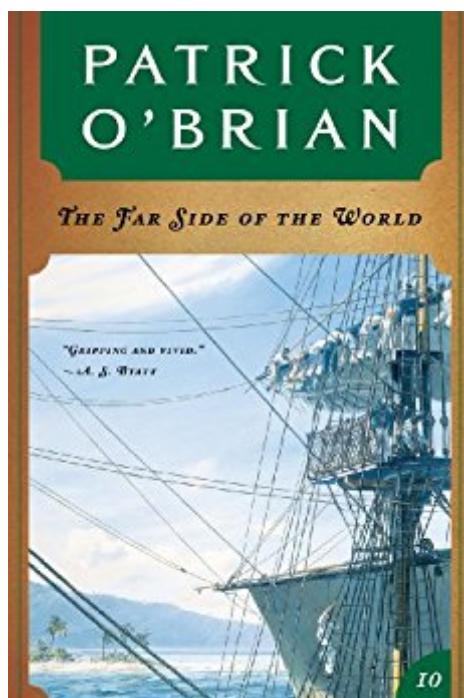


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The Far Side Of The World (Vol. Book 10) (Aubrey/Maturin Novels)



Synopsis

The inspiration for the major new motion picture starring Russell Crowe. The war of 1812 continues, and Jack Aubrey sets course for Cape Horn on a mission after his own heart: intercepting a powerful American frigate outward bound to play havoc with the British whaling trade. Stephen Maturin has fish of his own to fry in the world of secret intelligence. Disaster in various guises awaits them in the Great South Sea and in the far reaches of the Pacific: typhoons, castaways, shipwrecks, murder, and criminal insanity.

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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).

The recent film *Master & Commander: The Far Side of the World* sparked my interest in Patrick O'Brian's lengthy series of nautical adventures featuring Capt. Jack Aubrey and his close friend and ship's doctor, Stephen Maturin. While the source novel, *The Far Side of the World*, comes at a midpoint in O'Brian's chronology, it provides a familiar port for a movie fan to embark on the journey. (Had I read the book before seeing the movie, this might be an entirely different review; now, a comparison between the two is inevitable.) O'Brian's novel is an intelligent, fascinating look at British naval life during the Napoleonic wars. The author quickly draws readers into the world of seamanship and His Majesty's Navy, filling the pages with rich images and jargon that bring a bygone era back to life with less flash but more substance. Book and movie are both enjoyable and absorbing; still, readers will find very little resemblance here, as the movie draws very few scenes and plot twists from O'Brian's text. Characters, on the other hand, are better developed in these pages, and there are more of them to boot. Relationships aboard ship are more fully explored and there are even a few women -- a handful of officer's wives -- among the passengers. Subplots dealing with international intrigue, shipboard romance and murder (that were dropped entirely from the movie script) kept my interest level high. There is plenty of humor, too, providing the occasional elbow jab in the ribs and hearty chuckle. The novel can be slow-moving at times; it seems an endless wait before HMS Surprise and her crew even leave port!

Given the existence of the movie *MASTER AND COMMANDER: THE FAR SIDE OF THE WORLD*, something has to be said initially about that. I would very strongly recommend anyone who has

seen the movie and wants to read the novel to resist the temptation to do so. Mainly this is because it is the tenth novel in a series, and the author assumes that you have read the previous nine. If you pick this up and attempt to read it without having read the others, you will be utterly at sea (pun intended). I also do not recommend this novel to viewers of the movie (who don't intend to read the other novels first) because the novel and the movie bear very little resemblance to one another. There is, in fact, almost nothing in common between the two except for the two main characters, the fact that the H.M.S. Surprise is chasing another ship (an American ship rather than French as in the movie, presumably so as not to alienate American movie goers), they encounter the Galapagos Islands, and they end up in the Pacific. In other words, there is only the most superficial resemblance between the novel and the movie. For readers of the series, this is one of the stronger additions to the sequence. Instead of taking the Surprise back to England where she is to be sold or perhaps broken up, Jack is summoned to go out in search of the U.S.S. Norfolk, an American ship sent out to harass British whaling ships in the Pacific. Although things go well at first, it turns out to be an almost doomed voyage, with one catastrophe after another taking place. None of the misfortunes dooms the mission, but neither do they allow anything to go smoothly. The only thing that saves the mission is that the Norfolk ends up having even less luck than the Surprise.

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