

# **Beat to Quarters Study Guide**

**Beat to Quarters by C. S. Forester**

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# Plot Summary

Captain Hornblower commands H.M.S. Lydia, a 36-gun frigate on detached service. He is ordered to proceed to the Pacific Coast of Nicaragua, deliver armaments to a local revolutionary and assist the revolutionary in fomenting rebelling in Central America, destroy Natividad, a Spanish 50-gun ship, assist in the establishment of a trans-isthmus trade route, and if possible, establish British trade in the area.

The novel opens as Lydia closes the west coast of Nicaragua, making a perfect landfall at the Gulf of Fonseca. Lydia anchors and is shortly hailed by a small craft from a seemingly deserted beach. Hornblower accompanies a local envoy to meet the appointed revolutionary contact. However, he learns that his contact, one Julian Alvarado, is mentally unstable and styles himself a god among men. Although Julian Alvarado—El Supremo—is obviously deranged he is nevertheless fomenting rebellion against Spain, England's military enemy, and thus Hornblower delivers the armaments and proceeds to execute his other orders. Shortly thereafter Natividad is sighted making for the Gulf of Fonseca. Hornblower hides Lydia behind an island and executes a perfect surprise attack that captures Natividad without the loss of a single Englishman. El Supremo demands Natividad be surrendered to his command, and again Hornblower complies.

Lydia and Natividad transport El Supremo and five hundred soldiers along the coast to La Libertad where a land action quickly captures the town. El Supremo then leads his army overland where they capture San Salvador. Hornblower proceeds along the coast alone, seeking to make prizes and cause ruin. A small Spanish lugger flying a flag of truce shortly joins him—the lugger delivers the startling news that Spain has split with France and allied with England. Hornblower's new orders include a repeal of his previous orders and instruct him to now assist the Spanish government in Central America in any way possible. He determines to recapture or destroy Natividad and begins to patrol the coast. His command is greatly complicated when Lady Barbara Wellesley, a young but influential aristocratic woman demanding transportation to England, joins the ship.

Within a few days, Lydia raises Natividad and chases her. The much-smaller English frigate overtakes the Spanish ship-of-the-line and fierce and close gun battle ensues. Lydia strikes first and hard and uses her superior maneuverability to great advantage, but the Spanish ship's more numerous and heavier guns are telling and Lydia is dismasted. The engagement continues until the Spanish ship also is disabled and the two stricken vessels drift apart as night falls. Heroic efforts during the night see Lydia ready for limited action in the morning. Hornblower has correctly determined the Spanish captain's course and as dawn breaks the two ships again join in combat although the wind dies to a dead calm. Lydia survives withering long-range fire from the Spanish ship as Hornblower causes his frigate to be towed into action by the ship's boats. After numerous broadsides, the wind picks up and Lydia's superior handling proves decisive. Although both ships are devastated Lydia emerges victorious and repeatedly rakes the Spanish ship. As fires break out aboard the Spanish ship



Hornblower demands surrender but the Spanish captain—a disciple of El Supremo—refuses and Natividad sinks with nearly all hands lost.

Hornblower returns to Panama to report his victory but is greeted with formal rebuke and polite insults. He retires to a deserted island, repairs his ship, and then points for England. During the ensuing months of relative inactivity, Hornblower and Wellesley develop a close and then intimate friendship. Wellesley develops romantic feelings for Hornblower. The reserved and proper captain entertains thoughts of a dalliance with the influential and rich young woman but realizes his social station and economic situation would ensure a disastrous personal outcome to any romantic relationship. Instead, he determines to focus on Maria, his distant wife in England, and remain at arms' length from Wellesley. As Lydia approaches St. Helena and a small English fleet Wellesley and Hornblower find themselves shut into the small captain's cabin and collapse to the deck kissing in a passionate embrace. Hornblower regains his composure, however, and breaks off the embrace and declines to pursue the relationship. Snubbed, Wellesley turns icy and departs from the ship as quickly as possible.



# The Prosperous Voyage

## The Prosperous Voyage Summary

Captain Hornblower commands H.M.S. Lydia, a 36-gun frigate on detached service. He is ordered to proceed to the Pacific Coast of Nicaragua, deliver armaments to a local revolutionary and assist the revolutionary in fomenting rebelling in Central America, destroy Natividad, a Spanish 50-gun ship, assist in the establishment of a trans-isthmus trade route, and if possible establish British trade in the area.

Part I consists of seven named and enumerated chapters including 1 - The Captain; 2 - Land; 3 - The Orders; 4 - El Supremo; 5 - Revictualling; 6 - The Coming of the Natividad; and 7 - El Supremo's Fleet Sails. It is the first of three parts and is intermediate in length. Part I establishes most of the major characters of the novel, describes the Lydia—the novel's primary setting, and grounds the novel during the historical Napoleonic War between England and France in the early 1800s. Events described in the novel suggest that Lydia sailed from England in mid 1807, reaching the Pacific coast of Nicaragua in the early months of 1808; thus, the bulk of the action of the novel occurs in the last half of 1808.

Captain Hornblower commands H.M.S. Lydia, a 36-gun frigate. Hornblower takes to the quarterdeck every morning at the same time and paces for an hour—the crew understands he is not to be disturbed during this time. Lydia is a single-deck frigate with 36 guns, half of which are carronades; she also carries at least one and probably four or more 9 lb. long brass bow chaser. The foremast gallant top is 140' above the deck and the ship is capable of about 4 knots in light airs. She is considered a fine handling vessel. Her officers include 1st Lieutenant Bush; 2nd Lieutenant Gerard; 3rd Lieutenant Galbraith, a famously handsome man who is grievously wounded during a sea battle and later dies from said wounds; 4th Lieutenant Rayner; and midshipmen Clay, killed during a sea battle; Howard Savage, wounded during a sea battle; Hooker; and Knyvett. Warrant officers include Master Crystal; boatswain Harrison, overly fond of starting seamen with his rattan cane; coxswain Brown; Howell, the carpenter; and Marsh, the gunner. The marine officer is Lieutenant Samuel Simmonds, who is wounded during a sea battle. Hankey, the ship's surgeon, has died before the novel opens, and has been replaced by Laurie who is untrained and completely incompetent. The named crew is large and includes Hornblower's steward, Polwheat; crewmen Owen, a half-wit; Jenkins; Poole; Smith, who dies during the initial chapters; Sullivan, a red-headed Irishman who plays the fiddle; Gray, master's mate; Benskin; Holroyd and Tooms. There is also Whipple; MacEvoy; Wilcox; Hudson; Williams, who is wounded during a sea battle and later receives surgery to extract a large splinter; John Summers, master's mate, wounded during a sea battle; Vincent and James Clifton, boatswain's mates, both wounded during a sea battle; and Harper, Dauson, North, and Chump who are all drowned during a sea battle.



Lydia has sailed from England with secret orders that were not opened until a certain remote ocean location; she has not touched land in seven months' time. She has sailed around Cape Horn, far into the Pacific, and ascended the west coast of South America beyond sight of land. She intends to make landfall at a particular destination known only to the captain. Hornblower is naturally garrulous and previous commands have suffered because of the development of over-familiarity with the lieutenants. Hornblower has, therefore, developed a very stern and aloof demeanor and constantly battles his natural tendency for friendly banter. For this reason, even Bush, the first lieutenant, is entirely unaware of the ship's mission. Lydia is virtually out of supplies—water is low, limejuice is expended, tobacco is nearly expended, food is old and spoiled, and only grog enough for a few days remains. Hornblower worries about these shortages as well as his complicated and nearly unachievable orders as he paces the deck. Punishment is rigged and the only defaulter is presented. Owen, a half-wit, has constantly spat upon the deck—for this offense, he receives a dozen lashes. Hornblower finds punishment repulsive and has a difficult time witnessing it. Later in the day, land is sighted. After some hours, Hornblower mounts the foremast with a glass and reviews the distant coast. He concludes that he has made a perfect landfall on the Gulf of Fonseca—an admirable feat of seamanship. Even though the charts of the waters are decades old and translated from Spanish they prove accurate enough.

The distant coast features several volcanoes and their ascending smoke makes a strange sight for the English crew. Hornblower dresses in his best finery that puzzles the crew as they observe the entirely vacant coast. Hornblower sits and reviews his orders from the Admiralty. They instruct him to travel to this location without making sight of land, then to deliver arms and ammunition to one Don Julian Alvarado and then assist Alvarado in a rebellion against Spain—Spain has recently entered the war on the side of the French and in opposition to England. England hopes that Alvarado's rebellion will spread throughout Central America and seriously disrupt Spanish commerce and shipments of gold and silver. Hornblower's orders state that he is to assist Alvarado in every way possible. He reflects that his time as a prisoner of war in Spain is probably to account for his selection for the mission—he speaks Spanish with fair fluency, a rare skill for an English post captain. Beside all this, he is ordered, if possible, to open British trade across the Isthmus of Darien. Finally, he is cautioned that a Spanish two-decker fifty-gun frigate, *Natividad*, is known to patrol the waters and Hornblower is ordered to take, burn, sink, or destroy the vessel. He muses that any one of the orders would be difficult. Taken together, they are laughably improbable. Hornblower then regains the deck.

Lydia beats to quarters, clears for action, runs out her guns, and coasts into the large harbor. As the lead is heaved, the ship enters the strange harbor, rounds a small islet, and then drops anchor. As Lydia swings around her anchor to tide and wind, a small craft launches from the shore. The boat closes the ship and Manuel Hernandez comes on board. He makes his introduction in Spanish, states he is the lieutenant general of *El Supremo*, and demands that Hornblower accompany him immediately to the palace. Hornblower ignores the impolitic impropriety of such demands and acquiesces to go ashore.



Hornblower accompanies Hernandez to the shore and up a small road. Alongside the road, various dead and near-dead men are shackled to stakes in the ground. Hernandez explains that they are 'unenlightened' men and have thus been sentenced to death by El Supremo. They die—usually—after two days in the tropical sun without water. They proceed on horseback through a desperately poor village and then onward through more dead and dying men to the palatial house of El Supremo. El Supremo sits like a king in his hall, surrounded by obsequious servants and lackeys. He is a small, unimpressive man, and is restless and fidgety. His lank black hair starting to gray. The interview is short—El Supremo demands weapons. Hornblower requests revictualing for Lydia. El Supremo instructs Hernandez to supply Hornblower's large demands. A dismayed Hornblower attempts to sum up El Supremo while El Supremo announces his own divinity. Those who deny his divinity are de facto 'unenlightened'. El Supremo then lays out a strategy on conquest; he intends to sail with an army to capture the capital of Nicaragua. Hornblower is then dismissed. Once again, he ignores the insult in order to complete his orders, and returns to the ship where he is plagued by doubts about the obviously disturbed El Supremo.

The next morning, however, Hernandez appears on the beach with men driving hundreds of cattle and pigs and bearing vast quantities of supplies for Lydia. Hernandez nervously apologizes for failing to provide flour—it is not obtainable. Instead, he has provided ground maize. He also apologizes that the only alcohol available is rum—Hornblower does not admit that rum is the preferred drink of sailors. Tobacco, water, wood, fruits, salt, and everything else are brought aboard in vast quantities. The revictualing occurs largely without incident until the evening when some of the English crew sneak past the marine sentry and begin to walk into town. They find a poor soul tied to a stake, dying for want of water, and attempt to free him. The townspeople immediately react and drive the sailors away, back to the beach, grievously wounding one in the scuffle. The British marines file up and begin to shoot toward the townspeople. Hornblower immediately intervenes and stops the conflict; even though his crewman dies, he berates the sentries for allowing the men to pass, condemns the sailors for disobeying orders, and orders the revictualing to continue without further ado. Soon, cries of a sail are heard—the *Natividad* is approaching the harbor. As the ship closes land Hornblower impassively asks some officers to dinner, talks unconcernedly, and then plays several hands of cards.

