

# **The Commodore Study Guide**

**The Commodore by Patrick O'Brian**

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## Plot Summary

Jack Aubrey and Doctor Stephen Maturin return home to discover that much has changed in their absence. Jack finds that he has been promoted to Commodore and given a new mission to stamp out the slave trade on the west coast of Africa, while Stephen discovers that his enemy the Lord of Habachtschal is conspiring to bring treason charges against him for his previous conduct as a British spy and for his support of Clarissa Oakes and Padeen Coleman. Stephen must spirit the two out of danger and then join Jack and his new squadron on their mission in Africa. Little do both men know that the Africa mission is a cover for an even more important task of surprising a French fleet that is planning an invasion of Stephen's home country of Ireland.

Jack and Stephen return from the Indian Ocean aboard Jack's ship, the Surprise. They reach home to find that much has changed in their absence. For Jack, the glory of a promotion to Commodore and a new mission to thwart the slave trade on the west coast of Africa, is marred by burgeoning troubles with his wife Sophie. Sophie believes Jack has had an affair with Clarissa Oakes, who Jack and Stephen rescued on a previous adventure and who now lives nearby, caring for Stephen's young daughter Brigid. Jack, in turn, is angered by some of Sophie's decisions in handling his affairs while he is away. The two quarrel while Jack is home and are no longer speaking to one another when Jack's new squadron leaves for the African Coast.

Stephen returns home to find that his wife Diana, unable to bear the burden of their new daughter Brigid, has fled, leaving Stephen a note explaining her actions. Brigid is now in the care of Clarissa Oakes. Stephen soon learns of a plot by Lord Habachtschal to have Stephen arrested for treason. Stephen is forced to take what possessions he can, along with Clarissa Oakes, his daughter Brigid, and his steward Padeen Coleman, all of whom are in danger from the plotting Habachtschal, and join Jack on his journey south.

After leaving Clarissa, Padeen, and Brigid in the care of an aunt in Spain, Stephen and Jack travel to the west coast of Africa. On the way, Jack learns of his secret mission. He is to make a show of engaging the slave runner ships on the west coast, and then double back to intercept a French invasion fleet, that British spy say is planning to land in Stephen's home country of Ireland.

The Commodore's fleet has great success capturing slave ships, though Stephen catches yellow fever and nearly dies. Finally, they turn back toward home and tail the newly formed French fleet to the coast of Ireland, where Jack succeeds in foiling the invasion. Jack mends the rift with his wife Sophie, and Stephen returns to his wife Diana.



# Chapter One.

## Chapter One. Summary

Chapter one opens with the Surprise, commanded by Jack Aubrey and the Berenice, commanded by Heneage Dundas, making their way to their home ports in England. Berenice comes upon the Ringle and the Surprise, who which is badly damaged by a fight with an American frigate and then bad weather. Berenice assists Surprise in making the necessary repairs for her to gain her home port. On their way home, the two faster ships must in gratitude and courtesy be paced by the clumsy Berenice, though Captain Dundas has suggested several times that they part ways so that the other vessels might make home port quicker.

During some rather bad weather, Dundas is aboard Surprise reviewing old times with Aubrey, a longtime friend who had served together as young midshipmen. One such story they rehash is when Dundas beats Aubrey at a backgammon game and Aubrey challenges the winner to a duel. The two sneak off during a water stop on an island and fight with swords. When Dundas accidentally cuts Aubrey, the two come to their senses and make apologies; both are flogged for the incident back at the ship. After much banter, Dundas finally brings up the uncomfortable request of a loan of money from Aubrey, who willingly offers him part of Aubrey's share of prize money Surprise is carrying to England. The money will save Dundas from being arrested and going to debtor's prison upon returning to England.

As Aubrey and Dundas sit in companionable silence, a sailor barges in and reports that a ship has been sighted two miles off. After a series of lantern signals to determine the identity of the ship with the incorrect response coming from the other vessel, quarters are called and Surprise and Berenice prepare for battle. Battle preparations wake Stephen Maturin, the ship's surgeon and Aubrey's closest, oldest friend. Maturin wakes thinking about his wife, Diana, and their meeting in the near future, a time he both eagerly and anxiously awaits, as it has been several years since they have seen each other. In fact, Maturin has a daughter, Brigid, whom he has never seen. Diana married Maturin mostly out of friendship and his kindnesses to her, so he is unsure about how she will feel towards him after such a long separation. Maturin rises and goes to the sickbay to prepare to care for any battle wounds. His "loblolly-boy," Padeen Coleman is already there setting up for surgery. It turns out that there is to be no battle, as the unknown ship turns out to be a ship of the line, Thunderer, who seems to have an incompetent signalman.

Thunderer, knowing she has inconvenienced three other vessels in her inability to signal correctly, invites all three captains to breakfast, which they accept. The breakfast, quite mediocre, would have been acceptable, but the ship has no coffee on board. Maturin, however, is able to meet with Thunderer's intelligence agent and gain information of the state of affairs of England, which are still in turmoil in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars. Thunderer hands over letters for Surprise's crew; one of which mentions the



possibility of Aubrey's promotion to Commodore. Maturin informs Aubrey that Maturin needs to get back to England as quickly as possible because of the situation with Spain and post-war politics. Aubrey convinces Maturin to take the Ringle, which will split off and hasten to London.

Surprise finally makes home port, where the prize money is divided among the crew. Aubrey disembarks immediately and begins a hasty journey home, though when he arrives, he finds only a couple drunk servants and learns Sophie, his wife, and the children are at Woolcombe. Aubrey takes a large horse from the stable and starts his journey to his other residence. On the way, the horse is spooked and Aubrey is thrown and knocked unconscious, right on his property's boundary.

## Chapter One. Analysis

Much of *The Hundred Days* and other books in this series are replete with descriptions of the details of life at sea. There is no reason a reader needs to understand all the technicalities of sailing, but if s/he is interested, a good nautical dictionary would serve the reader well. Much of the technical aspects is understandable just by context, though.

Chapter one introduces Captain Jack Aubrey. He is one of the main characters in *The Commodore*. In general, he plays a large role in the entire O'Brian series. The reader learns that Jack Aubrey is a competent sailor. He has been a Navy captain for many years and has been in charge of various ships during his career, although, he has captained the *Surprise* more than any other. Promotions within the Navy are based mostly on experience and loyalty, but luck and good timing are factors as well. Aubrey was a frustrated Captain. He had been loyal to his country and served it well. Aubrey learns in chapter one that his loyalty, hard work and perseverance is finally paying off with a probable promotion to Commodore Admiral when he returns to England. Considering some of the incompetent men who have made Commodore long before Aubrey, it is a well-deserved and too-long-in-coming promotion.

Chapter one also introduces one other main character, Dr. Stephen Maturin. Maturin is a surgeon aboard Aubrey's ship and has also worked as a British intelligence officer. During their missions he not only cared for the crew but attempted to analyze the politics of each port as well.

The understated British "reserve" in mannerism is quite evident in how Aubrey and Dundas act towards each other, particularly when Dundas is trying to find the courage to ask for a loan of money from Aubrey.

Another thing to note in *The Commodore* is the fact that O'Brian uses real historical events around which to write his Aubrey-Maturin novels, though *The Commodore* has less of that than other of O'Brian's novels. As with the nautical terminology, it is not necessary to know any of the historical facts around which the story is written, but some research into those facts would add complexity and another dimension to the story line.



Readers who are unfamiliar with the military may find some of the vocabulary and actions of the officers and sailors a bit mystifying. Again, most of the actions are understandable in context, though present and former military members will likely relate to the aspects of the book having to do with life in the military, particularly a sea-going service.



# Chapter Two

## Chapter Two Summary

Chapter two opens in London with Maturin arriving at the Naval Intelligence office to see Sir Joseph Blaine. The first thing Maturin does when Sir Blaine greets him is to offer him a dried beetle specimen, which thoroughly delights Sir Blaine. Blaine tells Maturin that a small squadron is intended for Aubrey, who will be allowed to hoist a broad pennant. His mission will be off the coast of Africa to protect English merchant vessels and to discourage slave trade. Blaine mentions the possibility of a French attempt to invade Ireland and asks Maturin, an Irishman, where his loyalties would lie. Maturin replies that if Ireland cannot govern herself, then she is better off with England. Maturin meets with the intelligence committee where his past activities since his last meeting are reviewed. The committee is pleased to learn that much of the gold that is captured is not available to use in further intelligence work.

Maturin goes and naps at the rooming house where he keeps an apartment and then meets Blaine for dinner. Maturin tells him about Sarah and Emily, the Melanesian girls Maturin rescued when their village all die of smallpox. Maturin speaks of leaving them with Mrs. Broad to raise and of being willing to stand for their dowries. Blaine moves on to the topic of Clarissa Oakes, who Maturin had once asked Blaine to look after. Blaine explains that after Clarissa's husband is killed in line of duty, Blaine takes Clarissa to live with Diana, Maturin's wife. Blaine also discusses the "man with a limp," who is a highly-placed official and who is a traitor, leaking intelligence to the French. The man with the limp probably knows that it is Sir Blaine and Maturin who know of his treason and Sir Blaine wants to warn Maturin of this fact. Sir Blaine says that the problem with the man with the limp is that he may make it difficult for Blaine to secure pardons for Clarissa Oakes and Padeen Coleman. Sir Blaine seems so anxious and careworn that Maturin gives him some coca leaves to chew on.

A new section in the chapter opens with the Ringle weighing anchor at Shelmerston and Maturin, Padeen, Sarah and Emily disembark and take a chaise headed for Aubrey's home. Mrs. Williams, Sophie's abrasive mother, believes it her duty to inform Aubrey of Diana's behavior so that Aubrey can give Maturin the information. Sophie asks her mother to do not such thing as Aubrey is still recovering from the fall from his horse. Mrs. Williams ignores her daughter's entreaties and goes into Aubrey's sick room and divulges the information about Diana—that she has been drinking heavily, not caring for her daughter and keeping company with the wrong sort of people. Mrs. Williams even insinuates that Diana is having an affair with a Mr. Wilson. Mrs. Williams concludes her conversation saying Aubrey must break the news about Diana to Maturin. Aubrey is indignant and says he will do not such thing and neither will Mrs. Williams. Mrs. Williams' degradation of her niece, Diana, is all the more despicable in that Diana fronts Mrs. Williams money and a recommendation to take over running the betting on horse races.



