Commodore Hornblower Study Guide

Commodore Hornblower by C. S. Forester

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Captain Sir Horatio Hornblower has retired to his country estate where he is the local squire, welcomed by his tenants and beloved by his wife and son. He is called back into service as a commodore to lead a fleet of English ships to the Baltic Sea, where he is instructed to damage French interests and, if possible, draw both Sweden and Russia into the greater Napoleonic wars on the side of England. Hornblower prosecutes his duty with zeal and, against all odds, accomplishes his orders with aplomb.

The novel is the eighth volume in a series and as such, most readers will be intimately familiar with Hornblower's many exploits and accomplishments. The novel frequently refers to these events as having happened during a prior time; thus, even for new readers, Hornblower is established as a capable and resourceful officer. He is often plagued by self doubt and almost always tortures himself with deep introspection and second-guessing his own decisions. Yet in action, he flawlessly makes the right choices at the right time and takes decisive action when such is warranted.

Hornblower is called up from the life of a country gentleman of means and given the office of commodore, leading a flotilla of English warships to the Baltic Sea. The Napoleonic wars have engulfed Europe and only England stands against the French tyrant. Sweden and Russia maintain a delicate neutrality in the face of increasing French aggression, and Hornblower is ordered to bring them into the war on the side of England. He proceeds to the Baltic with dispatch and encounters a French privateer, which shelters near a Swedish fortress. When Hornblower determines the Swedes will not eject the ship, in conformance with international law but over Napoleon's interests, he contrives to destroy it from a great distance. An outraged Napoleon orders an army into Swedish Pomerania as a reprisal; thereafter, Sweden enters the war against Napoleon.

Hornblower then proceeds to Russia, where he meets the Czar and engages him in political discussion. The Czar is convinced of England's naval power after touring Hornblower's flotilla, and sends an insulting response to Napoleon's incessant demands for concessions. Within days, Russia and France are also at war. Hornblower is then instructed to support Russia in any way possible. He takes his ships to Riga, where the Russians prepare a major defensive position. A huge French force closes on the city and a prolonged siege occurs where it seems that, eventually, the French must emerge victoriously. Hornblower consults with the local military leaders, including the Prussian defector Clausewitz, and together they lead a successful defense of Riga. Hornblower aids materially by several audacious plans that are executed with perfection. After months of siege, the French fail to take the city. Defections from the French occur constantly, and then plague and typhus sweep through the malnourished French army. The Russians counterattack and drive the French into full retreat. Hornblower meets with the rear-guard, composed of Prussian troops, and convinces them that their best interest lies with defecting from the French cause and taking up Prussian independence.

Shortly after this series of resounding successes, Hornblower becomes ill with typhus and collapses into fever. After weeks of illness, he regains himself and recuperates enough to travel home to England. There, he makes his report to the Admiralty and then quickly travels home where he meets his wife and child in a joyful reunion.

Chapters 1, 2 and 3

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Summary

Captain Sir Horatio Hornblower has retired to his country estate where he is the local squire, welcomed by his tenants and beloved by his wife and son. He is called back into service as a commodore to lead a fleet of English ships to the Baltic Sea, where he is instructed to damage French interests and, if possible, draw both Sweden and Russia into the greater Napoleonic wars on the side of England. Hornblower prosecutes his duty with zeal and, against all odds, accomplishes his orders with aplomb.

Captain Sir Horatio Hornblower is a naval captain of long accomplishment. He has recently retired to Smallbridge as the squire, a town which he largely owns. The date is early 1812, probably late April. Accompanied by his wife, Barbara, and his son, Richard, Hornblower settles down in a large and comfortable home, well staffed with servants, including Brown, his former bosun and now his man-servant. Hornblower and Barbara practice the peculiar habit of bathing daily; after their baths they dress in finery. Hornblower feels awkward in the fashionable clothes selected for him by Barbara, and yearns to wear a simple naval uniform instead. Once properly dressed, Hornblower, Barbara, and Richard leave their house and are presented to the assembled townsfolk as the new squire and landowner. The town parson performs the introductions and notes Hornblower's many accomplishments, the town children sing a song, Hornblower makes some formal pronouncements of goodwill, and the stilted episode concludes. Hornblower retreats into his house and shortly after receives a communiqué from the Admiralty in London. They politely order him to London at his earliest convenience. There, he is to be appointed commodore of a small fleet and sent on an unspecified mission. Overjoyed at the prospect of returning to the sea, Hornblower makes immediate preparations to depart. Barbara sadly resigns herself to the absence of her husband.

With Brown driving the horses, Hornblower sets off immediately for London and arrives after several hours on the road. He straightens his clothing and enters the Admiralty, where he meets Admiral Louis. Hornblower bluffly accepts the command without any pretense at reservation; Louis informs him the destination is the Baltic, where he will be largely autonomous on a complicated political mission. He will command a fleet including Nonsuch, a seventy-four gun frigate; Lotus and Raven, sloops-of-war; Moth and Harvey, bomb-ketches; and Clam, a cutter. Louis then accompanies Hornblower to the office of The Marquis Richard Wellesley, K.P., His Britannic Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Richard is Barbara's brother and hence Hornblower's brother-in-law. Wellesley informs Hornblower of the complicated political mission and then asks Hornblower who he would have as captain of Nonsuch—without hesitation, Hornblower asks for, and receives, his old friend Bush.

Wellesley then delivers Hornblower's verbal orders and offers advice. Hornblower's mission to the Baltic will be complicated by the political situation obtaining during the

Napoleonic Wars. Denmark and Norway are strongly aligned with France. Finland is newly conquered by Russia. Sweden and Russia remain ostensibly neutral but fairly belligerent toward England—their long-term intentions are unclear. Several independent cities in the Baltic area are aligned with, or have been conquered by, France. After the meeting, Hornblower retires to his lodging and paces the floor for hours, contemplating his orders and their implications. His walking is interrupted when the innkeeper politely informs him that the gentleman lodging below Hornblower is bothered by the relentless, mechanical pacing. Hornblower laughs at his own good fortune and peculiar habits and retires for the evening.

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Analysis

The introductory chapters of the novel proceed rapidly and set the tone and texture for the remainder of the text. Several key characters are introduced, including Hornblower, Brown, Barbara, Richard, and Wellesley. For Hornblower, Barbara, and Brown, basic characterization is provided as well as some character background. As the novel is intended to be read as the eighth volume in an ongoing series, most readers will be intimately familiar with Hornblower's lengthy career of distinction—new readers need not worry, however, as the text contains an atomic story and the salient points of history are blocked out in general detail. Many events and even individuals presented in the novel are derived from historical reality. External events can thus be strongly dated and the bulk of the novel's primary timeline takes place about 1812.

Hornblower, at thirty-six years of age, is clearly a man of consequence on or off the sea. His nineteen years of naval exploits have lifted him from a seventeen-year-old common, poor midshipman to the rank of post captain and now a landed squire. He has a son, Richard, from a previous marriage—Richard's mother having died in childbirth. Hornblower met Barbara Wellesley in a previous volume in the series and the two characters have been strongly attracted to each other since shortly after their first meeting. Barbara, also a widow, married Hornblower shortly after the death of his first wife. She usually flares with irritation when others assume Richard to be her biological son, though her love for Hornblower leads her to restrain most public commentary on this topic. Barbara's brother is the current Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and hence Hornblower's brother-in-law. The relation certainly benefits Hornblower's political and military progress, though he is indeed a completely competent commodore in the event.

Hornblower's orders give him wide latitude of personal interpretation. Nominally under the command of Sir James Saumarez, Hornblower will act nearly as if on detached command under his own recognizance, though he is enjoined to take particular advice from Braun, an agent who will join him. In general, Hornblower is to influence Russia to enter the war against France, influence Sweden to enter the war against France, and damage French interests in any way reasonably possible—the usual mix of nearly impossible goals, frustrating limitation, and meaningless grandiloquence offered by the Admiralty. In short, Hornblower is allowed to his own recognizance, and is expected to execute without flaw.

Chapters 4 and 5

Chapters 4 and 5 Summary

Hornblower and Barbara ride in a coach through Upper Deal. Hornblower watches the weather and wind while Barbara explains her numerous and expert preparations for his comfort aboard ship. They reach their objective and exit the coach amidst much fussing by Barbara, which Hornblower attends to only half-heartedly. Brown hires transport to the ship and Barbara insists she accompany Hornblower at least that far. Copious luggage is loaded and they embark across choppy seas. Hornblower is pleasantly surprised that he does not immediately become seasick, while Barbara continues to fuss and worry. Upon reaching the ship, they say a final goodbye and Hornblower clambers up the side of Nonsuch, spurning the bosun's chair. Hornblower's arrival is greeted with much pomp and circumstance, his pendant is flown, and the fleet fire cannon salutes appropriate to his station as Bush greets him warmly. His baggage stowed, Hornblower gives a final wave to Barbara as she returns to shore. The flotilla immediately departs for the Baltic.

Some time later, Hornblower sits in his cabin while Brown stows his baggage. Brown calls attention to a cased set of pistols, which are a surprise to Hornblower. He inspects them and discovers they are a gift from Barbara, in case such should be necessary. The matched pair of muzzle-loading pistols is of the finest quality, each with double rifled barrels of steel. They are percussion locks, the first Hornblower has ever seen, and the case includes crafted ammunition, patches, and percussion caps. Hornblower inspects them at length and appreciates Barbara's thoughtfulness. He then studies his surroundings and listens to all the ship's peculiar noises. They all comfort him except one—a rhythmic stumping on the upper deck which he cannot place. Finally, the sound drives him to distraction and he mounts to the quarterdeck. Bush and the lieutenants freeze into immobility at the appearance of the commodore, and the noise stops. Eventually Hornblower realizes it is the sound of Bush's wooden leg impacting the planks as Bush paces the quarterdeck: he is relieved to make the discovery before making a faux pas.

Hornblower then meets with Mr. Braun. Braun is an accomplished linguist and a man once of high station. The recent spate of war has driven him from his Finland home to Sweden, where he is now a nominal citizen. He speaks many languages and has cultural, social, and political experience which should prove useful to Hornblower. Hornblower dislikes the man and considers him a refugee, or "stateless" individual; Hornblower muses that Braun's Finland heritage will probably bias his outlook toward Russia who has invaded and controls Finland. After lengthy discussions, Hornblower dismisses Braun to dine with Bush. Upon learning that Braun is Finnish, Bush advises Hornblower to keep that information secret—superstition among sailors is rife, and they believe all Finns to be evil warlocks.