Hornblower has considered his options and determined that a ship action would prove perilous for Lydia as the Spanish two-decker greatly outguns the English frigate. He therefore determines to attack *Natividad* by stratagem. Hiding Lydia behind a favorable land mass on an island, he waits for the Spanish ship to pass by very closely. He then dispatches two boats with men to circle *Natividad* and simultaneously fires a surprise broadside of grapeshot at nearly point-blank range, scouring the Spanish deck. Within moments, he closes the Spanish ship and boards her. The surprise is complete and telling and within minutes, the upper deck is secured. Fighting on the lower deck briefly continues until the dispatched boats complete the encirclement and English sailors pour through the lower deck's portholes. *Natividad* is captured without a single English casualty.



Hornblower anxiously awaits developments ashore. He causes the Spanish officers to be shackled below on Lydia, knowing that El Supremo will likely order them executed. Soon enough Hernandez appears and demands Hornblower attend to El Supremo. Ashore, El Supremo states his demands—the Spanish ship will be handed over and commanded by El Supremo's picked men; the Spanish officers will be executed. Lydia and Natividad will sail as a fleet, transporting an army to La Libertad where they will capture that city and thereafter all of Nicaragua. After some brief consideration, Hornblower determines his orders demand that he acquiesce to El Supremo's demands.

Later, Vice Admiral Don Cristobal de Crespo, Ship Captain Andrade, Frigate Captain Castro, Corvette Captain Carrera, and several other officers of El Supremo arrive and take possession of Natividad. They quickly quell the crew by summary execution of a hesitant boy, demanding oaths of loyalty, and charismatic promises and exhortations. Later dissenters are hanged. The next day El Supremo boards Lydia and demands twenty-three guns salute him—the King of England receives only twenty-one guns. Hornblower orders the salute, feeling it to be ridiculous but also meaningless. El Supremo dines alone; the ships take on the rag-tag army and make sail for La Libertad, Nicaragua.

## The Prosperous Voyage Analysis

The title of Part I, especially contrasted with the title of Part II, suggests that all of the positive events occurring during the novel happen early on; this very nearly is accurate. Part I establishes the novel's sense of place and time in real geography and historical reality, respectively, and introduces almost all of the primary characters in the novel. Dust jackets of various editions of the text offer a date of mid-1808 for the landfall of Lydia on the western coast of Nicaragua and matching the novel's events to historical events reveals that this date is correct. Hornblower is on detached command and therefore is the master of his own fate within broad restrictions. Lydia is officered by capable and devoted men and crewed by resolute and highly trained English sailors. If she is slightly under complement, it is made up for by seven months at sea under the firm training and exercise regime of the intensely reserved and private Hornblower. She is the only English warship in the Pacific and aside from Natividad is the most powerful military weapon within thousands of miles. Hornblower is in the difficult but promising position of being able to dictate military outcomes anywhere along thousands of miles of coast. Lydia's heroic voyage around Cape Horn has been further complicated by difficult orders that insist she not tip her hand by sighting land until making final landfall. Such a task of navigation is almost impossibly difficult but the mathematical and exacting Hornblower manages to carry it out. Instead of taking pride in his accomplishment he, as usual, is self-effacing and internally credits the perfect landfall to dumb luck.

Such self-doubt characterizes Hornblower throughout the entire novel. He remains entirely isolated from his crew and even his officers—his first lieutenant William Bush is little more than a formal acquaintance and his other lieutenants and midshipmen view him with distant and formal admiration but find little human warmth in him. The only character in the novel that connects with Hornblower on a personal and intimate level is





Lady Barbara Wellesley and she accomplishes this only after months of careful attention. Hornblower nevertheless runs a taught and crack ship. Regular rehearsals of sailing maneuvers and gunnery exercises have drilled the crew into a functional group and complex tasks are accomplished with relative ease. Hornblower's relatively light use of formal punishment endears him to the men but his occasional reliance on the cat ensures flagrant offenses are kept in check. Although naval custom varied widely, Hornblower resorts to discipline less frequently than the average captain of the time does. As Hornblower keeps his orders secret from the crew, they are always at a loss of what to expect. Since Hornblower has a good idea of 'what will happen next' he usually appears to be prescient to the ignorant crew. This sort of trick makes Hornblower seem larger-than-life on several occasions.

El Supremo is clearly deranged and styles himself a god on earth, the inheritor of centuries of greatness and the last survivor of demigods and conquerors. His rationale makes no sense and his description of events is garbled and fictive. He nevertheless rules with obvious and absolute power and his decrees are fulfilled in exact detail. His nearest supporters—Hernandez and Crespo—clearly fear him and know that any failure means death. El Supremo's favored form of execution is the rather simple expedient of tying offenders to posts and exposing them to the blazing tropical sun. Denied of water or sustenance they die quickly, never surviving beyond the third day. El Supremo relates the sun's power to his own magnificence. Even though he is crazy, El Supremo is nevertheless willing to foment rebellion and appears capable of so doing and thus Hornblower determines to support him, as ordered. In fact, El Supremo's insanity has no realistic bearing on Hornblower's future difficulties—they would have occurred even had El Supremo been sane and relatively normal.

Lydia's stores are nearly exhausted when she makes landfall, and Hornblower fears that the lack of tobacco, water, and especially grog will lead to mutinous feelings. He therefore sets about revictualling, or provisioning, Lydia at the first opportunity. When Hornblower meets El Supremo, both men have vastly different goals. El Supremo's primary goal is to secure military firepower in the form of muskets, ammunition, and cooperation of Lydia's cannon. Hornblower's preoccupation is food, water, tobacco, and rum. Fortunately for Hornblower, El Supremo is uncaring to the hardships such provisioning will cause his local peasants and gladly exchanges supplies for muskets. Hornblower makes extensive and inflated demands for foods and other supplies and—much to his amazement—El Supremo quickly grants them all. Hornblower is still more surprised when, shortly thereafter, such extensive supplies are actually delivered. He could not hope for better or quicker service had he been waiting in a British naval yard.

The first encounter with Natividad is arguably Hornblower's greatest success in the novel. He positions Lydia behind geographical obstructions and hides, waiting to spring a deadly surprise on the complacent and unsuspecting Spanish ship. He has carefully considered his options, correctly divined the Spanish captain's intentions, and exactly designed the trap. The execution is flawless and combines expert seamanship and resolute military action. The much larger Spanish ship is captured without a single English casualty—surely unparalleled in history. Hornblower then concerns himself with the welfare of his Spanish prisoners. Knowing that the common sailors will be utilized by



El Supremo, he leaves the on ship. The executive officers are taken aboard Lydia where they are hidden—later he tells El Supremo's agents that they have already been executed and dumped over the side. By this simple stratagem, he preserves their lives.

The 'prosperous' period of Hornblower's voyage concludes when he hands over Natividad to El Supremo, boards soldiers and transports them to La Libertad, and assists El Supremo to foment revolution throughout Nicaragua. Per his orders, Hornblower has been remarkably successful. With his further support, it seems likely that El Supremo will make large gains in Spanish Central America and that, perhaps, English interests will be well represented in the region within months or years. Hornblower revels in his unqualified successes and dreams of military honors. Alas, the seemingly prosperous voyage has been ill fated and Hornblower will shortly be called upon to undo everything he has heretofore accomplished.



# The Unprosperous Voyage

## The Unprosperous Voyage Summary

Part II consists of seven named and enumerated chapters including 8 - News From Europe; 9 - Lady Barbara Comes on Board; 10 - The Anchor; 11 - More News from Europe; 12 - Lady Barbara's Accomplishments; 13 - Meeting with Natividad; 14 - The Ships Dismasted; 15 - Refitting; 16 - Evening and Night; 17 - The Battle; 18 - Sunday Morning; 19 - Fresh Orders from Spain; 20 - The Isle of Coiba; and 21 - El Supremo Again. It is the second of three parts and is greatest in length. The middle part of the novel recounts the military adventures of Lydia along the Pacific coast of Nicaragua as she fights Natividad.

After transporting El Supremo, Lieutenant General Manuel Hernandez, and a rag tag army of five hundred men to La Libertad, Nicaragua, Lydia parts ways with Natividad. Lydia sails toward the pearl centers of Central America as Hornblower considers the likelihood of capturing prizes. Free of Natividad and El Supremo, Hornblower finds great enjoyment in sailing. After a few days a sail is sighted—strangely, the Spanish ship closes Lydia flying a flag of truce. The ship launches a boat that comes alongside; political figures mount the side and address Hornblower, handing him communiqués. He retires to his cabin, reviews them, and discovers that Spain has abandoned its alliance with France and come over to the English side. Spain is now England's ally, and Hornblower is instructed to desist from assistance to El Supremo; in fact, is ordered to help Spain suppress any revolutionary activities in Central America before returning to England. Another letter is from Lady Barbara Wellesley, an English aristocrat, who politely demands passage home to England aboard Lydia. Hornblower takes the deck and rather abashedly informs the Spanish politicians that he has fomented revolution and delivered Natividad to El Supremo. He then announces that as a matter of course he will call on the Spanish governor at Panama and then seek to destroy or capture Natividad.

Lydia ports at Panama and almost immediately Lady Wellesley comes aboard and politely but firmly demands passage; she has, in fact, already brought her baggage. Hornblower realizes any impolitic action with an aristocrat could spell the end of his career but even so is very reluctant to take her as a passenger. Immediately he dislikes her but nevertheless sends her below into his cabin, accompanied by Hebe, her lascivious handmaid. Entirely flustered, Hornblower regains some composure when Wellesley refers to the deck of her cabin as the 'floor'; her gaffe indicates her intelligence and experience is not as all encompassing as she presents.

Hornblower calls on the officials at Panama and exchanges news and plans with the Viceroy. He returns to Lydia slightly intoxicated and orders the ship under way. As the ship weighs anchor a difficult situation develops—the anchor is heavily fouled. Hornblower seethes at having Wellesley aboard inspecting his actions and worries about looking sharp in front of the Spanish shoreline observers. A complicated series of



tricky maneuvers successfully are executed to free the fouled anchor and Lydia makes the open sea. Hornblower descends to his smaller cabin—he has displaced Lieutenant Bush just as Wellesley has displaced the captain—and contemplates over the day's developments. The Spanish Viceroy had been a timid man, unready to commit forces to attack the rebellion until urgently pressed by Hornblower. His thoughts then turn to Wellesley, who is twenty-seven, tanned and altogether too familiar with naval custom to befit a lady. She is nevertheless from a very influential family, and he begrudgingly finds her attractive in her own rough way. Hornblower retakes the deck and informs Wellesley that her brother Arthur has gained a signal military victory in the war. They make small talk even as Hornblower is irritated at having his routine interrupted.

