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The Surgeon's Mate



Synopsis

13 discs

Book Information

Series: the Aubrey/Maturin series (Book 7)

Audio CD

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Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (119 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

Jack Aubrey may be resigned to the perils of his profession, but Stephen must now be silently wondering if maybe he and Jack are the men who never return. Indeed, this story began two volumes ago, in "Desolation Island", where it looked like they might have "copped it" in the horrible old Leopard. Then the next story, The Fortune of War, begins with the Leopard limping into a British port off the Malay Peninsula, where after being treated handsomely they board the fast-sailing packet ship La Fletch for England (at last) where Jack is to take command of a new frigate. But the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune say nay, for their ship burns and sinks, leaving them on the open ocean in a ship's boat whose sails had been stolen and sold by a corrupt boatswain. After many brutal, parched, sunburned days in the lifeboat terror strikes once more when a ship within hailing distance fails to see them and sails on. As they appear about to succumb to the elements, however, they are rescued by HMS Java. Just as they are recovering from the debilitating ordeal in the lifeboat, Java engages the American ship Constitution (it's the War of 1812), loses the battle, and Aubrey and Maturin find themselves prisoners of war in Boston. There they discover they are very special prisoners, for Aubrey or Maturin -- or both -- are suspected of being more than a captain and his ship's surgeon. They escape this peril by sailing a little sloop out of Boston harbor into the open sea where they meet and are taken aboard the blockading HMS Shannon. With them

is the love of Stephen's life, Diana Villiers, who was in Boston due to entirely credible circumstances, and whose fervent desire to leave with them is equally credible.

Some critics have referred to the Aubrey/Maturin books as one long novel united not only by their historical setting but also by the central plot element of the Aubrey/Maturin friendship. Having read these fine books over a period of several years, I decided to evaluate their cumulative integrity by reading them consecutively in order of publication over a period of a few weeks. This turned out to be a rewarding enterprise. For readers unfamiliar with these books, they describe the experiences of a Royal Navy officer and his close friend and traveling companion, a naval surgeon. The experiences cover a broad swath of the Napoleonic Wars and virtually the whole globe. Rereading all the books confirmed that O'Brien is a superb writer and that his ability to evoke the past is outstanding. O'Brien has numerous gifts as a writer. He is the master of the long, careful description, and the short, telling episode. His ability to construct ingenious but creditable plots is first-rate, probably because he based much of the action of his books on actual events. For example, some of the episodes of Jack Aubrey's career are based on the life of the famous frigate captain, Lord Cochrane. O'Brien excels also in his depiction of characters. His ability to develop psychologically credible characters through a combination of dialogue, comments by other characters, and description is tremendous. O'Brien's interest in psychology went well beyond normal character development, some books contain excellent case studies of anxiety, depression, and mania. Reading O'Brien gives vivid view of the early 19th century. The historian Bernard Bailyn, writing of colonial America, stated once that the 18th century world was not only pre-industrial but also pre-humanitarian (paraphrase).

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