Chapters 4 and 5 Analysis

These chapters progress the plot in several ways. First, Hornblower joins his flotilla of craft and formally is introduced to Braun, who will influence Hornblower's mission in numerous ways. Second, the flotilla departs England and makes its way north; hence, Hornblower is once again on the water. Indeed, Hornblower taking to the sea completes the first major turning point in the novel's development and places the protagonist within the element which has made him famous. Events leading up to this moment are best viewed as set-up constructions which will inform the remainder of the text, as is common with novels of this type. Characterization is further developed for Hornblower, Barbara, and Bush, and is introduced for Braun. The contemporaneous political entanglements of the Baltic region are presented and discussed. As Hornblower will have to pass through a long and dangerous straight to reach the Baltic, it is critical to ascertain which coastal fortresses might prove hostile. Finally, the ships of the flotilla are developed somewhat.

The novel's texture shifts from the countryside routine to the nautical routine; there will be no more lectures from Barbara, and Hornblower becomes the great, reserved, infallible commodore. Note how Hornblower's orders are presented within the text to seem weighty and complicated without being clearly presented. He is to harm France if possible and turn Russia and Sweden against France—but this is obvious given the political situation. The nuances of Hornblower's orders are only gradually developed through the text. This places the reader in much the same position occupied by Bush—that of gradually diminishing ignorance. This construction makes Hornblower appear far more prescient than he is, and is an admirable fictive element.

Foreshadowing is fairly obvious within these chapters. Bush will continue to be loyal, capable, and unimaginative. Hornblower will, as always, be insightful, capable, reserved, and ridiculously nervous. The pistols presented by Barbara will certainly be used—if not fired—at a decisive moment—their ability, noted by Hornblower, to each fire two shots with sureness, rapidity, and accuracy will prove of note. Braun will prove tempestuous and brooding and Hornblower's trust of the man will always be reserved, and for good reason. Braun's hatred of Russia will become a cause of great difficulty in Chapter 12.

Chapters 6 and 7

Chapters 6 and 7 Summary

Brown wakes Hornblower early and he dresses in full uniform. Hornblower takes the deck before the flotilla enters the narrow straight of the Sound. The sea lane is scarcely three miles wide—Danish fortresses will certainly fire upon the English ships, but Hornblower hopes Sweden's neutrality will hold. He issues orders in a laconic drawl to give the appearance that everything is in control. Bush, long accustomed to Hornblower's habits, realizes that his affected demeanor implies something exciting is about to happen.

In May, 1812, the flotilla enters the sound, led by Lotus, commanded by the dependable and capable Vickery. Nonsuch brings up the rear. Hornblower feels that the lead ships will likely escape heavy fire because of surprise. Thus, Nonsuch will receive the lion's share of any damage and can also assist in towing any disabled vessel. For such an eventuality, Hornblower has caused towing gear to be readied in advance. The water shoals and the wind remains perfect for the evolution. As expected, the Danish fortresses open fire, but from great distance as Hornblower has the fleet hold to the Swedish shore as much as possible. The first fortress slips by without incident, and Sweden indeed remains neutral. Hornblower and Bush breakfast on the quarterdeck. Due to Hornblower's subtle suggestion, Bush dismisses the crew in shifts to also breakfast.

The next Danish fortress approaches as the water again shoals, though the wind remains perfect. The fortress is alerted and ready and opens fire immediately when the flotilla comes into range. The English ships return fire which is ineffective—their main goal is to rush through without damage. Then Harvey is hit and dismasted. The remainder of the flotilla passes by at full speed while Nonsuch backs sail and renders assistance. As a hot fire is exchanged, Harvey is cleared of wreckage and taken in tow. The process is much shortened by Hornblower's earlier preparation to tow, which is fortunate because the ships drift into dangerously shoaling waters. Harvey is then towed out stern-first and, once safe open water is reached, the flotilla assembles, repairs damage, and begins to cruise the Baltic.

After several days a sail is raised on the horizon; Hornblower is taking his morning bath on the open deck under a hose discharging fresh seawater pumped by the men. His bathing habits are highly unusual for the time. When the sail is sighted, he orders a pursuit which is subsequently made needless as the ship deliberately closes with the fleet and runs up an English flag. Nonsuch closes to within speaking distance with Maggie Jones and Hornblower hails her—humorously, still naked and wet from his shower. The captain, Clarke, explains that the ship is a merchant ship hauling timber to England; he also cautions that the ship is infected with smallpox. Hornblower quizzes Clarke on local political conditions and receives a ready and cogent analysis. Hornblower also hears a muted shouting from the forecastle, which Clarke insists is

caused by feverish crewmen. Hornblower believes the situation to be a ruse and orders the strange craft boarded. Bush is obviously uncomfortable boarding a ship possibly bearing smallpox, but follows orders. Upon boarding, Clarke surprisingly shoots himself in the head—soon enough Hornblower learns that Maggie Jones is indeed a timber ship originally destined for London but that she was captured by the French privateer Blanchefleur. Clarke, an Englishman, led the prize crew. Fearing hanging or worse for capture after treason, Clarke has attempted suicide. Clarke lingers on for several hours. Bush wants to hang him for treason, as a demonstration, but Hornblower feels such action would be cruel and without purpose. The prize crew is pressed or imprisoned and the merchant ship is restored to her rightful crew and allowed to continue her voyage. Hornblower realizes that he must sink, burn, or destroy Blanchefleur and also realizes that he has the element of surprise—humorously, still naked and damp from his shower.

Chapters 6 and 7 Analysis

It is interesting to contrast Hornblower's dressing scene at the opening of Chapter 6 to his dressing scene in Chapter 1. Here, he is in control of the clothing and process, whereas on land he was uncomfortable, awkward, and a bit ridiculous. His mental machinations about appearances are also telling characterization—he wants to appear thoughtful in all things, even dress, yet does not want to appear to be doing it deliberately, and hence he declines to shave. His next mentioned outfit in the text is his birthday suit—Hornblower stands naked on the deck, showering under cold seawater. When Maggie Jones is raised and all throughout the subsequent encounter, including the shouted political discussions with Clarke, Hornblower stands naked and wet on the quarterdeck. Clarke does not react to Hornblower's lack of clothes which should probably surprise Hornblower, had he not forgotten his own lack of clothing until after the encounter.

These chapters complete the setting transformation from England to the Baltic, as Hornblower leads his flotilla through the Sound and the narrow passage—in the Kattegat—between the North Atlantic and the Baltic. The passage is only a few miles wide and runs between Denmark and Sweden. Denmark is at war with England while Sweden is nominally neutral. Hornblower hugs the Swedish coast to avoid heavy fire from Danish fortresses. In the event, his passage is successful, though the ships take some damage. Bush looks upon Hornblower's successful navigation without serious loss as something of a minor miracle, though Hornblower considers it simply standard seamanship. Continuing his fortunes, Hornblower encounters Maggie Jones and discerns correctly that Clarke, her apparent commander, is not being truthful.

Hornblower is thus presented with an immediate problem which must be solved. The westbound trade to England, of timber, cordage, and other nautical supplies, will shortly begin. England is dependent upon receiving these stores. The French privateer Blanchefleur could wreak havoc with the merchant shipping amidst the confined Baltic waters. Thus, the ship must be destroyed or taken. Hornblower realizes his best chance of taking the privateer will be to surprise the ship before it knows of his presence in the area.

Chapters 8 and 9

Chapters 8 and 9 Summary

Hornblower holds council with Bush, Vickery, Cole, Mound, Duncan, and Freeman, the captains and commanders of the flotilla. He explains the political situation obtaining in the Baltic—Denmark is hostile; Sweden, Russia, and Swedish Pomerania are nominally neutral. A variety of other independent cities or small countries, including Prussia, have various allegiance to France. Hornblower himself does not know the answers to all their questions. They then disperse and start sweeping for the French privateer. A heavy fog rolls in just as a strange sail is raised. Hornblower enjoins the chase and things are made confusing by the fog. Signals are exchanged and Blanchefleur is cut off from escape and then cut off from a friendly harbor. She finally seeks shelter, anchoring in shoaling water within shot range of a Swedish fortress. Approach to her is made difficult by various sandbars, and Raven runs aground. Hornblower positions his flotilla to prevent her escape and then anchors to await developments.

Within a few minutes, three small craft exit the port and speed for Nonsuch. First, a Swedish boat approaches under flag of truce. Baron Basse boards Nonsuch and Braun translates for him—he insists that Swedish Pomerania must remain neutral. Hornblower points out that if Sweden allows Blanchefleur to remain in safe harborage than in point of fact Sweden is not behaving in a neutral fashion. Basse vacillates uncomfortably. Second, a French boat approaches under flag of truce. Count Joseph Dumoulin boards Nonsuch and Hornblower speaks to him in French. Dumoulin states that he intends to support Basse in a declaration of belligerent status for Swedish Pomerania. Third and finally, an English boat approaches under flag of truce. Hauptmann boards Nonsuch and advises Hornblower that he must take no action which would provoke Swedish Pomerania. Hornblower is flabbergasted to learn that Hauptmann is not only not an English citizen, but is an agent of a German state and hence an actual enemy combatant of England. Nevertheless, Hauptmann licenses trade permits to English ships. Hornblower is naturally confused by the situation as well as the fact that nobody speaks the same languages. He finally dismisses all the men with courtesy and summons his own captains to a meeting.

As usual, Hornblower determines on decisive action. While Raven warps off a spit, Hornblower transfers his command to Harvey. Clam runs into sighting position in deep water and takes the anchored Blanchefleur under observation. Harvey and Moth close with the privateer, though heavy sandbars intervene. Hornblower then observes as Mound operates his vessel's main weapons, two eighteen-pound mortars. The mortars, or bombs, are high-angle-of-attack weapons that throw a gigantic explosive shell in a parabolic trajectory toward the enemy. Hornblower has never seen them in action before and finds their usage fascinating. Using a series of hoisted signals, Clam observes the fall of the mortar shells while Harvey and Moth alternate firing upon the French privateer. Within a few shots, the bomb-ketches are scoring hits. The French ship casts off and attempts to make some headway but loses masts and catches on fire.

The plunging, explosive shots quickly wreak the ship and ignite the main magazine. Blanchefleur explodes in a cataclysm of fire. The English ships withdraw, having not entered into Swedish waters, and stand out to sea. Hornblower feels cold and drained, feeling as if he has murdered men rather than destroyed an enemy vessel.

Chapters 8 and 9 Analysis

Hornblower faces a conundrum in these chapters. Obviously his orders are to attack French interests whenever possible, and this certainly infers the destruction of the French privateer. Yet the political situation is complex—as made obvious by the bewildering panoply of political types that descend upon his ship. Napoleon's France has conquered many countries in Europe, including several Baltic States; it is worth noting that several of the political entities considered in the text do not exist in the present day. States that have been conquered by Napoleon's France are subservient to France and hostile to England. States that stand remain neutral—that is, not aligned with France—are fairly limited, but include Russia and Sweden. Hornblower must therefore destroy the French privateer without engendering ill will from Swedish Pomerania. While a lesser man might vacillate in such a confusing situation, Hornblower does not. His duty is clear—the French ship must be destroyed. His particular insight allows him to see that if the French ship is destroyed without technically violating the neutrality of the Swedish coast, then he must be held blameless. The bomb-ketch ships are thus brought into action.

