 1BD, or email your entry to telegraph@nautilusint.org, marked 'Poetry competition'. The deadline for entries is **31 March 2015**. Winning entries will be published in the Telegraph, and the winners will receive signed copies of the hardback author's limited edition of *Lusitania R.E.X.*


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