Lydia sails in search of Natividad. The weather is pleasant, the coastal scenery vivid and strange with volcanoes and jungles, and the sea life is abundant. Hornblower longs for the English Channel but also finds the strange coast appealing. Wellesley sends Hebe to invite Hornblower to breakfast—the interruption to his routine shatters the moment of complacency and once again, the captain winds up into nervous tension. Later in the day, he relents from his irritability and invites Wellesley and some officers to dinner. The meal is a great success and Wellesley charms the entire company with her feminine graces and cultured conversation. After dinner, they engage in playing cards and pass a delightful evening.

Lydia sails the coast searching for Natividad and after a few days encounters weather. She shortens sail, continues and then sights a sail. After closing, she discerns Natividad, also under shortened sail in the heavy weather. Hornblower sends Wellesley below to the cable tier—the lowest deck in the ship where the anchor cable is stored. Although it is filthy and pitch black, it is also the safest location in the ship during any ship-to-ship action as it is well below the waterline and thus protected from cannon shot. Lydia clears for action and runs out the guns as Natividad turns to her. The ships close on opposite tacks and steer a collision course. At the last possible moment, Hornblower unexpectedly veers to leeward, yielding the weather gauge but simultaneously delivering a crippling point-blank broadside into the surprised Natividad. Lydia hauls around and delivers another broadside at close range. The high seas often prevent Natividad from opening her lower deck's ports but she soon replies with her lighter guns. The two ships lie alongside each other in the pitching storm and exchange broadsides. The destruction and execution is heavy on both sides. Lydia, expertly handled, is by far the more skilled ship in maneuver and gunnery—but Natividad's heavier and more numerous guns are telling. Lydia loses her mizzen and the wreckage drags on her like a drogue—she falls away from the wind and steers wildly. Under a withering fire from Natividad, Lydia concentrates on hacking free the wreckage of cordage and spars. The execution is terrible as Natividad delivers several unanswered broadsides. Finally, Lydia is freed from the dismayed wreckage and swings back into action. Within a few more minutes, she pounds Natividad and dismasts her foremast. The two ships, severely damaged, are unable to maintain steerage in the heavy seas and gradually fall away from each other.

Hornblower works to restore order aboard Lydia. Fifty men are wounded and Laurie, the appointed surgeon, is overwhelmed and cringing. Hornblower instructs him to offer



laudanum and rum, and then to bandage anything bleeding. A loose cannon on deck, trundling with every roll of the ship, is secured. Lydia is hulled in at least seven places below the waterline and is making heavy water; a sail is fothered around the bows and the chain pumps are manned continuously. Preparations are made to fish a jury mizzenmast to the stump of the old mast. Fourteen dead are collected and interred to the sea. Wellesley gains the deck and requests permission to relocate from the cable tier to the cabin—Hornblower, nearly hysterical, retains enough control to inform her that the entire cabin has been shot away; she will have to return to the cable tier.

The evening is consumed with pumping and repairs as the heavy swell continues, and Lydia and Natividad drift further and further apart. Hornblower's primary concern is the lifting of the heavy spar that will serve as the jury mizzen. A complex series of preparations are made, followed by complicated evolutions until finally the mast is raised and fished to the mizzen stump. Some measure of order is restored throughout the ship and Hornblower eyes the distant Natividad wearily, realizing that he will not be able to close her with his stricken ship and the heavy weather. The crew is granted some relief with some watches sent below and food served out. Polwheal informs Hornblower that Wellesley has been moved to the orlop deck, screened from the bloody cockpit—or surgeon's area—by a canvas barrier. Hornblower is enormously relieved by Polwheal's intervention and takes some food. Throughout the night, Hornblower sleeps fitfully on a chair on deck while the storm continues unabated. In the early morning, he wakes and considers his options, contemplating on Natividad's likely course. At first light, he bends on sail and alters course in a decisive manner.

Within a few hours Hornblower's decisions prove nearly prescient—Natividad is sighted making sail on a parallel course. Hornblower closes the distant ship until the wind dies away and the chop begins to drop. A frustrated Hornblower determines to close Natividad at any cost and sends out the two remaining ship's boats to tow, by rowing, the frigate. The work is appalling but slowly Lydia gains on Natividad. Soon Natividad attempts towing but the larger ship is nearly immobile. Instead, Crespo orders the boat to drag Natividad's bows around and the Spanish ship begins to send distant broadsides toward Lydia. The ships close at an agonizingly slow pace; Hornblower calls the fiddler and pipes to the deck to distract the men from the gunfire. Lydia suffers prolonged and heavy execution but is eventually towed to four hundred yards of Natividad whereupon Hornblower causes the remaining boat—the other destroyed with great loss of life—to tow Lydia around broadside to the Spanish ship. A heated series of broadsides is exchanged; the short range allows the faster-firing Lydia to demonstrate superior gunnery but Natividad's heavier and more numerous guns are devastating. Broadside after broadside the exchange continues for an hour and a half until a slight wind is felt. Hornblower immediately sends men aloft and drives Lydia close around Natividad's stern where heavy raking fire devastates the Spanish ship.

Natividad loses all three masts and her sides are stove in nearly everywhere. Piles of corpses are seen everywhere on the ship and her reply is limited to erratic and inaccurate shooting. However, she does not strike her colors. Hornblower repeatedly demands surrender but Crespo refuses. A fluky wind then drives the ships together in a grinding crash. As the surviving Spaniards crowd the foredeck to board Hornblower



calculatingly discharges two carronades loaded with canister at point blank range—the effect is appalling and not a man survives on the foredeck. Lydia fends off, simultaneously delivering bow-to-stern raking fire with the cannons' muzzles nearly touching Natividad. Flaming wads follow cannon shot into the interior of the Spanish ship and soon she is aglow with numerous fires. The battle is over; Hornblower sends the sailors aloft to clear the burning Spanish hulk. Within minutes, Natividad settles and sinks, the choppy sea dousing the conflagration. A handful of survivors are picked up and pressed. Lydia has suffered approximately one-third of her crew as casualties. Hornblower retains a skeleton crew on pumps and deck, sends men below to sleep, and then more-or-less collapses on deck after twenty-one hours of combat.

Hornblower wakes on Sunday morning. He tallies the dead at forty-two, from a crew of about two hundred and seventy. More will die shortly as seventy-five men are wounded; in fact, for many days Hornblower reads the burial prayer as one to several men are buried to the sea. Repairs have continued throughout the night and early morning and the decks are nominally cleared. The pumps continue and eject white water at every turn. Hornblower makes a minor inspection of the deck and then proceeds below to the cockpit to review the wounded. He finds a scene reminiscent of Hell and is startled to see Wellesley moving among the wounded and offering what aid she can. His sensibilities are offended by a woman amidst the horror but Wellesley ignores his protests and assists the wounded men as best she is able. She also demands Laurie perform actions as she instructs him. Hornblower remains in the cockpit for several hours of brutal surgery and offers assistance, as he is able. As the hours pass more die. Finally, the tour of the cockpit concludes; those able are removed to the deck into fresh air and canvas-ventilating shafts are rigged to clear the air of the cockpit.

The stricken Lydia sails for a fortnight, pumps worked unceasingly, trying to make Panama. As they approach the putatively safe harbor, a Spanish lugger intercepts them. Hornblower and the Spanish official exchange greetings and Hornblower then informs him that Natividad has been sunk. The Spanish official looks distressed, draws forth a lengthy communiqué, and hands it to Hornblower; it is evident that the envoy has several different communiqués to cover various eventualities. The officious and deliberately vague and rude letter from the Spanish governor informs Hornblower that English ships are not welcome in Spanish ports anywhere along the coast and instructs him to vacate Spanish waters. Hornblower restrains himself, delivers a polite but brusque reply, and then turns Lydia about. He searches the charts, locates a potentially suitable islet, and makes course for it.

Lydia makes the islet of Coiba and locates a suitable shelving sandy beach. The ship is emptied ashore; a fortress is constructed; highlands are buttressed and cannons transported. For about two weeks, Lydia is hove over and repaired. A new mizzen is stepped and the ship's seams are caulked. Hornblower works the crew relentlessly and when Lydia again floats free, she is shipshape and as good as new. Wellesley throughout admires Hornblower's adamant resolve and stoic carriage. Refitted and in perfect repair and good trim, Lydia vacates Coiba and points for England, some 5,000 miles distant.



Once again, Lydia is intercepted by the Spanish lugger. The Spanish official boards Lydia, inspects the ship with open admiration, and commends Hornblower on the exceptional repair. He then invites Hornblower aboard the lugger for a 'surprise' of an undisclosed nature. Hornblower acquiesces and voyages to the lugger where he is entertained and then shown El Supremo—captured in war. El Supremo is in filthy rags and is chained to the deck amidst his own excrement. El Supremo explains to Hornblower that he has had himself thus imprisoned on a whim; soon he will mount the throne of the world and reign once again in glory. Then El Supremo recounts how Hernandez and hundreds of other had been hanged in San Salvador and subsequently descends into a fit of howling insanity. The Spanish official finds it amusing; Hornblower is disgusted by the display. Hornblower returns to Lydia, appalled and deeply troubled by the event, and shuts himself in his cabin for several days.

## The Unprosperous Voyage Analysis

The name of Part II, especially contrasted with the name of Part I, suggests that Hornblower's adventure is about to take a decided turn for the worse. Such is in fact the case. In Part I, events developed according to plan and in Hornblower's favor. The entire status quo of Hornblower's world is not simply altered in Part II—it is wholly reversed with a single letter from England; this is the major turning point in the narrative. Spain, previously England's wartime enemy, is now England's ally. Hornblower is ordered to desist from all activities against Spain and instead to support Spanish interests when possible. Instead of Natividad's capture being a signal victory it is, at a stroke, a great embarrassment and difficulty. Hornblower is canny enough to realize his superiors will lay all blame at his feet and thus he immediately determines to recapture Natividad. Not only are Hornblower's political and military fortunes mixed up, his life is further complicated by Lady Barbara Wellesley who joins Lydia rather by demand. If Hornblower refuses her passage it will be damning upon his return to England; likewise if he offers passage and something bad happens to Wellesley it will be damning upon his return to England. The best outcome Hornblower can expect is neutral and the worse would end his career. Caught in a difficult situation he has little option but to accept her as a passenger. This passenger development informs the entire dramatic action of Part III of the novel, and forms a minor turning point in the narrative.

Hornblower dislikes Wellesley because of circumstances rather than because she is unlikable. He quickly determines she is unattractive—he will later change his mind—and probably scandalous. The nervous and introverted Hornblower's initial dislike heavily foreshadows his eventual capitulation to Wellesley's charms. His assumption that Wellesley is a globetrotting woman is unfounded; she has visited the West Indies on vacation that is acceptable behavior for a woman of her station. Through no fault of her own, her ship was captured and forced to Panama where she has remained waiting transportation. Even the recalcitrant Hornblower concedes that her presence is warranted and explicable. Rather than wait in Panama and die from disease, Wellesley determines to risk passage on a British warship; she is clearly unaware of the physical discomfort such will entail and probably also seriously underestimates the risk of death or worse. Within weeks, she will be disabused of any notion that warships are much like



passenger ships. Although a colorful addition to the novel, Wellesley's servant Hebe remains rather undeveloped. She is probably best interpreted as a parallel character to Hornblower's servant Polwheal. Even with these minor characters, however, the author does an outstanding job of characterization. Wellesley comes aboard without the usual complications of a bosun's chair—her boarding capability symbolizes her general adaptability and naval capability.

