

H.M.S. Surprise Study Guide

H.M.S. Surprise by Patrick O'Brian

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

H.M.S. Surprise Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1.....	5
Chapter 2.....	8
Chapter 3.....	10
Chapter 4.....	12
Chapter 5.....	14
Chapter 6.....	16
Chapter 7.....	18
Chapter 8.....	20
Chapter 9.....	22
Chapter 10.....	25
Chapter 11.....	27
Characters.....	29
Objects/Places.....	37
Themes.....	40
Style.....	42
Quotes.....	45
Topics for Discussion.....	51



Plot Summary

Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin, a medical man of science, are close, particular friends of long acquaintance, having sailed together on previous occasions. They again join together on a prolonged voyage of the *H.M.S. Surprise*, a Royal Navy frigate. Captain Aubrey is entrusted with the task of transporting a political delegation to Kampong, many thousands of miles distant. On the way Aubrey and Maturin worry about Sophie Williams and Diana Villiers—their respective love interests. Unfortunately, the ambassador dies of ill health when the journey is nearly complete and Aubrey turns the ship around. He falls in with an English fleet under attack from a French naval squadron and leads a spectacular and successful defense before landing at Calcutta for repairs. In Calcutta, Maturin engages Diana's lover in a pistol duel and kills his opponent while receiving a dreadful wound to the chest. Maturin subsequently extracts the ball by himself and the two men return home, the remainder of their voyage being relatively uneventful.

The novel is the third in a series of twenty dealing with the experiences and adventures of Captain Jack Aubrey, Royal Navy, and Stephen Maturin, man of science and medicine. As such, the novel presupposes the reader has a certain familiarity with the principle characters including Aubrey, Maturin, Sophie Williams, and Diana Villiers. Although the various relationships and current situations of the four characters are glossed over, the sparse detail given would seem to indicate their relationships are not of paramount importance to the plot, which is in fact not the case.

The novel opens with an exciting rescue sequence; an over-confident Maturin accepts a poorly-considered mission of secret intelligence which results in his capture, imprisonment, and torture. Aubrey, in temporary command of a frigate returning to England, learns of Maturin's plight and executes a daring rescue. The two men then return home where Aubrey, supremely skilled on the water but nearly incompetent ashore, surrenders command of the frigate to the normal captain and is then arrested and imprisoned for debt due to a series of ill-considered fiduciary transactions conducted in a previous novel. Meanwhile Maturin gradually recovers his health and regains the use of his shattered body.

Maturin's friends in the intelligence service desire to rehabilitate his reputation as a man of learning and medicine, and therefore contrive to send him on a prolonged errand through scientifically largely unexplored areas; he will thus be enabled to publish monographs and regain his scientific reputation. Maturin's particular friend Aubrey is selected to captain the ship which will perform the errand of delivering a political ambassador to a distant kingdom. The two men are thus assigned to *H.M.S. Surprise* and quickly board and leave England. The remainder of the novel treats their experiences sailing to and from India.

On the trip, the ambassador dies and Aubrey turns the ship around, commenting on the frustration of having run a fool's errand. The ship then falls in with a returning fleet of Indiamen plying the far-East trade. The fleet is harried by a French squadron. Aubrey



organizes an unlikely but spirited defense; although his ship suffers severe damage, his plan thwarts the French attack and Aubrey is once again regaled as a masterful captain and leader of men. The ship then stops at Calcutta for repairs. While there, Maturin meets his love interest, Diana Villiers, living in a scandalous affair with one Mr. Canning. The inflammatory Canning strikes Maturin on one occasion, and Maturin takes the opportunity to demand satisfaction of honor. A pistol duel ensues and Maturin kills Canning but receives in return a dreadful shot to the chest. In a memorable but unlikely surgical scene, Maturin uses a large mirror to extract the ball from his own chest. Upon his urging, Diana returns to England aboard a non-military vessel; she leads the wounded and sick Maturin to believe they have become engaged and will be wed in England.

The main action of the novel concluded, Maturin and Aubrey return home via a long voyage which proves mostly uneventful. They reach home to discover that the honorable Sophie eagerly awaits Aubrey's return in anticipation of marriage; the beautiful but faithless Diana, however, has met yet another rich young man and absconded with him to America, leaving Maturin depressed and alone.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin, a medical man of science, are close, particular friends of long acquaintance, having sailed together on previous occasions. They again join together on a prolonged voyage of the *H.M.S. Surprise*, a Royal Navy frigate. Captain Aubrey is entrusted with the task of transporting a political delegation to Kampong, many thousands of miles distant. On the way Aubrey and Maturin worry about Sophie Williams and Diana Villiers—their respective love interests. Unfortunately, the ambassador dies of ill health when the journey is nearly complete and Aubrey turns the ship around. He falls in with an English fleet under attack from a French naval squadron and leads a spectacular and successful defense before landing at Calcutta for repairs. In Calcutta, Maturin engages Diana's lover in a pistol duel and kills his opponent while receiving a dreadful wound to the chest. Maturin subsequently extracts the ball by himself and the two men return home, the remainder of their voyage being relatively uneventful.

The novel opens during a restricted session of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty in London, England; it is the first meeting of a new administration. Sir Joseph Blain, Admiral Harte, and the newly-appointed First Lord are present, as well as numerous other political and military figures. Sir Joseph states the case of the recent capture of several incredibly rich Spanish vessels; although the ships were taken before the official declaration of war, he argues they should be considered as prizes. The First Lord notes with distaste that Royal Navy Captain Jack Aubrey would be one of four young captains to benefit from the incredible prize. After a brief political discussion the First Lord rules the seized vessels escheat to the crown. The First Lord then moves on to question Sir Joseph about another matter. Sir Joseph is astounded to hear the First Lord openly betray the name of one Stephen Maturin, a secret intelligence agent; such a lapse in secrecy is scarcely believable, and certainly unacceptable.

The scene changes to the sitting room of Mapes Court, the home of Mrs. Williams and her three daughters Sophia, Cecilia, and Frances. Dr. Stephen Maturin sits with Sophia, his medical patient and close personal friend; Sophie is engaged to Maturin's particular friend Captain Jack Aubrey. Maturin and Sophie discuss Aubrey's current temporary assignment as a captain aboard *H.M.S. Lively*, blockading the French fleet at Toulon. Sophie makes a chance remark which sends Maturin into a despondent period of retrospection. He has recently wooed but lost the affections of a young and beautiful widow, Diana Villiers, Sophie's cousin. Diana instead took up with Richard Canning, a powerful and wealthy, but married, Jew. Diana and Canning's illegitimate relationship caused such social outcry they left the country for India. Maturin, a secret intelligence officer of considerable personal wealth, spared no expense in obtaining detailed minutia about Diana's flight and current whereabouts. Their meeting comes to an abrupt end and Maturin departs for an entomological lecture.



At the lecture Maturin sees but does not openly acknowledge Sir Joseph. Afterward they meet at Sir Joseph's private apartments. Sir Joseph explains the grave indiscretion at the admiralty and states that he did his best to cover up the *faux pas*. Maturin finds the First Lord's indiscretion outrageous but does not appear to be particularly concerned; he is determined to continue on his mission, though he does ask Sir Joseph to interfere with the machinations of a certain unnamed pederast. Sir Joseph expresses grave concern about Maturin's safety but Maturin is determined to carry on with the mission.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The novel is the third novel of a series which eventually spanned twenty books; the action of the novel is set in 1804 during the historical wars of Napoleon Bonaparte. The novel is, in broad terms, historically accurate though of course the characters and ships are fictional. Numerous referenced events, however, are historically factual, and the general setting and tone of the novel are widely considered to be authentic. Because the novel continues the action, plot, and characterizations of a previous novel the reader is assumed to know much about the principle characters. The chapter serves more as a brief reminder of the state of affairs continuing from a previous novel rather than as a full development of the setting.

The chapter introduces all of the novel's principle characters, including Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin, the two primary characters of all twenty novels in the series. They are close friends and normally sail together when occasion permits. Aubrey is a career Royal Navy seaman who has risen through the ranks to post captain. He is insightful, determined, and courageous to a fault; his one weakness is food and he constantly battles against his weight. Maturin is a naturalist and a medical man who typically sails with Aubrey as a guest; he is sometimes appointed as official ship's surgeon and even when not so officially appointed serves in that role. Aubrey's beloved is Sophie, a fairly beautiful and personally vibrant young woman with high morals, complete faith, but a snake for a mother. Sophie and Aubrey are entirely enthralled with each other even though Aubrey's service requirements usually keep them apart. Sophie's mother, Mrs. Williams, will not allow the marriage to proceed without proof of a large dowry. Sophie's cousin, Diana Villiers, is an incredibly beautiful but very spirited young widow. Maturin is entirely smitten by Diana and in the past pursued her with an awkward and strangely indifferent ardor. Sophie believes that had Maturin simply stated his interest forthwith, Diana and he would be married these many months past. Instead Maturin fumbled and bumbled about until Diana met Canning and, eventually, ran off with him to India to escape the social buzz and scandal their dalliance had occasioned. Maturin, though dismissive of the idea, is crushed by Diana's rejection. The friendship between Aubrey and Maturin is strong, interesting, and charismatic; it forms a substantial amount of the appeal offered by the novel. The two characters are nearly perfect foils for each other, with the thin, over-educated, and unworldly Maturin able to closely bond with the fattish, street-wise, and hedonistic Aubrey. Aubrey likewise finds in Maturin a completeness of soul and a true friend.



Sir Joseph's concern over the First Lord's indiscretion foreshadows events which will transpire in Chapter 3; it will become obvious that Maturin is as over-confident in his abilities as it appears.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Captain Jack Aubrey commands *H.M.S. Lively*, on squadron duty off the coast of Toulon, running a frigate-picket blockade of the French fleet. *H.M.S. Lively's* normally-appointed captain is a member of parliament and thus away in England on political duties; Aubrey has thus been appointed temporary command. Because of his many successes in a short period of time, Aubrey is held in incredible regard by the stern and professional crew and officers of *H.M.S. Lively*. Blockade duty is notably boring, particularly damaging to morale, and wearing on ships. Supplies are running remarkably low—so low, in fact, that those who can dine on rats caught in the hold.

The ship is approached by a messenger cutter who tosses over bags of mail and dispatches. Aubrey learns that he has been commanded to break station and proceed to a rendezvous at Minorca; there he will meet Maturin who is acting as an official agent of the British government. They are to leave at once, before even being supplied. After retrieving Maturin the ship is to continue on to Gibraltar and reunion with the permanent captain; thus Aubrey will be released from service. The orders allow Aubrey a certain leeway in his voyage and yield several extra days' time. Aubrey also receives several letters from Sophie.

On the voyage *H.M.S. Lively* participates in a brief military engagement near Cape Gooseberry. The ship's longboats land most of the crew in stealth, and led by Aubrey they raid a French coastal fortress, killing some soldiers, spiking some guns, blowing up the stores, and taking one prisoner. The French respond by sending out two small gunboats that attempt to intercept the returning longboats. Aubrey sails directly for them and boards; in a shockingly brutal scene the pressed Chinese and Javanese of Aubrey's crew massacre the French to a man. Aubrey is later happy to learn that the captured gunboat's code book is recovered and will not expire for several days.

Eventually the ship makes Minorca and Aubrey goes ashore in the dead of night along a certain stretch of deserted coast; he flashes pre-arranged signals but receives no reply from Maturin. Aubrey goes ashore to leave private marks, planning on returning the next night. While ashore he is approached by a strange man who explains he has been sent by Maturin. By private signals Aubrey learns he can trust the man who introduces himself as Joan Maragall. Maragall informs Aubrey that Maturin has been captured by the French and is presently imprisoned in Port Mahon where he is being tortured.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter 2 opens with Aubrey's command ship performing boring and routine duty of port blockade. The duty for frigates essentially entails sailing back and forth in front of the enemy port, day after day, week after week, while the larger rated ships of the line sail



just over the horizon. The frigate picket thus serves as the eyes of the fleet. Needless to say, the continual pattern sailing in all weather and without supply is not a desirable appointment. Aubrey is soon enough notified that he is to leave station, proceed to Minorca to rendezvous with Maturin, and then proceed to Gibraltar and return command of the ship to her normally-appointed captain.

