



# Storm and Conquest: The Clash of Empires in the Eastern Seas, 1809

*Stephen Taylor*

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**This is history, not fiction; but the story is pure Patrick O'Brian, with special effects out of *The Perfect Storm*.**

The Indian Ocean was the final battleground for Nelson's navy and France. At stake was Britain's commercial lifeline to India and its strategic capacity to wage war in Europe. In one fatal season, the natural order of maritime power since Trafalgar was destroyed. In bringing home Bengali saltpeter for the Peninsular campaign with military and civilian passengers, Britain lost fourteen of her great Indiamen, either sunk or taken by enemy frigates. Many hundreds of lives were lost, and the East India Company was shaken to its foundations. The focus of these disasters, military and meteorological, was a tiny French outpost in mid-ocean—the island known as Mauritius. This is the story of that season. It brings together the terrifying ordeal of men, women, and children caught at sea in hurricanes, and those who survived to take up the battle to drive the French from the Eastern seas. Mauritius must be taken at any cost.

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