

Flashman at the Charge Study Guide

Flashman at the Charge by George MacDonald Fraser

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Plot Summary

Flashman at the Charge is, ostensibly, the fourth part of the cache of "Flashman Papers" discovered late in the 20th century and published by George MacDonald Fraser. Octogenarian Harry Flashman, retired as a Brigadier-General from the British Army early in the 20th century writes a memorial of his seemingly illustrious career. This novel deals with the Crimean War (1853-54), during which "Flashy" is the only man who participates in all three skirmishes of the fabled Battle of Balaclava, falls prisoner of war to the Russians, and is nearly forced to work on their behalf in the planned Russian invasion of India, but plays a major role in preventing it.

Captain Harry Flashman ("Flashy"), a bully, a knave, and a coward at heart who somehow always blunders into a position to be seen as a hero, does his best to avoid going to the front in the Crimean War by finagling a cushy post on the Board of Ordnance in London. Lord Raglan, Commander-in-Chief of the Army, however, decides this is a waste of his talents, assigns him to his staff, and puts him in charge of educating the German Prince William of Celle. Before long, Flashy and Will head east to deliver orders concerning the siege of Sevastopol.

In the Crimea, Flashy loses his gung-ho ward in the first battle, endures ignominy, and contracts dysentery, but is back in the saddle on 25 Oct. 1854, where he is the only man who takes part in the three phases of the Battle of Balaclava. After "yelling and farting" his way into the Charge of the Light Brigade, trying to get the commander to wheel away from the blazing Russian guns, Flashy is taken prisoner of war into Russia, where he enjoys a luxurious house arrest and learns a great deal about Russian society before the liberation of the serfs. He is reunited with school chum and fellow POW Scud East, a spy and Christian moralist. They overhear plans for a Russian invasion of India and find themselves able to flee safely when peasants revolt and the landlord entrusts his daughter's safety to Flashy (having earlier asked him to impregnate her).

Flashy is recaptured and the sadistic Count Ignatieff, author of the invasion plan, casts him into irons and transports him east of the Caspian Sea to "make propaganda" for Russia among the Afghans. Flashy is broken out of the dungeon of Fort Raim with the rebel chief Yakub Beg and the bandit Izzat Kutebar. He is seduced by Ko Dali's beautiful and tactically brilliant daughter, and rendered fearless and bloodthirsty by hashish given him secretly, commands the firing of rockets at the Russian supply ships holding all the powder and shells needed for the Indian expedition. Flashy hurries to India to report his adventures, hoping to return home to safety in England and a possible knighthood.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

With bowels rumbling and heart terror-filled, Harry Flashman knows he is trouble as he bears a message to the commander of the Light Brigade. With war with Russia looming early in 1854, and as a popular hero of past conflicts, "Flashy" knows he cannot avoid service, but pulls strings to join the safe Board of Ordnance. Wife Elspeth is mortified that he is not wearing the proud pink and blue of the 11th Hussars and cannot imagine that its commander, Lord Cardigan, will not take him back. Ordnance proves a boor. One night, Flashy and friend Speed go to a pool hall, where well-dressed, conceited young Cutts, a "regular shark," takes £15 off a poor little "lamb." Obtaining a "shaved" ball, Flashy helps the greenhorn make a public fool of Cutts. Flashy considers taking the boy to a whorehouse, but settles for leaving him for the police to find.

After a boring day at Ordnance, Flashy finds Elspeth looking "fetching," riding with "Lord Haw-Haw," the Earl of Cardigan, who 14 years earlier sacks Flashy and sends him to the horrors of Afghanistan. Graying, alcoholic, and flirtatious, Cardigan treats Flashy with contempt as he invites Elspeth to ride at his estate. Elspeth praises Cardigan's "condescension," while Flashy swears at her naiveté. They settle their row with sex so good that Flashy forgets to forbid her to see Cardigan again.

Lord Raglan, the kindhearted "ass" destined to preside over the death of the Light Brigade as Commander-in-Chief of the Army, summons Flashy, who assumes this means a transfer to the front. Reviewing his file, he finds Flashy's talents wasted and announces on behalf of Prince Albert that he is to supervise Prince William of Celle, Queen Victoria's young German cousin, who is studying in England. Flashy doubts he is suited to be a spiritual advisor, but is relieved not to be a warrior. When Raglan takes Flashy to the Palace, "Willy" turns out to be the greenhorn. Albert promotes Flashy from captain to colonel and orders Willy to be obedient to his new mentor.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Chapter 1 introduces Harry Flashman as he resumes his life's story in 1854. Flashy makes it clear from the outset that he has tried to avoid an active role in the Crimean War and finds himself in the infamous "Charge of the Light Brigade" through a series of accidents. He assumes that readers are familiar with his essentially cowardly and self-serving approach to life, which belies his fame as a war hero in India and Afghanistan. Throughout the novel, he alludes to these campaigns and to adventures in Europe and the American West. He insists that his reputation is a fluke. Readers need not be familiar with the first three novels to appreciate this one fully.

An interview with Lord Raglan, the new Commander-in-Chief of the British Army allows a review of Flashy's past. The device is a natural way to convey a great deal of factual



information, much of which finds its way into later pages. In recalling the interview, Flashy's assessment of Raglan as incompetent is colored by the debacle in the Crimea. He contrasts the soft-spoken Raglan with his predecessor, the tactical genius, the Duke of Wellington, hero of Waterloo.

Having Flashy befriend and later pull a prank on a hapless young foreigner in a billiard hall is the first of the accidents that bring him to the Crimea. The "greenhorn" turns out to be a royal cousin and Flashy is assigned to serve as his mentor. With war brewing - the patriotic atmosphere in London is well-described - Flashy sees this as his best chance of staying out of harm's way. Prince Albert is painted as a German-accented fop. Flashy in an aside reminds readers that he long ago enjoys a brief tryst with Her Majesty. Note how Flashy wins over amiable young Willy, and how the courtiers expect the informality to be condemned.

The second accident begins with a chance meeting between Flashy and Lord Cardigan, the general who 14 years earlier drums him out of the prestigious 11th Hussars (the "Cherry-pickers"). Flashy finds "Lord Haw-Haw" flirting with his beautiful wife, Elspeth. Cardigan's speech impediment and obnoxious laugh are used to establish him as a villain. Flashy informs his naïve wife that the man is a sexual predator. The spouses fight and make up with sex, and the sexual content of the novel builds going forward, expressed with frankness more appropriate to the late 20th century than to Victorian or Edwardian times. Cardigan later proves Flashy right when he is caught half-naked with Elspeth, and the two men ride into battle loathing one another. In Chapter 1, Flashman states enigmatically that the accidents save India for the British Empire.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Flashy and Willy take to one another, outfitting and provisioning on Her Majesty's account as they join the 17th Lancer Regiment. To Elspeth's delight, society's doors open thanks to the prince. While shopping, Willy sees painted whores and demands to have one. Shocked, Flashy takes him to a high-priced, discrete establishment, St. John's Wood, Willy is inept with the "strapping blonde wench" he is given and with whom he falls in love during repeated visits.

Willy takes so well to his army duties that Flashy worries they may be assigned to action. Britons are war-crazed and certain that Russia will be swiftly defeated. On the day war is declared, Flashy and Willy report to the chaos of Raglan's headquarters, where they spend a month in staff work and feverish social engagements. During these, Cardigan pursues Elspeth when not bragging about his Cherrypickers being the army's elite. Flashy would like to see "Jim the Bear" Cardigan turning on a spit.

In May, Elspeth attends a dance and spends the night with Marjorie. After working late, Flashy gets drunk and, filled with desire for Elspeth, goes to Marjorie's, hides in the closet, and pops out to see Elspeth and Cardigan half-naked. The Earl withdraws with dignity and Flashy expresses mortification at being cuckolded. When Elspeth insists she has been taken unawares, Flashy cannot be sure what has happened, cannot murder, thrash, or divorce her, and ends up having make-up sex again, vowing revenge.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter 2 sees Flashy recalling previous service to royalty and describing how caring for Willy is quite a task. Its major theme is sex, for the young prince insists on visiting a whorehouse where he falls in love with a buxom girl. Lord Raglan chides Flashy for being too strict a teacher and advises giving his exhausted ward time for recreation. Flashy makes clear to the readers that he has quite a sexual history but is shocked that the young man is so obsessed. He is amused at Willy's clumsiness the first time and compares it with sailors just in from long voyages.

Sex surrounds Elspeth's party going. Cardigan continues pressing his case and apparently invades her boudoir, only to be caught by Flashy, hiding in the closet, drunkenly waiting to make love with his wife. Flashy contemplates instances when he has been the secret lover uncovered and admires his old enemy for the dignity with which he retreats. He and Elspeth then fall too as he rants about being cuckolded. The scene grows quite heated, but her tears and claims of innocence win Flashy over, and they make up in bed. He nearly cries himself to sleep when Elspeth suggests he may have been in the closet with another woman. Conflict with Cardigan is now guaranteed in the pages ahead as vendetta.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The war, pitting Britain and France against Russia to protect Turkey, proceeds without direction. Patriots demand blood, someone suggests attacking Sevastopol, the cabinet agrees, and Flashy informs Raglan. Reaching cholera-ridden Varna, Flashy and Willy find the commanders bickering. Flashy is horrified by the calm discussions and wishes, in retrospect, that he had killed Raglan in his sleep to prevent the invasion. After a month of confused preparations, some 60,000 troops, half too sick to fight and under-supplied, cross the Black Sea. During five days ashore, the men foul the beach and cholera spreads. Raglan orders Flashy and Willy to ride to the rear and advance guards with word to commence their picturesque march. When Cossacks appear on the crest, the advance is sounded, and Flashy has to take enthusiastic Willy in hand to keep him from wandering.

The Battle of the Alma is exaggerated in English art. Flashy sees the lunacy of confronting the Russians' position. He observes the early bombardment from safety, but Raglan orders him and Willy to join him across the river into the heat of a battle that is going badly. Raglan orders Flashy to ride back to the guns to order them up and, when he returns, Willy is missing. Flashy yells for him to stop, hesitates to obey Raglan's order to chase him, and sees the boy fall lifeless. Raglan admonishes Flashy for neglecting his most sacred duty, and during the lecture, Flashy wonders how Raglan's conscience will deal with the thousands of corpses he has produced. Among Willy's effects is a locket picturing his favorite whore.

Chapter 3 Analysis

In Chapter 3, Flashy insists, "this memorial isn't about the history of the war, but about me." Nevertheless, he provides a vivid account of the sights, sounds, and smells of mid-19th-century warfare. Writing as an old man, he wishes he had known what would happen so that he could show the courage of a young Bismarck and stop the lunacy. The chapter turns between two fools: old Raglan, perching on his horse in the midst of battle, and the young German prince who races off to a gruesome death. The old fool castigates Flashy for dereliction of his sacred duty and rejects the excuse that Flashy has done as ordered. Flashy contrasts the thousands that Raglan has sacrificed by lack of preparation, which is shown in detail earlier in the chapter. The chapter ends sentimentally, with Flashy wondering if Willy's pious relatives would want him alive if they knew he had been "thumping" a favorite whore.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Flashy is glad not to be among the 3,000 dead and countless wounded, and wishes warmongers could be shot in the belly to understand what they are advocating. He worries that Willy's death marks the end of his career, but Times reporter Billy Russell and fellow galloper Lew Nolan, who are railing about Lord Lucan's indecision, convince him that once Russell describes the events, Willy will be forgotten. Bad Russian champagne gives Flashy dysentery and he pampers himself in Balaclava until ordered back to duty. Approaching the Causeway Heights, Flashy sees the cavalry parading and then retiring before a distant swarm of Russians. The Highlanders are a mile away, protecting the road but in reach of the Russian guns. Flashy gallops warily towards them, learns that Campbell has ridden back to Balaclava.

When he finds Campbell, Flashy is told his information is out of date and awaits a reply as the Russian cavalry makes its appearance on the Heights. The British cavalry are out of position to stop them from cutting the supply lines, leaving only the 93rd Highlanders. Campbell forms them into two lines, orders "no retreat," allows them to fire only when the enemy is less than 100 yards away, and has the men reload rather than bayonet survivors. As the Russians retreat, Campbell prepares a message for Raglan and asks Flashy first to advise Scarlett and/or Lucan to move north. As he does so, thousands of Russian hussars and dragoons appear, and Scarlett orders not a defense but a charge that will end in Moscow. As the two forces slam into one another, Flashy drops down to ride Cheyenne-style, "roaring and blaspheming" like everyone, emptying his revolver, and bloodying his sword on a dead horse. Bringing word to Raglan, Flashy is too ill to enjoy his notoriety but in later years capitalizes on it.

