

Hornblower and the Atropos Study Guide

Hornblower and the Atropos by C. S. Forester

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Plot Summary

The novel presents a series of episodes in the life of Horatio Hornblower, the protagonist and dominant character. The narrative begins with Hornblower, his pregnant wife Maria, and their infant son taking passage aboard a canal boat traveling from Gloucester to London. Early in the voyage one of the canal boat's two crewmen is incapacitated, and Hornblower volunteers to steer the boat. Maria is distressed that her husband deigns to manual labor, but Hornblower finds the canal boat's operation fascinating. Additionally, he wants to get to London as quickly as possible to take up his new appointment as captain of HMS Atropos. After an interesting voyage, Hornblower arrives in London, sees Maria to a hotel, and assumes command of his ship.

Hornblower's next orders are atypical and surprising. Instead of going to sea, Hornblower is put in charge of the Thames River funeral procession of the national hero, Horatio Nelson. Conferring with various public dignitaries, Hornblower establishes a proper decorum and mood and arranges a series of river barges to transport the massive coffin and the train of mourners. All goes as planned until the barge carrying Nelson's coffin develops a serious leak. Hornblower improvises and alters the ceremony slightly in order to unload the coffin before the barge sinks. Hornblower's quick thinking saves the day and the funeral procession completes without public incident.

Hornblower then takes to the sea but makes it only as far as the Downs before a thick fog rolls in. Atropos anchors among many British merchant ships and waits for the weather to clear. A drifting oar and a distant thud pique Hornblower's curiosity, and a subsequent reconnoiter discovers that a nearby merchant ship has been captured by a French privateer operating in the thick fog. Hornblower quickly arranges a boarding mission, and the French privateer is captured. Hornblower then proceeds to the Mediterranean and joins Collingwood's fleet.

He is instructed to take on a variety of unique supplies and personnel, and then Atropos is dispatched to Marmorice Bay, in Turkey, where she undertakes a prolonged and complicated salvage of HMS Speedwell, a sunken wreck containing a vast sum of monies. The salvage operation is fully described and comprises the major event of the narrative and concludes successfully with a high-stakes escape through a tricky passage, pursued by a much larger Turkish ship. The treasure is returned to Gibraltar and Atropos again cruises the Mediterranean before encountering the much larger Spanish ship Castilla. Joining with HMS Nightingale, Atropos engages and defeats the Spanish ship in a short, but brutal, action. Atropos repairs in Palermo and there catches the eye of the King of Sicily. For diplomatic reasons, the Royal Navy agrees to sell Atropos to the King of Sicily. Removed of command by this act of international goodwill, Hornblower returns to England where he is devastated to find his two children grievously sick with smallpox.



Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Captain Horatio Hornblower takes command of HMS Atropos and pursues a series of naval exploits in the Mediterranean. Sailing to Marmorice Bay, in Turkey, he oversees salvage work upon the wreck of HMS Speedwell, which contains a vast sum of gold and silver in pay chests lost when the ship sunk. The funds are recovered and returned to Gibraltar, and Atropos again cruises the Mediterranean and, with HMS Nightingale, captures the Spanish ship, Castilla, in a short but brutal engagement. Atropos travels to Palermo for repair and refit, and there she captures the attention of the King of Sicily. For diplomatic reasons, the Royal Navy agrees to sale Atropos to Sicily. Hornblower declines a commission into the Sicilian navy and returns to a doubtful future in England, where he sadly finds his infant son, Horatio, and his newborn daughter, Maria, feverish with smallpox.

Hornblower, Maria and their infant son, Horatio, take passage on Queen Charlotte, a towed canal boat running from Gloucester through the Cotswolds to London. Hornblower is fascinated with the boat and spends a great deal of time examining its construction and the way it is handled. The Hornblowers board the craft at Gloucester and take the best cabin class available. The boat proceeds down the Thames & Severn Canal, while Hornblower marvels over the craft's operation, and Maria frets about Hornblower's indecorous behavior. The boat is pulled along at nine miles per hour by a team of horses using a footpath parallel to the canal. The towrope is long and allows a man at the tiller to guide the boat through the center of the canal. Queen Charlotte is considered a priority boat and carries a long scythe blade at her prow, to cut the towrope of any other boat which fails to properly yield.

Charlie, the man driving the horses, drinks gin continually and eventually passes out and falls from his mount. Tom Jenkins, the captain and apparent owner of the boat, frets because his payments depend upon timely delivery. An alternative rider cannot be located, but Hornblower, much to Maria's embarrassment, volunteers to steer the boat if Tom drives the horses. The matter is settled and the journey continues. The boat first passes through the Sapperton Tunnel, where Hornblower and Tom propel the boat using their own legs, as the tunnel is too narrow for horses. After making the two-mile traverse, fresh horses are harnessed and the voyage continues with Hornblower at the tiller. The boat moves through various locks and eventually transfers from the Thames & Severn Canal to the Thames River proper, near Lechlade. Now moving with the current, the boat begins a slow descent to Oxford. Hornblower is momentarily stressed by taking the boat across a series of staunches, or partial dams, but he performs admirably. At Oxford, a fresh crew is procured and Hornblower returns to the passenger cabin, much to Maria's relief. The Hornblowers then eat a miserable dinner and catnap as they can, while the boat continues past Reading and Windsor before arriving at Brentford. The overland voyage of about one-hundred miles has taken less than a day, and Hornblower believes it to be a miraculous passage.



Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

The novel begins with an atypical construction—Hornblower travels from Gloucester to London. The action is interesting and intriguing, but has absolutely no connection with the remainder of the novel. In fact, the novel could begin in the middle of Chapter 6 without further modification to the plot. As such, the introductory chapters stand alone from the remainder of the text and can almost be considered an independent vignette. They do establish several facts about the subsequent narrative, but nothing that would take more than a sentence to summarize—Hornblower travels to London to assume command of HMS *Atropos*. This early device couples with the latter novel, itself composed of two major episodes, to yield an episodic feel to the text. While this is not fatal to the narrative, it does detract from the texture of the novel. Most of the initial two chapters is given over to a consideration of the process of operating a river boat along a canal with other traffic, sharp turns, locks and staunches. Certainly this information is interesting and the segment is compelling and well-written.

Hornblower receives a fair amount of characterization in these chapters. He is a newly-appointed post captain with less than three years' seniority; in fact, only a few months seniority. He has received a new appointment to a recently-vacated post, commanding *Atropos*—though he does not know his ultimate assignment. He is a new father with an infant son and a pregnant wife. He is rather cloyed with attention from his wife and finds her attentions somewhat irritating. He is interested with virtually anything new or interesting and is a very capable seaman. He is able to go for long periods without food or rest and is more interested in personal accomplishment than personal appearances. Maria, on the other hand, is a fairly neglected spouse who is a little overly-concerned about her husband's apparent station in life. Maria is friendly, but reserved, and an excellent mother. Maria is also very concerned with cost and exhibits a false economy when she purchases inedible food because it is cheap (penny wise, but pound foolish). Little Horatio appears to be a normal infant boy in all respects. Following the canal boat trip, the novel's plot begins in earnest in the middle of Chapter 3.



