



# The Far Side of the World

*Patrick O'Brian*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

# The Far Side of the World

*Patrick O'Brian*

## **The Far Side of the World** Patrick O'Brian

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.

## **The Far Side of the World Details**

Date : Published April 17th 1992 by W. W. Norton Company (first published 1984)

ISBN : 9780393308624

Author : Patrick O'Brian

Format : Paperback 366 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Adventure

 [Download The Far Side of the World ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Far Side of the World ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online The Far Side of the World Patrick O'Brian**

---

## From Reader Review *The Far Side of the World* for online ebook

### Renee M says

Call me Ishmael! I think of this one as "Jack and Stephen Meet Moby Dick." They spend the first half of the book chasing an American frigate through whaling waters, gathering information from those they come across much the way Melville handled the bulk of his Great American Novel. Of course, that's not all. There's a tragic affair, impotence, murder, suicide, men overboard, cannibals, shipwreck ... Culminating in a final chapter that's as suspenseful as any sea battle. God, I love these books!

---

### Jason Koivu says

In case you ever wanted to know what it feels like without actually doing it, here is a book that moves with the slow satisfaction of a sailboat journey around the world.

The flow of language will at times rock you asleep and other times you will be buffeted about by a crash of words mightily massed and moving perpetually forward.

But mostly *The Far Side of the World* is a book for those who are already embroiled in the saga of Jack and Stephen, two unlikely friends bound together in a noble cause, the fight against tyranny.

That's not to say newcomers couldn't begin mid-way through the series by picking up this - #10 and literally the exact middle - and not enjoy themselves. One of the smart things Patrick O'Brian did was to make each book self-contained. Now granted, there is a story thread passing through the series from start to finish and you'd be better served starting at the beginning. However, O'Brian gives enough backstory to bring anyone and everyone up to speed, so that you can enjoy these books as one-offs.

That is also part of the problem with these books, they tend to start slow because of all the backstory given. Also, O'Brian spends some time setting up the action to come. There is necessary information to deliver to the readers and there is unnecessary-but-welcome foreshadowing. All of that means the story doesn't usually get underway for a few chapters. But I suggest just sitting back and enjoying the subtly with which the author delicately maneuvers his readers through dangerous plot shoals and takes them out to clear-sailing deep blue waters.

*The Far Side of the World* contains almost no sea battles, yet herein you'll find shocking violence of a different nature. Human nature can be fickle, funny and frightening. Readers are treated to a little bit of everything in this one as love sours and blooms aboard ship, and the consequences are brutal.

I've read book #10 about three or four times now over the years with a gap in between each time just long enough that I forget the most unexpected turn the story takes. Those caught up in the sea battle chases that this series so often deliver spectacularly might be disappointed, but found it to be a dangerous and delightful detour away from the norm.

Those familiar with the movie "Master & Commander: The Far Side of the World" will see that director Peter Weir took the basic structure of his movie from this book. However, it is not faithful from start to finish. For instance, our hero's quarry isn't the same, though the goal is similar. The movie takes bits from a

few of the books and patches together a plot of its own, while maintaining the overall feel of O'brian's work in a way that made this fan happy. And likewise, I believe fans of the movie should find plenty of enjoyment in these books.

---

## **Darwin8u says**

*“Martin was a thoroughly amiable man, a man of wide reading, but when he came to write he mounted upon a pair of stilts, unusually lofty stilts, and staggered along at a most ungracious pace, with an occasional awkward lurch into colloquialism, giving a strikingly false impression of himself.”*

? Patrick O'Brian, *The Far Side of the World*

*'The Far Side of the World'* is driven by a fairly simple plot. It is a chase, a hunt, a sea race from Gibraltar, down around Cape Horn into the Pacific. The *Surprise* has been tasked with intercepting the American frigate the *Norfolk* as it hunts for British whalers in the Great South Sea on the Far Side of the World. The benefit of this novel's simple plot structure is it really boils the book down to what makes the series great: O'Brian's nautical prose and the relationship between Dr. Stephen Maturin and Captain Jack Aubrey.

The relationship between Maturin and Aubrey is one that captures the unique relationship that forms between some men in battle, war, etc., that seems to almost transcend relationships of blood or the liquid link of lovers. Some of the most touching parts of this novel are those lines where Captain Aubrey recognizes how his role as captain requires him to do something that will cause distress or pain to Dr. Maturin. The affection is real. It is honest. It is mature. The amazing thing is this type of love between men almost NEVER gets exposed in modern literature or art. Again, I say almost because there are example, but the great thing about this series is O'Brian lets this relationship grow and develop and adds complexities to it that are unparalleled anywhere in literature.

I also adore how these two men explore two great models\* of masculinity. Captain Aubrey (to me) represents almost a Ruler form of masculinity while Doctor Maturin represents the Explorer form. These two men, with these two very distinct FORMS and WAYS of BEING men are able to interact, cooperate, resolve conflict, etc., through their linked affection, to a world at war and a world unknown. I read these novels and I believe there is nothing that Victorian rules and the Age of Enlightenment can't accomplish.

\* Borrowing a bit from Clare W. Graves here.

---

## **Cherie says**

Not a lot of war or spying stuff going on for the most parts, just a lot of going about the seas, my favorite parts! Jack and Stephen lost at sea and Stephen on the verge of having his head operated on. The *Surprise* to the rescue and - the end. IS the war over?

As always, a stellar reading by Simon Vance.

