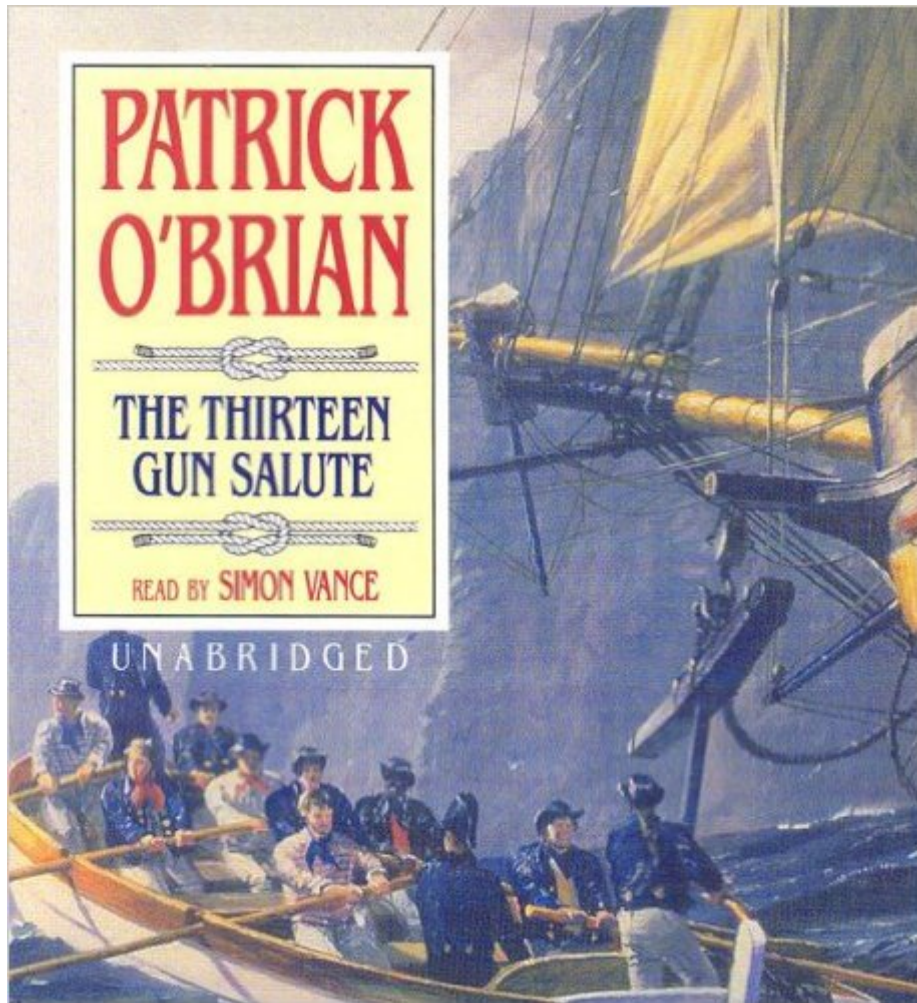


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# The Thirteen Gun Salute (Aubrey-Maturin)



## Synopsis

Captain Jack Aubrey sets sail for the South China Sea, shepherding Stephen Maturin's diplomatic mission to prevent links between Bonaparte and the Malay princes. A classic duel of intelligence agents unfolds.

## 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).

Whenever a dignitary comes aboard one of the King's ships, there is always a thundering salute from the cannons, the number of discharges determined by the rank of the honored guest. Thirteen guns is the right, proper salute for a royal ambassador, and Captain Aubrey has been commissioned to deliver the King's representative from London safely around the world to a strategic Pacific post in the early nineteenth century British Empire. The highlight of the book is the pilgrimage Dr. Steven Maturin, ship's surgeon, takes to an ancient Hindu temple nestled within a crater in the center of the island. The depiction of both the journey and the destination are so vivid and tangible that it ceases to be fictional in the reader's mind. The sights, smells and sounds of the Polynesian jungle fairly exude from each page of the book. In the final chapter, the foreshadowing and descriptive imagery employed as a typhoon approaches are likewise breathtaking. Imagine a wall of billowing purple clouds against a copper sky with a surging sea beneath: at once beautiful and terrifying. SO WHAT? Most of the action in the book occurs on the gorgeous, Malaysian island of Pulo Prabang. I actually began to search for the location of the island in an atlas before I realized that it was completely fictional, an eruption from the creative mind of Patrick O'Brian, taking on reality only in the minds of his readers. A mark of masterful historical fiction is its utter believability: here it is as if the author has created his very own Machu Picchu. Another mark of good writing is depth of personality in the characters. One particular quality in Dr. Maturin that we would do well to imitate is wonder.

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