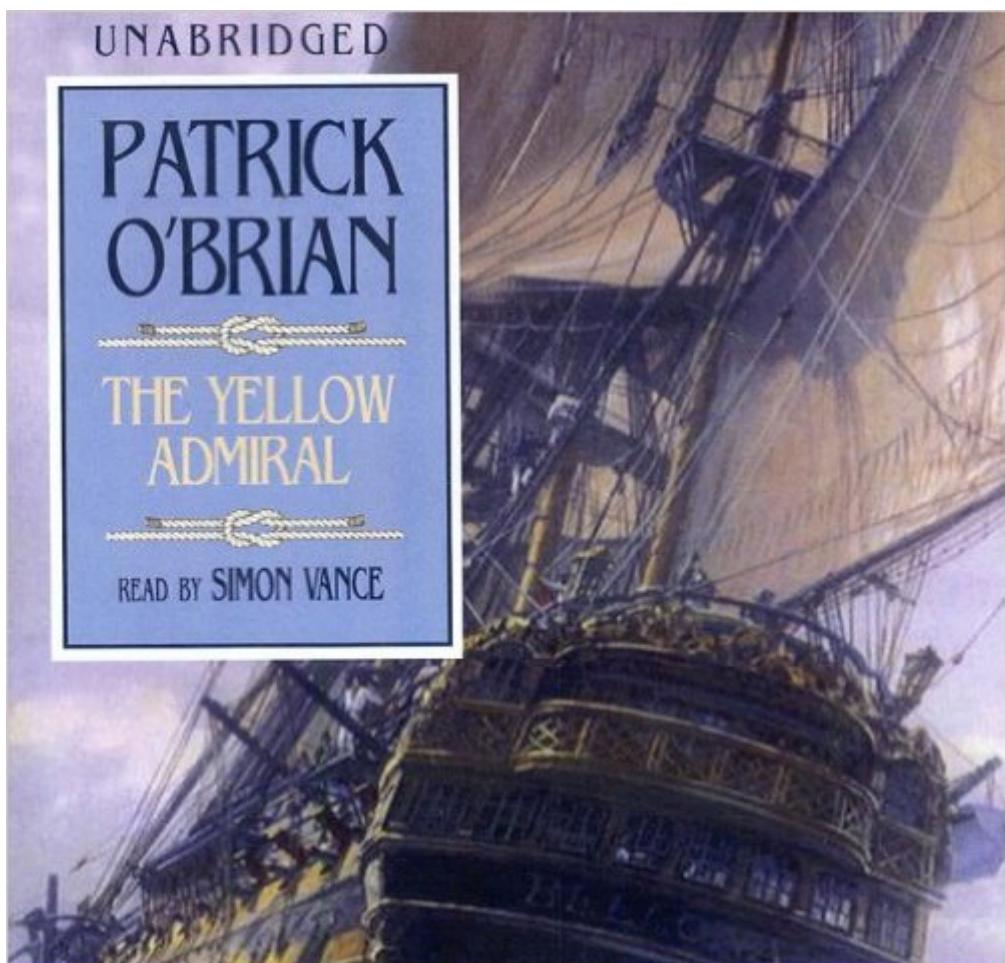


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The Yellow Admiral (Aubrey-Maturin)