Maturin arrives and greets Aubrey to the sounds of the three children crying upstairs as they are ill with measles, which Maturin confirms when he examines them. Tom Pullings arrives with the news that he has made post-Captain and is jubilant. As Pullings goes to speak with Aubrey, Maturin takes his leave of Sophie and he, Paden and the two girls leave for Barham Down, Maturin's home.

At Barham, Maturin knocks and pulls the bell wire, but no one answers until at the kitchen door, Clarissa yells out to learn the identity of the visitors. When Maturin identifies himself, she opens the door and warmly greets him, Padeen and the two girls. Clarissa leads them a room where Maturin's daughter was playing by herself. When dinner is ready, Clarissa sits with Maturin and they first discuss Brigid and then Diana. Clarissa relates that Diana begins to drink heavily when it is obvious that her daughter is not normal. Clarissa believes that Diana thought Maturin and Clarissa had been lovers, which is untrue. When Maturin asks when Diana's unhappiness began, she says it was long before Brigid is born. She says Diana misses Maturin terribly and then has a very difficult labor and is later unable to bond with her child. Maturin ends the conversation by saying he has to take Sarah and Emily to their new home but he is leaving Padeen with Clarissa.

## Chapter Two Analysis

Sir Blaine and Maturin share an avid interest in the natural world; hence, Sir Blaine's enthusiasm for the beetle is entirely sincere. Before Sir Blaine takes Maturin in for his meeting with the committee, Sir Blaine questions Maturin's continued loyalty to the crown. Sir Blaine is not implying that Maturin has shown any hint of disloyalty previously, but Blaine wants to be certain Maturin can in good conscience support England against France if the latter government attempts a takeover of Ireland, where Maturin is born. Maturin firmly believes Ireland should be allowed to rule herself (though he also thinks Ireland as done a rather poor job of that in the past), but if England will not relinquish her hold on Ireland, Maturin believes it preferable to be under the English than the French; thus, at this time he is able to pledge his loyalty to the crown.

If the reader has not read the previous two Aubrey-Maturin books in the series, s/he will not fully understand the report Maturin makes to the committee about his intelligence activities over several years time. It is not necessary to know all the details behind the report the committee secretary reads for Maturin's approval, though, in order to follow the plot in the *Commodore* as O'Brian works in most of the necessary facts that affect the actions in this book. The most salient fact is that Maturin requested that Sir Blaine arrange pardons for both Clarissa Oakes and Padeen Coleman when the two arrive in England earlier. Sir Blaine is unable to do so, partially because Oakes has identified a traitor within the intelligence community, but one who is well placed and of high station and cannot be touched without absolute, immutable proof. This person (identified as a man with a limp) now knows that Sir Blaine is aware of his questionable loyalties and would most likely make pardons very difficult to obtain. A very telling moment in this section between Maturin and Blaine is when Maturin offers Blaine a wad of coca leaves to chew on, telling Blaine it will reduce his anxiety. Maturin has off and on fought with an





addiction problem, first to an opium derivative and now with the coca leaves. In fact, Maturin feels partially responsible for Coleman's transport to Australia because Coleman first becomes addicted to the same opium substance (laudanum) when working with Maturin and under Maturin's influence. It is interesting that Maturin is now willing to possibly help another man to an addiction, albeit not as bad as opium.

After the meeting with Sir Blaine, the story jumps to Maturin, Sarah, Emily and Coleman on their way first to Aubrey's home and then to Barham Down, which is Maturin's home, though he has not seen it as his wife purchases it while he is away at sea. When Maturin meets with Aubrey, their close friendship is quite evident, though the warmth between them may seem more cool because of the British reserve and tendency towards formality among the upper class of that time. One may admire Aubrey for refusing to discuss Diana's recent activity, but it is not perhaps how a very close friend would act.

When Maturin arrives at his home and discovers a disinterested daughter and a missing wife, he shows his character by remaining calm and making sure Sarah, Emily and Padeen are cared for. The fact that he seems more empathetic and compassionate towards Diana's actions demonstrates that Maturin truly loves the woman for herself and not for her looks, which has been what attracted other men to her in the past.

The brief note that Diana leaves with Clarissa for Maturin is rather uncharacteristic of the Diana as she has been in previous novels. That she pleads for Maturin not to despise her shows how highly she values Maturin's good opinion of her. It is a note that would certainly melt anyone's heart who already loves the writer of the note.

The chapter ends on a bit of an ironic note with the last sentence when Clarissa sends Maturin to the room where his wife had slept and saying that she had put "New sheets and clean curtains" (p. 55) in the room. That is, metaphorically, exactly what Diana needs - a clean and new life.



# Chapter Three

## Chapter Three Summary

Chapter three opens to a light note with Aubrey's twin daughters and his young son, George, racing to tell him that his Admiral's uniform has arrived. The children pour an immense amount of energy into the minute details of the uniform's arrival. At the children's earnest pleas, Aubrey goes inside to don his new uniform, which Killick has already laid out. In the middle of the "fashion show," Aubrey suddenly realizes he is late to meet Captain Hervey and rips off his uniform and dons his civilian garb.

Mrs. Williams, Sophie's mother makes a snide remark about Aubrey putting on airs by donning a Rear Admiral's uniform rather than Commodore. Sophie explains the protocol involved and so Mrs. Williams tries to stir up more trouble by gossiping about a man making inquiries about Clarissa Oakes. Mrs. Williams states that she rode to see Clarissa and questions her about her background, but Mrs. Williams feels as though Clarissa was being evasive.

Back at Barham, Maturin is sorting through papers and hears Padeen teaching Brigid to speak Irish. The discovery quite excites Stephen to realize that his daughter can talk and is willing to do so with the right person, i.e., in this case, Padeen Coleman. Clarissa worries that she should not have told Maturin about Mrs. Williams' visit that upset both her and Brigid, but Maturin is glad to have the information. Maturin relates to Clarissa about hearing Brigid and Coleman having a conversation. Maturin tells Clarissa he will deal with Mrs. Williams and asks Clarissa to ignore for now, Brigid's talking in Irish. He says, "Let the flower open" (p. 62).

Maturin returns to Aubrey's home and tells Aubrey of his time at Barham Down. Maturin mentions that he engaged a man named Pratt to try to find Diana and to let Diana know that Maturin does not blame her and that Brigid is not an idiot as believed. Maturin tells Aubrey that Maturin intends to forbid Mrs. Williams to enter his home again. When Maturin speaks with Mrs. Williams a bit later, he has to threaten her, almost to the point of blackmail, to make clear that she is to stay away from Clarissa and Brigid. Maturin joins Aubrey in the telescope room and learns about the ships of Aubrey's new squadron. Aubrey points several out through his telescope, an instrument of which Aubrey is quite proud and taken with.

The next morning, Aubrey and Maturin continue their discussions about the various ships, captains, and crew members of Aubrey's newly-forming squadron. Aubrey also expresses a small amount of anxiety at being solely in charge of so many ships and crew without an admiral backing him up. At breakfast, the Port Flag-Admiral's lieutenant arrives with a message that the Pyramus is to be cut from Aubrey's squadron. While Aubrey is in with the lieutenant, Sophie speaks to Maturin about her concerns about Aubrey, saying he seems more aloof and almost cold to her than ever before. Maturin stumbles through trying to reassure her, which makes matters worse.



Aubrey and Maturin take a ship's boat to board the *Bellona*, boarding her on the larboard side so to avoid any formal pomp associated with Aubrey's initial arrival on his flag vessel. A young man shows Maturin to the sick berth to meet his two assistants, William Smith and Alexander Macaulay. Maturin is appalled by the room assigned as the sick berth, saying that no one could possibly heal in such a place. Maturin is then shown to the dispensary, which again meets with Maturin's disapproval. Maturin goes and expresses his strong disapproval about the entire set-up to which Aubrey agrees to give Maturin the use of a couple of the ship's carpenters to create an acceptable sick berth.

## Chapter Three Analysis

This chapter demonstrates how it is useful to understand the British naval system of rank. Many readers would be confused as to why Aubrey, who has been promoted to Commodore Admiral (the lowest ranking admiral) would be wearing the uniform of a rear admiral (the next step above Commodore). Here, the author works into the story an explanation for readers unfamiliar with naval rank. Since Aubrey has one or more post-captains under him, he is entitled to wear the rank of a rear admiral. A post-captain is a captain who has actually earned the rank of captain and commands a rated vessel. On the other hand, a commander (just below captain) who commands a vessel is addressed as captain, though he is not actually a posted (his name posted as a true captain). None of this is essential to understanding the book, though it makes for a more interesting read.

Mrs. Williams gossiping about someone making inquiries about Clarissa Oakes foreshadows several events further in the book, which concerns one of the sub-plots about both Clarissa and Padeen.

Maturin's character and compassion is evident when he hires Pratt to find Diana and let her know that he understands why she runs off and does not blame her and to let her know the wonderful news that Brigid is coming out of her shell. It says much that Maturin responds in a compassionate way, rather than feeling jealous. This attitude of Maturin's contrasts to that of Aubrey who is cold and aloof to Sophie, which the reader later learns is a reaction to jealousy over the Reverend Hinksey, who is the curate on one of Aubrey's properties. Hinksey had at one time chased Sophia to convince her to marry him, but she runs off with Aubrey.

Brigid's blossoming so rapidly under the tutelage of Padeen seems too good to be believable, but at any rate, the narrator later explains how Padeen has a magical touch with animals also, which seems to be a way of convincing the reader that Padeen could truly effect such a change in Brigid so quickly. One can see how wise Maturin is when he suggests that no one make any fuss about Brigid's changes or to even acknowledge the changes as it may scare her back into her shell. Maturin's fatherly instincts are evident also as he basically threatens Mrs. Williams (blackmail in a sense) if she ever goes back to his home.

Aubrey's intense self-examination and indeed insecurity is evident here as in many of the other books of the series when he confesses his nervousness about his new rank and the responsibility it involves.

The esteem with which Aubrey and many of the rest of the crew of the Bellona hold Maturin is evident in their quickness to put to rights the situation about the sick berth quarters.