Between the blockade station and Minorca, the ship takes part in a land raid. The chapter's construction is interesting because nearly all of the dramatic combat action is related in a letter that Aubrey writes to Sophie. He pauses during the writing when he remembers the violence and gory scenes of slaughter—and then he simply writes to Sophie that they were victorious, leaving out all the bloody details.

Chapter 2 transparently sets up the plot for the subsequent several chapters—Aubrey happens to catch a small French craft with codebook intact. The craft is seaworthy, small enough to avoid attention, but large enough to house a hidden contingent of seamen. The craft has all signal flags required to enter port and is a good sailing vessel, though nondescript. Finally, the craft is captured by direct assault and boarding and is thus in effectively pristine condition. All of these details though seemingly insignificant become critical in Aubrey's plan executed in Chapter 3. As it happens, Sir Joseph's misgivings about Maturin's safety were entirely practical and Maturin's confidence in his ability to travel faster than any possible news was wrong. He has been captured and imprisoned, and is undergoing horrible torture. It is worth noting that Maturin owns land in Spain and has a Spanish title; thus, although an English subject, he is allowed to travel through Spanish territory even though Spain nominally is occupied by France, at war with England. Clearly, however, Maturin's Spanish travel papers were immediately invalidated upon word that he is in fact a secret intelligence spy.

Chapter 2 also presents a formal dinner aboard ship where Aubrey hosts the off-duty officers, midshipmen, and the chaplain. This common event is remarkably entertaining because of Aubrey's over-confident sense of humor and his strangely housewife-like concern for the chaplains' stomach. The chapter also introduces Killick, Aubrey's shrewish and belligerent steward. Killick is a recurring character throughout the novels of the series and has an impish and incorrect sense of order and is decidedly not impressed by Aubrey's successes and promotions. Aubrey finds him irritating and nearly untenable but appreciates Killick's dedication and unlikely ability. For example, while Aubrey led the crew on the military raid upon Cape Gooseberry Killick went ashore in the nearby town and shopped for fresh foodstuffs.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Chapter 3 relates the events surrounding the rescue of Maturin by Aubrey. Aubrey takes a selected crew of men aboard the captured French boat and sails into Port Mahon, his coxswain Bonden at the helm. Aubrey is very familiar with the port, having lived there some time previously and having carried on a scandalous affair with Molly Harte, the wife of Admiral Harte. The boat uses the captured code book to present the correct signals and is allowed to enter the port and sail to the quay without challenge. Maragall has arranged for the boat to quickly clear the health inspection and to be met by several local guides. In small groups and pairs the selected crew skulks away into the night, following the local guides.

Rather than simply rescuing Maturin, which would indicate his singular importance, Aubrey determines to rescue all of the prisoners in the building. In addition no French will be left as witnesses—Aubrey hopes to make the escape appear as a spontaneous arising of the prisoners. The various small groups reassemble near the prison, a converted house, and sneak into the grounds.

In a series of brief but extremely violent encounters, Aubrey's crew slaughters the small French guard contingent and takes the prison; it is possible that one French officer manages to escape. Aubrey discovers Maturin too wrecked to even stand. While the men secure the premises Aubrey causes Maturin to be strapped onto a board. The remaining prisoners, all horribly tortured, are freed to fend for themselves. Aubrey collects some French papers, and the crew vanishes into the night, carrying Maturin to the boat, and they quickly sail out of the harbor and into the dark night.

Chapter 3 Analysis

The rescue mission is exciting and colorful. Aubrey uses the French boat, free of damage, and the captured French codebook to sail directly into the enemy port without trouble. The Spanish sympathizer has arranged various contacts and processes to ease the mission. The actual assault on the prison is short and violent, and successful. The prison houses a torture rack and all of the prisoners are in bad physical condition—Aubrey suspects that some will die; some of the prisoners are assisted by the Spanish sympathizer. Maturin, through physically ruined, is mentally alert and manages to summon the prison commander by a ploy—the man is killed when he arrives from a distance. Maturin also has Aubrey's men secure all the important documents from the prison before he allows them to carry him away strapped to a board. Only one French officer—Dutourd—potentially escapes. He leaps from a high window in the dark and his fate remains uncertain. Dutourd's escape has an ominous overtone because he is aware that Aubrey, an English officer, accomplished the rescue whose prime goal was

securing Maturin. The chapter concludes with Aubrey returning to the sea which, symbolically, he finds cleansing and peaceful.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Back in England Maturin recovers his health through sheer force of will. He brushes aside various folk remedies and instead takes the hot waters of Bath; he also makes his desire for a hot, humid climate well-known. As he recovers his health he is visited by Sir Joseph and Mr. Waring who take down his statement regarding his captivity with the French. Bonden and Killick remain with Stephen for Aubrey has been cast into debtor's prison for defaulting on loans. When news of Aubrey's financial situation reaches the Williams household, Mrs. Williams forbids Sophie of having further contact with him—a decree which Sophie subtly ignores.

Sir Joseph informs Maturin of his retirement; he will be replaced by one Mr. Waring. Stephen is amazed but pleased with the choice of Sir Joseph's successor. In the meantime Maturin arranges for Fanshaw—Aubrey's prize agent—to advance funds to debtors and secure Aubrey's release from prison. Aubrey straightaway goes by ship to the Grapes, an abode legally off-limits to the debt collectors. Sir Joseph then informs Maturin that he has secured an official voyage for him to a hot and humid climate; the mission is to escort one Mr. Stanhope, a newly appointed envoy, to Kampong (the exact location of Kampong is not specified; presumably it is near Singapore or Cambodia). Mr. Stanhope is to travel aboard *H.M.S. Surprise*—a twenty-eight gun sixth-rate frigate—lately wanting of a captain and most crew. Thus, Sir Joseph also offers the command to Maturin's particular friend Aubrey. Maturin arranges the situation by post. Aubrey sneaks out of the Grapes in a hearse and travels to the port in time to arrive on Sunday, which is considered a debtor's holiday. He meets Maturin, accompanied by Sophie, at a deserted crossroads in the dark of early morning hours. Aubrey and Sophie exchange prolonged intimate words while Maturin, Bonden, Killick, and Mr. Pullings stand away. As Sophie leaves under the care of Bonden, the remainder of the party proceeds toward their new ship.

Chapter 4 Analysis

In large part Chapter 4 is simply plot advancement; the events described tie the initial scenes of Chapters 1 through 3 to the remaining action of the novel. As usual, the dialogue is humorous, credible, and rings authentic. Aubrey's troubles with debt collectors are a recurring theme in his life; although skillful on the water he is not very capable of managing routine aspects of life ashore. Aubrey is an accomplished, qualified, and capable commander. But his political situation is complicated by his father's unpopular and outspoken political views; and his ruinous financial situation allows him no influence. Thus, as a new captain, Aubrey's personal fate seems to be to remain without command, ashore, on half pay as the war progresses. He is fortunate however to have Maturin for a friend. Maturin is deeply involved in the secret intelligence service and is often called upon to perform official duties. It is just such an



occasion that allows Maturin's political connections to do him a personal favor by securing the command of a vessel for his friend Aubrey. Thus, once again, the two men will accompany each other on a voyage to the far side of the world.

Aubrey served aboard *Surprise* as a young midshipman and knows the ship intimately. He recalls, in fact, carving his initials on the main cap. Always keenly interested in receiving a command, Aubrey literally leaps for the chance offered by Maturin and immediately summons his various regular crewmates to attend him. Thus he will return to the sea not only with Maturin, but his coxswain Bonden, his steward Killick, and, as a lieutenant, a favored junior officer Mr. Pullings. All of these characters share deep relationships which have developed over the course of the two previous novels.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

The ship is becalmed for an unusually long period of time and eventually drifts near to St. Paul's Rocks, rocky islets near the coast of Brazil. Throughout the entire voyage Stanhope has remained below decks, severely seasick. On Sunday, Aubrey holds church and Mr. White delivers a lengthy and tedious sermon. Aubrey then conducts a thorough inspection of the entire ship. He notes that the sail locker is in deplorable condition and many of the sails are molding—he orders a complete cleaning and turning-over of the sails. Aubrey notes with alarm that scurvy appears to be coming on among many of the men, including Mr. Nicolls, the 2nd lieutenant, who appears for inspection unclean and disheveled.

After church services Maturin looks longingly at St. Paul's Rocks, some two miles distant. Nicolls volunteers to row Maturin to the islets and the pair sets off in a rowboat. On the way Nicolls confesses to Maturin as a medical man: Nicolls has been unfaithful and his wife has cast him out. He has not received any letters from home and he has sunk into a despondent state of depression. Maturin awkwardly, and inefficiently, attempts to comfort Nicolls and then the two arrive at the islet and Maturin is immediately carried away into a rapture of biological investigation; he compares the desolate, hot, and stinking rocks to the Garden of Eden. While he adventures about, Nicolls sleeps. Maturin is suddenly surprised by a massive advancing wall of utterly black thunderheads. The islet is swept over by a raging squall which covers it in inches-deep water and scours the surface with rapid winds. After the squall passes Maturin searches unsuccessfully for Nicolls—the officer and the rowboat have been swept out to sea and destroyed.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Most of Chapter 5 is devoted to two events: Aubrey's inspection of the ship and Maturin's voyage to the island. The chapter's main focus is characterization and development of tone and setting. The amount of naval detail provided during Aubrey's inspection tour is impressive and interesting. His personal preferences are noted; he would rather have a fighting ship than a clean ship, though of course a clean ship is preferable to a dirty ship. His treatment of the officers and crew is steady, fair, and commendable. The various rituals that make up Sunday preaching and inspection are presented in an accessible form and materially develop the novel's texture.

The chapter concludes with Maturin's voyage to St. Paul's Rocks. On the way, as was customary for the times, Nicolls confesses to Maturin as a medical man. Maturin finds this habit distasteful and, as usual, tries to minimize the confession and divert attention back to the situation at hand. He has learned from experience that living with the men after they have exposed their personal secrets and weaknesses is often troubling. Once



ashore, Maturin is equal parts ridiculous and scientist. He moves about the island sniffing birds, collecting bones and specimens, and reveling in the extreme heat. The rapidly-approaching storm catches him completely off guard, and nearly all of his specimens, Nicolls, and the rowboat are washed out to sea and lost. Even the distant ship is laid over on her beam ends and driven away before the squall, leaving Maturin more or less marooned on the rocky outcrop.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Maturin remains on the rocky outcrop for three days, subsisting on a tiny pool of water fouled with excrement. The extreme heat and exposure, however, has a remarkably recuperative effect on his health and he finds himself much recovered. He is eventually rescued by the ship once it manages to return. The ship is dismayed at the loss of Nicolls, but continuing through necessity Pullings is promoted to 2nd lieutenant and Babbington is appointed as acting 3rd lieutenant—his official status of midshipman prevents Aubrey from making the appointment outright and permanent, though he is sure the admiralty will honor it. The ship crosses the equator and Badger Bag comes aboard to haze the neophytes among the crew. Scurvy continues to worsen among the crew and Maturin finally demands that Aubrey put ashore to search for greens and citrus. The ship lands upon the Brazilian coast and picks up stores of fruits and vegetables which effectively combat scurvy. Maturin captures a sloth and takes it aboard the ship.