---

## Wealththeow says

Captain Aubrey of the British Royal Navy is sent to the South Seas to prevent the American frigate *Norfolk* from harassing English whalers. It's an excellent book all around, but there are moments of pure perfection in it. The prim parson Martin shows Maturin the letter he wants to woo his lady-love with, it's horrifyingly bad, Maturin tries to tell him so as gently as possible, and Martin completely refuses to hear it. Or at one point Maturin falls out of the cabin window while Aubrey is talking. Aubrey immediately realizes what happens and, without a moment's hesitation, dives in after him, for Maturin is so uncoordinated that he could drown in only an inch of water. Later, upon finding entering the cabin and finding both Aubrey and Maturin missing, their shipmate immediately knows that Maturin fell out of the ship and Aubrey went after him. And of course the ending is basically the best ending of all endings in the entire world. (view spoiler)

I will note that this book contains Maturin once again refusing to help a woman have an abortion. It's a particularly bad situation because he's pretty sure that her sterile husband will kill her once he finds she's pregnant. (view spoiler) My frustration with him was mitigated somewhat when, later in the novel, he goes on a several minute tirade about how shitty the patriarchy is for women. But still. Maturin, get your shit together.

---

## Madeline says

It's always nice to revisit Aubrey and Maturin. I've only read a couple books from this series, and I never feel any serious need to find more installments, but I always enjoy them when I do. And this is one of the best ones - not only because it's pretty similar to the movie version and picking out what they changed/didn't change for the adaptation is a fun game, but also for other reasons, which I will now list:

-Plots! So many plots. Almost too many plots.

This book is just over four hundred pages, and there is A LOT happening. The main story concerns the *Surprise* trying to track an American ship, the *Norfolk*, around South American (the movie changed the bad guys into Frenchmen, first because it connects better to the threat of Napoleon and also AMERICA FUCK YEAH). But there's more. Maturin has a spying subplot, as he often does, and there's a nice scene where Jack helps him figure out where a secret letter has been hidden. Then the *Surprise* itself is a little fuller than usual, as the ship is carrying a bunch of twelve-year-olds who are learning about ship life (let's call them interns), which was included in the movie - but there's also a bunch of crewmen who were recruited from an insane asylum, and also two crewmen bring their wives along. So in addition to the multiple plots, we also have a ton of characters to keep track of, but luckily they're all a lot of fun. Also we have the tension created between Maturin and Aubrey when Aubrey cancels the former's day trip to the shore and Maturin gets all huffy about it. And there's a big scandal where one of the crewmen has an affair with one of the women and *it does not end well*. And towards the end of the book Aubrey and Maturin fall overboard (or, more accurately, Maturin falls overboard and Aubrey jumps in to save him) and are lost at sea, and then rescued by a boat crewed entirely by Polynesian women who plan to castrate them (*why the hell was that not in the movie?*). And then Aubrey captures a bunch of prisoners and the crew of the captured ship and the *Surprise* have to stay on an island together while Aubrey tries to keep everyone from killing each other.

Quick - without looking, tell me the name of the American ship they're trying to catch. See what I mean about almost too many plots? It can be hard to keep up with, but luckily it's all very exciting and well-written, so even if you're not 100% sure what's going on, you're still having a good time.

-Lots of fun details

O'Brian's books are always impressively researched, but it seemed like there was an extra amount of good insider information about ships in the 1800s here. There are details about the Sunday services given on English ships (sailors were woken up half an hour earlier, to give them time to clean up for services), the sheer number of different people who traveled on ships (see: crewmen's wives and the interns, and it's very cute because the two women are in charge of the kids' lessons onboard), and the ceremonies involved in taking a ship and its crew prisoner. I also now exactly what grog is - I always knew it was watered-down rum, but apparently they also added lemon juice and sugar to it, and someone should really put that in a Mason jar and sell it to hipsters for \$15. Additionally, there are a lot of descriptions about the food served on the ship, like this passage about the meal served at a fancy dinner in Aubrey's cabin:

"'Mr. Martin,' said Jack, after the chaplain had said grace, 'It occurred to me that perhaps you might not yet have seen lobscouse. It is one of the oldest of the fore-castle dishes, and eats very savory when it is well made: I used to enjoy it prodigiously when I was young. Allow me to help you to a little.'  
Alas, when Jack was young he was also poor, often penniless; and this was a rich man's lobscouse, a Lord Mayor's lobscouse. Orrage had been wonderfully generous with his slush, and the liquid fat stood half an inch deep over the whole surface, while the potatoes and pounded biscuit that ordinarily made up the bulk of the dish could scarcely be detected at all, being quite overpowered by the fat meat, fried onions, and powerful spices."

...yum? Either way, you gotta admire the detail that went into this book. O'Brian knows his stuff.

And now we come to my favorite aspect of this book.

-Ladies! (yeah!) Ladies! (yeah!)

In addition to the two women on board the *Surprise* (one of whom gets a really good, albeit tragic, subplot where she has an affair with one of the crewmen), there's the previously-mentioned bit where Aubrey and Maturin get rescued by a ship of Polynesian women. Polynesian women who decorate the masthead of their ship with the severed dicks of their victims. Also one of the women jumps into the ocean and kills a shark with a knife.

Okay, on the one hand, I understand why this was left out of the movie version, because it would be a total distraction from the whole let's-get-the-French plot. But on the other hand, *where is my movie about a ship full of castrating Polynesian women!* Scratch that, I want a miniseries.

