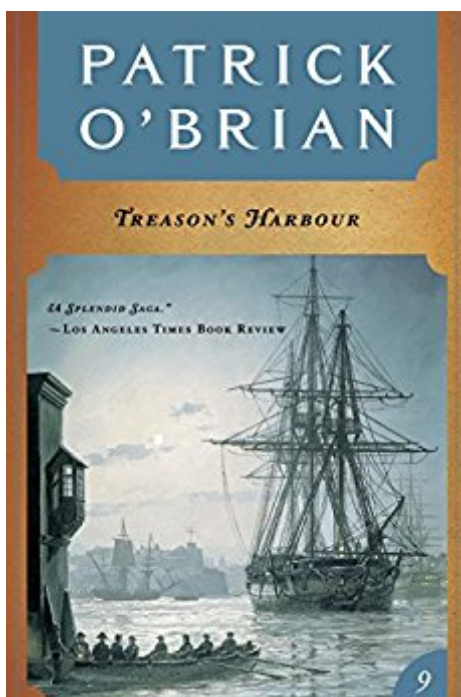


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Treason's Harbour (Vol. Book 9) (Aubrey/Maturin Novels)



Synopsis

"The finest writer of sea-stories in the English language." — J. de Courcy Ireland
All Patrick O'Brian's strengths are on parade in this novel of action and intrigue, set partly in Malta, partly in the treacherous, pirate-infested waters of the Red Sea. While Captain Aubrey worries about repairs to his ship, Stephen Maturin assumes the center stage for the dockyards and salons of Malta are alive with Napoleon's agents, and the admiralty's intelligence network is compromised. Maturin's cunning is the sole bulwark against sabotage of Aubrey's daring mission.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

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).

I am very conflicted about rating this novel. The Aubrey-Maturin books are a series of novels, but in fact are almost a single novel rather than a series of stand alone books. Disliking one novel is almost tantamount to saying that you dislike a chapter of a book, which is almost silly. I must, therefore, confess to feeling a bit silly saying that this is one of my least favorite novels in the series. The series as a whole is masterful, and group of books that I love dearly, and it is to be expected that some parts are to be less successful than others. TREASON'S HARBOUR is from first to last a spy story. This is not always apparent, but even the two long segments that interrupt the more straightforward espionage sections of the narrative result as they do because of a major British official selling state secrets. O'Brian's genius lies in his willingness to leave so many strands of his story unresolved at the end, and while this willingness to forestall resolving his tale weakens TREASON'S HARBOUR taken exclusively on its own, it strengthens the series of books overall. The novel finds our heroes in Malta, following the events of THE IONIAN MISSION. Almost immediately we find that French agents have identified Stephen Maturin as a British intelligence agent, and they point their reluctant agent Laura Fielding--an Italian beauty who is the wife of a British naval officer who has been imprisoned by the French and who can therefore be used to force her to comply with their needs--at the good doctor, hoping to make her his lover in order to accumulate secrets. When finished with Maturin, they clearly mean to kill him. Meanwhile, we learn that a major British official is in league with the French, and is passing on secrets to them.

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