by Wilbur Smith, narrated by David Case

My Personal Review:
In BIRDS OF PREY, it is the year 1667, and we are introduced to the 17-year old Englishman, Hal Courteney. Hal is a crewmember on his fathers ship, the Lady Edwina, as it sails the high seas off the southern tip of Africa. England is at war with the Dutch Republic, and the ships captain, Sir Francis Courteney, has been given license by the British Admiralty to prey on Dutch trading ships of the United East India Company as they return to Amsterdam from the East Indies via the Dutch settlement at the Cape of Good Hope. Sir Francis captures a Dutch ship carrying the newly appointed Governor of Good Hope and his wife, Katinka. During the period when the Governor and his wife are held for ransom, Hal loses his virginity to Katinka, a sadistic, treacherous, highborn slut. (Well, good breeding isn't everything.) Subsequently, Sir Francis, Hal and the rest of the Lady Edwinsas company are betrayed by a former ally, the Scottish Earl of Cumbrae, with the help of a former crewmember, Sam Bowles, and imprisoned at Good Hope. Sir Francis is brutally tortured and executed. Hal and a handful of survivors later escape, acquire another ship, and go on to defeat their primary tormentors, Cumbrae and a Dutch army colonel named Schreuder, against the backdrop of a war between the Christian Emperor of Ethiopia and the Moslem Sultan of Oman. Along the way, Hal inherits his fathers captaincy and finds true love (as opposed to hormonal-driven sex with Katinka) - twice.
As painted by the author, Wilbur Smith, the chief characters of this swashbuckling adventure are almost caricatures. The good guys - principally Hal and his loyal buddies, Aboli, Ned, and Daniel - are brave, noble and heroic. The bad guys - Katinka, Governor van de Velde, Bowles, Cumbrae, and Schreuder - are cruel, dishonorable and totally vile. The action, much as in Harrison Fords Indiana Jones film trilogy, is wildly improbable, especially over the books latter half. Similarly, however, that same action is scripted with such exuberance and energy that its totally engaging. Finally, I read to be transported to places that, in most cases, I will never visit. I doubt that I shall ever ply the Indian Ocean or South Atlantic aboard a frigate under sail. This book took me there in grand style.
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