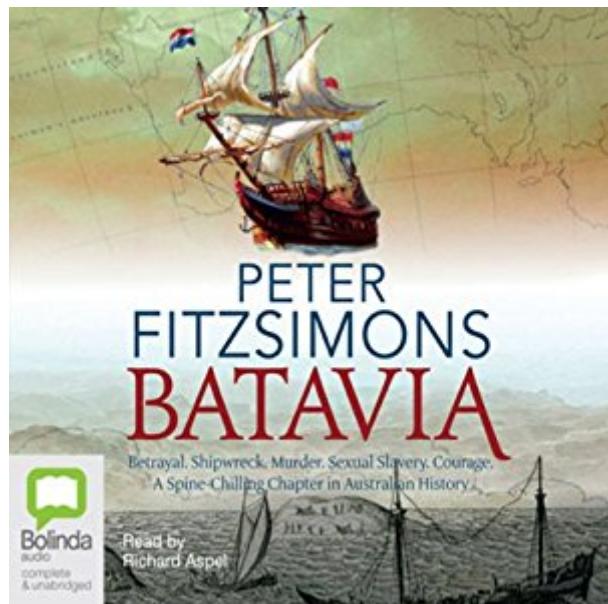


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# Batavia



## Synopsis

The story begins in 1629, when the pride of the Dutch East India Company, the Batavia, is on its maiden voyage en route from Amsterdam to the Dutch East Indies, laden down with the greatest treasure to leave Holland. The magnificent ship is already boiling over with a mutinous plot that is just about to break into the open when, just off the coast of Western Australia, it strikes an unseen reef in the middle of the night. While Commandeur Francisco Pelsaert decides to take the longboat across 2,000 miles of open sea for help, his second-in-command Jeronimus Cornelisz takes over, quickly deciding that 250 people on a small island is unwieldy for the small number of supplies they have. Quietly, he puts forward a plan to 40 odd mutineers how they could save themselves, kill most of the rest, and spare only a half-dozen or so women, including his personal fancy, Lucretia Jansz - one of the noted beauties of Holland - to service their sexual needs. A reign of terror begins, countered only by a previously anonymous soldier, Wiebbe Hayes, who begins to gather to him those are prepared to do what it takes to survive....

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Batavia While a 'Wikipedia' article criticises Peter Fitzsimons for not respecting the disciplines of scholarship as a historian, this 'weakness' in his work in my view may be forgiven easily. He has written an atmospheric and engrossing account based on fact, and drawn liberally on a creative imagination to enliven the account with entirely credible character development, and impressive description of nautical practice and life in the early 17th century. My only caution is that this is not a

book for the squeamish, for as he successfully builds a compelling horror centred on the Mutineers and Jeronimus as a character in particular, the graphic description of mindless violence will offend and nauseate some. This is not done to be self serving however, as the evidence increasingly unfolds that the 'reign of terror' on Batavia's Graveyard was disturbingly real. The counterpoint to Jeronimus' cynical evil is skilfully woven, focussed on another major character, Wiebbe Hayes, whose innate decency and emotional intelligence is sensitively described. A compelling read, showing regular flashes of dark humour, particularly for those interested in nautical life in wooden ships, the development of trade in the Dutch East Indies, social mores, greed and power and notions of justice in the 17th century.

This book grabs you by the throat and never lets you go. It is well documented and historically accurate. A fascinating lesson in the rich, and not so charitable history of the Netherlands, Indonesia and Australia in the 1600's. (That is where it became a bestseller.) The book is not for the faint of heart and paints a very graphic picture, including maps and archival photographs, of the life and times of the Dutch seafarers in the "Golden Age" of Holland as well as the events that followed the tragic shipwreck off the Australian coast. The reasons the Dutch were successful in those years is that they outfought, out-sailed, out-killed and outsmarted the major completion from Portugal, England, Spain. Their management of the Indonesian islands was less than "cordial" to say the least. In our modern times, it is a valuable retrospect of the harsh world that our ancestors had to survive. Don't miss it!

Batavia, by Peter Fitzsimons, is simply one of the best books I have EVER read. If you are interested in Australian history, even just a little bit, you will thoroughly enjoy this book and may even learn something. If you enjoy reading a thrilling adventure, you will love this book. The story of Batavia, as told by Fitzsimons, is all the more enjoyable because it based on events that really happened. Fitzsimons has gone to great lengths to reference his sources and to note where he has used creative license. Finally, as Fitzsimons writes in his introduction, "It combines in just the one tale such momentous elements as the world's first corporation, the brutality of colonisation, the battle of good versus evil, the derring-do of seafaring adventure, mutiny, love, lust, bloodlust, greed, treasure, criminality, a reign of terror, murders most foul, sexual slavery, natural nobility, survival, retribution, rescue, first contact with native peoples and so much more." This is a lofty description for any book to live up to, and I doubted that any could, but live up to it Batavia does and with ease.

A bit slow to start and seems a little far fetched as the author sets the scene for the coming events. However all the early reasoning is later shown to be sound and very believable, well researched and logical. I like the way he tells the story as a dispassionate observer and from the shipwreck on, the book becomes hard to put down. My wife and I both read the book just after visiting the island groups where the shipwreck occurred and actually snorkelling off East Wallaby Island in early summer. The islands are dead flat barely above the sea and have only shrubs as protection from the normally prevailing SW winds, the Batavia wreck was in June the start of winter and though cold, they did get rain. I'm sure if the wreck had been in summer most would have died. When you put the book down you are left questioning how you would have handled the same situation and how those that survived felt as they lived out the rest of their lives.

This book is well researched to the extent possible for such a poorly understood event. Many readers may be dismayed by the brutality documented throughout. I was going to recommend it to my wife but decided the brutality (even if accurate) was too excessive to make the book enjoyable. As they would say in a movie or TV show "reader discretion is advised".

Fantastically captivating story. Read the entire book in two days and was really both shocked and surprised. A good pirate story with some chilling episodes that leaves you wondering about the cruelty of men but luckily also have the good guys pulling through.

A fascinatingly written historical insight into what an atrocious set of events occurred concerning the wreck of the Batavia and an even greater insight into the abhorrent behaviour of the human species given a set of adverse situations! A very enjoyable read.

Having read an earlier account of the Batavia (The Wicked and the Fair), I was somewhat prepared for the gruesome horror of this narrative. FitzSimons has provided us with a most thoroughly researched and well written account. He avoids the temptation to sensationalise the violence of the Mutineers, while at the same time capturing the emotion, the fear, and even the tender moments of some of the survivors. Most of all, he draws us fearfully into the human mystery of how evil one man might become when left unchecked, and how disturbingly easily that evil can spread to others when in fear of their lives. A haunting tale.

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