# Chapter Four

## Chapter Four Summary

Narration discusses the differences in the way the servants at Aubrey's home act between those who were formally at sea and those who have never been to sea. Killick, in particular, is difficult and has an altercation with the butler, Mnason, who is an authority on social affairs on land. Sophie holds a dinner for the post captains of Aubrey's squadron. Maturin had not planned on attending, but Sophie sends Killick to request the doctor's presence, who arrives late with apologies. Maturin is seated between somewhat boring men, one Captain Thomas was the oldest man present and rather cross. When Maturin offers to slice the veal, Thomas learns that Maturin is the ship's surgeon and thereon refuses to speak any more to Maturin since he is not an officer in command.

Pullings speaks to Maturin about Captain Thomas saying that the captain does not use the allotted powder to practice the guns and that his ship and crew are basically all show and no substance. Pullings expresses the hope that Aubrey will get rid of Thomas. Aubrey does request of his superior to give him a different ship other than the Thames, which Thomas commands, but the Admiral tells him it is an excellent opportunity for Aubrey to get Thomas up to par. Aubrey learns later that day that the Laurel, captained by Dick Richards, will be joining the squadron, which pleases the Commodore since Aubrey taught Richards gunnery.

Maturin meets with his two assistants and they sort through and stow the medicines and bandages. Maturin mentions both a medicinal ointment that has a placebo effect and the coca leaves, which he believes is most useful to help depressed seamen. Maturin goes on at great length extolling the virtues of these coca leaves. As Maturin and his assistants are still working, Aubrey arrives to tell Maturin that a gentleman from the Sick and Hurt board wishes to meet with Maturin in Aubrey's cabin. The gentleman turns out to be a messenger from Sir Blaine, who requests Maturin to meet Blaine in a wooded area.

When Maturin meets Blaine, he learns that there is an investigation going on about the status of Padeen Coleman and Clarissa Oakes and their not-yet-granted pardon. The investigation is instigated by Habachtsthal, whom Clarissa implicated in an earlier novel as being a traitor and passing on English secrets to the French. Not only are they investigating Oakes and Coleman, but Maturin is in danger of coming under inquest also and losing or at least having his assets frozen. Blaine subtly suggests that killing Habachtsthal would solve all the problems, but Maturin is unwilling to do that. In the end, Maturin decides to take Coleman and Oakes to Spain where they are safe and to also take the majority of his assets, which happen to be in gold bullion, to Spain.



## Chapter Four Analysis

It is interesting, although not unexpected, that Maturin remembers men by whatever disease or wound he has treated them. For example, Aubrey tells Maturin that the Laurel will be joining the fleet, which is commanded by Dick Richards, and asks Maturin if he remembers the man. Maturin remembers that he treated him for bad acne.

It is ironic that Maturin, who is an intelligence agent, asks Aubrey out loud when they sail and Aubrey has to remind him that it is best not to mention such things aloud.

When Aubrey brings up the medicines in sick bay, he mentions a truly awful smelling ointment he got from a Turkey merchant. Maturin says that the stuff smells so badly, that the sailor has no doubt that he has been dosed with some powerful stuff and that belief is more healing than anything else. This is an interesting passage because it describes what modern psychologists and physicians call the "placebo" effect whereon if one believes a medicine will work, then it will even if it's only a sugar pill. This scene demonstrates Maturin's great powers of observation as pertains to his position as a doctor of medicine. During this same session with his assistants, Maturin brings up the topic of the coca leaves, which he got while in South America. Maturin believes the leaves to be a cure for depression, nervous anxiety and offers mental clarity. It is also interesting to note that the health benefits of coca leaves are still being debated today.

The entire meeting with Maturin and Sir Blaine is about a situation that O'Brian's book *Trulove* is based upon. Clarissa Oakes is able to identify the man, Habachtsthal, as a spy and traitor, so Habachtsthal is attempting to get rid of her and Maturin.



# Chapter Five

## Chapter Five Summary

Stephen rides back to Portsmouth anxious at the news from Blaine and wishing that he had brought some cocoa leaves to calm his nerves. Near the gallows he is almost overtaken by the pursuit of thundering hooves, but manages to speed his mare, Lalla, on and reach the town gate of Portsmouth safely. He stops at an inn for a drink and reflects on the true mission of Jack's command. A British agent named McAnon has uncovered a plot by the French for a secret invasion of Ireland. A French squadron, ostensibly bound for the West Indies, will depart from Lorient and steer to Bantry Bay on the southeastern coast of Ireland. Jack's orders, which he will not open until he is at sea are to intercept the invading squadron.

Stephen returns to the Ballona. Captain Thomas of the Thames is leaving the Commodore's office when Stephen arrives. Stephen overhears him telling Jack that something will not happen again, before Thomas emerges from the cabin looking angry. He leaves and Stephen goes in to see his friend. Stephen asks Jack if he can borrow Ringle, one of the fastest ships in Jack's command, for an urgent trip to London. Stephen admits that the trip is a private matter and that he intends to be in London only long enough to load up a few trunks. Jack consents immediately and with little questioning.

Jack tells of his day making the fleet ready. He tells Stephen that he met an old friend of theirs, Bob Morley, who had recently arrived at Portsmouth to find his wife six months pregnant. Morley had been gone from home two years and was hurt and angered by the news. Jack knew that Morley was notorious for carousing and fraternizing with women in foreign ports while he was away. He tried to suggest to Morley that he can hardly blame his wife for doing what he himself did, but Morley tells Jack that it is different for women.

Ringle departs and soon reaches the river Thames. They anchor at Greenwich and Stephen tries to pay a visit upon Mr. Lawrence, a friend and fellow doctor whom he wishes to consult about Brigid's developmental condition. Mr. Lawrence is not in when he calls, but he is able to stop by Mrs. Broad's to see Emily and Sarah, who are happy in London. Stephen visits Mr. Hinkley, his lawyer. Mr. Hinkley tells Stephen that his money has been withdrawn from the bank and placed in crates marked Double-Refined Platina by their thief-taker confidant Pratt. The money has been stowed in a copper warehouse and is ready for offloading to the Ringle.

The crates are loaded in the early morning and Ringle departs but is slowed by a strong wind which is blowing in from the west-southwest and has many of the slower boats windbound. Ringle ends up windbound at Deal with many ships. Stephen is anxious of the delay, especially as it means he will not be able to get the ship back to Portsmouth



for the departure of the Commodore's little fleet. The Ringle eventually manages to escape out of a narrow straight at high tide.

Stephen returns home and tells Clarissa that they must flee to Spain. They take Brigid, who is under the care of Stephen's servant beginning to speak, though she still prefers to speak in Irish. Padeen comes along as well. They load up their possessions and ride for the Ringle.

The Ringle races for the northern coast of Spain. She is briefly harassed by a French lugger, but outsails the larger ship and arrives safely at the Spanish port of Carunna. Stephen arranges for his gold to be deposited in the bank. Stephen persuades his military contacts in the city to provide an armed escort to take Clarissa, Brigid, and Padeen to his Aunt Petronilla's, where they will be staying. Stephen promised Padeen a farm in Ireland if he will consent to go with Clarissa and Brigid and care for them for a year and a day. They part company and Stephen advises Captain Reade that they may be able to rendezvous with Commodore Aubrey's fleet at an island called The Berlings.

## Chapter Five Analysis

Stephen has noticed moments of callousness creeping into Jack's interactions with people. He believes that this uncharacteristic tendency is becoming more prominent. He worries about the strain of such a large command, coupled with Jack's secret fears that Sophia may be tempted in his absence to begin an affair with a former rejected suitor. The suitor is now a pastor of the local parish and who seems to be showing up a great deal at Ashgrove Cottage, Jack's estate.

There is a mark of feminism in Jack and Stephen's talk of Bob Morley. In a realistic sense, this conversation seems somewhat anachronistic, but then O'Brian has made his main characters exceptional in many other regards so that it is not much of a stretch for the reader to imagine them to be uncommonly progressive. When Jack suggests that he could help Bob Morley call the other man out, in other words, to challenge him to a duel, Stephen finds this a contradiction. He asks Jack how he can advise Morley to show charity and forgiveness to his wife, Christian values, as Stephen points out, but then advise and even help facilitate bloody revenge with regard to the cuckold. Jack flees from ethics to mathematics, telling Stephen of the quadratic equation and how the solving the equation often produces two answers because of the squaring of the values. Both of these answers, says Jack, are valid, even though they are contradictory. These sorts of mental constructions and evasions have been used for centuries by people of supposedly benevolent religions and values in order to justify barbarity.

Stephen finds that his money is imperiled by the possible boarding of the Ringle by the French lugger. For the first time in his life, money seems to mean something to him. Without the gold ensconced in the hold, he will not be able to provide for his now fugitive family. This is a typical theme in stories of the aristocracy. Rich aristocrats are often brought low suddenly, their fortunes taking a turn, from their point of view, from



largess to destitution. This is not so much symptomatic of the volatility of their fortunes as much as it is a telling sign of their carelessness about money.



# Chapter Six

## Chapter Six Summary

The Ringle arrives at The Berlings to find Jack putting the fleet through its paces in a series of tough military drills. Captain Thomas of the Thames, a neat and orderly man who slave-drives his men to keep his ship spotless and orderly but whose military credentials are suspect, is furious at what he sees as the Commodore questioning the military readiness of his crew.

Stephen boards the Ballona and finds Jack in a foul mood because of the general poor performance of the ships in the exercise. Stephen tells Jack little of his flight, though he spends a great deal of time telling his friend of the many seabirds he saw on the way from Carunna. Jack repeats the drill on Ballona to show the other ships what times he expects and his experienced crew performs much better.

Stephen looks in on Mr. Gray, the ship's second lieutenant, who Stephen's assistant believes was suffering from an "attack of the stone," meaning a kidney or urinary stone. Stephen confirms this diagnosis and gives the lieutenant some laudanum so settle him down in case surgery is required later.

