



Monsoon

Wilbur Smith

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Monsoon, a Courtney Family Adventure from Wilbur Smith

One man. Three sons. A powerful destiny waiting to unfold.

Monsoon is the sweeping epic that continues the saga begun in Wilbur Smith's bestselling *Birds of Prey*. Once a voracious adventurer, it has been many years since Hal Courtney has dared the high seas. Now he must return with three of his sons - Tom, Dorian, and Guy - to protect the East India Trading Company from looting pirates, in exchange for half of the fortune he recovers.

It will be a death or glory mission in the name of the crown. But Hal must also think about the fates of his sons. Like their father before them, Tom, Dorian, and Guy are drawn inexorably to Africa. When fate decrees that they must all leave England forever, they set sail for the dark, unexplored continent, seduced by the allure and mystery of this new, magnificent, but savage land. All will have a crucial part to play in shaping the Courtneys' destiny, as the family vies for a prize beyond any of their dreams.

In a story of anger and passion, peace and war, Wilbur Smith evinces himself at the height of his storytelling powers. Set at the dawn of eighteenth-century England, with the Courtneys riding wind-tossed seas toward Arabia and Africa, *Monsoon* is an exhilarating adventure pitting brother against brother, man against sea, and good against evil.

Monsoon Details

Date : Published May 16th 2003 by St. Martin's Griffin (first published 1999)

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Author : Wilbur Smith

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From Reader Review Monsoon for online ebook

Matt says

I seldom read the type of book referred to as a “guilty pleasure.” It’s not because I’m some beret-wearing, croissant-eating, Proust-reading snob. (The fact that I wear berets and eat croissants is coincidental). To the contrary, I’m as comfortable as the next person wallowing in the gutter drinking Yellow Tail chardonnay and reading Ken Follett. It’s just that the books I use to escape are conceptually different. When I’ve had a long day at work, I like to read big fat histories on World War I or the Civil War. The subject matter may be weighty, but it excites my passions. Plus, it reminds me how glad I am we have penicillin, even though I am allergic to penicillin.

Every once in a while, though, I need a break from my own interests. That happened recently, after I finished a string of books that had, among other topics, an exploration of terrorism, and the story of an epileptic child. I needed a book I could breeze through. It had to be ridiculous, but also good, because if there’s no quality I’m just wasting my time.

That’s when I pulled Wilbur Smith’s *Monsoon* down off the sagging bookshelf that holds all my unread books.

Smith is an internationally best-selling author who I only recently learned existed. (In my defense, there are a lot of books in the world. Also, I drink a lot). He is probably most famous for two series of historical novels revolving around the adventures of the Courtney and Ballantyne families and their adventures in and around Africa. I had randomly read one of his books, *Triumph of the Sun*, enjoyed it, and had picked up *Monsoon* on the advice of some Wilbur Smith fans.

It should be noted that *Monsoon* is not the first book in the series. It should also be noted that this doesn’t matter. Though Smith’s Courtney and Ballantyne novels have some overlap, my near-absolute ignorance about Smith’s “mythology” did not hinder my enjoyment in the least. The plots are self-contained, and though I may be missing out on a bit of psychological shading, I feel confident expressing the notion that Smith’s novels are not fueled by deep-seeded character traits.

(I am a bit mystified as to the exact sequencing of the novels. Wikipedia has a lot of un-sourced information, if you are interested. Frankly, it took me five minutes of reading before it hit me that I didn’t care).

Monsoon tells the story of Hal Courtney, the hero of an earlier novel, *Birds of Prey*. Hal is a doughty old privateer turned merchantman who has built himself a laudable commercial empire. He has four sons. Tom, Guy, and Dorian all have the same mother, while their half-brother, Black Billy, was born of a union between Hal and an Ethiopian princess. In terms of defining character traits, Tom is the oldest, Guy is kind of boring, and Dorian is the youngest. Black Billy is the bad one, but you should have guess that because his nickname is Black Billy.

This is a 600 page novel, plus change, and there are a lot of things going on in it. I don’t think it gives too much away to say that the central narrative involves Dorian’s capture by an Arab pirate named al-Auf off the coast of Africa. There follows a breathless series of chases, escapes, duels, love affairs, betrayals, and battles.