Sitting miserably on Sapoune Crest with Russell and Nolan, Flashy agrees with much of their criticism of Cardigan and Raglan thus far. Eastward lay two valleys separated by the Causeway. Along the North Valley, the Russians have created an effective crossfire. The British cavalry are stationed at its entrance. Sorry to see that the hated Cardigan has not yet suffered a painful wound, Flashy reminds Raglan that Wellington never loses a gun as Cossacks begin withdrawing cannons. As Raglan is stung into action, Airy pens the order and sends it down with Nolan. Raglan sends the clarification that Lucan is to "behave defensively" and with good judgment. Seeing no sense in the order, Flashy plunges down the bluff and overtakes Nolan, who is sure that the word is "offensively."

Letting Nolan report, Flashy lends Sir George Paget a cheroot, explains his belly troubles, and watches Nolan lose his temper with the thickheaded Lucan. Before Flashy can return to safety, Lucan summons him to serve as Cardigan's galloper, riding out in front of five regiments. Four times Flashy passes gas as loudly as a mortar—the fourth time drawing Russian gunfire. Historians write of the spirit burning in Flashy's burning breast," but it is rather in his bowels. He and Nolan yell at Cardigan to wheel before the



Russian guns (and Nolan dies) but Cardigan crashes onward. A hundred yards out, yelling and farting, Flashy tries to signal the remnant away, but they make a "final, mad charge," surprising the Russians with their fury. Trying to flee, Flashy turns the wrong way and finds himself on the ground searching for the Russian word for "friend," but the press claims he is doing the honorable thing sacrificing himself.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Lengthy Chapter 4 is devoted to a single historic day, 25 Oct. 1854. The map on pg. 92 is quite useful keeping tabs on where Flashy is at any given moment. After summarizing the action in graphic detail, Flashy candidly admits that some accounts by military historians do not completely square with his memories, and he leaves it to the reader to decide. Transitioning to the infamous afternoon battle, Flashy offers a soliloquy on blame, blunders, and the fact that had the 600 who ride into the valley of death not done so, most would still be dead 50 years later. Still, he wishes he could "kick Raglan's arse" — and his own for being there.

Much of the chapter depicts underlings criticizing the brass—and with good reason. Obscure reference is made to Oliver Cromwell's views on military leadership and Hannibal's sage tactics. Flashy likens the Charge of the Light Brigade to the last moments of the Battle of Little Big Horn and to the Battle of Chillianwallah in India, leaving unclear whether earlier volumes might show him participating in them. His riding "Cheyenne-style" is another indication. A comic element is introduced when pilfered Russian champagne gives Flashy a horrific case of gas. Champagne ties in to his prisoner of war period, which leads to India's salvation.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

British officers taken prisoner-of-war at the time are treated like guests, sometimes asked "parole" not to escape, and swapped for enemy prisoners. Flashy's dull, superstitious Russian captors regard Flashy with awe. Under guard in a tent, he feels sick but giddy to be alive. Dapper, French-speaking Major Lanskey takes Flashy to see General Lipandi, who checks Flashy's breath for alcohol, sure that only drunken men could behave like the Lights. Flashy has no answer for the "hideous mistake" and does not yet know he has been part of history, so he affects unfelt bravado in answering questions. The Russians toast the Light Brigade and Flashy accepts their plaudits. He is treated so well that he dreads being exchanged and returning to the squalid camp.

Rather than being exchanged, Flashy is taken to a country estate after a visit to Yalta, where 30 enlisted POWs are housed in a stuffy shed. Seeing—and smelling—they show how hellish war is more clearly than the battlefield itself. They receive better treatment than they would at Balaclava. Sergeant-Major Ryan speaks for the men, welcoming the famed officer and confiding a plan of escape. Disgusted by such dutifulness, Flashy forbids it and leaves with an "England is proud of you" speech that draws three cheers and a song. He is also grieved to learn that Cardigan has survived unharmed.

Flashy is taken across the peninsula and the Azov Sea to Taganrog, where he joins the party of an imperial courtier for the slow, rough ride by telegue (cart) across the vast, featureless Russian steppe. At post stations, Flashy observes that the Crim Tartars are white slaves, property of the landowners, worse off than blacks in the U.S., subject to flogging, knouting, and exile to Siberia on a whim. Discontent is everywhere, controlled by the "white terror" (secret police) through the requirement of showing one's "ticket to live" when traveling. Flashy finds Russia frightening and bewildering, admires only the tea, and is particularly horrified to witness several brutal "peasant-thrashings."

Russian civil servants are pompous, stupid, and rude. A bull-necked registrar insults Flashy and Englishmen in general at a station until a self-assured, rakish, abrupt young officer, Count Ignatieff, slashes his face with his riding crop and forces him to lick Flashy's boots. Flashy sizes Ignatieff up as a soulless "bastard." As Flashy rejoins his guard, he rues Ignatieff's suggestion that they may meet at Starotorsk, Flashy's destination. Happy to be away, Flashy concludes that if Satan exists, he is a Russian.

Count Pencherjevsky's mansion stands out from the countryside as an oasis of comfort. Only the Cossack guard reminds him he is a prisoner. A steward shows Flashy to his apartment. Climbing the stairs, Flashy notices a saucy, delightful 18-19-year-old blonde, whom he would gladly "mount" after two months without a woman, but she ignores his bow. Entering the room, Flashy is surprised to see Scud East, a schoolmate at Rugby.



Chapter 5 Analysis

Chapter 5 commences Flashy's prisoner-of-war experiences in Russia. He tells readers how officers are treated in the old-style gentlemanly code of warfare still obtaining in 1854, but since broken down. He notes that upper-class Russians are fluent in French, which allows him to communicate. During a visit to enlisted POWs in Yalta, held under more wretched conditions, of course, Flashy is horrified that so dreadfully wounded they still think it their duty to the Crown to escape. This theme continues in the chapters ahead. Flashy is content merely to be alive. Leaving, he hears the chorus to Garryowen, a drinking song earlier mentioned during the Battle of Balaclava. He describes it as the full-throated song of many of the campaigns he has fought, including the battle of Greasy Grass (Little Big Horn) with Custer's 7th Army.

Chapter 5 includes a long soliloquy on the terrible human cost of war and courage whose various motivations Flashy can describe and understand—but not share. As a coward, he accepts that those who enter the North Valley are brave, but leaves lauds to Tennyson. He moves on to an initial description of the horrors of Russian serfdom and the worse state of the peasantry after emancipation. Throughout his stay, Flashy makes clear that Russia is a barbarous, benighted, and inexplicable land and describes incidents of cruelty in graphic detail, culminating in the savage, illegal practice of "knouting" by which he is convinced to collaborate with the Russian army in Afghanistan. For several chapters, it remains merely a mysterious word.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Flashy and East size one another up, amazed at being reunited after 15 years. Although in school they are hardly friends, Flashy resolves to let bygones be bygones while they are stuck together. When Flashy asks about Pencherjevsky and this place, East invites him to walk the gardens and there tells him the rooms have concealed "speaking-tubes." They cannot stay outside too long because Russians trust no one, but a coat hung over the tube thwarts listeners. When Flashy asks about the beautiful girl, East blushes and says she is the Count's married daughter, and admits he avoids going to family dinner rather than be tempted by her. Flashy remains lusty, but wants to get the lay of the land first.

Looking like the ogre in "Jack and the Beanstalk" or the giant Goliath, the Count in a thunderous bass voice welcomes Flashy to dinner as a brother and introduces daughter Valentina ("Valla") and 35-year-old sister-in-law Sara. The Count shows excellent taste in food and furnishings and expertise in describing what the Russians should have done differently at Balaclava. He then turns to criticizing his son-in-law, Sasha, who cannot drink, ride, or give him grandchildren—never mind that he is away at the front. That night, Flashy and the Count get roaring drunk, sing, and become friends, and Flashy feels at home for the rest of his stay. The family is flattered he wants to learn Russian and help.

At times, the cultured Count seems as "cruel as a cannibal chief," and when Valla has her maid Vera shorn of her long red hair to pay Sara after losing at cards, Flash sees that serfs are subhuman, as their terrible housing, diet, and backbreaking labor confirm. Flashy describes punishments that serfs receive for minor infractions. The Count explains much about Russian law and the danger of anarchy should reform occur. Peasant revolts average one every two weeks in Russia and are suppressed by the Cossacks, but Pencherjevsky has no fear, considering himself a good master, despite "strict justice" that does not excuse a single blow. He never touches serf women or sells them as concubines—a major reason for uprisings. Marxist agitators are slowed by popular illiteracy.

Russian melancholy sinks into Flashy, and the first time he makes a pass at Valla, she punches him in the groin. East fights boredom by writing to an old friend, about Flashy and Valla, whom he loves chastely from afar—as Flashy learns by snooping. In February, Sasha comes home for a week to a cold reception and a week after he returns, Aunt Sara introduces Flashy to the Russian steam bath. As steam rises like a London fog, Sara emerges from the women's locked section, "birches" Flashy vigorously, front and back, asks him to birch her, and then begs him for sex, instantly becoming his favorite aunt. Next day, the Count takes him riding and, after describing Cossack culture, laments having no grandson to carry on the name. Sara has testified to Flashy's virility, so he is to impregnate Valla before returning to England. Flashy finds



this "spooky" but flattering and begins nightly trips to Valla's room like a prize bull. He finds her bouncy and eager and leaves her sleepy at breakfast.

Flashy's speculation about what happens if Valla fails to get pregnant becomes moot when senior military figures begin holding conferences in the Count's library. East prepares to spy on them from the old screened gallery, but Flashy points out they have no way to get overheard information back to British headquarters and denies any "duty to eavesdrop." The thought of giving up this comfort and being pursued by Cossacks through the snow is appalling. During these visits, Flashy and East are confined to their rooms. When a "really big wig" arrives, East cannot be controlled. Flashy is soon fed up with him. Valla drops in for cards—and to remind Flashy that it has been three nights. He sneaks past the sleeping Cossack guard for "a violent bout" and returns to see East crouching and listening. Flashy is relieved that East assumes he has been spying and panics at being dragged into the gallery.

Flashy perks up when minor matters are finished and Ignatieff rises to summarize for Tsar Nicholas himself Item 7: a 30,000-man expedition to Northern India. With Britain tied up in the Crime and the Afghans and Sikhs eager for liberation, it is a perfect time to move. Five invasion routes have been considered, with the southern route now being favored as meeting the least native resistance. By the time the British learn about the movements, it will be too late to augment the 35,000 troops in India, augmented by 300,000 native soldiers, most of whom are expected to desert. As an expert in the region, Flashy agrees with this assessment. Ignatieff says the invasion can be underway in seven months and the Tsar sighs his permission.

Before the meeting breaks up, Ignatieff proposes diverting the British further by planting on Flashy and East, carefully chosen for this purpose, elaborate plans for Russian forays into North America from Alaska, and allowing them to escape. As the plan is dropped, Flashy and East slip back to their rooms to discuss what to do with what they have heard. If warned, Raglan has barely enough time to move auxiliary troops into India. Studying a Russian geography book, they determine the safest route back to camp. Flashy does not care enough about India to risk being "nabbed," cannot understand the mentality of accepting suicidal risk, and feels Ignatieff may exchange them now that they no longer fit his plan, but also sees that overhearing the conference is a fluke not to be ignored and trusts his own talents. They spend days in lunatic planning, Flashy worrying that anxious East may do something foolish, before fleeing is forced on them.

It comes when a priest and a political agitator, Blank, come to ask the Count to waive the "poll-tax" for an impoverished woman's sons. In a rare show of temper, Pencherjevsky declares that this would establish a disastrous precedent, orders them off his land, and dispatches Cossacks to teach them a lesson. Later, the head Cossack reports that they have lashed the priest to death but the agitator has escaped. The Count is aghast and the Britons wonder what will happen. After a tense dinner, they find out: Blank has inspired the serfs to revolt and they are attacking the mansion.



Chapter 6 Analysis

Chapter 6 introduces several new characters. The first, like Flashy himself, is reprised from Thomas Hughes' mid-19th century novel, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. Flashy deftly sketches how back at the Rugby School they are hardly close friends. Stuck together with East for the foreseeable future, Flashy allows bygones to be bygones (nothing this is not his normal style) but is troubled that East is the gung-ho kind of soldier that Flashy has so often criticized. Furtive reading of East's letter to another, more hated old acquaintance, produces a range of emotions in Flashy, going from vanity to annoyance.

When Count Pencherjevsky, the second new character, hosts a conference of top generals and Tsar Nicholas I himself, Flashy and East sneak into a musty gallery, the former reluctantly and the latter enthusiastically, where they overhear detailed plans for a Russian invasion of India. Observing the odds against him, Britain's premier hands-on expert in Afghanistan and a former warrior in India, being in this situation, Flashy must agree that the Russian plan is sound. His vanity is again tweaked when Ignatieff explains why he has hand-chosen these two British officers to smuggle out to the English staff false plans for an invasion of Canada from Alaska: while East is clever, dangerous, and patriotic, Flashy is all brawn and little brain.