Bonden and Killick meet in secret to discuss the Commodore's foul mood and general despondency. Killick tells Bonden that it is rumored that Jack and Sophie fought during their berth and that they have possibly parted ways. Jack, says Killick, was upset over the way Sophie had handled some of the affairs of his estate in his absence, in particular the handling of the estate of Frank Pengelley, an old seaman and friend. It seems that Parson Hinksey, Sophie's old courter had advised her on many of her decisions and Jack was sore and suspicious of the parson's intentions. There was also an incident involving a dinner hosted at Stephen's cottage when Stephen was away in London. Clarissa Oakes hosted a dinner that was attended by Sophie and the Parson. Clarissa apparently wore her best dress, which was made from a Javanese silk that Jack Aubrey had purchased for her on their voyage back from New South Wales. Jack had sent some of the silk in the same bolt back to Sophie. Sophie arrived at the dinner in a dressed made from this material, and the whole dinner was an awkward affair because of the two identically dressed women. Killick claims that Sophie came home and tore the dress off and declared she would never wear it again. Sophie suspects, incorrectly, that Clarissa had an affair with Jack on the journey back to England. They quarreled further and Sophie apparently flung her wedding ring out the window. Jack slept his last two nights ashore in the summerhouse and Sophie slept in her dressing room with the door locked.

Stephen and Jack have dinner and Stephen describes his dinner with Parson Hinksey in London. Stephen tells Jack that he finds Mr. Hinksey a charming and learned man. He relates how Hinksey had informed him of his engagement to a Miss Lucy Smith.



Jack then repents of his treatment of Sophie, and Stephen advises his friend that both he and Sophie must give up the wretched habit of jealousy or it will tear them apart.

## Chapter Six Analysis

Jack has good cause to be suspicious of Captain Thomas and the Thames. He has learned from the Admiralty that Captain Thomas has not used one tenth of the artillery budget allotted to the ship for drills and practice. When the Ringle approaches the fleet, Stephen and Captain Reade are stunned to see ships practicing canon-work from both sides of the ships at the same time. This all-barrels-out work is highly unusual for drills.

The conversation between Bonden and Killick cannot be taken as wholly reliable, and the reader is left in doubt as to the facts about the quarrel and the degree to which it has escalated. Stephen's subsequent conversation with Jack seems to confirm much of the story though, and Jack even repeats some of the same words that Killick attributed to Sophie. There is a great irony that plays out during the conversation, for Stephen, who is unaware of his friend's newfound hatred of Parson Hinksey, talks at length of the man's good qualities, including his good looks and appeal to other women. Jack is consumed with jealousy throughout Stephen's descriptions and responds to his friend with terse, gruff replies. When Stephen mentions Hinksey's engagement, Jack's aspect changes completely. His rage and jealousy move rapidly to guilt, and after first trying to rationalize some of his behavior by saying that Sophie too handled the matter irrationally, he seems to accede to Stephen's frank analysis of the situation and of his own poor conduct.

The conversation between Bonden and Killick is riddled with colloquial 19th century language, most of which is left unexplained. The modern reader will be forced to look up several phrases. A particularly pertinent example of this occurs when Killick and Bonden describes the Commodore's possible separation from his wife as the two having "parted brass rags." This phrase is used repeatedly in place of a clear description of what the two sailors think has occurred between their Commodore and his wife and its meaning is helped out very little by the context.



# Chapter Seven

## Chapter Seven Summary

The operation on Mr. Gray went well, but he quickly fell prey to an infection and was buried at sea before the fleet got underway. The fleet leaves The Berlings with the Thames bringing up the rear and having a difficult time keeping up. Jack thinks that this has nothing to do with her seaworthiness or the work ethic of her men but more to do with the lack of sailing experience of her captain, Mr. Thomas. Jack has yet to open his orders and does not yet know of the secret mission of the fleet.

Jack finally opens his orders and learns of the Irish invasion. He is delighted with the mission but is unsure how to approach Stephen about the subject, since Stephen is of the opinion that Ireland, his native land, should remain free of British rule. Stephen tells Jack that while he sincerely hopes that England will not use the act of defending Ireland as an excuse to annex the nation, he has no wish for his home country to fall under French rule.

Jack calls a meeting of all captains to review the exercises and discuss the assignment. The captains do not yet know about the secret mission, so the talk is the stealth methods of the slave trader ships. Jack asks Captain Thomas, who has been on this mission before and who reportedly owns lands in the Indian Ocean, for his opinion on the situation. Captain Thomas becomes immediately defensive and asks Jack why he was singled out.

Captain Howard tells Stephen that he has a captain's mate named Whewell on his ship who was born in Jamaica and has much experience with the slave trade. Howard wonders if Jack would like to talk to this Whewell even though he is not an officer. Stephen assures Howard that Jack would, and Howard lets it slip that Whewell once served on a slaver owned by Captain Thomas's family. Jack's summons Mr. Whewell to his cabin and they talk of the slave trade and the common practices of the slaver ships.

Mr. Gifford, the surgeon on the *Stately*, pulls Stephen aside to mention a problem on his ship. William Duff, the captain of the *Stately*, is, according to Mr. Gifford, a pederast, and that he has been ordering some of the younger boys in the crew to report to his cabin alone. The crew is uneasy about the whole affair. Stephen questions the validity of the information and is in general dismissive of the information.

Jack grants Mr. Whewell a field commission of the lieutenant, partly in recognition of the man's continued aid in planning their prevention campaign, and partly because the planning sessions are often running long into dinner and it is a rule in the navy that only officers may dine at the captain's table.

Jack confesses to Stephen that he does not understand how he is to carry out his orders of taking the slave ships by surprise when news of his mission and of the



composition of his fleet have been trumpeted from half the papers in Europe. Stephen suggests that this was done intentionally to assure the French that his command would be busy along the African coast and would be nowhere near to aid Ireland.

The squadron captures its first slave ship, the Nancy. The captain pretends to be Spanish and presents his papers to Stephen. Stephen sees through this ruse, declares that the man is English, and throws his papers over the side. The Nancy is boarded and sized. Jack tells the five hundred or so slaves aboard that they will be taken back to Sierra Leone and set free. Jack sends Mr. Whewell and the crew of the Ringle ahead to Sierra Leone with letters to the city governors. He also asks Mr. Whewell to look into hiring some Kroomen, local shipping merchants, to help guide the ships of the squadron into the nearby rivers and estuaries to raid slave ships that may be hiding there to await the squadron's departure.

## Chapter Seven Analysis

Jack hints to Stephen that he was dissatisfied with an article in a London paper announcing his new command and his mission to help stamp out slave trafficking on the Africa coast. Jack is not an abolitionist and agrees with Lord Nelson that putting a halt to the slave trade will doom the British navy. Jack knows that Stephen is against slavery and the disagreement is a sticking point in their friendship, so he does not dwell on the subject. He does confess to Stephen that he secretly hopes that the sealed orders he is about to open will divert him from this mission to a more direct confrontation with the French. Stephen, who knows that Jack's true mission is to intercept a French invasion fleet, but who does not relish the idea of another naval battle, suggests offhandedly that Jack might find the mission to disrupt slave traffic more fulfilling than he presently thinks. Stephen also informs Jack that if he wishes to placate Captain Thomas and get better work out of the man, he need only mention his views on slavery. Stephen says that he had a conversation with Thomas during which Thomas expressed similar views, including his agreement with Lord Nelson, and his doubt at a fleet of this type being able to run down fast schooner slave ships, much less cover so much territory along the coast. Thomas also told Stephen that the Holy Writ condoned slavery.

Stephen's attitude toward French rule is likely at odds with my Irish Catholics. France at this time was a Catholic nation and thus from a religious perspective, many Irish would choose France over England, because becoming part of Great Britain would require them to officially convert to Anglicanism. Stephen is well aware that his views in this respect are at odds with many of his countrymen and he mentions this to Jack.

Captain Thomas becomes overly defensive when Jack asks him about the slave trader. The reaction is so strong that it seems obvious that the reader is supposed to draw the immediately conclusion that the land that Captain Thomas own in Java is people with slaves. His reaction to Jack's inquiry reeks of guilt, and it is possible that his foul mood so far in the mission is a result not only of his disagreement of the cause, but his secret violation of the law. Less than a page later, O'Brian pulls the trigger on this setup when Captain Howard tells Stephen of the captain's mate Whewell who has served on a



slaver owned by Captain Thomas. Howard tells Stephen that it is known by some in the navy that Thomas violates the abolition laws, nor is he the only one. Officially this state of affairs is kept quiet.

Mr. Whewell's speech to Jack could easily be taken as the author's indictment of slaver. The conditions aboard slave ships is discussed in brief, but sickening detail.

When Mr. Gifford informs Stephen that Captain Duff is a homosexual, Stephen questions not only the validity of the charge but the immorality of the act. He tells Mr. Gifford that he abhors an informer far more than he abhors a sodomite, and that the practice of pederasty is rooted in classical tradition. Stephen mentions Achilles, the Homeric hero, and others. When Captain's Duff barge arrives from the Stately for the captain's dinner, Jack remarks humorously to all that Captain Duff's bargemen are so finely dressed, and he wonders how a boat full of ladies managed the passage. Stephen watches Captain Duff closely during the dinner and concludes that the man "with no hint of those traits usually associated with unorthodox affections." Stephen hopes that Jack's little jest will be enough of a warning to Captain Duff and that the matter will not come to a head in some other way.

Stephen is aghast at the conditions aboard the Nancy. When they first approach the ship they see two young dead black girls dumped over the side of the ship to be torn apart by the waiting sharks. The reek of the ship is described in great detail, and Jack, who does not have Stephen's medical detachment to call upon to handle the situation, soon returns to the Bellona and takes a long bath in an attempt to rid himself of the smell and the feeling of unclean. In his subsequent conversation with Mr. Whewell, the timbre of his voice betrays his feeling of disgust. He confirms with Mr. Whewell that the penalty for slave traders in Sierra Leone to be cut in half. Stephen asks Mr. Whewell if the conditions aboard the Nancy are typical of the slave ships. Mr. Whewell shocks Stephen by telling him that the Nancy was in relatively good shape, and that he has seen far worse.



# Chapter Eight

## Chapter Eight Summary

The squadron arrives in Freetown and Jack makes a show of firing off his guns and sinking the now empty Nancy in the channel. The following morning, the Aurora, one of Jack's ships who had conducted a midnight raid on the river that adjoined the town, returned escorting at least five schooners, two brigs, and a ship, all slavers. The men in Jack's command are thrilled at the prospect of the prize money to share, there was a bounty on freeing slaves, and on the perceived chance of shore leave in Freetown and Sierra Leone. They are greatly disappointed to learn that the Stephen has forbade shore leave to all.

