



Midshipman Bolitho

Alexander Kent

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The year is 1772, and Richard Bolitho is a sixteen-year-old midshipman about to undergo a severe initiation into the game of seamanship. The book follows young Bolitho's adventures as he intercepts and destroys a band of vicious pirates and then is swept away on a dangerous mission through the treacherous stamping ground of smugglers, wreckers, and murderers.

Midshipman Bolitho Details

Date : Published April 1st 1998 by McBooks Press (first published 1975)

ISBN : 9780935526417

Author : Alexander Kent

Format : Paperback 240 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Adventure

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theduckthief says

"On this particular day in mid-October 1772, Richard Bolitho sat wedged in a corner of one of the long rooms half listening to the babble of voices around him, the clatter of plates and tankards and the hiss of rain against the small windows. The air was heavy with mixed aromas. Food and ale, tobacco and tar, and each time the doors opened to a chorus of curses and complaints the keener tang of salt from the waiting ships."

The year is 1772 and Richard Bolitho is a young midshipman newly assigned to the Gorgon, a seventy-four gunner under orders to sail to Africa's west coast to patrol the area. Britain is at peace but her trade routes are under current threat by pirates. What they encounter involves abandoned ships, an occupied fortress and a chase. While navigating his way through the politics of life aboard ship, Bolitho must avoid the ire of Lieutenant Tregorren who has taken an instant dislike to the young man.

This book is a quick read and Kent is able to combine the historical facts of the time with nautical knowledge and good old-fashioned story-telling. This isn't always the case with historical naval fiction. Some authors get bogged down in the details. See my "Master and Commander" review for more information.

Not only is the book entertaining, the writing is also wonderful. "The smells too seemed to rise to meet them. Salt beef and tar, bilge and packed humanity, while all around them the massive hull creaked and groaned like a living thing, the deckhand lanterns spiralling and throwing shapes across the great timbers and seaman alike, as in a vast painting."

My only complaint is the shortness of the book. At only 159 pages it serves as little better than an introduction to a book rather than a full story. But if you like historical naval fiction then I would definitely recommend this series.

David Holton says

All the Bolitho novels are a great read, I have waded through almost the entire series of 30 books covering 40 years of history from the French Revolution, US War of Independence, Napoleonic, the second US War with the Brits, anti slavery patrols and putting down the pirates. Thoroughly recommended if u like an easy but convincing read of naval history.

John says

Rugged deeds on a rugged coast.

Roger Ball says

Though naval adventure series such as this was ever something I sought after, I have always enjoyed historical fiction. So when someone happened to leave behind this first book of the series in an airplane seat many years ago, I thought "what the heck, I'm between books and need something", so gave it a try. 30 books in this series later.....I finished them all. :-)

One of the things I found the most interesting was the way the author gave very accurate descriptions of how sailing life really was for the ships of this time and the blood and guts that sea battles entailed. Loved how the reader is allowed to follow the main character as he grows up and becomes a Captain himself.

If you liked the movie "Master and Commander" (one of the more accurate movies made of sailing ships of this period) you will love this series.

Ahhh, now the fun to find and click on the other 29 books in this series as having been read. Oh well.

Karen says

The Bolitho novels are all good reads, nothing too taxing, but the author has the knack of adding details from the British navy of the Napoleonic age without too much pain. All the crowding of ships, men pressed ganged into service unwillingly to be molded or beaten into a deadly crew, the rotten food, dangerous weather conditions, the dangers of war, all are included. Occasionally, there's some romance, but this always takes backseat to the struggle to defeat Napoleon.

The first 24 books concern the life and times of Richard Bolitho, who seems to be the perfect officer. Born into a seafaring family, he is brave, intelligent, kind hearted, considerate, but a killer all the same. He attracts to himself, the best and worst in English officers, and seems to have a talent for getting himself involved in feuds. His friends are loyal to him, and he to them, no matter what. The later books take a dive in story quality, often seeming a bit mawkish in dialogue, particularly between Bolitho and his mistress, Lady Catherine Sommerville, and the details are too similar to the real life Nelson and Lady Hamilton. The sex scenes are almost decorously disguised, and Bolitho is always going off to sea.

The more recent books concern Bolitho's nephew, Adam, who is nearly identical to his uncle in personality, which makes reading them a case of "been here, done that before." Still, if you like reading about this time period, that of Napoleon and just after, are interested in Nelson, the British Navy, and the conditions faced by sailors, you just might find these books a good, rousing read.

Pat Morris-jones says

I didn't really think I would enjoy this book but it is free on audiobook from library so I will often give books a try for that very reason. Well I did enjoy it. It prob isn't rocket science nor a classic but it's pleasant, easy to listen too and engaging. Within book ratings as a whole it's prob only 3 to 3 and a half but as I listened to it happily, unexpectedly so, I've given it 4 stars instead.