The major development in Part II is, by any standard, the military action fought between Lydia and Natividad. The description of the action spans five chapters and consumes about one fourth of the novel's pages. The engagement is complex and described in detail using numerous nautical terms that might prove difficult for some readers. The action consists of an initial chase and engagement during heavy weather; extensive damage to each ship that results in a temporary separation; a prolonged and slow chase during light wind resulting in heavy damage to Lydia; and a final gun duel within pistol-shot range resulting in the burning and sinking of Natividad.

Although the exact armaments of each ship are not disclosed, it seems likely that Lydia would throw a broadside weight of metal in the neighborhood of 280 lbs. or less, and that Natividad would throw a broadside weight of metal in the neighborhood of 450 lbs. Lydia's largest guns are probably 18 lb. guns whereas Natividad sports 24 lb. guns on the lower deck. About half of Lydia's guns are carronades, capable of accurate fire only at pistol-shot range, whereas Natividad's guns are all long cannon. At point blank range, carronades enjoy the advantage of exceptionally lightweight—but closing carronades against long guns is exceptionally trying and costly, as Hornblower learns. Finally, Natividad is larger and capable of withstanding more punishment to her frame and larger crew while Lydia is faster and much more nimble. These many variables are summarized by Bush on a few occasions when he comments that Natividad has about twice the strength of Lydia; a fact that Hornblower knows but doesn't want to hear.

The initial pass of the two ships finds them on opposite tacks converging on a collision course in a gale. Textbook tactics would dictate obtaining the weather gauge at any cost but Hornblower thinks outside the box and turns to leeward at the last moment, surrendering the weather gauge but gaining tactical surprise. He shoots by the larger ship and delivers a full broadside at point-blank range without a reply. He quickly wears ship and delivers a raking broadside at short range—again without a reply. Such atypical tactics are fairly demanded if Hornblower hopes to win the fight; a traditional slugging match between the two ships can only lead to Lydia's defeat. Soon enough the ships are aligned in parallel and exchange broadside after broadside and Natividad's superior weight of metal is quickly telling—Lydia is dismasted and loses her steerage. As the crew abandons the guns and clears the wreckage, Natividad pours in several more broadsides. Clearly, Lydia takes the worse of it during this period of the fight. Once cleared, however, she again uses her superior maneuverability to gain positional advantage and manages to in turn dismast Natividad. The two crippled ships are then drawn apart by the gale and Hornblower watches his enemy drift away into the falling darkness.





The night sees Lydia a hive of activity. Damage is repaired, wreckage is cleared, and a sail is fothered. This operation entails taking a large, heavy sail and wrapping it around the hull of the ship. Lydia's bows are pierced by numerous cannon shot under the waterline. Such holes cannot easily be repaired and unless the water is stopped or slowed, the ship will sink. The sail wrapping slows—but does not stop—the inflow of seawater and lets the chain pumps eject more water than the ship makes. Presumably, similar activities are taking place aboard *Natividad*, but without the zeal of the English ship. The night action also consists of a chase, though it is entirely psychological. The ships are not in visible contact and throughout the night, Hornblower chooses his course to mimic what he intuits the Spanish captain will do. If he is wrong, the enemy will escape. If he is right, the battle will commence at dawn. Needless to say, Hornblower's instincts are correct and first light sees the two ships only a few miles apart.

Hornblower again closes the enemy but in an agonizing development, the wind begins to drop off. Lydia closes within extreme range of *Natividad*'s guns and begins to receive fire—the enemy ship is still beyond range of Lydia's reply. Then the wind dies altogether. What follows is a profoundly glorious and resolute closing with the enemy. Hornblower causes the ship's boats to be manned and tied by towropes to Lydia. The unfortunate sailors then begin the backbreaking labor of towing the frigate toward the enemy, all the while under direct and heavy fire. As the seas calm and the distance closes, *Natividad*'s fire becomes increasingly accurate and deadly. Hornblower stands the deck amidst the destruction and resolutely watches the distance inch closer. He proceeds through maximum range, through medium range, and to 400 yards from the enemy taking withering fire for hours. Finally, he causes Lydia to be towed broadside and begins returning fire. Ironically, within a few minutes, the wind again picks up and Lydia readily outmaneuvers the larger ship. A hot and close action ensues and Lydia passes within yards of *Natividad*'s bow, delivering destructive raking fire to the enemy.

Two decisive events then follow. A freak of wave and wind drives Lydia against *Natividad*. Seeing a putative stroke of luck, the Spanish crew masses in the bows of their ship to board and overwhelm Lydia. The ever-ready Hornblower, however, has caused his quarterdeck carronades to be loaded with canister shot, effectively turning the big guns into giant shotguns. As the Spanish crew surges forward the Lydia discharges grape into them at point-blank range, preventing the boarding and decimating the Spanish crew. Simultaneously, Lydia's main guns continue to shoot into the Spanish ship's bows so close that their muzzles nearly touch the enemy's hull. The English shot tears gaping holes in the Spanish hull and is closely followed by flaming wads. Thus within moments the interior of *Natividad* is aglow with numerous small blazes. Wrecked, decimated, and hulled many times the Spanish ship is mortally wounded. As Lydia draws back flames eat away at the enemy vessel. Hornblower's surrender demand is met with refusal and within minutes, hundreds of seamen drown alongside the maniacal Crespo. The few remaining men that are rescued are—of course—pressed into Lydia's service.

The so-called butcher's bill, or list of casualties, for Lydia is exceptional. About one third of her crew is hors de combat: dead; wounded and about to die; seriously wounded; or lost overboard. At a time when the savagery of combat was calculated by the dead and



wounded proportion, Hornblower's action is unprecedented in brutality. An exact final count is not offered, but something in the neighborhood of fifty men die from the action. Wellesley demonstrates her incredible ability and determination throughout the latter part of the action as she takes away her canvas partition and enters the cockpit as a volunteer physician. Such behavior by an aristocratic woman was, at the time, entirely unheard of. Wellesley calms the frantic Laurie and directs his actions while simultaneously provided first aid and comfort, as she is able. Her actions doubtless save many lives. Her further suggestions on treatment of the wounded enable more to survive. Finally, her heroic activities so impress Hornblower that he undergoes a fundamental shift in attitude toward her.

Part II wraps up with the recovery and repair of Lydia. Hornblower learns that he is denied the previously offered assistance from any Spanish port. He travels to a nearby but deserted island, locates and fortifies a suitable harbor, builds a fortress on the beach, and careens his ship for critical repairs to the hull. Capable carpenters and riggers quickly restore the ship to full condition even in the absence of port facilities. A new mizzenmast is stepped by using an overhanging crane assembly erected atop a near-vertical cliff dropping to the water. The entire process takes less than two weeks under Hornblower's driving and impatient hand.

Lydia then sails for England and Hornblower makes a final visit to the Spanish lugger that has brought him so much unfortunate news. There he meets El Supremo for a final time. The rebel's movement has been crushed and his followers all hanged. He is being transported to Panama where he, too, will be hanged. He lives chained to the deck, surrounded by his own feces. Still mad as a hatter, El Supremo states that he has allowed himself to be thus fettered as a point of amusement. He then contemplates the sun, compares its might to his own greatness, and then descends into raving despondency, biting at his chains and wailing of his fate. Hornblower is sickened by the display and returns to his own ship where he enters a prolonged period of abject depression. He has seen far too much of himself reflected in the eyes of the nervous madman wallowing in his own filth while awaiting execution.



# The Happy Return

## The Happy Return Summary

Part III consists of three named and enumerated chapters including 22 - Homeward; 23 - The Coward; and 24 - The Happy Return. It is the last of three parts and is the shortest in length. In the final part, Lydia returns homeward from Nicaragua, sailing around Cape Horn and reaching St. Helena. On the lengthy and uneventful voyage Hornblower and Wellesley develop intimate feelings for each other.

Lydia continues her homeward journey. For several evenings, Lieutenant Bush and Lady Wellesley chat and throughout Bush is self-effacing and sings the praises of Hornblower. Meanwhile Hornblower remains aloof and isolated, nervous and troubled by his recent experiences. Wellesley waits a few nights and then invites Hornblower to dinner—he accepts and is joined by some of the other officers. Hornblower begins very restrained but as the evening progresses, he becomes more talkative—nevertheless, he turns down an invitation for after-dinner whist.

As the weeks go by and Lydia continues South Wellesley and Hornblower spend ever-increasing amounts of time talking. Wellesley soon grows to adore Hornblower and even becomes romantically inclined toward him—even as she realizes that, likely, the infatuation is both unrealistic and caused by lack of real society. Hornblower begins to entertain fantastic notions about the possibilities of having some type of affair with Wellesley. Finally, Lydia rounds Cape Horn and begins to point north.

Hornblower and Wellesley spend every evening in each other's company, sitting on the deck and chatting privately. Wellesley, by subtle intimation, makes herself more romantically available to Hornblower. Hornblower spends many contemplative hours thinking about the probably social and economic ramifications of pursuing any type of relationship with Wellesley—in addition, he is a married man and struggles with the constant comparison of his stodgy wife Maria and the willowy and successful Wellesley. Hornblower tries, however unsuccessfully, to remain entirely devoted to his wife even as Wellesley's constant presence plays upon his nervous mind. In various masterful conversations Wellesley discusses her yearning for food while Hornblower, too, diverts his sexual appetite toward a focused consideration of fresh foodstuffs. Finally a call of "Land ho!" (p. 262) signals journey's end. Then the wind fails and Lydia wallows. That evening Hornblower and Wellesley briefly enter the cabin and brush against each other—they turn, embrace, and then kiss passionately. Wellesley draws Hornblower to the floor and kisses him passionately—he responds with ardor. Then, Wellesley's maid Hebe stumbles upon them and hurries away—but the moment is broken. Against Wellesley's protests, Hornblower regains his feet and composure. The rejected Wellesley turns immediately icy and storms from the cabin as Hornblower stammers excuses.



Within a few hours, the wind returns and Lydia sails in to St. Helena. Cannon salutes and the entire minutia of naval etiquette follows her appearance and Hornblower then calls upon the admiral. Various exchanges take place and Hornblower is informed he will accompany a convoy homewards. Meanwhile an aristocratic lady learns of Wellesley's presence and immediately joins her aboard Lydia to assist in her removal to a plush Indiaman. Hornblower attends to various other functions and then returns to his ship where he finds Wellesley on the verge of departure—while her new aristocratic friend intercepts Hornblower with formalities, Wellesley plays the part of the great lady and debarks.

## The Happy Return Analysis

Part III bears little resemblance to the remainder of the novel; there is next to no nautical action as Lydia sails south from Nicaragua, rounds Cape Horn under largely favorable conditions, and sails for St. Helena, a British outpost far off the coast of Southern Africa. The crew recovers and returns to their daily routine without intervention from Hornblower—presumably, an acting lieutenant is selected from the midshipmen and various other arrangements made to adapt to the short-handedness of the ship's crew, but these are not discussed in the text. Instead, Hornblower develops a close relationship with Wellesley. Little else is discussed in the closing chapters of the novel.

