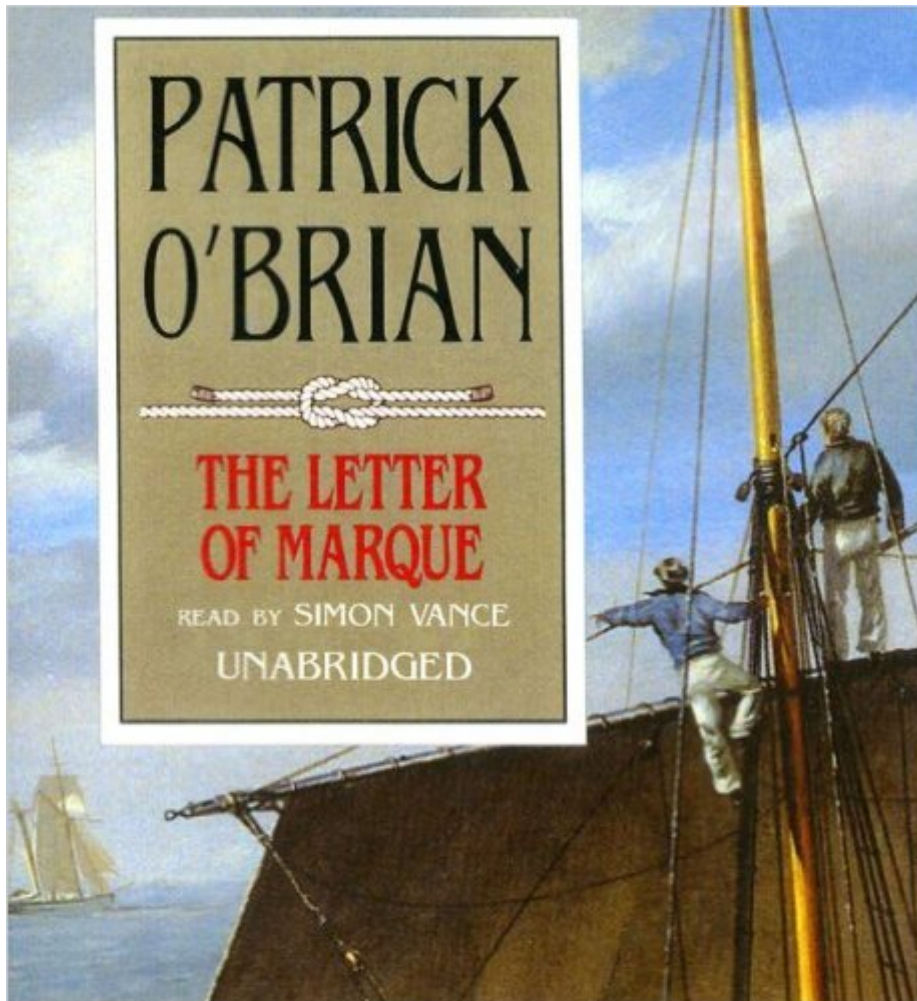


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The Letter Of Marque (Aubrey-Maturin)



Synopsis

If Jane Austen wrote Royal Navy yarns, they might read like this. The early-19th-century locations are fascinating, as are the evocation of period shipboard life.... Seafarers and landlubbers alike will enjoy this swift, witty tale of money and love. -- Publisher's Weekly

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (101 customer reviews)

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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).

In THE LETTER OF MARQUE, Patrick O'Brian manages another exceptional entry into what is arguably the finest long series of novels in English of the twentieth century. As many have noted, these novels are simply unsurpassed for their combination of literary quality, historical veracity, dramatic tension, and narrative excellence. This particular volume also has more action than any in the series in a long while. It is also quite possibly the most upbeat in the series up to this point. My own theory is that O'Brian conceived both the previous novel, THE REVERSE OF THE MEDAL, and this one as companions. The former takes the fortunes of our heroes Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin to exceedingly low points; in fact, things never got so bad for Jack Aubrey as they did in that one. In this novel, however, a world of troubles comes to an end. Whereas at the end of THE REVERSE OF THE MEDAL Jack was publicly shamed by having been taken off the naval lists and stripped of his rank, by the end of THE LETTER OF MARQUE he knows that he will be restored with seniority to the Royal Navy within a few months. Whereas before Jack's financial affairs were in dismal shape, now he is wealthier than he has ever been, thanks to two extraordinary successes commanding the letter of marque (i.e., privateer) Surprise, lately of the King's Navy as the H.M.S. Surprise. And while his sham trial and conviction wasn't able to tarnish his reputation as completely as his father's political enemies had hoped, he nonetheless had seen better days in the public eye. Now, however, thanks to his great naval victories as a privateer, he had become something of a popular hero.

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