



Rhode Island Rendezvous: Book 3 of the Patricia MacPherson Nautical Adventure Series

Linda Collison

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A riveting page turner, Rhode Island Rendezvous delights and informs, offering a fresh take on the seafaring novel.

Linda Collison's *Rhode Island Rendezvous* thrills as a hard-to-put-down historical novel of nautical derring-do. Entertaining throughout, the expansive saga charts high-seas adventures between New England, the West Indies, and ports in between in the eighteenth century. The third novel in the Patricia MacPherson Nautical Adventure series picks up the engaging narrative of a cross-dressing surgeon's mate who strikes out as a ship captain in a profession that was then solely the province of men.

Set during a period of social unrest in the American colonies after the Seven Years' War, when people are rioting over the newly imposed Stamp Act, the meticulously researched novel tracks Patricia MacPherson, an upper-class woman in boarding school cast adrift after the abrupt death of her Caribbean plantation-owning father. Setting off on her own, she poses as Patrick MacPherson, a former surgeon's mate in His Majesty's Navy, disguising herself as "a rising young merchant seaman dressed to go to a wedding feast where he will rub shoulders with Newport's best." Determined to make her fortune, she becomes a smuggler who sneaks in molasses for "Yankee Gold" Rhode Island Rum and ends up captaining the schooner *Andromeda* as it embarks on a dangerous international voyage.

The story flows well, propelled forward by crisp, clean writing that often displays flair, such as in a description of a wig as being "the flaming red-gold of a Guy Fawkes bonfire." *Rhode Island Rendezvous* sails along breezily from beginning to end thanks to the skilled craftsmanship of a seasoned novelist. The prose has a slight veneer of formality that seems appropriate for the historical period in which it's set but is crystal clear and accessible even to those who don't read much historical fiction.

Dialogue feels authentic throughout and nails down sailor jargon like "and the cobblestones cost us naught but the labor—ha!—they'll provide ballast on the voyage out." Occasionally, it's a vessel for labored exposition, such as when the first mate recounts his entire background in casual conversation. It can reach poetic heights, such as when MacPherson explains why she abandoned the medical profession: "Ah, but there was little profit in bleeding and cupping. Fewer bones to be sawed, with the war over and the treaty signed." Overall, the dialogue largely comes across as natural and of its era, appropriately formal without being stilted or off-putting.

The story glides forward apace, and the novel is expertly plotted. Action takes place often enough to maintain interest. In a few paragraphs, the book can go from alcohol-soaked bonding in which the protagonist must labor to hide her true identity to a private lamenting over restrictive societal norms to a brewing storm that threatens the *Andromeda* and its small crew. The book puts one right in the middle of the action, showing an intimate familiarity with boats and seafaring.

Characters are believable. MacPherson, for instance, is well fleshed out and given ample motivation for wanting to masquerade as a man. Her crew members can sometimes feel interchangeable, though, little more than deckhands ordered about in service of the action with few distinguishing traits.

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JOSEPH S. PETE (August 31, 2017)

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