Quarterdeck: A Kydd Sea Adventure
(Kydd Sea Adventures)

In this fifth adventure in Julian Stockwin's popular series, Kydd must pass a tough examination to confirm the lieutenancy awarded him at the bloody battle of Camperdown. But aboard the 64-gun Tenacious he faces a more daunting challenge—matching up to the high-born officers, who have spent a lifetime learning to be gentlemen. With the help of his enigmatic friend Renzi, Kydd struggles to conform to his new world but soon discovers it's easier to swing a cutlass in close quarters than negotiate the brutal minefields of upper-class society. Relief comes his way when Tenacious reaches the colonies and he is unwittingly caught up in the danger and intrigue surrounding the birth of the American Navy. There, in uncharted waters, Kydd finds that quick wits and superior seamanship once again make the difference between life and death.

My Personal Review:
Quarterdeck by Julian Stockwin
Julian Stockwin's Kydd series now stands at 8 volumes. Quarterdeck is the fifth in the series and finds Thomas Paine Kydd a new lieutenant serving in HMS Tenacious about 1798.
I guess I'm an advocate of Stockwin over O'Brian and the other British seafarer writers and even Nicholas Nicastro primarily because Stockwin's books move the genre from the officers' point of view to that of the seamen of the day. I also appreciate what I come to think of as four themes Stockwin weaves within and between his books. In addition to the seafaring adventure, we get to explore the lifestyle of the men of the service at different stages in their careers. And the author exposes us to the more general seaman's culture of the time. Finally, Renzi is used to help his main character develop the skills necessary to move up the ranks. Quarterdeck starts with Kydd sitting for an oral exam to turn his acting lieutenant rank into a permanent station. One of the themes of the book is Kydd's transition from common seaman to a king's officer. He devotes 3 months to allowing Renzi and his sister, Cecilia, and others to tutor him in the basics of manners required of gentlemen of the age. Renzi continues
his supervision of Kydd at points throughout the remainder of the tale. Stockwin's formative research found that a hundred twenty plus men passed `through the hawse during this period of time and that a handful of these officers worked their way up the ranks to Admiral. So this is a pivotal volume in the series and Tom tussles with the task throughout the book. The major sea adventures include the mechanics of moving a convoy to Halifax during which Kydd, as the most junior of the lieutenants, is in charge of signals. There is a storm while Tenacious is accompanying a merchant ship to Halifax; the ship with a compliment of notable passengers is lost. And the lieutenant is assigned to make a short passage on the new American frigate, the Constellation.

Within these adventures, Stockwin requires Kydd to wield a sextant in shooting the sun and taking bearings, as well as ingeniously resolving the direction of north from the moon and a pocket watch. All of these are minor in relation to the task of finding his place in the officers mess where he is surrounded by `gentlemen. This is my second reading of Quarterdeck. I thought I could skim most of the text and concentrate on the dialog. I was wrong. As with the first reading, I could neither put the book down or resist careful appreciation of Stockwin's skill with words.

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