Everything is high stakes, but it never really feels like it. I enjoyed this novel without ever loving it. It didn’t grip me. I never cared for the characters, so I never worried about their fates. Everyone is drawn so broadly. For example, Tom is the “good” son, eldest and dutiful. Despite his youth and inexperience, it takes him five minutes to become the best sailor, swordsman, and lover between Cape Agulhas and Bombay. Then there’s

Aboli. What do we know about him? Well, he's loyal, and he seems to have no ambition other than to serve his master. That's it. There are good guys and bad guys and no in-between guys. Moral complexity is not one of Smith's strong suits. And in a book like this, moral worth correlates strongly to plot outcomes. Sure, sometimes one of the good guys bites the dust, but it doesn't take a genius to figure out the big picture. If there's trouble, the main characters are likely to wriggle out. This is the kind of book I could read right before bed and never have to fight to put down. It is filled with cliffhangers that I found easy to leave.

That is more negative than I mean to sound. *Monsoon's* pacing and breathlessness nullify such quibbles, making them akin to critiquing the construction of the barrel that is carrying you over a waterfall. At his best, Smith does an extraordinary job walking a genre tightrope. On the one hand, he has created a painstakingly researched novel that is firmly rooted in a fascinating historical context. On the other hand:

[Aboli] swung the axe in a wide, flashing arc. It took the man full in the side of his neck, severing it cleanly. His head toppled forward and rolled down his chest, while his trunk stood erect before it slumped to the deck. The air escaped from his lungs in a whistling blast of frothy blood from the open windpipe.

Smith's novels are punctuated by graphic, over-the-top violence, occasional sex (not nearly as graphic), and several scenes designed to be deliberately provocative (an adolescent boy gets circumcised; a woman is tortured by having packets of chili powder inserted into... well you get the picture). The result is something that is half-throwback (sea chases! swordfights!) and half modern (ultra violence! torture porn!). In a way, it's like watching an X-rated Errol Flynn movie.

The main villains in the piece are Muslims. I mention this because we live in a world where such things are going to be noticed. It bears mentioning that the Muslim characters share the exact same moral spectrum as the English characters. That is to say, they are either good or evil. The good Muslims don't have much agency, besides being helpful to the English characters. Then again, most of the characters lack true agency; their destinies are controlled by the storyline. As in *Triumph of the Sun*, Smith displays a keen interest in Islamic traditions and culture.

One thing I've noticed in both the Smith novels I've read is the effort that Smith has gone to in creating them. He's not a slouch. To be sure, his characters are thin, and his plot tends to lurch in places (some major threads take hundreds of pages to resolve; others only a couple), but he is an ambitious craftsman.

I'm not likely to sit down and read Smith's entire series any time soon. This is a function of limited time and limited speed-reading abilities. That said, it makes me really happy that these books are out there, waiting for me. Waiting for the moment when I need them.

Frik Prinsloo says

Action packed, continuous flow. Hal Courtney and his close family are at it again. Real life drama with a twist. Just as I thought, this is the best Wilbur Smith novel by far. He knows how to keep you in suspense while the plot unfolds. I would have loved to live my life as Tom Courtney, it must have been amazing. This book keeps you in suspense till the last page. Well deserved 5 stars

Richard Derus says

Rating: 4* of five

The Book Report: Second chronologically in the Courtney family saga, *Monsoon* covers Hal Courtney and his sons' efforts to end the scourge of piracy plaguing the East India Company, and their inexorable, inevitable removal from an England too small and too meager to hold the family's talents, abilities, and personalities, to a colonial future in the Cape Colony.

The multipolar world of southern and eastern Africa, its long-established power dynamics, and the astounding riches of India, south Asia, and Arabia, are all economically and still excitingly delineated by the Courtney family's arrival and conquest of and by this gigantic, extraordinary prize they seek. Their family dynamic, a violent and competitive and bitter one, is brought to several surprisingly exciting climaxes...it's not like one can't see the events coming, but Smith's ability to tell a tale is such that the inevitable feels like a shipwreck in progress.

After an amazing set of adventures in the clutches of people whose self-interest marches against the Courtneys', the family's future is firmly established and their connection to Africa becomes, by the dawn of the 18th Century, unbreakable.

My Review: Of all the Courtney family saga, this book reigns supreme in my affections. Hal's sons are a quarrelsome, angry, fascinating lot, and their well-roundedness makes even their worst traits and meanest actions feel real, comprehensible, and emotionally powerful.

