



The Wine-Dark Sea

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In this installment of O'Brian's maritime epic, Captain Aubrey and the crew of the *Surprise* are pursuing an American privateer through the Great South Sea. As is his custom, O'Brian grabs your attention with the first, beautifully memorable sentence: "A purple ocean, vast under the sky and devoid of all visible life apart from two minute ships racing across its immensity." And he doesn't relinquish it until 260 pages later, by which point Jack Aubrey is delighted at the mere fact of being alive.

The Wine-Dark Sea Details

Date : Published December 5th 2011 by W. W. Norton & Company (first published 1980)

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Author : Patrick O'Brian

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From Reader Review The Wine-Dark Sea for online ebook

Cherie says

One of my favorite in the series yet. Imagine being in a sailing ship near an underwater volcano when it decided to erupt and push up to the surface! Ice bergs in the south sea at the tip of South America and a sea battle with an American Man of War and escaping by the skin of their teeth. Struck by lightning and no main mast nor rudder. Doomed to sail ever eastward 5000 miles until they reach land again???

Judith Johnson says

What a cracker! In spite of the fact that I am with child to find out what's happening back at the ranch with Diana, I thoroughly enjoyed this - excellent dramatic episodes, and all the usual O'Brian side stories - natural history, medicine, social history, international relations etc etc. As always, if my husband had given me a sideways glance as we sat relaxing and holiday-reading together in the Austrian alps, he would have seen that my face was wreathed in smiles, and, (but for goodness sake, don't tell anyone!) might also have spotted me giving the cover a surreptitious kiss when I'd finished the book. Fellow O'Brian adorers will no doubt identify!

Jamie Collins says

Lots of action in this one: a volcanic eruption, pirates, gales, lightning, icebergs, broadsides and chases. Wonderful book, even with the relatively dull section when Stephen is on his own in Peru.

My favorite scene is when Jack and a small crew arrive in the harbour after days in a small boat, nearly dead from exposure and dehydration, and Tom Pullings very nearly does not recognize them.

Darwin8u says

“And jealous now of me, you gods, because I befriend a man, one I saved as he straddled the keel alone, when Zeus had blasted and shattered his swift ship with a bright lightning bolt, out on the wine-dark sea.”
—Homer, The Odyssey, Book V
—“oínopa pónton”

So, "wine-dark sea" is a phrase used quite a bit by Homer. And Homer was quite an author I guess. And he did some pretty damn good writing about boats and stuff. So, it is only natural that Patrick O'Brian would eventually get around to using the "Wine-Dark Sea" image in one of his books. In Book 16 to be specific. This book is actually book 4, of a 5-novel circumnavigation of the globe series within his greater 20 book (21 if you count his last unfinished novel) Aubrey-Maturin series. There is some nice sailing, and the wine-dark sea section happens to appear at a point when some volcanic activity is happening nearby (which given

the location of most of Homer's sea stories, also ties the mysterious wine-dark colors together).

Anyway, there was some interesting sections dealing with South American politics, and Andes hiking. Some of my favorite new characters are the two little girls rescued from a South Asian island that was decimated with small-pox. They have attached themselves to Dr. Maturin and become a lovely feature on the Surprise. I'm starting to get that feeling one gets towards the last couple days of an amazing vacation. You still enjoy the country, beach, mountains, etc., but there is a sense of impending dread that this all will end too soon. One day, I'll reach to the table next to my bed and there won't be a new O'Brian novel to read. I'm already sad.

Here are a couple links to read if you want to read more about "wine-dark seas" and Homer:

<http://www.nytimes.com/1983/12/20/sci...>

<https://www.laphamsquarterly.org/sea/...>

<http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/hoffm...>

Matt says

Another in the series of Aubrey Maturin books that I just finished. I love this series but I found this book to be the most uninteresting of the series so far. Not sure why, it just seemed a story that didn't go anywhere and maybe it's because Jack and Stephen need to get back to their wives in England and stop running into trouble in the South Pacific and South America. I do still give it 3 stars because even though the story wasn't as good as past ones, I still enjoyed the writing and the realism of what it seems to be like to be on a ship of sail in the early 1800s Napoleonic era. I don't know why I have such a thing for this genre of books...

