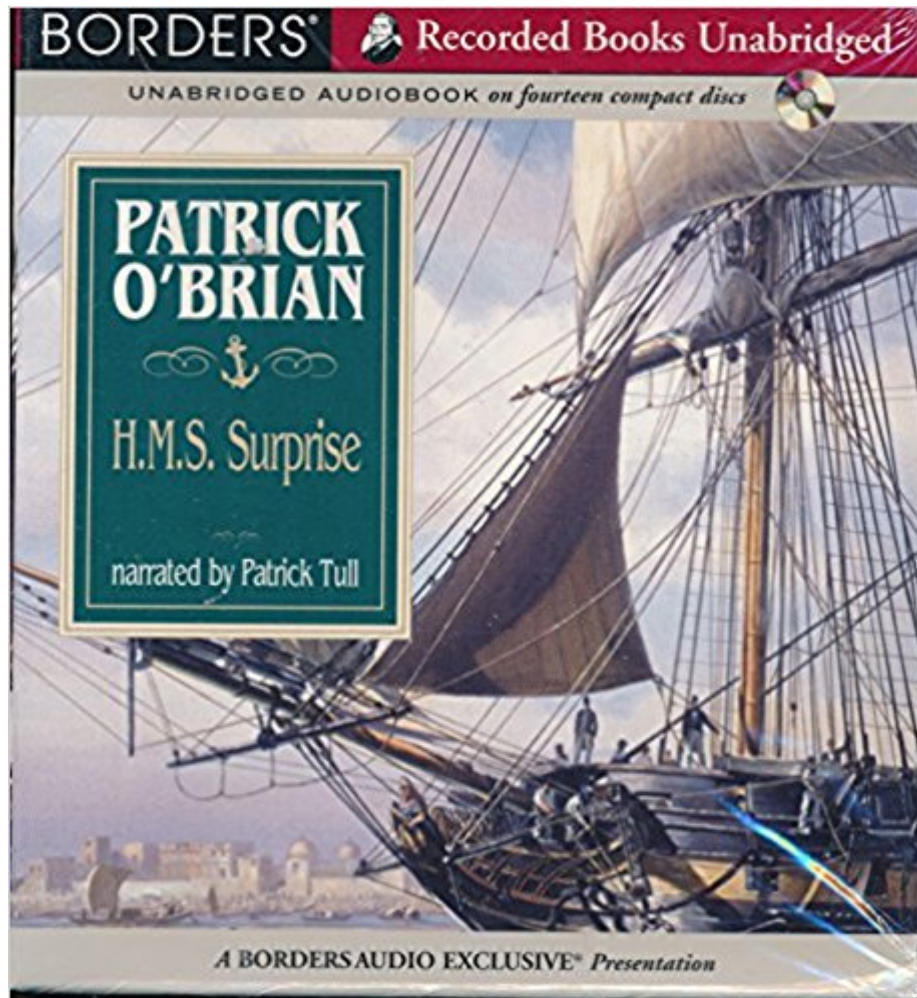




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H.M.S. Surprise (Aubrey/Maturin Series, Volume Three)



Synopsis

14 compact discs, a superior version narrated by Patrick Tull. Recorded Books/Borders.

Book Information

Series: Aubrey Maturin Series (Book 3)

Audio CD

Publisher: Recorded Books/Borders; Unabridged edition (1992)

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Customer Reviews

14 compact discs, a superior version narrated by Patrick Tull. Recorded Books/Borders.

I've become a huge fan of this series by Patrick O'Brian. He is known for the excellent and accurate detail he puts in his descriptions, and the language of the time. I'm on the sixth one and expect to keep going. Aubrey and Maturin and characters are almost like friends you hope will come through their trials and tribulations whole. If you get the Audible versions go for Patrick Tull's narrations; by far the best.