Living in the lap of luxury and enjoying nightly sex with the Count's buxom, lusty daughter — his favorite kind of lover — Flashy is loathe to jump ship. The chapter is replete with increasingly explicit descriptions of Flashy's sexual antics with Valla and East's Victorian sexual repression. The Count is amusing, declaring he is willing to suffer the fires of hell to obtain a grandson and heir. He sends his sister-in-law in to make sure that Flashy is up to the task before making the request. This allows for a colorful account of the banya or bathhouse, a primary Russian institution. After overhearing the generals' plans, however, Flashy's little brain overcomes his reluctance to act and, resigned to action, helps him look for the best means of escape. He has again been drawn into the kind of potentially lethal situation he tries hard to avoid.

The opportunity is forced upon them when Pencherjevsky's Cossacks murder a priest and the peasants revolt. Earlier, the Count, a complex man of cultured tastes, intelligence, and brutality that Flashy sees as the essence of the Russian character in general, doubts that his serfs will ever revolt because he does not sexually abuse their womenfolk (and has built them a stone church). He takes Flashy under his wing to teach him about social realities in Russia. Flashy shares these with the reader in a long disquisition on the tragic life of the peasantry, offering detailed and well-chosen examples, showing the danger of strong folk holding "absolute power over spiritless creatures" Flashy qualifies: he is not a "holy hypocrite" whining about inequality, but he does recoil at Russians enjoying their brutishness. He assures his readers that any professor of Russian history can vouch that he is not exaggerating. Notably, the church is tangential to the discussion, but murdering a clergyman proves as dangerous as raping a serf girl, setting up Flashy and East's harrowing escape, described in Chapter 7.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

As the mob, several thousand strong, armed with whatever they find, beat down doors and break windows, calling for Pencherjevsky's blood, the Count puts Valla under Flashy's protection and sends them tearfully on their way. They harness a three-horse sled in record time and escape just ahead of the mob. Looking back, they see the house in flames, Valla tries to struggle out before fainting dead away. They race ahead, East finally seeing that they will not be pursued. It is heaven-sent.

Inside the sled is snug as passengers snuggle in furs; the driver exposed to the winter quickly freezes. They have adequate provisions for the 5-6 hour ride to Yenitchi. East and Flashy take turns driving. During one time off, East doses Valla with laudanum to put her back to sleep and Flashy hides his anger at losing the opportunity to comfort a bereaved, naked blonde. At the first way station, they verify their course, obtain fresh horses, and nap a while before setting out. Awakening, the silence of the white-covered steppe makes Flashy fret, he rouses East, and, as they set out, men and beast hear the terrifying cry of wolves. Flashy remembers tales of sleds being run down by famished packs. They proceed at top speed for hours before the wail resumes and quickly there are five pounding in their wake. At first petrified, Flashy thinks to throw a fur at the pack, but it only briefly diverts them and they continue closing ground.

As the sled pulls into Yenitchi, however, the wolves vanish. The refugees secure horses, provisions, and clothing for Valla, and push on onto the bleak "Arrow of Arabat," which runs 60 miles through the Sea of Azov to Arabat on the peninsula. The inland lagoon, Sivache, stinks even in winter. Flashy lies to Valla about her father's safety and she drinks herself back to sleep.

After a bit of a rest, Flashy takes the "ribbons" (reins) as they slide onto the bridge. When East relieves him, Flashy finds Valla half-asleep but responsive to his advances and they enjoy a good "wallow," with static electricity from the furs enhancing Flashy's performance. He is exhausted, re-buttoning, when East alerts him to distant hoof beats. They are six miles from the closest shelter. Three-horse sleds can outrun heavily-equipped cavalry horses, but to improve the odds, Flashy jettisons supplies, the cover, and finally naked Valla, certain that gallant Russian officers will stop for her. As they jump forward, East wonders why—and nearly turns back for Valla. Flashy takes over driving and plays "stern duty personified." The causeway ends, they pass Fort Arabat, and enter broken, uneven ground that trips up two horses and the sled overturns, pinning Flashy. In agony, he begs East to help, but East cannot budge it and feels the call of duty. Russians soon surround Flashy, who fears a lance will soon run him through, but merely knock him unconscious.



Chapter 7 Analysis

Chapter 7 opens with Flashy comparing the mob besieging Starotorsk with various sieges he has been in. He rapidly describes the urgent situation, the flight to the barn, and narrow escape into a Christmas wonderland that is marred at a distance only the sight of the house bursting into flame. Flashy describes in some details a Russian institution of equal importance with the banya: the troika or three-horse sled. Lovely Valla is strewn nearly naked on the furs that line it, but Flashy's lust must be contained as do-gooder East doses her with laudanum, an opiate popular in the 19th century. They ride onward through the cold.

Indulging in a bit of name-dropping, Flashy senses danger when the silence is too profound, just before wolves pick up their trail. Kit Carson, whom he quotes, is a famous figure on the America frontier in the first half of the 19th century. Tales that Flashy has heard about wolf attacks from Pencherjevsky deepen the sense of Russian barbarism, and the tossing out of furs and bread show humorously how desperate Flashy grows.

Having survived the wolves by drawing into town, Flash, East, and Valla appear to be nearing safety, for the narrow, desolate "Arrow of Arabat" is normally used only in summer by camel caravans. As they drive out onto it, however, they are pursued by cavalry, at whose command is revealed. Having enjoyed electrifying sex with Valla a final time in the sled, Flashy kisses her a gallant goodbye and throws her overboard to save 112 pounds weight and causing a diversion, which allows them outdistance their pursuers. The sled overturns on the verge of freedom, East steals away to fulfill his mission, and Cossacks surround a trapped Flashy, laugh at him, and knock him out cold. Separated from his recent companions, Flashy is on his way to a new adventure.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Flashy figures anyone who considers it "poetic justice" that he is "hoisted on his own petard" for tossing Valla overboard, which so angers East that he abandons a comrade for duty. Christians like East always put morality first. Flashy would have gotten word to Raglan out of cowardice and self-love. Badly patched up, Flashy sits in a filthy cell facing Ignatieff's hypnotic eyes. The Russian slaps him and warns not to expect mercy after breaking his promise to Pencherjevsky and escaping. Another slap silences Flashy's retort, but learning that father and daughter are both safe relieves him.

As a common felon, Flashy has no rights and will soon wish he had been crushed to death. His only chance is to answer truthfully why he has tried to escape. When Ignatieff confronts Flashy with Item 7, he babbles the truth, blaming East for instigating the spying, and reiterates that he has not mistreated Valla. He is gagged and brought out to witness the fatal knouting of a serf as a warning of the death he will suffer if he fails to "make propaganda" for Russia among the Afghanis.

Flashy is chained hand and foot and his guard is threatened with knouting if he escapes or dies. Flashy is relieved to be locked underground, away from that "evil madman" and guaranteed life for the four months it takes to reach India. He knows how many things can happen in that time, and that he is more at home in Afghanistan than the Russians. Flashy reminds himself, "when the game's going against you, stay calm—and cheat." They travel 1,500 miles through the Arabian Nights, retracing the path to Yenitchy, crossing melting snows to Taganrog and on to Rostov. Flashy's chains torture him as the telegue bounces along. The weather warms in hellish Astrakhan, whose thin women excite Flashy. After a miserable crossing of the Caspian Sea, they debark at Tishkandi and begin a five-day crossing of the desert to the Aral Sea. Flashy begins seeing familiar face types and the air smells like home, although he realizes he is in a frightening, alien land.

Steaming across the Aral, they reach Fort Raim, a swarming army base, where Asians unload material into newly-build sheds. Ignatieff sees Flashy surveying the various regiments and points out the gallows where "unteachables" serve as examples. As Ignatieff trots away, Flashy hears the commandant report the capture of two prominent rebels. The hanging victims sicken Flashy and remind him of his own dire situation. A sergeant takes control of Flashy and throws him into a cell from which even lizards cannot escape. Trembling in the dark, Flashy hears a voice and is astonished to see someone suspended spread-eagled by chains from the corners of the cell. Another man, laboring to support his weight below, greets Flashy as a "gift from God" and promptly slumps unconscious.



Chapter 8 Analysis

Chapter 8 opens with Flashy considering how his capture by Ignatieff - who had predicted they would meet again - is "poetic justice" that he is "hoisted on his own petard" for his ungentlemanly treatment of Valla. Commenting on how and why East abandons him, Flashy makes his strongest comments yet on pious Christians, having earlier denigrated prayer at the North Valley and on the flight from Starotorsk.

In one of the most vivid and graphic passages in the novel, Flashy shows why the word "knout" strikes such fear in Russians' hearts. Ignatieff stands by to explain the torture step-by-step and threatens to end Flashy's life that way unless he "does propaganda" for Russia among the Afghans, among whom his dossier shows he works easily and effectively. Knowing that Flashy cannot make use of the information he feeds him, Ignatieff lays out plans to foment insurrection among foes of British imperialism, take the northern route through Syr Daria despite the native bandits, mentioned in passing during the conference at Starotorsk. He then brags about the thoroughness of Russian intelligence while ticking off elements in his service record, which Ignatieff does not find heroic. Later, Flashy wonders if Russian intelligence has done as good a job in Central Asia, for if it has, his advantage there - on which hangs his survival - is diminished.

Chapter 8 provides much local color describing the passage through the Arabian Nights-like regions east of the Black Sea as Flashy is taken to the Aral Sea, where Russia is fighting to pacify and subjugate various indigenous peoples among whom Flashman feels at home. Reaching bustling Fort Raim, which Flashy likens to a fort on the American frontier, Flashy is again struck by Russian barbarism: the gallows upon which two leading rebel leaders, recently captured, will soon hang as a good omen at the start of the invasion. This prepares the reader to meet Flashy's new cellmates, whose stories make up Chapter 9 and Appendix II.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

The hanging man, Yakub Beg, cries out and moans and pants as Flashy without thinking takes up his weight. Flashy says he is not Russian, but an English POW who speaks Persian. Beg sees providence in Flashy's coming, which cannot appreciate - wondering why he does not let this "Asiatic nigger" simply dangle, rather than break his own back. As Khan of Khokand and guardian of the White Mosque, Yakub greets Flashy as a guest. When Izzat Kutebar comes to, Yakub introduces him. A might swordsman once, old Kutebar had been hanging in chains when Yakub is captured. Only because he has served long in Afghanistan does Flashy realize these are not madmen by the way they revile one another with irony and formal imagery native to Persian and Pushtu. Kutebar trusts no one to rescue them as Yakub anticipates. At nighttime, Yakub orders both cellmates to rest so they have the strength to bar the door against the Russians when the "Lady of the Great Horde" comes over the wall. Kutebar weeps over this but obeys.

Resting, Flashy reviews his last year and hopes that this talk of escape can throw off the fear of death that Ignatieff has planted. The fort appears impregnable, but he has seen mad, hacking mêlées work. Most likely Yakub and Kutebar are just keeping their spirits up. He falls asleep despairing. Dawn comes with nothing happening, and they support Yakub, who is weakening through another day. The second night, Flashy cries out during a nightmare and is hushed by Kutebar, who answers a distant birdcall in kind, using the Khokandians' long-distance signal.

Following explosions and gunfire, Russians storm the door and gain entry. Before they can kill Yakub, Kutebar tackles the executioner and Flashy, whose instinct is to hide in the corner, says a silent prayer, swings his chains, breaks the sergeant's arm, and seizes his revolver. When it misfires, they grapple until a soldier mis-times his thrust and stabs the sergeant. Flashy's next shots go off, killing the sergeant and wounding the other, giving Kutebar time to finish him off. They make fast the door, free Yakub's ankles with a key and pound at the links of his wrist chains. Rescuers pour in with greetings and a black-clothed and turbaned figure kisses Yakub passionately. Flashy is disgusted by the "perversion." Under fire, all are spirited over the wall to safety, including the "infidel" Flashy, who is pleased to be out of Ignatieff's clutches. They halt a half mile away to await reinforcements. Blessing them enough for saving Yakub, the boy kisses Kutebar until he is pushed away for shamelessness, and kisses Flashy only after Flashy feels breasts press against his chest. What else can a gentleman do?

Chapter 9 Analysis

Chapter 9 introduces by name the elusive rebel leaders Yakub Beg and Izzat Kutebar, whom the Russians are exultant to have captured and have brought together physically



in a cell as a brief layover until their public execution. Unwittingly, however, they have also united them spiritually through the cruel torture they impose. The depths of Russian barbarism are plumbed again.

Thrust into this situation, Flashy has the advantage of long years in this region, so he knows the languages in all their nuances, the tendency to abuse during lighthearted banter, to quote proverbs and colorful—usually earthy—sayings, to indulge endlessly in hyperbole. Flashy admits that without this background, he would judge the two men crazy. In this part of the novel, the so-called editor usually translates Arabic/Persian words on their first usage. He fails, however, on two words that are frequently applied to Flashman: *bahadur*, meaning "brave," and *feringhee*, literally "Frenchman" but applied to Westerners in general. Flashman quotes the prisoners swearing by the Islamic evil spirits, *Shaitan* and *Eblis*, without identifying either.

