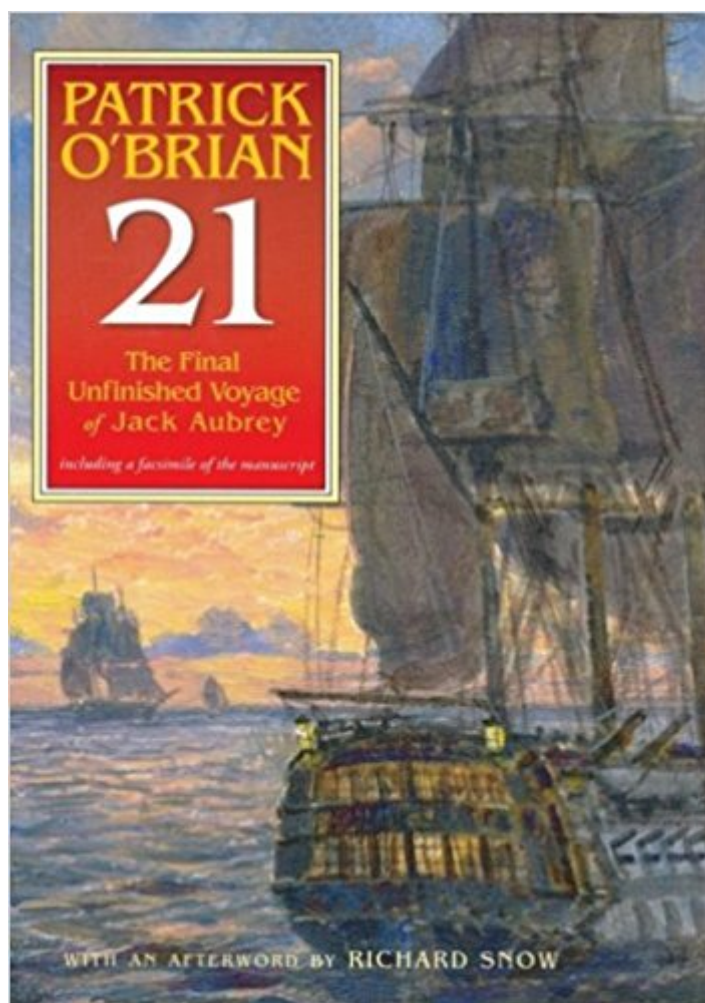


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21: The Final Unfinished Voyage Of Jack Aubrey (Aubrey-Maturin)



Synopsis

In response to the interest of O'Brian's many fans, here is the tantalizingly incomplete manuscript of the final Aubrey-Maturin novel that the author was writing when he died, meant to chronicle Aubrey's mission to South Africa.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For Aubrey/Maturin addicts, there could be no better gift: a new, albeit incomplete, story with freshly piquant details, wry humor and salty nautical action. Although the official word was that O'Brian had finished the series with 1999's *Blue at the Mizzen*, he was in fact working on a new installment at the time of his death in 2000. This short volume juxtaposes a facsimile of O'Brian's handwritten manuscript of the untitled novel with a printed version of the text, which corresponds to O'Brian's loosely edited, typed pages. As the tale opens, our heroes are off the coast of South America, trying to find a friendly place to put the *Surprise* in for victuals and water. Jack Aubrey has received the happy news that he has been given the rank of rear admiral of the *Blue*, and all is well for the time being. But the Catholic locals are surly at best to the mostly Protestant crew. To fix things, Stephen Maturin does some judicious buttering up and Aubrey reunites with Samuel Mputa, the region's Papal Nuncio and, incidentally, one of his "indiscretions" from his days as "a long-legged youth" serving on the South African station. The typescript of the third chapter ends mid-sentence, but the handwritten manuscript continues on to include a duel between Maturin and a romantic rival, leaving readers begging for more. Alas, this fragmentary but worthy addition to the series is truly the end of

a literary era, leaving only readers' imaginations to fill in the rest of the story. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Audible Audio Edition edition.

The pages of O'Brian's 21st Aubrey novel will leave readers hungry for more. Not surprisingly, 21 neither stands alone as a novel nor serves as a concise conclusion to the series. Instead, it sketches out the details of the start of another Aubrey mission. The bulk of the chapters offers set-pieces describing gunnery practice, grog, deck-swabbing, a hernia operation, and a reunion with Papal Nuncio Samuel Mputa. The pages also contain O'Brian's trademark humor and eagle-eyed observations, if cut short. There's nothing new here for seasoned readers except, perhaps, for an elaborate menu devised by an Argentine grandee. And yet that doesn't diminish the power of this small, unfinished masterpiece. Copyright © 2004 Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc. --This text refers to the Audible Audio Edition edition.

I wanted to get "21" to complete my set of Patrick O'Brian's Jack Aubrey sea novels, all purchased from . Please be aware that the previous books (all 20 of them) are approximately 5.5 x 8.3 inches in size and actually are a set you might keep on your bookshelf. This book measures 7.0 inches by 10.1 inches and is significantly different in physical size. But, I'm glad it has it available to complete the set.

It's fascinating to see that O'Brian's genius was with him until the very end. For example, the picture of Sam at the top of "a noble flight of stairs" and Jack's reaction to his appearance there is nearly as touching as the pillory scene in "The Reverse of the Medal." However, I, too, object to the fact that the final pages have not been printed, but left in O'Brian's difficult script, and I would be much happier if the printed chapters were on the right hand pages where they would be easier for most people to read, rather than the left, with the handwritten manuscript on the right. I also dislike the dismal picture on the cover, and I wonder if it was by O'Brian's usual painter, Geoff Hunt, who does contribute a drawing to the end of the book.