Chapters 3, 4, and 5

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 Summary

Arriving at Brentford, the Hornblowers leave the canal boat and take passage in a wherry—a larger rowed craft. The wherry transports them from Brentford, through London proper, to Deptford, where Hornblower gets his first view of *Atropos*, lying at anchor at Deptford Hard. As the boat moves through London, the man at the tiller attempts to engage Hornblower in conversation but gives up and spends his time pointing out the various sights to Maria, who is all agog at the splendor of the city. The oarsman makes a few deprecatory comments about London Bridge. Hornblower finds the entire passage banal but is, of course, enthralled at the eventual sight of *Atropos*. The Hornblowers leave the wherry and take residence at a hotel in Deptford. Hornblower barely ensures the pregnant Maria is well-situated before hauling out his uniform and departing for his ship. Maria, as usual, frets about his appearance and regrets his departure. Hornblower boards *Atropos*, and, by reading his orders aloud to the assembled ship's company, officially takes command. He is introduced to his officers but barely remembers them aside from his first lieutenant, John Jones. Jones informs Hornblower that admiralty orders await him in the cabin. The two men proceed to the cabin, which is almost entirely vacant. Hornblower opens the orders and reads them with evident surprise—he is ordered to confer with Henry Pallender to arrange the naval details for the imminent funeral procession along the Thames of the late Lord Nelson. Uncharacteristically unsure of himself, Hornblower hands the orders to Jones, who eagerly reads them without much comprehension.

Over the next several days, Hornblower consults with Pallender and arranges for the Thames River processing. The event will consist of a series of clumsy barges—the first will bear the massive coffin of Nelson and the subsequent barges will bear a series of dignitaries. The barges will embark from near Greenwich and proceed up the Thames to Whitehall Steps. Hornblower enlists his ship's crew to write out literally hundreds of orders to various individuals. Throughout this busy period, Maria nears the end of her pregnancy and irritates Hornblower with her desire for his company.

On the day of the funeral, everything goes as planned. Hornblower captains the first barge with Nelson's massive coffin and watches with pleasure as the funeral procession strings out behind him in more-or-less perfect order. So that he can constantly monitor the time, Hornblower hangs his pocket watch from Nelson's coffin. And then comes the crisis—the lead barge, the very barge with Nelson's body aboard—springs a leak and begins to fill with water. Still two miles from London Bridge and four miles from Whitehall Steps, the barge faces the river flow and contrary winds and is sinking. Hornblower, making an instant decision, takes the tiller and sets Horrocks to work bailing. He exhorts the men to row as quickly as possible and hopes to make Whitehall Steps before the barge sinks. As the barge passes under London Bridge, Horrocks has made some headway, but then choppy currents break over the bows of the barge, shipping new water.



The stressful voyage continues as Horrocks bails and Hornblower steers. Horrocks's thrown water passes between Hornblower's legs, and soaks him through. The barge becomes heavier and less maneuverable as it approaches Whitehall Steps. The original plan was to position the barge near the pier and retain the coffin aboard until the entire procession had disembarked. Hornblower knows the barge will not float that long, though, and changes the plans mid-stream. As soon as the first barge reaches Whitehall Steps he orders the coffin disembarked. Free of the massive weight, the barge rides higher in the water. Hornblower hands the clumsy vessel over to Horrocks, who takes it to a nearby jetty for repairs. Hornblower's actions save the day though some are mildly angered at the breach in protocol. A dripping Hornblower stands on the pier and whispers an explanation to Admiral Lord St. Vincent, his superior officer.

Some time later, Hornblower realizes his watch still hangs from Nelson's coffin—now ensconced in a secured room. He is forbidden entrance by a sympathetic acquaintance, Lieutenant Bracegirdle. Fortunately, Lord St. Vincent happens by and allows Hornblower to retrieve his watch; he also tells Hornblower to attend on him on a certain day and accompany him to a party hosted by the King. Many hours later Hornblower returns to his hotel where he finds Maria has delivered a baby girl; all is well. Hornblower takes his son Horatio and plays with him in the hotel common room until his supper is ready. The boy obviously loves his father, and Hornblower rather dotes upon his son. Hornblower eats a huge meal and, freed of all responsibility for the moment, relaxes with his family.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 Analysis

Nelson's funeral procession up the Thames River is considered in Chapters 3 and 4. Like Chapters 1 and 2, the funeral procession is an atomic event that has little impact on latter events in the novel. The processing is interesting and intriguing but has only incidental connection with the remainder of the novel. In fact, the novel could begin in the middle of Chapter 6 without further modification to the plot. As such, like the introductory chapters, these chapters stand alone from the remainder of the text and can almost be considered an independent vignette. They do establish several facts about the subsequent narrative, but nothing that could not be elucidated in a brief introductory paragraph—John Jones is lieutenant of *Atropos*, and the ship is ready for sea. This repetitive device yields an episodic feel to the text. While this is not fatal to the narrative, it does detract from the texture of the novel. Most of Chapters 3 and 4 is given over to a consideration of the process of planning and executing a funeral procession. Certainly this information is interesting and the segment is compelling and well-written.

The fictional Hornblower is tied into the historic funeral of Nelson; it would be a poor heroic captain from the British age of sail who was not somehow connected to the redoubtable national hero. Given the time and political situation of Nelson's death at Trafalgar, the honor given Hornblower in appointing him to arrange the Thames River progression is considerable. Obviously, the admiralty has no qualms about Hornblower's administrative skill. As would be expected, Hornblower carries out his complicated duties with aplomb. The only hitch comes when the barge bearing Nelson's coffin springs a leak and threatens to sink. Hornblower considers his options and decides to



take a calculated risk. He speeds up the procession and sets a man bailing and, in the end, improvises a ceremonial change to allow the coffin to be disembarked much sooner than planned. As also to be expected, Hornblower is successful in the execution of his duty, and Nelson is disembarked without incident. Fortunately for Hornblower, St. Vincent allows him to retrieve his watch and also invites him to meet the King.

The two chapters depict Hornblower in a very different way than is customary within the series of novels. Here he is not a military man but a simple naval administrator. Facing problems of an atypical nature, Hornblower is still able to rise to the occasion and perform admirably in a complex social and political milieu. Meanwhile, the reliable Maria gives birth to Hornblower's second offspring—a girl named Maria. In a rare family scene, Hornblower plays with his infant son and derives great enjoyment from a few moments of family life. Hornblower's soaking, combined with the cold weather, foreshadow his pending illness. As would be expected, Maria is very excited to have her husband presented to the King of England.



Chapters 6 and 7

Chapters 6 and 7 Summary

A very sick Hornblower meets St. Vincent at the appointed hour, and they slog through mud in dirty weather to take a carriage to St. James. Hornblower is distressed because he is so ill, but in one respect his cold is a blessing—it prevents him from endless fretting about meeting the King. The carriage arrives and the men disembark and move through a maze of uniformed officers and guards. At the appropriate time, they are presented to the King, who makes brief but polite inquiry into Hornblower's recent activities. The King then makes a sort of snap decision and announces that Hornblower's command should prove suitable for His Serene Highness. Hornblower does not understand the oblique reference, but one does not question the King.

Hornblower is then maneuvered to a smaller group of people, and he follows St. Vincent's approach to a youth dressed in finery. They are cut off by a burly man, who identifies himself as the High Chamberlain to His Serene Highness. After formal introductions, Hornblower and St. Vincent bow to the youth, who is His Serene Highness, Prince of Seitz-Bunau. Hornblower, sick and out of his element, does not grasp the developing situation. Later, St. Vincent offers an apology and then explains the situation to Hornblower in terms simple enough for him to understand. The Prince has fled Napoleon's conquest of Europe and desires to enter service in the Royal Navy. The King has selected Hornblower's command as suitable, and, therefore, the Prince will serve aboard *Atropos* as a midshipman. The complications of such an arrangement are not lost on Hornblower. St. Vincent then refers to Hornblower as his protégé and makes several kind statements before departing. Hornblower returns to his hotel and tells Maria about his visit to court.