I've read Wilbur Smith books since I was eleven, and I've only seldom felt let down. This book was not, in any way at all, a let-down. It was as violent as the monsoon it takes its name from, and still, like that monsoon, it gave life and comfort to its recipients. Powerfully imagined, powerfully written, passionate and real and engrossing. Don't miss it.

Matt says

Smith continues the final collection of Courtney novels, developing some of the early ancestry of the family he has made famous in nine previous novels. The novel opens with an adult Hal Courtney, who has taken up a life as a farmer in rural England. Courtney has four sons from a few marriages: William, twins Tom and Guy, as well as Dorian. These boys have their own quirky characteristics, which are exemplified throughout the novel. When the English summon Hal to take up a nautical voyage to contest an Arab pirate who has been plundering ships, the elder Courtney seeks the assistance of his sons, who have been told of their fathers many voyages from years before. Tom and Guy find themselves in love with the same woman, though she is unable to admit her love for them because of her caste in life. When Guy agrees to a mission in India, he follows the woman he loves, causing grief for the other twin. William, much older than his other siblings, also refuses the mission, choosing to continue his life in England, where he is fostering business and political contacts. This leaves Tom and Dorian, who become the central characters in the novel and whose lives prove fundamental. While on the high seas, Dorian and Tom help their father seek out the Arabs, but trouble befalls the ship and Dorian is captured by the Prince of Oman, who takes him back to his settlement off the African coast. Dorian's appearance echoes a prophecy in Islam, leaving the settlement to believe he is a direct descendent of Muhammad. While in captivity, Dorian meets one of the Prince's daughters, Yasmini,

in whom he develops strong affections. This forbidden love is discovered and the Prince banshees Dorian to death for incestuous behaviour. He is able to escape with Yasmini, though the Arabs in the settlement choose to deem him dead and erect a tomb to substantiate the story. Meanwhile, Hal suffers a horrific fate, leaving Tom in charge of the English ship. The search for Dorian continues, though when Tom is convinced his brother died at the settlement, he agrees to stop looking. Years pass and Dorian has become extremely acclimated to the Muslim way of life, which does not bode well when Tom Courtney returns to finish the mission on which Hal was originally sent. Facing off, Tom and Dorian must fight for their respective honours, where only one side can prevail. Smith tells a powerful tale that develops the multi-generational flavour of the series and plants plots that are sure to be developed in novels to come. An interesting addition to the Courtney saga.

As with the previous novel, the nautical flavour of the story left me less than enthralled, but the theme was not lost, nor was the character development built throughout the narrative. Smith effectively keeps the political and social actions of the day at hand as he develops a wonderful story that spans years and sees his sons grow into their own personalities. The battle of the twins over one woman foreshadows the storyline of Sean and Garrick Courtney in the first collection of novels, which will likely also play a role in future novels, should the child be raised in India under Guy's tutelage. The ties and animosity developed throughout this novel between Tom and Dorian will play an interesting role in upcoming novels, especially as they head to the African continent. One other aspect worth noting is Smith's use of the Muslim pirates as the central enemies of the novel. While the book was penned at a time when Muslim fundamentalism began to emerge as the new ideological war in the world, Smith is able to use this clash at a time when the high seas were the ultimate battleground. How nice to see this spin on the hero-aggressor storyline that does not include mention of al-Qaeda or suicide bombers. The subtle discussion of the religious beliefs and tolerances exemplifies that the seventeenth century was also a time when Christianity battled Islam and both tossed 'infidel' monikers on one another, while surviving together. Smith's trademark use of Africa as a backdrop also comes to pass in small part throughout the novel, which will soon develop into a major setting for future novels, as the Courtneys settle on the continent and begin making a name for themselves.

Kudos, Mr. Smith for another interesting novel. Perhaps settling in Africa will allow the characters to make roots and settle, leaving seafaring storylines off the starboard side.

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<http://pecheyponderings.wordpress.com/>

Patrick says

This was a thoroughly enjoyable read. It continues the story started in *Birds of Prey*. And now we have the transition from one generation to another, from Henry Courtney to his sons William, Tom, Guy and Dorian. It is mostly about how the sons grow up and make their way in the world. Some turn out well, others, less so. There is plenty of sailing and pirate action to accompany this. So hold onto your hats if you decide to read it.

Kirra says

So this book was recommended by a friend and I judged the book by its cover....did not think I'd like it. Holly golf balls I loved it!!!! I needed a 20 minute reflection after this as it was an emotion journey.

