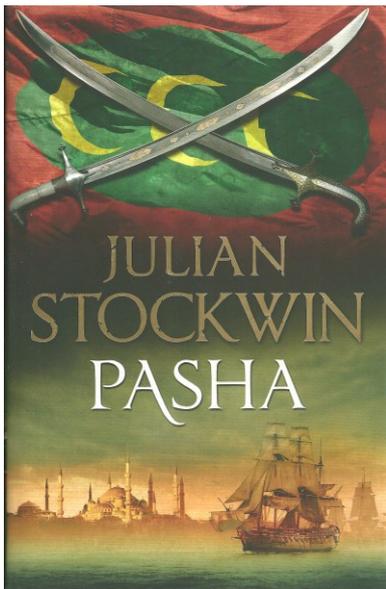


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NAME: Pasha

CATEGORY: Book Reviews

DATE: 270914

FILE: R2038

AUTHOR: Julian Stockwin

PUBLISHER: Hodder & Stoughton

BINDING: hard back

PAGES: 166

PRICE: £18.99

GENRE: Fiction

SUBJECT: Napoleonic Wars, Nineteenth Century, sailing frigates, wooden walls, Mediterranean, Eastern Mediterranean, Ottoman Turks, Sultan Selim III, Ottoman Empire

ISBN: 978-1-444-78538-8

IMAGE: B2038.jpg

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LINKS:

DESCRIPTION: It really doesn't seem like this is the fifteenth story in the Kydd and Renzi series. For readers who have been greatly entertained by any, or all, of the previous fourteen stories, there is little a reviewer can say, other than to confirm that this is a worthy addition to the series and will provide as much pleasure and information as any of the preceding books. For those who have yet to read one of these stories, there is much to say without spoiling the many surprises in store for them in this gripping yarn.

Stockwin and his wife Cathy form a very effective writing team, visiting the locations for each new story and conducting extensive research. One of the risks for any writer of fiction is that, after a few highly successful stories, it becomes difficult to avoid becoming stale or to avoid boredom with the characters that make the story. Having read each of the previous stories, this reviewer can say that each new story is as fresh and vibrant as a newly minted first publication. Although Kydd and Renzi revisit some old locations over a number of stories, the latest story always contains much new material against a novel plot line and the Stockwin team obviously enjoy the research phase for the next book. During the series, Stockwin has broken much new ground and carved for himself a position equal to any of the most popular writers of French Republic and Napoleonic Wars maritime fiction. That is a major achievement because there have been a number of outstanding authors writing in this genre. From time to time, Stockwin has been favourably compared to O'Brien, and there is some similarity in that both authors have used two characters as the primary heroes that are very different and complimentary. In O'Brien's case, there a captain who is a seaman and a

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doctor who does some spying, but that has only a superficial relationship to the Stockwin characters of a captain who is a seaman and an educated individual who does some covert work. Stockwin broke new ground by having a young Guilford wigmaker who was press ganged into the Royal Navy and therefore someone who had no experience or aspiration to make a life at sea. Once onboard a warship, the wigmaker, Kydd, develops a friendship with a mysterious figure, Renzi, who has volunteered to serve as a seaman but who is educated. From that first story, the characters evolve and each new book peels some more layers off the onion that is each character. Eventually the mysteries of Renzi are revealed and he develops a long distance relationship with Kydd's sister that seems fated never to be consummated.

In each story, Stockwin includes a piece of technology that is not well known. This forms one key element in that particular story and has a place in historic reality.. This latest story contains one such item and the author's note includes mention that an example was presented to Britain and resides in a Royal Navy fort in the Portsmouth area.

This latest tale is as involving and absorbing as those that have gone before. It follows a series of highs and lows for the two main characters. In the process, it takes Kydd to a new elevation as it does for Renzi and for Kydd's sister. It also sets the ground work for the next story with a new career mapping out for Renzi and a new career stage for Kydd.

This new book is a stand-alone story in that it can be picked up and enjoyed without the reader needing to first read earlier stories. However, most readers will be motivated to buy earlier stories because of the enjoyment they have gained from this tale. This reviewer would recommend buying all of the previous books and starting from the first to be published, completing the process by rereading this new story. That probably means that the reader will have reread this book in time to buy the next story. That recommendation is based on the reviewer's own experience of coming in to the series at the fourth book. In doing this, the reading experience moves to the next level because there is a further dimension added to the entertainment of each tale.

One of Stockwin's particular achievements is that he successfully broke the Trafalgar barrier that has defeated some other writer's of naval fiction. Nelson is such a powerful icon that his death in the moment of great victory marks for many the end of the story of the British sailing battleship and the war at sea during the Napoleonic Wars. The reality is very different. The French continued to send out individual ships and small squadrons. Battles were still fought around the world, and the British Empire was about to take off with a spurt of expansion that saw new strongholds in Africa and other locations, new colonies, major sea routes to police and frictions with older nations and Empires. It is just that historians have largely failed to tell the stories, concentrating on land warfare after 1805, taking the story of the British Empire from the late Victorian period and starting again with naval warfare from 1900.

Having taken Kydd and Renzi through the Trafalgar barrier, by the interesting device of having Kydd take his frigate into the battle as part of the frigate screen, there is now an almost untrodden opportunity for very fresh stories based on events that are now almost entirely forgotten. It will be very interesting to see if later stories take Kydd and Renzi on the course plotted by Admiral Cockrane to the South American revolutionary wars, the Anglo American War of 1812 and the Eastern Mediterranean again.

The latest tale is set in the Eastern Mediterranean and provides the basis for a return later in one of the stories that must follow.

A cracking read and well worth the time and money. This review is written for an English language Internet news and information resource, but the Kydd and Renzi saga is published in a growing number of languages with some major growth in readership from parts of the world where interest in nautical affairs may seem unlikely. The only downside of reading this new book is that there is the wait until the next story is published.