An excellent gift to the fans of Patrick O'Brian but, I am sure, of little interest to anyone else. Certainly it would be the worst possible introduction to O'Brian's wonderful nautical fiction. But for those of us who have for years read and re-read his tales, so beautifully written and so infused with the great friendship between his two central characters, this fragment of O'Brian's intended

twenty-first novel in the series allows us to pay one last visit to these two fascinating men. And happily we find them in a time of comparative joy and leisure. Gentle humor abounds as Aubrey and Maturin tease one another, based on their sure knowledge of one another's quirks and modes of thought. Although it seems certain that the typewritten manuscript of these three, rather short chapters would have received further polishing and likely substantial additions before the book was completed, what we have is not only recognizable, but very characteristic O'Brian prose, often illuminated by the choice of exactly the right adjective that is at once both unexpected and yet revealed as inevitable. I would go so far as to argue that even as it stands, the writing here more nearly approaches that of O'Brian's best books than that of at least the last few novels. A unique feature of this final book is that it presents the printed text face-to-face with O'Brian's handwritten draft for that same text, and it can be fascinating to see how the prose evolved from pen to typewritten versions. But the typewritten text ended with still several handwritten pages yet to go, and the publishers have elected to present those last pages as they were found without transcription into print. As a previous reviewer noted, deciphering those handwritten passages can be a thorny task (after a week of it, there are still a number of words I can claim to read only tentatively and a few not at all). But I think the publisher was right in not attempting to integrate those last handwritten pages into the printed text drawn directly from what had already been typed up by O'Brian. First, there would have been a problem of continuity. As O'Brian worked on his manuscript, changes were being made in the storyline so that the remaining handwritten pages do not really reflect plot developments that had been typed up. And perhaps more importantly, much of this last handwritten portion bears evidence of being a rapidly written first draft, sketching out the storyline more than attempting to create anything close to an envisioned final version; some words are omitted, some are unintentionally repeated. Undoubtedly, these imperfections in these last few pages would have been corrected if O'Brian had had the opportunity to redraft them by hand (as seems to have been his usual working method) or typewriter, but for the publisher to transfer them into print would have required either a heavy hand in editing - thus departing unfortunately far from the O'Brian original - or acceptance of a stylistically incompatible finale. No, all in all I agree with the publisher's decision to leave these last several pages in O'Brian's own handwriting. For those of us sufficiently interested, decipherment at least to the extent of following the storyline is not too difficult a job, and it is a task that ultimately brings us closer to this most favored of authors as, in his last days, he once again sailed in company with Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin. One final note: if given a choice between obtaining the American edition of this book published by Norton or the British edition issued by HarperCollins, I would suggest the latter. Although the Patrick O'Brian

content of the two is the same, the UK edition also contains an illuminating introduction by William Waldegrave and, perhaps even more pleasing, it is printed on a superior paper stock for clarity and simply more luxurious feel.

Reading 21 is a bitter-sweet experience. O'Brian died in the midst of writing the book, so it is an incomplete manuscript, most of which is typed (the original hand-written manuscript faces the printed page), the final few pages only in the author's hand. The experience is somewhat akin to reading a love-letter that was neither completed or sent. I am left wondering in what direction O'Brian would have taken the story - what new adventures awaited Aubrey and Maturin, their dreams finally realized: Napoleon defeated and exiled on St. Helena, Aubrey having finally been awarded his blue flag, Maturin nurturing and kindling a new love. Yet what a wonderful way to end a remarkable series. 21 begins where *Blue at the Mizzen* left off, the *Suprise* sailing home having completed its "hydrographic" (and military, political and intelligence-gathering) mission to Chile. At the river Plate, Aubrey runs in with his bastard son Sam, now a Papal legate in Argentina and Maturin duels an arrogant army captain over a point of honor concerning Maturin's love-interest, Christine. The central conflict for the novel, it seems was just being established. What a wonderful three chapters, though! After 20 books together, the father and relationship between Maturin and Aubrey is somewhat akin to an old married couple, as when Aubrey, explaining how he finagled extra powder, explains that he bribed the "last powder-hoy for a trifle of whisky - you know the Irish drink, Stephen?" to which Maturin replies, "I have never heard of it." It is a pity there was not more. As O'Brian writes in 21, "In the close-packed community that made up the crew of a man-of-war there was extremely little privacy: they ate, slept, washed, relieved themselves in public; in public they were flogged ... Each man and boy knew exactly what the others earned and how much the married men sent home." It has been a remarkable journey, sailing and fighting alongside Cpt. Aubrey and engaging in espionage with Dr. Maturin, criss-crossing the globe and sharing in their personal lives. It was with a heavy heart that the voyage ended, but it was a tremendous journey. If you have not yet been acquainted with Patrick O'Brian (or "Lucky" Jack Aubrey and Dr. Stephen Maturin), I envy you the experience. The series (beginning with *Master and Commander* (Movie Tie-In Edition)) earns my highest and most enthusiastic recommendation.

Interesting that I am writing a review for a book that should not be reviewed. If you are not a fan of the Aubrey/Maturin canon, 21 is meaningless. If you are a fan and (of course) have the other twenty, then there is no doubt you must have #21. As J.A. might say, "In for a penny, in for the

whole nine yards." As an aside...An internet search will find you the "translation" of the manuscript-only section at the end of PO'B's final work, which added much to my enjoyment of this artwork frozen in mid-creation.

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