What I love about Patrick O'Brian's fiction is his command, his understanding of human nature and, more importantly, his ability to capture that understanding in words that very convincingly depict the most essential element a writer can convey - life with all its ups and downs in a completely believable way. This novel captures the time and place very well too. I am rereading the series after several years of reading contemporary authors accounts of this slice of history. I think any fiction reader will do well to read all of O'Brian's Aubrey-Maturin novels as well as all of the Dewey Lambdin Lewrie novels and of course Dudley Pope's Ramage novels. I highly recommend H. M. S. Surprise.

I own all 20 of the Aubrey/Maturin novels, including the incomplete one. Lots of genre fiction I sell to a used bookstore or keep in piles somewhere out of the way; but these books have pride of place on my bookshelf, and I find I reread them every 2 or 3 years or so, just for sheer pleasure. Well, I am on the fourth read through of the cycle now, and HMS Surprise - book 3 - has captivated my interest like never before. The book is almost wholly concerned with Maturin; Aubrey and his sea escapades this time provide a backdrop, a cyclorama against which the true drama unfolds. Maturin the character is really introduced in this book; the circus-sideshow character developed in Master and Commander and Post Captain is fleshed out, and we learn that behind that entirely self-unaware facade of the absent-minded natural philosopher, there stands a man of uncommon mental acuity; a secret agent; a man of incredibly strong will; a heart torn by unrequited love; and above all, a man of honor. The first time I read through these novels I was only peripherally aware of the code of duello, and the several ways of giving the lie, including the lie direct. Maturin's honor is offended twice in this book, and the final duel is the climax, with its aftermath providing a satisfying anticlimax. Honor in the early 18th century was a peculiar and interesting concept, and as we watch Maturin negotiate the challenges of his walled-off and secretive life, we see it explained - by demonstration, in its highest form. As I read through again, I came to feel that I perhaps came to this book too young; what seemed like pointless maundering takes on greater gravity if you have lived a little before you come to it. Of course, there is a downside; the language in which these books are written is infectious, and I find that for weeks after I complain that I have been "utterly brought by the lee," and when someone says something truly offensively stupid I have been known to state "I prefer it otherwise," a remark which in those days might have led to pistols at dawn. Nowadays my drooling interlocutors barely realize that a remark has passed, much less its significance. I, personally, would prefer it otherwise; which is why I so greatly treasure the hours I have spent in these magnificent time-machines, these novels. I hope you may do likewise, and profit by it as I have.

So many have written so much about the Aubrey / Maturin novels that I risk being repetitive in detailing the plot here. Therefore I'll simply highlight what resonated with me. While the second book was a bit "Austen-eque" for my taste, O'Brian returns to the sea, much more riveting ground, I found. The majority of the book, in fact, is a retelling of life at sea: there are interspersed naval action, but the long voyage from Britain south, across the Atlantic (by way of Brazil, to my surprise) rounding the Cape to India was the primary focus of the story. I realize this sounds hardly interesting, the detail and minutiae were so rich that I couldn't wait to get back into the story. The

nature - and danger - of Maturin's work is also developed, as is the romance that played such an important role in the second book in the series. In many respects, the series is unfolding like a solid friendship: the character and nature of a person is revealed gradually, your fondness and attachement growing incrementally, one's understanding and respect of another neither given nor assumed, but built over time. In this regard as well as his ability to transport readers to the early 19th century, O'Brian is deserving of the accolades readers accord him.

O'Brian never disappoints. This is a fine addition to the Aubrey/Maturin canon. If you have read the others, you understand. If not, get started! The best historical novels ever written.

Once again, Lucky Jack Aubrey outwits and outguns the French while protecting English shipping, attempting all the while to take a prize so that he could afford to pay off his debts and marry the woman he loves. Meanwhile, Dr. Maturin encounters Diana Villiers, the woman he has loved and hopelessly pursued for many years, an encounter which leads to a tragedy that he barely survives. And, once again, it is brought vividly to life by Patrick O'Brian's colorful writing and his astonishingly deep knowledge of the early 19th century British navy. A rousing good read!

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