The ship continues to voyage south though it is often becalmed for long periods in the sultry heat. Stanhope suffers ill health and seasickness throughout. The ship finally reaches southern latitudes and passes from the heat to the cold; but the winds do pick up. The ship travels through an enormous storm system and is dismasted and nearly lost. Aubrey, Bonden, and others climb into the shrouds and along the bowsprit to hack away the wreckage of the foremast as the ship pitches its bow into green water and skews about avoiding being pooped. Eventually the ship weathers the storm, though generally damaged, and foats into warm and calm seas. Throughout the period Stanhope continues to suffer ill health and his entourage becomes depressed and irritating to the crew. The warm and calm seas, however, has a recuperative effect on Stanhope and he begins to take the deck in the evenings. On some evenings Aubrey and Maturin play music and they are, rarely, joined by Stanhope. The prolonged period at sea, however, has caused scurvy to once again be present among many of the crew. Finally, the ship comes to berth in the harbor of Bombay.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The chapter is fairly lengthy and continues to develop the texture of nautical life and characterize the primary protagonists. Aubrey relates various stories about the ship during various dinner meetings while Maturin continues to be astounded and astonished by the natural world which presents itself. Additionally, Maturin from time to time ponders over Diana Villiers and the nature of his affection for her—this provides clear but vague foreshadowing of events which will shortly occur. Stanhope's health languishes, Atkins continues to be an irritating shrew, and the crew becomes ever-more efficient. Meanwhile Maturin teaches Bonden to write and read and continues to long for the sight of an albatross—in which he is eventually satisfied. *H.M.S. Surprise* has



traveled approximately 8,000 miles total—perhaps 2,000 miles in Chapter 5 and 6,000 miles in Chapter 6.

One risible section of the chapter involves Maturin lecturing Stanhope and Atkins on the various aspects of sailing—a topic of which Maturin is singularly ignorant. He assures them, incorrectly using various nautical jargon as is his wont, that the plunging and leaking ship are in fact normal. Within moments the ship is dismasted and nearly founders; Maturin and Stanhope remain ignorant of their peril which is, perhaps, a good thing. A few feet away Mr. White, Mr. Berkeley, and others sit in their chairs, seasick, with their feet drawn up above the freezing water washing throughout the cabin and wondering why they exerted such an effort back in England to secure their present situation.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

The ship drops anchor in Bombay. Mr. Hervey's uncle, an admiral, immediately appoints him command of another ship and appoints Mr. Stourton as *H.M.S. Surprise's* 1st lieutenant—an appointment which surely leaves Pullings disappointed. Because of the replacement of first officers, the admiral seeks to mollify Aubrey by instructing the local shipfitter's yard to offer unlimited assistance and render preferential treatment. Aubrey is thus constantly engaged in refitting the ship and rarely steps on land. Maturin on the other hand spends the entire period ashore, exploring the natural world and investigating local custom. He learns that a hostile French armada, led by Rear-Admiral Charles-Alexandre Lyon Durand Linois, is rumored to be in the general area, a fact which has driven shipping insurance rates very high. Maturin knows that Diana lives in Bombay with Canning, and he locates her house and learns that she is away on business. Jack also learns that Diana is expected on a certain day and is determined to have the ship completely refitted quickly so that he can leave prior to that date—he thus cancels all leave and forces the crew to work exceptionally hard.

Mail arrives from England, and Maturin receives several lengthy intelligence summaries and various official reports. He also receives letters from Sophie and he reads them over and over, analyzing them closely. She tells him that her two younger sisters have become married. Maturin and Aubrey then argue about Sophie and Diana—prior to becoming engaged to Sophie, Aubrey had doted upon Diana. Aubrey frets that Sophie will believe he is engaging in inappropriate contact with Diana; Maturin seeks to quell Aubrey's fears through a rather Byzantine logical process which is altogether unconvincing. Aubrey becomes more convinced than before that he must sail before Diana's return.

Maturin, however, meets Diana by chance in the city—she has returned several days prior to schedule. Maturin and Diana spend many hours talking and exchanging news about each other and everyone that they know. Diana explains that her social position is untenable—Canning is fond of fighting, yet she can not leave because her behavior is not capable of being rehabilitated in polite society. Maturin ponders this for a considerable period of days, as he also learns that while Canning is away, Diana is said to entertain a whole host of gentlemen in inappropriate ways. On one occasion Stanhope and Atkins accompany Diana and Maturin on a day trip; at the end of the day Atkins privately but brusquely propositions Diana as if she were a common prostitute.

Throughout this period Maturin has befriended a young girl named Dil, a local who is quite erudite and intelligent. Maturin worries about Dil's and contemplates purchasing her and other methods of ensuring a bright future; Diana says that she will take care of the situation. Maturin spends virtually no time at the ship and becomes more-or-less incommunicado in his prolonged wanderings and discussions with Diana. He finally becomes determined to propose to her, feeling that marriage would partially rehabilitate



her social aspects. Diana at first believes he is making a jest, and then vaguely dismisses the offer with a promise to think about it. And then suddenly, days before he is scheduled to, Canning steps into the room and the conversation takes a marked turn. After several uncomfortable minutes Maturin departs. When he arrives at his lodging—which he has not visited for several days—he discovers Bonden waiting for him. Bonden says that Aubrey is in a high state of agitation and has nearly issued orders for Maturin's arrest—*H.M.S. Surprise* will sail in the morning and Maturin's presence is required. Maturin refuses to board the ship immediately; instead he sends Bonden back with assurances that he will board on the morrow. Maturin finds himself remarkably freed due to Diana's refusal of his marriage proposal; he now only worries for Dil's future. He finds Dil and give her six silver bracelets he has purchased as a gift. He sends Dil off on an errand to Diana and then he goes to sleep.

In the morning Maturin looks for Dil again but cannot find her. He travels to her house and discovers that she is dead—robbed of her silver bracelets and murdered. He is destroyed at the turn of events; he buys her body, then buys wood and pays for the funeral service and conflagration.

Chapter 7 Analysis

The chapter focuses almost entirely upon Maturin's character and his experiences in Bombay. Throughout the chapter Aubrey and his crew remain aboard, working hard to refit the ship in record time. The ship undergoes major operations, including receiving mostly new masts, re-rigging, and having knees and other hull-structure components sawn out and replaced.

Meanwhile, Maturin ventures about Bombay, enlisting the assistance and friendship of Dil, a prepubescent local girl. Maturin expects Diana to arrive on a certain date but she returns early—as does Canning, though apparently not quite as early. Diana is socially ruined—a widow who returned to England seemingly to fetch away a wealthy married man and act as his concubine. Clearly, if Canning were to discharge her there would not be much of a potential future remaining. Maturin sees this complication and mistakenly believes that he can, indeed must, fix it: he offers to marry Diana. As usual, she declines although she does appear to see Maturin's offer for what it is—sincere. Maturin then makes a monumental mistake and gifts Dil with six silver bracelets that represent considerable wealth in the poverty-stricken regions of Bombay. Within a few hours Dil has been murdered and her bracelets stolen. Maturin immediately recognizes his role in the tragedy and is entirely destroyed by the turn of events. The mention of Linois' fleet foreshadows the single notable maritime encounter of the novel.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Mr. Stourton joins the ship as 1st lieutenant. Several hours later Maturin boards the ship in the late afternoon his countenance is so horrific that Aubrey does not berate him as planned, and the ship sails from the harbor on the tail-end of flood. During the first day Aubrey meets privately with Stourton and instructs him as to the running of the ship—there will be relatively few floggings and startings; Aubrey discountenances corporal punishment and expects Stourton to run the ship by example, not tyranny. Stourton seems rather to agree though he exhibits a marked preference for a spotless ship; Aubrey enjoys this but does not value it more than naval efficiency.

Aubrey then writes a lengthy letter to Sophie which he realizes will not be delivered for many months. He relates the extent and nature of the repairs, reviews the crew, praises Pullings, and notes that Linois must unfortunately be far, far away. He then drifts into a daydream about purchasing a country cottage and raising vegetables while Sophie bears children and plays the proper wife. Some time later Maturin and Aubrey reminisce about love, women, and life ashore. They then climb up into the foretop where Aubrey shows Maturin the initials 'JA' carved in his youth. Maturin is astounded at the beautiful vista obtainable from the foretop and vows to return there often. A sail is then sighted and the bustle of the crew is heard throughout the ship as Aubrey navigates to intercept the sighted vessel.

The distant vessel, the *Seringapatam*, is found to be a British commercial vessel of the Indian trade. Aubrey and the other ship's captains are old friends and they spend the afternoon getting drunk and gossiping in Aubrey's tiny cabin. Aubrey is again disappointed to learn that Linois is likely far, far away. The other captain's wife has lately run off and he therefore makes a present to Aubrey for Sophie—the carcass of a resplendent bird of paradise; the feathers intended for a fashionable hat. Later, Aubrey shows the plumage to Maturin who goes on at length about the nature of sexual attraction and the male burden of sex.

The ship sails ever onward and the days blur together into a timelessness found only at sea on long voyages. Stourton proves an efficient but hard-driving 1st lieutenant and Aubrey retains complete responsibility for navigation, having little faith in Harrowby's abilities. A Mr. Ahmed Smyth from Bombay has joined Stanhope's delegation as an oriental secretary, and Atkins attempts to thwart Smyth's influence and smear his reputation.

Stanhope's health has recovered somewhat in Bombay, but as the ship travels another 7,000 miles his health once again fails him. He becomes seasick and is unable to eat for prolonged periods. Maturin is pleased when, finally, Stanhope's health appears to improve. But within a few days Stanhope begins to vomit blood and convulse. At Maturin's advice Aubrey puts the ship at difficult anchorage in ninety fathoms off a



remote island. Stanhope and Maturin are taken ashore. Maturin plans to operate in the morning, as soon as the light is sufficient, but Stanhope dies during the night. The next morning the ship pulls away, bound now for Calcutta. A depressed Aubrey refers to the entire voyage as a fool's errand.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Stanhope's prolonged and complicated illness draws to a conclusion upon his heavily foreshadowed death. His entire entourage is not functional without him, and thus will not be landed. The mission therefore ends, and Aubrey looks forward to speeding home to Sophie. He must first, however, touch at Calcutta for official business.

The chapter continues to develop the rich nautical texture which is the hallmark of the entire series of novels. Aubrey meets and greets another captain after a chase sequence. The terminology used and the sailing evolutions belong to another age and time, but are presented in such a natural way that the reader feels practically on the deck. The dominant event of the chapter, however, is Stanhope's rapid breakdown in health, accompanied by serious physical symptoms. Maturin quickly determines that surgery is the only option and causes Aubrey to seek the closest practicable anchorage. The ship is anchored in deep water with tricky winds and strong cross-currents, and then pulled into the anchorage proper by towing. Nevertheless, Stanhope dies during the night. His death, foreshadowed often during the previous chapters, is not surprising. It does, however, have an enormous influence on the mission—as Stanhope's travel was the reason for the mission, Aubrey immediately turns the ship about and heads for home; 15,000 miles have thus been traveled in vain, and another 15,000 are required before home is attained again.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

The ship begins the long journey home; on the way it meets the China fleet, returning from China laden with spice, silks, and other good valued at approximately six million pounds sterling. The officers of *H.M.S. Surprise* are invited aboard the China fleet flagship and are dined in style, in the company of various passengers and officers. All of Stanhope's entourage, save the poor Mr. White, gladly pay passage and transfer to the relative ease and luxury of the Indiamen transport ships. After two days of goodwill exchanges, Aubrey sails away alone. After discussions with a rigger in the China fleet, Aubrey is determined to re-rig and re-step the foreroyalmast in a new fashion. This delicate operation is carried out successfully in spite of a heavy swell.

The ship continues on its way home and then, finally, encounters the long-discussed but never-seen French fleet of Admiral Linois. Numerous phony signals are exchanged at long distance as Aubrey rapidly closes the distance and then turns to run before the impressive fleet. *H.M.S. Surprise* is cleared for action as Aubrey notes the enemy fleet consists of four ships; *Marengo*, a 74-gun ship of the line, *Belle Poule*, a 40-gun heavy frigate, *Symillante*, a 36-gun frigate, and *Berceau*, a 22-gun corvette. Aubrey considers his ship evenly matched, one-on-one, to the *Symillante*, but outclassed by the *Belle Poule* and heavily outclassed by the daunting *Marengo*. Aubrey considers his options during a prolonged nautical chase; he realizes his obvious priority is to ensure the safety of the China fleet. He therefore leads the French fleet away through a series of ploys and maneuvers. As the fleet converges on the ship, its impressive speed allows it to elude the larger ships and heavier guns. The *Berceau* closes, bow on to *H.M.S. Surprise's* broadside, and takes a fearful drubbing while attempting, unsuccessfully, to slow Aubrey's advance. Aubrey tips his hat to the valiant captain of the smashed vessel and continues away from the China fleet. The pursuit continues and Aubrey uses many ruses and maneuvers to convince the French fleet to follow.