Later, aboard *Atropos*, Hornblower receives his orders; he is to travel to the Mediterranean and place himself under command of Lord Cuthbert Collingwood, one of the heroes of Trafalgar. He considers the victory at Trafalgar and the import of it to England's future—Napoleon might rule the earth, but the English rule the seas. Hornblower summons Jones and inquires about the status of the ship, only to find that it is woefully unprepared for immediate departure. The crew is short twenty topmen; the ship is short on water, woefully short on food, powder and shot. Hornblower realizes the blame is his own more than Jones'. His reverie is interrupted by a commotion on deck. A few minutes later a deputation enters the cabin; the Prince has arrived with his extensive baggage and orders to join *Atropos* as a midshipman. Doctor Eisenbeiss is ordered to join *Atropos* as surgeon. Hornblower has the vast baggage sent ashore, presses the prince's few attendants, informs Eisenbeiss of his new situation in life as a King's surgeon in the Royal Navy, announces that the Prince will be known as Mr. Midshipman Prince, orders the men to abandon their court uniforms for ship's uniforms and sends the Prince to berth with the other midshipmen. Eisenbeiss blusters and states he will protest his treatment by writing to various political figures. Hornblower



coolly stands his ground and notes that if Eisenbeiss contravenes the "mutiny acts," he will swing from a yard-arm. The browbeaten Eisenbeiss retires.

Hornblower spends the remainder of the day in a whirlwind of activity, arranging to have four tons of powder, twenty tons of shot and vast quantities of water brought aboard *Atropos* and stowed in appropriate fashion. Much of the casks of meat, which have already been stowed in *Atropos* are discovered to be inedible. Hornblower uses equal parts obsequious fawning and calculated scheming to convince the businessman in charge of provisioning to exchange the casks for usable product. The day drags on and on and *Atropos* is a hive of activity, her decks strewn with all manner of supply and her hold rapidly filling. Hornblower is careful to ensure she is loaded properly so that her sailing trim is not thrown off. After sunset, the ship is finally fully ready for sea—the still-ill Hornblower turns the men to their suppers and then drops into his hammock for much-needed sleep.

Chapters 6 and 7 Analysis

Chapters 6 and 7 provide the transition from Hornblower's life ashore to his life at sea. His family situation becomes more settled, albeit only slightly, as he ensures Maria is adequately housed and receives medical attention for the delivery of their second child. This all works out in the end as Hornblower becomes more and more engaged in readying his ship for sea. As the domestic life falls away from him, so the marine life gradually engulfs his attention. Having successfully planned and executed the funeral procession of Nelson along the Thames River, Hornblower is rewarded by being presented to the King. At court, the King makes an apparently quick decision to attach his great-nephew, the Prince, to Hornblower's command. As this type of political machination is beyond Hornblower, St. Vincent must explain it in simpler terms. Hornblower is fully aware that having the King's great-nephew aboard ship is both an honor and a problem. *Atropos* is tiny, and the Prince will be housed as a common midshipman. In the event, the Prince proves adaptable, capable and dependable, and in this Hornblower is fortunate. The Prince's "High Chamberlain," Eisenbeiss, proves less tractable, but Hornblower simply can, and does, order the man into obedience. Humorously, the Prince's few other servants are pressed into *Atropos*' crew bringing her shortage—a chronic problem in the Royal Navy—to something like eighteen men, or about twelve percent underserved.

The next problem faced by Hornblower consumes a large part of Chapter 7 but is accomplished in a single day—that of fully provisioning *Atropos*. The writing is clear and compelling and illustrates the difficulties Hornblower faces in getting his ship ready for sea. Many of the stores providers have interests at variance with quickly provisioning a ship. For example, the Victualing officer does not want to take back barrels of meat, which are inedible because it will cause him to lose profits. Hornblower is adept at using layers of obvious flattery, apparent obsequiousness and sneaky dealings to get what he wants. His movements through the court were wooden and perfunctory, but here within his sphere of expertise, they are exactly the opposite. In one long day he accomplishes what Jones has failed to do over the past few weeks. Vast quantities of stores of all

types are acquired and loaded, and Atropos concludes the day fully provisioned and ready for sea. This is a major turning point in the narrative as it concludes the initial chapters ashore and propels the plot forward into the next lengthy segment, which concerns events at sea.



Chapters 8 and 9

Chapters 8 and 9 Summary

Atropos takes to the sea but is forced to swing at anchor at the Downs due to thick fog. Many ships drop anchor and wait for clear skies. Hornblower uses the time to relentlessly drill the men on seamanship. While the drills are proceeding, an oar floats by Atropos, and Hornblower orders it to be drawn on board. He notes it is numbered '27' but that the 7 has a crossbar in the European style. From off in the foggy distance a shot or sharp bang is faintly heard. Something tickles at Hornblower's imagination, and he takes a bearing on the current and orders his gig lowered. He arms the gig crew with muskets and cutlasses and then proceeds carefully along the bearing line. He comes to Amelia Jane, a London brig, lying at anchor. The officer of Amelia Jane responds to Hornblower's hail, but with a disguised accent. Hornblower goes aboard and quickly discovers the brig has been captured by a French prize crew. Realizing that an English ship of war is nearby, they surrender without a fight. Hornblower realizes the French must have a ship nearby—probably a privateer—and determines to use a ruse to smoke out its location. He declares the French men pirates and orders them hanged immediately. Faced with immediate death, the French prize captain falters and reveals information about his boat to demonstrate that he is a privateer and not a pirate. Hornblower returns to Atropos and sends Jones and armed men in the ship's boats. They take the French privateer, Vengeance, without loss. Hornblower writes a report to the admiralty and mentions Jones' ability. Jones humbly notes that his name is rather common in the service, and requests that Hornblower refer to him in any possible correspondence as Lieutenant John Jones the Ninth.

It is about July, 1806, and Atropos sails to Gibraltar, making good time. On the lengthy voyage, Hornblower constantly drills the crew in seamanship. At Gibraltar, Hornblower is ordered to take on board Mr. William McCullum, the wreck-master and salvage director of the Coromandel Coast. McCullum brings aboard a variety of strange equipment and three Sinhalese divers—that is, pearl divers from Ceylon. Hornblower seethes with questions but retains an icy and reserved composure. This is made easier by McCullum's brusque and condescending manner. Atropos sails from Gibraltar to their next rendezvous point, seeking Collingwood's Mediterranean fleet. On the voyage, Hornblower reviews the Spartan nature of his cabin and recalls he left England without saying goodbye to Maria as a sort of personal penance for, in his opinion, failing in his duty to have Atropos ready for sea. The fleet is not found at the first rendezvous point, and Atropos proceeds to the next station, near Cape Ferro, and locates the fleet. Atropos is ordered to take station in the fleet and Hornblower nervously feels the eyes of the fleet upon him. He carefully sails into the fleet and takes station exactly as ordered, feeling some pride in the crew's handling of the ship. He is then called to attend on Admiral Collingwood, and a lengthy interview takes place. Collingwood then orders Hornblower to proceed to Malta, where Atropos will be joined by George Turner, master. Hornblower is subsequently to proceed to Marmorice Bay, on the coast of Turkey, to prosecute salvage operations upon the wreck of Speedwell. Speedwell had,



many months previously, been carrying military pay chests of incredible value when she capsized without breaking up. Hornblower is to support McCullum in salvage operations to recover gold and silver from the wreck. George Turner had been Speedwell's master at the time of the loss. Hornblower exults in finally knowing his immediate destiny.

Chapters 8 and 9 Analysis

Chapter 8 details a singular episode in the novel that illustrates how an attentive and active officer can make a difference in military affairs; however, in a by-now familiar pattern, it has no relation to the remainder of the novel. A muffled distant sound—perhaps a pistol shot—and a floating oar with a non-English marking combine to raise Hornblower's suspicions. The Downs anchorage is only a few miles from France, and the heavy fog provides ample opportunity for the French privateer *Vengeance* to sneak in among anchored merchant shipping. The lightly-armed privateer sneaks into the anchorage and sends an armed party aboard an unsuspecting merchant ship. The privateer, when captured, retains aboard enough men to capture about five other merchant ships. Thus, Hornblower's initiative literally saves one ship and potentially saves others from capture. The entire action lightly wounds two crewmen from *Atropos* and one French officer. Hornblower's methodology of browbeating the French prize crew into divulging information is interesting. In his characteristically taciturn and self-effacing after-action report, Hornblower declines to mention his own initiative, though, of course, any astute reviewer would read between the lines of the report to surmise the facts. Poor Lieutenant John Jones shares his name with eleven other men of the same rank in the same service, and his additional "the Ninth" hopefully distinguishes him from the pack.

