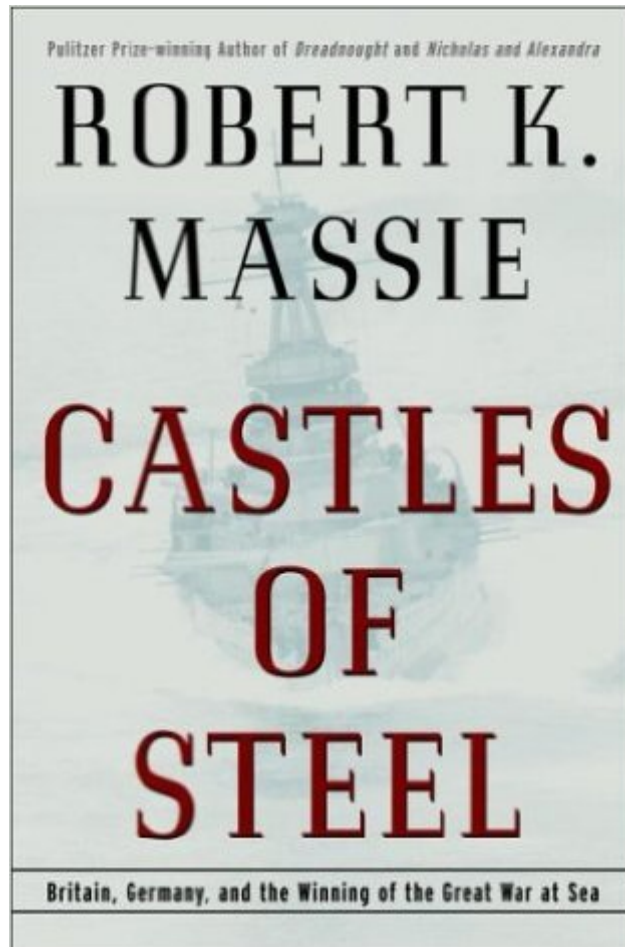


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Castles Of Steel: Britain, Germany, And The Winning Of The Great War At Sea



Synopsis

In a work of extraordinary narrative power, filled with brilliant personalities and vivid scenes of dramatic action, Robert K. Massie, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Peter the Great*, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, and *Dreadnought*, elevates to its proper historical importance the role of sea power in the winning of the Great War. The predominant image of this first world war is of mud and trenches, barbed wire, machine guns, poison gas, and slaughter. A generation of European manhood was massacred, and a wound was inflicted on European civilization that required the remainder of the twentieth century to heal. But with all its sacrifice, trench warfare did not win the war for one side or lose it for the other. Over the course of four years, the lines on the Western Front moved scarcely at all; attempts to break through led only to the lengthening of the already unbearably long casualty lists. For the true story of military upheaval, we must look to the sea. On the eve of the war in August 1914, Great Britain and Germany possessed the two greatest navies the world had ever seen. When war came, these two fleets of dreadnoughts—gigantic floating castles of steel able to hurl massive shells at an enemy miles away—were ready to test their terrible power against each other. Their struggles took place in the North Sea and the Pacific, at the Falkland Islands and the Dardanelles. They reached their climax when Germany, suffocated by an implacable naval blockade, decided to strike against the British ring of steel. The result was Jutland, a titanic clash of fifty-eight dreadnoughts, each the home of a thousand men. When the German High Seas Fleet retreated, the kaiser unleashed unrestricted U-boat warfare, which, in its indiscriminate violence, brought a reluctant America into the war. In this way, the German effort to seize the trident—by defeating the British navy led to the fall of the German empire. Ultimately, the distinguishing feature of *Castles of Steel* is the author himself. The knowledge, understanding, and literary power Massie brings to this story are unparalleled. His portrayals of Winston Churchill, the British admirals Fisher, Jellicoe, and Beatty, and the Germans Scheer, Hipper, and Tirpitz are stunning in their veracity and artistry. *Castles of Steel* is about war at sea, leadership and command, courage, genius, and folly. All these elements are given magnificent scope by Robert K. Massie's special and widely hailed literary mastery.

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Customer Reviews

For those of you who have read Mr. Massie's "Dreadnought," which detailed the German/British battleship "arms race" leading up to WWI, and who have been waiting for years for the sequel....here it is. And is it great! Fans of the author know that he is a master of narrative history. His books read like good novels, and he excels at capturing personalities with telling anecdotes. At the beginning of "Castles Of Steel" he explains how Kaiser William compensated for his withered left arm, and basically useless left hand, by building up his right arm. William also wore large rings on the fingers of his right hand. He would shake hands with a steel-like grip and watch with amusement as his victim winced. To quote the author "...the hand shaker said merrily, 'Ha ha! The mailed fist! What!' " This small episode not only tells us a lot about William's personality, but the expression he uses also reminds us of his Anglophilia (he was, after all, Queen Victoria's grandson). In a similar way, Mr. Massie conjures up the characters of other people who are important to this story. On the British side: Beatty, Jellicoe, Churchill, Jacky Fisher, David Lloyd George, etc. On the German side: Hipper, Scheer, Tirpitz, Hindenburg, Ludendorff, etc. The major pre-publication concern about this book would have been: could Mr. Massie satisfy not just the fan of narrative history but also the fan of military history. After all, unlike the author's previous books, this book was to be primarily about battles rather than personalities. It turns out that we needn't have had any worries on that score, either. In particular, the descriptions of The Battle of the Falkland Islands and of Jutland are brilliant.

I would think that anyone who read and liked Robert Massie's "Dreadnought" should appreciate his new "Castles of Steel: Britain, Germany, and the Winning of the Great War at Sea". As in the earlier book, although the ships and navies of the two rival nations are always at center stage, it is the people who built those ships and directed their activities and operated them and - in this book - fought them that really make the text vivid. And what personalities! Winston Churchill, the

extraordinary Jacky Fisher who was the true father of the Dreadnought-type battleships that defined the era, the glamorous Admiral David Beatty who captivated the British public, Kaiser Wilhelm, Admiral Franz von Hipper ... If anything, the narrative in "Castles of Steel" is even more compelling than that of the first book because it deals with the drama and chaos of World War One itself. Massie's narrative lucidly explains the course of the naval war from the very opening days until the German High Seas Fleet scuttled itself after the conclusion of hostilities to prevent its delivery to its enemies. Along the way, several complex, controversial episodes are examined, including the disastrous Gallipoli Campaign and the Battle of Jutland, the great clash of battle fleets towards which decades of naval technical development had been aimed. Massie does not shy away from exploring the bitter in-fighting that erupted after the guns of battle had fallen silent, and he appears to present the arguments on both sides of controversies fairly. Although his portrait of Winston Churchill as First Lord of the Admiralty is as an ambitious politician whose directives sometimes seeded chaos rather than order, Massie by no means holds Churchill solely or perhaps even chiefly responsible for the Gallipoli debacle.

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