Yakub Beg believes firmly that they will be rescued and intimates a female deliverer. Kutebar reviews for Flashy earlier failed attempts at spirited away Russian prisoners, helping to build dramatic tension. Nothing happens for two nights, but then a splendid jailbreak, worthy of the Wild West thriller occurs, in which Flashy takes part to save his own skin and—rather out of character—after saying a silent prayer. He is revolted when the apparent leader appears to be a homosexual, claims to have seen this before, but considers it "perversion." He does an amazing about-face, however, when the swathed figure turns out to be the "Lady of the Great Horde" that Yakub Beg awaits. Flashy's long-suppressed hormones cut in and he enjoys a long kiss. Her identity and sexual exploits with Flashy are revealed in the next chapter. This still mysterious figure is also remarkable also for playfully carrying out the Muslim practice of *hallal* (the ritual sacrifice of animals) on the corpses of the fallen Russian guards. Kutebar, who has shown a sense of humor, rebukes this jest.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Flashy's rescuers ride for hours to the Kizil Kum oasis in the Red Sands. There, the Tajiks great him hospitably. As his chains are being filed off, Flashy thinks about getting home to London, figuring that Yakub owes him safe passage to Afghanistan, where he can pass as a native. He will relate Ignatieff's plan and his own adventures, be hailed in the press as the "Saviour of India" and probably knighted.

When Flashy broaches the idea with Kutebar, the ex-captive enthuses about Tashkent melons and then the Silk One: in his view a witch, a wayward child, wanton, but also their deliverer. Flashy seeks to learn more about a female who takes part in men's work in a Muslim country. Ko Dali is a Chinese warlord married to a Khokandian. He rules in distant Kashgar. Kutebar wishes Ko Dali had governed his strutting daughter as well. It is scandalous that the Silk One is always right, but that is Allah's will. She first joins the Tajiks two years ago, shortly after the Russians build Fort Raim, and Yakub falls in love. They will marry if Yakub's first wife allows, and the Silk One will help Yakub reach his goal of ruling a kingdom, Khokand or Kashgar perhaps. It is said that the Silk One's head is shaved when she is taken at the fall of Ak Mechet, and she keeps it shaved, under a turban, until she is avenged. She is worth ten heads in the council, rides like a Kazak, and is as brave as Kashgar himself. Said to be touched by God, she sees the Russians' weaknesses and confounds them. Kashgar insists that he is an independent and successful bandit for 30 years, not a freedom fighter.

That night, cleaned up and dressed in local costume, Flashy visits Yakub, recuperating in his pavilion, attended by his lieutenant, Sahib Khan, and Ko Dali's "fetching" daughter. She is wrapped tightly in white, looking self-assured and petting a Persian kitten on her lap. Kashgar has told Yakub about Flashy's desire to go to India, but Yakub insists that first they become blood brothers. As always, Flashy finds this ritual and oath far more solemn than swearing on the Bible. After refreshments, Flashy details his story, which leaves Yakub laughing that the Great Bear's army is intended not for them but for India. The Russians will destroy Tashkent and Khokand en route, within a month. God may save India, but who will save them? When Flashy suggests to the glum gathering coming to "terms" with the Russians, Yakub tells about the fall of Ak Mechet, when the Russians refuse surrender; Sahib Khan tells how his family is massacred there. The Russians intend to clear out the region, killing and enslaving, and their artillery is unstoppable. Kutebar calls for rallying all Muslims to jihad (holy war). They may not win, but they can make the price in Russian lives high and remind the Tsar that the spirit of Timur and Chinghiz Khan still ride the plains. Kutebar observes that he is overdue in Paradise.

Lying prone, Ko Dali's daughter remarks to her kitten that the men are enjoying their despair and mimics them. Kutebar growls, and Yakub laughs, asking her how they can be saved. She calls for a sudden attack, while the Russians' backs are to the sea. Seek



help from Buzurg Khan or Bokhara if necessary. The Russians' ammunition has not arrived, so they cannot take advantage of their numerical superiority. Yakub sees how such a plan would serve both their and the British needs, but Flashy doubts it can be done. The Silk One saunters off to think of a plan, as Kutebar wishes Ko Dali had disciplined her as a child. Wanting only to get to India, Flashy boldly renews his request, but Yakub says he should take his ease until they resolve matters here, so his report will be accurate.

For three days, Flashy watches some 5,000 riders gather—Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Mongols—to face Russian artillery and rifles. He stays clear of the Silk One, whom he finds dangerously attractive and too clever for comfort. Flashy wants only to be safely away from Ignatieff and the Russians. On the fourth day, Yakub summons Flashy to announce that the Russian ships Obrucheff and Mikhail have set sail filled with powder and ammunition. If they can be destroyed at anchor, loaded, the Bear will be clawless for a year. The Silk One has learned that one warehouse holds 20 stands of rocket artillery, Congreves, inaccurate but volatile when hitting a wooden ship. Flashy points out that the Russians have the rockets, which are too heavy and bulky to steal, and require a heavy frame and tubes to fire. Aiming is hit-and-miss.

Kutebar explains the plan: 5,000-6,000 riders seize the pier before the "go-down" (warehouse) where the rockets are stored and hold 50 yards of beach for an hour. Native gunners launch the "fire of Eblis" against the ships at close range, igniting dry timbers. Khokand will be saved for a generation—along with India. They have calculated the odds and cost and ask Flashy's advice on the rockets. Yakub thanks God for sending a man of training who will not bungle the job of launching the rockets. Flashy needs not worry about an invasion, for there will be none. Yakub's eyes glitter with "joyful madness" showing Flashy there is no sense in arguing or groveling. Flashy admits it is a sound plan: Yakub, Kutebar, and Sahib Khan, each leading a division, storm past the fort at 4 AM, cut off the pier, defend two fronts, and shield the firing party. After the expected "Guy Fawkes" explosion, survivors escape by sea. Knowing better than to desert Yakub, Flashy looks as steady as he can. The Silk One will assist with the rockets.

As Flashy's guts churn next day, he goes one last time to dissuade Yakub, but finds him gone for the day and Ko Dali's daughter alone with her kitten, as beautiful as Scheherazade—and aware of it. When Flashy turns down her invitation to wait, the Silk One talks to her kitten about his fear, despite his dissembling. When Flashy shows anger, she wonders if lust, the third forbidden sin, will appear. Flashy has seduced and been seduced in many ways, but never through a kitten. As he reaches out, the Silk One continues her observations, likening him to a nervous child or young man.

When Flashy grabs her, the Silk One offers no resistance and sends her kitten away. It returns as she sits naked astride her first Englishman and is sent away with the promise that it will hear the details. Flashy is mortified. When she pulls off her turban to reveal a bald head and wiggles on him, Flashy falls to it with passion. He yelps when she looks up and cries, "Yakub!"—and resumes plunging and moaning until they fall exhausted into one another's arms. She redresses and fetches bowls of kefir Flashy eats two while



she tells the kitten why she lets him make love to her. Flashy insists that "a good gallop" needs no philosophic excuse. Unafraid of Yakub's return, Flashy tries to kiss her, and she declares him now as dangerous as Sinbad the Sailor. Flashy has not heard of "The Old Man of the Mountains," but she will tell him only after the battle. Quoting the Persian proverb, "Lick up the honey, stranger, and ask no questions," she leaves.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Chapter 10's opening contemplation is on how Flashy's time with the Khokandian Horde is one of the few that he cannot believe happen—but it can be verified in history books. Ko Dali's daughter ("the Silk One") is his fondest memories. The Russians have been steadily and brutally forcing eastward into no-man's-land peoples who are civilized long before themselves—and who are offering desperate resistance. Flashy likens it to a frightening fairytale, a combination of Arabian Nights and Robin Hood.

The action takes place at the Kizil Kum oasis in the Red Sands, where Yakub is recuperating and planning the next phase in the war against Russia. Flashy emphasizes that while he may like his new acquaintances and even sympathize with their cause, his only concern is to protect his own hide—by getting far away from the Russians—and returning to the safe, comfortable life in London. Elspeth's name comes up several times in his yearnings, but does not interfere with the lust that Ko Dali's daughter inspires in him. She is developed in this chapter as an intriguing character, particularly in a Muslim setting. Kutebar is adamant that her father should have beaten sense into her as a child. When Flashy tries to point out helpfully that Russians have had empresses and England is currently ruled by one, Kutebar observes that "Sultana Vik Taria" does not go unveiled or plan ambushes. It is surprising that someone as experienced in Muslim matters would think it could matter what the infidels do.

Flashy is, naturally, attracted to Ko Dali's daughter sexually, but worries about affronting Yakub and finds her unpredictable and too clever. Eventually Flashy succumbs to her seduction, likening her to Scheherazade, the narrator of the Arabian Nights, who stays alive by telling incomplete stories to the Sultan who holds that all women are unfaithful sexually. Ko Dali's daughter wins Flashy's over by talking to her kitten condescendingly about Flashy's fear, anger, and lust. When they come together, she takes the top position, riding him, and pulls a nasty trick on him by pretending to see Yakub approaching.

After the seduction, Ko Dali's daughter serves Flashy kefir (fermented milk) that he finds delicious but detects an unusual flavor. After he has eaten two refreshing bowls, he loses all sense of fear. Her questioning shows that she is looking for an effect, but what she is up to is left to the next chapter to describe. She mentions the "Old Man of the Mountains," but like Scheherazade puts off the story.

A good portion of the chapter is given to describing Ko Dali's daughter's plans for blowing up the Russians' powder, thus de-clawing the Bear. They want the Russians to know that Timur and Chinghiz Khan (Genghis Khan) still ride the plains. Russians are

still traumatized by mention of the Golden Horde, brutal Mongol overlords who engulf their territory in the 13th century. The invaders' leader is Genghis Khan's grandson. Several times the central stratagem of bombarding the Russian supply ships with English-made rockets refers to Guy Fawkes. He is the most famous of the conspirators in the 1605 "Gunpowder Plot" against King James I and Parliament using tons of black powder. Since the plot fails, it is likely Flashy has in mind the fireworks and bonfires used in the annual celebration of the event on 5 November.



Chapters 11-12

Chapters 11-12 Summary

When Yakub's overlord, Buzurg Khan, refuses to risk his people, the 5,000 set out, whooping with Flashy bragging to do his part. Kutebar approves of Flashy's surprising bloodthirstiness. Flashy pictures carving up Ignatieff. The Silk One rides beside Flashy, knee-to-knee, watching him. Invoking God and the memory of Ak Mechet, Yakub starts the charge into the empty steppe. As muskets fire from the fort, Ghazi war-cries burst from the riders as they occupy the beach. In the go-down, half-naked natives wait to do the heavy lifting. Although Flashy boasts that the targets will be sunk in a jiffy, it is major work to set up the firing-frame, and the rockets are old-style, finless and requiring the affixing of long firing sticks. Some are corroded. Kutebar and the Silk One are impatient to begin firing, but Flashy is confident there is time, lecturing about the rockets.

As Flashy makes adjustments and calls for a match, all eyes are fixed on him, and as the Congreve blazes away, he recalls Guy Fawkes Night. It misses the Mikhail by miles, Flashy adjusts and lights a dud. Flashy next touches off the whole battery at once, deafening everyone and filling the go-down with choking smoke. Kutebar invokes God as the Mikhail catches fire. Only the Silk One keeps her head, giving orders to re-aim at the Obrucheff. The Russians are close to breaking through Yakub's line. The first twenty rockets fall nowhere near their target, putting Flashy into a rage. Shipboard guns and muskets begin firing at the smoking go-down as the Obrucheff begins moving offshore. Swearing at the Russian cowardice, Flashy fires five rockets as the go-down collapses, knocking him out.

When he comes to, Flashy's rage is replaced by a pleasant, dreamy tranquility. People crawl out of the wreckage, Kutebar swears, and Ko Dali's daughter tends to Flashy's swollen head. Outside, the fighting draws close. Yakub appears, wounded, and orders them to the water. When they are 20 yards offshore, the remaining Congreves explode. As they drift in the current, as he fondles the Silk One's bottom, Flashy hears Yakub say that the Obrucheff has escaped—and just then, she goes up in a great explosion.

More than 2,000 Khokandians die in the Battle of Fort Raim, and Yakub estimates 3,000 Russians. It is forgotten in Russian textbooks. The Russians do not march on India that year and the Khokandians are not stamped out by the Russians until the 1860s. Flashy recovers his senses two days later in Kizil Kum, and wonders why he had behaved like a "Viking in drink." It goes against his nature, instinct, and judgment. Congratulations convince him he has not been hallucinating, and he senses that Ko Dali's daughter is behind it.

When Flashy asks directly, Ko Dali's daughter reminds him of the "Old Man of the Mountains." He lives long ago in Persia and leads fighting men who prepare to kill and die by taking hashish. Flashy watches in amazement at the "cool tart" talking to her kitten. He has heard of the Assassins. She tells of putting it in his kefir because he is



afraid. With Yakub's whole plan depending on him, she does what she must. When he objects that he could have been killed, she notes that he is alive—and could have been killed as a coward. Facing the truth, Flashy detests her and reminds her of her infidelity to Yakub. Calmly she explains how all men fear and need some passion to overcome it. The seduction makes sure that Flashy eats the kefir. She confesses to being curious about sex with an Englishman, but talks only to her kitty about this. As an old man, Flashy recalls Ko Dali's daughter most fondly among all his women and everything comes back to him when he holds the scarf she gives him as a parting gift. He wonders if real heroes always feel as he does that night and feels sorry for anyone born fearless.