After nightfall Aubrey turns around and sails rapidly for the China fleet. In the morning he finds the fleet but also discovers Linois has unfortunately also smoked out the fleet's position. Aubrey calls all the fleet's captains aboard *H.M.S. Surprise* and holds a council of war. Eventually it is decided that the only viable course of action is to execute Aubrey's audaciously proposed plan—form up in lines and engage the French, hoping that the superior number of small guns, pointed into the French rigging, will so disable the French fleet as to allow subsequent escape. Commodore Muffit, in charge of the China fleet, wholeheartedly supports Aubrey's audacious plan.

Three of the largest and best-armed Indiamen ships, *Lushington*, *Royal George*, and *Earl Camden*, are disguised to look as man-of-wars; they fly false pennants and the crew change into Royal Navy uniforms. Aubrey portions out his officers and crew into the various Indiamen ships to bolster their effectiveness and resolve. Passengers are shipped to the smaller vessels which beat fall away far to leeward. Aubrey makes his



line and for several hours the two fleets maneuver for position. Linois gains the weather gauge and makes an abortive closing motion—when Aubrey causes the fleet to turn up in direct confrontation Linois falters and falls off, declining the engagement. That night Aubrey allows his men to rest and eat large meals while Linois works his vessels heavily to gain the weather gauge once again.

In the morning, Aubrey is overjoyed when a heavy swell rolls in and begins to pitch the seas—the French two-decker vessels will be unable to open their lower gunports without shipping huge quantities of green water. Once again the French fleet begins to close; Aubrey intends to split his line in two and reverse direction, enveloping the French fleet at minimal range between two lines of ships to allow maximum fire into the French rigging. Linois has anticipated the maneuver, however, and presses on under a cloud of sail. Aubrey quickly realizes that Linois means to cut through his line rather than parallel it, and he quickly falls out of position and sails directly at the mighty *Marenga*. *H.M.S. Surprise* takes four withering broadsides on the bow as the distance is closed, but finally heads *Marenga* and begins to exchange broadsides. Aubrey is heavily outclassed, his twenty-eight guns no match for *Marenga's* seventy-four. He is somewhat saved by *Marenga's* inability fully to use its lower, heavier, guns due to the heavy swell. The English ship is shattered by raking fire and Aubrey is wounded by a loose cannonball rolling about the deck. However, Aubrey's bold stroke works; *Marenga* falls off and the line is not cut though the cannons continue to fire at close range. Just as *H.M.S. Surprise* appears to be lost the slower Indiamen affect an about-face and join combat, shooting into the French rigging. The French fleet breaks the action and retreats away, nursing shattered spars and tattered sails.

Commodore Moffit quickly boards *H.M.S. Surprise*. His exuberance over victory is quickly dampened by the disastrous state of affairs aboard the frigate. He honors Aubrey and gives him joy of the victory. Aubrey is elated to emerge victorious but overcome by the crushing depression he generally feels after action.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Chapter 9 provides the climax of action for Aubrey. He engages a vastly superior French fleet with one frigate and perhaps a dozen Indiamen and emerges victorious—in that the China fleet is saved from capture. The cost of the engagement is surprisingly light—four dead and several wounded, and *H.M.S. Surprise* receiving devastating damage. Although the French losses are not specified, it is likely that *Marenga* suffered comparable loss of life, and *Berceau* suffered appalling casualties while receiving raking grapeshot at point-blank range—Aubrey notes the bow scuppers disgorging volumes of blood from the instantly-cleared deck after one volley of grape. Additionally, the China fleet continues unmolested, Aubrey's ship refits at Calcutta, and the French must return to Batavia for refitting, effectively removing their offensive potential for a considerable period of time. Indeed, Aubrey's victory is singularly impressive although rather routine in the entire career of such a legendary captain.



Most of the chapter is given over to a detailed consideration of the various maneuvers utilized by both fleets to attempt to gain the advantage. The prolonged chase scenes are commented upon, in a superbly risible meta-fictional touch, by Mr. White who comments to Maturin that the so-called action seemed interminable boring. Various aspects of maneuver are considered. For example, Aubrey willingly sacrifices the weather gauge to Linois during the night before the exchange for several reasons—Aubrey's crews will be rested and fed, Linois' fatigued and hungry; although Linois will control the engagement, he will not be able to open his lower gunports and use his heaviest guns; Aubrey's maneuvers will be determined by Linois', but Aubrey's will be simpler to execute with his non-military crews. Thus, Aubrey takes a chance and is proved correct in his judgment even though standard military conventions would claim he blundered by willingly sacrificing the weather gauge. In brief, the chapter is definitely the most exciting naval action chapter of the novel, featuring sailing tactics, weather considerations, estimation of ships' and crews' abilities, and the entire sphere of psychological evaluation and deception of one's opponent. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the destruction and death caused by the exchange of heavy gunfire, as well as a consideration of the various psychological effects of combat.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Bowes dies from wounds received during combat after a few days of languishing, which brings the death toll to a surprisingly low four. The ship takes on water and is nearly lost before managing to limp into Calcutta. The East India Company lauds Aubrey's astounding victory and spares no expense in refitting *H.M.S. Surprise* with everything she requires. Meanwhile, Aubrey and the crew are treated to elaborate feasts and constant entertainment befitting heroes. Canning, as the senior representative of the Company in Calcutta, visits often with Aubrey and congratulates him on the victory. He gives Aubrey secret investment advice which will allow him to make a tidy sum in the stock market, and he places a strongbox full of gems and valuables aboard Aubrey's ship for transportation—Aubrey, of course, is entitled to a percentage of the value. Thus without crassly paying the captain money, Canning and the Company see to it that Aubrey is richly rewarded for his troubles. Although Aubrey had at one time detested Canning, he finds the man entirely open and genuine and quickly warms to his company.

Meanwhile Maturin visits Diana and finds her in a high state of agitation. On one occasion he comforts her by embracing her, and Canning leaps into the room and accuses Diana of unfaithfulness. Maturin rebukes Canning and demands that he withdraw. Canning tries to intimidate Maturin who refuses to back down; Canning then strikes Maturin and storms out of the room. Diana begs Maturin to ignore the insult, and Maturin leaves forthwith. Maturin returns to the ship and finds Etherege, the Marine Captain. He engages the man to be his second and demands a satisfaction of honor be made for Canning's humiliating blow. Etherege attempts to mollify Maturin, noting that "[y]ou don't have to fight a Jew, Doctor" (p. 341)—he suggests that a file of Marines seize Canning and publicly beat him at recompense. Maturin, of course, will have none of it and Etherege therefore arranges the particulars of a duel.

At the duel Maturin is accompanied by Aubrey, M'Alister, and of course Etherege. While Canning buttons up his coat Maturin strips to only his trousers, noting to Aubrey that cloth carried into a wound is liable to cause horrible infection. Maturin knows that Canning will attempt a lethal shot—for his own part, the ever-proper Maturin intends only to lightly wound Canning. At the mark, Canning shoots immediately and his ball strikes Maturin on the right chest, breaking a rib and traversing the sternum, coming to rest near Maturin's heart. Staggered by the blow, Maturin shifts his Joe Manton dueling pistol to his left hand and, taking aim at Canning's left arm, fires as Canning reaches for his second's pistol. The shot strikes Canning who falls prone, briefly rises on all fours, and then collapses into a pool of blood—Maturin has missed his aim and shot Canning through the heart. M'Alister quickly bandages Maturin, verifies that Canning is dead, and then Aubrey causes Maturin to be rapidly transported to the ship away from the law of Calcutta which forbids dueling.



Chapter 10 Analysis

Just as Chapter 9 provided the climax of Aubrey's voyage, Chapter 10 provides the climax of Maturin's. As stated previously, Canning and Diana have proceeded to Calcutta by land during the period of Aubrey's engagement with the French fleet. After the sea-action, Aubrey and his crew are hailed as saving heroes, which indeed they are. The East India Company plies them with wine, food, and companionship, while the ship is completely refitted in the yard. Needless to say, the taciturn Maturin finds little interest in social celebration and instead spends his time in private conversation with Diana and a casual exploration of Calcutta.

At a dramatic turning-point in the narrative, Diana collapses into Maturin's arms just as Canning—probably waiting in hiding for just such an event—emerges and vituperates Diana. Maturin, normally reserved, boldly protects Diana's honor against the much-larger Canning's abuse. Refusing to back down, Maturin receives a blow from Canning. Rather than allowing Etherege's Marines to deal with Canning, and refusing any public apology, Maturin demands a satisfaction of honor by duel. Etherege acts as Maturin's second and arranges the terms and grounds; two pistol shots each. Maturin needs only one and his missed aim results in Canning's nearly-immediate death. Maturin notes moments before the duel a closed carriage arrives for observation—needless to say, Diana has witnessed the event. The Joe Manton dueling pistols, foreshadowed since early in the narrative, have finally extracted satisfaction for Maturin.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Maturin writes a letter to Diana encouraging her to take passage to England. Aubrey personally delivers the message; he finds Diana vague, vain, and infuriating though he keeps his own counsel on Maturin's behalf. Diana asks Aubrey to allow her passage aboard *H.M.S. Surprise* but he declines; she insults him and calls him a 'scrub', and he leaves in silence. Later, Diana attempts to visit Maturin aboard ship but finds him unconscious and feverish. She returns two days later and holds a brief conversation with him, wherein she appears to accept his marriage proposal and Maturin believes they are engaged. Diana has sold some of her jewels and has purchased a passage to England; she intends to meet Maturin there in several months' time.

Maturin's fever continues high and M'Alister determines that the ball must be removed. It is a delicate operation and Maturin turns to the best physician available—himself. Using a mirror and a specially-designed tool Maturin slices his chest apart and extracts the ball. M'Alister then sews and bandages him while Aubrey, acting as loblolly boy, passes out from the close and vivid procedure. Maturin regains some of his strength and the ship leaves Calcutta, bound for England. Maturin's fever deepens and he goes into a prolonged period of delirium; Aubrey, aware of Maturin's many secrets, sits alone with him for several days, listening to Maturin speak on endlessly in a variety of languages about many delicate political matters. Aubrey is embarrassed that the usually taciturn Maturin confesses at length his complete desire for Diana. Eventually Maturin's fever breaks and he begins a prolonged convalescence; he is a notoriously cranky patient and most of the crew suffers under his commanding abuse. The ship briefly touches at a tiny island and Maturin discovers a heretofore-unknown-to-science land tortoise; a giant animal that Maturin christens *Testudo aubreeii*, in honor of Aubrey. The discovery of the giant tortoise entirely lifts Maturin's spirits even as the ship resumes her long voyage. After several weeks he is recuperated physically. The remainder of the voyage homeward is uneventful.

The ship touches at Madeira to check for news and to water—there is no news, and Sophie has not come down to Madeira as Aubrey had requested. Maturin receives an unfortunate correspondence from Diana—she has returned his engagement ring and in a brief note cruelly informs him that she is engaged to an American she knew in Bombay who traveled on the same ship as did she; they have gone on to Virginia to be married. Maturin climbs to a peak and spends the night sleeping in the hollow of a rock. He then meets Aubrey and informs him that he must have misunderstood Diana's statements. The ship stands out the next morning. Nearly home, the ship raises a strange sail in the dark of the night. The ship is friendly and much to Aubrey's satisfaction is providing passage to Sophie who was previously bound for Madeira. Aubrey proposes an immediate marriage aboard ship, but Sophie declines, holding out for a proper marriage with her mother's permission. Thus the novel concludes on a rather happy note—at least for Aubrey, if not Maturin.



