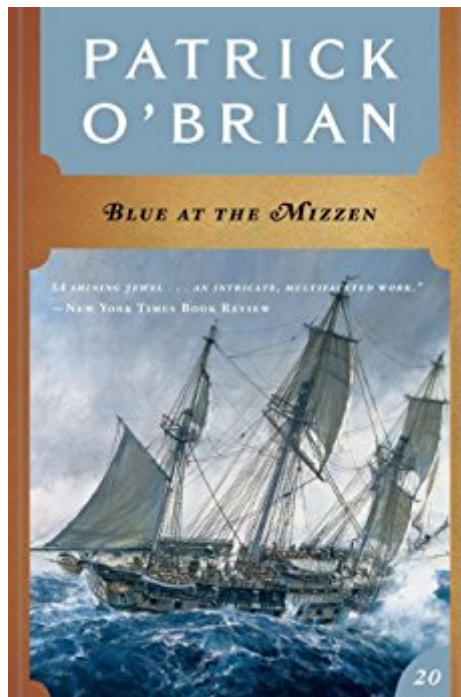


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Blue At The Mizzen (Vol. Book 20) (Aubrey/Maturin Novels)



Synopsis

"The old master has us again in the palm of his hand."âLos Angeles Times (a Best Book of 1999) Napoleon has been defeated at Waterloo, and the ensuing peace brings with it both the desertion of nearly half of Captain Aubrey's crew and the sudden dimming of Aubrey's career prospects in a peacetime navy. When the Surprise is nearly sunk on her way to South Americaâwhere Aubrey and Stephen Maturin are to help Chile assert her independence from Spainâthe delay occasioned by repairs reaps a harvest of strange consequences. The South American expedition is a desperate affair; and in the end Jack's bold initiative to strike at the vastly superior Spanish fleet precipitates a spectacular naval action that will determine both Chile's fate and his own.Â

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Customer Reviews

A few years ago, I happened to be traveling in Kazhakstan, and met up with a fellow westerner. We struck up a friendly conversation when I noticed he was reading an Aubrey-Maturin novel. "Oh yes, I love them." he said, "But I've got only two more to go. And when I finish, I don't know what I'll do." I knew exactly what he meant; at least back then we could look ahead to the indefatigable Patrick

O'Brian's ongoing output. But now we're done for. I read "Blue at the Mizzen" two weeks after the sad news of O'Brian's death. As I closed in on the ending, the lump in my throat had nothing to do with the resolution of the plot. And it wasn't really for the drying-up of this amazing flow of dialog and description. Like all great literature, the books will be there forever, to be re-read with pleasure and recommended to friends and family. No, it was for poor Jack and Stephen. Because by now I know well how long it takes to sail around the Horn and I could tell by the number of pages remaining that the tale would end-with the usual flurry of action-but that the two particular friends would still be standing out to sea, far from England. Like Capt. Cook, the great navigator the stories owe so much too, Aubrey and Maturin are triumphant and ever hopeful, but their bones can never rest at home. If you are a reader of the series, there is no question that you are going to read this book. The only worry is the details. Buy now, or wait for the paperback edition? I say, go for it. And be assured that O'Brian went out at the top of his form. "The Hundred Days" seemed hackneyed and tired, but "Blue at the Mizzen" has all the dialog, the detail and intrigue, all the warmth of the best of the series.

About five years ago I was introduced to the Aubrey/Maturin novels of Patrick O'Brian. I first read *The Wine Dark Sea*, and then I returned to the beginning of the series and promptly read all of the books in the series. In recent years, I have eagerly awaited the release of new books in the series. And, *Blue at the Mizzen* was worth the wait. The Aubrey and Maturin characters have evolved as individuals, as they have aged and had other experiences in life. Unlike most of the earlier books in the series, *Blue at the Mizzen* features Dr. Maturin to a greater degree than the brooding Capt. Aubrey whose concern over his future makes him more remote to both Maturin and to the reader. After O'Brian killed off Dr. Maturin's wife in *The Hundred Days*, Dr. Maturin surprisingly develops a romantic interest in a fellow naturalist, Christine Wood. Their romantic episode is odd, but given Maturin's character, that is not really surprising. As usual, a lot happens in this book, but as in the other books, O'Brian often unleashes the action in a understated or offhanded way. Events happen with little or no warning or with minimal discussion. The intelligence activities involving the Republic of Chile are not as clearly described, for example, as Maturin's South American intelligence activities in *The Wine Dark Sea*. As with other books in the series, the action sometimes is secondary to the activities on the ship, the relationships of the main and minor characters, and Maturin's focus on the birds and beasts that they encounter. Even so, *Blue on the Mizzen* was an enjoyable book that held my interest. How does it compare with the other books in the series? Good question. Personally, I liked it better than *The Yellow Admiral*, which spent too much time on shore.

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'Brien is a superb writer and that his ability to evoke the past is outstanding. O'Brien 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'Brien 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).

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