The bomb-ketches are awkward ships, purpose-built around their primary weapons, two enormous mortars. The forward half of the ships have no mast and are instead given over entirely to a huge shooting platform built on a solid oak framework. To compensate for the lack of a foremast, the main mast is made overly-large and bears a tremendous press of sail. To remain nominally balanced, the mizzen is reduced somewhat in scale. The ships draw little water, are awkward sailors, and look bizarre. They have little to commend them, in fact, except for their mortars. These weapons fire eighteen inch shells at a high angle of fire, allowing plunging shot at remarkable distances. Further, the shells are explosive and have a fuse which may be cut to cause them to detonate approximately when they impact. They are a frightful weapon when used against stationary objects—against a moving ship they are nearly useless. However, Hornblower's fleet has a variety of capabilities. He uses the bomb-ketches in this instance and fires from afar upon the French privateer, quickly destroying her. As the French vessel cannot fire back in reply, Hornblower feels the deed more akin to murder than warfare.

Chapters 10, 11, and 12

Chapters 10, 11, and 12 Summary

The commanders of the fleet gather to Hornblower's mess and enjoy their recent victory. Braun has combed through local newspapers and presents Hornblower with various local interpretations of events. Hornblower learns of a vast Napoleonic army arrayed against Moscow, and a smaller army moving toward St. Petersburg—both capitals of neutral Russia are thus menaced. Hornblower is dumbfounded by Napoleon's seemingly limitless lust for conquest. Meanwhile, he knows that Barbara's two brothers, Richard and Arthur, will criticize any personal failure, and he is convinced he must act heroically. Within a few days, Baron Basse returns via ship to meet with Hornblower. Basse introduces Colonel Lord Wychwood of the First Guards. Wychwood carries dispatches from the English ambassador in Stockholm. Wychwood states that subsequent to the destruction of the French privateer, Napoleon has sent an army into Swedish Pomerania. Even so, Sweden has not officially declared war.

The various dispatches Hornblower receives request him to transport Wychwood to Russia where he will meet with the Czar. Wychwood and Hornblower discuss the political situation of the Baltic at length—it is apparent that Wychwood is particularly knowledgeable about the area. Hornblower fears he must take decisive action to mold the course of events, and wonders how Barbara will interpret his decisions. Hornblower considers and then orders the fleet to sail for Kronstadt. Soon enough they arrive and anchor. The Russian fortress greets them with proper honors and soon a message arrives by boat. Hornblower is invited to a dinner ball with the Czar. He takes some of his men, along with Braun to act as interpreter. Braun's behavior is awkward and strained and concerns Hornblower. They arrive at the palace and are introduced to many individuals. Hornblower is taken into a writing room, where he meets several politicians and a political discussion, full of innuendo and intrigue, takes place. An anonymous, handsome, pale young man attends the meeting, but does not speak and is entirely ignored. Hornblower recognizes him as Alexander, the Czar of Russia, but as the others ignore him, so too does Hornblower. Thus, the Czar is present but not officially so.

After the discussion, Hornblower moves to a great hall and is presented to many individuals. His rank and station cause him to be paired with Countess Canerine for dinner. He is amused at the antics of the Russian dinner; the guests mill about with small plates and take their food from a variety of small dishes arranged on tables around the area. Then, the Czar is announced. In a moment of clarity Hornblower suddenly sees Braun, above on the balcony, and realizes that he intends to assassinate the Czar. Hornblower excuses himself rapidly and runs up the stairs. Just as the Czar enters the room, Braun draws a pistol—one of Hornblower's double rifled pistols, in fact. Hornblower draws forth his sword and slices Braun's hand open. The pistol drops and Braun swoons. Yet all eyes are upon the Czar and the action goes entirely unnoticed. Hornblower gathers his men and they secrete the wounded Braun in a sitting room,

bandage his hand, and pour alcohol over him to make him appear simply a drunk. Eventually, Braun is returned to England with a dispatch courier.

Hornblower descends and joins the Countess, just as the Czar passes by and personally addresses Hornblower. The Countess is impressed, and thus Hornblower spends time with the Countess and she introduces him to caviar and vodka. Hornblower drinks more than he should and eats his fill before he realizes that the gathering is not dinner, but simply a hall full of appetizers. They move in to dinner and Hornblower, nervous, anxious, and flattered by the attention from the beautiful Countess, drinks more than he should. In time, the Countess captivates him and her sultry glance "set his brain creeping about inside his skull" (p. 149). After dinner, the Countess secretly meets Hornblower and they sneak off together and have sex.

Chapters 10, 11, and 12 Analysis

These three chapters form a minor story arc within the novel. Hornblower moves into the second phase of his complex mission—he meets the Russians and attempts to win them over to the English cause. His task is made much easier by the appearance of Wychwood, a fellow English soldier with vast political experience and, more importantly, local connections, influence, and understanding. Wychwood is conveyed to Hornblower by a small ship. Together, they discuss the situation and Hornblower orders the flotilla to move to a Russian port—this move toward Russia will become significant in later chapters. There, he is invited to the Czar's grand ball. Hornblower is socially backward and believes that the appetizers are the actual meal. He finds it humorous that the people are expected to eat standing up, holding a plate in one hand and eating with the other. He adapts, though, to what he supposes is the local dining custom and eats his fill from the various plates. The reader is privy to the real joke, which is at Hornblower's expense.

Much of the foreshadowing of Chapter 6 comes to fruition during this segment of the novel. Braun's intense hatred of the Russians is in fact not held in check and he plans to use his invitation to the dinner party to assassinate the Czar. He steals one of Hornblower's fine rifled pistols and will use this weapon to make his attempt. As it is sure-fire and accurate, any shot should suffice. At the last moment, Hornblower's somewhat intoxicated mind puts all the pieces together and he rushes to Braun and prevents him from shooting. Note that he uses his decorative "100 guinea" sword, functional but intended for parade and not combat. His officers then handle the situation so that, outside of the crew, no one is aware that an assassination attempt has been foiled. Hornblower realizes the assassination attempt must be kept secret—certainly the Czar would not look favorably upon Hornblower for bringing an assassin into his court, armed with Hornblower's own personal weapon.

The other major development of these chapters dealing with the Czar's party is the relationship between Hornblower and the Countess. She is decidedly beautiful and Hornblower finds her irresistible. This contrasts with his own pitiless self-examination which leads him to view himself as an aging man. In any event, the fact that the Czar

exchanges personal compliments with Hornblower is enough to woo the Countess. They flirt about all evening and then arrange to meet privately after the party begins to break up. By that time, Hornblower is more or less drunk; he meets the Countess ostensibly to view some private art collections, but they proceed directly to her bedroom and have sex. Hornblower's affair is casual and unusual for such a disciplined and purposeful man.

Chapters 13, 14, and 15

Chapters 13, 14, and 15 Summary

Hornblower awakes aboard ship with a dreadful hangover. In the next hour, a message arrives by boat announcing a visit from M. le Comte du Nord. Hornblower confers with Wychwood, who confirms that M. le Comte du Nord is in fact the Czar, who likes to travel "incognito" to avoid the pomp and circumstance due his station. The ship is readied for the visit and then the Czar comes aboard, attended by a few military officers. Bush rather feels the Czar should be entertained as a great dignitary but Hornblower does not. Instead, he causes the men to be put through typical evolutions of sail, then takes the Czar on a complete tour of the ship, through all of the gun decks and even into the deep recesses of the vessel. The Czar is amazed at the cramped spaces and the cheerful disposition of the men. Later, Hornblower serves the Czar a typical lunch of boiled meats and such. All the while, Bush is afraid that Hornblower is causing an international incident by his cavalier attitude toward the Czar. Hornblower realizes, however, that the Czar is traveling incognito just so as to allow such an informal interaction with the ship. After eating, the Czar and his party depart.

A few days later, Hornblower paces his quarterdeck and sorts through the political situation and recent developments. He decides to proceed to Königsberg, where he intends to disrupt the resupply shipping of Napoleon's army. He locates an area where many supply barges must necessarily pass and determines to strike there, hoping to not only destroy supplies but also to disrupt communications. As the flotilla sails, Hornblower puts the ships through a prolonged series of exercises to heighten skills in message relay, gunnery, and sailing. Meanwhile, he frets internally about his own nervousness and indecision.

Having reached his destination, Hornblower takes small boats into the harbor at night to reconnoiter. He discovers a giant boom, composed of huge logs, chains, and cables, stretched across the harbor mouth. It is too massive to disable and effectively prevents his ships from entering the harbor. Thus, attack by the fleet will be impossible—another plan is needed. Hornblower quickly devises a plan. One hundred and fifty men, about one-tenth of his command, will board ships' boats and make their way into the harbor by landing on the coast through shoaling water. The two bomb-ketches will be positioned on the far side of the harbor to retrieve the men after they cross overland on an escape. Meanwhile, the remainder of the fleet will make a false and abortive attack on the harbor as if they were unaware of the massive boom.

In execution, the plan works fabulously. The detachment of men makes its way into the harbor under cover of night and sneaks past the fortress that guards the passage. By early dawn they are deep in the harbor and begin their work of destruction, burning barges and killing the enemy. The enemy is unprepared and surprised and the destruction is great. As the day wears on, Nonsuch and the two sloops approach the fortress and boom and exchange cannon shot at long range. Hornblower sends up a

dizzying number of messages and receives complicated replies. The feint fools the fortress and draws their fire and attention. After several hours, the landing party retreats to the furthest end of the harbor, burns their own boats, and marches across land to the rendezvous spot where they are picked up from boats launched from the bomb-ketches. The final tally, as reported by Vickery, is one ship, eleven coasting vessels, and twenty-four barges sunk, including one black powder supply of considerable amount. The English suffer two men wounded. It is a stunning victory for the English

Chapters 13, 14, and 15 Analysis

This segment of the text progresses Hornblower's potential for action into action. He has now met the Czar, who will determine whether Russia aligns for or against France; he has captured the Czar's confidence by his bold statements of assurance. Unknown to the Czar, but critical nonetheless, Hornblower has foiled an assassination attempt. Now all that remains is to convince the Czar that, with England's naval assistance, Russia can withstand Napoleon's armies. Hornblower realizes his chance when the Czar visits the English flotilla incognito. Clearly, this is no state visit intended to have political consequences, else the Czar would visit as his royal personage. Instead, the Czar is interested to see the English navy and gain a personal evaluation of the might of the British weapons which promise so much. Hornblower handles the meeting masterfully and the Czar sees the English ships as capable weapons, manned by cheerful and willing sailors, and officered by competent and resolute men. Although he does not eat the weevil-infested bread, the Czar gains the confidence he needs to make his decision.