Danger from the Russians is still too close, so Flashy is anxious to be off to a hero's welcome in India. Elspeth lacks the brains to talk to cats or put opium in food. He hopes that Cardigan is dead but worries what he is up to otherwise. Flashy must get back to civilization soon. Yakub moves the survivors out of reach of Russian reprisals. He promises that when they reach Samarkand he will have Afghan pals convoy Flashy to Peshawar. The hard ride is like a holiday outing. Flashy wishes he could "board" Ko Dali's daughter one last time but has no opportunity. Yakub is talkative about his ambitions and conversation always returns to the Silk One and Kashgar.

Heading south from Samarkand, Yakub laughs at his prediction that the Russians would not water their horses at the stream of See-ah. When Flashy quotes a verse from an English hymn about the wicked ceasing from troubling, Yakub observes that all holy songs are made of dreams. As they part as blood brothers, Yakub quotes from Firdausi or Omar. As Yakub and Kutebar thunder away, Flashy feels oddly lonely but it passes. Entering Afghanistan, even with a tough escort, feels odd. The old sights have changed. Flashy insists on taking the rugged northern route because the southern route and Kabul hold too many bad memories. In Peshawar, Flashy is confronted by a "whipper-snapper" ensign who summons his sergeant at the sight of this "beastly-looking nigger." It takes half an hour to convince them and a captain of his identity, at which point they demand if he has anything to declare in customs.

Chapters 11-12 Analysis

Reiterating the truth of his tales, no matter how strange, and the clarity of his memory, if not his understanding, Flashy continues, reaching the novel's climax in Chapter 11, and then briefly recounting his escape from mortal danger to India and his dreams of home mixed with half-century old reflections on these exciting days.

The Battle of Fort Raim is, for the Khokandian attackers viewed largely as vengeance on the Russians for the massacre at Ak Mechet. The leadership, primarily Yakub and Ko Dali's daughter, see the strategic value for them and for the English. The battle proceeds as laid out in Chapter 10, focusing tightly on the go-down, the action in front of it being strictly diversionary. Thanks to Ko Dali's daughter, Flashy is uncharacteristically fearless and bloodthirsty, seeking a vendetta with Ignatieff, his ultimate villain. In Chapter 12, she explains that she has slipped him some hashish into his post-coital



refreshments; he recognizes the way by which the Assassins are motivated to accept approaching martyrdom centuries before.

Chapter 11 describes in detail the outmoded but mostly functional British rockets. While preparing them for firing, Flashy wonders who in England has made money on selling them to the Russians. "Full of beans," Flashy jury-rigs a launcher that appears properly aimed. He grows frustrated and then angry with the hit-and-miss message he knows is inevitable, and exults when firing a salvo finds the mark. Recall that in the planning Ko Dali's daughter makes clear that they have a massive number of rockets at their disposal, making the individual shots seem shortsighted—but Flashy has all along insisted that he is not an artilleryman.

Only Ko Dali's daughter is not caught up in the celebration that follows hitting the first ship, and Flashy grows cocky when called back to reality and the need to target the second ship before the Russians break through the crumpling defenses outside. His inflated male ego is bruised when 20 rockets miss their target and it begins pulling away. The Russians score a direct hit on the godown as Flashy sends off the 21st, and he is knocked unconscious. It appears that a small dingy, set afire during the barrage on the Mikhail, later drifts into the fleeing Obrucheff and ignites her.

The sexual theme returns, with a wounded, delirious Flashy fondling the Silk One in the escape boat — with her either not noticing or not minding — and wishing for one last chance to be together before crossing into Afghanistan. Unable to tell what she may have shared with Yakub, Flashy agrees with Kutebar's contention: Ko Dali's daughter knows too much not to be dangerous. She refuses to evaluate his sexual performance when he rather pitifully asks and seems to consider the dalliance as her duty to maximize his battle-readiness. Looking ahead to the comforts of England, Flashy compares Ko Dali's daughter with his wife, whom he has always found sexually exciting. He cheats on her in London and in Central Asia not because he is tired of Elspeth but because he desires instant gratification anywhere and everywhere. The octogenarian thinks back over them all fondly, but Ko Dali's daughter enjoys a special place in his elderly heart.

The novel ends on a light note with Flashy gone native encountering British customs. It is hardly the hero's welcome he has convinced himself he deserves and will receive.



Characters

Harry Flashman

The novel's narrator, who insists his memoirs are not about wars and battles but about himself, "Flashy" is writing early in the 20th century, in his eighties, about his many exploits. This novel, the fourth in a series of "Flashman Papers" focuses on his service as a 31-year-old captain in the British Army on reserve status when the novel opens. He is married for 14 years to 30-year-old, beautiful, adoring, shallow wife, Elspeth, by whom he has a noisy five-year old son, Harry Albert Victor Flashman ("Havvy"). Flashy repeatedly insists that anyone who has read the earlier installments will realize he is a bully, a knave, and a coward who somehow always blunders into a position to be seen as a hero. Whenever this happens, he plays the part in public, but without pride. The most important background information for this novel is that he is a bully while attending the Rugby School 15 years earlier, and goes on to a brilliant career in Afghanistan and India, during which he achieve fluency in Persian and Pushtu.

When war-fever grips Britain in 1854, Flashy realizes he cannot avoid service but cannot see getting himself killed for a "politician's vanity" or a "manufacturer's profit." He pulls family strings to be safely assigned to the Board of Ordnance. Lord Raglan, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, however, finds this a misuse of Flashy's bravery, takes him onto his staff, at Prince Albert's insistence promotes him to colonel, and puts him in charge of the military education of Queen Victoria's German cousin, Prince William of Celle (Willy). An accomplished philanderer, Flashy is shocked by the boy's sexual appetite. Hope of a safe job in London vanishes when Flashy is given the cabinet's instructions to hand deliver to Raglan, and soon he and Willy find themselves on the disease-ridden Crimean Peninsula. Willy is killed in the first battle, putting Flashy on Raglan's bad side, and a case of dysentery keeps Flashy to himself for weeks. Summoned back to Raglan's side but still suffering, Flashy is forgiven.

Aghast at Raglan's inability to make decisions, Flashy goads him and thus becomes responsible for the Light Brigade making its suicidal charge. Raglan sends corrected orders to the front via Flashy, which puts him in harms way when the charge begins. Captured by the Russians, Flashy enjoys several weeks of comfort on an estate at Starotorsk, in the company of his Rugby schoolmate Scud East. They eavesdrop on a top-level staff meeting that finalizes plans to invade India, and the two Britons look for ways to get the information to headquarters. They escape when peasants stage a revolt, being charged with getting the landowner's daughter Valla to safety—Flashy earlier having been commissioned by her father to visit her nightly and impregnate her.

During the dash, Flashy is injured, recaptured, shown the dread fate that awaits him if he fails to cooperate during the crossing of Afghanistan, and taken across seas and deserts to Fort Raim, where the invasion force is staging. Imprisoned with two native rebel leaders, Flashy takes an active role in their escape, is seduced and drugged into directing the firing of rockets at the Russian fleet, thereby preventing the offensive. The



novel ends with Flashy in native attire showing up at Peshawar and insisting he is an English colonel needing to see the commanding officer.

Lord Raglan

A historical figure, Lord Raglan commands all Allied troops in the Crimea. Harry Flashman holds him responsible for the ill-fated Charge of the Light Brigade and unfit for military command, commenting, "He should have been a parson, or an Oxford don, or a waiter, for he was the kindest, soft-voiced old stick who ever spared a fellow-creature's feelings—and that was what was wrong with him." Raglan is regularly contrasted with his predecessor as Commander-in-Chief, the Duke of Wellington.

Raglan Loses his right arm decades earlier at the Battle of Waterloo. Before the Crimean War he serves as Master-General of the Ordnance, a branch of service that he tells Flashman is no place for a real warrior and takes him onto his staff. Despite lack of reconnaissance, Raglan is hopeful that an invasion of the Crimean Peninsula can come off successfully. He peevishly overrules objections from Brown and the Navy. During the opening Battle of the Alma, a befuddled Raglan forgets it is not 1815 and the French are allies, not enemies. With uncharacteristic severity Raglan assures Flashy that the battlefield death young Prince William of Celle ("Willy"), whom he places in Flashy's care, will look bad on his record, but seems not to be concerned by the thousands of casualties his orders and lack of planning cause. Days later, Flashy is forgiven and resumes service as Raglan's fastest galloper, which places Flashy in harm's way when the Light Brigade makes its suicidal charge.

Count Nicholas Pavlovich Ignatieff

A historical figure, Ignatieff is a brutal young, Russian diplomat whom Harry Flashman first meets when the Ignatieff whips an impudent petty official who is insulting him and all Englishmen. Flashy characterizes Ignatieff as self-assured and abrupt, "the kind who knew exactly what was what, where everything was, and precisely who was who—especially himself. He was probably a devil with women, admired by his superiors, hated by his rivals, and abjectly feared by his subordinates. One word summed him up: bastard." His eyes, one blue and the other half-blue and half-brown are hypnotic and cause Flashy discomfort. He has gingery, curly hair, and a square face. Scud East, another British POW held at Starotorsk, has also gotten an eerie feeling about Ignatieff, and is certain they will see him again.

The second meeting occurs after Ignatieff monopolizes a planning meeting in Starotorsk to finalize with Tsar Nicholas I plans for invading the Indus (Northern India). East and Flashy eavesdrop on the meeting and decide they must escape to get word to headquarters. Their chance comes when the peasants on Count Pencherjevsky's estate revolt and they are charged with getting young Valla Pencherjevsky to safety. East gets away but Flashy is captured and Ignatieff orders him into irons and makes him watch a prisoner knouted to death to see the horrors that await him if he fails to cooperate



during the trip across Afghanistan. Arriving at Fort Raim, Ignatieff points out the gallows on which the uncooperative hang as a warning to rebels. Flashy's only goal in life becomes getting far away from this "evil madman"—although while under the influence of hashish, Flashy wants badly to settle the score with Ignatieff in a painful and bloody fashion.

Ko Dali's Daughter

Also known as the "Lady of the Great Horde" and the "Silk One," Ko Dali's daughter—no one knows her actual name—is a beautiful, lithe Chinese woman first seen leading a force of fierce Tajik warriors breaking her condemned lover, Yakub Beg (along with Izzat Kutebar and Harry Flashman) out of a Russian dungeon in Fort Raim. She arrives swathed and turbaned in black, leading Flashy to think she is a rather forward homosexual male.

While Yakub is at a war planning meeting for an attack on the Fort which she suggests—firing a cache of British-made but Russian-held rockets at two munitions ships anchored offshore before the armaments can be brought ashore—Ko Dali's daughter seduces Flashy in the garden of Yakub's estate and then gives him hashish-laced kefir as a refreshment. The hashish turns him fearless and bloodthirsty for the battle, during which she stands at his side.

Although her one-sided conversations with her kitten, to whom she assigns a series of epithets, annoys him greatly and he resents being drugged, Flashy recalls while writing early in the 20th century, the "wraith of her perfume," slanting black eyes, and the admonition, "Lick up the honey, stranger, and ask no questions."

Richard Airey

A historical figure, Airey is quartermaster-general to General Raglan. From the safety of Sapoune Ridge, Raglan uses Airey as intermediary, sending messages to Lord Lucan, who is reluctant to engage the Russians. Airey pens the fateful message, carried by Lew Nolan, that sends the Light Brigade to its fate.

Yakub Beg

A historical figure, descended from Timur the Great, Yakub Beg is a Tajik military leader fighting to prevent a Russian take-over of the lands east of the Caspian Sea. Yakub later rules the city of Kashgar. Harry Flashman describes him as long-jawed and straight-nosed with a scalp lock and forked goatee, "a tough customer, by the look of him; one of those genial mountain scoundrels who'll tell you merry stories while he stabs you in the guts just for the fun of hearing his knife-hilt bells jingle."

When Flashy first meets him, Yakub is suspended, spread-eagled, three feet off the ground by chains attached to his ankles and wrists. He is in constant pain, but pure



agony is alleviated when fellow prisoner, the aging bandit Izzat Kutebar. Flashy takes turns bearing the burden as Yakub weakens physically, but insists he will be delivered by the "Lady of the Great Horde." Yakub insists that his two supporters both rest at night, in order to have the strength to block the door when the Russian jailers come to kill them when the Lady arrives.

Yakub, Kutebar, and Flashy are, indeed, rescued, and they head to Yakub's estate in the Kizil Kum east of the Aral Sea. While Yakub is at a planning meeting for an assault on Fort Raim, Ko Dali's daughter—Yakub's intended second wife if the first wife will agree to the arrangement—seduces Flashy and feeds him hashish-laced kefir, turning him fearless and bloodthirstiness, fit for the campaign. Flashy never learns whether she tells Yakub about the seduction. Yakub takes his British blood brother to the Afghan border before turning him over to another escort.