Anyway, that entire subplot is awesome, and combined with the two women who travel on the *Surprise*, completely obliterates the argument that female characters don't belong in seafaring stories because "it's not historically accurate!" Check and mate, says O'Brian. Also the Polynesian women are fantastic because they prompt this conversation between Stephen Maturin and another man, which I will reproduce in its entirety because that's how happy it made me:

"'No,' said Martin, 'I saw nothing but a swarthy crew of ill-looking female savages, full of maligned fury, a disgrace to their sex.'

'I dare say they had been ill-used, the creatures,' said Stephen.

'Perhaps they had,' said Martin. 'But to carry resentment to the point of the emasculation you described seems to me inhumane, and profoundly wicked.'

'Oh, as far as unsexing is concerned, who are we to throw stones? With us any girl that cannot find a husband is unsexed. If she is very high or very low she may go her own way, with the risks entailed therein, but otherwise she must either have no sex or be disgraced. She burns, and she is ridiculed for burning. To say nothing of male tyranny - a wife or a daughter being a mere chattel in most codes of law or custom - and brute force - to say nothing of that, hundreds of thousands of girls are unsexed every generation: and barren women are as much despised as eunuchs. I do assure you, Martin, that if I were a woman I should march out with a flaming torch and a sword; I should emasculate right and left.'"

(at this point, I have to point out that earlier in the book Maturin refuses to perform an abortion on a woman who tells him that her husband will literally kill her if he finds out she's pregnant, so way to put your money where your mouth is, douche. But the speech is still awesome, and Maturin is still great.)

---

## **Anna says**

This must be one of my favourite instalments of the Aubrey and Maturin series. It contains a good many exciting pursuits, terrible storms, unfortunate misadventures, amusing puns, appealing creatures, even some frightening and sad moments. The whole book concerns one very long voyage to the South Pacific and thus there is a lot more in the way of ship shenanigans than spy happenings. As usual, I laughed out loud many times, for example at Jack misquoting "Lead on, Macbeth," only for a crewman named Macbeth to mistake it for an order. This description also tickled me: 'Valparaiso was notorious for possessing nothing, and that nothing of the very lowest quality as well as exorbitantly dear and delivered only after endless delay'.

The relationship of Aubrey and Maturin is especially central to this book. Stephen sulking at not being allowed to visit the Galapagos, Jack diving after in after Stephen falls into the sea (again), and their attempts to gather coconuts on a desert island are all delightful. Both have endearing quirks: Jack's continued attempts to be witty, Stephen's newfound taste for coca leaves, both of their particularity about coffee and grilled cheese. I also appreciated the many flora and fauna that appeared, including regular cameos from Scourge the ship's cat and Aspasia the ship's goat. How could you fail to smile at lines like, 'They met on the quay, Lopez accompanied by an embarrassing, unnecessary spider monkey that had to be menaced and hissed at to make it go home'.

I won't spoil things any further by detailing all that I enjoyed, suffice it to say that 'The Far Side of the World' is exceptional even by Patrick O'Brian's high standards. I couldn't help noticing that the plot of the film adaptation does not bear very close resemblance to the book. I can understand why, though, as too much occurs to be easily fitted into film format. The film is entertaining and well-cast but the book, of course, is much better.

---

## **Dan Glover says**

Like all of the Aubrey/Maturin series that I have thus far read, this was great. This book contained much

more of the sailor's superstitions than the other books and there was a more serious falling out between Jack and Stephen than in previous volumes as well, adding some further depth to their relationship. Overall, really enjoyed it.

In the volume I have there is an essay on Patrick O'Brian's Aubrey/Maturin novels by Charlton Heston. Of course it is an admirer's perspective but it is a good essay. Especially good is the examination of Jack and Stephen's friendship. Heston points out that in great literature, most friendships among the main characters is merely asserted (like Tom Sawyer and Nigger Jim, Holmes and Watson, etc.), whereas in O'Brian's novels, the friendship is the key element and the heart of the books. Thinking about this point a bit more, one is hard pressed to find a friendship which is displayed and explored more than the one in the center of this series.

---

## **Karla says**

It was impossible to listen to this book and not think of the film the entire time. I was actually surprised by how much the movie adhered to it, although it was more in terms of themes and glimpses, rather than sticking to the actual plot. The plot as a whole was the same (chasing a ship around the Horn), but so much of the ancillary details had been altered.

The character of Hollom was another of these "same, but different" elements - in the film, he is a wholly sympathetic character but in the book, while he does have the taint of Jonah about him, he has quite a few qualities of a snake in the grass. It doesn't make his end any less sad, though. The doomed-in-blood love triangle between he, the gunner, and the gunner's wife was a meaty little melodrama below decks that provided some periodic distraction from the overarching mission of chasing the *Norfolk*.

One part of the plot that was wholly missing from the movie was the fact that Jack gets saddled with a bunch of asylum rejects because the Royal Navy is low on men. Since O'Brian is fastidious about adhering to historical fact, I have no reason to believe that a ship's captain never had this foisted upon him by an idiotic Admiralty. Given the wrong-headed and oblivious actions by the Admiralty in other matters, telling a captain he has to use mutineers and loonies to run his ship seems entirely probable. It's a wonder Britain ruled the seas as long as she did.

In all, I absolutely loved this one and the many scenes with Maturin and his naturalist colleague Martin were very fun. I didn't think that listening to two guys talk about bugs and birds would be so entertaining. It was my most favorite installment in the series since book 2, *The Post Captain*.