Chapter 11 Analysis

Chapter 11 provides the falling action of the narrative and concludes most of the plot and several sub-plots developed through the novel. Maturin recovers from his wound through the unlikely and highly unorthodox methodology of operating on his own person; the scene is one of the best-known and most-commonly remarked upon in the entire series of twenty novels. Maturin's technique is correct, and he slowly but surely recovers completely. *H.M.S. Surprise* sails home without further incident. At Madeira, Maturin learns that Diana has broken off their engagement—no surprise for the reader in this—and escaped to America with a rich American fiancé. Maturin is, as usual, silent and stoic in his crushing disappointment. Aubrey is also much defeated to discover that Sophie has not come down to Madeira as he requested; but then, in a happy ending, he discovers her just a few days from Madeira, aboard *Ethalion*, commanded by Heneage Dundas, a devoted friend of Aubrey.



Characters

Jack Aubrey

Aubrey is one of the principle protagonists of the novel and shares the spotlight with his particular friend and confidant Stephen Maturin. Aubrey is a larger-than-life character with dash and charisma. He is an unchallenged and undoubted master in his element of the sea; a legendary captain, a masterful navigator, a superb tactician, and an undefeatable warrior. Although he is intelligent he relies more on experience, insight, and a nearly infallible instinct to carry him through the various perils he encounters.

Aubrey is a recently-appointed post captain without a permanent assignment. He begins the novel in temporary command of *H.M.S. Lively*, but quickly surrenders the frigate to its normal captain and returns to half-pay and shore leave. Aubrey's father is involved in politics and is an abrasive and vocal member of an unpopular minority; Aubrey is therefore unlikely to secure a command of his own. Just as Aubrey is a master at sea, he is nearly incompetent while ashore—he has engaged in a number of poor fiduciary choices and finds himself in debt and penniless. Aubrey therefore spends time in debtor's prison which he obviously dislikes.

Aubrey is engaged to the beautiful young Sophie Williams and he dotes on her with vigor. He is entirely devoted to Sophie but, without sufficient funds, unable to wed her due to her mother's stern demands of a suitable dowry. Throughout the novel, Aubrey frequently worries about Sophie, writes prolonged letters to her, and acts as if she were present to approve of his decisions. Refreshingly, Sophie returns his love and concern. Aubrey's self-esteem is a sure thing, however, and he is rarely afflicted with internal doubts.

Aubrey wears his blonde hair in a long queue and dresses in the traditional ship captain's uniform. He is usually adorned with a sword and hat which he wears in the style preferred by Vice-Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson, Aubrey's idol. Aubrey is very athletic, possessed of an almost super-human vigor, great strength, and an incredible constitution. He is also particularly fond of food and drink, and Maturin often cautions him against becoming overly corpulent; Aubrey weighs about 224 pounds. Aubrey is handsome and fairly useful, though his good-looks are marred by a variety of scars and combat-related wounds including an ear cruelly sliced apart in an old encounter.

Stephen Maturin y Domanova

Maturin is one of the principle protagonists of the novel and shares the spotlight with his particular friend and confidant Jack Aubrey. Maturin is a quiet man who much prefers the closeness of a study to the attention of others; his personal expertise lies in the area of medicine and he is also a natural scientist of some repute. He is an unchallenged and undoubted master in his element of medicine and science and his medical opinions are



surprisingly modern and always correct. Maturin has performed several miraculous cures through advanced techniques and is considered, by the crew, to hold life in the palm of his hand.

Maturin has hereditary holdings of considerable extent in Spain though he rarely visits that country. Although possessed of some financial means, he cares nothing for the finer things in life and champions political causes that are obviously doomed simply because they are philosophically correct.

Maturin, in addition to being a physician and scientist, is an agent for the secret intelligence network of England. This relationship explains why Maturin is so often able to obtain choice assignments by request, why he is allowed to travel upon Royal Navy vessels without enlisting as crew, and why he is so often found to be involved with various Royal Navy activities. From time to time, however, Maturin's relationship with the intelligence service is compromised; his reputation is subsequently 'rehabilitated' by a prolonged voyage of a purely scientific nature. This plot device is not particularly credible, but does allow Maturin to lead a complex, subtle, and interesting series of adventures throughout the novels of the series. It is also the principle plot device used to secure command of a frigate for Aubrey and place Aubrey and Maturin together again in the current novel.

Maturin is a small, wiry man who in many respects is the antithesis of Aubrey. Maturin is much given to introspection, subtle interpretations, and Byzantine analysis of the current situation. He is nearly entirely mental, with little interest in things physical—though capable enough when the time comes. Although he is possessed of a nearly preternatural constitution, Maturin is not notably dexterous or strong, though his physique is rarely a handicap to his desires. Although he can be over-confident of his abilities, he is nearly always correct in his analysis of situations and people. A notable exception to his typical clarity of vision centers on his love interest, Diana Villiers; Maturin is unable to comprehend her complexities and unwilling to accept her rather obvious shortcomings. Like Aubrey, Maturin derives great pleasure from music and is a capable musician. He is a master surgeon and accomplished medical man, but his real love is the investigation of the natural world. Nearly every stop ashore finds Maturin eagerly gathering local flora and fauna, dabbling in the local customs and language, and returning to the ship at the last possible instant.

Sophia "Sophie" Williams

Sophie is one of two secondary protagonists in the novel and the only sympathetic female character presented in any detail. She is an exceptionally beautiful and very devoted young woman who has won the love and shares the affection of Jack Aubrey; Aubrey and Sophie became tentatively engaged in a previous novel. Although Sophie is rather rough around the edges, being raised in the country and largely uneducated, she has a natural grace and sympathetic bearing that carries her successfully through social engagements. In several places through the novel, uninterested characters comment on Sophie's good looks and grace, and she is actively courted by a famously eligible



bachelor. Sophie's mother constantly badgers her about Aubrey's unsuitability as a spouse and notes his infamous lack of money. Nevertheless, Sophie is committed to honesty and is in love with Aubrey and will hear nothing bad about him.

Sophie has two younger sisters who are, in the course of the novel, married off to suitable young men—one under duress. Maturin comments to Aubrey that being the oldest sister and remaining unmarried is perilously close to being labeled a spinster; Aubrey is aware of the social implications and vows all the more to achieve his fortune by some means and thus gain permission to wed from Sophie's mother.

Unlike her mother who is stern, penurious, and abrasive, Sophie sees wealth as simply a means to an end which can be achieved through other means. Sophie's natural disposition is trusting, open, and honest. She is held in particularly high regard by Aubrey's crew who sincerely desire her well. Likewise, Maturin values her as a particular friend. Throughout the novel Sophie writes Aubrey long and frequent letters, informing him in an open style of her whereabouts and acquaintances. Aubrey devours the letters and sends his own to Sophie. In fact, one of the novel's more unusual elements of construction lies in the presentation of Aubrey's letters to Sophie as plot development. In one memorable scene Aubrey pens a letter to Sophie about a military engagement. He pauses in writing and considers some of the more brutal and fearful aspects of combat and then restrains his pen to noting, simply, that the engagement was carried off victoriously.

Diana Villiers

Diana is one of two secondary protagonists in the novel though her role is often antagonistic to Maturin. She is exceptionally beautiful; indeed, physical beauty and sexual allure are clearly her dominant features and she easily controls most men through her physical charms. Even the resolute and indifferent Maturin is brought short-of-breath by Diana's lissome body clothed only in a clinging gown matted to her form by the humid heat of Calcutta. In a previous novel, Jack Aubrey had pursued her unsuccessfully prior to diverting his attentions to Sophie Williams. Also in a previous novel, Stephen Maturin had pursued her vehemently, though without much success, until Diana had met and engaged Richard Canning in a scandalous affair which caused them to flee England for India.

Diana's early history is treated in some detail in a previous novel, but is very briefly recounted in the present work. She was born in India to influential parents and spent the majority of her early life there, marrying a fairly influential English gentleman. Upon his death the young widow found herself without means and returned to England where she relied upon the generosity of her relatives, including her cousin Sophie Williams, for assistance. While staying with the Williams Diana met both Aubrey and Maturin. Although she found Aubrey boorish she was intrigued with Maturin's boundless education and deep intellect. His monetary means, however, were insufficient to capture her complete attention and she shortly engaged the wealthy Canning in a sexual affair.



After Canning and Diana remove to India, she is viewed with suspicion and regret by the local social circles; only a few women accept her as a guest. She is acutely aware of her fallen state in society and realizes that Canning's sponsorship is her only avenue of advancement or even survival—a realization that makes her furious. Their relationship is also strained by Canning's wife who—from England—viciously protests Diana's presence. Diana also finds Canning's constant jealousy and suspicions tiresome and irritating; her flamboyant and highly inappropriate conduct, however, justifies Canning's fears. As her situation with Canning deteriorates Diana is once again presented with salvation by Maturin, who offers to marry her and thus salvage and rehabilitate her social position. After Maturin kills Canning in a duel, essentially over Diana's affections, she accepts Maturin's marriage proposal and takes from him an engagement ring. Of course such an alternative is not long appealing to the sensual and worldly Diana, and before she has reached England she has wooed and conquered a rich American fellow-passenger. She informs Maturin of their estrangement in a brief letter which includes his simple iron engagement band.

Mr. Commissioner Richard Canning

Canning is a vastly wealthy and very influential man in the East India Company. As a Jew, he is unable to sit in Parliament and vote his seats directly; he instead exerts political influence through controlled subordinates. He is married and moves through a lofty social circle. In a previous novel, Canning met Diana Villiers and was successfully wooed by her. Their subsequent sexual affair was notoriously scandalous which caused Canning and Diana to flee England for India where they reside in Bombay.

In most respects Canning is a typical man of the times, differing only in being very jealous of Diana's attention. For example, Aubrey finds him altogether likable and open whereas Maturin, because of his infatuation with Diana, finds him controlling and demeaning. In the novel Canning's jealousy leads him to strike Maturin; Maturin's subsequent demand of honor results in a pistol duel. Canning delivers a telling and near-fatal first shot from which Maturin somewhat recovers in time to deliver a fatal shot through Canning's heart.

Sir Joseph Blain

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



Admiral Harte

Admiral Harte is a political opponent of Jack Aubrey. Aubrey conducted a much-discussed and scandalous sexual affair with Molly Harte, Harte's wife; Aubrey, ever over-confident of his own social wit and race, was sure the affair was discreet. Harte's antipathy toward Aubrey is vented whenever occasion allows, and the politically connected Harte forms a formidable barrier to Aubrey's career. Harte is a minor character in this novel.

Mr. Stanhope, Mr. Atkins, Mr. White, Mr. Berkeley, Mr. Ahmed Smyth

Mr. Stanhope is a political envoy sent from England to Kampong to establish political treaties with that national interest. Stanhope is very polite, reserved, and quite shy. His appointment is the purpose of *H.M.S. Surprise's* voyage. Stanhope spends most of the voyage wavering between gravely ill and merely seasick. He eventually recovers somewhat in Bombay but then vomits blood and convulses a few days later. Under Maturin's orders, he is landed on a small island where he faces the prospects of surgery when the morning light is sufficient; however, Stanhope dies during the night leaving his political functions incomplete.

Mr. Atkins is Stanhope's secretary. Atkins is domineering, unintelligent, and very abusive. Nearly everyone hates him passionately though Stanhope appears to find in Atkins qualities of friendship and trust. Atkins is usually abrasively cajoling others to his own advantage. While in Bombay, Atkins makes a rather uncouth and certainly untoward advance toward Diana, treating her as a common prostitute. Diana later fumes about Atkin's blatant advances but mistakenly refers to him as 'Perkins'.

Mr. White is Stanhope's reverend and delivers lengthy and dry sermons on Sundays; he is generally liked. Mr. Berkeley is described only as a young attachy. Stanhope has other servants, as well, which are noted but not named. In Bombay Stanhope is joined by Mr. Ahmed Smyth, an oriental secretary. Thus, Stanhope's entourage consists of perhaps seven or eight total men and they are housed in what would ordinarily be Aubrey's cabin. Aubrey and Maturin are shifted to the 1st lieutenant's cabin, and so on down the chain of command.