Chapter 9 then sets up the salvage operation, which continues through Chapter 19. *Atropos* sails many, many miles from England to Gibraltar and then proceeds to the Tyrrhenian Sea. By this time, Hornblower's ceaseless drills have hammered the crew into a functional, even skilled, cadre of seamen. This is fortunate, for when *Atropos* joins the Mediterranean fleet, Collingwood orders a somewhat tricky maneuver of station keeping. Hornblower's ship executes the order perfectly, and Collingwood rightfully interprets this to mean Hornblower is dependable and enterprising. The remainder of the chapter develops the plot as Collingwood explains to Hornblower his upcoming mission. This is a major turning point in the plot and establishes a full background for the action which will climax in Chapter 18. Collingwood's orders also provide heavy foreshadowing for subsequent events because, in execution, Hornblower completes them nearly as Collingwood narrates them. Note the narrative technique of providing information to the reader via the conversation between Collingwood and Hornblower. *Speedwell*, ironically named, had capsized by accident—further details are later offered by Turner. She had not broken up but sunk intact to a sandy bottom in a protected bay without a scouring tide. There is every reason to believe, therefore, that she has remained intact with her vast stores of gold and silver in good order. She lies in deep water, though, and must be salvaged using expert techniques. Of course, this fact has also preserved her from salvage by Turks or Greeks. McCullum will—or so Collingwood believes—direct all salvage operations. Hornblower's job is to transport McCullum and



then ensure he has adequate time to proceed with salvage. Collingwood warns Hornblower that the political situation in Turkey is complicated and delicate, and admonishes him to not cause an incident of any kind. Clearly, the situation is problematic and must be left to Hornblower's enterprising judgment. Fortunately for England, Hornblower proves adequate to the task.



Chapters 10, 11, and 12

Chapters 10, 11, and 12 Summary

Atropos sails to Malta and takes aboard various supplies including a variety of strange requests from McCullum. Hornblower receives an invitation to dine with the Governor and Hornblower summons Prince. Eisenbeiss demands to accompany the Prince; Hornblower had originally been intending this but Eisenbeiss' imprudent demeanor puts Hornblower off and he refuses to tolerate his company. The dinner goes off without a hitch, but upon his return to Atropos, Hornblower learns that the petulant Eisenbeiss has fought a duel with the domineering McCullum, and McCullum has been shot through the chest. Hornblower goes ashore to the hospital and finds McCullum alive. The attending physician states that McCullum's chances ashore or aboard are rather the same and predicts that after several days McCullum will die from infection. Furious, Hornblower returns to the ship and verbally attacks Eisenbeiss. After threatening Eisenbeiss with flogging or worse should McCullum die, Hornblower has McCullum transported to the ship and placed in the care of Eisenbeiss. Atropos then sails with all haste to Marmorice Bay, some 800 nautical miles away. Hornblower hopes that McCullum will live long enough to offer at least some assistance in the salvage of Speedwell.

Atropos runs to Rhodes and then points in toward Marmorice Bay. During the voyage Hornblower has attempted, only somewhat successfully, to intervene in McCullum's and Eisenbeiss' ongoing personal feud. McCullum's wound does not heal and begins to fester, and Eisenbeiss informs Hornblower that McCullum will not live much longer unless drastic action is taken. Eisenbeiss theorizes that the bullet must not have passed through the chest cavity, else McCullum would be dead. Instead, the bullet must have passed through muscle tissue only, lodging at the lower point of McCullum's scapula. Eisenbeiss desires to remove the bullet surgically, noting that McCullum will die without the procedure, while with it, he may have a chance to live. Hornblower discusses the procedure and then agrees to it.

Atropos anchors in the protected waters of Marmorice Bay, as close to the spot of Speedwell's wreck as Turner can remember, and the operation is completed that very day. Eisenbeiss successfully removes the ball and a mass of clothing fragments carried into the wound channel; he is guardedly optimistic. Meanwhile, Hornblower and Turner consult about local political conditions, and Turner explains the general layout of Marmorice Bay. Within a few hours of anchoring, a Turkish boat puts out from the shore, and the local Mudir boards Atropos. Turner translates the conversation between Hornblower and the Mudir. Hornblower attempts to convince the Mudir that he is searching for a French squadron and that a powerful English squadron is just over the horizon. He does this in the belief that it will stall the Turkish inquisitiveness about the ship's appearance in the bay. The Mudir then negotiates prices for watering and for purchasing food and departs. Hornblower then instructs the crew on how to build a sweep to search for the wrecked ship on the bottom. As McCullum's possible recovery is still some days off, Hornblower decides to pursue salvage insofar as he is able. He



spends a great deal of time discussing the wreck with Turner, who had been present at the loss. Turner believes the wreck will be entirely intact, and that the ship will be keel up on the firm, sandy bottom. As the bay has no scouring current or extreme tides, Turner also believes the wreck will be nearby to where it sank in more-or-less solid condition.

Chapters 10, 11, and 12 Analysis

Hornblower's irritation at Eisenbeiss' undiplomatic bearing causes him to leave the man aboard ship while he and Prince visit the governor of Malta. Eisenbeiss' fuming angers the irritable McCullum, and the men exchange words, which escalate to combat. Against all odds, McCullum's shot misses while Eisenbeiss' shot strikes home. The shot appears to pierce McCullum's chest cavity, but in fact the ball travels a circular course through McCullum's body and slides under his massive muscles until it comes to rest beneath his scapula. The wound itself is not life-threatening, but the ball has carried particles of clothing and other debris into the wound channel. As the days go by, McCullum's wound begins to fester with infection and he becomes feverish. His chance of survival is virtually zero, which prompts Eisenbeiss to take the rather radical step of surgical removal. The procedure is successful, but leaves McCullum weakened and prostrate. Hornblower frets the entire time, noting that McCullum's skills are nearly singular. The narrative devotes an unusually great amount of space to the interesting description of the surgical procedure and its various complications.

In chapter 11, it is March, 1807, and *Atropos* reaches Marmorice Bay. Immediately before entering the protected waterway the narrator engages in a concise but splendid and compelling recounting of the naval history of the Aegean Sea; it is among the best writing in the novel. Turner confers with Hornblower and briefly explains the complicated political paradigm existing in the region, although interesting, this situation never impacts the plot. Turner also notes the general layout of Marmorice Bay, and Hornblower realizes that his available charts are old and inaccurate and nearly useless. Turner notes there are two passages into the bay and states that the east passage is unquestionably superior. His mention (p. 198) of the difficult west passage, sporting the large Kaia Rock in the middle of the waterway, subtly but heavily foreshadows *Atropos*' eventual tricky escape via the west passage. Marmorice Bay remains the narrative setting through Chapter 18. *Atropos* enters via the east passage. Much of the subsequent action depends upon a good mental map of Marmorice Bay—reference to a good atlas with suitable local definition will help the reader to understand subsequent events.

By this point in the voyage, Eisenbeiss has largely reconciled to McCullum and treats him as a difficult patient rather than an antagonist. Eisenbeiss is clearly a competent surgeon but even at this stage of his relationship with Hornblower, Eisenbeiss retains a self-inflated pomp that is irritable. McCullum's operation is described in considerable detail and is fascinating. Turner's explanation of the wreck and his estimates all prove entirely reliable. Chapter 13 also introduces the local Mudir, or political leader, who engages Hornblower in what appears to be a perfunctory information exchange.