Sir George Brown

A historical figure, Brown commands the Light Division in Crimea. Flashman calls him an "old Scotch war horse" and "nobody's fool." Brown and commander-in-Chief Lord Raglan are "bosom pals." Brown opposes the assault on Sevastopol because no reconnaissance has been performed to allow proper planning, but warns Lord Raglan that as it appears the British Cabinet is in favor of this action, Raglan faces replacement if he fails to comply. This caveat tips the scales in favor of the disastrous invasion.

Sir Colin Campbell

A historical figure, Campbell commands the "Thin Red Line" at the Battle of Balaclava. Described as melancholy when others would grow angry and swear, and wearing a "dreary moustache," Campbell finds him and his 93rd Highlanders the only British troops in a position to prevent the Russian cavalry from severing the main supply lines between British headquarters and the beachhead at Balaclava. He forms his men into two lines (four is standard) and orders "no retreat." He keeps the men from firing until the Russians are under a hundred yards away. He then orders them to reload rather than advancing to bayonet the Russian wounded.

Lord Cardigan

A historical figure, Cardigan commands the Light Cavalry Brigade (11th Hussars, called the "Cherry-pickers) at the Battle of Balaclava, who Flashman catches attempting a sexual tryst with his wife Elspeth. In an earlier episode of the "Flashman Papers," Cardigan, nicknamed "Jim the Bear" and more often "Lord Haw-Haw" for his obnoxious laugh, which frequently punctuates windy speeches delivered with a lisp, drums Flashy out of the Cherry-pickers for marrying below his station. For him now to be acting lecherously towards Elspeth is double offensive to Flashy. When Flashy catches them half-naked, Cardigan beats a distinguished retreat.



Flashy and Cardigan next meet as preparations are being made to attack Sevastopol on the Crimean Peninsula. Cardigan serves directly under his brother-in-law, Lord Lucan, and the two despise one another. Cardigan lives in luxury aboard his private yacht rather than in camp. After Flashy delivers a message from Lord Raglan, he is ordered to stay at Cardigan's side, should he need to send a message back to the chief commander. Neither Cardigan nor Flashy likes the arrangement. As the charge begins, Cardigan rides straight into the heart of the Russian firing and Flashy tries mightily to get him to halt and swing around, which would have reduced the frightful casualties suffered by the Light Brigade. As a POW, Flashy is gravely disappointed that Cardigan has not suffered a horrifying death and worries about him being back with Elspeth in England.

Fanny Duberly

A historical figure, Fanny Duberly is a British society woman and diarist, who accompanies her husband to the Crimea and smuggles herself ashore disguised as a washerwoman. During his convalescence from dysentery after the Battle of Alma, Harry Flashman recalls trying to seduce her in Wiltshire six years earlier and dreams of another try. Flashy meets her cooking breakfast for the Highlanders and has a hard time refraining from squeezing her breasts in front of the men. As the Russian charge begins, Duberly trots across the battlefield as though at a picnic.

Scud East

Harry Flashman's fellow student at the Rugby School in England some 15 years earlier, East is in this novel a major in the British army taken prisoner in Silistria three months earlier. They find one another thrown together at Starotorsk under comfortable house arrest. East is taller and thinner than Flashy remembers, but still awkwardly nervous. Recalling their school days, Flashy recalls they are hardly friends but resolves to let bygones be bygones while they are stuck together.

When high Russian officials arrive at Starotorsk, East insists it is their duty to eavesdrop and, when they overhear information of critical military significance, that they escape and get it to headquarters. Flashy is loath to leave the comfortable house and assume the great risk. A peasant revolt forces them to flee with Valentina ("Valla") Pencherjevsky, for whom East lusts but as a Christian forces himself to avoid temptation. During the flight, East invites Flashy to pray with him for a good completion of their mission. When Flashy tosses Valla out of the sled to gain speed, East is appalled and wants to go back for her.

When it appears they are safe, the sled overturns, pinning Flashy, and East insists it is his duty to carry the information to the staff, even if it means leaving his comrade to perish. In captivity, Flashy considers that East may have left him because of his feelings for Valla and the lack of gallantry Flashy exhibits. Flashy notes that East is killed in Cawnpore, India, a few years after this narrative, a victim of his gung-ho spirit.



Elsbeth née Morrison Flashman

Harry Flashman's 30-year-old, beautiful, adoring, shallow wife, Elspeth is the daughter of a tradesman who buys a peerage just before his death. They have been married 14 years and have a noisy five-year old son, Harry Albert Victor Flashman ("Havvy"). Flashy assumes that Elspeth has had as many affairs as he but never catches her until she is with Lord Cardigan, Harry's hated former commander. She claims that she is being raped and loves only Harry. He cannot bear to hit or divorce her. Towards the end of the novel, having been seduced by and drugged by a scheming Chinese woman, Flashy reflects on Elspeth's dimness as a virtue.

Lord Lucan

A historical figure, Lucan is commander of cavalry in the Crimean campaign, direct superior to his brother-in-law, Lord Cardigan. They despise one another. Reporter Billy Russell mocks Lucan as "Lord Look-on" for his indecision - unable to order oats without written orders from Lord Raglan.

Izzat Kutebar

A historical figure, Kutebar has been a bandit for 30 years and a friend of Yakub Beg, with whom he is imprisoned by the Russians at Fort Raim on the Aral Sea. Grizzled, stout, and 20 years older than Yakub, Kutebar is once a renowned swordsman. He supports Yakub Beg's weight on his own back, hunching beneath the man being tortured by suspension by his ankles and wrists. When Harry Flashman joins them in the dungeon, he shares the burden with Kutebar, who "damns the Russians as only an Oriental can." Kutebar's store of proverbs, sayings, and oaths gives color to the novel. Much of his ire is directed at Ko Dali's daughter, a great warrior and tactician, who does not realize a woman's proper place in Muslim society.

Tsar Nicholas I

A historical figure, Nicholas is in the last year of his life when he attends a senior staff meeting at Count Pencherjevsky's mansion in Starotorsk to hear once again plans for an invasion of the Indus (Northern India) while British forces are preoccupied on the Crimean Peninsula.

Louis Edward Nolan

A historical figure, "Lew" Nolan is a staff galloper assigned to General Airey. Flashman calls him a "cavalry maniac who held everyone in contempt" as he enthusiastically carries orders to the Light Brigade at the opening of this episode in the "Flashman Papers." Nolan loses his temper and screams insolently at the thickheaded Lord Lucan,



to whom he brings orders from Lord Raglan to delay the charge no longer. Nolan dies during the infamous Charge.

Sir George Paget

A historical figure, Page is second in command of the Light Cavalry Brigade (11th Hussars, called the "Cherrypickers) to Lord Cardigan. Harry Flashman, whose mutual hatred with Cardigan is fiery, is on good terms with Paget and lends him a cheroot (cigar) just before the Charge of the Light Brigade. Paget worries that without infantry the infantry, the British will be mauled by the Russians—as they are.

The Pencherjevskys

A Cossack family living on an estate in Starotorsk, northeast up the coast of the Sea of Azov, the Pencherjevskys provide a comfortable house arrest for Harry Flashman and fellow POW Scud East. The widowed Hetman reminds Flashy of the ogre in "Jack and the Beanstalk" and of the biblical giant Goliath. He plays chess, has sophisticated taste and a keen intellect, but also has a cruel streak. He and Flashy take a liking to one another.

Daughter Valentine ("Valla") is a saucy, delightful 18-19-year-old blonde, whom on arrival Flashy allows he would gladly "mount" after two months without a woman, but Valla ignores his first bow. Later, Flashy learns that she is unhappily married to a man who shows no bravery and has been unable to impregnate her, and her father, rather amazingly, convinces Flashy to pay her nightly visits to obtain a male heir. This Flashy does with great pleasure.

Valla's 35-year-old handsome but not pretty Aunt Sara completes the household. A taciturn character, she surprises Flashy by introducing him to the Russian steam bath—and even more by seducing him there. Flashy later realizes that this is an assignment to size him up as a stud for Valla.

When Pencherjevsky Cossacks murder a priest, the peasantry rises up in revolt, and Pencherjevsky orders Flashy and East to save Valla. They throw her, naked into a sled and race away. To save themselves from pursuing troops, Flashy rather ungallantly tosses Valla overboard, but is captured nonetheless when the sled flips. In captivity, Flashy learns that the Count and Valla both survive.

William Howard Russell

A historical figure, Billy Russell is a war correspondent for The Times. Harry Flashman declares, "He was a good fellow, Billy, and we got on well, but he always had an eye cocked towards his readers, and the worse he could make out a case, the better they liked it." Nevertheless, Russell omits any mention of the loss of Prince William of Celle from accounts of the Battle of Alma, concentrating instead on the lack of planning and



leadership that results in 3,000 dead and countless wounded without proper hospital provisions.

Marshal Armand Jacques Leroy de St. Arnaud

A historical figure, St. Arnaud commands the strong French contingency in the Allied army that invades the Crimean Peninsula under the overall command of the British Lord Raglan. St. Arnaud is said to look more like an ice-cream vendor than a general. He is already sick with the fever that claims his life as he agrees to the assault on Sevastopol.

James Yorke Scarlett

A historical figure, Scarlett is commander of the Heavy Cavalry Brigade during the Battle of Balaclava. A "fat, cheery old Falstaff" who mops his head with a "hideously-coloured scarf," Scarlett is shown sitting drunkenly on shipboard studying a book about how to command a cavalry brigade as the fleet crosses the Black Sea. Faced with the onslaught of Russian hussars and dragoons, Scarlett at first gapes while his subordinates issue orders to face them, but then, as a "purpling old lunatic" orders not a defense but an uphill offensive that will end in Moscow. His chief subordinate, Beatson, tries unsuccessfully to talk sense into him. The Count Pencherjevsky, Harry Flashman's host during his house arrest as a prisoner-of-war, considers Scarlett "an English Cossack," and wishes he could talk with him at length.

Prince William of Celle

Queen Victoria's German cousin, Willy is in England to learn military and social life. Flashman first meets Willy losing and sulking in a billiards hall, befriends him, helps him swindle a swindler, gets him drunk, and abandons him in an alley with his rear end painted with bootblack for the police to find. Flashman is amazed to learn the boy is royalty when he is summoned by Prince Albert to serve as Willy's military and social mentor. Willy takes a liking to an upscale whorehouse but also learns a great deal about soldiering. The two go to the Crimean Peninsula on Lord Raglan's staff, and Willy gets himself killed riding wildly with the troops while Flashman is performing his staff duties.



Objects/Places

Alma River

A Russian creek north of Sevastopol, flowing into the Black Sea, the Alma is the site of the first confrontation between Cossacks and the Allied invasion force in the Crimean War. The battle is later memorialized in British cathedrals, churches, memorials, and oil paintings as far more magnificent than it is in reality. Flashy sees from the start that it is lunacy to attack the bluffs, and only because the Russians fight badly, Raglan is lucky, and the British troops show "idiot bravery" is the slaughter kept from being worse. Flashy observes the early bombardments from safety but then is sent galloping back and forth with messages to the French, who do not engage.

Balaclava

The port southwest of Sevastopol on the Crimean Peninsula, Balaclava is the invasion point for the Allied (Anglo-French) forces attacking the Russian Empire in the Crimean War. The port is quickly fouled by some 60,000 troops and disease spreads, further decimating the invasion force. The famous Battle of Balaclava, fought 25 Oct. 1854, consists of three separate actions, and Harry Flashman is the only man who is part of all three, albeit unintentionally and unwillingly. These consist of 1) The Thin Red Line, 2) Scarlett's Charge, and 3) the Charge of the Light Brigade.

Board of Ordnance

The British Army posting into which Harry Flashman gets himself assigned as war with Russia looms, the Board of Ordnance is commanded by Lord Paget. It proves to be a boring, overly-technical assignment, and Flashman spends as little time as possible there, instead taking his wife Elspeth on the round of pre-war parties in London. At the novel's conclusion, however, some of what Flashy has learned comes in handy when he oversees setting up and firing a Russian-held cache of antiquated British-made Congreve rockets at the Russian munitions ships Obrucheff and Mikhail, in order to deny the enemy powder and ammunition for the intended invasion of the Indus (Northern India).

The Charge of the Light Brigade

The closing battle in the Battle of Balaclava on 25 Oct. 1854, the Charge of the Light Brigade was a military disaster for the British Army. Led by Lord Cardigan, whom Flashman utterly despises, it enters a box canyon seeking to prevent the removal of Russian canons. Flashman several times refers to Alfred Lord Tennyson's famous poem, "The Charge of the Light Brigade," himself saying only that it is a great mistake.