Killick

Killick is Jack Aubrey's steward and has been a faithful servant for many years. Killick is keenly aware that his personal fortunes are inextricably linked to Aubrey's success and ensures that Aubrey is always presented in the most favorable circumstances attainable. Beyond professional interest, however, Killick is a loyal friend and defender of Aubrey and goes to great lengths to provide hot coffee, good food, plentiful drink, fresh fruit, clean clothing, and other amenities under often-difficult circumstances. Killick



often serves as a sort of comic relief within the narrative; his presumptuous and rude lines delivered in a whiny nasal tone set Aubrey's teeth on edge.

Barrett Bonden

Bonden is Aubrey's coxswain. He is easily the most dependable character in Aubrey's crew, even serving as manservant to Maturin and Aubrey while ashore. Aubrey demonstrates his complete trust in Bonden by sending him, alone with Sophie on a night-time overland trip in a sealed carriage. Needless to say, the reliable Bonden always demonstrates complete tact, honesty, and devotion. During the prolonged voyage from England to India, Maturin teaches Bonden to read and write which pleases Maturin even more than Bonden. In exchange, Bonden fruitlessly attempts to educate Maturin on nautical terms and methods—a subject for which Maturin has a seemingly-purposefully blind eye.

Mr. Hervey, Mr. Stourton, Mr. Pullings, Mr. Babbington, Mr. Callow, Mr. Lee, Mr. Peters, Mr. Meadows, Mr. Scott, Mr. Joliffe, Mr. William Church, Mr. Braithwaite, Mr. Etherege, Mr. Bowes, Mr. Nicolls, Mr. Rattray, Mr. Johnson, Mr. M'Alister, Mr. Harrowby, Mr. Hailes, and Choles

Mr. Hervey is the 1st lieutenant of *H.M.S. Surprise* for its voyage from England to Bombay. In Bombay, Hervey is promoted to master and commander of a ship because of his political connections; although he is an enjoyable and optimistic officer, he is very myopic and not a particularly capable navigator. Hervey is replaced by Mr. Stourton, a highly capable and enthusiastic 1st lieutenant.

Mr. Thomas Pullings is the 2nd lieutenant of the ship during the latter chapters of the novel; he is appointed as the 3rd lieutenant but is promoted after Nicoll's death. Pullings is a recurring character in the various novels of the series. In Bombay he is passed over for promotion to 1st Lieutenant. He is an enthusiastic and optimistic officer, a devoted supporter of Jack Aubrey, and an extremely capable navigator, seaman, and officer. Pullings has preceded Aubrey into matrimony, and Aubrey views his relatively inexperienced young lieutenant as a sort of savant on the nature and essential characteristics of womanhood.

Mr. Babbington is a midshipman aboard the ship during the latter chapters of the novel. Babbington suffers from various sexually-transmitted diseases and is always lusting after some prostitute or another, women that he terms ladies. After Nicolls dies, Babbington is promoted to acting 3rd lieutenant. Babbington is a recurring character in the various novels of the series. He is an enthusiastic and optimistic sailor, a devoted supporter of Jack Aubrey, and a capable navigator and seaman.



Mr. Callow is a midshipman aboard the ship during the latter chapters of the novel. Callow suffers from acne and is generally described as a very ugly boy—so ugly, in fact, that his appearance puts Jack Aubrey off his food, which is no mean feat.

Mr. Bowes is the purser and is noted for the unusual quality of being very honest; he dies from wounds received during the exchange with *Marenga*. Mr. Nicolls, the 2nd lieutenant of the ship, spends most of his time in despondency; an indiscretion has estranged him from his wife. Nicolls rows Maturin to a deserted islet and then vanishes and is presumed dead during a violent storm. Mr. Etherege is the marine lieutenant of the ship. Mr. Rattray is the bosun of the ship and has been appointed to her since the time that Jack Aubrey served in her as a young midshipman. Mr. Peters, Mr. Meadows, Mr. Scott, Mr. Joliffe, Mr. Lee, and Mr. William Church are all midshipmen—Church, like most midshipmen, is a notable glutton; he is also assigned as Aubrey's aide-de-camp. Mr. Braithwaite is the master's mate. Mr. Johnson is the cook. Mr. M'Alister is the ship's assistant surgeon and is capable though overly-fond of drink. Mr. Harrowby is the ship's master but unfortunately a timid and indifferent navigator; he is killed in the exchange with *Marenga*. Mr. Hailes is the ship's gunner; his name is variously spelled 'Hales' in latter chapters. Choles, the loblolly boy, is M'Alister's assistant.

Franklin, Kelynach, Garland, Conroy, Davidge, Achmet, Butoo, O'Connor, Boguslavsky, Brown, Plumb, Tiddiman, Dick Turnbull, Ned Hyde, Faster Doudle, Mellish, Wilks, Clerk, Bent Larsen, Harris, Old Reliable, William Jenkins, John Saddler, Collins, Haverhill, Pollyblank, Moss brothers, Evans, Strawberry Joe, Carlow, Nevin, and Bates

The indicated men, listed in the order they occur, are the named crew aboard *H.M.S. Surprise* during the latter chapters of the novel. The characters indicated are of relatively minor importance but many of them perform some notable action or are involved in a colorful scene. In general, their names are given one or two at a time, often in dialogue as they are ordered to perform some function. Tiddiman is swept overboard and lost in a squall. Achmet and Butoo are Arabic and they teach Maturin the basics of their language on the long voyage to India. Faster Doudle and Mellish are foretopmen who share a penchant for gambling which is punishable by flogging in the Royal Navy; because they are able seamen, Aubrey overlooks their occasional indiscretions. Wilks is apparently very loud. Old Reliable, clearly a nickname, is famous aboard for never wasting a shot from the guns. William Jenkins and John Saddler are wounded during the exchange with *Berceau*. Carlow is killed during the exchange with *Marenga*. Bates is the ship's armorer, and he fashions Maturin's surgical extractor in Chapter 11.



Mr. Randall, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Carew, Lord Garron, Mr. Fielding, Mr. Dashwood, Mr. Butler, and Mr. Norrey

The indicated men are the named officers and midshipmen aboard *H.M.S. Lively* during the initial three chapters of the novel. Mr. Carew is the chaplain and a relative newcomer to the sea. The characters indicated are of relatively minor importance. One memorable scene involved Aubrey pondering the flavor of various vermin that appear in Mr. Carew's soup bowl.

High Bum, Low Bum, Jelly-belly, Jack Satisfaction, and Java Dick

The indicated men are the named crew aboard *H.M.S. Lively* during the initial three chapters of the novel. The characters indicated are of relatively minor importance but are described with notable vividness. The names are all English nicknames for Chinese or Javanese sailors pressed into service from suspected pirate craft. The men all speak with a Cockney accent, having served with Englishmen for many years. Aubrey is shocked by the dispassionate but efficient brutality the men exhibit in combat.

Joan Maragall

Joan Maragall is a Spaniard but an English sympathizer who resists the Franco-Spanish alliance. He tells Aubrey that Maturin has been captured and tortured, and is instrumental in arranging events which allow Aubrey to rescue Maturin. Maragall is himself a minor character in the novel outside of Chapters 2 and 3.

Dil

Dil is a very young Indian girl, probably an Untouchable, who meets Maturin and acts as his guide through Bombay. Maturin develops a strong friendship with Dil. Dil's mother offers to sell her as either a slave or a concubine, but Maturin declines. Instead, he tries to discover a way of assuring Dil's future—a prospect made difficult by her class. Dil is remarkably intelligent and well-spoken. Prior to leaving Bombay, Maturin makes Diana promise to somehow assist Dil—he then purchases six silver bracelets and makes a gift of them to the young girl. Later that evening she is robbed of the bracelets and murdered. Maturin pays for Dil's funeral rites, but is of course devastated by her loss. Dil appears only in Chapter 7, although in that segment of the novel she is an important character.



Objects/Places

H.M.S. Lively

H.M.S. Lively is a British frigate commanded by Captain Hammond; the ship is noted for being fast and a good sailing ship. The crew is widely respected as being very competent though stern. Many of the crewmembers are pressed Chinese and Javanese who are suspected of being pirates. Captain Hammond sits in parliament and during the opening chapters of the novel has been recalled to England on political matters. During his absence the command of the ship has been entrusted to Jack Aubrey. The ship is the principle setting for the first three chapters of the novel.

H.M.S. Surprise

H.M.S. Surprise is a sixth-rate twenty-eight gun British frigate of French build. Originally named *Unity*, she was captured during combat and placed in English service where she has remained for many years. The ship is unofficially known as *Nemesis* for a particularly audacious raid she made on the Spanish in 1797. Jack Aubrey served aboard the ship as a young midshipman. Since that time Surprise has grown old but has received overhaul and remains a fine sailing ship. Aubrey describes her as possessed of a bluff bow and lovely lines, weatherly, stiff, and a fine sea-boat. She is fast enough, roomy, and dry—a particularly nice feature in frigates of the time. The ship measures approximately 107' in length and under Aubrey's specifications is refitted with new masts and altered rigging in Bombay. As a youth, Aubrey carved his initials into the main cap. As her captain, he is delighted to discover they remain. The ship is the principle setting for the final seven chapters of the novel.

St. Paul's Rocks

St. Paul's Rocks is a series of rocky islets off the coast of Brazil. The rocks support no vegetation but do house a large colony of terns and boobies. Maturin and Nicolls visit the rocks while *H.M.S. Surprise* is becalmed nearby. They are then caught up in a violent white squall which sweeps Nicolls to sea and drown him. Maturin is rescued several days later when the ship manages to return. The rocks are fully described in chapters 5 and 6. Aubrey notes that St. Paul's Rocks are nearly always mistaken for a sail when they are first viewed on the horizon.

Joe Manton's Cased Pistols

Maturin owns a pair of cased dueling pistols manufactured by Joe Manton, the finest gunsmith of England during the period. The pistols are a fairly bizarre thing for a ship's surgeon to possess—the fact that Maturin routinely practices with them is also worthy of comment. Maturin finds that his hands, crippled from his torture by the French, are no



longer as steady in firing as they once were. In Chapter 10 Maturin uses the pistols in a duel of honor against Canning; Maturin is nearly killed but returns mortal fire upon Canning. Bonden subsequently pulls the ball from the second pistol, cases the pair, and returns them to Maturin's cabin aboard the ship.

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 top known as the "lubber's hole". The top itself is stabilized by standing rigging which runs from the edges of the platform to the mast, forming lines which 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, such as Maturin, are expected to gain the top by use of the lubber's hole.

Pulo Batak

Pulo Batak is the name Pullings uses to specify a remote anchorage on the coast of Sumatra. Although the approach is simple the anchorage is extremely difficult, featuring ominously deep water right to the shore and a strong cross-current with tricky wind. The shore itself is well-suited to watering and gathering food, however, and is free of hostile native presence. *H.M.S. Surprise* anchors in ninety fathoms of water during a ripping tide and failing wind, and then tows in to Pulo Batak to land an ailing Mr. Stanhope, who dies during his first night ashore. Pullings comments that he has anchored at Pulo Batak twice previously in another ship, the *Lord Clive*.

Splinters

Naval combat between large 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, Maturin relates to Aubrey the process used to remove a splinter from a crewman, noting that it was a shard of wickedly-sharp wood nearly two feet in length that penetrated the chest cavity nearly to the depth of the heart.



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 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.

The China Fleet

The China Fleet is a fleet of Indiamen ships belonging to the British East India Company returning from a lucrative trading mission to China. Jack Aubrey encounters the China fleet in the vicinity of a hostile French squadron and organizes a spirited and successful defense against far-superior firepower. The engagement between the China fleet and the French squadron is the novel's notable naval action.

Madeira

Madeira is an archipelago off the coast of Portugal including Madeira Island which has a favorable port. Within the novel, Madeira appears to represent primarily the port facility. Being several hundred miles from England and friendly, the port is the first and last port visited by returning and leaving ships. In the novel, Madeira functions much as an extension of England itself and—at least thematically—represents home ground for Aubrey and Maturin.

Testudo Aubreii

Testudo Aubreii is the scientific name assigned to a previously-unknown huge land tortoise discovered by Stephen Maturin. The animal is fictional. In the novel it represents the largest land tortoise species known. The tortoise comes from a small and unnamed island visited by *H.M.S. Surprise* on her return voyage from India. The name is meant to honor Jack Aubrey.