Next, Hornblower moves to inflict a serious blow on the French. As the French armies do not control the Baltic Sea, they do not rely much on sea shipping. Instead, they use river systems and harbors to move supplies along coastal and inland routes. This frees them from the need to have a standing navy, but also allows them to supply their armies in an area without roadways. Hornblower intends, therefore, to attack the resupply and communications chain at a weak point—where the barges move from one river to the next in a large harbor. Direct attack is frustrated by a huge boom, or floating barricade, which cannot easily be disabled. Of course the boom could be systematically destroyed, but this would also obviate surprise and hence ruin any chances of success. Instead, Hornblower maps out an audacious plan based upon predicting the enemy's responses to a variety of events. The force sent into the harbor is large enough to destroy surprised shipping but not large enough to fight its way out after surprise has been lost. Thus, Hornblower has them escape overland by an unpredictable route—after they have destroyed shipping. Meanwhile, the main fleet makes a feint attack upon the harbor's fortress to pin attention away from the escaping men. All in all, it is a masterful plan and one executed with perfection. As Napoleon's armies already teeter on the brink of insufficient supply, the massive destruction wrought on the supply chain by this action will prove telling as the months wear on; this is a type of foreshadowing of the conditions which will obtain during the siege of Riga, in later chapters. The Russians and Swedes can now see positive, concrete results of the presence of the English navy. Hornblower's list of accomplishments continues to grow.

Chapters 16, 17, and 18

Chapters 16, 17, and 18 Summary

Hornblower sends his cutter, with Wychwood, on a diplomatic tour. When the cutter returns, Wychwood bears dispatches which announce war between Russia and France. Hornblower's mission is ostensibly successful. However, he realizes that he must now do all within his power to ensure Russia's defense. Wychwood counsels Hornblower that the definitive stand in the Baltic must be made near Riga, to prevent Napoleon's second army from reaching St. Petersburg. Hornblower again sends the cutter, with Wychwood, on a diplomatic run to England. As the cutter readies to sail, it is loaded with mail bound for home. Hornblower frets the entire time that his actions may not be deemed suitable by the Admiralty or, more importantly, by Barbara.

The flotilla sails for Riga as Hornblower frets. When they enter the gulf by Riga, during July of 1812, Hornblower has a strong premonition that extended combat lies ahead. A local pilot comes on board to guide in the fleet and he chatters meaninglessly about the impossibility of war in the area. Even as he speaks, Hornblower hears muted but massed cannon fire in the distance. On the coast, numerous fires burn; from prior experience in Central America, Hornblower correctly identifies them as bivouac fires of two opposing armies. Hornblower anchors the fleet and the officers take to a barge and row for shore. On the way, they encounter another boat and chase it down and capture it. It is French and contains Jussey, a major of engineers, who is scouting the bay. Hornblower thus makes an important but accidental captive. He questions the new prisoner craftily but nonchalantly and gains considerable tactical and strategic information.

Hornblower goes ashore and meets the governor, General Essen. Essen accompanies Hornblower to the seat of local government, where he is introduced to His Excellency the Intendant of Livonia and his wife, the Countess—with whom Hornblower is acquainted. After a moment of self-conscious awkwardness, politics are discussed and Hornblower announces his intention to assist the beleaguered city in any way possible. The small group has dinner and then attends a ballet. Hornblower finds the dancing interesting but the music, as always, disorients him. During the second act, artillery is heard in the distance. As the Intendant ignores it so too does the remainder of the audience. It increases and then fades in intensity. Various messengers deliver news of a French attack and a Russian counterattack at the nearby village of Daugavgriva. Essen and Hornblower quietly withdraw and visit the scene of battle. They enter the command post and meet General Diebitsch and Colonel von Clausewitz. Diebitsch is a Pole, and Clausewitz a Prussian defector who refuses to fight for Napoleon; both men, as is Essen, are fictional representations of historical figures. The commanders accompany Hornblower and Essen to the top of a local church—the highest observation point obtainable—where they see a panoply consisting of sixty thousand French troops and the Russian defenses. Clausewitz explains the likely French tactics in prescient detail.

Chapters 16, 17, and 18 Analysis

These chapters set up the final segment of the novel, which consists of the defense of Riga, centered on the small outlying town of Daugavgriva. Riga is tactically significant only in that it lies between Napoleon's advancing second army and St. Petersburg. A second, larger Napoleonic army heads for Moscow. If both Russian capital cities fall, then Russia will be knocked out of the war and the entire European continent will be arrayed against England. Thus, ensuring that either St. Petersburg or Moscow escape capture, is essential to English interests. Hornblower and his flotilla cannot effect issues at Moscow and he naturally focuses on St. Petersburg. The first, and in fact, final stand against the French must be made at the defensible Riga. There, Hornblower's flotilla will be of some use. The French army numbers sixty thousand—larger than the defending force. The French force is composed of a variety of European soldiers, including a formidable contingent of Prussians. Clausewitz, himself a Prussian and a notable historical figure, refuses to fight for Napoleon and has thus defected to the Russian cause. The Russian defenses are good, but Russian morale is not particularly high.

Hornblower's accidental capture of an important French officer demonstrates how he seizes opportunities and makes the most of them. He uses a subtle ploy to get the man to reveal far more about the tactical situation than he should. When the man realizes how much he has said and closes his mouth, Hornblower acts nonchalant and uninterested so that, later, the man may again reveal further information. Hornblower then cooperates with the local authorities which surely must make the bulk of the decisions regarding the local defense. By the end of Chapter 18, the initial French attack has been accomplished and, fortunately for England, repulsed by the Russians. This sets the stage for the remainder of the novel, which considers the siege of Riga.

Hornblower also meets the Countess a second time. This narrative construction is interesting in that it infers some future complication—yet in fact nothing comes of it. The Countess vanishes from the narrative and Hornblower does not think of her again. This sub-plot can be considered the primary narrative loose-end and is remarkable in that, otherwise, the narrative structure is tightly controlled. It is also interesting to note that the attack on Riga and several of the individuals involved are historic facts and persons. The outcome of the historical event is as described in the novel, though of course Hornblower's fictive participation is not historical.

Chapters 19, 20, and 21

Chapters 19, 20, and 21 Summary

Hornblower determines the French are very likely to attempt an amphibious maneuver to gain the flank of the Russian defenders. He therefore sets the two sloops on constant nighttime alert and patrol. After only a few days, Raven signals that a French force is indeed on the water. The sloops' boats are launched and various hot skirmishes are conducted. In fact, Cole of the Raven has rather botched the job by signaling at the first sign of the French. Hornblower had hoped to capture or kill some thousands of enemy but instead the venture only takes a few hundred. Nevertheless, the crossing is prevented. One of the prisoners is Lieutenant von Bülow, a Prussian. Hornblower internally agonizes over Cole's botched performance but does not publicly comment on it.

Over the next days, Hornblower sits in the chapel tower with Clausewitz and observes the French army's siege tactics. They construct long saps, or fortified trenches, running into the village defenses. The saps proceed at a steady pace and it is thus possible to mathematically calculate when the siege will succeed. Clausewitz explains to Hornblower many of the principles of land warfare. Clausewitz explains that the Russian artillery, basically a direct-fire type of weaponry, cannot significantly damage the French siege works. Hornblower wishes that the bomb-ketches could be placed in action but realizes the shoaling water will not permit them to approach close enough to be effective. Hornblower mulls over the situation and, as usual, comes up with an innovative solution. Four large barges are heavily loaded with sand and then placed alongside each of the bomb-ketches, one barge on each side. The three vessels are then lashed together with cables and the sand is flung into the ocean. As the barges grow lighter, they float higher and by the cables lift the bomb-ketches nearly out of the water. The lashed vessels are extremely unwieldy but draw only a foot or two of water. Hornblower refers to the barges so used as "Camels", because they lift the boat. The bomb-ketches are then maneuvered into firing range and begin lobbing high-angle shells into the French saps. The French earthworks are quickly destroyed and their saps devastated, with great loss of life. The French respond by drawing artillery battalions around and opening fire upon the bomb-ketches, whereupon their retreat is forced. During the final moments of the action, Mound is killed.

Later, Hornblower receives more dispatches from England. They inform him that the defense of Riga is tantamount and must necessarily include the loss of his ships if such should prove necessary. He also reads letters from Barbara and grows homesick and nostalgic. The bomb-ketch attack temporarily halted the French advance, but the village has been reduced to rubble and the French siege seems sure of success. Further effective use of the bomb-ketches is prevented by French batteries pointed to sea. Later still, Hornblower and Clausewitz discuss the tactical situation. Clausewitz points out that recently bodies have been flowing down the river from distant battles fought weeks ago. Hornblower considers the situation and believes that small craft could be used to ferry a

considerable Russian contingent across the harbor so that they could attack the French from the flank and rear. Clausewitz immediately agrees and plans are carried out to eventuate the audacious sortie.

Just as the flanking maneuver is about to occur, and quite by coincidence, the French launch a major attack. They are thus off-balance and out of contact when the Russian flanking sortie comes to bear. The French attack is routed with great loss of life and the Russian sortie is hugely successful. Then the Russians retreat back to the boats and return to the village. The attack is a great success and once again causes great delay to the French offensive. Once again, Hornblower's audacious tactics have proved useful. The siege continues and then comes dreadful news—the French have captured Moscow. St. Petersburg, hence Riga, must be defended at all costs.

Chapters 19, 20, and 21 Analysis

Months pass and the French siege continues. Hornblower comes to see that siege work is mechanical and predictable. The French gain so many feet every day and the Russians cannot prevent it. Eventually, the saps will be close enough to allow the French access to the town interior and then a pitched battle will be fought on roughly equal terms. Unless the French can be seriously weakened, they will likely win. The various Russian counterattacks have weakened and slowed the French, but not enough to ruin their cause. Meanwhile, the French capture Moscow. This is a serious blow to the Russian cause and furthermore will eventually free hundreds of thousands of French soldiers to concentrate on Riga and St. Petersburg. It is a black hour, but all of the defenders remain determined.

Hornblower contributes to the defense in two major instances. On the first instance, he contrives a method to bring the bomb-ketches closer in to the shore. This stunt cannot be repeated because thereafter the French mount artillery battalions pointing to sea. On the second instance he merely points out that men could be shuttled by sea and thus gain a flanking advantage. In the execution, the flanking maneuver takes place simultaneously with a major French attack. The momentum of the attack is shattered and the flanking maneuver is enormously successful. Yet still, the French seem the inevitable victors. What Hornblower achieves in reality is to delay the French attack by some weeks. In the end, this proves the decisive factor in the Russian defense, though at this point in the novel the consequence of the delay appears to be fairly minimal.