---

## **Algernon says**

*Come all you thoughtless  
young men, a warning  
take by me  
And never leave your  
happy homes to sail the  
raging sea.*



Episode number ten bring about a change of tack in the long journey of Captain Jack Aubrey and his friend, Doctor Stephen Maturin. It is time to sail away from the crowded and treacherous waters of the Mediterranean, from the cat-and-mouse games with French spies and from bureaucratic entanglements. "H.M.S. Surprise" is sent on a solitary mission to the far side of the world, there to give chase, capture or destroy an American frigate that is harrasing the British whaler ships in the South Pacific.

For me, this installment was one of the most anticipated developments since I first started the series and after watching the 2003 movie adaptation (which differs greatly from the book). I admire Patrick O'Brian's battle scenes and political acumen, but I remain more interested in the actual sailing of the ship, in the visits to exotic places, in the hardships of life aboard and in the sense of wonder at the diversity of life that Dr. Maturin and his friends keep fresh for voyage after voyage. That means that the long descriptive passages, the apparent lack of ship to ship action and the focus on personal dramas among the crew were added incentives to enjoy the trip. I can understand how some reviewers might feel slightly disappointed by the routines of very long voyages, especially if they start the journey here instead of with "Master and Commander", but I rate this book among my personal favorites, one of the most dramatic (weather-wise) and hilarious Aubrey-Maturin adventure so far.

**I have never known any commission with so much weather in it.** exclaims Jack Aubrey towards the end of the voyage.

Becalmed in the Atlantic doldrums, struck by lightning, stranded on a sand bank in Recife, frozen and battered close to the Antarctic, waterless near Galapagos, tossed around like a kid's toy by a typhoon in the middle of nowhere, marooned on a hostile island : I start to wonder how can the journey be called uneventful. And how can people still crack jokes when only a 'nine-inch plank' stands between them and eternity?

Yet some of the most memorable scenes in the book, after the descriptions of stormy weather, are the tribulations of landlubbers trying to make sense of nautical jargon and trying to convince the sailors to take some time-off for scientific exploration. Stephen gets a sidekick, in the person of pastor Martin, a fellow naturalist and a man with two left feet. Every time these two companions step ashore something dangerous is bound to happen, like trying to catch a boa constrictor bare-handed:

*I saw that Martin was clinging to its neck with both hands and I represented to him that this was rash, heedless, imprudent. I should have gone on to remind him of the fate of Laocoon, but a coil tightening under my chin cut me short. In gasps he replied that this was a boa - boas were notoriously good-natured - he only wished to see its vestigial hind-legs - he was not hurting it.*

The equanimity and good nature of these highly educated landlubbers is tested almost on daily basis, as they are constantly about to be tossed overboard by a swinging spar, baffled by the jargon or distracted by passing birds and sea creatures. Under the pen of O'Brian even the insult have style:

*a wicked contumelious discontented froward mutinous dog* (this for Jack who refused a dinner invitation from his Admiral because he had a date with a lady)

----

*"Oh you wicked mutinous dogs, sons of everlasting whores."* (this from a twelve years old midshipman berating his crew of old hands)

I thought, halfway through the series, that I was getting familiar with the various parts of the rigging and with the operation of a frigate. The author is still gleefully crushing my hopes for a commission in the Royal Navy with dialogues like these:

*Yarrow said, 'I dare say they are hauling away the cat before hooking on the fish.'*

*Pocock said, 'Perhaps they will stopper with a dog.'*

*Stephen said, 'It is my belief that they have raised a mouse, and that having seized it with a fox they will clap on a lizard.'*

*'Lord, what a jargon the honest creatures have invented, upon my word,' said Pocock, laughing heartily for the first time in Stephen's acquaintance with him. 'were your terms authentic?'*

*'They were indeed,' said Stephen. 'And there are hounds too, somewhere about the masts.'*

Later on, Jack Aubrey gives a lecture to his young midshipmen about the finer points of lifting an anchor:

*They followed him to the mangerboard, where he observed, 'This is a voyol. Watch now! He makes it fast to the cable - he reeves the jeer-fall through it - the jeer-fall is brought to its capstan, with the standing part belayed to the bits. So you get a direct runner-purchase instead of a dead nip, do you understand?'*

I am never sure when the author is pulling my leg. In the past, I have known Maturin to invent nautical terms in order to impress his land-bound academic colleagues. With other obscure words, I am luckier. For example, 'a glass of sillery' is a reference to a sweet white wine from the Marne region of France, a favourite at the captain's table aboard the HMS Surprise. I have remarked before, and this episode is no exception: the research into early 19th-century sailing is flawless, the wealth of detail unparalleled in any other historical fiction I have tried.

One such reference, and another hilarious episode for the modern reader, is the method Stephen Maturin has discovered for controlling his addiction to opium. A friendly explorer, returning from a crossing of the Andes, is offering Stephen a stimulant much in favour with the natives of the Altiplano:

*Ever since the first acullico that you were so good as to give me I have felt my mind glow, my mental and no doubt physical powers increase. I have little doubt that I could swim the river that lies before us. I shall not do so, however. I prefer to enjoy our conversation and my present state of remarkable well-being - no fatigue, no hunger, no perplexity of mind, but a power of apprehension and synthesis that I have rarely known before. Your coca, sir, is the most virtuous simple I have ever met with.*

Dr. Maturin's opinion was widely shared by the rest of the medical community until advances in the refinement of the active ingredient led to abuse and even more serious addictions. The joke may be on me, since doctors' claimed benefits of chewing the natural coca leaves are still considered valid today.

