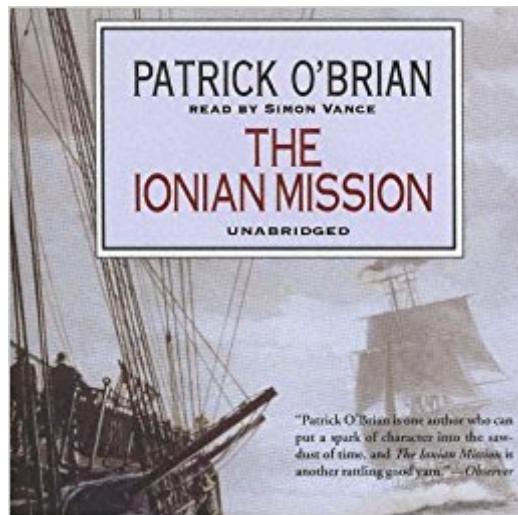


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The Ionian Mission (Aubrey-Maturin (Audio))



Synopsis

Patrick O'Brian's Aubrey-Maturin tales are widely acknowledged to be the greatest series of historical novels ever written. To commemorate the 40th anniversary of their beginning, with Master and Commander, these evocative stories are being re-issued in paperback with smart new livery. This is the eighth book in the series. Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin, veterans of many battles, return in this novel to the seas where they first sailed as shipmates. But Jack is now a senior Captain commanding a line-of-battle ship sent out to reinforce the squadron blockading Toulon, and this is a longer, harder, colder war than the dashing frigate action of his early days. A sudden turn of events takes him and Stephen off on a hazardous mission to the Greek islands. All his old skills of seamanship, and his proverbial luck when fighting against odds, come triumphantly into their own. The book ends with as fierce and thrilling an action as any in this magnificent series of novels. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Aubrey and Maturin return to the choppy Mediterranean waters where they first served together, enforcing the Royal Navy's blockade of Toulon. Then the two companions are sent to the Greek Islands, where another series of maritime cliff-hangers awaits them. O'Brian performs his peculiar narrative magic as adeptly as ever, putting (as The Observer would have it) the "spark of character into the sawdust of time." --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This entry in the Aubrey/Maturin series (see above review of *The Surgeon's Mate*) finds Captain Jack Aubrey "shoved into a temporary command in that rotten old Worcester ," a poorly built ship. Worse, he's off to the Mediterranean to join the Royal Navy's endless blockade of the French port of Toulon. Aside from a chance encounter with a French man-of-war that triggers a brief but extremely colorful battle, there is little excitement as HMS Worcester settles in with the other blockading ships, some with crews showing signs of strain from remaining constantly alert but inactive. Second in command at Toulon is Admiral Harte, no friend of Aubrey's (who cuckolded the admiral years ago). Harte dispatches Aubrey on a delicate mission to the politically volatile Ionian coast. Although he has the succor of Stephen Maturin, a seasoned intelligence agent, and Professor Graham, an expert on the region's customs, Aubrey is caught in a complex net of Turkish politics and rivalries. And while Harte seems to offer all reasonable backing for the mission, Aubrey knows that should he fail, the admiral would like nothing better than to throw him to the dogs. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

What a great story! Aubrey is in trouble by land and sea because of bad decisions and yet brilliant at sea when it comes to sailing and battle tactics where O'Brian has never swayed with regard to the captain. Aubrey is endeared to me as a reader because he's brilliant, doesn't know it or dwell on it, in his element. He is the polar opposite of brilliant in personal matters, knows it and dwells on it. What a great balance in story telling because I, as a reader, worry about Aubrey every moment one foot is ashore and I'm concerned for him at sea but feel that every sea encounter will end as well as it can which doesn't mean with success. This is another great installment by O'Brian and I highly recommend it.

As is sometimes the case in the Aubrey-Maturin series, the plot does plod at times. I find the discussion of Jack's home life and woes on land to be tedious. I guess we always want think of Aubrey as the Russel Crowe version: large and in charge. His gullibility and financial irresponsibility knock holes in this image. This does serve to develop his character and makes the difference between the at-sea Jack and the landsman Jack that much more striking. While it does take some time to get to the climax of the book, with a lot of diplomatic effort Jack and Stephen do get there, and one thing O'Brian excels at is narrating battles and chases at sea.