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, Jack Aubrey's sworn and obvious duty is to engage and destroy the French at every opportunity. He carries out this duty first with *H.M.S. Lively* and later with *H.M.S. Surprise*, engaging the French successfully on both occasions. Aubrey's particular friend Stephen Maturin also stands in opposition to the French, finding their governmental system tyrannical and offensive. He participates as an intelligence officer—a spy—in the defense of England.

The novel relates two sea voyages in the year 1804; although the voyages are fictional they contain many historical elements and the fleet-action maritime combat between the China fleet and the French squadron historically occurred in February, 1804—in the novel it occurs later in the year. The ships mentioned represent fictionalized ships of historical significance, though the English crews are entirely fictional. All aspects of the novel are related to sea adventure; most of the action takes place at sea and even the action which takes place on land generally relates to the sea. For example, the *H.M.S. Surprise's* prolonged stay in Calcutta is necessitated by the large amount of repair work made necessary by the damage inflicted by *Marenga's* guns.

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 Friendship

The two protagonists of the novel, Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin, share the spotlight nearly equally. The two men have enjoyed a prolonged friendship which has developed slowly over the course of two previous novels. Their mutual confidence has survived conflict, suspicion, and even competition and emerged the stronger for it. Both men are able to haltingly share their innermost fears with the other, and their natures are such that their respective spheres of expertise complement the others' without conflict.

The constantly developing nature of their friendship not only drives the tone and texture of the novel, but is also largely responsible for the novel's plot development. For example, the first major portions of the novel develop because Aubrey is determined to



rescue his friend from French imprisonment. Aubrey takes great risks and implicitly trusts Joan Maragall because Maturin trusts the man. Later, Maturin uses his influence to secure a captain's appointment for Aubrey, somewhat returning favors owed. This constant exchange of graces and friendship runs as a dominant thread throughout the novel—indeed throughout all of the novels of the series—and forms one of the most enjoyable themes present. Such a close male-male friendship, entirely devoid of any homoeroticism, is indeed rare in modern fiction. Their friendship is perhaps enabled only by the nature of the environment used as the principle setting; that of a man-of-war on prolonged sea duty.

The theme most representative of the depth of friendship shared between the two men is that of Maturin's recovery from fever after being shot during a duel. Aubrey is aware that Maturin is possessed of many political secrets which he is likely to expose through his feverish ranting. Even more touching, however, is Aubrey's desire to shield Maturin's pride and honor from the crew. Thus, as Maturin confesses his personal weaknesses and his intimate desires for Diana, Aubrey sits guard in his room and uncharacteristically fully entrusts the running of the ship to his lieutenants. Aubrey's friendship is made even more obvious in his failure to inform Maturin of the entire nature of his feverish declamations.

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; Jack Aubrey has an abiding love for Sophie Williams, fortunately reciprocated; and Stephen Maturin has an unrequited love for Diana Villiers.

Aubrey's life is framed and grounded by his distant love. Although he would certainly be an accomplished officer in the Royal Navy, Aubrey's drive and desire for success is guided by his desire and love for Sophie. Without her, Aubrey may well be a lackluster captain or even a career lieutenant. Sophie's love inspires Aubrey, demands his success, and drives him to success. Sophie's influence on Aubrey is positive. He spends his free time writing and reading letters to and from Sophie, and spends his quiet moments pondering her affection and the nature of their relationship.

Maturin's life, on the other hand, is disrupted by his love for Diana. He is an accomplished scientist and renowned surgeon in spite of, rather than because of, his love for Diana. In fact, without Diana Maturin may very well be more productive and reach greater accomplishments than he does. His love for Diana consumes him, frustrates him, weakens his resolve, and leads him into self-doubt. Diana's influence on Maturin is negative, and the love he expresses for her nearly costs his life. Meanwhile, Diana reciprocates Maturin's feelings only haphazardly and ephemerally.



Style

Point of View

The novel is told from the third-person, limited, point of view. The narrator is reliable, entirely effaced, and unnamed. Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin, the main characters, are the protagonists and central figures in all of the scenes in the novel. The narrator divulges some internal thoughts of the two protagonists, but not of other characters. The majority of the story is told through action and dialogue; revealed thoughts are very infrequent and are used for characterization rather than plot development.

The third-person point of view allows Aubrey and Maturin to be presented in a highly sympathetic manner. For example, the narrative structure portrays Maturin's penurious manners as frugal rather than stingy. The narrative also allows portrayal of characters' life situations as difficult but not pathetic. In this way, the choice of narrative view is appropriate and successful. As both characters are roughly equal in significance, the third-person point of view also allows their textual representations to be roughly equivalent. 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 settings. The first and most significant is *H.M.S. Surprise*, a sixth-rate twenty-eight gun British frigate of French build. Originally named *Unity*, she was captured during combat and placed in English service where she has remained for many years. The ship is unofficially known as *Nemesis* for a particularly audacious raid she made on the Spanish in 1797. Jack Aubrey served aboard the ship as a young midshipman. Since that time *Surprise* has grown old but has received an overhaul and remains a fine sailing ship. Aubrey describes her as possessed of a bluff bow and lovely lines, weatherly, stiff, and a fine sea-boat. She is fast enough (throughout the novel *H.M.S. Surprise* routinely walks along at 10 or more knots), roomy, and dry—a particularly nice feature in frigates of the time. The ship measures approximately 107' in length and under Aubrey's specifications is refitted with new masts and altered rigging in Bombay. The ship's normal complement consists perhaps 140 to 200 men (the exact number is not specified), and the ship would displace approximately 500 tonnes. Although not directly stated in the novel the ship clearly uses a standard three-watch system.

The second setting presented in the novel is diffuse and consists of numerous ports, cities, and islands. Included among these settings are a French port, Madeira, Bombay, Calcutta, St. Paul's Rocks, the coast of Brazil, and a few minor islands in the Indian Ocean. In general, these settings are transient, poorly described, and thought of—at



least by Aubrey—as temporary locations to refit and re-supply. While the action aboard ship is dominated by Aubrey, the action ashore is usually dominated by Maturin. On every occasion when time permits, Maturin goes ashore and usually has a wonderful experience of adventure and exploration, returning to the ship with a collection of specimens of animals, insects, and plants.

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.

The novel becomes linguistically complex in two primary respects. First, when dealing with nautical events a somewhat complicated specialized language is used which includes references to various parts of sailing craft and sailing techniques which are probably not particularly familiar to modern readers. For example, when waiting to depart Bombay Aubrey holds the ship on a single anchor; this indicates his extreme anxiousness to depart. The technical language is accurate and interesting and a reference to a general sailing encyclopedia will assist in a careful reading and complete understanding of the text. Second, the novel makes frequent reference to various events which occur prior to the novel's opening, proper. In many cases, these events are detailed in one or both of two prior novels in the series and readers unfamiliar with these novels may find the references vague or puzzling.

Structure

The 379-page novel is divided into eleven numbered chapters of roughly equal length though some chapters are noticeable longer than others. 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 intended to be read as part of a series of novels; specifically as the third novel in a series which extends to twenty volumes. Nearly all of the principle characters presented in the novel, therefore, are recurring characters with backgrounds and histories well-developed in the prior two novels. Similarly, events happening prior to the scope of the current novel are often referenced. This structure proves somewhat difficult for readers unfamiliar with the prior two novels. Nevertheless, basic character glosses and event recaps are provided.

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 year 1804. Thus, the novel's language, technology, politics, geography, et cetera, are all based upon historically accurate representations.



Quotes

"'Is it the state of the world, my dear' said Stephen, with a grin—no professional look left at all. 'Well now, for the moment it is plain enough. On our side we have Austria, Russia, Sweden and Naples, which is the same as your Two Sicilies; and on his he has a whole cloud of little states, and Bavaria and Holland and Spain. Not that these alliances are of much consequence one side or the other: The Russians were with us, and then against us until they strangled their Czar, and now with us; and I dare say they will change again, when the whim bites. The Austrians left the war in '97 and then again in the year one, after Hohenlinden: the same thing may happen again any day. What matters to us is Holland and Spain, for they have navies; and if ever this war is to be won, it must be won at sea. Bonaparte has about forty-five ships of the line, and we have eighty-odd, which sounds well enough. But ours are scattered all over the world and his are not. Then again the Spaniards have twenty-seven, to say nothing of the Dutch; so it is essential to prevent them from combining, for if Bonaparte can assemble a superior force in the Channel, even for a little while, then his invasion army can come across, God forbid. That is why Jack and Lord Nelson are beating up and down off Toulon, bottling up Monsieur de Villeneuve with his eleven ships of the line and seven frigates, preventing them from combining with the Spaniards in Cartagena and Cadiz and Ferrol; and that I where I am going to join him as soon as I have been to London to settle one or two little points of business and to buy a large quantity of madder. So if you have any messages, now is the time; for, Sophie, I am upon the wing.' He stood up, scattering crumbs, and the clock on the black cabinet struck the hour." (Chapter 1, pp. 20-21).

"'You are very welcome, gentlemen,' said Jack, turning in the direction of the chin. 'Mr Simmons, please to take the end of the table; Mr Carew, if you will sit—easy, easy.' The chaplain, caught off his balance by a lee-lurch, shot into his seat with such force as almost to drive it through the deck. 'Lord Garron here; Mr Fielding and Mr Dashwood, pray be so good,'—waving to their places. 'Now even before we begin,' he went on, as the soup made its perilous way across the cabin, 'I apologize for this dinner. With the best will in the world—allow me, sir,'—extracting the parson's wig from the tureen and helping him to a ladle—'Killick, a nightcap for Mr Carwe, swab this, and pass the word for the midshipman of the watch. Oh, Mr Butler, my compliments to Mr Norrey, and I believe we may brail up the spanker during dinner. With the best will in the world, I say, it can be but a Barmecide feast.' That was pretty good, and he looked modestly down but it occurred to him that the Barmecides were not remarkable for serving fresh meat to their guests, and there, swimming in the chaplain's bowl, was the unmistakable form of a bargeman, the larger of the reptiles that crawled from old biscuit, the smooth one with the black head and oddly cold taste—the soup, of course, had been thickened with biscuit-crumbs to counteract the roll. The chaplain had not been long at sea; he might not know that there was no harm in the bargeman, nothing of the common weevil's bitterness; and it might put him off his food. 'Killick, another plate for Mr Carew; there is a hair in his soup. Barmecide... But I particularly wished to invite you, since this is probably the last time I shall have the honour. We are bound for Gibraltar, by way of



Minorca; and at Gibraltar Captain Hammond will return to the ship." (Chapter 2, pp. 37-38).

"'Potier,' from above, and the whistling moved down the stairs, 'qu'est-ce que ce remuemynage?'

"By the light of the big lantern under the arch Jack saw an officer, a cheerful, high-coloured officer, bluff good humour and a well-fitting uniform, so much the officer that he felt a momentary pause. Dutourd, no doubt.

"Dutourd's face, about to whistle again, turned to incredulity: his hand reached to a sword that was not there.

"'Hold him,' said Jack to the dark seamen closing in. 'Maragall, ask him where Stephen is.'

"'Vous ktes un officier anglais, monsieur?' asked Dutourd, ignoring Maragall.

"'Answer, God rot your bloody soul,' cried Jack with a flush of such fury that he trembled.

"'Chez le colonel,' said the officer.

"'Maragall, how many are there left?'

"'This person is the only man left in the house: he says Esteban is in the colonel's room. The colonel is not back yet.'

"'Come.'" (Chapter 3, pp. 71-72).

"'Surprise!' cried Jack again. 'I have not set foot in her since I was a midshipman.' He saw her plain, lying there a cable's length from him in the brilliant sunshine of English Harbour, a trim, beautiful little eight-and-twenty, French-built with a bluff bow and lovely lines, weatherly, stiff, a fine sea-boat, fast when she was well-handled, roomy, dry... He had sailed in her under a taut captain and an even tauter first lieutenant—had spent hours and hours banished to the masthead—had done most of his reading there—had carved his initials on the cap: were they still to be seen? She was old, to be sure, and called for nursing; but what a ship to command... He dismissed the ungrateful thought that there was never a prize to be looked for in the Indian Ocean—swept clear long ago—and said, 'We could give *Agamemnon* mainsail and topgallants, sailing on a bowline... I shall have the choice of one or two officers, for sure. Shall you come, Pullings?'