Hornblower receives mail from home during this bleak period of months. He is overtaxed and tired and the news from home seems jarring even as it comforts him. Hornblower feels the physical and mental toll the siege is taking upon him but is ceaselessly dedicated to ensuring the Russians have every advantage possible. Note the expert narrative construction which places Hornblower by the historically significant Clausewitz—as both men are experts in their respective fields, nautical tactics and land tactics are discussed and explained back and forth. This allows the reader to also be educated about these tactics in a transparent method.

Chapters 22, 23, and 24

Chapters 22, 23, and 24 Summary

The siege drags on for months and the small village is reduced to pulverized stones. Basements are connected by ditches and the only building standing in the town is the chapel from which observations are made. Pamphlets are sent into the French army by subterfuge—they advertise welcome reception of defectors by the English. One day, Hornblower accompanies Essen to review a large contingent of Spanish and Portuguese troops who have in fact defected. They have been fighting for Napoleon for five years, since Spain aligned with France. Since then Spain has revolted from France and has been largely liberated by English armies. Hornblower, speaking Spanish, greets the Spanish officers and tells them of their country's recent accomplishments. They are received warmly and Hornblower assures them the English will send them home as early as possible. In exchange, their leader signs a statement of warm welcome by the English and this too is circulated among the French by subterfuge. The Spanish officers also tell Essen that the French army is seriously malnourished and the camps are full of disease. In fact, they claim that French morale is very low and French fitness barely acceptable. Hornblower again feels "as if there were an actual movement inside his brain" (p. 277) upon learning of this.

Then comes the final French assault. The French forces attack in column and range against the Russian forces deployed in line. The French soldiers mass and charge over the completed sap and into the ruined village. The defense stalls the attack but then withers. Essen charges into the retreating men and attempts to rally them with some success. The issue is in doubt. Hornblower, feeling as if in a dream, is swept aside in an eddy of combat and finds himself near the chapel from which several score of Russians begin to retreat. He exhorts the massed and dubious men, urging them to stand and fight. He then draws his sword and commands their attention, charging bodily at the flank of the French column. The men follow him and sweep into the stalled French column, smashing into the flank and turning the attack. Hornblower's horse is shot from under him and he is flung down onto the ground. He feels as if it is a dream, and he remains resolute and even-headed. He recovers himself and is in the thick of the melee for several agonizing minutes. The stalled French column, hit from the flank, crumbles and then dissolves into a rout. The Russians quickly regroup and then pursue, pass the sap, and destroy it. The slaughter is great. Hornblower has made the decisive movement, the moment of history has changed the fate of the world for many years. The French fall back to their camp and cease most activity. A temporary armistice is called so the many wounded can be gathered and cared for. Hornblower arranges for Bülow to view the defectors and then return to the French camp on a sort of informal parole—the verified news of massed defections is bound to be particularly harsh to the Prussian contingent.

The siege continues. Hornblower returns to his ship and frets. As the winter comes on, the seas often have a scum of ice form in the mornings. Hornblower fears that his ships

will become frozen in and thus fall easy prey to the French. And yet leaving at this moment would so demoralize the Russians that they might surrender. Then comes news that the French armies around Moscow are retreating. In fact, the French at Moscow have suffered a series of debilitating defeats and are falling back there. It seems as through Russia must be victorious in defeating Napoleon. The Russians at Riga respond by launching an attack which is hotly contested, but that night the French spike their guns and withdraw from the siege, the date being sometime in October of 1812. The Russians regroup and then pursue in a counterattack. Hornblower and Essen ride into the deserted French camp and see the bodies, but something is wrong. Many dead and near-dead bear no injuries. Suddenly they realize that the French camp is full of plague and diseased men lay dead and dying all about them.

The Russian force advances further and comes to a covering force composed of Prussian troops. The combat will be fierce and bloody, but Hornblower has another idea. Hornblower, accompanied by Clausewitz, rides forward alone and addresses the Prussian commander. He states that the Prussian King is simply a captive of Bonaparte and that the true Prussian honor is found not in supporting the French but in opposing them, as has Clausewitz. The Prussian general, thoroughly demoralized but entirely military, agrees and the Prussians stand down. The French forces retreat pell-mell and take heavy losses. The defense of Riga is successful. Hornblower feels as if in a dream and shortly after the negotiation he swoons.

When Hornblower next awakes he is disoriented. Brown explains that he has suffered through a dangerous bout of typhus, or gaol fever, doubtlessly contracted in the siege, and has been feverish for several weeks. The Russian defense has proved enduring, the British fleet has returned to England under the command of Bush. Hornblower is in fact a convalescent guest of Prussia. Soon enough, Clam arrives and bears Hornblower home to England. He reflects that it has been eight full months since last he was home. He first reports to the Admiralty and learns that Braun has been long since hanged, and that his service in the Baltic has been deemed entirely acceptable and, indeed, inspiring. After making his official report, Hornblower, still recovering, heads for home and a happy reunion.

Chapters 22, 23, and 24 Analysis

The final chapters close out the novel by wrapping up the successful defense of Riga. The delays caused by Hornblower's activities prove the seminal germ of success, as the French are defeated by malnourishment and disease. Further, Hornblower's release of Bülow demoralizes the Prussian contingent because Bülow bears credible witness that thousands of soldiers have already defected from Napoleon's army. All this, coupled with the successful Russian defense and counterattacks, leads the French army to abandon the siege and retreat to safety and areas of better forage. Finally, the divisive issues in the French army are made fully obvious when the entire Prussian contingent defects from the cause. All across the Russian frontier, the French army collapses in retreat. It appears that the bulk of Napoleon's strength has been expended in an ultimately fruitless assault. The grand events described in the novel are historical facts

—Hornblower's fictive participation is not historical, but the construction of placing Hornblower into historical events is intriguing and quite enjoyable.

On two occasions in the novel, Hornblower feels as if his brain were actually moving about inside his skull. The first occasion happens when the Countess makes her sexual interest evident (p. 149); the second occasion happens when Hornblower speaks with the Spanish defectors (p. 277) and tells them of events in Spain. On both occasions, Hornblower is remembering his distant home in different ways, and on both occasions he is deeply affected by the experience. The narrative construction that ties these two scenes together, however, is subtle. Another narrative feature of the novel which is notable is the extent of time Hornblower spends ashore focused on land-based activities, rather than at sea. Even while at sea, Hornblower is generally acting in support of land-based action. The only naval encounter of note occurs when the bomb-ketches destroy the French privateer in the harbor. The novel thus makes clear the extent to which naval power can influence events ashore so long as the areas are coastal.

The wrap up phase of the novel, or dénouement, consists of another narrative contrivance. Hornblower, long feeling weary and as if in a dream, collapses entirely and wakes up some weeks later. He has contracted, suffered, and survived typhus—likely exposed in the French camp. Thus, the wrap-up operations at Riga, the departure of the English ships, and the tedious nature of final goodbyes are all obviated for Hornblower. Bush takes the situation in hand. Hornblower, too sick to travel, is left behind with Brown. When he regains consciousness he then returns quickly to England and makes his report. By his return, of course, news of his incredible successes have widely circulated and thus he need not sound his own horn. The novel concludes much as it opens, with Hornblower contemplating the easy and happy country life he savors at Smallbridge.

Characters

Captain Sir Horatio Hornblower, Knight of the Bath

Hornblower is a naval captain of long accomplishment. As a lieutenant, he carried the Castilla by boarding; as a captain he defeated Natividad with the smaller Lydia; he escaped from French prison, capturing Witch of Endor in the process. He is wealthy, married to a second wife whom he adores, and landed as a gentleman ought to be. He is decorated with the ribbon and star of an order of chivalry and held in the highest esteem by the Lords of the Admiralty and the common man in the streets. Hornblower has received a knighthood for gallant action in command of Sutherland. Hornblower is about thirty-six years of age during the principle actions described in the novel. He recounts his naval career as spanning nineteen years, sixteen of which have been aboard ship. He served four years as a midshipman, six years as a lieutenant, and nine years as a captain before being appointed commodore.

Hornblower is entirely tone deaf and finds music irritating and incomprehensible. He is somewhat prone to seasickness, abhors many of the normal usages of naval life, declines strict discipline achieved through flogging, and passes his time in isolation, reading, or occasionally playing whist with reluctant lieutenants and midshipmen. He enjoys daily seawater showers and worries frequently about his aging appearance. He spent a prolonged period as a prisoner of war in Spain, where he became tolerably fluent in Spanish. He also spent a period as a prisoner in France, where he became fluent in French. Hornblower expects much from his officers and crew. When the occasion demands it, he is a relentless taskmaster. His leadership qualities are grounded in the reality of always expecting more from himself than he does from his subordinates. He is much given to pacing the quarterdeck in silent isolation every morning for about an hour, as much a form of physical exercise as mental calculation. He is described physically in only vague terms. His thin brown hair grays and recedes alarmingly during the novel. His fingers are long and apparently delicate, though he considers them bony.

Lady Barbara Wellesley Hornblower

Barbara is Hornblower's second wife, a once-widow herself (her first husband had been killed in military action), and the sister of Wellesley. She has an aquiline nose, grey-blue eyes, and a pretty face. Hornblower finds her unutterably attractive and lovely. Barbara and Hornblower met in a previous volume of the series when they were both married to other people. They are fully in love with each other and Barbara dotes on Hornblower—he secretly craves her attention but outwardly is usually standoffish. Barbara's opinion of Hornblower's accomplishments is Hornblower's usual standard of success. If he feels she would approve, he is satisfied.

Barbara has no children and finds it irritating when people assume Richard is her son. She is concerned with appearances and proper demeanor. She likes to ensure that Hornblower is properly dressed and equipped for any eventuality. In the present novel, Barbara is a fairly minor character, occurring only in the opening chapters.

Richard Arthur Hornblower

Richard is Hornblower's sixteen-month-old son; his mother died in childbirth. Hornblower named him for Barbara's two brothers, Richard and Arthur. At the beginning of the novel, Richard is about eight months old. Barbara writes news of Richard's development and Hornblower finds this information particularly enjoyable. Richard, like Barbara, plays little direct role in the novel.

Brown (Hornblower's bosun and servant)

Brown is Hornblower's man-servant on land and coxswain at sea. He has a natural physical aptitude which makes him good at nearly everything he does, whether it be driving horses, mending clothes, or supporting Hornblower. Brown enjoys a long-term relationship with Hornblower, having accompanied him in French captivity and escaping with him in a dramatic sequence of events. Throughout the novel, Brown is tireless and dedicated in supporting Hornblower, always offering a cloak or a cup of tea as appropriate to the situation. Brown is present in most of the scenes of the novel, but always in a minor and subservient role. In reality, Brown is a minor character in this novel, though he has greater prominence in other volumes of the series.