Fort Raim

A Russian fort built on the northeastern tip of the Aral Sea at the mouth of the Syr Daria river, Fort Raim is the staging ground for a Russian invasion of the Indus (Northern India). After his escape from Starotorsk, Harry Flashman is taken in wrist and ankle chains to "make propaganda" for the Russians during the passage through Afghanistan. Flashy is thrown into a dungeon with two newly captured prisoners, the tribal leader Yakub Beg and the bandit Izzat Kutebar. Partisans, led by Ko Dali's daughter, break them out. The forces then return to use captured British rockets to destroy the munitions ships anchored offshore before the Russians can arm themselves for conquest. The successful operation marks the climax of the novel.

St. John's Wood

St. John's Wood is the London neighborhood housing the upscale whorehouse to which Harry Flashman takes his young ward, Prince William of Celle, when Willy sees painted prostitutes on the streets of London and demands to have one. Willy returns to St. John's Wood frequently, unusually seeing the same "strapping blonde wench." When he dies in the Crimean War, Willy is wearing her picture in a locket hung from his neck.

Sapoune Ridge

Sapoune Ridge is the high ground west of the Causeway Heights where Lord Raglan establishes his headquarters.

Scarlett's Charge

The second of three skirmishes in the Battle of Balaclava on 25 Oct. 1854, Scarlett's charge results when Russian cavalry in superior numbers charge down from Causeway Heights and James Yorke Scarlett against his subordinates' advice orders a charge rather than a retreat. Why the Russians retreat after suffering a dozen casualties is a mystery.

Sevastopol

The target of the Allied (Anglo-French) forces in the Crimean War, Sevastopol is the primary city on the Crimean Peninsula in Central Asia. British public opinion, whipped up by journalists, virtually forces the cabinet into ordering the army into laying siege to the city to no good purpose.



Starotorsk

The noble estate of Count Pencherjevsky, Starotorsk is located northeast up the coast of the Sea of Azov. Count Nicholas Ignatieff arranges to house two British officers there, hoping to leak to them plans for an invasion of Canada from Russian Alaska to further throw off from defending India. Harry Flashman and Scud East overhear the real plans, to which Tsar Nicholas I gives ascent. Life at Starotorsk—both the luxury and culture enjoyed by the the family and guests and the abject misery of the peasantry—is depicted in detail.

Thin Red Line

The opening skirmish in the Battle of Balaclava on 25 Oct. 1854, during the Crimean War, the "Thin Red Line" refers to two rows of the 93rd Highland Regiment commanded by Sir Colin Campbell under Lord Raglan. Harry Flashman happens by carrying communications when the Russian cavalry charge. Campbell orders his troops to hold their fire until the enemy are nearly upon them. The Russians flee despite suffering only a dozen casualties.

Varna

A port on the western shore of the Black Sea in Bulgaria, Varna is the major naval base for the Allies during the Crimean War. Cholera and other diseases decimate the forces during the long, hot first summer of the war, and inexperienced commanders are still bickering when Harry Flashman hand-delivers to Lord Raglan the cabinet's orders to attack Sevastopol.



Themes

Sex

Sex flows as a continuous undercurrent through *Flashman at the Charge*, with the degree of explicitness growing throughout the novel. Narrator Harry Flashman, writing in his eighties, recalls all his lovers fondly, having seduced and been seduced in many ways. Among the conquests about which he brags is Queen Victoria. Nevertheless, Flashy remains physically attracted to his wife of 14 years, the comely if dim-witted Elspeth, whom he suspects is as unfaithful as he, but is never caught until he finds her with his archenemy, Lord Cardigan. Elspeth convinces Flashy that Cardigan has surprised her and for the second time in the novel, they enjoy make-up sex.

Flashy clearly frequents prostitutes whenever he feels a need, but retains a bit of Victorian priggishness when the young Prince William of Celle demands to visit a brothel and becomes enamored of a particular lady. When Willy dies in battle, he wears her picture around his neck and Flashy wonders if his relatives would want him back alive if they knew.

During his convalescence from dysentery after the Battle of Alma, Flashy runs into society lady Fanny Duberly, whom he tries to seduce in Wiltshire years earlier, and dreams of another try. Instead, he is taken prisoner of war after the Charge of the Light Brigade, and is taken to comfortable house arrest at Starotorsk. He is instantly taken with lovely Valla, but she ignores him. When he makes his first mood, she punches him in the groin. He is then seduced by her aunt in the bathhouse as a test of his virility and then ordered by her Valla's father to visit her nightly and impregnate her, since her wimpy husband is unable. Flashy performs his duties with abandon and notes that someone has taught Valla a good deal about making love. As they flee a peasant uprising, Flashy takes advantage of a drugged Valla before throwing her out of the sled to hasten their escape. The sexual tension of the stay at Starotorsk and flight is heightened by the massively suppressed libido and Christian idealism of Flashy's school companion and fellow POW, Scud East. He lusts for Valla but manfully represses it. Flashy finds it humorous.

Finally, rescued from the dungeon below Fort Raim, Flashy encounters Ko Dali's daughter, whose handkerchief later in life reminds him of her beauty and scent. She first appears as a boyish warrior and her kissing the rescued prisoners makes Flashy recoil from homosexuality, but he quickly accepts a kiss when he realizes she is a woman. Ko Dali's daughter, a vision of Scheherazade, seduces Flashy in the absence of Yakub Beg, her intended (if his wife allows a second wife) and then plies him with hashish—both in order to turn him fearless before battle. Flashy feels emasculated by the way she goes about it, but wishes they could have another encounter before he leaves for India and heads home to Elspeth.



Duty

Flashman at the Charge shows a number of aspects of what duty entails. Narrator Harry Flashman claims to have reached his eighties by not putting his life at risk for some abstract "others"—Queen, Empire, colleagues in arms, or greedy industrialists. Earlier volumes of the Flashman Papers tell of his attempts to avoid putting his life at risk in Europe, India, and Afghanistan, but something has always come up that thwarts his plans and something else always comes along to preserve him and put him in the most favorable light. Flashy is, therefore, a hero in the popular mind and knows he cannot avoid service when the Crimean War breaks out. He pulls family strings to get into the safest branch of service, but is pulled out to join the Commander-in-Chief's personal staff. A fanatical fellow "galloper," Lew Nolan, the epitome of the gung-ho attitude Flashy detests, dies during the infamous Charge of the Light Brigade. By that point, Flashy has already experienced the "Thin Red Line," where the general insists on no retreat, and Scarlett's Charge, where the British run uphill after a superior force, hearing they will chase them all the way to Moscow. That the aristocratic British generals overall fail in their basic duty of adequate planning, provision, and supervision is made abundantly clear.

When taken prisoner by the Russians, Flashy meets an old schoolmate, a fellow POW, who believes fervently that their moral duty is to escape, making Flashy cringe at the imposition of Christianity on top of patriotism as a reason for risking one's life. Their house arrest is so comfortable and life in camp so wretched, that Flashy looks for any way not to go along. At Scud East's instigation, they eavesdrop on a top-level planning session for an invasion of India and East becomes manic with the need to get the information to headquarters. Realizing the providence of hearing this as an expert in Central Asian affairs, Flashy agrees they must try to report, but in a safe fashion.

At the end of the novel, set free from prison and anxious to get to India and thence home, Flashy reverses himself, arguing to the Khokandians that he must do his patriotic duty of reporting the impending invasion of India to headquarters. The warlords counter that if they can blow up the supply ships in harbor before they can offload munitions, there will be no invasion. Sex and a secret dose of hashish turn Flashy into a fearless warrior and the plan works. Flashy enters India knowing he will again be hailed as a hero and perhaps knighted. Throughout, he has primarily done his duty to keep himself alive.

Brutality

Flashman at the Charge depicts four heated battles in which professional soldiers blow and slash one another to pieces and exult in the results. This violence, however, is not particularly brutal. Brutality is reserved for narrator Harry Flashman's sojourn in Russia in the last years before serfdom is abolished. Flashy's host during his comfortable house arrest is a cultured, learned man who also happens to be capable of the coarsest brutality. Even before reaching Count Pencherjevsky's mansion at Starotorsk, Flashy



witnesses lords savagely beating passive peasants. At Starotorsk, he sees a maid shorn of her hair to pay a gambling debt, and peasants flogged and sent off to Siberia for offenses as minor as washing windows too early and disturbing the Count's daughter. Flashy sees them living in abject poverty, working themselves to death, and hears the Count proclaim it his duty to be strict because if they get an inch they will take a mile.

Far worse than Pencherjevsky, who appears no worse than other landowners of the era, is Count Nicholas Ignatieff, whom Flashy sizes up at their first meeting as truly a bastard. With reptilian eyes and a brisk manner, Ignatieff is utterly feared by subordinates, and his suggestion that he and Flashy will meet again at Starotorsk hangs over Flashy's head. When they next meet face-to-face, Flashy has survived a sled accident while fleeing, but is bruised and bandaged. Ignatieff informs him he has become a common felon with no rights, claps him in chains, and forces him to watch a knouting. This quintessential Russian punishment, invariably fatal, surpasses any flogging that Flashy has seen—and he admits to being mildly drawn to such events. Ignatieff explains the unspeakable torture step-by-step before informing Flashy that unless he "does propaganda" for Russia among the Afghans during the upcoming invasion of India, he will suffer such a fate. Taken in chains to remote Fort Raim, Flashy is next shown men hanging from gallows—the lucky ones by the neck—to serve as examples to would-be rebels. He is thrown into a dungeon where one prisoner is suspended by his four limbs three feet off the ground. If a fellow prisoner were not supporting his weight all day and night, he would be disjointed. Flashy concludes that if there is a Devil, he is Russian.



Style

Point of View

Author George MacDonald Fraser uses the octogenarian Harry Flashman, retired as a Brigadier-General from the British Army early in the 20th century, as a memorialist reviewing a long and seemingly illustrious career. Fraser claims to be just a technical editor who also adds historical and cultural endnotes to help the reader. The present novel is the fourth part of the cache of "Flashman Papers" discovered late in the 20th century by Fraser.

"Flashy" assumes that readers are familiar with his earlier exploits, and reminds them continually of how his reputation as an intrepid hero is at odds with reality. Somehow, something always seems to come along not only to put him in harm's way but also to deliver him from it and leave him looking good to everyone around. Flashy readily admits to crippling fear and following the impulse to flee danger, but has not, until the publication of his Papers, discouraged anyone from wining and dining him as a national hero.

Because the novel is told as a written memorial, there is no need for changes of perspective between the third person and the first person omniscient, although occasionally for rhetorical purposes, Flashy refers to himself in the third person. Once the dramatic moment passes, he reverts to the first person. Sometimes he slips from past tense narrative to present tense, briefly, for the same reason. Everything is put forth through Flashy's eyes after fermenting in his memory for half a century. He readily admits that historians of the Crimean War, which is the focus of this novel, do not always and entirely agree with his memory, but declares it is a book about himself not about history. Everything in the novel refers back to himself.

Setting

Flashman at the Charge takes place in the years 1854-55. The action opens in London, England, where the population is rife for a good, bloody war with Russia. After scenes in a billiard hall, the Palace, and an upscale whorehouse, it moves to the squalid Black Sea port of Varna and then onto the Crimean Peninsula, which juts out like an arrowhead into the northern part of the Black Sea. Thanks to improper sanitation, disease haunts Balaclava, the invasion point, as badly as it had Varna, the demarcation point. The three great skirmishes of the Battle of Balaclava are recounted, with Harry Flashman being the only human being to take part in all three.

Taken prisoner by the Russians after the Charge of the Light Brigade, Flashman is placed under comfortable house arrest in Starotorsk, northeast up the coast of the Sea of Azov. He and fellow prisoner Scud East escape during a bloody peasant revolt, ostensibly to rescue the landowner's daughter, Valla, but in fact to bring word to the



British authorities that Tsar Nicholas has authorized an invasion of India. Flashman is captured and taken eastward in chains to Fort Raim on the north shore of the Aral Sea. The Russians threaten to kill him savagely if he does not "propaganda" for them in Afghanistan en route to India, Flashman having lived and fought in Afghanistan in an earlier installment in the series.

At Fort Raim, Flashman is imprisoned with two rebels awaiting execution, and escapes when their followers attack the fort. Flashman takes part in a great battle at Fort Raim, aiming British rockets that the Russian have stolen at the Russian fleet provisioning the Indian invasion force. After the battle, Flashman is taken south by his new friends to the border of Afghanistan, and ends this fourth portion of memoirs amusingly showing British soldiers in Peshawar wary of his native attire.

Language and Meaning

Flashman at the Charge is told in British English. The narrator is an octogenarian writing about his life and career early in the 20th century, but the events described fall in 1853-54. There is, therefore, much 19th-century military jargon used. Every regiment has a few nicknames, official and unofficial, every non-British ethnic group has its pejorative label (e.g., Frogs, Sawnies, and Ruskis). The extensive dialog contributes to character development as Scotsmen talk in Scottish brogue, officers sound upper class and enlisted men speak Cocky. Lord Cardigan's lisp is mimicked at length, with his signature laugh punctuating most sentences, earning him the nickname "Lord Haw-Haw."