Synopsis

With the outbreak of peace in 1814, Captain Jack Aubrey fears he is doomed to life on shore, not his strongest suit. But just in time, an urgent dispatch orders him to Gibraltar: Napoleon has escaped from Elba.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The Yellow Admiral" is one of the less interesting of the Aubrey/Maturin series, although it has its merits. This novel takes place mainly on shore, and as usual, Jack Aubrey's life is more complicated and beset with more problems here than when he is at sea. The biggest problem in Aubrey's life is the probability of being "yellowed". The rank of an admiral in the Royal Navy is denoted by color. For example, an Admiral of the Blue has higher rank and responsibility than an Admiral of the White. In some cases, however, an officer is promoted to the rank of admiral for ceremonial purposes only, but is effectively decommissioned. When this happens, he is referred to as an Admiral of the Yellow, or one who is "yellowed". With Napoleon facing imminent defeat and peace on the horizon, Aubrey faces the strong prospect of himself being yellowed. To make matters worse, Aubrey opposes the enclosure movement in his district even after his commanding officer, Lord Stranraer, urges him to support it. And just when things could not get worse, Aubrey's wife discovers his old correspondence with a former mistress and throws him out of the house. Things are not going well for Stephen Maturin either, since he is isolated from his fortune and temporarily destitute. But in a rare turn of events, he appears to enjoy a tranquil domestic life with his tempestuous, capricious

wife, Diana. In fact, it is a rare twist in this series to see Aubrey financially secure but romantically distraught while Maturin, for a change is emotionally contented, but utterly impoverished. If you are a fan of this series or a lover of history then you will enjoy this book. It has an enormous amount to teach us about life in England and in the British navy during the Napoleonic wars.

The Yellow Admiral is as good as any of the previous 17 Aubrey/Maturin novels: as good as novels get. It has occurred to me, and not for the first time as I have read and reread the entire series and observed the whole cast of characters mature, that what we call the Aubrey/Maturin series is really one very long book with eighteen chapters. One can read the Holmes/Watson books in any order; the characters never change, and I don't recall references by Doyle to previous events, such as those backwards glimpses O'Brian slyly slips to us steady fans from time to time that must sail right over the heads of hit-and-run readers. With not a molecule of discredit to her genius intended, Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot remained the same character through 25 stories, and I'm not aware of any maturation of Miss Jane Marple. Of course, Agatha Christie probably felt that her readers preferred the familiarity that the sameness of characters provided. What gives me the feat tha! ! t The Yellow Admiral might be the final Aubrey/Maturin episode? Diana never once jumps the traces; Jack mends all his fences at home; Sir Joseph Blaine is very much back in control in his seemingly obscure but influential position with "the Committee;" and Stephen has lived through a volume without a crisis. Then, just as Jack Aubrey has gotten used to the idea of building the Chileans a navy, while on a little respite in Funchal, Madeira, with his family and almost everyone else dear to him, he receives an urgent dispatch from Lord Keith of the Admiralty, advising him that Napoleon has escaped from Elba. Writes Keith: "You are to take all His Majesty's ships and vessels at present in Funchal under your command, hoisting your broad pennant in 'Pamone,' and . . .

The most important aspects of this story takes place on dry land in England. Patrick O'Brien paints the tapestry of 19th century rural life in terms that makes it relevant to the story and breathes life into it that it becomes personalized and completely relevant. It also is this time ashore that makes the adventures at sea so much more interesting for Jack and Stephen. It is the complexity of the characters dealing with their successes and trials at home which make the two main characters seem that much more human. Developing characters that are seemingly real is what Patrick O'Brien has mastered like no other and it is what has kept me coming back to his books (18 times so far). Back ashore in England, Stephen is broke and Jack is once again an impecunious landowner. Jack's fortune is tied up in lawsuits related to his actions off West Africa suppressing the slave

trade. To make matters worse (or more interesting), Jack's marriage is on the rocks as a result of Sophie's mother finding evidence of Jack's past infidelity. At the Admiralty, Jack's prospects are dimmed by his actions as a Member of Parliament and his opposition to the enclosure of a commons near his estate. As a side note, Patrick O'Brien clearly understands and has the ability to describe the political and economic aspects of enclosing a commons. He weaves this into the story without technical jargon and in an interesting manner. Even at sea, Jack has trouble. He captures a French privateer laden with gold and ivory, but the Admiralty believes that he ignored signals for personal gain. Troubles mount for Jack and his fear of being 'yellowed' seems that it might become a reality.

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