The Marquis Richard Wellesley and the Earl Arthur Wellesley

The Marquis Richard Wellesley, K.P., His Britannic Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Richard is Barbara's brother and hence Hornblower's brother-in-law. Wellesley is the ex-Governor-General of India and currently the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. As such, he informs Hornblower of the political situation in the Baltic and then delivers Hornblower's verbal and written orders.

Earl Arthur Wellesley is Barbara's second brother and hence Hornblower's brother-in-law. During the time of the novel,, he leads the British military forces in Spain and inflicts heavy defeats upon the French occupying forces there. At the time of the novel, Spain has revolted against France's despotic rule. Both men are minor characters in the novel.

William Bush

Bush is a long-time friend of Hornblower and has risen to the rank of captain, largely through the patronage of the successful Hornblower, though Bush is certainly a capable

if unimaginative officer. Bush has a wooden leg, having lost a leg in a hot action fought under the command of Hornblower some years previous. Bush's service is constant and nearly perfect, though he cannot be relied upon to be imaginative. Bush recognizes his strengths as well as his limitations, however, and because of this he is the perfect subordinate to Hornblower, who relies upon Bush absolutely and continually. During the novel, Bush commands Nonsuch. When Hornblower is debilitated by typhus, Bush assumes command of the squadron and leads it home to England.

Bush is entirely devoted to Hornblower and nearly venerates the commodore. Bush's physicality is described only in general terms. He appears of average height and build and is clearly in exceptional physical condition. He bears himself with dignity and proper reserve but is also friendly and well-liked among the other officers and the crew. His bravery is beyond reproach and he apparently takes great joy in close, hot combat actions. Bush has a fabulous constitution which has not been damaged by the loss of a leg. Bush's role in the present novel is much smaller than his role in other volumes of the series.

Mr. Braun

Braun is Hornblower's clerk and advisor, appointed by the Admiralty. He is tall and spare, fair, young, and prematurely bald. He has pale green eyes. He speaks Russian, Swedish, Finnish, Polish, German, French, and English with fluency, and speaks Lithuanian and Estonian with passing familiarity. His upbringing involved a complicated mix of cultures and he considers himself to be a Finn. He fought and lost with Finland against the Russian invasion and then escaped to Sweden where he is nominally a citizen. Because of his wide knowledge and linguistic skills, the Admiralty has retained Braun to act as advisor to Hornblower. Hornblower dislikes Braun almost immediately.

Braun serves with capable loyalty until he goes ashore with Hornblower to attend a dinner party offered by the Czar. Realizing his proximity to his hated foe will be assured, Braun steals one of Hornblower's rifled pistols and positions himself during the dinner party to have a clear shot at the Czar upon his formal entry. Even as Braun draws forth the pistol, Hornblower slices his hand open with a sword, foiling the assassination attempt and ruining Braun's future. Braun is then restrained by Hornblower's crew and taken back to the ship, where he languishes in isolation. Hornblower ships Braun off to England at the earliest possible opportunity. When Braun arrives in England, he is tried for treason, found guilty, and hung. Braun's betrayal of trust is heavily foreshadowed in the novel and is not particularly surprising. Far more surprising is Hornblower's incredibly slow recognition of Braun's perfidy.

Clarke

Clarke is an Englishman who, for unknown reasons, has cast his lot with the French. He is put aboard Maggie Jones, a captured English merchant ship, as the captain of a prize crew. When he meets Hornblower's Baltic flotilla, he closes and attempts a ruse to

escape recapture. He states his ship is infected with smallpox; Hornblower sees through the ruse and orders the merchant ship be boarded. When the first boarders gain the deck, Clarke, in desperation, shoots himself in the head, shattering his lower jaw. Although the shot is not instantly fatal, it is a mortal wound. After lingering for a few hours in delirium, he dies. Clarke is a minor character in the novel but an interesting one—he is the first of a score of characters who have defected from their birth nation's interest to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Such is the confusing political situation in the Baltic.

Colonel Lord Wychwood

Wychwood is a commander of the first guards, and acts as a sort of politico-military advisor and an ambassador of England. He is a shrewd and experienced man and is about thirty-five years of age. He has red hair and protruding eyes; while aboard ship he experiences minor seasickness but masters himself through willpower. Wychwood has an amazing capacity for drink. About the time that Braun's influence wanes in the novel, Wychwood's influence increases. Hornblower does not immediately like him but comes to appreciate his wide ability as time progresses. Within the narrative, Wychwood performs the broad functions of educating Hornblower, orienting English interests within Baltic politics, and conveying messages to a variety of individuals. While Hornblower acts in the forefront of the narrative, Wychwood operates in the background. Although present in many scenes, Wychwood remains essentially a minor character. He is perhaps best interpreted as more of a narrative construction than a character receiving standard development.

Countess Canarine

Hornblower first meets the Countess at a dinner party offered by the Czar. He is paired with her because of their similar rank and status; thus, their acquaintance is largely a matter of accident. She has bold, dark eyes with an internal fire and spirit. Her face is a perfect oval and her complexion like rose petals. Her bosom is large and white and Hornblower finds her entirely beautiful. The Countess initially finds Hornblower uninteresting but pleasant—only when the Czar personally addresses Hornblower in a positive way does the Countess re-evaluate him. From that point forward, she begins to flirt with him. By the end of the first evening of their acquaintance, the Countess offers herself to Hornblower and the two characters have a sexual affair.

The Countess is married to His Excellency the Intendant of Livonia and she is present at the beginning of the siege of Riga. Her presence is awkward for Hornblower and they spend several hours in close proximity, pretending to be nothing more than casual acquaintances. The Countess thereafter disappears from the narrative entirely. Her presence in the novel is problematic—she is well-developed as a character but appears in a non-critical role which could be entirely eliminated from the narrative without altering any other developments. In this she is perhaps imitating life, but her presence

adds little to the novel and must be viewed as one of the weaker narrative elements in the text.

Alexander, Czar of all the Russias (AKA M. le Comte du Nord)

Alexander, the Czar of all the Russias, is described as a tall, pale, young man. He holds his title in heredity though his father was assassinated. Alexander is proper and collected as a national leader and carefully weighs his involvement with Napoleon. For years he has maintained problematic neutrality, which has angered Napoleon and therefore cannot be maintained indefinitely. Hornblower meets Alexander at a critical juncture and convinces the monarch that England is ready, willing, and capable of intervening in any conflict between Russia and France. Later, Alexander boards Nonsuch to determine whether Hornblower's assertions are true only for the commodore or for the entire English fleet. Aboard Bush's taut ship, Alexander realizes that the English navy can indeed deliver on Hornblower's promise. Shortly thereafter, open hostilities between England and France are enjoined. The Czar thereafter disappears from the narrative. The fictional Hornblower's interaction with the historical Alexander is one of the highlights of the narrative.

It is interesting to compare the presentation of Alexander as the Czar, proper, with the presentation of Alexander in a so-called incognito role. In both cases, all present acknowledge that he really is the Czar. In his role as the Czar, he is subjected to protocol and ceremony which often makes intimate approach to problems impossible. Therefore, his appearance incognito allows him to interact with Hornblower and tour Nonsuch not as His Imperial Majesty, but rather as a common guest. His dual presentation within the narrative form an interesting and compelling addition to the novel's many achievements.

Objects/Places

Smallbridge

Smallbridge, in Kent, is a town over which Hornblower is the squire and in which the Hornblower family makes its normal residence. It has a green park, beyond which are the downs. The park borders a church with a tower and an orchard—all owned by Hornblower but worked by tenants. The Hornblowers' personal house is centrally located and staffed by John, a footman, Wiggins, a butler, and Brown, a servant—when he is not at sea with Hornblower. The novel begins in Smallbridge and concludes as Hornblower again descends into the town.

The Admiralty

The Admiralty, in London, refers both to a building housing the leaders of the Royal Navy as well as the leaders themselves. Hornblower's superior officers are members of the Admiralty and it is from them he derives his orders as well as to them he tenders his results. If the Admiralty approves of his actions, Hornblower is successful. The Admiralty expects a high degree of competence from their captains, and this expectation is often reflected in their orders, which combine the barely possible with the often clearly unobtainable. Hornblower's routine delivery of fantastic results earns him the trust and confidence of the Admiralty.

Hornblower's Baltic Flotilla

Commodore Hornblower commands a flotilla, or fleet, composed of Nonsuch, a seventy-four gun ship commanded by Bush; Lotus, a sloop-of-war commanded by William Vickery, an energetic and capable commander; Raven, a sloop-of-war commanded by Cole, an aged and uninspiring commander; Moth, a bomb-ketch commanded by Duncan; Harvey, a bomb-ketch commanded by Percival Mound, a young commander of twenty-years-age; and Clam, a cutter commanded by Freeman.

Nonsuch

Nonsuch is a seventy-four gun ship-of-the-line, a third-rate, two-decker commanded by Captain William Bush. Nonsuch is the core of Hornblower's flotilla and his usual flagship. Hornblower refers to it on one occasion as a battleship. Ironically, upon first receiving his orders, Hornblower considers Nonsuch his most potent ship; however, in actual execution, it does nearly nothing except serve as a floating office. Instead, the other ships of the flotilla prove far more useful in the shoal and constricted waters of the Baltic Sea.

Riga and Daugavgriva

Riga is a Russian city on the Baltic Sea which, in the novel, lies between the capital St. Petersburg and the advancing French army. To capture St. Petersburg, France must first take Riga. The Russians are aware of this and prepare a stout defense. Hornblower throws in his assistance at Riga and it becomes the site of a major Russian victory. Most of the combat actually takes place in the village of Daugavgriva, something of a minor suburb of Riga.

Bomb-Ketch

A bomb-ketch is a peculiar type of vessel mounting two masts, a main, and a mizzen. To compensate for the "missing" foremast, the main carries an enormous press of sail which necessitates strange rigging, including a chain forestay. The bomb-ketch's function is to carry two huge mortars, weapons capable of firing explosive eighteen-inch shells in a high arc of fire. They are particularly accurate against stationary targets. Bomb-ketch vessels draw only a few feet of water. The novel describes two bomb-ketches in several actions. Normally, they were used to bombard shore installations rather than in ship-to-ship combat. Because of their particular construction, bomb-ketch vessels enjoy a well-deserved reputation of having a particularly durable hull.

Camels

Camels are a type of flotation device affixed to a ship to raise its hull, allowing it to enter shallow water. In the novel, two large barges are heavily loaded with sand and then placed alongside a bomb-ketch, one barge on each side. The three vessels are then lashed together with cables and the sand is flung into the ocean. As the barges grow lighter, they float higher and by the cables lift the bomb-ketches nearly out of the water. The lashed vessels are extremely unwieldy but draw only a foot or two of water. The camels allow the bomb-ketches to closely approach the shore and fire upon the French siege works.