The far side of the world may hold less possibilities for open conflict, with so many thousands of miles for the American frigate to hide in, but it is unrivalled in the potential for study of the natural world. The conversations about whaling, ambergris, blue-legged boobies, turtles, iguanas, sharks, plankton, arthropods, etc are both educational and entertaining, when viewed from the deck of a period sailing ship:

**Alongside he was, and vast he was: a sperm whale with his great blunt squared-off head abreast of the forechains, his dark body streaming aft far along the quarterdeck, perhaps seventy-five or even eighty feet of massive creature, giving such an impression of tranquil strength the ship seemed frail beside him.**

The conflict between scientific curiosity and military expediency threatens at one point the long-lasting friendship between Jack and Stephen. Who wouldn't get angry when required to abandon the glorious diversity of the Galapagos islands without even putting a foot on shore? All because some big boys like to chase around the high seas and destroy one another with broadsides. Oh, well, I hope the good doctor and his friend Martin will have better luck in the Marquesas, one of the possible destinations of the voyage:

*I have heard differing and often muddle-headed accounts of the islanders' polity, but all agree that it pays great attention to various prohibitions or taboos and to relationship; and all agree that the people are most uncommonly amiable and good-looking, their only faults being cannibalism and unlimited fornication.*

Science requires sacrifices, and the naive Martin has his eyes opened to the women emancipation movement in a most painful manner ( I am trying to be obscure here, but I can't stop laughing as I see the galant pastor (view spoiler)). Dr. Maturin patches him up, and he tries to explain to Martin, still a bachelor, that women should be treated equally and offered the same opportunities and leeway as men:

**'I have him in my crow's-bill. A shark's tooth, as I had supposed, detached from the club and driven into the gluteus maximus to a most surprising depth. The question is, what shark?'**

**'May I see it?' asked Martin in a reasonably firm voice. He had already had thirty-six stitches in his scalp, while a square foot of court plaster covered his lacerated shoulders, but he was a man of some fortitude, and above all a natural philosopher. 'A shark without a doubt, but what shark I cannot tell. However, I shall keep it in my snuff-box, and look at it whenever I think about matrimony. Whenever I think about women, indeed.**

(view spoiler)

I have left out of my review the personal dramas of the sailors and officers, and the final battle, considering them to spoilerish to discuss here. At the end of the lecture, the image I would like to keep in my memory is the reaffirmation of the power of friendship to survive the occasional stormy weather. I am glad that Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin can get over their differences and that they will be our guides to the far corners of the world for another ten novels:

*Night after night they played there in the great cabin with the stern-windows open and the ship's wake flowing away and away in the darkness. Few things gave them more joy; and although they were as unlike in nationality, education, religion, appearance and habit of mind as two men could well be, they were wholly at one when it came to improvising, working out variations on a theme, handing them to and fro, conversing with violin and cello.*

---

## Gilly McGillicuddy says

I was going to do what I usually do and just copypaste what I wrote in my LJ at the time I was actually reading the book, only to find out that my review for Chapter 3 ALONE was already far over the character limit here. Sigh!

Instead I'll just copy my love-rant I wrote when I had just read Chapter 4 and his and Stephen's distracted duet. It'll have to do.

*'You are not offended by my moss, Stephen, are you?'* asked Jack.

You can't not love the man in moments like this. I am of a mind to challenge the entire world not to like Jack and still remain confident that not a single person will succeed. Lord, he is so amazing, you just want to be close to him and bask in the glow that is Jackness. Jack is LIFE. I think it is the fact that Jack loves life and he thoroughly shows it that draws you in. There was a bit in *The Mauritius Command* where Stephen was comparing Jack to Clonfert and talked of a "Jack who has never played a part in his life, who has no need for any role". It's that kind of honesty and openness that just sucks you in, regardless of the less admirable parts of his personality and regardless of the less positive things that his kind of simplicity can entail. You love him because *he* loves readily and unconditionally, you love him because he takes such obvious delight in his jokes, in his ship, in his life, in his morning coffee. You love him because he disregards Killick when he's being particularly shrewish and Stephen when he is the same. You love him because he honestly wishes the best for everyone. You love him because he loves Sophie. You love him because he loves Stephen. You love him because he would love you if he knew you and because he would naturally expect to be loved back but still be so utterly delighted that you would. You love that he turns red and wheezes when he laughs, and that he snores when he sleeps. You love that he takes his officers under his wing and feels their fortune as keenly as his own. You love that he professes not to be superstitious and is still every inch the sailor. You love that he wears his hair long and his hat athwart. You love that he can have mindless flings but does feel guilty over Mrs Smith. You love the way he revives when he gets another letter from Sophie. You love how he could never leave the sea to stay with her, even though you might want him to sometimes. You love his attention to gunnery and his devotion to his men. You love how he can get more speed out of every scrap of sail than anyone else. You love him when there is not a trace to be seen of the child in him and you love when there is nothing else to be seen *but* the child in him. You love that he will never say die. You love that he can be so boorish one instant and then turn around and play this most delicate of instruments and it somehow doesn't seem odd at all. You love that he can be Goldilocks and Lucky Jack and Captain Jno. Aubrey and just plain old Jack all rolled into one. You love that he can be larger than life, and still be so horribly inept. You love... I have no words. My head is aswim with what I want to say and I can't get it articulated properly. It's the sight of him holding on to the corner of a desk red-faced and wiping tears of laughter from his eyes, it's him sitting immovable and wet with morning dew in the maintop, his eyes trained on the shore and his hand clamped tight around a telescope, it's the intensity and focus that seems to emanate from him when he's about to engage a ship. It's all this and so much more and it's wrapped up in this generous great big mass of yellow-topped goodness that you can't help but want to crawl up next to.

