This rollicking action-packed yarn is (in the best sense) an old-fashioned story, full of battles at sea, pirates and spies. It may be a long book, but scarcely a word is wasted. Events that would consume whole chapters in many novels are disposed of in a paragraph, and the pace is breathless. Set at the start of the Napoleonic Wars (Napoleon is still 'First Consul' in the aftermath of the French Revolution) it is the story of Midshipman Peter Raven, 13 years old and newly recruited to His Majesty's Navy to serve on the battleship Torren, commanded by his uncle. Only Peter himself and two other shipmates survive when the Torren is captured through trickery by a truly memorable villain, Count Vallon, a mad and sadistic French nobleman who has set himself up as a piratical entrepreneur and warlord at a secret fortress in the Caribbean. Seeing the Torren's crew thrown to the sharks, Peter vows revenge. His chance eventually comes because, once rescued from his ordeal, he is recruited to the British Secret Service as protégé of a quite legal buccaneer, the romantic Commodore Beaumont. Peter's resulting exploits include both meeting and spying on Napoleon, before he wins a glorious revenge against the villainous Vallon. There are touches of C S Forester and even O'Brian here, but a lot more of Stevenson. I particularly like the author's refusal to milk easy patriotism and nationalistic prejudice. Although the villain is French, he is a crazy maverick privateer. Even Napoleon is far from demonised, and France in general is depicted warmly. The sins of political ambition are not here the sins of peoples and nations. This is a hugely enjoyable traditional story with a modern outlook underlying it, and with plenty to appeal to girls as well as boys.