Karla says

It says something about O'Brian's writing that, despite having a **SPOILERIFIC** description here on Goodreads, the initial portion of the novel - with the strange behavior of the sea causing everyone concern and dread, a slow build-up to the big reveal - still had power and beauty, even if I had been robbed of the suspense.

The middle of the series seemed to lag, but the last third has been strong and constantly on the upswing. Even though there are repetitious details (innate to series), the characters are so interesting and the writing so evocative overall that it rarely fails to satisfy. These are definitely books that I will revisit in the future.

Melissa says

The first book by O'Brian that I read -- or 12 pages anyway. Then I put the book down, went back to the bookstore and bought the first five books in his Aubrey/Maturin series. A whole new world of pleasure opened up fifteen years ago that still satisfies today.

My favorite section of the book narrates Stephen Maturin's journey across the high Andes of Peru in the company of a naturalist of Incan descent.

Alex Sarll says

I have, this past month or so, been haunted by the guanaco - a wild cousin to the llama of which I had previously been unaware, but which suddenly started popping up everywhere. And true to form, the South American sections here contain a surprising quantity of guanaco action. Not that coincidental camelids are the book's chief charm, which as ever resides in the delightful pairing of bluff Jack Aubrey (good cheer, naval heroism, terrible puns) and Stephen Maturin (surgeon, natural philosopher, spy, druggie, and terrible seaman). O'Brian has a bold way with pacing, happy to skip over major plot developments if they don't attract his interest, then follow in detail a minor nicety of shipboard etiquette or Andean taxonomy. And I love him for it. The action scenes are exhilarating, the humour's grand, but it's the sheer immersion in another, minutely-drawn era where he truly excels.

Nelson says

A return to form, in most respects, largely occasioned by O'Brian's lighting on a new theme, one that bids fair to carry him through the rest of the series--at least I hope so. It's a bit surprising he hadn't hit on it before this, but for the first time in the series, the undercurrent to the Aubrey-Maturin story is age and loss. One of Austen's characters in *Persuasion* remarks on how a life at sea ages a man horribly. Given all their adventures and misadventures (captures, multiple maroonings, prisons along with countless wounds in battle), it is only natural that the principal characters are beginning not only to show but to feel their age. Both mark it silently in their friend. Neither man escapes unscathed in this novel: Aubrey at least partially loses sight in one eye and Maturin several 'inconsequential' toes to frostbite. Neither man is in his prime as they were when the series started. Now it seems O'Brian's chief theme between the intelligence work and naval warfare is going to be telling the effects of time--physically and otherwise--on his two chief characters. And it makes perfect sense. O'Brian himself was 79 when this was published and wrote four complete further entries along with the draft for a fifth. The tone, as the title itself suggests with its allusion to Homer and mortality, is going to be elegiac from here on out. Frankly, that's pretty exciting. A writer as gifted as O'Brian, with his insight and irony, is bound to be brilliant on the subject. If it's to be a leavetaking, I'm glad it will be four novels long. What of this one? It carries the protagonists from the encounter in the islands narrated in the last book to the coast of South America and finally round the cape bound for home. Jack confides to his longtime friend Heneage Dundas in the novel's closing moments that most of the trip has been a failure. Hmph. His and Maturin's failure is the reader's triumph. The usual excitement of sea battle (against an out and out pirate as well as an American privateer) coupled with intelligence work (Maturin trying to subvert Peru's government against its Spanish overlords) is leavened here with Maturin's trip through the Andes, with loads of birds and beasts and Incan way stations to boot. There's yet another harrowing chase through ice-laden seas near the end. In other words, excellent stuff.