Mr. Whewell describes for Jack and Stephen the events of the raids. Jack is glad to learn that the slave ship fired upon his raiders. This was good news as international law would then consider those aboard the slaver pirates and the ship forfeit. He asks Mr. Whewell about the papers of the ship commanders. Mr. Whewell assures Jack that the papers were largely "lost" during the raids.

Stephen takes a trip into Freetown, quizzing his Kroomen guide about the local flora and fauna. He visits a Mr. Houmouzios, an intelligence operative in the city. Stephen exchanges some intelligence correspondence with Houmouzios and asks if he could use his contacts in the city to help Stephen acquire some coca leaves from Peru. The Krooman, whose name is Square, agrees to remain aboard the Bellona and guide the doctor on some naturalist expeditions into the surrounding country. Stephen is preparing to take his first trip into a nearby swamp when Jack tells him that the squadron is heading off for Philip's Island, a port known for slave trading that may not yet have heard of Jack's activities in Freetown. Stephen begins to consider what flora and fauna he could see on Philip's Island when Jack tells him that his new plan is to keep the bigger ships, Bellona included, out of the sight of land, within hailing distance of Camilla and Laurel who will act as intermediaries between them and the smaller vessels like Ringle, which are to prow the shores, rivers, and estuaries.

At dinner that night, after the captain and Mr. Pullings have been called away, the talk turns to homosexuals. A fight breaks out between some of the officers of the Bellona and a visiting officers of the Stately. The officers of the Bellona comment that "sodomites" will never be real men and that they do not know how to fight. Stephen brings up Patroclus and the Theban Legion but is not heard in the argument. The officer from the Stately takes the whole conversation as impugning the fighting readiness of his ship. Order is restored without violence, but Stephen thinks it was a near thing.

The squadron arrives at a Philip's Island with an empty bay, but intelligence gathered from the nearby Kroomen traders indicates that three slave ships are due to arrive in the next few days. Jack decides to take most of the squadron out to sea and out of sight of



land, but he offers Stephen the opportunity to remain ashore to get in a few days of naturalist exploration with Square.

## Chapter Eight Analysis

Mr. Whewell's account of the papers of the slaver's captains being "lost" during the raids is understood by both to mean that Jack's raiders took care to destroy or toss into the water any official papers they might have found. Jack tells Stephen that he had been informed by the governors of Sierra Leone that while the state condemned slave trade, there were official legal methods of getting such charges dropped and that ship's manifestos and other mission papers were often acceptable as evidence even if forged. Jack thus was careful to tell his raiders that it would be more convenient for any such papers that they found while searching the ships to be "lost." This explains Stephen's quick and unexplained dismissal of the papers of the captain of the Nancy. Stephen too had tossed the papers over the side of the Bellona immediately, much to the Nancy captain's horror, for this was akin to a sentence of death.

Stephen's current addiction to coca leaves is becoming more acute. He is taking larger doses as his body becomes used to the affects of the drug and as his dwindling supply loses its potency with age. There is some irony in the fact that Stephen forbids the sailors shore leave after dark in Freetown but undertakes the trip himself partially for the purposes of procuring drugs to fuel his addiction. Stephen perhaps does not see this irony, for his is still rationalizing his self-dosing and maintains a belief, common at the time, that such drugs, taken in moderation, are salubrious. Stephen tells Jack that the reason the men may not go ashore after sunset is the "miasmata." This is apparently a reference to the miasma theory, an early theory of medicine which held that disease like cholera and chlamydia were brought on by miasma or foul air. This was before medical science had elucidated the role of germs and viruses in disease.

Stephen is greatly disappointed that the squadron will move before he is able to see any of the natural surroundings, but he recovers his spirits when he considers the Sinon, the river that passes near to Philip's Island, and which contains all manner of exotic wildlife. Stephen's interest in naturalism reflex a fad common among learned, upper class men in the 19th century. This fad for naturalism infected many in the aristocracy by the advancement of the natural sciences and culminated in works like Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* and Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species*.





# Chapter Nine

## Chapter Nine Summary

Stephen returns from his excursion upon the *Sinon* with numerous samples of the flora and fauna. He tells Jack about his adventures with Square and then undertakes to write it all down. But he finds that he is feeling off color and has no energy to write, and even his coca leaves cannot boast his energy levels. He takes his temperature and discovers he is running a slight fever. He consults with his assistant physician William Smith and they determine that Stephen may have a case of yellow fever, a very dangerous illness that has afflicted several of the raiders who went ashore at Freetown as well as a number of the liberated slaves. Stephen is lacking the swelling of the head and the anxiety that often accompanies the fever. Smith sees this as a hopefully sign, but Stephen wonders if his use of coca leaves has granted him some immunity to those particular symptoms. He tells Smith how he is to be treated and dosed if he is too delirious in the coming days to proscribe for himself. Though he believes the yellow fever to not be a contagious disease, he decides to quarantine himself in his quarters while the illness runs its course.

Stephen is ill with yellow fever for several weeks and very nearly dies. He returns to full consciousness at last, his strength sapped, but the disease ebbing, to find that the expedition has proceeded down the coast, capturing a eighteen slave ships including a large schooner bound for Havana, and is now approaching the port of Whydah. Whydah, a port notorious for its involvement in the slave trade marks the end of the expedition's southern journey. Jack tells Stephen that once Whydah and its environs has been liberated, he intends to turn north and catch the trades back into the northern Atlantic for his rendezvous with the French invasion squadron.

Stephen senses that Jack's dark mood has returned and asks the cause, given the success of the squadron. Jack says there are two causes. The first is that the wind has taken a bad turn and he worries that when they are done in Whydah they will make little headway back to the trades. The second is that the fleet is, in his opinion, still in poor fighting shape, despite the action they have seen and the drills they have run. Jack tells Stephen that he has had to work hard in secret to keep the crews of the *Stately* and the *Thames* from mutinying, the one because the officers are at odds with the homosexual captain, the other because of Captain Thomas's tyranny and general incompetence. Jack says that Captain Duff has been too obvious in his preferential treatment toward his favorites and that the other officers on board says they have evidence of his proclivity. Jack reminds Stephen that the naval penalty for sodomy is hanging. Thomas, by contrast, has the full support of his close officers, men he has picked out and set in place around him, each of whom is, according to Jack, much like their captain, cruel and barely competent.

Mr. Whewell returns from scouting ahead to Whydah. He reports to Jack and Stephen that news of the fleet and its mission has finally preceded them and that Whydah has



been deserted of slave trade traffic. Jack turns the fleet in toward the port and arranges the ships in a line to fire a cannonade as a show of force. Mr. Whewell tells the doctor that he has procured the specimen of a female potto, a kind of sloth, which Stephen had been longing to see. Mr. Whewell brings the creature aboard and leaves her with Stephen.

The fleet leaves Whydah and is met by a propitious wind that comes on suddenly and drives them at full sails back up the coast. The sailors become convinced that Stephen's potto is good luck and has brought with her the favorable winds. At Stephen's insistence, the ships put in briefly at St. Thomas island, to refill their medical stores which have been cleaned out treating the numerous cases of fever and other ailments. The young marine officer from the Stately and the Bellona officer at whose words he had taken offense many months before, fight a duel there and both men are killed.

The fleet arrives in Freetown and Stephen is disheartened to learn from Houmouzios's assistant that his master is travelling and will not be back for several days. Stephen begins to walk toward the swamp when he is called back by a messenger from Jack. The Commodore wishes Stephen to come to dinner with the Governor. At the dinner, Stephen is introduced to Christine Wood, whose brother is a member of the Royal Society. Both she and her brother are naturalists and have studied Stephen's writings. Stephen knows her by reputation and they get on well from the onset. She invites him to return the next day to study the creatures in her extensive gardens.

It is the dry season in Freetown and Stephen agrees to grant shore leave for all. Jack expects a stay of at least a week as they made up so much time with favorable winds and are ahead of schedule for their rendezvous with the French fleet. He brings Stephen a letter from Clarissa in Spain, which tells of their agreeable life under the care of Stephen's aunt. Brigid's is biddable, and learning her letters, though Clarissa tells Stephen that the child has some difficulty deciding which hand to write with. Enclosed with the letter is a picture Brigid has drawn of a wolf. Jack too has received mail, and he tells Stephen jubilantly that the letter contains good news from Sophie.

Stephen has lunch with Mrs. Wood, and learns that she once owned a potto. She shows him the bones of the creature who died some time ago. He asks her if she would consent to taking over care of the female potto he has been given, as he cannot bring himself to take the creature to the north, out of its tropical home. She consents gladly.

Stephen visits the newly returned Mr. Houmouzios who gives Stephen a fresh supply of coca leaves and three coded letters. Stephen returns to the ship to decode the letters, and discovers that all are from Blaine. The first says that the French invasion plans appear to be proceeding but the second informs Stephen that the timeline of the invasion might have been stepped up and that he must advise Jack to proceed with all due haste to the point of interception. The third letter is in a personal code that Stephen believes he recognizes but that he cannot make out, though he believes that it contains the word Diana.



Jack orders all hands to return to the ships. Stephen takes the female potto ashore and gives her to Mrs. Wood, taking his reluctant leave of the young woman. Within twelve hours, the fleet gets underway.

## Chapter Nine Analysis

Stephen reflects calmly on the extremely high mortality rate of yellow fever. He decides that the most important thing he can do in order to survive the sickness is to maintain his will to live. He thinks of his daughter and his desire to see her again. It is the patients who lose hope, he thinks, and stop fighting, who usually succumb.

The author uses a device of heading each of the stages of Stephen's illness with what are intended to be medical quotes about each stage. These dispassionate paragraphs frame the miserable and nearly lethal realities of Stephen's battle with yellow fever. Throughout the ordeal, Stephen experiences moments of lucidity, during which he falls back upon his training as a doctor and natural scientist. He asks about the symptoms he is exhibiting and about the progress of the illness. He overhears passing sailors, whose voices filter down the vent that affords his private chamber a bit of the fresh sea air outside. Twice he overhears them making predictions of his eminent death.