Hornblower bluffs the Mudir, explaining the Atropos' mission is a routine picket search for French ships. But he probably over-explains—in any event the Mudir acts largely uninterested. Hornblower makes one of his rare mistakes in judgment, believing the Mudir to be motivated by personal avarice and devoid of political ambition—though Turner's involved translation obfuscates much of the Mudir's commentary.



Chapters 13, 14, and 15

Chapters 13, 14, and 15 Summary

Turner and some assistants go ashore and make purchases from the local market. There is not much to buy, and the Mudir suggests that *Atropos* will have to remain for quite some time to fully provision. Hornblower believes this to be good news as it will justify an extended stay. Turner otherwise brings back little information but obtains Hornblower's permission to bribe the Mudir for further assistance in purchasing foodstuffs. Meanwhile, the wreck is located and marked with a buoy, and Hornblower begins to discuss the salvage operation with McCullum. McCullum is deliberately rude and obstructionist, but a patient and self-effacing Hornblower cajoles information in bits and pieces. Hornblower returns to the site of the wreck with Looney and the other Sinhalese divers, and they make initial exploratory trips to establish the exact location and condition of the wreck. The ship is indeed keel-up and intact, and has sunken into the sand so much as to prevent entrance. McCullum determines that demolitions work will have to be utilized—the hull of the ship will have to be cracked by underwater explosives; this will allow the divers to enter the reinforced lazarette, which contains the gold and silver coins.

Over the next days the underwater explosive is constructed. Waterproof fuse-hose is built to house the many yards of fuse to span from the surface to the wreck. Hornblower closely monitors the gunner's work—ironically, the gunner is named Clout. When the explosive device is built, Looney and the other divers place it under the wreck. Hornblower lights the long fuse from the surface, and the boat pulls quickly away from the locale. However, the fuse-hose has apparently leaked and the demolition charge never explodes. McCullum is not concerned, noting that other, more dangerous but more reliable, methods can be used.

Eventually the Mudir comes aboard again for another talk. Hornblower is too distracted with salvage to give much attention to the Mudir, but he does realize that the Mudir wants *Atropos* to stay in the harbor for some time—he suggests pirates may be about the area. Hornblower erroneously concludes that his ship's presence offers some peace of mind to the local residents. Finally, the Mudir offers some free supplies for as long as *Atropos* remains. Hornblower concludes that management of the political situation will not be much necessary and the Mudir goes ashore.

Operating on McCullum's instructions, the crew then constructs a demolition charge with a so-called flying fuse. Basically, the fuse is wrapped around and around in a large coil and then placed inside a water-tight compartment of a barrel sealed with pitch. The charge is transported to the site of the wreck and Hornblower lights the fuse through a hole in the barrel. The hole is then sealed and pitched and the whole apparatus—burning fuse and explosive charge, is dropped to the bottom. Looney and the other divers then nervously maneuver the ticking time bomb into place. They regain the surface and the boat rows away only moments before the flying fuse reaches the



explosive charge and the water's surface erupts in turmoil. Hornblower scans the area and does not detect any flotsam and concludes the explosion was a failure. But Looney makes another dive and returns with a tarnished silver shilling—the charge has opened the boat and exposed the treasure. Later that evening, a condescending McCullum explains to Hornblower the lack of flotsam from the explosion—the timbers have become entirely waterlogged and will never float.

Chapters 13, 14, and 15 Analysis

During these three chapters, two primary narrative events are discussed. As McCullum recovers, Hornblower directs the initial stages of the salvage operation. While McCullum begrudgingly offers advice, Hornblower actually directs the operations. The wreck is located and inspected, and then an unsuccessful demolition attempt is made. A second attempt, using a much riskier method, succeeds and cracks open Speedwell's hull releasing a "cascade of silver" (p. 253); the idea of the silver cascade captivates Hornblower's imagination. Now that the wreck has been located and prepared, salvage operations can be in earnest. The narrative spends a great deal of time discussing the methodologies utilized to burst open the hull of the wreck and the process of deep-water diving. Demolitions theory is much discussed between McCullum and Hornblower, and the execution is presented as a step-by-step process. Note the narrative construction, which prevents McCullum from simply performing the operation—it allows the operation to be explained in an apparently natural way, which aids in the suspension of disbelief. It also allows the protagonist Hornblower to remain the central figure in the action, and a heroic one at that. Although fascinating, the methods used for demolitions do not substantively impact the remainder of the narrative.

The second primary narrative event concerns the visits of the Mudir, or local political leader, and his conversations with Hornblower. Both men rely heavily on Turner as the interpreter of not only language but custom. Turner is a competent translator but obviously lacks Hornblower's insight into the nature of others. Hornblower thus misses several cues that should alert him to the Mudir's ulterior motives. As Hornblower desires some excuse explaining Atropos' continued presence in the bay, he seizes upon the Mudir's invitation to stay as adequate without ever critically questioning why the Mudir wants him to stay. Thus, a distracted Hornblower misses clues which should put him on his guard. Instead, he focuses on the salvage operation and assumes that the Mudir can be taken at face value. As subsequent events will demonstrate, the apparently disinterested Mudir is a far cannier opponent than Hornblower believes. Note how well-written the conversations are between Hornblower and the Mudir. Each man is distinctively presented, and Turner's third opinion is also noted. Though seemingly innocuous, these conversations heavily foreshadow future events.



Chapters 16, 17, and 18

Chapters 16, 17, and 18 Summary

Salvage continues as the weeks go by. The silver had been stored in bags, which rotted through long ago, leaving a cascade of silver pouring out of the ship. Daily diving brings up nearly all the silver. The gold had been stored in three massive chests and further demolition charges are fired to open the hull enough to bring out the first chest. More and extensive salvage is required to finally bring out the second chest, but the third chest has fallen through the entire wreck. McCullum recovers enough to begin taking an active role and determines that the entire wreck must be demolished to reach the final chest of gold. Hornblower spends the passing time drilling the men in seamanship and exercise. He spends a good amount of time congratulating himself on his successes and apparently adroit handling of the Mudir. He estimates that the equivalent of 200,000 pounds sterling has been recovered from the wreck.

And then one morning, he notices that the nearby fortress, so long deserted, is no longer deserted—a flag flies from the long-vacant pole. Scanning about he sees that the island fortress, sitting in the middle of the bay, is also occupied. Atropos is bottled up—any attempt to leave will take her under interlocking fire from the two fortresses. And finally, Hornblower scans the sea and sees in the distance a strange ship standing in for the bay. Its bizarre sail plan makes it immediately apparent that the ship is Turkish. Although obsolete, the ship still carries enough guns to reduce the tiny Atropos to a splintered hulk at a single broadside. Hornblower beats to quarters and clears for action; he also causes a spring to be placed on the anchor so that Atropos can be swung around to point in any direction. The Turkish ship closes and glides by insolently as Atropos is veered around to keep her broadside-on to the new arrival. Almost simultaneously, the Mudir again comes out to Atropos.

The Mudir explains that the situation has changed. Atropos is caught in the bay and brought to bay by the giant Turkish ship Mejidieh. There can be no escape. A quarrel ensues but the Mudir is expressionless to Hornblower's anger. The Mudir states that the treasure must be handed over, and then Hornblower may retain whatever minor amounts he can subsequently recover. An exchange follows, but it is evident the Mudir has known all along the nature of Atropos' mission. Hornblower quickly realizes he has virtually no options, but he tells the Mudir he must consider. The Mudir departs, promising to return in the morning to receive the treasure. Hornblower spends most of the night in an agony of self-despising introspection. He considers several courses of action but realizes he cannot provoke an international incident by openly attacking the Turkish forces. Also, Atropos is hopelessly outclassed by the giant Turkish ship—except in maneuverability and speed, which count for little in the confines of the harbor. As usual, however, Hornblower decides to trust to his luck instead of giving up.