Another excellent installment, with plenty of cloak and dagger suspense, surprised reactions to Aubrey's bargain powder purchase, a realistic section illustrating the day in, day out, boredom on

blockade duty and dicey political waters to navigate in the Mediterranean. This time it's Aubrey who must sort out the truth, deciding which minor ruler is the lesser of three evils, giving him the best chance to complete his mission. It adds a new dimension to Aubrey's character when he has to navigate dangerous waters on land.

The description throughout is just as good as O'Brian always does. This one contains a thorough description of blockade duty - not exciting but very interesting and helpful in understanding what the British fleet went through during the wars with Napoleon. A good read.

This is my favorite author and genre. If you ever liked the Hornblower books you will love these. One reviewer said "This is Jane Austen on a ship of war, with the humanity, joy and pathos of Shakespeare and brilliantly written." I agree. The dialogue is very authentic which can be a problem. "A Sea of Words" by Dean King can help with the strange terms and background that will help, and King's Harbors and High Seas will provide an atlas and geographical guide to the 20 book series. O'Brian's knowledge of the royal navy in the age of sail compares to Tom Clancy's knowledge of modern warfare.

Over the course of six months, I read the entire Aubrey/Maturin series by Patrick O'Brien. It never got old. O'Brian cleverly tells you details of 18th-19th century British naval life by having the experienced characters, who would never need to explain this to each other, explain this to the complete nautical novice of Dr. Maturin. There is rich contrast between characters who have known each other for some time, some as intimate friends, or between members of family, and the interesting, and occasionally untrustworthy strangers they come upon, all against the grand portrait of major historical events. Having not only an interest in history, but in science as well, it's enjoyable to see Dr. Maturin's frustration with old salt's superstitions and snake oil medicine even while his own understanding of science, medicine, and natural history would be seen as archaic and primitive by our perspective. The contrast between the sizable life-loving, highly social if occasionally clueless Jack Aubrey with his quiet, private, highly observant and often sang-froid friend is one of the best parts of this series. We get to see the best and worst of each of them, bolster and weighed down by the different best and worst of the other.

This is my second read of this volume. Had forgotten many details. Moves well and is another must for Aubrey-Maturin fans. Also good as a stand alone read. But much better if you are invested in the

series

The majority (2/3) of _The Ionian Mission_ has Aubrey and Maturin on blockade duty in the western Mediterranean - monotonous duty at best, and in spite of O'Brian's considerable skill at writing, it was pretty rough reading. The boredom of the duty (and of O'Brian's telling of it) was punctuated by tantalizing opportunities for action, both at sea with Aubrey and ashore with Maturin's espionage, both concluding without real satisfaction. That I empathized with the crew as they struggled with the lack of action speaks directly to O'Brian's abilities as a nautical writer. In my four-star review, perhaps I am being a bit hard on the author, as if anything, he has been religiously consistent and brutally honest in his portrayal of life in the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic Wars, and blockade duty was as much a part of life at the time as was outright action. O'Brian writes, "Day after day of much the same manouvers, continually lloking out; but nobody did they see, never a sail ... only sea and sky." That I was as restless and anxious for a confrontation as the crew is, to be fair, as much a part of the story as the fighting he describes. Perseverance pays off, however, the last 1/3 of the story moves at a much quicker pace once Aubrey is given orders to the Ionian Sea. There Aubrey must act as diplomat (not a strong suit of the Captain as his other misadventures on land demonstrate), negotiating between three rival claimants, clumsily navigating the labyrinth of Ottoman politics, simultaneously attempting to avoid anything his immediate superior (who has an axe to grind with Aubrey) could possibly construe as failure, the better to courtmartial him. I absolutely continue to recommend the series - and even with four-stars for the Ionian Mission, it is a realistic and worthwhile read. Recommended.

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