Jack uses the word "sodomite" to describe Captain Duff, but he tells Stephen he regrets using the word. Jack says that the situation is unfortunate because Duff is a good seaman, and that Jack likes the man. Moreover, Jack says that he does not care whether the man is a sodomite or not. The problem is that he cannot make Duff see that such behavior from the captain, with his position of authority on a man-of-war, will not do, and is a great danger to the performance of the crew and the loyalty of its simple sailors.

Stephen is delighted by the prospect of a return to Freetown. There is more to this than a simple desire to return to his family. His anxiety betrays itself when Jack mentions the return, and it is clear to the reader that Stephen is near to, or has already run out of his supply of coca leaves, and that he is desperate to return to Freetown to see if the order he has placed with Mr. Houzoumios has arrived.

Stephen and Christine Wood get along well and Jack congratulates his friend later for monopolizing the only pretty woman at the dinner. Stephen talks of Christine's remarkable knowledge of the natural world and the two marvel that she could have married someone so dull as James Wood, an naval officer they both know.



# Chapter Ten

## Chapter Ten Summary

The fleet is eight days out of Sierra Leone, and nearing the point where the most recent intelligence has indicated they can intercept the French fleet. Stephen is still unable to decipher the final message from Blaine, though he is sure that Diana's name is mentioned in it.

Finally, the Ringle spots a ship of the line flying American colors escorting two transports toward the rendezvous area. Jack keeps the Ringle ten miles off, watching the ships with her private colors showing. The second message had contained news of possible American involvement. The appearance of the American ships seems to confirm this. Jack hopes to tail the American to a rendezvous point with their French allies, so that he may engage the invasion fleet upwind, seizing the nautical equivalent of the high ground.

The fleet watches the rendezvous from a distance and follows the French and American squadron northeast toward Ireland, waiting for the opportune moment to begin the confrontation. The English squadron was clearly gaining on their quarry, and Jack contemplated leaving the Thames, which was struggling in the rear behind in order to overtake his target, but a sudden squall quashed this idea as the wind shifted to the west and the day became almost as dark as night. The storm abates and the following morning Jack's squadron corners the bulk of the French squadron in a rocky bay, trying to make land. Four full French troop transports are captured along with a the flag ship and with it the French Commodore. Bellona takes heavy damage in the fight but is able to limp along with half the crew at the pumps. Stately, which engaged the other French ship of the line was bested but not sunk, her adversary escaping along with another troop transport. Stately, her topmast and foremast both gone requires a tow to Bantry.

The citizens of the village that lies in the bay where the French had been corner were many of them inclined to attempt to help the French. But Stephen gives an impassioned speak in Irish about the evils of Bonaparte and succeeds in calming the mob.

While in Bantry, Stephen is visited by Stanislas, his wife's servant. Diana, as it happens is staying nearby with some relatives. She had in fact fled to Ireland before Stephen's return to Barham Down. On the way to his reunion with Diana, Stanislas informs Stephen of the sudden death of the Lord of Bachtschal. Stephen arrives at the estate where Diana is staying and is greeted warmly by his wife.

## Chapter Ten Analysis

As the fleet nears the point of interception, both men are filled with anxiety. Jack is filled with the fear that the French have slipped past him and Stephen is filled with dread at what the news the undecipherable letter might contain about his Diana.



The author's use of nautical terms and descriptions is so complete that the modern reader is likely to be completely baffled by the description of the naval chase. This detail, while lending the work a feeling of great authenticity is confusing even upon further study. The actual battle itself, contained as it is within a few paragraphs, is an anticlimax, considering it has been an event constantly looming on the horizon throughout the book.

The sudden and inexplicable death of Stephen's enemy, Bachtschal, as well as his and his wife Diana's immediate reconciliation are both examples of deus ex machina. Diana comments on Stephen's pallor and his awful thinness. To some extent this is to be expected after his long months at sea and battle with yellow fever, but coupled with the fact that in Bantry Bay Stephen is shown to be taking his pulse which is quite high, it is an indication of the effects of his addiction to the cocoa leaf. The outcome of this plot point is left over and addressed in the next volume of the series.



# Characters

## Captain Jack Aubrey

Captain Jack Aubrey is the seasoned captain of the *Surprise*. Both were eventually retired from the Navy, but despite its condition and age, Aubrey's favorite sailing vessel is always the *Surprise*. Aubrey sailed all over the Mediterranean Sea in the *Surprise* and conducted many strategic operations for the Navy. Despite Aubrey's many voyages and his loyalty to the crown, further promotion in the Navy continued to allude him. This was a constant source of frustration for Aubrey, but he has now been recognized for his abilities and has received notice in chapter one of his probable appointment to Commodore Admiral.

Jack Aubrey is one of two principle protagonists of the novel and shares the spotlight with his particular friend and confidant Stephen Maturin. Aubrey is a larger-than-life character with charisma and dash. He is an unchallenged master in his element of the sea; a legendary captain, a masterful navigator, and a superb tactician. Although he is intelligent he relies on experience, insight, and a nearly infallible instinct to carry him through the various perils he encounters. Aubrey wears his blonde hair in a long queue and dresses as a traditional ship's captain. Aubrey is very athletic, possessed of an almost super-human vigor, great strength, and an incredible constitution. He is also particularly fond of food and drink, and Maturin often cautions him against becoming overly corpulent; his weight fluctuates wildly. Aubrey is handsome and fairly useful, though his good-looks are marred by a variety of scars and combat-related wounds including an ear sliced apart in an old encounter and various scars on his head. Aubrey is usually quite useless on land though on military occasions he proves useful enough.

## Stephan Maturin

Dr. Stephen Maturin was trained as a naval surgeon. He sailed along with Captain Aubrey on his missions to provide care for the crew as required. When the crew were not in need of his services Dr. Maturin amused himself by obtaining local wildlife specimens for observation. He cataloged each one and amassed an expansive collection. He was also employed as a British intelligence officer, although this position was clandestine. Dr. Maturin's heritage is a mixture of Irish and Spanish, and he could pass for additional nationalities as well. He was rather bookish and unassuming in appearance, but once engaged in conversation his intelligence was unmistakable. Dr. Maturin is married to a woman named Diana. Due to the demands of life at sea their relationship was carried out across long distances. He was loyal to her and loved her, contrary to popular belief. In order to keep his disguise and fool the French, Dr. Maturin faked an affair with Mrs. Fielding. Dr. Maturin enjoyed music and played the cello well. Maturin is one of two principle protagonists of the novel and shares the spotlight with his particular friend and confidant Jack Aubrey. Maturin is a quiet man who much prefers the closeness of a study to the attention of others; his personal expertise lies in the area



of medicine and he is also a natural scientist of some repute—for example, van Buren has read Maturin's work. He is an unchallenged and undoubted master in his element of medicine and science and his medical opinions are surprisingly modern and always correct. Although possessed of great financial means, he cares nothing for the finer things in life and champions political causes that are obviously doomed simply because they are philosophically correct.

From time to time, Maturin's relationship with the intelligence service is complicated, especially as he has become entangled and identified in the past. Maturin is a small, squat man who in many respects is the antithesis of Aubrey. He weighs about nine stone, or 126 pounds. Maturin is much given to introspection, subtle interpretations, and Byzantine analysis of the current situation. He is nearly entirely mental, with little interest in physical activities—though capable enough in combat when the time comes. Although he is possessed of a nearly preternatural constitution, Maturin is not notably dexterous or strong, though his physique is rarely a handicap to his desires. Although he can be overly-confident of his abilities, he is nearly always correct in his analysis of situations and people. Like Aubrey, Maturin derives great pleasure from music and is a capable musician. In the past Maturin has been strongly addicted to laudanum, a situation that is referred to in several early passages in the novel. He now occasionally chews "coca leaves" to satisfy his craving for an altered state.

## Tom Pullings

Pullings has served under Aubrey as a lieutenant during previous novels in the series. He eventually gained promotion to captain, largely through Aubrey's efforts. On the expedition to Africa, he served as captain of the *Bellona*. He is an enthusiastic and optimistic captain, a devoted supporter of Jack Aubrey, and an extremely capable navigator, seaman, and officer.

## Diana Villiers Maturin

Diana Villiers is exceptionally beautiful; indeed, physical beauty and sexual allure are clearly her dominant features, and she easily controls most men through her physical charms. Maturin is still quite smitten with her, though they have been married some years. Villiers has long, jet black hair and a long, slender neck. Villiers is the cousin to Sophie Aubrey, Jack Aubrey's wife, and has a long and complex history that is fully developed in several prior novels. She had accepted a previous marriage proposal from Maturin before absconding to America with Harry Johnson to avoid possible legal complications. Maturin rescues her from this situation and stands by her during a pregnancy that results in a miscarriage. They eventually marry and Diana manages Maturin's home and has bought a place to raise Arab horses. Maturin finds that upon his return in *Commodore*, Diana has sold all her horses and left to parts unknown, leaving behind her and Maturin's young daughter, Brigid.



## Sophie Aubrey

Sophie is an exceptionally beautiful and very devoted woman and the mother of Aubrey's three children—twin girls and a younger boy. Sophie's character and her engagement and marriage to Aubrey are all treated at considerable length in prior novels. Sophie's mother, Mrs. Williams, is a notorious and penurious boor who has in this novel become involved in a somewhat shady numbers racket. Sophie's natural disposition is trusting, open, and honest. She is held in particularly high regard by most of Aubrey's friends, including Maturin who values her as a particular friend. While Aubrey is at sea, Sophie writes him long and frequent letters, informing him in an open style of her whereabouts and doings. Aubrey devours the letters and sends his own to Sophie. Sophie's sexual activity is muted, however, and following the birth of their last child, the Aubreys have been entirely platonic, much to Aubrey's dismay.

## Clarissa Oakes

Clarissa Oakes, though a minor character in *Commodore*, has appeared in previous novels; in fact, one previous novel features her almost exclusively as the main character. As learned in the *Trulove*, Clarissa is probably born c. 1787 in England; she becomes an orphan early in life and is sent to live with her guardian, who sexually abuses her and allows creditors to do the same. Clarissa is intelligent and insightful, and has a strong, steady and positive effect on Maturin's young daughter.

