

The Hundred Days (Aubrey/ Maturin Novels, 19) (Book 19)

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"One of the best novelists since Jane Austen...The Hundred Days may be the best installment yet." -Philadelphia Inquirer

Napoleon, escaped from Elba, pursues his enemies across Europe like a vengeful phoenix. If he can corner the British and Prussians before their Russian and Austrian allies arrive, his genius will lead the French armies to triumph at Waterloo. In the Balkans, preparing a thrust northwards into Central Europe to block the Russians and Austrians, a horde of Muslim mercenaries is gathering. They are inclined toward Napoleon because of his conversion to Islam during the Egyptian campaign, but they will not move without a shipment of gold ingots from Sheik Ibn Hazm which, according to British intelligence, is on its way via camel caravan to the coast of North Africa. It is this gold that Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin must at all costs intercept. The fate of Europe hinges on their desperate mission.

The year is 1815, and Europe's most unpopular (not to mention tiniest) empire-builder has escaped from Elba. In *The Hundred Days*, it's up to Jack Aubrey--and surgeon-cum-spy-master Stephen Maturin--to stop Napoleon in his tracks. How? For starters, Aubrey and his squadron have been dispatched to the Adriatic coast, to keep Bonapartist shipbuilders from beefing up the French navy. Meanwhile, one Sheik Ibn Hazm is fomenting an Islamic uprising against the Allies. The only way to halt this maneuver is to intercept the sheik's shipment of gold--because in the Napoleonic era, as in our own, even the most ardent of mercenaries requires a salary.

The Hundred Days is the 19th (and, we are told, the penultimate) installment of O'Brian's epic. Like many of its predecessors, it features a fairly swashbuckling plot, complete with cannon fire, exotic disguises, and Aubrey's suspenseful, slow-motion pursuit of an Algerian xebek. Yet it never turns into a mere exercise in Hornblowerism. Partly this is due to O'Brian's delicate touch with character--the relationship between extroverted Aubrey and introverted Maturin has deepened with each book, and even Aubrey's reunion with his childhood companion Queenie Keith is full of novelistic nuance: "They sat smiling at one another. An odd pair: handsome creatures both, but they might have been of the same sex or neither." Nor does the author focus too exclusively on his dynamic duo. Indeed, *The Hundred Days* is very much a chronicle of a floating community, which Maturin describes as "his own village, his own ship's company, that complex entity so much more easily sensed than described: part of his natural habitat."

Finally, O'Brian shows his usual expertise in balancing the great events with the most minuscule ones. Other authors have written about battles at sea, and still others have recorded the rapid rise and fall of Napoleon's fortunes after his escape from confinement. But who else would give equal time--and an equal charge of delight--to Maturin's discovery of an anomalous nuthatch? --James Marcus

7 1.5-hour cassettes

Other Books

Keponakan penyihir, Journeys to the end of the world, fantastic creatures, and epic battles between good and evil -- what more could any reader ask for in one book? The book that has it all is *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, written in 1949 by Clive Staples

Lewis. But Lewis did not stop there. Six more books followed, and together they became known as The Chronicles of Narnia. For the past fifty years, The Chronicles of Narnia have transcended the fantasy genre to become part of the canon of classic literature. Each of the seven books is a masterpiece, drawing the reader into a land where magic meets reality, and the result is a fictional world whose scope has fascinated generations.

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