Inderpreet Singh says

That was one hell of a novel I just finished reading. I read at quite a good pace of 100-150 pages daily. It was like the longest movie I had ever seen. Now I have a really fresh vocabulary related to ship, pirates and voyage. I felt like I am too voyaging with them while reading word to word which was so eloquently presented. It was enchanting to read how it started, how they fought, killed, died and finally united. And also wonderful description of love intermittently throughout the novel made it more craving to go on & see what comes next and complete it that very day. It took time but it was fruitful. Feeling smug as if I have achieved something. "Monsoon" is a must read, its a beauty !!

Walter Van praag says

I did not realise this was a sequel to Birds of Prey, but none the less it was an excellent read. Could hardly put this book down. Fortunately there were enough pages for it not to be a weekend book! The plot was brilliant and as a book seriously well researched and written. Even just on its own this book is worth reading even if you haven't read Birds of Prey yet.

Wilbur Smith is one of my favourite writers in general, despite his books always having Africa and history as the central themes and me not being particularly interested or fascinated by either as such, I have never been disappointed yet, so I highly recommend this book to anyone regardless of what you think you might like! Go on, read this book.

Farhana Faruq says

What a phenomenal book!!! Absolutely loved the story and at 800 plus pages I was hoping it could keep going. I think men would prefer the book: ships, fighting, pirates, women, hunting...all that fun stuff. Of course the Muslims were the bad guys - still a great story!

I've read quite a few books by Smith, this must be my favorite - not even giving away my copy..haha

Steven says

Pirates and privateers. What's not to love? A little long and Smith is prone to clichés and descriptions that don't always make sense. Plus talk about a book full of caricatures. Everyone is perfectly flawless and the best at whatever they do, from the stone mason to the heroes. Even the bad guys were all perfectly awful in their badness, with no redeeming characteristics whatsoever. It got a little tiresome and oddly predictable in places.

Jo Bennie says

The book opens at the end of the 17th century with teenage Tom Courtney up to mischief, sneaking into the

chapel of his father's great estate with his twin brother Guy to meet with a serving girl for sex, making his half brother Dorian look out. Dorian sounds the alarm as their older brother, the brutal William, approaches and they all flee. Tom and Dorian are caught by William and Dorian is only saved from being strangled by his father Hal, a powerful man who has built up his massive estate through his exploits at sea fighting the Dutch in South Africa and bringing trade goods back from India, Africa and the Far East.

Hal has been tasked by the East India Company to rid them of the pirate Jangiri who has been preying on the Company's as they make the epic cross from England round the Cape of Good Hope to India and Africa. The strangling of Dorian makes it clear to him he cannot leave any of his three younger sons in the care of his eldest, and he takes them with him.

What follows is an epic swashbuckling adventure, Smith's plot is fast and compelling and his characters beautifully executed and convincing, but Monsoon is much more than that. Every aspect of 17th century England, Africa and Arabia are cinematically rendered in exquisite detail, customs, dress, armaments, shipping, language and landscape. A great read.

Frank says

Another epic tale from Smith! This is the followup novel to *Birds of Prey* which I read a couple of years ago. It is also the second chronologically in the Courtney's of Africa saga by Smith. I really enjoyed this swashbuckling story of Hal Courtney, the hero of *Birds of Prey*, and his progeny. This novel takes place in the 1690's...about thirty years after the end of *Prey*. Hal Courtney is called by the king to rid the African east coast of a deadly Arab pirate who has captured several English ships. His sons, Tom, Guy and Dorian accompany him on this quest while his oldest son William remained behind in England to watch over the estate. Tom and his twin, Guy, fall out over a woman on the voyage and Guy ends up in India with a mortal dislike of Tom. William pretty much despises the whole family and is only after money and power. While Tom and Dorian remain true to their father and each other... But Dorian is captured by the Arabs and put into bondage before finding favor with the Caliph of Oman.... Lots and lots of action, adventure, despicable villains, beautiful women, and brave heroics. But most of all, Smith throws in a lot of history including the Omani wars with the Ottoman Empire, the brutality of the slave and ivory trade in Africa, and descriptions of exotic locales such as Zanzibar. I'll be looking forward to reading more in this series and I would recommend Smith to anyone who likes adventure with their history.