Most evenings find Hornblower sitting in a chair on his quarterdeck, a convenience that he has never before allowed himself. Next to him is seated Wellesley and they are far enough from any other person that they can hold quiet conversation in privacy. In summary, they come to regard each other as a friend, then a particular friend, and then an intimate friend. Wellesley develops romantic feelings for Hornblower that are tentatively returned. The relative social positions of the two characters are entirely incompatible, however. Wellesley's family would obviously object to her interest in Hornblower, a mere captain, and would seek to obviate difficulty by destroying him professionally and socially and charging her infatuation to rank seduction by a person in a position of power and privilege. Wellesley seems to consider the problematic relationship but chooses to ignore the implications in the pursuit of it. Hornblower on the other hand is of course more reserved and as the partner who stands to lose the most, so must also be the partner to prevent any untoward developments. What for most men would be difficult if not impossible is accomplished by the nervous and disciplined Hornblower. He prevents any sort of physical contact throughout the long voyage home, although he certainly entertains thoughts of a sexual nature. One of the most outstanding lines in the entire novel comments on Hornblower's repressed and restrained sexuality—"Somewhere just over the gloomy horizon of Hornblower's mind there lurked fancies stranger yet; dark phantoms of rape and murder" (p. 260). Finally, Hornblower considers Maria, his distant wife. He clearly loves her with a dull and pedestrian affection and holds her character in good if unexciting resolve. She is very nearly Wellesley's opposite. While one is present, willowy and charming, the other is far away, stout and reliable. Hornblower seems to sense what is fairly obvious to the reader—that Maria is much the better match for his high-strung nervousness and humble economic reality.



The exasperating and sexually charged situation is finally resolved in one of the novel's final scenes. After numerous and prolonged displacement of sexuality into indulgent discussions of decadent food, the two characters find themselves alone and shut into the captain's private cabin. Hornblower putatively thought—surely consciously thought—Wellesley to be on deck when he entered the cabin. Instead, in a classic Victorian moment, he brushes against her bare arm and she swoons into him. Their passionate embrace and fervent kissing soon forces them onto the floor where Hornblower nuzzles Wellesley's breast and they mutter sweet nothings. Wellesley in fact categorizes Hornblower's meaning to her better than she knows when she whispers "My poppet" (p. 263). Hornblower is rescued from his fractured resolve by Hebe's unlikely but timely entrance. The servant leaves, Wellesley promises discretion of all parties, but Hornblower has regained his composure. His flat refusal to again embrace or more earns an icy and seemingly final rebuke. As the shy captain stands flapping his hands and stuttering Wellesley arises as the great English lady and swirls from his sphere. In short, the scene is simultaneously predictable, funny, and pathetic. Part III derives its title—incidentally the original publication title of the entire novel—from Lydia's happy return to English port. Unmarred by untoward entanglements, Hornblower delivers Wellesley unsullied and unattached to another English aristocratic woman and another ship far more suited to female passengers. He has returned from a distant, almost an alien, world having done all that he was commanded. Military honors and improved assignment surely await him; a suspicion confirmed by his warm reception at the Admiral's ship. A happy return indeed.



# Characters

## Horatio Hornblower

Captain Horatio Hornblower is a post captain in the British Navy during the Napoleonic wars and commands H.M.S. Lydia, a 36-gun frigate, on detached service. His age is given as thirty-seven during 1808 indicating a birth date c. 1771 (this varies somewhat from a birthday of July 4, 1776, given in another novel of the series). He is very educated and joined the naval service fairly late at the age of about twenty-one (again, this varies somewhat from the age of seventeen stated in another novel of the series). He has a term of naval service given as fifteen years. Hornblower is an exceptional navigator, captain, and seaman though he is nervous and constantly plagued by internalized self-doubt. He regards himself as cowardly and dishonest yet all who know him regard him in an opposite way. His powerful drive to unqualified success masks his internal turmoil in icy reserve and even his closest 'friends' never fully know him. An introspective and lonely man, Hornblower is married to Maria and had two children by her—a boy and a girl named Horatio and Maria, respectively—both children died of smallpox prior to the novel's primary timeline.

Hornblower is entirely tone deaf and finds music irritating and incomprehensible. He is somewhat prone to seasickness, abhors many of the normal usages of naval life, declines strict discipline achieved through flogging, and passes his time in isolation, reading, or occasionally playing whist with reluctant lieutenants and midshipmen. He enjoys daily seawater showers, is unusually poor for a captain, and worries frequently about his shabby appearance. Hornblower's early career is mentioned casually during several scenes in the novel. A recent captain, Lydia is nevertheless not his first command. He spent a prolonged period as a prisoner of war in Spain, where he became tolerably fluent in Spanish. In any non-combat stressful situation, however, his Spanish deserts him and his English becomes stuttered and halting.

Hornblower expects much from his officers and crew and when occasion demands it, he is a relentless taskmaster. His leadership qualities are grounded in the reality of always expecting more from himself than he does from his subordinates. He is described physically in only vague terms—of apparently average height and weight, he finds his bulging middle unacceptable. He is much given to pacing the quarterdeck in silent isolation every morning for about an hour, as much a form of physical exercise as mental calculation. His thin brown hair recedes alarmingly during the novel. His fingers are long and apparently delicate, though he considers them bony. His crew secretly but affectionately refer to him as 'Old Horny' which, given a modern context, carries an amusing inference in the narrative.



## William Bush

William Bush, usually simply Bush or Mr. Bush in the narrative, is the experienced and fully capable 1st lieutenant of H.M.S. Lydia. Bush is entirely devoted to Hornblower and nearly venerates the captain. It seems probable that Bush has served under Hornblower for longer than the seven-plus months of Lydia's cruise. However, such details are not furnished in the novel (later novels in the series retroactively develop Bush and Hornblower's relationship into a long-term and close friendship; such a relationship is not evident in the current novel—in fact, it is contradicted by many passages in the current novel). Bush physically is described only in general terms. He appears of average height, build, and is clearly in exceptional physical condition. He bears himself with dignity and proper reserve but is also friendly and well liked among the other officers and the crew. His bravery is beyond reproach and he apparently takes great joy in close, hot combat actions—on numerous occasions he exults in glorious combat.

Bush has a fabulous constitution. For example, he receives a head wound during the action with Natividad but nevertheless remains on deck throughout the action and, later, when Hornblower surrenders to sleep Bush retains the deck and stays on his feet for several more hours. Bush's iron resolve is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than when Hornblower insinuates he should perhaps go below and Bush somewhat angrily dismisses the suggestion as inappropriate.

## Galbraith

Galbraith is the experienced and capable 3rd lieutenant of H.M.S. Lydia. Galbraith is described as a handsome man and on a few occasions, Hornblower surreptitiously glances at Galbraith and envies his good looks and easy social manners. Galbraith is heavily tanned and has brilliant white teeth in a wide and easy smile. He apparently enjoys good relations with the other officers and the crew. After the ship is joined by Lady Barbara Wellesley, Galbraith spends much time in her company and Wellesley appears to reciprocate feelings of goodwill. During the tail end of the action with Natividad, both of Galbraith's legs are crushed by a cannon shot and he is taken to the cockpit where he spends several hours with torturing pain. Under Wellesley's resolute guidance, Laurie amputates Galbraith's legs and performs an apparently satisfactory surgery. Galbraith survives, in any event, and begins to recuperate until gangrene sets in. Within a few days, Galbraith has died of infection and is buried into the sea. Hornblower finds Galbraith's death galling and is troubled by it more than the many other deaths among the crew.

## Polwheal

Polwheal is Hornblower's personal steward and is a curious blend of whining dissatisfaction, maternal care, and gruff seaman. In many respects he offers slight comic relief but he is also entirely dependable and always looking out for Hornblower's physical comfort. Polwheal demonstrates a keen insight into Hornblower's psychology



when, contrary to orders, he takes it upon himself to relocate Wellesley from the cable tier to a canvas-screened area on the orlop deck near the cockpit. The move, in direct contradiction of Hornblower's stated order, is sensible and eases Wellesley's physical discomfort and thus greatly eases Hornblower's mental discomfort at sending Wellesley into the darkness of the cable tier. Although a minor character, Polwheal is memorable and very likable.

## Laurie

Laurie shipped on Lydia as purser's steward but after Hankey, the surgeon, died of syphilis and alcoholism Laurie reluctantly was appointed ship's surgeon. For two months he apparently idles his time instead of studying Hankey's library. At least, when the action between Lydia and Natividad fills Laurie's cockpit with fifty wounded seamen he is sickened and entirely overwhelmed and seeks the deck to request instructions from Hornblower. Throughout the action, Laurie is overwhelmed and incompetent until Lady Barbara Wellesley intervenes. Under her verbal assurances, Laurie regains his composure and begins to act as physician. He first provides laudanum and rum and then stumbles alongside Wellesley bandaging wounds and offering water. Later still his confidence increases and he moves on to extracting splinters and other straightforward surgeries. Eventually he progresses far enough to remove Galbraith's shattered legs and neatly sews the stumps. Apparently, Laurie does a sufficient job as surgeon. Of the roughly eighty wounded men sent to his care, about  $\frac{1}{4}$  die which, for the time, is a rather good record of service.

## Lady Barbara Wellesley

Lady Barbara Wellesley is the aristocratic younger sister of two militarily and politically successful brothers. She comes from an established, respected, and powerful British family, has spent considerable time in India, and is familiar with the practices of the sea though not with military ships and actions. In the finer points of sea life, she rather overestimates her knowledge and ability. She has traveled to the West Indies on an English ship, apparently for vacation. Her ship is captured by a Spanish warship and she is therefore landed in Panama where she enjoys release upon her own recognizance. She remains in Panama for some time seeking a way of returning to England when epidemic diseases begin to erupt in the region. She thereupon retires aboard Lydia and demands passage to England. Wellesley is described as attractive but not pretty. She is heavily tanned, has brilliant white teeth, long fingers, but a highly arched nose. Hornblower considers her long, thin face to be horse-like. She has a willowy and graceful figure, however, and a youthful intensity and a joy of life that is infectious. Highly educated, she demonstrates a natural intelligence and a gift for putting others at ease.

She is keenly insightful and easily influences men, moving among the officers and even crew of Lydia with a casual confidence and enjoys easy successes among them. Her social ability and natural grace quickly wins the affection of the ship. Hornblower finds





her unattractive and irritating, at first, but is quickly won over by her feminine charms and wide knowledge and ability. During the action with Natividad, Wellesley moves into the cockpit and steadies the nervous Laurie, guiding his procedures by telling him what to do. Hornblower is aghast to find a Lady amidst the gore but quickly joins her in heroic lifesaving measures. Their shared horrific experience changes Hornblower's perceptions and he begins rather to dote upon her.

Wellesley realizes that her lofty social station precludes a successful relationship with Hornblower but rather than face facts she pushes them aside and engages in a prolonged and potentially ruinous flirtation with the captain. Although her initial advances are met with stoic reserve, she eventually brings even the isolated Hornblower into her confidence and for several months on the return voyage, they develop an intimate relationship but remain on proper physical terms. Finally, when land is sighted Wellesley embraces Hornblower and they collapse to the deck in his cabin in a passionate, kissing embrace. Brought back to reality by Hebe's timely intrusion, Hornblower regains his feet and composure. Wellesley attempts to regain his passion but, when unsuccessful, turns icy at his rejection. She thereafter refuses to address him and remains on board only as long as necessary. At the first opportunity, Lady Barbara Wellesley leaves Lydia for the roomier cabins of another ship.