Lord, how I love that man. I'm sorry, I'll shut up now. I got carried away. I just... it's been a while since I cared this much for a book.

---

### **Sean Lee says**

Slow start, epic finish. The last third of the book cuts an impressive bow wave. Aubrey and Maturin - what a duo!

---

### **Evan says**

This is a book that calls for a breakdown in the rating. There are aspects of it that probably deserve a three at

best. The plot itself isn't actually all that compelling: the story simply plods along from one adventure or crisis to the next, framed by the overarching back-cover-synopsis plot (which occupies remarkably little of the book). The characters are memorable, but I can't think of a single one that really develops during the story. But what brings the overall rating up to five stars is the author's incredible use of language. The characters speak from the page as vividly as the best of Twain's. The wit and wordplay is top-notch. It's such a delight to read that I found myself constantly wanting to read passages aloud to people around me. I've not had such simple **fun** reading a book in a long time, and I can't wait to read some more in the (prolific) series.

---

### **Jamie Collins says**

This is the book that provides the largest chunk of plot for the movie, *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World*. Jack Aubrey and the crew of the *Surprise* pursue their enemy around stormy Cape Horn, and naturalist Stephen Maturin is furious at being denied the opportunity to spend time on the amazing Galapagos Islands. During the journey there is drama on board concerning an unlucky "old" Midshipman who is considered a Jonah by the superstitious crew.

The plot of the book differs, of course. The story takes place during the War of 1812, that "absurd, unnecessary war", and the enemy is not a Frenchman but the *USS Norfolk*. The old midshipman is not only unlucky but unwise enough to sleep with the wife of the very dangerous gunner, with tragic consequences.

Dr. Maturin is practically a feminist for this time period, but there is a memorable scene where (view spoiler)

The sequence where Stephen falls off the ship, Jack dives in after him, and they are semi-rescued by a group of hostile islander women, is rather silly; but it's worth it for Stephen's complete trust in Jack's false reassurances of rescue, and for Mowett's reaction when he first spots the open window in the empty great cabin. ("The doctor!")

I've read this before in print, and I'm not a big fan of audiobooks, but it's great to hear the nautical aspects of these stories read aloud.

---

### **Leigh says**

I have never read a book so dissimilar in plot line from the movie and yet both are very good, it's weird.

---

### **Lisa says**

Patrick O'Brian's Aubrey/Maturin series is one of my favourites of all time. Despite initially not having much of a clue what the many, different sailing terms meant, somewhere in the first instalment I fell hook, line and sinker for the characters – particularly for the delightfully grumpy Stephen Maturin – and since then, whenever times have got tough and I need a pick-me-up, I treat myself to a little holiday in their company. As O'Brian is deceased and the series numbers twenty books, I've been making sure that I don't binge on them so that I'll know that I have a new adventure with them waiting for me each year for the foreseeable future (and yes, I realise that this is rather sad of me). Now halfway through the series, the previously confusing sailing terms now seem like second nature, and I'm as in love as I ever was with the rest of the

writing.

In *The Far Side of The World*, the wars with the French in which our characters were introduced have long since ended and, instead, we're now at war with America. Aubrey, in command of HMS Surprise – a ship that's already seen him through more than a few scrapes – is given the mission of pursuing an American ship, the Norfolk, and protecting British whalers in the Pacific from her depredations. On her way to intercepting the Americans, the Surprises will face onboard adultery, murder-suicides, the loss of its surgeon and captain overboard (and their subsequent 'rescue' by a boat of women native to the area, intent on castrating them), massive storms, sharks and, finally, a tense stand-off on a deserted island under the terms of a dubious peace. Meanwhile, Stephen makes a potentially dangerous error in judgement, before almost getting his skull sawn open by the ship's parson after knocking himself into a coma on the ship's guns.

The writing on display is as wonderful as ever, and I love how O'Brian depicts the various relationships onboard (even when they're unsavoury, which they often are). And even though he's now running out of real life events to exploit – as per his admission at the start of this book – his ways around that, often centring on Stephen's passion for naturalism and the crew's handling of the ship itself in the face of Mother Nature's fury, delights me as much as his splendid sea battles did.

I can't recommend this series highly enough – even for those, like me, who prefer to stay on dry land and wouldn't know a topsail from a taffrail.

\*\*Also posted at Cannonball Read 9\*\*

---

## Patrick says

'The Far Side of the World' by Patrick O'Brian shares a name with the subtitle of the movie, but apart from that, the two don't have a great deal in common. The film by Peter Weir made a pretty good attempt at putting those books on screen, and it was an entertaining piece of cinema in its own right, but it lacked a certain something. The script was actually a collage of incidents drawn from all the books; from 'The Far Side of the World' the film borrows the voyage to the Galapagos islands, and one or two other ideas and themes, but for the most part they are better considered as entirely different things.

The book begins in Gibraltar, a place which by now is starting to seem like an old friend to Aubrey and Maturin. There's a cloak and dagger feel to the first few chapters, where the roots of intrigue stretch all the way back some four entire books to *The Fortune of War*. The short version is that Stephen is hunted, and it is decided that the best thing for him would be a mission to somewhere very far away where he might be beyond the attention of the Americans and the French. An opportunity presents itself: Aubrey's old favourite, the HMS Surprise, is dispatched in pursuit of the USS Norfolk, an American frigate that has been harassing British whaling vessels in the distant reaches of the Pacific ocean.