Doug Oudin says

Wilbur Smith fascinates me. His knowledge of the African continent and affinity with the sea help bring his stories to life. He's graphic in his descriptions; so if you have a faint heart, you might not want to read the often gory and brutal details that often accompany his tales. On the other hand, his explicit renderings of pillaging, raping, and mutilating that unfold in the majority of his books are filled with details and insights that make his imagery captivating.

He also weaves a full tale of historical events and incorporates them into the lives of his colorful and believable characters.

At over 800 pages, Monsoon will keep you immersed for many hours of enjoyable reading.

Rick Brindle says

Wilbur Smith returns to form with this novel, the second one of the seafaring Courtney series. The usual sweeping story, taking the diverse and conflicting cultures of the times. Excellent escapist adventures, plus the odd beautiful woman along the way. Great stuff.

Dale says

I feel like I should be recommending an author instead of a book. Would save time. Anything Wilbur writes is fantastic. Much fun. If you like far off places, much adventure, hero's and beautiful damsels, he is your author. Even in these times, some things don't change.

Phil says

This book continues the tale begun in 'Birds Of Prey'. Smith is the greatest adventure writer ever. He takes you to a world that is totally believable and has a talent for putting his characters in cliffhanging situations without making them seem contrived. The hero overcomes all obstacles and gets the girl in the end, but you know that as soon as you pick the book up. Who cares. This is another of those books where you want to go hang out with the characters for a while and the only disappointment is when you reach the last page.

Constance Lapsati says

Γου?λμπουρ Σμιθ ε?ναι αυτ?ς. Με κ?θε ?να του βιβλ?ο, φε?γεις. Κι ?ταν κ?ποτε θα τελει?σουν οι σελ?δες, εκε? ε?ναι που λες αν μπορε?ς να περιμ?νεις το επ?μεν? του. Αν δεν μπορε?ς, απλ?, τον ξαναδιαβ?ζεις.

Lucknegrace says

I love Wilbur Smith's adventure stories. It's like watching an Errol Flynn movie and 960 pages just fly on by. The Courtney family saga hooks you in. Unfortunately, the first book I read was a later one in the series, so now I must backtrack. I ordered the old ones so stay tuned for reviews of them later.

Like my own family, there is enmity between the Courtney brothers. One brother is kidnapped and raised as a Muslim. We learn some of the mores and attitudes of Muslim behavior. Two favorite characters leave the scene, but strong replacements continue the exploration and building of the new life in Africa. The slave trade is explained. I didn't know that Arabs played such a big part in selling African natives into slavery. As in today's headlines, Arabs of old show no mercy or heart and treat women abominably. They use their religion as an excuse for committing atrocities and hold no loyalty toward friends, relatives or leaders. Greed rears its ugly head among the bad guys of both sides and, as this episode winds down, we follow the monsoon winds and crave more Courtney swashbuckling stories.

Dora says

3.5 για να μην ειμαι και πολυ αδικη.. ειχε πολυ ενδιαφερον στορι αλλα με κουρασε το μεγαθος και μου φανηκε υπερβολη να περιγραψει μια ολοκληρη ελεφαντοθυρα.... και οχι μονο ..ηταν λεπτομεριακος στα παντα πφφφ

Diana Macovei says

Musonul m-a speriat inițial cu întinderea sa pe sute de pagini ca în final s? vreau mai mult. Wilbur Smith î?i poart? pa?ii în aventuri de neuitat, al?turi de personaje magnifice de care s? te îndr?goste?ti ?i c?rora s? le urm?re?ti fiecare mi?care.

În tot vacarmul de evenimente ?i aventuri aten?ia mi-a fost îndreptat? constant spre Dorian. Am sim?it c? a fost singurul membru al familiei Courtney care ?i-a p?strat identitatea ?i integritatea moral?. În ciuda faptului c? s-a aflat printre str?ini a p?strat din inocen?a avut? atunci când a fost r?pit pân? la final. Povestea dintre el ?i Yasmini a fost ca un iaz de lini?te în mijlocul terorii, cu toate c? cei doi nu s-au aflat chiar pe un t?râm binecuvântat de pace.

O aventur? piratereasc? pe ape tulburi, dar ?i c?l?torii pe t?râmurii austere, sunt doar o parte din ceea ce ne a?teapt? în Musonul de Wilbur Smith, un volum ce va trece ca vântul ?i ca gândul imediat ce ai apucat s? întorci foaia.

<https://goodread.ro/recenzie-musonul-...>
