

★ **Seized: A Sea Captain's Adventures Battling Scoundrels and Pirates While Recovering Stolen Ships in the World's Most Troubled Waters**

Max Hardberger. Broadway, \$25 (304p) ISBN 9780767931380

In this heart-stopping account of his work recovering stolen (or otherwise illegally-seized) ships from "hellhole" ports, commercial captain Hardberger proves himself tough as a tank and articulate as a poet. An airplane pilot, teacher, and lawyer besides, Hardberger never turns down an assignment, no matter how perilous—from surreptitiously repossessing huge ships at midnight to transporting a fleet of old airplanes across East Germany in a perilous airborne convoy. Facing down foes that include gangsters, corrupt judges, and, of course, pirates, Hardberger proves a formidable hero, but nevertheless admits that "my long experience in leading men into dicey situations had taught me to keep my qualms to myself." Hardberger has a seafarer's gift for atmospheric storytelling, layering details to create a sense of place, history, and foreboding, as when outsmarting deceptive authorities at a Honduran port: "I knew that pier well, and those pilings had been rotten since Simon Bolivar was a boy." Full of the suspense that comes from ripping off the bad guys and making a daring escape, often aboard less-than-reliable craft ("the ship could only make a desperate run for Belize... before the hold filled with water and she took a nosedive into the sea")

Hardberger's escapades make undeniably fun reading. (Apr.)