## **El Supremo (His Excellency Don Julian María de Jesús Alvar**

El Supremo's name at birth is apparently Julian Alvarado—at least, Don Alvarado is the man Hornblower is ordered to support. By the time Hornblower makes landfall, Julian Alvarado has apparently gone completely insane and fancies himself as a god. He explains in confusing terms, to Hornblower, that he is descended from both the Alvarado line and the Montezuma line, he also corrects many purported historical misunderstandings about the greatness of the Alvarado line, and finally concludes by stating he is the sole survivor and legitimate heir to both lines of royalty—which for unspecified reasons means he is actually divine. He compares himself to the sun in potency and power and vituperates Christianity as false. Hornblower sees him as a shorter man of average build with lank, black hair that is graying with age but with piercing, gray eyes. El Supremo has an absolute self-confidence and a certain charisma that instills belief in his infallibility.

The method by which El Supremo has gained absolute control within his tiny kingdom is unspecified, but when Hornblower arrives on the scene, the locals are entirely cowed by El Supremo and follow his many ridiculous and dangerous orders without resistance. Those who fail to recognize El Supremo's divinity are termed 'unenlightened' and are executed forthwith by being tied to a stake and left in the full sun. Reportedly, death by dehydration follows within at most three days.

El Supremo has revolted from Spanish control and conspired with England to foment widespread rebellion throughout Central America. True to his word, when Hornblower supplies him with five hundred muskets and ammunition, El Supremo raises an army of



five hundred soldiers and sails to La Libertad. He captures the town, then marches on San Salvador, and captures that city. Later, San Salvador is recaptured by a Spanish army and all of El Supremo's surviving followers are hanged. El Supremo is then transported to Panama chained on the open deck of a Spanish lugger where he lives amidst his own filth and alternates between proclaiming his divinity and fits of raving insanity. Hornblower is deeply troubled by El Supremo's fate and situation—presumably, because he sees in El Supremo many of the shortcomings and paradoxes that he sees within himself. El Supremo is a memorable and distinct character.

## Hebe

Hebe is the Negro handmaid of Lady Barbara Wellesley. She is generally obsequious and much given to seasickness. Wellesley states that Hebe's morality is infamous and suggests that Hebe will have sexual intercourse with any available man—this statement appears to be damning but not particularly accurate as Hebe is entirely chaste during a months' long voyage on a British warship. Hebe is a minor but memorable character and her development and narrative presence closely parallels that of Polwheal, Hornblower's steward.

## Lieutenant General Manuel Hernandez

Lieutenant General Manuel Hernandez, usually referred to simply as Hernandez, is El Supremo's chief military officer although in actuality he functions more as an aide-de-camp to El Supremo than as any sort of leader. Hernandez is described as physically average though imposing and dresses in a peculiar blend of flashy militaria and shabby peasant garb common to all of El Supremo's army. Hernandez obviously worships El Supremo while simultaneously being in great fear for his life. He views El Supremo as the God he claims to be and advances El Supremo's cause as vigorously as he can. He arranges for the revictualling of Lydia and performs that function beyond all expectation. He later joins El Supremo in the attack on La Libertad and San Salvador and assists in the successful capture of both cities. Later, San Salvador is recaptured by Spanish forces and El Supremo watches as Hernandez, still bleeding from combat wounds acquired in defeat, is hanged with many other revolutionaries.

## Vice Admiral Don Cristobal de Crespo

Vice Admiral Don Cristobal de Crespo, usually referred to simply as Crespo, is El Supremo's naval tactician and admiral (claiming admiralty before the 'naval' forces possess even a single ship is ironic and humorous though perhaps the brash and haughty Crespo would disagree). Crespo is physically average in most respects though described as agile and fairly acrobatic. He displays a great deal of nervous energy, is very charismatic and eloquent, and is apparently liked by those who serve under him. He takes command of Natividad and secures the crew's obedience by murdering, out of hand, the first crewman who hesitates in swearing loyalty. Later still, various other



crewmen are hanged for undisclosed reasons. Crespo's reign of terror has its desired effect, however, and even as Natividad is pummeled into splinters Crespo remains in complete control. When Natividad burns and sinks, Crespo remains alive and on board—and goes down with his ship. Crespo's flamboyantly titled assistants are Ship-captain Andrade, Frigate-captain Castro, Corvette-captain Carrera, Lieutenants Barrios, Barillas, Cerna, and Aspirant Diaz (risibly, the only correctly titled man in El Supremo's entire naval command). Crespo is a fairly minor character and functions predominantly as Hornblower's opponent during a prolonged naval engagement. In every instance, Crespo proves inferior in tactics and strategy to Hornblower who completely dominates him on the sea of battle.



# Objects/Places

## H.M.S. Lydia

Lydia is an English fifth-rate frigate. She is a three-masted, square-rigged ship with a single gun deck and thirty-six guns, half of which are carronades; she also carries at least one and probably four or more 9 lb. long brass bow chaser and mounts at least four carronades on her quarterdeck. Her amidships cannons, the primary armament, are apparently composed of 12 lb. long guns. The foremast gallant top is 140' above the deck, suggesting a ship of about 150' in length, and the ship is capable of about 4 knots in light airs. She is considered a fine handling vessel. Lydia's normal crew compliment would be something around three hundred men though Hornblower notes she is slightly under-manned at the beginning of the novel. She suffers over one hundred casualties during her prolonged second engagement with Natividad.

## Natividad

Natividad is a Spanish warship that, by British standards of the time, would have been categorized as a fourth-rate ship of the line. She is a three-masted, square-rigged ship with two gun decks and fifty guns, including 24-pounder long guns on her lower deck; she apparently mounts no carronades that would be typical for a Spanish ship of her type and period. Bush describes her as having roughly twice the force as Lydia. Hornblower captures Natividad by stratagem, taking the Spanish ship entirely by surprise and boarding her. He then hands over command to Crespo, El Supremo's admiral. Later still, Hornblower sinks Natividad after a particularly bloody and brutal ship-to-ship action where Lydia's superior maneuverability and crew provide the advantage over the much-heavier ship.

## Nicaragua's Pacific Coast

Lydia makes landfall on Nicaragua's Pacific Coast early in the novel, and spends most of the novel sailing up and down the coast. Hornblower finds it, at first, to be offensive and ugly, with numerous smoking and stinking volcanoes and thick jungle running right down into rocky shorelines. After spending months cruising along the coast, however, he finds in it a certain beauty and attraction that compares favorably but distinctly with his native English Channel environment. Note that during the historical period considered by the novel, the boundaries of the political entity known as Nicaragua were quite different from today's political boundaries.

## Gulf of Fonseca

A large and important gulf on the Pacific coast of Nicaragua—today the gulf is shared between El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua. The gulf offers excellent anchorage



and is the point of landfall of Lydia after her seven months' voyage. Hornblower uses the gulf's physical attributes to great advantage to surprise and overwhelm a superior Spanish ship. The island behind which Hornblower hides is, perhaps, today's Tigre Island. During the time of Hornblower's visit, many people theorized about the possibility of cutting a trans-isthmus channel across Nicaragua which would terminate somewhere in the gulf.

## Coiba

Coiba is the largest island in Central America and offers several small but acceptable anchorages. It is the uninhabited island where Hornblower took Lydia for overhaul and refitting, hauling her over along the sandy beaches. Coiba is, today, declared a "World Heritage Site" and remains a nearly pristine jungle island.

## Cape Horn

Cape Horn is the southernmost headland of the Tierra del Fuego archipelago in South America—in general terms, the southernmost tip of the continent. It is the point at which Lydia could turn north when returning home to England, after passing to roughly 56° south latitude. The weather at the cape is nearly always heavy and passing around Cape Horn is fraught with peril. When Lady Barbara compares rounding Cape Horn to rounding the Cape of Good Hope, she displays signal ignorance about sailing reality.

## Futtock-Shrouds and the Lubber's Hole

The top of each lower mast is surrounded by a platform known as the top—hence, maintop, foretop, etc. The top is reached by climbing the ratlines on the standing rigging which runs from the outside hull upward on an incline to a point just below the platform of the top. The top is most-easily attained by climbing the rigging and then passing through a hole in the platform of the top known as the "lubber's hole". The top itself is stabilized by standing rigging that runs from the edges of the platform downward to the mast, forming lines that have a negative angle, that is, an overhang. These overhanging lines are called the futtock shrouds. Seamen climb the rigging, then move onto the futtock-shrouds and climb up, hanging backwards at a steep angle, and thus gain the top by clambering over the edge of the platform. Less-capable men are expected to gain the top by use of the lubber's hole.

## Splinters

Naval combat between large wooden ships was violent and dangerous, even though it rarely resulted in complete victory for either side. Ships rarely sank outright, though they were sometimes captured. The chief weapon of naval engagement was the cannon—several types, weights, and configurations are noted in the novel. In general, cannons threw heavy iron balls—cannonballs—at the enemy. The cannonballs would strike the



enemy ship's outer hull and cause enormous flocks of splinters to spall away from the ship's inner hull. These splinters, traveling at great velocity, were the chief cause of injury and death among the ship's crew. The word 'splinter' seems innocuous enough. However, they were lethal and often very large. For example, chapter eighteen details the cutting out of a large splinter from Williams' chest area.

## The Weather Gauge

To have or possess 'the weather gauge' describes the favorable positioning of a sailing vessel relative to another with respect to the wind; in brief, it is any position upwind of the other vessel. Being upwind, or having the weather gauge, allows a vessel to maneuver at will toward any downwind point and thus gain the tactical advantage over other ships. Further, the ship having the weather gauge typically controls the timing and even the occurrence of military engagement. In general, correct tactics dictate that seeking the weather gauge is always an appropriate endeavor-Hornblower ignores such conventional wisdom to great success upon his initial closing with Natividad.

## Carronades

A carronade was a short smoothbore cannon used by the British Navy until about 1860. They were designed as short-range cannons. Lightweight and devoid of many of the features of long guns, carronades were devastating at short ranges but notoriously inaccurate beyond pistol-shot ranges. Lydia is fitted with eighteen carronades that are put to good use against Natividad. A carronade weighed approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  as much as a long gun throwing an equal weight of metal. Lydia probably carries 18 pounder carronades as Hornblower notes with some trepidation Natividad's heavier 24 pounder lower deck guns.



# Themes

## Adventure on the High Seas

The novel's principle setting is the high seas during a time of war; Napoleon Bonaparte's military adventures threaten the British Empire and only a strong naval response keeps the French aggression at bay and ensures the survival of the empire. As a post captain of the Royal Navy, Hornblower's sworn and obvious duty is to engage the enemy at every opportunity. He carries out this duty with H.M.S. Lydia.

The novel relates a sea voyage in the years c. 1807-1808; although the voyage is fictional it contains many historical elements and the maritime combat described is derived from several historical accounts. The ships mentioned represent fictionalized ships of historically appropriate type, though the crews are fictional. All aspects of the novel are related to sea adventure. Most of the action takes place at sea and even the action that takes place on land generally relates to the sea.

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

## The Nature of Love

It is perhaps strange that one of the novel's primary themes treats the nature of love—after all, how can love enter into a wartime life at sea, months and miles away from home? Yet romantic love is certainly one of the novel's dominant themes. Although they experience love in different ways, both of the primary protagonists are romantically in love; Captain Hornblower yearns for Barbara Wellesley even as he considers the social, cultural, and financial implications while Wellesley falls in love with Hornblower by tacitly ignoring the realities of their eventual social paradigm.