Nente says

Sloppy, clumsy, incompetent writing.

The characters have no depth, their actions are illogical, their feelings have to be explained in plain words

because there is no skill to *suggest* anything, and even the word choice is frequently very unfortunate. Nor is the plot anything special to make up for the prose quality. The hero gets pushed around - there are some failures - the mission only progresses because he takes it on himself to disobey orders and choose a better course of action - then finally the heroic hero heroically takes over the whole enterprise, which is instantly crowned with success.

Really, this thing about disobeying orders is in such demand with the adventure writers, one wonders that there was any discipline in the Navy at all. But then, obviously the adventure writers are ~~lying~~ embroidering. I love naval fiction in general, but that's the only reason for my getting through this to the end.

Darlis says

Rather entertaining sea stories, but it really didn't keep my attention while I listened.

J E says

Could have been an interesting historical novel, but the characters are flat and unengaging. Bolitho is brave, honest, humble, hardworking, skillful, smart, and so on. No flaws. Never makes a mistake. I prefer to read about characters with at least a few flaws so they have to struggle and maybe learn something.

Francis Pellow says

i picked this up in a hope it would be a replacement for the Aubrey & Maturin or Hornblower series that i have finished quite recently. Unfortunately it doesn't have the depth of those but is an enjoyable yarn. Probably won't continue with this series though and look elsewhere for my nautical adventures.

Ensiform says

The escapades of a lowly midshipman of 16 years who distinguishes himself (or would if a lieutenant didn't hog all his glory) aboard the Gorgon against some slaver corsairs. I'd never heard of this book or author before, but it turns out to be a series of some 20-odd novels. This one was very much an episodic novel, since it ends with TV-serial style hints of the villain's return and indicates that Bolitho's career has only just begun. As its own book, therefore, it's a little unsatisfying. It's also not as learned as O'Brian's similar stuff, but there's a lot of good adventure and the sea atmosphere doesn't ring false by any means.

Bruce says

Tough book to rate. I love the genre more than this book. I grew up sailing and love all the sailing terms and really get into the historical fiction . (Kinda of a dork that way).

The series shows promise. This is between Hornblower than Aubrey. My view of the two.

- Hornblower more of an adventure series. Good writing but easy, fun stories. A little loose on history.
- Aubrey still adventure but more technical sailing and a little denser. Very focused on historical accuracy.

This is a little denser/more technical than Hornblower but I think a little looser on the historical context (although it is still there).

The plot of the first half of the book I loved. The second half (this is actually a compendium of two books) is not the best.

Looking forward to the next book.

Jim says

This is a collection of the first two of Alexander Kent's Richard Bolitho series of novels about life in the British navy at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th. Like many other series of this genre, Kent intends to follow Richard Bolitho from his days as a midshipman to higher ranks and assignments to numerous ships.

The first book, "Richard Bolitho, Midshipman," tells the story of Bolitho, assigned to the 74 gun ship of the line, "Gorgon." The Gorgon is sent to the west coast of Africa, which has been recently plagued by a number of pirates with increasing losses to British merchant men. The year is 1772. As a midshipman, Bolitho ranks very low in the pecking order of the ship and a number of lieutenants make his life extremely difficult. One officer in particular is aware of Bolitho's family, which includes a number of naval officers, including an admiral. The Gorgon reaches the waters off Africa, where they come across a derelict ship, which has been obviously attacked by pirates. This leads the captain of the Gorgon to sail for an island known for as a pirate hideout. The novel continues with excellent descriptions of life at sea and with plenty of action.

The second book - "Midshipman Bolitho and the Avenger" - starts with Bolitho and his good friend Martyn Dancer, another midshipman on the Gorgon, arriving at Bolitho's ancestral home for an extended period of leave while Gorgon undergoes a refit at the shipyard. The leave is interrupted when the body of a revenue officer is found on the coast not far from Bolitho's home - the officer has been obviously brutally murdered. Shortly after this, Bolitho's brother, Hugh, a lieutenant in the navy, arrives home and declares that the two midshipmen are seconded to his revenue cutter, which has been tasked with trying to stop the smugglers who are very active along the Cornish coast. Bolitho thus finds himself under the command of his brother and second in command on the cutter. The story is well told. Unlike some series, this book and the previous one are not just accounts of victorious actions. There are setbacks, there are twists and turns and there is excellent narrative.

I look forward to reading more in the Richard Bolitho series.

Oubucks2002 says

More contemporary (less unreadably 1950s) than the original high seas series but this first trilogy of the series degraded rapidly in coherency. I thought the author was having a stroke but the third book ended. Thoughts were inconsistent and while a great story line it was ruined by very fragmented writing and apparently no editing/advice.

William Howle says

The book was a fast read. I have read several books about the British navy during this era. Have found them all enjoyable, must say the ones by Patrick O'Brian are my favorites. I may read some more about the Bolithos as I move forward.