In the first light of dawn the men of Atropos silently assemble and silently cut the anchor and spring cables, sending Atropos adrift. They raise sail quietly and quickly move



outside of the range of the Turkish ship. Soon enough, however, they are discovered and Mejidieh gives chase. Turner assumes Hornblower means to run the gauntlet of the east channel, accepting the inevitable interlocking fire of the two fortresses. Hornblower has no such intention. He points Atropos to the treacherous west passage and further astounds Turner by announcing his intention to navigate between Kaia Rock and Sari Point rather than between Kaia Rock and Passage Island. Turner views the decision as nearly suicidal. With men on the chains and all hands at their stations, Atropos begins the impossibly intricate maneuver. Atropos wears from the west passage into the confined straight, and then tacks toward the shore. She sails nearly into the breakers before tacking again, is nearly on Kaia rock before tacking again, and is nearly aground on Sari Point before tacking a final time. Ineffective cannon fire from Passage Island passes close by as Atropos staggers, nearly stalled. But with a final tack onto a long run away from Marmorice Bay, Atropos makes good her improbable and audacious escape. The slow clumsy Mejidieh, realizing she has been entirely outwitted, makes no attempt to follow.

Chapters 16, 17, and 18 Analysis

These chapters conclude the salvage operations, which have consumed the narrative since Chapter 9—roughly half the novel. Several numeric estimates are given about the volume of gold and silver on Speedwell and they are seemingly contradictory. In general, though, the ship is presumed to have carried a value equivalent to 250,000 pounds sterling, and Hornblower discharges the equivalent of 200,000 pounds sterling at the mission's conclusion, leaving gold in the equivalent of 50,000 pounds sterling still underneath the wreck. This would indicate that 3/5 of the treasure value was in gold, and that the contents of each of the three massive gold chests were valued at about 50,000 pounds sterling. This conflicts somewhat with Hornblower's estimate that he abandons about 70,000 pounds in his escape. At any rate, the mission successfully recovers, as Hornblower muses, a king's ransom and fails to recover a prince's ransom.

As Hornblower concludes the initial steps of the salvage, McCullum recovers his health and begins to take a more-active part in the operations. This is fortunate, because at roughly the rate he recovers the operations becomes more technical in nature. The final problem comes about when the demolition used to open the hull of the ship allow the final chest of gold to drop through the wreck's top—remember the vessel is upside-down—to the sandy bottom, and hence it is buried by the wreck. McCullum prepares to use massive charges to demolish the entire ship, but also warns Hornblower that the final chest may never be recovered. All this is speculative, though, as operations are halted by the advent of the Turkish forces. Note the heavy foreshadowing provided at the end of Chapter 16; Hornblower smugly imagines he has deftly manipulated the Mudir, while, in fact, the situation is somewhat the opposite. Chapter 17 deals with the Turkish response to the British presence. As usual, Hornblower believes he should somehow have avoided any political entanglement at all and his night of self-criticism is entirely typical of the man.



Chapter 18 details the exciting and improbable escape from Marmorice Bay. A full understanding of the dangerous situation requires a firm grasp of the bay's geography. The deep-set anchorage offers two possible means of egress—an east passage and a west passage, running along the sides of the centrally located Passage Island. The east passage is much-preferred, as the west passage is shallow, twisty and dangerous; in fact, any ship larger than Atropos could not make the west passage in any condition. Two fortresses guard the east passage with interlocking fire. Reference to a nautical chart or detailed map will help materially in visualizing the exact layout. In short, Hornblower escapes through the west passage.

But that is not all. The west passage itself features a large prominence, Kaia Rock, in the middle of the waterway. Prudence would dictate passing to the east of Kaia Rock, yet that would bring Atropos under the guns of the fortress located on Passage Island. Hornblower thus takes the passage west of Kaia Rock, which brings Atropos up against Sari Point. A series of six, hair-raising turns are required in little more than two nautical miles—four of them in the middle one-half nautical mile, and these beating to windward—to escape the bay via this route. At every turn, the ship loses headway and threatens to fall into irons. As if by pure force of will, however, she keeps her way and creeps through the narrow route. Atropos passes nearly through breakers and brushes nearly against cliffs to affect the maneuver, and only a captain with the steely nerve of Hornblower would contemplate such a venture. Atropos is so much faster and more maneuverable than the Turkish ship so that no pursuit is contemplated—Atropos escapes through superior seamanship. This marks a major turning point in the narrative, as the final chapters deal with unrelated events.



Chapters 19, 20, and 21

Chapters 19, 20, and 21 Summary

Atropos travels to Gibraltar without incident and discharges the treasure for later transport to England. Atropos then sails east in search of Collingwood's Mediterranean fleet. To make the most of the transit, Hornblower sails by the Spanish coast and reconnoiters harbors. At Cartagena, Atropos sees numerous ships, including a large Spanish 44-gun frigate, the *Castilla*. Much to Hornblower's surprise, *Castilla* quickly puts to sea and gives chase. Atropos is no match for the much-larger Spanish ship, which bears twice as many guns and throws three times the weight of metal, and Hornblower runs. But *Castilla* improbably pursues into the open ocean. Hornblower is largely unconcerned, knowing that Atropos can easily outrun the Spanish ship. Hornblower is hoping to encounter a British fleet, so he slows Atropos to bait *Castilla* onwards. About 150 nautical miles from Cartagena, the weather thickens and both ships shorten sail. During one of these evolutions, Prince goes aloft and becomes careless and loses his balance. While a horrified Hornblower watches, Prince plunges into the sea and vanishes. In an instant, he heaves to and causes a boat to be launched. As *Castilla* closes, Hornblower sends up a flurry of signals to an imaginary English squadron and points Atropos at *Castilla*. The Spanish captain falls for the trick and briefly hauls his wind. Prince is fortunately recovered and brought on board. Hornblower has the bosun turn Prince over a cannon and apply a few strokes of the cane—much to Eisenbeiss' dismay.

Hornblower continues the ruse and actually pursues *Castilla* as the Spanish ship, presuming it is being chased by an English squadron, flees. The cat-and-mouse game continues for hours as Jones becomes confused about who is hunting whom, and Hornblower hopes to encounter an English squadron. Finally an English sail is indeed sighted; she proves to be HMS *Nightingale*, a tiny frigate bearing only 9-pounder guns. Hornblower assumes that the two English ships will combine and jockey for position and advantage before engaging the huge Spanish frigate, but in this he is wrong. In a tactical blunder, *Nightingale* closes directly and lays alongside *Castilla* before Atropos can render direct assistance. Atropos closes as rapidly as possible, exchanges a single devastating broadside at pistol shot range and then boards the Spanish ship. Hornblower leads the attack, which is composed of the entire crew of Atropos. The combined crews of *Nightingale* and Atropos carry the enemy, clear the decks, and take control—but all three ships are heavily damaged. The action takes place off the northern coast of Africa, due south of Mallorca. The easiest friendly port to make is Palermo, on Sicily, and the ships proceed there. Hornblower relies upon his own wits to effect repairs, and Atropos is quickly readied for sea, as well as given a fresh coat of paint and made eminently beautiful—unfortunately for Hornblower.