Ron says

Better; much better. Still did a ten-page data dump before starting the story, but at least there *was* a story.

Good characterization. The Peruvian excursion was a welcome diversion. Volcanoes, icebergs and shipwrecks, oh my.

A recurring theme is hubris, with various characters often counting on favorable outcomes only to have the cold water of reality dashed in their face.

Matt Thurston says

Reading Patrick O'Brian's 20-book Aubrey-Maturin series has been one of the highlights of my life. (I say that without a hint of hyperbole.) Through O'Brian first 16 novels (only 4 to go) I have circumnavigated the globe in the early 1800s at least three or four times, largely on board the H.M.S. Surprise, a 28-gun (28 canons) frigate; I have fought yardarm-to-yardarm with French, Dutch, Spanish, American, and pirate ships of similar or greater size; I have explored faraway lands where now-extinct animals roamed free and indigenous cultures lived according to centuries-old traditions; and I have dined and danced and played music in parlors and sitting rooms with English gentlemen and women via prose and wit that rivals Jane Austen.

I wouldn't rank "The Wine-Dark Sea" among the Top 5 books in the Aubrey-Maturin canon -- unlike the previous novel, #15, "The Truelove" -- but there is no such thing as an average, let alone bad Patrick O'Brian novel. After binging on these novels early in the series I've taken to savoring the books over the past few years, keeping my reading pace to a couple per year. I'll read Book #17, "The Commodore," later this year, and finish up with Book #20, "Blue at the Mizzen" sometime in 2018. And then, god-willing, I'll start the whole thing over again -- a story this good, even at over 7,000 pages, cannot be experienced once.

Wealhtheow says

Doctor Stephen Maturin, an intelligence agent of formidable powers, is dispatched to discomfit the Napoleonic French and their allies. With him comes his particular friend, naval captain Jack Aubrey. Each of them has some successes on this long voyage--Jack takes a truly ridiculous number of prizes--but are battered by their adventures and happy to head home.

I love this series so much. At this point, the continued travails of the Surprise's crew, captain, and surgeon are as comforting and interesting as hearing about my home town.

Fred says

Not to read a handful of the Aubrey books is to miss visiting one of the most thoroughly realized and absorbing imaginary worlds in all of English literature. O'Brian may not be as essential to life as Shakespeare, but he makes life richer by far.

Travis says

This installment of the Jack Aubrey/Stephen Maturin novels begins where "The Truelove" left off--with Captain Aubrey's 28-gun frigate "Surprise" pursuing an American privateer, the "Franklin," which had escaped them in the previous installment. They capture it after both ships are disabled during a volcanic

eruption at sea, fascinatingly described in all its wondrous details (one of which gives the book its title).

After sailing their prize to Lima, the "Surprise" leaves Maturin on shore so he can carry out his intelligence mission in Peru, but after he is betrayed he has to flee over the mountains to Chile before reuniting with Aubrey to sail through icebergs and battle American warships during a passage around the Horn. This trajectory affords O'Brian an opportunity to chronicle fascinating oddities of 19th century medicine, Peruvian culture, Napoleonic-era politics in South America, the flora and fauna of the High Andes, the dangers of navigating artic waters--and of course--the usual uncountable details of maritime life so lovingly described in all of O'Brian's books.

No one beats O'Brian at historical fiction, and here he is as good as ever. This was my second time through the book, and I think I learned more about human nature and the Napoleonic era than I did the first time I read it. I rated it 4 stars because despite its many merits, its two plot-lines didn't advance and intertwine as elegantly and successfully as I thought they might have. But that small quibble aside, I enjoyed it very much.

Renee M says

The one with Volcanoes and icebergs. Jack and Stephen get soundly mangled between the battles and the frostbite. Lots of chase and be chased. Plus, some intrigue in Peru, lots of cool animals for Stephen, and plenty of prize money.