Hornblower's Rifled Percussion Pistols

Barbara gives Hornblower a cased set of double-barreled, percussion-fired pistols with rifled barrels. The case includes select balls, greased patches, and percussion caps. The weapons are utterly reliable and effective to at least fifty yards. Mr. Braun steals one pistol and intends to use it to assassinate Czar Alexander, but he is foiled by Hornblower. Interestingly enough, the other pistol is not used in the novel.

Baltic Sea

The Baltic Sea is that body of water lying between Norway and Sweden on the north; Finland, Russia, and others on the East; Poland, Prussia, and Swedish Pomerania on the south, and Denmark and parts of Germany on the West. It is entered through a dangerous and narrow passage. Much of the Baltic Sea consists of shoaling waters, and the harbors of the sea freeze solid during most winters. Nearly the entire novel takes place within the Baltic Sea.

The Boom

Hornblower intends to attack a major French harbor by main force but is prevented from doing so because the French have constructed a sturdy floating boom across the harbor entrance. The boom is constructed from giant tree trunks chained together and fastened alongside huge cables. The boom extends across the harbor mouth, preventing entry from any large ships. The presence of the boom hinders Hornblower but only momentarily, and forces him to find another way of destroying the French supplies within the harbor.

Themes

Nautical Adventure

The novel's principle setting is the high seas and coastal areas of the Baltic during a time of general war; Napoleon Bonaparte's military adventures threaten the British Empire and only a strong naval response keeps the French aggression at bay and ensures the survival of the empire. As a commodore of the Royal Navy, Hornblower's sworn and obvious duty is to foil the interests of the French and promote the security of England. He carries out his duty by utilizing his flotilla of English ships in a variety of standard and atypical methods.

The novel relates a sea voyage in the year 1812; although the voyage is fictional, it contains many historical elements and the various conflicts and combat described are derived from several historical accounts. The ships mentioned represent fictionalized ships of historically appropriate type, though the crews are entirely fictional. Many of the Russian, French, Polish, and Prussian individuals introduced in the novel are fictionalized versions of historical people. All aspects of the novel are related to sea or coastal adventure; most of the action takes place at sea or at least within cannon-shot of the sea, and even the action which takes place on land generally relates to the sea.

The strength and popular appeal of the novel is undoubtedly due to the nature of nautical adventure and the conversational way in which it is presented. Although full of accurate descriptions of lengthy nautical and amphibious maneuvers and frequent technical descriptions of nautical equipment and tactics, the text is presented in an accessible and friendly manner, which allows the reader to descend to deck-level, as it were, and enjoy the excitement of days long gone.

The Allure of Family

The novel begins and ends at Hornblower's family estate in Smallbridge. In both instances, Hornblower is surrounded by familiar staff and home and, most importantly, next to his beloved wife Barbara and his son Richard. Throughout the roughly eight month's voyage in the Baltic, rarely a day goes by when Hornblower does not pine for his family and the reassuring presence of Barbara. Indeed, she has provided for most of his comforts, sends frequent communications, and knows how to make Hornblower feel loved and valued. Barbara also includes, under cover, scribbles and muddy fingerprints of Richard. To Hornblower, taking the sea as an older man is still exciting and compelling, yet it is also not quite so alluring as it once was because of necessity, it involves a sacrifice of home life. In fact, much of Hornblower's motivation stems from the allure of his family and his desire to return to them as a completely successful man, untainted by any hint or suggestion of failure. This desire is so strong that it drives him beyond his normal reserves.

This theme of the novel is also supported by Bush, as Hornblower observes that one of Bush's primary motivations is to keep his sisters well cared for. Because of this voluntary responsibility, Bush is unusually poor for a captain. An additional thread of this theme comes into play as Hornblower considers Brown, his servant and coxswain. He often compares Brown's capable care to that administered by a wife, and finds that Brown's ability to know when to leave well enough alone would be useful in a wife. This humorous comparison is typical of the logical and nervous Hornblower.

Leading the Leaders

Hornblower is appointed commodore and sets sail with a flotilla of English ships of war. In this sphere, his influence is absolute and all of his commands are immediately executed—he is the preeminent leader of men while at sea. However, his mission brings him into contact with a variety of superior officers and hereditary plenipotentiaries from numerous European and Baltic political entities. In most of these situations, his actual authority is limited or non-existent, and any influence which he might exert must be derived from that intangible quality known as leadership. For example, consider Hornblower's seating at the dinner party of the Czar. On a low rung on the ladder of influence, he sits next to a foreign dignitary and a local countess. From this vantage point, one would assume him to be a lowly and inconsequential pawn in the game of international politics. Yet this is not so, for Hornblower's influence on the Czar is all out of proportion to his actual rank. He convinces the Czar that English naval might is a force to be reckoned with and relied upon. Due in no small part to Hornblower's leadership, the Czar rejects Napoleon's demands and faces war with France. In another instance, Hornblower leads Sweden to open hostilities with France by the simple expedient of destroying a French vessel in a Swedish harbor. On both these occasions, Hornblower achieves his goals not by command but by the influence of leadership.

The final segment of the novel consists of a prolonged siege of Riga. In that element, one would expect the nautical commodore to be fairly useless as the effective use of his ships' might is strongly curtailed. However, Hornblower continues to lead the leaders by thinking outside of the conventional arena of land warfare and utilizing the proximity of the sea and his vessels to harm the French cause, delay the siege, and, ultimately, win the day. This theme of a subordinate in fact becoming a leader by inspiring vision runs throughout the novel and, indeed, the entire series of books.

Style

Point of View

The novel is told from the third-person limited point of view. The narrator is reliable, entirely effaced, and unnamed. Hornblower, the main character, is the protagonist and central figure in all of the scenes in the novel. The narrator divulges frequent internal thoughts of the protagonist, but not of other characters. The majority of the story is told through action and dialogue; revealed thoughts are frequent but generally are used for characterization rather than plot development. For example, Hornblower is often portrayed in an agony of self-critical and nervous thought.

The third-person point of view allows Hornblower to be presented in a highly sympathetic manner. For example, the narrative structure portrays Hornblower's isolated or affected mannerisms as deliberate rather than haughty. The narrative also allows portrayal of Hornblower's life situations as difficult but not pathetic. In this way, the choice of narrative view is appropriate and successful. Indeed, the structure of the novel and the method of plot development nearly require the use of a third-person point of view. Finally, the frequent appearance of minor characters is allowed through the point of view selected; it is carried throughout all of the novels of the series and is accessible and successful.

Setting

The novel's dominant setting is the southern Baltic Sea, with a heavy emphasis on the Riga coastal area during the latter portion of the text. Hornblower does spend a great deal of time aboard Nonsuch, a seventy-four gun, two-decker, third-rate ship-of-the-line, and spends some time aboard other ships in his flotilla—however, they are described only in vague terms and do not form a concrete setting beyond simply associating the tone of the novel to the English naval tradition. In this respect, the novel is distinctive from the other volumes in the series which feature strong naval settings. The novel's principle timeline consists of roughly eight months' time during most of which Hornblower is either ashore or on board an anchored ship within a short row of land. In fact, even when aboard ship, Hornblower's attention and focus is diverted to the land for most of the narrative. In addition to Nonsuch, a variety of other minor settings are presented, including the English town of Smallbridge, a harbor near Königsberg, and a regal structure near Kronstadt.

The latter portion of the novel is spent in the city of Riga or, more properly, in the outlying village of Daugavgriva. This is the location of the primary hostilities between the besieging French army and the defending Russians. At the beginning of hostilities, Daugavgriva is presented as a typical Russian town, with numerous wooden or light stone houses surrounding a massive chapel with a tall steeple, and so forth. By the end of the siege, the only structure left standing is the chapel with the tall steeple, and even

it is horrible scarred by innumerable cannon shot. The houses are reduced to little more than holes in the ground connected by ditches, and the residents are replaced entirely by weary soldiers.

Language and Meaning

The novel's language is generally simply and accessible. Standard punctuation is used to indicate dialogue and interior thoughts and descriptive text are easily distinguished. Most of the places, some of the objects, and even some of the events referenced in the narrative are identifiable as real geographical locations or historic events. It is notable that the novel was originally written and published in England and uses standard English spelling styles, which may somewhat unfamiliar to American readers though they pose no problems of meaning. Occasional words are given in a foreign language—nearly always in dialogue. These, too, present no particular barrier to comprehension as they are brief and their meaning is easily inferred from the context.

The novel becomes linguistically complex in two primary respects. First, when dealing with nautical events, a somewhat complicated specialized language is used that includes references to various parts of sailing craft and sailing techniques which are probably not particularly familiar to modern readers. The technical language is accurate and interesting and a reference to a general sailing encyclopedia will assist in a careful reading and complete understanding of the text. Second, the novel makes frequent reference to various events which occur prior to the novel's opening, proper—this is a standard construction technique and in no way detracts from the novel's readability. Nearly all of these events, of course, occurred in a prior volume of the series, of which this novel is the eighth.

Structure

The 314-page novel, originally published in England under the title The Commodore, retains English spelling and grammar but uses standard American punctuation. The text is divided into twenty-four chapters of unequal length. The narrative is presented in strictly chronological order with each chapter's events occurring after the events in the previous chapter and before the events in the subsequent chapter. Of course, references to previous events occur with some frequency and characters from time to time think about future events. Such deviations from the principle timeline are minor and are clearly identifiable as such. Thus, the novel's principle timeline is accessible and easily followed.

The novel is part of a series of novels; specifically, it is chronologically the eighth novel in a series which extends to eleven volumes; however, the novel was the fourth written of the series. Many of the principle characters presented in the novel, therefore, are recurring characters with backgrounds and histories lightly re-developed in a chronologically prior novel; even so, as the fourth-written novel in the series there are no problematic references to prior events as might be expected.

The structure is further complicated by adherence to historical events. In broad terms, events in the novel are fictional or fictionalized events which could have occurred, or did occur, in the period of time used as the novel's setting; namely, the war between Russia and France during the year 1812. Based on weather cues and the length of time various events are said to consume, the novel can be accurately placed as having transpired between May and October, 1812. Thus, the novel's language, technology, politics, geography, et cetera, are all based upon historically accurate representations. Many of the political entities discussed are no longer obtained and may be unfamiliar to modern readers.