"'Why, in course, sir,'—surprised.

"'Mrs Pullings no objection? No—eh?'

"'Mrs Pullings will pipe her eye, I dare say; but then presently she will brighten up. And I dare say she will be main pleased to see me back again at the end of the commission;



more pleased than now is, maybe. I get sadly underfoot, among the brooms and pans. It ain't like aboard ship, sir, the marriage-state.'

"'Ain't it, Pullings?' said Jack looking at him wistfully." (Chapter 4, pp. 92-93).

"'I am glad you like it,' said Nicolls, sitting wearily down on the only clean spot he could find. 'You don't find it rather strong for paradise, and hell-fire hot? The rock is burning through my shoes.'

"'There is an odour, sure,' said Stephen. 'But by paradise I mean the tameness of the fowl; and I do not believe it is they that smell.' He ducked as a tern shot past his head, banking and braking hard to land. 'The tameness of the birds before the Fall. I believe this bird will suffer me to smell it; I believe that much, if not all the odour is that of excrement, dead fish, and weed.' He moved a little closer to the booby, one of the few still sitting on an egg, knelt by it, gently took its wicked beak and put his nose to its back. 'They contribute a good deal, however,' he said. The booby looked indignant, ruffled, impenetrably stupid; it uttered a low hiss, but it did not move away—merely shuffled the egg beneath it and stared at a crab that was laboriously stealing a flying-fish, left by a tern at the edge of a nest two feet away." (Chapter 5, pp. 127-128).

"'In this bucket,' said Stephen, walking into the cabin, 'in this small half-bucket, now, I have the population of Dublin, London and Paris combined: these animalculae—what is the matter with the sloth?' It was curled on Jack's knee, breathing heavily: its bowl and Jack's glass stood empty on the table. Stephen picked it up, peered into its affable, bleary face, shook it, and hung it upon its rope. It seized hold with one fore and one hind foot, letting the others dangle limp, and went to sleep.

"Stephen looked sharply round, saw the decanter, smelt to the sloth and cried, 'Jack, you have debauched my sloth.'" (Chapter 6, p. 154).

"It was strange to see how quickly this progress took on the nature of ordinary existence: the Surprise had not run off a thousand miles before the unvarying routine of the ship's day, from the piping up of the hammocks to the drumbeat of 'Heart of Oak' for the gunroom dinner, thence to quarters and the incessantly-repeated exercising of the guns, and so to the setting of the watch, obliterated both the beginning of the voyage and its end, it obliterated even time, so that it seemed normal to all hands that they should travel endlessly over this infinite and wholly empty sea, watching the sun diminish and the moon increase.

"Both were in the pale sky on a memorable Thursday when Stephen and Bonden resumed their customary places in the mizentop, dismissing its ordinary inhabitants and settling down upon the folded studdingsails. Bonden had graduated from pot-hooks and hangers far north of the line; he had skimmed his ignoble slate overboard in 3°S; now he was yardarm to yardarm with pen and ink, and as the southern latitude mounted, so his neat hand grew smaller and smaller and smaller.



"'Verse,' said Stephen. It was an inexpressible satisfaction to Bonden to write in metre: with a huge childish grin he opened his inkhorn and poised his attentive pen—a booby's quill.

"'Verse,' said Stephen again, gazing at the illimitable blue-grey sea and the lop-sided moon above it. 'Verse:

"Then we upon our globe's last verge shall go.

"And view the ocean leaning on the sky;

"From thence our rolling neighbours we shall know,

"And on the lunar world securely pry by God I believe I see the albatross.'

"...believe I see the albatross,' said Bonden's lips silently. 'It don't rhyme. Another line, sir, maybe?' But receiving no answer from his rigid teacher he looked up, followed his gaze, and said, 'Why so you do, sir. I dare say he will fetch our wake directly, and overhaul us. Wonderful great birds they are, though something fishy, without you skin 'em. There are some old-fashioned coves that has a spite against them, which they say they bring ill winds.'" (Chapter 6, pp. 163-164).

"'I have fallen pretty low for an odious little reptile like that Perkins to take such liberties. Christ, Maturin, this is a vile life. I never go out without the danger of an affront: and I am alone, cooped up in this foul place all the time. There are only half a dozen women who receive me willingly; and four of them are demireps and the others charitable fools—such company I keep! And the other women I meet, particularly those I knew in India before—oh, how they know how to place their darts! Nothing obvious, because I can hit back and Canning could break their husbands, but sharp enough, and poisonous, my God! You have no notion what bitches women are. It makes me so furious I cannot sleep—I get ill—I am bilious with rage and I look forty. In six months I shall not be fit to be seen.'

"'Sure, my dear, you deceive yourself. The first moment I saw you, I remarked that your complexion was even finer than it was in England. This impression was confirmed when I came here, and examined it at leisure.'

"'I wonder that you should be so easily taken in. It is only so much trompe-couillon, as Amylie calls it: she is the best woman-painter since what's-her-name.'

"'Vigye Lebrun?'

"'No. Jezebel. Look here,' she cried, drawing a finger down her cheek and showing a faint smear of pink.

"Stephen looked at it closely. He shook his head. 'No. That is not the essence, at all. Though in passing I must warn you against the use of ceruse: it may desiccate and wrinkle the deeper layers. Hog's lard is more to the point. No, the essence of your spirit,



courage, intelligence, and gaiety; they are unaffected; and it is they that form your face—you are responsible for your face.'

"But how long do you think any woman's spirit can last, in this kind of life? They dare not use me so badly when Canning is here, but he is so often away, going to Mahy and so on; and then when he is here, there are these perpetual scenes. Often to the point of a break. And if we break, can you imagine my future? Penniless in Bombay? It is unthinkable. And to feel bound by cowardice is unthinkable, too. Oh, he is a kind keeper, I do not say he is not; but he is so hellish jealous—'Get out,' she shouted at a servant in the doorway. 'Get out!' again, as he lingered, making deprecatory gestures; and she shied a decanter at his head." (Chapter 7, pp. 227-228).

"Mr Pullings, all hands to make sail. Maintopgallants'l, stuns'ls and royal; and scandalise the foretops'l yard.'

"Maintopgallants'l, stuns'ls and royal, and scandalise foretops'l yard it is, sir." (Chapter 8, p. 253).

"I never heard of an anchor holding, well-nigh apeak, not in a hundred fathom water,' observed an elderly hand. 'It stands to reason, on account of the compression of wolume.'

"You pipe down, Wilks,' cried Pullings, turning sharp upon him. 'You and your God-damned wolumes.'

"Which I only passed the remark,' said Wilks, but very quietly.

"How cruel fast it ebbed! But it was slackening, surely it was slackening? Babbington joined him on the forecastle. 'What's o'clock?' asked Pullings.

"It wants five minutes of half-tide,' said Babbington. Together they stared at the cable. 'But it is slackening faster already,' he said, and Pullings felt his heart warm to him. After a moment Babbington went on, 'We are to buoy the cable and slip, as soon as we can tow again. They are making a kind of litter to pass him over the side in.'

"The ebb ran its course at last; the barge pulled out with the tow-line, buoying the cable in its way; and Pullings went aft, feeling young once more.

"Are you ready there below, Mr Stourton?' called Jack.

"All ready, sir,' came the muffled reply.

"Then slip the cable. Mr Pullings take the jolly-boat and lead in. Boats away, and stretch out there, d'ye hear me?" (Chapter 8, p. 270).

"The crash of the broadside, and of the bow-gun, and of the twenty shot hitting her, came in one breath—an extreme violence of noise. He saw the wheel disintegrate, Harrowby jerked backwards to the taffrail, cut in two; and forward there was a



screaming. Instantly he bent to the speaking-tube that led below, to the men posted at the relieving-tackles that could take over from the wheel. 'Below there. Does she steer?'

"'Yes, sir.'

"'Thus, very well then. Keep her dyce, d'ye hear me?'

"Three guns had been dismantled, and splinters, bits of carriage, bits of rail, booms, shattered boats littered the decks as far aft as the mainmast, together with scores of hammocks torn from their netting: the jibboom lurched from side to side, its cap shot through: cannon-balls, scattered from their racks and garlands, rumbled about the heaving deck: but far more dangerous were the loose guns running free—concentrated, lethal weight, gone mad. He plunged into the disorder forward—few officers, little co-ordination—catching up a bloody hammock as he ran. Two tons of metal, once the cherished larboard chaser, poised motionless on the top of the roll, ready to rush back across the deck and smash its way through the starboard side: he clapped the hammock under it and whipped a line round the swell of its muzzle, calling for men to make it fast to a stanchion; and as he called a loose 36 lb shot ran crack against his ankle, bringing him down." (Chapter 9, pp. 323-324).

"The porter's infant child, woken by the organ-note, applied himself to a winch, and the tigers were heaved apart.

"'Infant child,' said Stephen, 'state the names and ages of thy beasts.'

"'Father of the poor, their names are Right and Wrong. They are of immemorial antiquity, having been in this portico even before I was born.'

"'Yet the territory of the one overlaps the territory of the other?'

"'Maharaj, my understanding does not reach the word *overlap*; but no doubt this is so.'

"'Child, accept this coin.'" (Chapter 10, p. 338).

"'The ball is out,' he said. 'Pullings, let there be no noise abaft the mainmast, no noise at all,' and walked into his sleeping-cabin.

"'You look wholly pale yourself, sir,' said Bonden. 'Will you take a dram?'

"'You will have to change your coat, your honour,' said Killick, 'And your breeches, too.'

"'Christ, Bonden,' said Jack, 'he opened himself slowly, with his own hands, right to the heart. I saw it beating there.'

"'Ah, sir, there's surgery for you,' said Bonden, passing the glass. 'It would not surprise any old Sophie, however; such a learned article. You remember the gunner, sir? Never let it put you off your dinner. He will be right as a trivet, never you fret, sir.' (Chapter 11, p. 354).



Topics for Discussion

Would you rather be a seaman aboard *H.M.S. Lively* or *H.M.S. Surprise*? Why?

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

Do you think that Stephen Maturin could realistically operate on himself using a mirror and a few assistants? Would it really be possible to cut one's own self clear through to the beating heart and extract a musket ball? Is the scene believable?

Contrast the way that Sophie Williams treats Aubrey to the way that Diana Villiers treats Maturin. Should Maturin have been genuinely surprised by Diana's letter in Madeira in which she returned his ring and broke off their engagement?

Maturin purchases a pair of Joe Manton dueling pistols in England—the finest weapons available at any price during the time period. He practices with the pistols aboard ship. Later he insists to himself that he will only lightly wound Canning during their pistol duel, but in the event he shoots Canning through the heart, killing him. Is Maturin's resolve to lightly wound in reality simply a sop to his conscience? Discuss.

Aubrey audaciously engages *Marenga* with a much smaller 28-gun frigate and emerges victorious. Would it surprise you to learn that the action described in the book is based upon a historical engagement of similar forces which surprisingly resulted in an English victory?

Maturin makes a single veiled reference to having once been addicted to opiates. Discuss the elements of Maturin's character which might indicate a desire for a secret reliance on drugs.

The narrative descriptions of Diana and Sophie contain many similar elements. In general, Diana is characterized as more beautiful and far more sensual than Sophie. Contrast the two women. Which character do you find more sympathetic? Does the novel treat women characters fairly?

Aubrey seems to be a master of the sea but quickly falls apart when ashore, making bad decisions and spending money foolishly. Toward the conclusion of the novel Aubrey happily secures a small fortune. How long do you think these funds are likely to last once he sets foot aground in good old England?

Maturin's health and spirits improve remarkably after he discovers a giant land tortoise which he christens *Testudo aubreii*. Why do you think the discovery had such a recuperative effect on Maturin? Which event in the novel is a parallel characterization development for the character of Aubrey?

Why do you think Aubrey and Maturin are such close friends?



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