The King of Sicily has recently been driven from the Italian mainland by Napoleon. In the pell-mell retreat to Sicily, the entire Sicilian Navy was captured, abandoned or destroyed. The island King desires at least one ship in his navy, and the stunning



Atropos captures his eye. As a diplomatic gesture of international goodwill between allies, the English politician in charge at the station agrees to sell Atropos to the King of Sicily. The King offers Hornblower a transfer and commission in the Sicilian Navy, but Hornblower will hear none of it. Instead he recommends Jones—who accepts—and is thus stripped of his command. Twenty crew also transfer but the remainder is distributed among Collingwood's fleet. Hornblower then takes passage back to England aboard the message packet Aquila. Arriving in England alongside the news of his exploits, Hornblower walks the streets in complete anonymity. He walks the silent streets and feels the awkward transition from wartime to home as he enters the oddly silent door of his tenement. He finds a distraught Maria awaiting the apothecary. She sadly escorts him into the bedroom where the tiny figure of his infant son Horatio lies in bed, near death with smallpox. Crushed, Hornblower touches his son's brow and resolves to comfort Maria and pursue his duty as a King's officer.

Chapters 19, 20, and 21 Analysis

The final three chapters present a mix of events that are episodic. After the harrowing escape from the Turkish forces, Atropos sails the roughly 1,800 miles from Marmorice bay to Gibraltar without incident—the passage is described in a single line of text. There she discharges the treasure, also without incident. The statement that the value of 200,000 pounds sterling is discharged varies somewhat from earlier estimates of the amount of coin recovered and may be a well-rounded estimate. In any event, the mission is concluded with a result entirely satisfactory to all concerned. Hornblower muses that the amount recovered would be sufficient to build, supply and crew Atropos for over a year. The ship then leaves Gibraltar to rejoin Collingwood in the Tyrrhenian Sea. Along the way, Hornblower decides to travel the southern coast of Spain and look into the various ports and harbors to gather intelligence, which may prove useful to Collingwood.

At Cartagena, Atropos spies a large amount of shipping and is then pursued by a huge Spanish frigate, Castilla. Such a pursuit would be uncommon, but not impossible. Castilla presumably sees the diminutive Atropos as an easy capture and is uncharacteristically unworried about solo travel through the Mediterranean. She pursues Atropos over one hundred miles. Hornblower is not particularly worried, as Atropos should be able to easily out sail Castilla in any condition. He therefore allows a close pursuit to draw Castilla on, hoping to encounter a British squadron. The Prince's skylarking fall is humorously presented—but the young man is lucky to survive. His career in the narrative thus concludes on a down note. Hornblower's quick thinking allows various signals to be flown to an imaginary British fleet. The Spanish captain watches Atropos haul her wind, send off many signals and then turn around—and draws the only sensible conclusion. He therefore turns tail and runs.

Fortunately for Hornblower, a British ship eventually is sighted and cuts off Castilla's escape. HMS Nightingale is lightly armed—roughly the equivalent of Atropos. Either ship alone poses no challenge for Castilla, but combined they might take her. Hornblower assumes that Nightingale's captain, Ford, will seek tactical advantage



through superior maneuverability. But Ford, senior to Hornblower, has no such imagination. Castilla and Nightingale sail directly toward each other, heave to yardarm-to-yardarm, and exchange broadsides and boarders. Nightingale is seriously outclassed and takes severe punishment. A stunned Hornblower does all he can to immediately join the fray, finally putting Atropos alongside Castilla and exchanging a single broadside before leading virtually every man aboard Atropos over to board Castilla. The Spanish ship is carried by boarding, and Hornblower's personal leadership proves invaluable. Eisenbeiss' presence in the boarding party is inappropriate—as ship's surgeon, he should have remained aboard Atropos to care for the injured. Note that in a previously-written, but chronologically subsequent, volume in the series of novels, Hornblower was said to be a lieutenant at the time of the capture of Castilla. After the fight, the ships proceed to Palermo to refit.

At Palermo, Hornblower loses his command to fulfill a political nicety. The King of Sicily's situation is briefly discussed and is a lightly-fictionalized representation of an enormously complicated historical event. In brief, the island King has no navy and desires at least one ship. The local British lord decides to yield one ship as a show of international amity, and Hornblower—the junior captain in the smallest ship—is selected for the singular event. Hornblower is offered a Sicilian commission but of course declines it. Jones, realizing it as his only likely chance for promotion, accepts command of Atropos in the Sicilian Navy. Hornblower then returns home. This transfer of Atropos is a major turning point in the plot and also a remarkable narrative twist. Note also the narrative mention of the frigate Lydia, then preparing in England—such teaser knowledge held out to Hornblower is interesting in that Lydia becomes his next command. Hornblower then takes passage to England and makes an uneventful trip. He walks to his tenement and finds a distraught Maria and Mrs. Mason, and to his horror discovers his infant son and newborn daughter are sick with smallpox. The episodic narrative thus ends on a note of personal tragedy for the protagonist, and in this respect is a literary catastrophe.



Characters

Captain Horatio Hornblower

Horatio Hornblower is the protagonist and primary character in the novel and is present in every scene. He is above average in height and perhaps a little below average in weight, being described by the narrator as skinny. Nevertheless, he is physically strong and has an excellent constitution. He is prone to seasickness, a weakness of some irony given that he spends his life upon the sea. Hornblower, the son of a doctor, joined the Royal Navy at the fairly-advanced age of seventeen, entering as a midshipman. He thereafter climbed through the ranks rapidly, as a lieutenant, commander and captain. Devoid of patronage or political connections, Hornblower's promotions are all due to superior performance. He is without question a heroic figure. His navigational skills and seamanship are superior, as conclusively demonstrated by the escape from Marmorice Bay, and his tactical judgment is almost infallible. He possesses great strategic vision and is capable of making instantaneous decisions and plans that are nearly always essentially correct. Hornblower's career has seen him involved in almost every major nautical development during his lifetime, though his involvement is often tangential.

Hornblower married Maria Mason at a fairly young age. Hornblower has been married long enough "...to realize the advantages of allowing his wife to say what she liked as long as he could continue to do as he liked" (p. 11). Maria gives birth to two children—Horatio, prior to the novel's opening and Maria during the novel—though both die of smallpox as infants. Hornblower's relationship to Maria is not a source of great pleasure to him, though he dotes upon his son. Although Maria loves him dearly, he finds her common and rather irritating. The novel presents Hornblower as an accomplished captain of some renown. He is regarded as a man of exceptional talent, who can carry out a wide variety of tasks without supervision. If Hornblower has a primary weakness, it is doubtlessly his endless self-criticism. Although this works in his favor often by honing his plans to perfection, it also causes him a great deal of pain in life and he spends many months in self-imposed isolation, doubting his courage, intelligence and even worth.

Maria Hornblower

Maria Ellen Hornblower is the daughter of a landlady who owns a tenement where Hornblower lived during the Peace of Amiens. Maria's mother is dour and penurious, but Maria is expansive of spirit, optimistic and generous. Maria and Hornblower have been married for about two-and-a-half years at the opening of the novel. Maria is described as rather plain and perhaps a bit homely, though willowy and thin—when not pregnant. Hornblower finds her overly prone to weeping and emotionally clinging. Obviously devoted to Hornblower, she dotes upon his needs. In return, Hornblower is formal and distant but also devoted and proper respecting her support. Maria gave birth to their first child while Hornblower was away on blockade duty; she gives birth to their second child



while Hornblower is aboard *Atropos*. Maria is a fairly minor character in the novel but is notable as Hornblower thinks of her often during his long voyages. In general, she is a highly-sympathetic character and Hornblower's failure to love her and often shabby treatment of her is one of his few glaring character flaws.

Horatio and Maria

Horatio is Hornblower's and Maria's first-born son and is still an infant during the time of the novel. He is a happy child, who greatly enjoys Hornblower's attentions. Horatio makes the initial voyage by canal boat and thereafter lives with his sister, Maria, as Hornblower departs on his naval adventures. Maria Hornblower is pregnant with her second child—the daughter Maria—when Hornblower departs in *Atropos*. Horatio and his younger sister, Maria, contract smallpox at the end of the novel and subsequently die. Horatio is little described and is a minor character, notable primarily for indicating how much Hornblower enjoys family life with his child; Maria hardly appears in the narrative. Hornblower often thinks of Horatio and, in a more vague way, Maria while away on his nautical voyages.

