



Passage to Juneau: A Sea and Its Meanings

Jonathan Raban

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"Raban is searching and compassionate. . . . And he is at all times eloquent."

-- Richard Ford

Following the overland triumph of **Bad Land**--whose prizes included the National Book Critics Circle Award--Jonathan Raban goes to sea.

The Inside Passage from Puget Sound to Alaska is winding, turbulent, and deep--an ancient, thousand-mile-long sea route, rich in dangerous whirlpools, eddies, rips, and races. Here flourished the canoe culture of the Northwest Indians, with their fantastic painted masks and complex iconography and their stories of malign submarine gods and monsters. The unhappy British ship Discovery, captained by George Vancouver, came through these open reaches and narrow chasms in 1792. The early explorers were quickly followed by fur traders, settlers, missionaries, anthropologists, fishermen, and tourists, each with their own designs on this intricate and haunted sea.

When Jonathan Raban set out alone in his own boat to sail from his Seattle home to the Alaskan Panhandle, he wanted to decode the many riddles and meanings of the sea: in Indian art and mythology, in the journals of Vancouver and his officers and midshipmen, in poetry and painting, in the physics of waves and turbulence. His voyage began as an intellectual adventure, but he soon found himself in deeper, more ominously personal waters than he had planned.

In this seaborne epic, Raban brings the past spectacularly alive and renders the present in a prose of sustained brilliance and humor. Exhilarating, panoramic, full of ideas, natural history, and mordant social observation, his journey into the wild heart of North America turns into a profound exploration of the wilderness of the human heart.



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