Quotes

"Even Barbara, the nicest woman in the world, was not free of the besetting sin of womankind, approving of change merely because it was change; but Hornblower did not answer her as he had answered Brown.
"'Thank you,' he said, trying desperately to sound gracious as he said it.
"'My towel, Hebe,' said Barbara. The little Negro maid came gliding forward, and wrapped her up as she stepped out of the hip bath.
"'Venus rises from the waves,' said Hornblower gallantly. He was doing he best to fight down the feeling of awkwardness which possessed him when he saw his wife naked in the presence of another woman, even though Hebe was a mere servant, and coloured.
"'I expect,' said Barbara, standing while Hebe patted the towel to her skin to dry her, 'the village has already heard of this strange habit of ours of taking baths every day. I can hardly imagine what they think of it.'" p. 6

"Hornblower had come to the surface by now, fully emerged from the wave of thought that had engulfed him. He saw the nervous gesticulations of the innkeeper, caught between the devil of this unknown lordship downstairs and the deep sea of Captain Sir Horatio Hornblower upstairs, and he could not help smiling—in fact it was only with an effort that he prevented himself from laughing outright. He could visualise the whole ludicrous business, the irascible unknown peer down below, the innkeeper terrified of offending one or other of his two wealthy and influential guests, and as a crowning complication Brown stubbornly refusing to allow until the last possible moment any intrusion upon his master's deliberations. Hornblower saw the obvious relief in the two men's faces when he smiled, and that really made him laugh this time. His temper had been short of late and Brown had expected an explosion while the wretched innkeeper never expected anything else—innkeepers never looked for anything better than tantrums from the people fate compelled them to entertain. Hornblower remembered damning Brown's eyes without provocation only that very morning; Brown was not quite as clever as he might be, for this morning Hornblower had been fretting as an unemployed naval officer doomed to country life, while this evening he was a commodore with a flotilla awaiting him and nothing in the world could upset his temper—Brown had not allowed for that." p. 28

"Hornblower sat forward on the seat of the coach and peered out of the window.
"'Wind's veering nor'ard a little,' he said, 'West by north now, I should say.'
"'Yes, dear,' said Barbara patiently.
"'I beg your pardon, dear,' said Hornblower. 'I interrupted you. You were telling me about my shirts.'
"'No. I had finished telling you about those, dear. What I was saying was that you must not let anyone unpack the flat sea-chest until the cold weather comes. Your sheepskin coat and your big fur cloak are in it, with plenty of camphor, and they'll be safe from moths just as they are. Have the chest put straight below when you go on board.'
"'Yes, dear.'
"The coach was clattering over the cobbles of Upper Deal. Barbara stirred a little and

took Hornblower's hand in hers again.
"'I don't like talking about furs,' she said. 'I hope—oh, I hope so much—that you'll be back before the cold weather comes.'
"'So do I, dear,' said Hornblower, with perfect truth." p. 30

"'Eight bells, sir.'
"Hornblower came back to consciousness not very willingly; he suspected he was being dragged away from delightful dreams, although he could not remember what they were.
"'Still dark, sir,' went on Brown remorselessly, 'but a clear night. Wind steady at west by north, a strong breeze. The sloops an' the flotilla in sight to looard, an' we're hove-to, sir, under mizzen t's'l, main t'mast stays'l an' jib. An' here's your shirt, sir.'
"Hornblower swung his legs out of his cot and sleepily pulled off his nightshirt. He was minded at first just to put on those few clothes which would keep him warm on deck, but he had his dignity as commodore to remember, and he wanted to establish a reputation as a man who was never careless about any detail whatever. He had left orders to be called now, a quarter of an hour before it was really necessary, merely to be able to do so. So he put on uniform coat and trousers and boots, parted his hair carefully in the flickering light of the lantern Brown held, and put aside the thought of shaving. If he came on deck at four in the morning newly shaved everyone would guess that he had been at pains regarding his appearance. He clapped on his cocked hat, and struggled into the pea-jacket which Brown held for him. Outside his cabin door the sentry snapped to attention as the great man appeared. On the half-deck a group of high-spirited youngsters coming off watch subsided into awed and apprehensive silence at the sight of the commodore, which was a fit and proper thing to happen." p. 49

"'Captain Bush!'
"'Sir?'
"'What time is sunrise this morning?'
"'Er—about five thirty, sir.'
"'I don't want to know about what time it will be. I asked "What time is sunrise?"'
"A second's silence while the crest-fallen Bush absorbed this rebuke, and then another voice answered.
"'Five thirty four, sir.'" p. 50

"'Make a general signal to heave-to,' said Hornblower. 'Captain Bush, stand by if you please to cast off the tow. I'll have Harvey jury-rigged before we round Falsterbo. Perhaps you'll be good enough to send a party on board to help with the work.'
"And with that he went off below. He had seen all he wanted both of Bush and of the world for the present. He was tired, drained of his energy. Later there would be time enough to sit at his desk and begin the weary business of: 'Sir, I have the honour to report . . .' There would be dead and wounded to enumerate, too." p. 65

"A loud harsh voice announced: 'L'Empereur! L'Impératrice! Le Prince Royal de Suède!'

"Braun stood there between the two pillars, glancing down. His hand was at his waist; he was drawing the pistol. There was only one silent way to stop him. Hornblower whipped out his sword—the hundred-guinea gold-hilted sword, the gift of the Patriotic Fund, with an edge like a razor—and he slashed at the wrist of the hand that held the pistol. With the tendons severed the finders opened nervelessly and the pistol fell heavily on the carpeted floor while Braun turned in gaping surprise, looking first at the blood spouting from his wrist and then at Hornblower's face. Hornblower put the point of the blade at his breast; he could lunge and kill him on the instant, and every line in his expression must have attested the genuineness of his determination to do so if necessary, for Braun uttered no sound, made no movement. Somebody loomed up at Hornblower's shoulder; it was Mound, thank God.
"'Look after him,' whispered Hornblower. 'Tie that wrist up! Get him out of here somehow.'" pp. 143-144

"Hornblower turned and looked back at the squadron.
"'Make a signal to Lotus,' he ordered: 'Why are you out of station?'
"The flags soared up the halliards, and Hornblower saw the sloop hurriedly correct her position.
"'Lotus acknowledges the signal, sir,' reported the midshipman.
"'Then make "Why do you not reply to my question?"' said Hornblower, harshly.
"It was some seconds before any reply was visible.
"'Lotus signals "Inattention on the part of the officer of the watch," sir.'
"'Acknowledge,' said Hornblower
"He had stirred up trouble there; Vickery would be raging at this public censure, and the officer of the watch in question would be regretting his inattention at this very moment. There would be no harm done and probably some good. But Hornblower was perfectly aware that he had only launched the censure because he wanted an excuse to postpone thinking about the next unpleasant matter on which he had to decide." pp. 168-169

"This was all very well and logical, but there was no blinking the fact that he wished he were home; he could conjure up in imagination so vividly the touch of Barbara's hand on his own that it was an acute disappointment to realize that it was only in imagination. He wanted to have Richard on his knee again, shrieking with laughter over the colossal joke of having his nose pinched. And he did not want to imperil his reputation, his liberty, and his life in combined operations with these unpredictable Russians in a God-forsaken corner of the world like Riga. Yet then and there—his interest rousing itself spontaneously—he decided that he had better go below and reread the Sailing Directions for Riga; and a close study of the chart of Riga Bay might be desirable, too." p. 208

"'I shall rest awhile,' he announced, and lay back and close his eyes.
"There was something more than fatigue about this desire for sleep. Asleep, he would be quit of this siege, of its stinks and perils and bitterness; he would be free of his

responsibilities; he would not be plagued with the endless reports of Bonaparte's steady advance into the heart of Russia; he would no longer be tormented with the feeling of fighting a desperate and hopeless battle against an enemy who was bound, because of his colossal strength, to prevail in the end. Oblivion awaited him if he could only sleep—oblivion, nepenthe, forgetfulness. Tonight he yearned to sink into sleep as a man might yearn to sink into the arms of his mistress. His nerves were curiously steady, despite the strain of the last few weeks—perhaps (such was his contrary nature) because of it. He settled himself down in the straw, and even the tumultuous dreams that assailed him were (as he was somehow aware) not nearly as serious as the thoughts from which he would have suffered had he been awake." pp. 263-264

"The story came out rapidly, staccato, drawn from the Conde's lips by explosive promptings from Essen. Bonaparte's army had been dying on its feet long before it reached Moscow; hunger and disease had thinned its ranks as Bonaparte hurried it by forced marches across the desolated plains.
"'The horses are nearly all dead already. There was only green rye to give them,' said the Conde.
"If the horses were dead it would be impossible to drag supplies in to the main body of the army; it would have to scatter or starve, and as long as the Russians had any sort of army in existence it would be impossible for the main body to scatter. As long as Alexander's nerve held, as long as he maintained the struggle, there was still hope. It began to seem certain that Bonaparte's army in Moscow had spent its strength, and the only way in which the French could bring fresh pressure upon Alexander would be by advancing upon St. Petersburg with the army here before Riga. That made it more imperative still to hold on here. Hornblower felt considerable doubt as to Alexander's constancy if he were to lose both his capitals." p. 276

"The lodge-keeper who opened the gates stood with gaping mouth at the sight of Hornblower, but his surprise was nothing compared with that of Wiggins when he threw open the door in answer to Brown's thundering upon it. He could not even say a word but stood yammering before he drew aside to admit his master. There was the sound of singing in the hall, which was gay with holly and bright with candles. Apparently Barbara was entertaining the village carol singers.
"'Glad ti—iding of com—fort and joy,' sang the carolers.
"There was a rush of feet, and here was Barbara, and Barbara's arms were about his neck and Barbara's sweet lips were upon his. And here came Richard, his steps hesitating a little, big-eyed and solemn and shy at the sight of this strange father of his. Hornblower caught him up in his arms, and Richard continued to inspect him solemnly at close range.
"'Glad tidings of comfort and joy,' said Barbara, her hand on his arm." pp. 313-314

Topics for Discussion

Why would the Admiralty chose a man such as Hornblower to prosecute the mission to the Baltic Sea? Considering Hornblower's orders, do you think any measure of success short of complete success would be acceptable to the Admiralty?

Once appointed commodore, Hornblower passed up many senior captains to request Captain Bush be assigned command of Nonsuch. Why do you think Hornblower takes such comfort in having a subordinate such as Bush during times of war?

If you could command any vessel in Hornblower's flotilla, which would you take? Why? Discuss the various weapons used on the various ships; which ship proved most successful in the Baltic campaign? Why?

A modern map does not show several of the political entities discussed in the novel. What happened to these entities? Why does Swedish Pomerania no longer exist? Discuss the history of the Baltic Area in general outline.

The text fully develops the political situation in obtaining the Baltic area, including lengthy discussions about Napoleon's goals and the English fight to stop Napoleon. How does this material contribute to the construction of the novel? Is so much detail warranted in a book of this type? Why or why not?

Hornblower has a sexual affair with a countess during his Baltic exploits. In what way does this narrative element contribute to the overall construction of the novel? Does the usually nervous and self-damning Hornblower feel he has wronged Barbara with this affair? Why or why not?

Hornblower looks in the mirror toward the end of the novel and is shocked by the physical changes in his facial appearance. Why do you think that he has "aged" so much during the eight months discussed in the novel?

Given the option, do you think Hornblower would rather be a commodore of a flotilla or the captain of a frigate on detached service in some far-flung corner of the globe? Discuss your choice, explaining why you think it is the one Hornblower would prefer.