And that's basically it. This long-distance pursuit over deep blue water is effectively the entirety of the plot. It makes rather a pleasant change from the intricacies of the preceding novels, and it feels like a deliberate return to a story of plain sailing. Most of the crew will be familiar names to anyone who has made it this far, and it has the episodic feeling of the earliest books in the series. In some respects it feels like a kind of holiday.

This is not to say it is all sunshine and light. The journey as a whole is extremely rough: there are storms, hunger, thirst, and there's one borderline absurd incident where Jack and Stephen are almost drowned.

Unusually for O'Brian, there's a total absence of sea battles in this book: it is all man against nature; or man against man's own better nature. But as ever, nothing is ever really allowed to arrest the progress of our heroes. The perfect example is where Stephen takes a very bad knock on the head while trying to spot a passing bird in a heavy sea; for a good few pages he is in a coma, and it only when the friendly American doctor is actually standing over him with a trepanning drill in hand that a piece of snuff falls into his nose, he sneezes, and awakens. Aside from the occasional callback, the whole thing is then forgotten. Put like this, it seems ridiculous — but the genius of these books is the effortless panache with which it is all carried off.

And yet there are moments where the author inverts the reader's expectations with a confidence that is intensely compelling. The best example of that here is a sub-plot which comes to an end in one of the most horrifying moments in these stories thus far. Hollom, an officer, is having an affair with the only woman on the HMS Surprise, Mrs Horner; she is the wife of the gunner, Mr Horner. (The confluence of names here is bizarre — Hollom, Horner — and there's another unrelated man on board called Honey.) Everyone on the ship seems to know about this affair, but it attracts little in the way of comment. Then Mrs Horner becomes pregnant and approaches Stephen for help in securing an abortion; appalled, Stephen refuses to help her.

While the Surprise is ashore for repairs, Mr Horner leads his wife and Hollom to a quiet place, and he murders them both.

*'...below him he heard the men in the foretop, unaware of his presence, talking in low urgent voices, little more than a whisper. They were upset; more upset than could be accounted for by a master's mate bolting with a gunner's wife on a warm and pleasant island. Whales again; a perfectly enormous school of them spouting over not much more than a mile of sea; he had never seen so many together – certainly more than two hundred. 'Innocent blood in the sun,' said a voice in the foretop: Vincent, a West Country lay preacher. 'Innocent blood my arse,' said another, probably old Phelps.'*

The reader is not shown the act, but they are left in little doubt as to what happened when Horner returns to the ship late, covered in blood, and apparently out of his mind. There is no question of justice. Jack is sure that, out of respect and knowledge of the adulterous relationship, he would find no man to testify against the gunner. Incredibly, he takes no particular action, and nor does anybody else. But the question of what to do with Mr Horner is suddenly rendered moot when he hangs himself.

In another book (by a different writer) this might have formed the basis of an entire novel's worth of material. But O'Brian wraps it up quickly, as though it were just another spell of bad weather. The relationship between Horner and Hollom is sketched out as if glimpsed from a distance. They don't even have first names. These are not people the reader is privileged to know.

As usual, the event is cause for some smart ruminations on Stephen's part about the nature of human sexuality; but nothing ever comes of it. Certainly there was never anything romantic about the situation. One implication, a joke in dubious taste, is that the gunner's impotence is the reason his wife is drawn to Hollom. In fact the whole tragedy feels like the zenith of some grim, anti-romantic parable. *'Innocent blood my arse.'*

Not that Stephen or Jack could ever be part of the punchline: they are, as ever, immune. Jack's part is to muddle through, while Stephen delivers the eloquent asides that comfort the reader into thinking the author is entirely aware of what is going on. I like this part, which comes after poor Martin is nearly murdered by a female crew of Pacific islanders fond of castration:

*'Oh, as far as unsexing is concerned, who are we to throw stones? With us any girl that cannot find a husband is unsexed. If she is very high or very low she may go her own way, with the risks entailed therein,*

*but otherwise she must either have no sex or be disgraced. She burns, and she is ridiculed for burning. To say nothing of male tyranny – a wife or a daughter being a mere chattel in most codes of law or custom – and brute force – to say nothing of that, hundreds of thousands of girls are in effect unsexed every generation: and barren women are as much despised as eunuchs. I do assure you, Martin, that if I were a woman I should march out with a flaming torch and a sword; I should emasculate right and left...'*

It might be considered strange that Maturin could come out with this, and yet he — and the book — demonstrate so little in the way of empathy for Mrs Horner. Is it a failure of imagination? She is placed in an impossible position. She is there only because her husband is there; she is alone amongst men who have themselves been separated from female company for months or even years; that much could be said of Diana Viliers in earlier books, but in the eyes of the author here, Mrs Horner does not merit anywhere near the same degree of attention.

She begins as a nice face in the background until she is smudged out of the picture. If you were inclined to be generous, you could say that there's something deliberate in the austerity of this picture. Perhaps the novel simply reflects the way in which history is not written by women like Mrs Horner? Well, perhaps. But isn't it the job of the novelist to correct that?

