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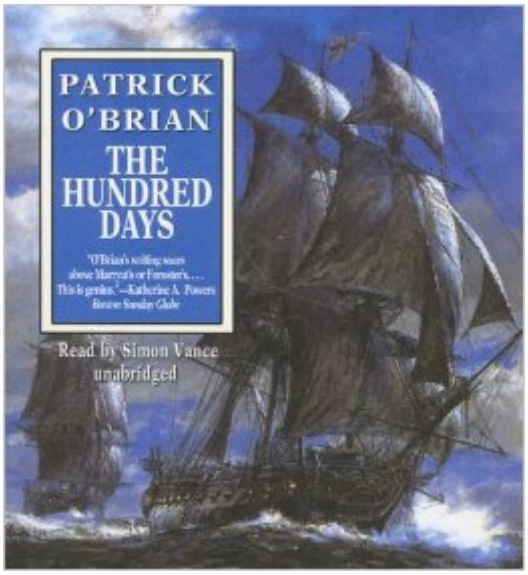
The Hundred Days: Aubrey-Maturin Series Book 19 (Aubrey-Maturin (Audio))



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Synopsis

When Napoleon escapes from Elba, the fate of Europe hinges on a desperate mission: Stephen Maturin must ferret out the French dictator's secret link to the powers of Islam, and Jack Aubrey must destroy it. Napoleon, like a vengeful phoenix, pursues his enemies across Europe. If he can corner the British and Prussians before their Russian and Austrian allies arrive, his genius will lead the French armies to triumph at Waterloo. In the Balkans, a horde of Muslim mercenaries is gathering in support of Napoleon, but they will not move without a shipment of gold ingots, which is on its way via camel caravan to the coast of North Africa. It is this gold that Aubrey and Maturin must intercept at all costs.

Book Information

Series: Aubrey-Maturin (Audio) (Book 19)
Audio CD: 7 pages
Publisher: Blackstone Audio Inc.; Unabridged edition (February 1, 2008)
Language: English
ISBN-10: 1433209128
ISBN-13: 978-1433209123
Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.7 x 5.8 inches
Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces
Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (123 customer reviews)
Best Sellers Rank: #2,086,152 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #26 inÂ Books > Books on CD > Authors, A-Z > (O) > O'Brian, Patrick #535 inÂ Books > Books on CD > History > Military #2872 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Sea Stories

Customer Reviews

Scanning through the other customer reviews of "The Hundred Days", I am struck by the chasm between those who condemn the book (sometimes in startlingly harsh terms) and those who applaud it. I count myself firmly among the latter, but acknowledge that this volume differs significantly from earlier entries in the series. What some readers apparently view as an absence of skill and spirit on O'Brian's part, I find instead to be the product of a subtle and masterful command of the literary art. Death is a central theme, Death is a chief character of "The Hundred Days", and I find it not surprising at all that O'Brian has elected to use a style in keeping with that particular focus. I have seen numerous comments from dissatisfied readers decrying O'Brian's "failure" to deal with the deaths of major characters at length. With all due respect, I think that view misses the

whole point of what and how O'Brian has written. The cheapest, most false piece of writing produced by any hack would have lavished sorrow upon these deaths; shedding shallow tears would have been the easy thing to do. The abruptness of these deaths, even the absence of healing mourning, heightens the pain and the sense of loss we feel. O'Brian has not written a book to make us "feel good". Instead he has painted for us a portrait of emotional constraint, the hues of the world washed over with the grey of an unexpressed grief. Only at rare moments are we pernitted to see the black gulf beneath Stephen's determined insistence to continue on after Diana's death. He is a man who is hiding even -- or, especially -- from himself the depth of his loss, while we see that grief has dulled his usual acuity.

I confess I peeked at the reviews of this book before settling in to read it and was a bit worried by the rather harsh remarks by a number of readers. Shouldn't have been. This is a novel of real power. Witty (often darkly humorous), intelligent and beautifully written it is completely at a piece with rest of the series. Still puzzled by those reviewers who claim this was ghosted and a bit troubled by one writer who complained Villier's death was a problem because she was such a strong female character. Well yes, but this isn't Oprah nor is this about consciousness raising as we know it at the end of the twentieth century. Rather, this work is a fantistically imagined glimpse into the very early nineteenth century-a time quite different from our own. I had heard of O'Brian first in the mid-1970's but couldn't rally much interest. Napoleonic Wars? Royal Navy? So? Then, for some reason or another, I picked up 'Master and Commander' over the New Year's Holiday. Three months later, I had read each of the nineteen novels in sequence. One of the great reading experiences of my life. 'The Hundred Days' is an altogether tougher work than those which preceed it. Aubrey and Maturin have been at this for a great long while. The war with Napoleon drags on and on. Fortunes are made and lost. Friends and family die. There indeed is very little of the joy to be found in the earlier books. Choices available to a person were far fewer in number in the early 1800's. Societal constraints, class strictures, duty-any number of factors conspired to grind a person down. By the end of 'The Hundred Days' Aubrey seems tired and spiritless. And why not? Good friends killed. Endless political intrigue.

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'Brian is a superb writer and that his ability to evoke the past is outstanding. O'Brian 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'Brian excels also in his depiction of characters. His ability to develop psychologically creditable 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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