When the action moves into Flashy's prisoner of war phase, the text grows heavy first with Russian and then with Persian, Arabic, and Pushtu words and phrases. Many of these are diligently translated in footnotes upon first use, but more than a few others are overlooked, in some cases leaving the reader confused. Flashy takes great interest in mid-19th-century Russian society while living in comfort on a noble estate. He describes this for readers (particularly well the banya or Russian bathhouse) but gives more attention—and more empathy—to the plight of the serfs, whose slavery is more profound and unhappy than black slaves in the United States. He concludes that Russia is a land of barbarism and if there is a devil, he must be Russian.

When Flashy is transported eastward into the Hungry Steppe, he feels back at home. After meeting the two important rebels whom the Russians have recently captured, he tells the reader that if he had not spent long years in the region and come to understand not only the languages but the culture, he would think his new companions crazy for the way they talk to one another. Flashy to some extent joins in spouting hyperbole and sayings in the rich texture characteristic of Arabic, Persian, and Pushtu. Similes and metaphors abound and references to historic and legendary figures.

Structure

Flashman at the Charge consists of an "Explanatory Note" by George MacDonald Fraser, who claims to be the editor of the "Flashman Papers" that have come recently to



light a half-century after their being written early in the 20th century. The present novel forms the fourth part of Flashman's personal memoir, when he is a colonel in the British Army during the Crimean War (1854-55).

The body of the novel consists of twelve numbered but untitled chapters, running in chronological order after Flashman the opening pages establishes dramatically that he is not only forced into the suicidal Charge of the Light Brigade but in several ways responsible for it. The chapters are of widely varying lengths. Forty-four endnotes explain obscure references in the text, maintaining the fiction that this is a historical memoir rather than a work of historical fiction. A few of them are indispensable for making sense of British customs in 1854. Two maps help the reader immensely in figuring out where Flashman is located and where he is headed next. Finally, there are appendices talking about Balaclava, Yakub Beg, and Izzat Kutebar, whose value to the volume is minimal.

There are no divisions above the chapter level, but the action takes place in four phases:

- 1) Flashy does his best to avoid going to the front in the Crimean War by finagling a cushy post in Ordnance.
- 2) Flashy is reassigned to the Commander-in-Chief's staff and brought East in preparation for the siege of Sevastopol; there he loses his ward and is the only man who takes part in the three phases of the Battle of Balaclava.
- 3) Flashy is taken prisoner of war into Russia, where he enjoys a luxurious house arrest and learns a great deal about—and shares with readers—Russian society before the liberation of the serfs.
- 4) Flashy is taken in irons east of the Caspian Sea to "make propaganda" for Russia among the Afghans as the Bear invades Northern India.

Flashy is instrumental in forestalling the invasion and makes his way to Peshawar, hoping to return to his normal, safe, and peaceful life, probably being hailed as savior of India.



Quotes

"You have already guessed, no doubt, the shock that was in store for me at the Palace next day. Raglan took me along, we went through the rigmarole of flunkeys with brushes that I remembered from my previous visit with Wellington, and we were ushered into a study where Prince Albert was waiting for us. There a reverend creature and a couple of the usual court clowns in morning dress looking austere in the background—and there, at Albert's right hand, stood my little greenhorn of the billiard hall. The sight hit me like a ball in the leg—for a moment I stood stock still while I gaped at the lad and he gaped at me, but then he recovered, and so did I, and as I made my deep bow at Raglan's side I found myself wondering: have they got that blacking off his arse yet?" Chapter 1, pgs. 31-32.

It was a sight I'll never forget. Elspeth was standing by the bed, naked except for her long frilled pantaloons; her flowers were still twined in her hair. Her eyes were wide with shock, and her knuckles were against her lips, like a nymph surprised by Pan, or centaurs, or a boozed-up husband emerging from the wardrobe. I goggled at her lecherously for about half a second, and then realized that we were not alone.

"Half way between the foot of the bed and the door stood the 7th Earl of Cardigan. His elegant Cherrypicker pants were about his knees, and the front tail of his shirt was clutched up before him in both hands. He was in the act of advancing towards my wife, and from the expression on his face—which was that of a starving, apoplectic glutton faced with a crackling roast—and from other visible signs, his intention was not simply to compare birthmarks. He stopped dead at the sight of me, his mottled face paling and his eyes popping, Elspeth squealed in earnest, and for several seconds we all stood stock still, staring." Chapter 2, pg. 44.

" 'I dare say the sea air will do us good and raise everyone's spirits,' says Raglan, and by God, he didn't raise mine. I've wondered since, if I could have done anything about it, and decided I could. But what? If Otto Bismarck had been in my boots and uniform, I daresay he could have steered them away, as even a junior man can, if he goes about it right. But I've never meddled if I could avoid it, where great affairs are concerned; it's too chancy. Mind you, if I could have seen ahead I'd have sneaked into Raglan's tent one night and brained the old fool, but I didn't know, you see." Chapter 3, pg. 56.

"It was plain as a pikestaff what they were after, and if I could have sprouted wings in that moment I'd have been fluttering toward the sea like a damned gull. Directly behind us the road to Balaclava lay open; our own cavalry were out of the hunt, too far off to the left; there was nothing between that horde of Russians and the Balaclava base—the supply line of the whole British army—but Campell's few hundred Highlanders, a rabble of Turks on our flank, and Flashy, full of wind and horror." Chapter 4, pg. 79.



"He paused, facing them, and there was no sound now but the restless thump of hooves, and the creak and jingle of the gear. All was still, five regiments of cavalry, looking down the valley, with Flashy out in front, wishing he were dead and suddenly aware that dreadful things were happening under his belt. I moved, gasping gently to myself, stirring on my saddle, and suddenly, without the slightest volition on my part, there was the most crashing discharge of wind, like the report of a mortar. My horse started; Cardigan jumped in his saddle, glaring at me, and from the ranks of the 17th a voice muttered: 'Christ, as if Russian artillery wasn't bad enough!' Someone giggled, and another voice said: 'We've 'ad Whistling' Dick—now we got Trumpetin' Harry an' all!'" Chapter 4, pgs. 101-102

" 'With submission, majesty,' says Ignatieff, 'there would be no difficulty. I have selected these two men with care—they are ideal for our purpose. One is an agent of intelligence, taken at Silistria—a clever, dangerous fellow. Show him the hint of a design against his country, and he would fasten on it like a hawk. The other is a very different sort—a great, coarse bully of a man, all brawn and little brain; he has spent his time here lechering after every female he could find.' I felt East stiffen beside me, as we listened to this infernal impudence. 'But he would be necessary—for even if we permitted, and assisted, their escape here, and saw that they reached the Crimea in safety, they would still have to rejoin their army at Sevastopol, and we could hardly issue orders to our forces in Crimea to let them pass thorough. This second fellow is the kind of resourceful villain who would find a way.'" Chapter 6, pg. 160.

" 'It is terrible for her—to be subjected to this nightmare,' says he. 'But that was a noble lie you told, about her father—I wanted to shake your hand on that, old boy.' And he wrung it then and there. 'It still think I must be dreaming,' he says. 'This incredible country, and you and I—and this dear girl—fleeing for our lives! But we are near home, old fellow—a bare sixty miles to Arabat, and then eight hours at most see us to Sevastopol, God willing. Will you pray with me, Flashman, for our deliverance?' 'I wasn't crawling about in the snow, not for him or anyone, but I stood while he mumped away with his hands folded, beseeching the Lord that we might quit ourselves like men, or something equally useful, and then we climbed in and took our forty winks. Valla was dozing, and the brandy bottle was half-empty—if ever they start a Little White Ribboners in Russia, all the members will have to be boys, for they'll never get the women to take the pledge.'" Chapter 7, pg. 180.

" 'You will have heard of this,' says Ignatieff softly. 'It is called a knout. Its use is illegal. Watch.'

"The Cossack stood opposite the bench with its howling victim, took the knout in both hands, and swept it back over his shoulder so that its hideous lash trailed behind him in the snow. Then he struck.

"I've seen floggings, and watched with fascination as a rule, but this was horrible, like nothing imaginable. That diabolical thing cut through the air with a noise like a steam



whistle, so fast that you couldn't see it; there was a crack like a pistol-shot, a fearful, choked scream of agony, and then the Cossack was snaking it back for another blow. " 'Wait,' says Ignatieff, and to me: 'Come here.' They pushed me forward to the bench, the bile nearly choking me behind the gag; I didn't want to look, but they forced me. The wretched man's buttocks were cut clean across, as by a sabre, and the blood was pouring out.

" 'The drawing stroke,' says Ignatieff. 'Proceed.'

"Five more shrieking cuts, five more explosive cracks, five more razor gashes, and the snow beneath the bench was sodden with blood. The most horrible thing was that the victim was conscious still, making awful animal noises.

" 'Now observe,' says Ignatieff, 'the effect of a flat blow.'" Chapter 8 pg. 196.

" 'Who ... are you?' says he.

" 'Flashman. Colonel, British Army.'

" 'I am Yakub Beg,' whispers he, and even through his pain you could hear the pride in his voice. 'Kush Begi, Khan of Khakand, and guardian of ... the White Mosque. You are my ... guest ... sent to me ... from heaven. Touch ... on my knee ... touch on my bosom ... touch where you will.'

"I recognized the formal greeting of the hill folk, which wasn't appropriate in the circumstances.

" 'Can't touch anything but your arse at present,' I told him, and I felt him shake—my God, he could even laugh, with the arms and legs being drawn out of him.

" 'It is a ... good answer,' says he. 'You talk ... like a Tajik. We laugh ... in adversity. Now I tell you ... Englishman ... when I go hence ... you go too.'

"I thought he was just babbling, of course. And then the other fellow, who had collapsed, groaned and sat us, and looked about him." Chapter 9 pgs. 210-211.

"I've seduced—and been seduced—in some odd ways, but never before with a kitten pressed into service as pimp. She was right, of course—I was scared, not only of Yakub Beg, but of her: she knew too much, this one, for any man's comfort, and if I knew anything at all it wasn't just for love of my brawny frame and bonny black whiskers that she was taunting me into attempting her. There was something else—but with that slim white shape tantalizing me within arm's length, and that murmuring voice, and the drift of her perfume, subtle and sweet as a garden flower, I didn't care. I reached out—and hesitated, sweating lustfully. My God, I wanted her, but—

" 'And now he pants, and trembles, and fears to touch, my furry sweet. Like the little boys at the confectioner's stall, or a beardless youth biting his nails outside a brothel, and he such a fine, strong—nothing of a man. He—'

" 'Damn you!' roars I, 'and damn your Yakub Beg! Come here!'" Chapter 10 pgs. 250-251.

"And pat on his words the sun was suddenly in the sky—or so it seemed, for the whole place, the lighter, the sea around, and sky itself were suddenly as bright as day, and it seemed to me that the lighter was no longer drifting, but racing over the water, and then



came the most tremendous thundering crash of sound I've ever heard, reverberating over the sea, making the head sing and shudder with the deafening boom of it, and as I tried to put up my hands to my ears to shut out the pain, I heard Kutebar's frantic yell: " 'The Obrucheff! She has gone—gone to the pit of damnation! Now whose work is half-done? By God!—it is done, it is done, it is done! A thousand times done! Ya, Yakub—is it not done? Now the praise to Him and to the foreign professors!'" Chapter 11 pg. 268.

" 'A very good day to you, old boy,' says I. 'I'm Flashman.'

"He was a fishy-looking, fresh young lad with a peeling nose, and he goggled at me, going red.

" 'Sergeant!' he squeaks. 'What's this beastly-looking nigger doing in the office verandah? For I was attired à la Kizil Kum still, in cloak and pyjamys and puggaree, with a bigger beard than Dr Grace.

" 'Not at all,' says I, affably, 'I'm English—a British officer, in fact. Name of Flashman—Colonel Flashman, 17th Lancers, but slightly detached for the moment. I've just come from—up yonder, at considerable personal expense, and I'd like to see someone in authority. Your commanding officer will do.'

" 'It's a madman!' cries he. 'Sergeant, stand by!'

"And would you believe it, it took me half an hour before I could convince him not to throw me in the lock-up, and he summoned a peevish-looking captain, who listened, nodding irritably while I explained who and what I was.

" 'Very good,' says he. 'You've come from Afghanistan?'

" 'By way of Afghanistan, yes. But—'

" 'Very good. This is a customs post, among other things. Have you anything to declare?'" Chapter 12 pgs. 276-277.

Topics for Discussion

How are journalists portrayed in the novel? What is Harry Flashman's attitudes towards the press? What are the army brass's view?

In what two ways does Harry Flashman provoke the Charge of the Light Brigade? Why does he feel no one is to blame for the debacle?

Can a case be made for the premise that Harry Flashman is a pacifist?

How does Harry Flashman's explosive flatulence contribute to his narrative about the Charge of the Light Brigade?

What are Harry Flashman's views on religion and prayer? How does the novel treat religion in general?

How would you compare and contrast the forms of evil committed by Pencherjevsky and Ignatieff?

What role does Ko Dali's kitten play in the novel? How does it illumine her character and local culture?