Clarion Review

General

The Tides of Avarice: A Sagaria Legend
John Dahlgren
Editions Didier Millet
978-981-426053-4
Four Stars (out of Five)

"It's the gore and grue and the shrieks of the women and the spurting of the blood that thrills the soul of any buccaneering boyo," chortles one of the many talking animals playing pirates in John Dahlgren's absolutely delightful *The Tides of Avarice*, a *Treasure Island* meets *Redwall* romp. At the risk of "overbuttering the pudding of his flattery," as the story's unlikely hero, a library archivist (a lemming), puts it when playing up to the villain (a gray fox), the first two-hundred pages of this book are fresh, entertaining, and just so darn much fun.

The Tides of Avarice is as cheering and as engaging a swashbuckling yarn as any a pirate lover could imagine, even if the characters are talking animals (more in the vein of a Don Bluth production than Walt Disney). Readers of the genre know that Dahlgren's story is going to be all about finding a buried treasure when one character laments that "there ain't no buried treasures left" because "they've all been unburied." The hero and inheritor of the map showing where the loot is hidden, Sylvester Lemmington, is every bit a young Jack Hawkins of the Robert Louis Stevenson school, and his nemesis, the pirate chief Terrigan Rustbane, while not quite Long John Silver, is at least a cum-laude graduate of the Blackbeard school of corsair captains.

Although meant to be a frightening villain ("they say even the monsters of the ocean depths are terrified of the gray fox, despite the fact that he feeds 'em so well with all the corpses he sends their way"), Rustbane is a delight, a true buccaneer of the old school, a sword-and-pistol-wielding Basil Rathbone of the animal kingdom. *The Tides of Avarice* is his book, and he drives the story, has all the best lines, and steals every scene.

While the choice of foxes, ferrets, lemmings, mice, and other animals may cost Dahlgren those readers seeking a more realistic nautical yarn, it will appeal to teenagers or parents looking for a good bedtime story to read to their children. *The Tides of Avarice* has a charm and joy all its own, and its first ten chapters are just too much fun to put down.

However, to maintain such a pace—along with fresh writing—is difficult, and Dahlgren falls into the doldrums just shy of halfway through the adventure. When the wind finally fills the sails once again about one hundred pages later, the story weighs anchor and moves ahead.

The last one hundred and fifty pages are very talky, and while there is the occasional sparkle, the ending is far less engaging than the beginning of the tale. This is not to say that the later part of the book is bad, only that it is disappointing in comparison to the tremendously enjoyable opening. Perhaps one of Dahlgren's own characters sums up the experience of reading this story best when he says that, "no one can ever take away from us the adventures we've had, but the escapades have to stop sometime."

Mark G. McLaughlin