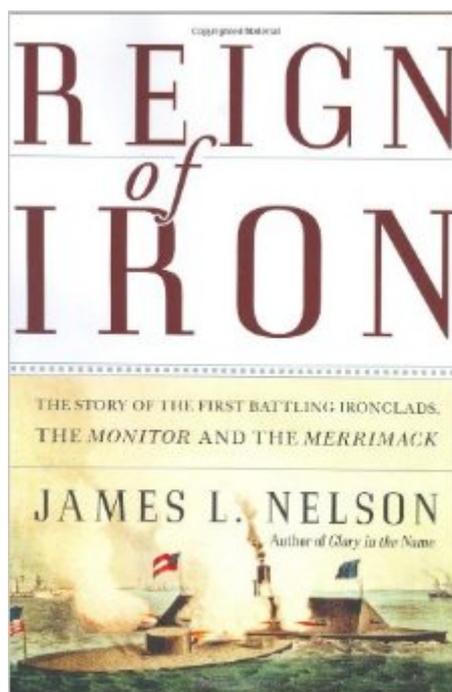


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Reign Of Iron: The Story Of The First Battling Ironclads, The Monitor And The Merrimack



Synopsis

The acclaimed author of the Brethren of the Coast trilogy revisits one of the great American naval battles and a turning point in our history -- the first major work on the subject in thirty-five years. . . The first ironclad ships to fight each other, the Monitor and the Virginia (Merrimack), were the unique products of American design genius and ingenuity, North and South. In one afternoon, in a battle that lasted four hours, they ended the three-thousand-year tradition of wooden men-of-war and ushered in, as Admiral John A. Dahlgren called it, "the reign of iron." In this absorbing history, novelist, historian, and tall-ship sailor James L. Nelson, through in-depth research and a storyteller's voice, brilliantly recounts the story of these magnificent ships, the men who built and fought them, and the extraordinary battle that made them legend.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

James L. Nelson brings their famous conflict to the fore in Reign of Iron, a historical study of the events leading up to and proceeding after the battle. The book begins with the Merrimack, newly recommissioned Virginia, steaming into its first battle and decimating the Union navy's proud wooden ships blockading Hampden Roads, and the Monitor, after struggling through rough seas down the coast, arriving on the scene at the end of a hard day's fighting. But Nelson, a master tactician himself, tears readers away before the two ironclads meet, taking us back to the beginning of the war and the race by North and South to develop ironclad vessels for battle. Nelson carries readers quickly but thoroughly through the process, switching perspectives from North to South as each ship takes shape. Before you know it, you'll find yourself back at Hampden Roads on March 8,

1862 -- Virginia has ruled the day, leaving the pride of the Union's fleet -- the Congress and the Cumberland -- as smoking ruins, and the Minnesota aground in the shallow waters and waiting only for sunrise on March 9 for Virginia to finish the job. But the Monitor, with timing worthy of a Hollywood blockbuster, arrived late on the 8th. Its diminutive size didn't inspire much confidence among sailors of the massive frigates who'd been bested that day, but the plucky iron "cheese box," as it was called, placed herself at Minnesota's side and defended her admirably. For hours, the two iron ships pounded each other with their big guns -- ultimately doing little real damage to each other, but stalemating in a spectacular fashion.

James L. Nelson put his considerable writing skills of naval fiction into creating this outstanding historical work. Most history is dry reading, but this book reads like an excellent novel. Nelson covers the political turmoil and indecision at the outset of the Civil War and the failure of the incompetent commander of the Norfolk/Gosport naval facilities to destroy military stores and the Merrimack. The Confederates captured large numbers of cannon and tons of ordinance as well as the repairable Merrimack and a good dry-dock. When it was discovered that the Merrimack had been raised and the Confederates were converting it to an iron-clad, the Union panic began. It was hard to get the Monitor built because the old-school naval commanders did not like to innovate. Finally, the design of Swede John Ericsson was accepted, but to get the ship built, Ericsson mostly financed the construction with his own money. In early March 1862 the Monitor was completed and sent to deal with the Merrimack (CSS Virginia), but she almost sank in rough seas and was barely saved. Meanwhile, a day before the Monitor arrived, the Merrimack had destroyed two Union frigates, the Cumberland and the Congress. It was a fierce battle but the wooden ships in the area could do nothing but run or be destroyed. The only thing keeping the Merrimack from escaping were large caliber cannon on forts in the area that could deliver plunging fire. On the 9th of March, the Monitor and Merrimack dueled for several hours with little damage to each other, few casualties, and no clear winner, but the Monitor and the forts were enough to keep the Merrimack bottled-up. The Confederates wanted to move the Merrimack to Richmond, but the waterways were too shallow, so they blew her up.

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