## Padeen Coleman

Padeen is Maturin's servant, or steward, and is responsible for keeping Maturin's clothing and cabin in good order. He also acts as the ship's loblolly boy, or a type of unskilled medical assistant. He is described as large and physically powerful. He speaks only halting English and is usually very quiet and reserved. Maturin finds him trustworthy and competent, and is drawn to him because of their shared heritage and similar viewpoints; in particular, Maturin values Padeen's quiet nature. Coleman plays a pivotal role in helping Maturin's young daughter blossom.

## Preserved Killick

Killick is Jack Aubrey's steward and has been a faithful, if cantankerous, servant for many years. Killick is keenly aware that his personal fortunes are inextricably linked to Aubrey's success and ensures that Aubrey is always presented in the most favorable circumstances attainable. Beyond professional interest, however, Killick is a loyal friend and defender of Aubrey and goes to great lengths to provide hot coffee, good food, plentiful drink, fresh fruit, clean clothing, and other amenities under often-difficult circumstances. Even so, Killick's irascible behavior and stunning insubordination are a constant but minor irritant to Aubrey. Killick often serves as a sort of comic relief within





the narrative; his presumptuous and rude lines delivered in a whiny nasal tone set Aubrey's teeth on edge.

## **Sarah and Emily Sweeting**

Sarah and Emily Sweeting are two Melanesian girls who are taken from their home town by Maturin as the sole survivors of a plague; they act as ship's boys, for the most part. Although female and frequently naked, their young age prevents them from being seen as sexual objects. Maturin bring the two girls to his home to be eventually turned over to a village woman to be raised.

## **Barrett Bonden**

Barrett Bonden is Aubrey's coxswain. He is the most dependable character in Aubrey's crew, even serving as manservant to Maturin and Aubrey while ashore. Bonden often fruitlessly attempts to educate Maturin on nautical terms and methods, a subject for which Maturin has a seemingly-purposefully blind eye. Bonden was born on the lower gun deck of the *Indefatigable*. Bonden also informs Maturin of negative happenings among the crew; Maturin then deals with the situations or carries the information to Aubrey, as appropriate.

## **Sir Joseph Blaine**

Sir Joseph Blaine is the head of the Naval Intelligence office and as such he is fantastically knowledgeable about virtually any topic tangential to politics, the military in general, and the Royal Navy in particular. Sir Joseph is a thoroughly patriotic and entirely reliable man, not given to histrionics or political trends. He instead is completely focused on pursuing goals which further the interests of England. He shares a close friendship with Maturin; aside from both being involved in secret intelligence work, both men are avid naturalists and scientists. Sir Joseph also admires Maturin's dedication to the work and not the remuneration.

## **Brigid Maturin**

The young daughter of Stephen and Diana Maturin, she is quiet and extremely reserved and does not talk at the beginning of the book. Later, Padeen begins teaching her Irish, and the two of them become close buddies, Padeen able to bring her out of her interior world.

## **Dick Richards**

Captain of the *Laurel*, one of the new sixth-rates. When asked by Aubrey if he remembers Richards, Maturin replies that he remembers he had acne so badly that they



called him "Spotted Dick" (p. 97). Aubrey mentions that he taught Richards gunnery, so he is likely quite good at fighting with the ship's guns.

## **Habachtsthal**

A gentleman who instigates an investigation into the legal status of Oakes and Coleman and who also fingers Maturin as the person who brings the two into England illegally. In an earlier novel, Habachtsthal is implicated by Clarissa Oakes as part of a treasonous triangle of spies who are passing information to the French.

## **Captain Heneage Dundas**

The captain of the *Bernice* is an old friend of Jack Aubrey's. They return to England together after meeting up in the Indian Ocean and Jack kindly agrees to lend Dundas some of the prize money won by the *Surprise*, so that Dundas may avoid debtor's prison.

## **Pratt**

A thief-taker and friend of Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin, Pratt arranges for Stephen's gold to be smuggled out of London.

## **Mrs. Broad**

Mrs. Broad runs a boarding house in London. She initially took in Clarissa Oakes upon her return to England. Stephen leaves the Sweeting sisters in her care.

## **Mrs. Williams**

Sophie Aubrey's mother is a stern, manipulative woman. Stephen warns her that he will not tolerate her meddling in his affairs.

## **Fanny, Charlotte, and Geogre Aubrey**

Jack's brood are all still young children. They are energetic and happy, and are thrilled at their father's return and his promotion.

## **William Smith**

Stephen's assistant surgeon aboard the *Bellona*, William Smith cares for Stephen during his outbreak of yellow fever and is largely responsible for Stephen's surviving the ordeal.



## **Brendan Lawrence**

Jack Aubrey's London lawyer, who along with the thief-taker Pratt, helps Stephen smuggle his gold out of London and fly from charges of treason about to be leveled by his enemy Habachtschal.

## **William Duff**

William Duff is the captain of the *Stately*, a ship in Jack's squadron. His men suspect him of being a sodomite. He is a large, good-natured man who Jack describes as a capable seaman and good captain.

## **Captain Thomas**

Captain Thomas is the captain of the *Thames*, a ship in Jack's squadron. Stern and cruel, he torments his crew to keep his ship looking spotless, but he is, according to Jack, completely incompetent as a seaman.

## **Mr. Whewell**

A sailor with extensive experience in the slave trade, who Jack employs to help guide the squadron's prosecution of slave ships on the west coast of Africa.

## **Mr. Hinksey**

The new parson of a parish in Portsmouth is an old courter of Sophie. Jack suspects the man of intentions toward his wife until he learns of Hinksey's impending engagement.

## **Mr. Houmouzios**

Stephen Maturin's secret intelligence contact in Freetown. Mr. Houmouzios successfully procures for Stephen a new supply of coca leaves, to which Stephen has become addicted.

## **Square**

A Kroomen trader with intimate knowledge of the coastal area around Freetown, Square guides Stephen on several naturalist expeditions.



## Christine Heatherleigh

Christine is a noblewoman and scientist living in Freetown. She takes an immediate liking to Stephen and the two spend hours discussing naturalism. Stephen is much taken with the woman and part of him is disappointed that she is married.



# Objects/Places

## Surprise

Surprise is a private man-of-war, owned by Stephen Maturin, and captained by Jack Aubrey and then Tom Pullings. She was French-built and has previously been known as L'Unité, Retaliation, and Retribution. Her figure-head is a gilded woman with an ample bosom and a look of surprise on her face. She displaces about six hundred tons, has a crew of about two hundred men, and carries a main armament of twelve-pounder long guns. Her crew is composed of unusually able seamen including Awkward Davies and other named individuals.

## Telescope

Aubrey has a telescope set up in his observatory, from which Aubrey can see individual ships in the harbour some distance away.

## Violin

Maturin hears Aubrey playing the violin in the very early hours of morning. Maturin is awestruck at Aubrey's virtuosity on the instrument.

## Coca Leaves

Maturin frequently chews coca leaves and maintains a massive stash of the stimulant in a strongbox. When Lord Blaine is agitated and says he cannot sleep for worry, Maturin offers him some of the leaves, saying chewing them will give him clarity and calmness. Later, Maturin tells his two surgeon's assistants about the leaves, which he says he can use to treat the mental ills of the crew. At the end of the adventure, Stephen is showing pronounced signs of mental and physical degradation due to his overuse and addiction to the drug.

## Cello

Stephen Maturin accompanies his friend Jack on the cello, though he is not nearly as accomplished with his instrument as Aubrey is with the violin.

## the Ringle

A schooner of the style known as a Baltimore Clipper, the Ringle is the fastest and most agile ship in Jack's Fleet. Stephen borrows the Ringle for his flight to Spain, and the



vessel plays a critical role as the scout ship for Jack's squadron in the battle with the French invasion fleet.

## **the Stately**

A ship in Jack's squadron, the Stately is commanded by Captain William Duff. The officers of the ship are in constant danger of mutiny because of the perceived proclivities of their captain.

## **the Thames**

A ship of the line commanded by the tyranical Captain Thomas, the Thames sustains heavy damage during the battle with the friend and must be towed to Bantry Bay.

## **the Bellona**

Jack's command ship is a huge ship of the line, with an extra deck and heavy armaments. The Bellona is nominally commanded by Tom Pullings, and Stephen Maturin serves as her surgeon. Jack's Commodore's pennant flees from her mast.

## **the female potto**

A slothlike little primate who is given to Stephen by Mr. Whewell and which Stephen subsequently entrusts to the care of Christine Wood. When the potto is brought aboard the Bellona, a favorable wind arrives to speed the ship back up the coast toward Freetown, and many of the sailors in the squadron come to regard the little animal as a good luck charm.

## **secret orders**

Jack receives a set of secret orders when he leaves England, and which he does not open until his ships have completed an exhausting series of military drills. The orders reveal that after journeying to the west African coast Jack is to double back and intercept a French invasion fleet.



# Themes

## Slavery

Slavery and the abolitionist movement are key concepts in the *Commodore*. Jack Aubrey, in his first mission as a Commodore of the British Navy, is given the assignment of ferreting out slave trading ships departing from the west coast of Africa. The transition from the condoning of slavery to the rise of abolition in England was less bloody than the same transition in the United States, but there were still a great many difficulties. Many members of the English aristocracy and of the growing merchant class had financial interest in the slave trade. In the story, Jack Aubrey is concerned about Captain Thomas's ability to perform his duties after he hears a rumor that the man has property in Java and is reported to own slaves. Later, Mr. Whewell informs Jack and Stephen that Captain Thomas's family has been in the business of slaving for years. When asked about slavery and their current mission, Captain Thomas expresses his doubt that intercepting slave traders, returning slaves to the coastal cities will do much good. He also brings up the fact that the Bible condones slavery. Jack too is not decided upon the issue, though he tends to side with the opinion of Lord Nelson, who has said that the end of the slave trade will be the end of the British Navy. When Jack witnesses firsthand the conditions of some of the slave ships that the squadron captures, and when Mr. Whewell describes their normal practices, a change of heart seems to overcome him. He is clearly furious at the treatment he witnesses and though he never tells Stephen outright that he has changed his mind about slavery, the vehemence with which he executes his mission from that point on seem to indicate that he has changed his mind about the barbaric practice.

Mr. Whewell's descriptions of the horrific conditions aboard slave ships, of their cramped spaces, rampant disease, and high mortality rate, act as shocking invectives against the practice. These images are reinforced firsthand when Jack's squadron captures a slave ship, the *Nancy*, and Jack and Stephen see for themselves the state of the vessel.