At this point in the series it becomes difficult to imagine a catastrophic event that could ever shake Aubrey and Maturin off the tracks to which they are so inseparably trained. Oddly, the closest we have ever got is Diana, but at this point she has been confined to the margins for what seems like years. But in terms of conventional naval disasters, they somehow exist in a zone beyond affect. I'm thinking of something like the main event in Conrad's 'Lord Jim', where Jim abandons his ship full of pilgrims thinking it is about to suddenly sink, and then has to live with the consequences of knowing it had only run aground. Is it that the format of the books will not allow for the possibility of trauma, or is it something else?

The simple fact that these books were written as part of a self-sustaining series doesn't do much to explain the way in which they were written. It is not hard to imagine a different set of historical novels where the protagonists would not live this strange perpetual life in a limbo of war and not-quite-war; where they might go back to Regency England and close out their lives in something resembling the shape of a conventional span of life, or at least of fiction. But there's something radical in this repeated insistence on the return to the ocean. The prospect of a grand overarching narrative is brought up afresh in every book, only to be quietly shelved for another tilt at the wild blue yonder.

---

## **Kenneth says**

Although I've been reading the Aubrey/Maturin books on and off for years, I saw the *Far Side of the World* movie before I got to the book. As others stated, it was interesting to see what was kept and what was dropped in the film, and ultimately, I think they nailed the feel of the books as best they could.

As for the book, O'Brian packs a lot into this one, but ultimately I prefer the conclusion of the movie to that of the book.

SPOILER

.  
. .  
.



.  
. .  
. .  
. .

The wreck of the Norfolk was a disappointment, especially after the *Surprise* spent so much time chasing her. While I know O'Brian based his work on the historical record, I preferred the movie's subterfuge and close-quarters ship battle to the anti-climatic wreck in the book. The tension between the American survivors and their British opponents was ruined by the sudden arrival of the *Surprise* at book's end. It was something that had been hinted at to be sure, but ultimately it felt to arbitrary.

---

### **John Jr. says**

No women are major characters in this volume of Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin's adventures during the War of 1812, but women are central to parts of the action, even though the story takes place entirely on and around the frigate H.M.S. *Surprise*, which Aubrey commands. Needless to say, naval practices were different 200 years ago. Along with two women, the *Surprise* is carrying a cat belonging to the bosun, a goat named Aspasia to provide milk, and a handful of other animals taken along as food. Though one of the women (whose name already escapes me) plays only a small and benign role, the gunner's wife, Mrs. Horner, proves to be a dangerous temptation for another member of the crew, and mayhem results. What's more, when two members of the crew fall overboard in the Pacific one night and are left behind (during which one of them observes that the sea is as warm as milk, a nice telltale reminder of the absence of refrigeration), they're plucked from the water the next morning by a small band of oceangoing women warriors, who dispatch sharks with ease and are inclined to do the same to the crewmen. Knowing little of South Seas anthropology, I can't judge whether this fantastical episode draws on fact or fancy, but it reads like a believable surprise, and it prompts a short proto-feminist response from Maturin, who ends by declaring that "If I were a woman I should march out with a flaming torch and a sword; I should emasculate right and left."

It's not only women who upset the desired order of things among the men who constitute our central characters. The mission of the *Surprise*, based in Gibraltar as the tale begins, is to go in search of an American frigate that, according to an intelligence report, is heading to the Pacific to wreak havoc on British whalers there. Thus the *Surprise* and her crew confront the stifling heat and lack of wind in the horse latitudes; a squall that rips the bowsprit away (while the ship is refitting up a river in Brazil, Maturin meets a Peruvian who introduces him to the coca leaf); the howling winds and icy temperatures off Cape Horn; the quest for food and water, which leads to a spell at Juan Fernandez Island; a pass through the Galapagos Islands (already renowned to naturalists decades before Darwin's visit), which Maturin and his friend Martin are allowed to see but forbidden to explore; and the seemingly impossible task of finding one particular ship in the ocean.

O'Brian's language is one of the pleasures of this series. Here, three relative landlubbers take a swipe at the nautical terminology in which these stories abound:

Now there was a pause, and Yarrow said, "I dare say they are hauling away the cat before hooking on the fish."

Pocock said, "Perhaps they will stopper with a dog."

Stephen said, "It is my belief that they have raised a mouse, and that having seized it with a fox they will clap on a lizard."

"Lord, what jargon the honest creatures have invented, upon my word," said Pocock, laughing heartily for the first time in Stephen's acquaintance with him. "Were your terms authentic?"

"They were indeed," said Stephen. "And there are hounds too, somewhere about the masts."

"So were my cat and fish," said Yarrow.

A practiced reader of the series will suspect that these landmen have got the words right but misapprehended their usage. Practically everyone will know what Jack has gotten wrong when he observes to Stephen, "But there are more things than heaven and earth, you know." And those with a taste for the prose and narrative style of times past will appreciate O'Brian's way of condensing a discussion into the sort of catalogue that (in my experience) more often appeared at the head of a section or chapter. Maturin and Martin are studying the plates of a particular giant tortoise of the Galapagos Islands through telescopes:

...comparing them with those of *Testudo aubreei*, which Maturin had discovered, described and named,... and with the thin-shelled and lighter though still respectable tortoise of Rodriguez. Reflections upon insular tortoises, their origin — tortoises in general, whether deaf — their voices rarely heard — capable of a harsh cry however as well as the more usual hiss — all oviparous, careless of their young — crocodiles more diligent as parents — but tortoises more generally sympathetic — perfectly capable of attachment — instances of affection in tortoises.

To employ a more modern expression, gotta love it.

---

## **Shira says**

Excellent social commentary well-couched, with very well distinguished voices.

---