HMS Surprise (Windsor Selection) by Patrick O'Brian

One Of The Best Of The Series

My Personal Review:
This book, third in the wonderful series, is the first that makes one think that perhaps some of the usual descriptions are missing something.

If you read the story and reflect upon it, do you possibly come to think that perhaps, in reality, the story of Jack Aubreys career is mostly a peg on which to hang the complex life-story of Stephen Maturin?

So instead of the sea-captain being the central figure, and Maturin his interesting companion, the books are about a wonderfully rich and complex individual who happened to spend much of his life at sea in the Navy of the early 1800s.

Consider: we are made privy to far more of Stephens inner thoughts than Jacks: we usually see Jack from outside, but we look over Stephens shoulder as he pens his diary. We are fully in touch with Stephens emotions, in all the key points in his relationship with Diane, the terrible sadness over the child Dil - whereas when Jack receives a strong emotional blow, for instance in Master and Commander, where he comes back from finding Molly Harte together with Colonel Pitt, He was very pale, and in the strong moonlight he looked deathly - black hole for a mouth, hollows for his eyes. All right, we understand his feelings, but by outside observation, not by entering into Jacks thoughts.

By contrast, in HMS Surprise we have the heart-wrenching drama of Stephen and Diana: surely the moment when he feels through the envelope, the ring returned to him, that he had given with such hopes, is one of the most touching in literature. And what are we to think of Diana? Are moral judgments relevant? Surely we can understand her wish to escape the worlds of both India and England, which have both given her nothing but cruelty. Yet if only Jack Aubrey had agreed to take her home in Surprise, what a different outcome there might have been, being with Stephen for the whole voyage. But Jack was stern and unwilling, partly because he felt she would only hurt Stephen, partly to assuage his own guilt for his past wooing of her.

Yet with all the emotional drama, we do not lack for naval action, or marvelous scenes, or humor. The descriptions of India surely can be
compared to none but Kiplings of nearly 100 years later. We get the thunderous action where Jack saves the India merchant fleet from the French navy. And we have Stephens three-toed sloth, brought aboard from the jungles of Brazil, a favorite with the ships company: but it doesn't like Jack Aubrey until one day Jack gives it a little cake soaked in rum - ah-hah! Some minutes later he felt a touch on his knee: the sloth had silently climbed down and it was standing there, its beady eyes looking up into his face, bright with expectation. More cake, more grog: growing confidence and esteem. After a few days of this, Stephen notes its condition - he looked sharply round, saw the decanter, smelt to the sloth, and cried Jack, you have debauched my sloth. Quite a row ensues, to the entertainment of those overhearing it...

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price:
HMS Surprise (Windsor Selection) by Patrick O'Brian - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!