



Under the Black Flag: The Romance and the Reality of Life Among the Pirates

By David Cordingly

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For this rousing, revisionist history, the former head of exhibitions at England's National Maritime Museum has combed original documents and records to produce a most authoritative and definitive account of piracy's "Golden Age." As he explodes many accepted myths (i.e. "walking the plank" is pure fiction), Cordingly replaces them with a truth that is more complex and often bloodier. 16 pp. of photos. Maps.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Though literature, films, and folklore have romanticized pirates as gallant seaman who hunted for treasure in exotic locales, David Cordingly, a former curator at the National Maritime Museum in England, reveals the facts behind the legends of such outlaws as Captain Kidd, Blackbeard, and Calico Jack. Even stories about buried treasure are fictitious, he says, yet still the myth remains. Though pirate captains were often sadistic villains and crews endured barbarous tortures, were constantly threatened with the possibility of death by hanging, drowning in a storm, or surviving a shipwreck on a hostile coast, pirates are still idealized. Cordingly examines why the myth of the romance of piratehood endures and why so few lived out their days in luxury on the riches they had plundered.

From Publishers Weekly

Widespread piracy began in the Western world in 1650 and ended abruptly around 1725. Cordingly, formerly on the staff of the National Maritime Museum in England, describes who became pirates (mainly volunteers who joined up when their ships were captured); what they wore (scarves or handkerchiefs around their head, just like in the movies); and how they were armed (literally, to the teeth). Pirates, says the author, were "attracted by the lure of plunder and the desire for an easy life." They were not the clean-cut heroes of the Errol Flynn films either, but cutthroat murderers. Some of the famous pirates are portrayed: Sir Francis Drake made his name by plundering silver on the Spanish Main; Sir Harry Morgan is famous for his ransom of Portobello to the President of Panama for 250,000 pesos; and Captain Kidd remains mysterious because of his buried gold and silver on Gardiners Island, near New York City. Fictitious pirates are also surveyed, such as Long John Silver and Captain Hook, and the allure they still have over us is explored. Even if you don't know a corsair (a Mediterranean-based pirate) from a buccaneer (a Caribbean pirate), this book will delight and inform. Photos not seen by PW. Author tour.

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From Library Journal

The image of the swashbuckling pirate tramps the sea decks of our imaginations—bold, brave, and rebellious—owing to countless versions of adventure classics like *Treasure Island*, *Captain Blood*, and *The Black Pirate*. But as Cordingly (coauthor of *Pirates*, Abbeville, 1992) points out in this well-written, instructive, and entertaining book, our popular view of piracy and pirates is far off the mark. The majority of 17th- and 18th-century Anglo-American pirates (the focus of Cordingly's study) were brutal men, given to drink, gambling, and casual violence. The author amply documents their viciousness in these pages. He highlights the contrast between our perceptions and the reality of pirate life and explains why piracy thrived in this period and how most pirates were hunted down and finally executed. While Cordingly breaks little new ground in this study and generously acknowledges his use of more academic works, his book is an insightful, concise, and thoroughly enjoyable portrait of the misnamed Golden Age of Piracy. For general readers.

-?David B. Mattern, Univ. of Virginia, Charlottesville

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Users Review

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