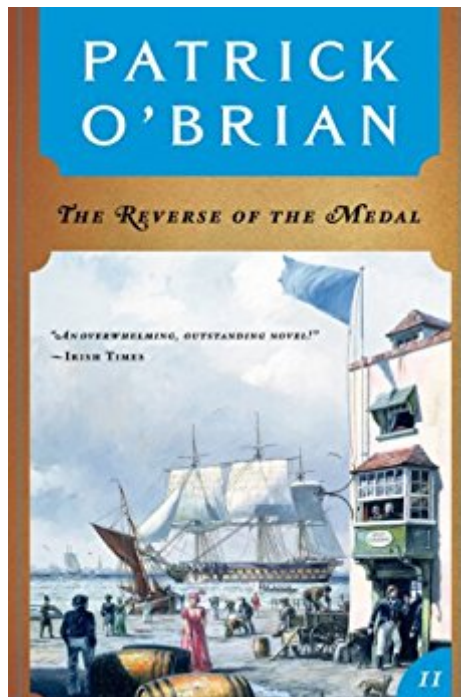


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The Reverse Of The Medal (Vol. Book 11) (Aubrey/Maturin Novels)



Synopsis

"An overwhelming, outstanding novel..." "Irish Times" Captain Jack Aubrey, R. N., ashore after a successful cruise, is persuaded by a casual acquaintance to make certain investments in the City. This innocent decision ensnares him in the London criminal underground and in government espionage—the province of his friend Stephen Maturin. Is Aubrey's humiliation and the threatened ruin of his career a deliberate plot? This dark tale is a fitting backdrop to the brilliant characterization and sparkling dialogue which O'Brian's readers have come to expect.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Above all else, Patrick O'Brian is a patient writer. It is absolutely astonishing how slowly and carefully he is willing to develop his stories, amazing now when we have all of his books before us, and even more amazing when they were written, when he took years to bring plot details to fruition. Those who have not read this books would be absolutely stunned to discover their true nature. Before I had read these books, I had assumed they were nautical slugfests, thick with the smoke of battle and the stench of gunpowder. Yet in this, one of the best books in the series, there is next to no fighting, at least of the naval kind. The book is broken roughly into two parts. The first contains

the final leg of what is anticipated to be the final voyage of H.M.S. Surprise before she is to be either broken up or sold by the British navy. Though still one of the finest sailing ships in the navy, she is underpowered compared to other ships of the line, and her timbers will not allow the fitting of heavier guns. She spends the last part of her career as a British ship chasing an American privateer, only just failing to capture her. The second half of the novel takes place upon the return of Jack and Stephen to England. Jack hopes to buy the Surprise, and after receiving a stock tip by a mysterious individual who offers him a ride to London upon his arrival in England, he firmly believes that he is about to come into a very great deal of money, and being the generous soul that he is, he quickly shares the stock tip with all of his friends. But he soon discovers that the tip was actually a ploy by the political enemies of his Radical father, and he finds himself hauled before the law for stock market fraud. Meanwhile, Stephen is, with one exception, hardly faring better.

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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