To be fair, Hornblower's life is, at least partially, framed and grounded by his distant wife Maria and the sturdy if unexciting love he holds for her. His life's goals are simple and conservative—he hopes to earn a few thousand pounds sterling and subsequently retire to a modest country cottage with Maria. Although he sees her in realistic and fairly unflattering ways—she is short and plump, without many graces, and not pretty—he is in love with the reality of her person. He recalls that she has borne him two children, a boy and a girl named, respectively, Horatio and Maria; he recalls her near-collapse but iron resolve when both children died of smallpox in rapid succession. Hornblower's distant simple but real love allows him the uncomfortable practice of comparing distant, common, stodgy Maria with the present, aristocratic, and willowy Wellesley. He



balances the two women and finds one resolute and realistic, the other available but problematical. He finally resolves to return to Maria and avoid Wellesley—equally for positive reasons as well as negative ones. Wellesley is far above him in social station and would prove untenable in many respects.

Barbara Wellesley, on the other hand, appears to be young, unrealistic, and romantic in her pursuit of Hornblower. At some level she must realize that her family, perhaps most especially her two older and eminent brothers, would never accept her dalliance with a common captain of little means and no notable paternity. Neither could Hornblower provide for her economically. As her senior by considerable years, Hornblower would be widely seen as an unfortunate seducer, as one who took advantage of a situation of trust. Surely, Wellesley is aware of all these issues—as is Hornblower—and yet for her they do not present the personal ruin they would for him. Wellesley is in a position to enjoy a casual and ephemeral romanticism at sea and subsequently to move on to a more established relationship ashore—without crippling damage to her reputation. As such, her pursuit of Hornblower is fairly selfish and ill considered.

## The Isolation of Command

Much of the novel concerns itself with Hornblower's constant nervous introspection and his abject and absolute isolation aboard his own ship. The captain of a royal ship bears the entire burden of success or failure, and a captain on detached service, such as Hornblower, is harshly judged long after the facts by those who have, through fortune or luck or skill, achieved a certain level of success and thereby exemption from further chancy trials. Lydia may be successful or she may fail; either way, Hornblower will be accountable. For example, as he reads his orders before touching land he realizes that they contain "the usual combination of the barely possible and the quite Quixotic" (p. 25) blend of suggestion, innuendo, and direction. Whatever the outcome, it will be entirely Hornblower's to enjoy or explain.

Hornblower affects a personal style of absolute rigidity and total isolation. If he responds to his inferior officers at all it is usually with a simple 'ha-h'm'—that noncommittal sound which does not mean no but yet does not mean yes. He spends every morning on deck pacing, where even the first lieutenant is prohibited from addressing him. He spends most evening dining alone. His sole point of connection with the lieutenants and midshipmen appears to be the formulaic and ritualistic sharing of dinner on appropriate conditions, followed by a game of cards. Even at cards, he plays because he wants to play—the officers play because the captain wants to play; and the game is invariably whist, not what any midshipman would chose. The after-card chatter is dominated by Hornblower's recounting of the game and critical analysis of his subordinates' failures to play correctly. Hornblower introspects about even this aspect of his personality. He recalls earlier commands where he enjoyed a certain garrulous friendship with his senior officers early on, only to discover later in the cruise that his orders were often subject to consideration or discussion. For a man such as Hornblower, this faulty result of common friendship indicates the entire relationship must be restructured. Hence, Hornblower lives in abject isolation aboard his own ship.



It is interesting to compare Hornblower's isolation with that of El Supremo, particularly throughout the various phases of El Supremo's political influence. In addition, Lady Barbara Wellesley echoes Hornblower's isolation in a minor way when one considers her prolonged stranding in Panama and her slow return to England.

# Style

## Point of View

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

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

## Setting

The novel features two primary types of settings. The first and most significant is shipboard in the British warship *Lydia*, a frigate in the service. The ship is captained by Hornblower, officered by Bush, Knyvett, and others, and crewed by a rag-tag assortment of British seamen and pressed lubbers. One of the novel's achievements is the presentation of shipboard life as something intriguing and even desirable while simultaneously presenting a realistic view of the often horrible hardships endured. *Lydia* is a mid-size fifth rate frigate of recent construction. She carries 36 guns, half of which are carronades. She has at least one—and probably four—9 lb brass long guns, and mounts at least four carronades on the quarterdeck. The description of "A thousand musket balls" (p. 198) being fired from two carronades with canister loading suggests that the quarterdeck carronades were at least 32 pounders and were treble-loaded—highly unlikely, and the description is either grossly in error or intended only as allegory; a more-realistic number of musket balls would be something like eight-four. *Lydia* is a three-master square-rigged ship of about 150 feet in length, judging from her foremast height. Her normal crew compliment is slightly less than three hundred men though, as most ships of the period, she is below full crew numbers.

The second setting presented in the novel is diffuse and consists of numerous ports, cities, and islands along the Pacific coast of Central Mexico. In general, these settings are transient, poorly described, and thought of—at least by Hornblower—as temporary locations to refit and re-supply. These include the Gulf of Fonseca, *El Supremo's* dusty



town and magnificent residence, Panama City, La Libertad, the volcanic coast of Nicaragua, and the island of Coiba.

## Language and Meaning

The novel's language is generally simply and accessible. Standard punctuation is used to indicate dialogue and interior thoughts and descriptive text are easily distinguished. Most of the places, some of the objects, and even some of the events referenced in the narrative are identifiable as real geographical locations or historic events. It is notable that the novel was originally written and published in England and uses standard English punctuation and spelling styles that may somewhat unfamiliar to American readers.

The novel becomes linguistically complex in two primary respects. This includes references to various parts of sailing craft and sailing techniques that are probably not particularly familiar to modern readers. The technical language is accurate and interesting and a reference to a general sailing encyclopedia will assist in a careful reading and complete understanding of the text. Second, the novel makes frequent reference to various events that occur prior to the novel's opening, proper—this is a standard construction technique and in no way detracts from the novel's readability.

## Structure

The 273-page novel is divided into three named parts; each part is divided into three to fourteen chapters. The twenty-four named and enumerated chapters are of roughly equal length though some chapters are noticeably shorter than others are. The narrative is presented in strictly chronological order with each chapter's events occurring after the events in the previous chapter and before the events in the subsequent chapter. Of course, references to previous events occur with some frequency and characters from time to time think about future events. Such deviations from the principle timeline are minor and are clearly identifiable as such. Thus, the novel's principle timeline is accessible and easily followed.

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

The structure is further complicated by adherence to historical events. In broad terms, events in the novel are fictional or fictionalized events which could have occurred, or did occur, in the period of time used as the novel's setting; namely, the war between England and France during the years 1807-1808. Thus, the novel's language, technology, politics, geography, et cetera, are all based upon historically accurate representations.



## Quotes

"It was not long after dawn that Captain Hornblower came up on the quarterdeck of the Lydia. Bush, the first lieutenant, was officer of the watch, and touched his hat but did not speak to him; in a voyage which had now lasted seven months without touching land he had learned something of his captain's likes and dislikes. During this first hour of the day the captain was not to be spoken to, nor his train of thought interrupted." (p. 3)

"Coffee, sir,' said Polwheal. 'Burgoo.'

"Hornblower sat down at table; in the seven months' voyage every luxury had long since been consumed. The coffee was a black extract of burnt bread, and all that could be said in its favour was that it was sweet and hot. The burgoo was a savoury mess of unspeakable appearance compounded of mashed biscuit crumbs and minced salt beef. Hornblower ate absent-mindedly. With his left hand he tapped a biscuit on the table so that the weevils would all be induced to have left it by the time he had finished his burgoo." (p. 13)

"Captain Hornblower folded up the crackling paper again and fell into contemplation. Those orders were the usual combination of the barely possible and the quite Quixotic, which a captain on detached service might expect to receive. Only a landsman would have given those opening orders to sail to the Gulf of Fonseca without sighting other land in the Pacific—only a succession of miracles (Hornblower gave himself no credit for sound judgment or seamanship) had permitted of their being carried out." (p. 25)

"Certainly, Captain. I will supply whatever you ask. You have only to name it.'

"I want drink for my men,' said Hornblower. 'Is there wine to be had here? Ardent spirits?'

"There is a little wine, Your Excellency. Only a little. The people on this coast drink an ardent spirit with which you are perhaps not acquainted. It is good when of good quality. It is distilled from the waste of the sugar mills, from the treacle, Your Excellency.'

"Rum, by God!' exclaimed Hornblower.

"Yes, señor, rum. Would that be of any use to Your Excellency?'

"I shall accept it in lieu of anything better,' said Hornblower sternly.

"His heart was leaping with joy. It would appear like a miracle to his officers that he should conjure rum and tobacco from this volcano-riddled coast.

"Thank you, Captain. And shall we begin to slaughter the cattle now?'

"That was the question on which Hornblower had been postponing a decision ever since he had heard about the arrival of the cattle on the beach. Hornblower looked up at the lookout on the masthead. He tested the strength of the wind. He gazed out to sea before he took the plunge.

"Very well,' he said at length. 'We will start now.'" (p. 52)

"So quickly had it all happened that the Spaniard had only just gone about and had gathered no way on her new course when the Lydia came leaping upon her out of the



blackness behind the island and rasped alongside. Months of drill bore their fruit in the English ship. The guns crashed out in a single shattering broadside as the ships touched, sweeping the deck of the *Natividad* with grape. Overhead the topmen ran out along the yards and lashed the ships together. On deck the cheering boarders came rushing to the portside gangway.

"On board the *Spaniard* there was utter surprise. One moment all hands had been engrossed with the work of the ship, and the next, seemingly, an unknown enemy had come crashing alongside; the night had been torn to shreds with the flare of hostile guns; on every hand men had been struck down by the hurtling shot, and now an armed host, yelling like fiends from the pit, came pouting onto the deck. Not the most disciplined and experienced crew could have withstood the shock of that surprise. During the twenty years the *Natividad* had sailed the Pacific coast no enemy had been nearer to her than four thousand miles of sea." (p. 68)

"'You killed very few of the crew of the *Natividad*, Captain?' asked *El Supremo*, and thereby approaching directly some of the very difficulties Hornblower had in mind.

"'Eleven killed,' said Hornblower. 'And eighteen wounded, of whom four seem unlikely to recover.'

"'So you left enough to work the ship?'

"'Ample, señor, if—'

"'That is what I wanted. And, Captain, human beings in addressing me do not use the expression "señor." That is insufficiently honorific. I am *El Supremo*.'

"Hornblower could only bow in reply. *El Supremo*'s marvelous manner was like a stone wall.

"'The navigating officers are still alive?' went on *El Supremo*.

"'Yes,' said Hornblower; and, because he could see trouble close ahead and was anxious to keep it to a minimum, he added, with a gulp, '*Supremo*.'