## Homosexuality

Though the word is never used in the book, homosexuality is a frequent topic of discussion among the characters, especially Jack and Stephen, who have several long talks about "sodomite." Jack has to contend with a possible mutiny by the officers of the *Stately*, whose captain, William Duff, has been taking some of the younger boys of the crew to his cabin and who is suspected of being a sodomite. Matters are not helped by the fact that Captain Duff seems to be playing favorites with the, as they are often called in the book, "ladies" of his crew.

Both Stephen and Jack show progressive attitudes toward the subject, though, in fact, they would say that they show "classical" attitudes. They frequently bring up the condoning of homosexuality and even pederasty, the love men with boys, in classical



literature like Homer's *The Illiad*. Jack tells Stephen that homosexuality has always occurred in secret in the British Navy. Officers who were given to the "proclivity" were discouraged to be as discreet as possible, and though the penalty for sodomy was hanging, this had not occurred within Jack's memory, and incidents were usually covered up with transfers of either the offending officer or the offended crewmen. Jack attempt something along these lines by transferring members of the *Stately* crew he feels are fomenting mutiny. Jack tells Stephen that he rather likes William Duff, and that he does not care if the man is a "sodomite," so long as he commands his ship well and is a good seaman.

The conflict eventually results in a duel, when a member of the *Bellona* makes an offhanded comment about the *Stately* not being in fighting shape because of its many "ladies." A marine from the *Stately* takes offense at the remark and the two men end up killing each other in a duel on St. Thomas island.

## Authenticity

Authenticity is a central theme of all of Patrick O'Brian's Jack Aubrey novels. The level of historical detail extends not only to nautical terms and concepts, but to colloquial language, manners and customs, social mores and figures of speech.

The book is thick with the terms and concepts of nautical life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The beginning of the book contains a full-page drawing of a three-mast square-rigged ship, with each of the twenty-one different sails labeled. Throughout the book, O'Brian employs a style of high realism in the nautical details. Few of the terms are explained, but are flung at the reader almost nonstop, in both the prose and in the complicated dialogue of the sailors. The author leaves up to the reader the task of looking up the terms and trying to make sense out of the unfamiliar terms and expressions.

At times, the author's insistence on such immersive realism is taken so far that even a careful reader can become easily confused as to what is going on. This is particularly pronounced when the author is describing navigation, and in particular, it is nearly incomprehensible in the description of the chase of the French fleet.

It is not just nautical terms that require research by the reader. Terms like "attack of the stone," and "to part brass rags" are slipped into important conversations, occurring again and again with little explanation and only a faint hope of divining their meanings from the context. This attention to realism allows the author to create a vivid and immersive world, but any careful reading of the book requires the use of some outside reference materials.





# Style

## Style

### Point of View

The story is told in the third-person with the point of view changing between a number of characters. For the most part, the action stays with Jack or Stephen, with Stephen taking the preponderance, but the author makes frequent dalliances into the minds of bit characters. On a few occasions the intended point of view is difficult to guess. It could be either Jack or Stephen, but the writing is detached to the point of sounding like omniscient third-person narration. The author does not always mark changes in the point of view with breaks or new chapters, but sometimes switches on the fly between the characters.

The characters are for the most part reliable in their narration of the events. There are few instances, during Stephen's bout with yellow fever and during his ongoing addiction to coca leaves, where Stephen's descriptions of the events around him become cloudy and suspicious. But even in these moments, his natural analytical character tends to keep him as grounded as the situation will allow him to be.

### Setting

The book takes place largely aboard the various vessels of Jack Aubrey's squadron, and in particular on the flagship, the *Bellona*. The author uses realistic and laboriously researched language to immerse the reader in the experience of sailing aboard a nineteenth century ship of the line.

There are several other locales, exotic and mundane, that the characters visit during the adventure. Portsmouth is a trading port in Hampshire on the southern coast of England. It is the home berth of Jack Aubrey, Stephen Maturin, and most of Jack's regular crew.

Freetown is the capital of the western African nation of Sierra Leone. Its deep water harbor has long been one of the principle trading ports on the Atlantic. Freetown is surrounded by estuaries fed by the Sierra Leone river and is teeming with a wide variety of flora and fauna. Stephen Maturin decrees that the crew of the squadron are not to have shore leave after dark in Freetown because of the miasmatic vapors, but he cannot stay away from the wonders of its surrounding nature and employs a local named Square to guide him.

Saint Thomas's Island, or Sao Tome, as it is called in Portuguese, is a large tropical island south of the Bight of Benin. Stephen insists that Jack stop at the island to refill the squadron's medical supplies. It is here that the officer from the *Bellona* and the marine from the *Stately* kill each other in a duel.



## Language and Meaning

There are two separate strains to the language in the book. The first revolves around nautical slang and colloquial nineteenth century common English. Nearly every utterance of a sailor in the Commodore's squadron contains a word or phrase whose meaning requires research on the part of the reader. Phrases like "attack of the stone" and "to part brass rags" are presented without explanation, and it seems as though the author is not only attempting to satisfy his reader's craze for authenticity, but inviting him to take it upon himself to delve further and study the language and history on his own.

The second strain involves Stephen Maturin specifically, and to some extent Jack Aubrey as well. Stephen is the principle narrator of the story and his descriptions are peppered with nineteenth century scientific terms and phrases. This is true not only of his descriptions of his medical practice aboard the *Bellona*, but also of his obsession with the scientific study of nature. He is constantly returning to this obsession and his language switches immediately to a scientific mode. As an example, when Stephen talks of an animal, he will say its common name first, but will almost always, even if he is speaking aloud, follow up by saying the creature's scientific name, its binomial nomenclature.

Jack and Stephen also employ frequent references to classical literature. Most of these are mentioned in passing and not explained to the reader. Often heroes or characters from classical literature are employed as descriptive adjectives or phrases such as the expressions "like Patroclus" or "take Achilles."

## Structure

The book contains ten chapters that are structured primarily around changes of scene. Though the story contains a few chases and escapes, it is not structured dramatically, with rises and falls in tension, but is a sprawling tale of constant movement and action.

The story has three phases. The first concerns Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin's return to England. It concludes with Jack sailing away with his new command and Stephen flying from eminent arrest in London on the *Ringle*. The second phase encompasses Jack's mission to root out slave traders on the western shore of Africa. This phase also contains a secondary plot about Stephen's growing addiction to coca leaves and his near death from yellow fever. The second half of this phase is left to the reader's imagination, as the point of view stays with Stephen during his bout with yellow fever, during which he is too delirious to observe the events around him. His return to full consciousness marks the end of the second phase. The third and finally phase of the story involves Jack's pursuit and capture of the French invasion fleet, as well as Stephen's homecoming and the reunion with his estranged wife, Diana.

The story ends with the *deus ex machina* of Stephen's sudden and unexpected reunion with Diana and the correspondingly unexpected news of the death of Lord Habachtschal, Stephen's enemy and the man who was seeking to have Stephen arrested for treason.



## Quotes

"Clearly they wanted to know what he had accomplished, and in all probability this extreme haste meant that they were having some difficulty in representing the matter in a favourable or even tolerable light to their Spanish allies" (p. 20).

"As he did so a blackbird shot across the road right under the horse's nose, cackling loud. Abhorson gave a violent sideways leap, a turning leap that threw Jack with perfect ease—a heavy, heavy fall, jack's head hitting the stone that marked his boundary" (p. 29).

"Let the flower open" (p. 62).

"Listen,' said Stephen, 'I think the balance is exceedingly delicate at this point and I dare not make any move at all—dare not rush blundering in'" (p. 63).

"He looked coldly at each in turn, and then in a carefully controlled voice he said 'I have just discovered that this—this vessel, for I will not call it a vile hulk, has a sick-berth that would disgrace a Turk, a sick-berth that a parcel of Hottentots would blush for, so they would'" (p. 87).

"I am very obliged to you Jack, my dear,' said Stephen" (p. 114).

"Two long heaves, with the ship rolling seven degrees, all her teeth showing; and on the next rise the gun-deck bow thirty-two pounder uttered its enormous sullen roar, shooting out a stab of flame that lit the whole jet of smoke, and its ball struck barrel-staves from the target" (p. 154).

"I will tell you something, Jack: both you and Sophie are afflicted, deeply afflicted, with that accursed blemish jealousy, that most pernicious flaw, which sours all life both within and without; and if you do not heave your wind you may be hopelessly undone" (p. 164).

"But hardly had the Doctor turned before the radiance in Jack's face, smile, eyes dropped by two or three powers: the French clearly intended another invasion of Ireland, or liberation as they put it, and he felt a little shy of broaching the matter" (p. 169).

"I will not pretend to misunderstand you,' said Stephen, 'but I must tell you that I abhor an informer very much more than I abhor a sodomite'" (p. 179).

"Why, Stephen,' he said, looking up, 'I was so sorry to dash your spirits about the fetid swamp; but I dare say the miasma would have done you as much harm as an ordinary unlearned cove'" (p. 209).

"No. They have tied me to a stake: I cannot fly, but bear-like I must fight the course,' said Stephen with a creditable smile" (p. 216).



"He is a good kind fellow, and he handles his ship like a prime seaman, but he seems incapable of taking a hint,' said Jack on returning" (p. 246).

"How quickly those last few hundred yards fled by! At one moment you could still notice a full or that damn fool of a Thames, and the next you were in the full deafening roar of battle yardarm to yardarm, the barosides losing all unity and merging into a continuous iron bellow" (p. 276).



## Topics for Discussion

Discuss the treatment of slaves aboard the slave ships. How does this treatment affect Jack Aubrey?

Describe the nineteenth century fad of naturalism and use Stephen Maturin as an example of an enthusiast for this fad.

Discuss the ways in which the author uses authentic details to tell the story. Is this detail always a positive?

Describe the various attitudes of the characters in the story toward abolition.

Discuss Stephen's use of the coca leaves. How does he rationalize his abuse of the drug?

Compare Jack Aubrey's opinions regarding homosexuality to the popular opinion of his times. How does this compare to the popular opinion of our times?

Give a detailed portrait of Captain Thomas.

Describe how Jack and Sophie become estranged.

In your opinion, what is the difference between punctiliousness and competence? Does the former always require the latter? Site examples from the book.