"'Then,' said *El Supremo*, 'I will take the *Natividad* into my service. I will kill the executive officers and replace them with men of my own. The others and the common sailors will serve me.'" (p. 75)

"Clearly she was an Englishwoman. She wore a wide shady hat trimmed with roses, in place of the eternal mantilla, and her grey-blue silk dress was far finer than any Spanish black. Her skin was fair despite its golden tan, and her eyes were grey-blue, of just the same evasive shade as her silk dress. Her face was too long for beauty, and her nose too high arched, to say nothing of her sunburn. Hornblower saw her at that moment as one of the horsefaced mannish women whom he particularly disliked; he told himself that all his inclinations were towards clinging incompetence. Any woman who could transfer herself in that fashion from boat to ship in an open roadstead, and could ascend a rope ladder unassisted, must be too masculine for his taste. Besides, an Englishwoman must be unsexed to be in Panama without a male escort—the phrase 'globe trotting' with all its disparaging implications, had not yet been invented, but it expressed exactly Hornblower's feelings about her." (p. 105)



"'B-but we are going out in this ship to fight,' he said. 'Natividad's got twice our force. It will be d-dangerous.'

"Lady Barbara laughed at that—Hornblower noted the pleasing colour contrast between her white teeth and her golden sunburn; his own teeth were stained and ugly.

"'I would far rather,' she said, 'be on board your ship, whomever you have to fight, than be in Panama with the vomito negro.'

"'But Cape Horn, ma'am?'

"'I have no knowledge of this Cape Horn of yours. But I have twice rounded the Cape of Good Hope during my brother's Governor-Generalship, and I assure you, Captain, I have never yet been seasick.'" (p. 108)

"'Thank you, Captain, they did indeed. There is only one more thing that I wish for, which I should like to ask as a favour.'

"'Yes, your ladyship?'

"'And that is that you do not call me "your ladyship." Call me Lady Barbara, if you will.'

"'Certainly, you—Lady Barbara. Ha—h'm.'

Ghosts of dimples appeared in the thin cheeks, and the bright eyes sparkled.

"'And if "Lady Barbara" does not come easily to you, Captain, and you wish to attract my attention, you can always say "ha—h'm.'"

"Hornblower stiffened with anger at this impertinence. He was about to turn on his heel, drawing a deep breath as he did so, and he was about to exhale that breath and clear his throat when he realised that he would never again, or at least until he had reached some port where he could get rid of this woman, be able to make use of that useful and noncommittal sound. But Lady Barbara checked him with out-stretched hand; even at that moment he noticed her long slender fingers.

"'I am sorry, Captain,' she said, all contrition, 'please accept my apologies, although I know now that it was quite unforgivable.'" (pp. 123-124)

"Another puff, and simultaneously a crash from the waist told where the shot had struck.

"'Two men down at number four gun,' said Bush, stooping to look forward under the gangway, and then, eyeing the distance between the two ships, 'Christ! It's going to be a near thing.'

"It was a situation which Hornblower had visualised several times in his solitary walks on the quarterdeck. He took a last glance up at the weathervane, and at the topsails on the point of shivering as the ship tossed on the heaving sea.

"'Stand by, Mr. Rayner. Fire as your guns bear,' he called. Rayner was in command of the starboard side main deck battery. Then, from the corner of his mouth to the men at the wheel—'Put your helm a-weather. Catch her! Hold her so!'

"The Lydia spun round and shot down the lee side of the Natividad and her starboard side guns went off almost simultaneously in a rolling crash that shook the ship to her keel. The billow of smoke that enveloped her momentarily was blown away instantly by the gale. Every shot crashed into the Natividad's side; the wind brought to their ears the screams of the wounded. So unexpected had the manoeuvre been that only one single shot was fired from the Natividad, and that did no damage—her lower deck ports on this side, her lee side, were closed because of the high sea.



"Grand! Oh, grand!" said Bush. He sniffed at the bitter powder smoke eddying round him as if it had been sweet incense.

"Stand by to go about," rasped Hornblower." (p. 142)

"Then, once more he was engulfed in the smoke and din of the Natividad's broadside. He felt the wind of shot round him, and heard the scream of splinters. The cries of the man under the carronade ceased abruptly, and beneath his feet he could feel the crash as the shot struck home in the Lydia's vitals. But he was mesmerised by the necessity of completing his task. The mizzen stay parted under his axe; he saw another rope draw up taught, and cut that as well—the pattern of the seams of the deck planking at that point caught his notice—felt another severed and flick past him, and then knew that the Lydia was free from the wreckage. Almost at his feet lay young Clay, sprawled upon the deck, but Clay had no head. He noted that as an interesting phenomenon, like the pattern of the deck seams." (pp. 150-151)

"Call the hands to stand by to repel boarders," he said, and he walked across to where the two starboard side quarterdeck carronades were thundering away. So intent were their crews on their work, so hypnotised by the monotony of loading and firing, that it took him several seconds to attract their notice. Then they stood still, sweating, while Hornblower gave his orders. The two carronades were loaded with canister brought from the reserve locker beside the taffrail. They waited, crouching beside the guns, while the two ships drifted closer and closer together, the Lydia's main deck guns still blazing away. There were shouts and yells of defiance from the Natividad, and the musket flashes from her bows showed a dark mass of men crowding there waiting for the ships to come together. Yet the actual contact was unexpected, as a sudden combination of wind and sea closed the gap with a rush. The Natividad's bow hit the Lydia amidships, just forward of the mizzenmast, with a jarring crash. There was a pandemonium of yells from the Natividad as they swarmed forward to board, and the captains of the carronades sprang to their lanyards.

"Wait!" shouted Hornblower.

"His mind was like a calculating machine, judging wind and sea, time and distance, as the Lydia slowly swung round. With hand spikes and the brute strength of the men he trained one carronade round and the other followed his example, while the mob on the Natividad's forecastle surged along the bulwarks waiting for the moment to board. The two carronades came right up against them.

"Fire!"

"A thousand musket balls were vomited from the carronades straight into the packed crowd. There was a moment of silence, and then the pandemonium of shouts and cheers was replaced by a thin chorus of screams and cries—the blast of musket balls had swept the Natividad's forecastle clear from side to side." (pp. 197-198)

"Good morning, Captain," he said, bowing profoundly. 'I trust Your Excellency is enjoying the best of health?'

"Thank you," said Hornblower.

"The Spanish officer was looking curiously about him; the Lydia still bore many marks of



her recent battle—the row of wounded in hammocks told a good part of the story. Hornblower saw that the Spaniard seemed to be on his guard, as though determined to be noncommittal at present until something unknown had revealed itself.

"'I see,' said the Spaniard, 'that your fine ship has been recently in action. I hope that Your Excellency ad good fortune in the encounter?'

"'We sunk the Natividad if that is what you mean,' said Hornblower, brutally.

"'You sank her, Captain?'

"'I did.'

"'She is destroyed?'

"'She is.'

"The Spaniard's expression hardened—Hornblower was led for a moment to think that it was a bitter blow to him to hear that for the second time the Spanish ship had been beaten by an English ship of half her force.

"'Then, sir,' said the Spaniard, 'I have a letter to five you.'" (p. 217)

"'The sun grows in his splendour every day,' said El Supremo. 'He is magnificent and terrible, as I am. He can kill—kill—kill, as he killed the men I exposed to him—when was it? And Moctezuma is dead, and all his line save me, in the hundreds of years ago. I alone remain. And Hernandez is dead, but it was not the sun that killed him. They hanged Hernandez even while the blood dripped from his wounds. They hanged him in my city of San Salvador, and as they hanged him he still called upon the name of El Supremo. They hanged the men and they hanged the women, in long rows at San Salvador. Only El Supremo is left, to govern from his golden throne. His throne! His throne!'

"El Supremo was staring about him now. There was a hint of bewildered realisation in his face as he jangled his chains. He peered at them stupidly.

"'Chains! These are chains!'

"He was bawling and shouting. He laughed madly, and then he wept and he cursed, flinging himself about on the deck biting at his chains. His words were no longer articulate as he slobbered and writhed.

"'It is interesting, is it not?' said the Spanish captain. 'He will struggle and shout sometimes for twenty four hours without a stop.'

"'Bah!' said Hornblower, and his chair fell with a clatter to the deck as he got to his feet. He was on the verge of vomiting. The Spaniard saw his white face and trembling lips, and was faintly amused, and made no attempt to conceal it." (pp. 237-238)

"What was monstrous about his thoughts was the suspicion that possibly Lady Barbara would not repulse him. It seemed inconceivable and yet possible, like something in a nightmare. He might even put his hot hand on her cool bosom—a thought which made him writhe in strange anguish. His longing to taste her sweetness was excruciating. He had been nearly a year cooped up in the Lydia now, and a year of unnatural living breeds strange fancies. Somewhere just over the gloomy horizon of Hornblower's mind there lurked fancies stranger yet; dark phantoms of rape and murder." (p. 260)





"The barge left the ship's side, and rowed steadily away. She was all blurred, too, a vague patch of red and gold. Hornblower found Bush beside him.

"'The victualling officer's signaling, sir,' he said.

"Hornblower's duties were clamouring for his attention. As he turned away from the ship's side to plunge into them he found himself, idiotically, remembering that in two months' time or so he would be seeing Maria again. He felt vaguely glad about that before it passed out of his mind again. He felt he would be happy with Maria. Overhead the sun was shining brightly, and before him rose the steep green slopes of St. Helena."  
(p. 273)

## Topics for Discussion

Would you rather be a seaman aboard H.M.S. Lydia or Natividad? Why?

Do you consider Hornblower to be the epitome of what a Royal Navy captain should embody? Why or why not?

The novel presents several minor facts and situations which are significantly altered in other novels in the series. For example, Lieutenant Bush is characterized as only recently acquainted with Captain Hornblower. Yet, in other novels, it is established they are long-time friends. Discuss how the gradual addition of chronologically-previous novels poses difficulties in the Hornblower saga.

After reading the novel, does the life of a common seaman seem appealing to you? In your opinion, which class of sailors has the best situation—seamen, midshipmen, officers or the captain?

Upon first seeing Lady Barbara, Hornblower judges her as horse-faced, mannish, nonsexual, irritating and undesirable. Yet, a few months later, his mind is wracked with torment over unsatisfied romantic and sexual attraction to her. Do you think this change would have occurred had Hornblower and Lady Barbara been acquaintances on land?

El Supremo is clearly mentally imbalanced yet simultaneously charismatic and apparently in absolute control of his subordinates. Why do you think men such as Hernandez and Crespo would willingly and devoutly follow such an obviously insane leader?

After handing over the Natividad to Crespo, Hornblower watches various brutal measures taken against the Spanish crew. Some are summarily shot, others are hanged. He reflects that his own English seamen viewed such brutalities with relative calm. He also reflects that his own English seamen would be outraged if such treatment had been visited upon the Spanish officers. Why would the English seamen view such forms of punishment so differently when applied to different classes of persons?

As Natividad burns and sinks, Hornblower demands Crespo surrender. Instead, Crespo and nearly everyone else go down with the ship. Why would Crespo choose death over survival in defeat?

Hornblower views Laurie's squeamishness and uncertainty with disgust. Yet, Laurie was simply a mate without medical training or experience. Do you think Hornblower's attitude was justified? Why or why not?

During the fight between Natividad and Lydia, some men, such as Clay, are killed outright. Others, such as Galbraith, are hideously wounded and subsequently die. Still



others are maimed and survive. Others, such as Williams, are grievously wounded but recover completely. Some, such as Bush, are lightly wounded; and some, such as Hornblower, are not wounded. Which of these men are the most fortunate? Which are the least fortunate?