Tom Jenkins and Charlie

Tom and Charlie operate the towed canal boat upon which Hornblower takes passage in the early chapters of the novel. Charlie drives the horses and is overly fond of gin; during Hornblower's journey, Charlie drinks himself into a stupor and then passes out, falling off his horse. Tom then drives the horse team, but this leaves the tiller unattended. Hornblower, in order to hasten the journey and also to satisfy his curiosity, volunteers to man the tiller and steers the canal boat throughout the first portion of the novel. Tom is an old sailor, once main topman in *Superb*, who lost a hand and was discharged. He either owns the canal boat or is invested in its operation as he is very concerned about being late. Both men greet Hornblower with a good deal of hazing, but by journey's end, Tom is grateful of Hornblower's voluntary service. Tom has a filthy mouth and often swears oaths that shock even Hornblower after years at sea. Even so, he is intelligent and exceptionally capable within his sphere of duty. Minor but memorable characters, the two men do not appear outside of the initial chapters of the novel.

Lieutenant John Jones the Ninth

Jones is 1st lieutenant of *Atropos* and serves fairly competently but without inspiration; he is first introduced in Chapter 3. He is described as a lantern-jawed man with a close-shaven but heavy beard. Jones demonstrates a familiarity which Hornblower often finds off-putting, but in general he is a friendly man who knows when to leave Hornblower alone. Jones sees to some, but not enough, of *Atropos*' fitting out before Hornblower joins the ship, and he has a long familiarity with most of the crew. As John Jones is a common name (there are twelve Lieutenant John Joneses at the time of the novel),



Jones is known to the Admiralty as John Jones the Ninth. During the capture of the French privateer off the Downs Jones performs with bravery and competence, though throughout the remainder of the novel, he rarely takes the initiative and is often left stammering in response to Hornblower's various orders. While Jones is a competent lieutenant, he will likely not make a capable captain due to his utter lack of imagination and average intellect. Although present in many scenes in the novel, Jones' slow responses operate as something of a foil to Hornblower's genius.

When Atropos is sold to the King of Sicily, command and a commission in the Sicilian Navy are offered to Hornblower but of course he declines. When asked for a recommendation, Hornblower puts forward Jones as suitable, though he nearly damns him with faint praise: "'Well, my lord [...] he is a worthy enough man. The fact that he is John Jones the Ninth in the lieutenants' list may have held him back from promotion'" (p. 335). Realizing a commission in the Sicilian Navy is probably his only chance for command, Jones accepts the transfer and, with twenty men, carries Atropos from the Royal Navy into the Sicilian Navy as the only ship of that navy. Hornblower notes that Jones appears very well in the flashy, gaudy and impressive Sicilian captain's uniform.

Henry Pallender, Esquire

Pallender is the Blue Mantle Pursuivant at Arms of the College of Heralds. He is in charge of making the proper social and cultural decisions regarding the funeral procession for Lord Nelson. Pallender works closely with Hornblower over a several-day period to arrange the functions of the river procession of Nelson's coffin. Pallender displays encyclopedic knowledge of all things proper but is notably lacking in a sense of humor. Pallender's natural reserve allows him to work well with the typically aloof Hornblower. Pallender is an aged man with a bald head trailing a fringe of long, white hair. He has pale blue, rheumy eyes and a thin and pointed nose that is usually dripping. A minor character, Pallender frequently appears during Chapters 3 and 4 but thereafter vanishes from the novel.

Admiral Sir John Jervis, Lord St. Vincent

St. Vincent, or "Jervie," as the men informally call him, is serving a second term as the First Lord of the Admiralty during the time of the novel. He is lightly fictionalized representation of the historic person of the same name. During the historic period which is the setting of the novel, St. Vincent was a national hero of wide renown. St. Vincent occurs in several of the volumes of the series. He is usually dressed in finery and described as an old, heavy man suffering from gout. Hornblower often watches St. Vincent's swollen ankles as the man hobbles about. St. Vincent views Hornblower as a promising protégé and takes special care to introduce him to important political figures, including the King of England. Hornblower doubtlessly owes much of his professional advancement to St. Vincent. After Atropos sails from England, St. Vincent does not again appear in the narrative.



His Serene Highness, Ernst the Prince of Seitz-Bunau (

Prince, as he is called throughout most of the novel, is the great-nephew of the King of England. He is also the hereditary heir apparent to the crown of the principality of Seitz-Bunau but has been forced to flee Napoleon's conquest of Europe. He fled to England prior to Napoleon's victory at Austerlitz. Prince is a collected and intelligent youth with a handsome face and fair hair worn in ringlets. He has blue eyes and a slightly upturned nose. At the beginning of the novel he speaks no English and has no skills of which to speak. He desires to enter the Royal Navy, however, and is assigned to Atropos and rated midshipman. Hornblower assigns him to the care of Midshipman Horrocks and the two young men become fast friends. As well, Prince gets along famously with Smiley and the other members of the crew. Prince learns English and develops into a capable midshipman with great rapidity. During one tense moment, when Atropos is being chased by the larger Castilla, Prince becomes careless and falls from the rigging into the sea. Rescued against all odds, Prince creates real danger for the entire ship due to his antics, and Hornblower takes the unlikely step of having the young royalty turned over a cannon and caned. When Atropos is sold to the King of Sicily, Collingwood has Prince transferred to his flagship as a midshipman. Prince is a fairly minor but very memorable character and his presence demonstrates Hornblower's adaptive nature to various difficult situations.

His Excellency the Baron von Eisenbeiss, High Chamberlain an

Eisenbeiss, originally the court surgeon of Seitz-Bunau, has assumed the role of High Chamberlain to His Serene Highness following their ouster from continental Europe by Napoleon's wars. Eisenbeiss speaks English fluently and is fiercely jealous of his self-appointed position. Eisenbeiss is a burly man with a fair amount of bluster and self-importance about him. He is often described as tall and massive and has an apparently equal amount of fat and muscle. Eisenbeiss eventually discloses, under close questioning, that he was court physician at the time of Napoleon's overrun of Seitz-Bunau. In the subsequent flight of the Prince, Eisenbeiss ended up as the only professional retainer present; whereupon, the Prince signed his patent of nobility and appointed Eisenbeiss as High Chamberlain—upon Eisenbeiss' recommendation. Though appropriate enough, given the circumstances, Hornblower finds the outcome suspicious, as does McCullum.

Eisenbeiss spends the early portions of the novel trying unsuccessfully to browbeat Hornblower into allowing various concessions. He eventually learns that discipline in the Royal Navy will apply to all aboard and largely gives up seeking special treatment, though he never gives up seeking special treatment for the Prince. While preparing for a court dinner ashore Hornblower becomes irritated by Eisenbeiss' presumptive attitudes and leaves the man aboard, while the Prince accompanies him to dinner without an



interpreter. During the evening Eisenbeiss quarrels with McCullum and they fight a duel. McCullum misses but Eisenbeiss does not, shooting McCullum through the chest. This obviously complicates Hornblower's life and further distances the doctor from the captain's affection. But Eisenbeiss proves a capable surgeon and physician and brings McCullum back to full health by the time the salvage operations become critical. During the boarding action of Castilla, Eisenbeiss abandons his role as surgeon and boards the Spanish vessel, cutlass in hand. For this, he is reprimanded by Hornblower, who rightly sends him back to his duties aboard Atropos. Through the narrative Eisenbeiss functions often in a comic-relief role, though a deeper examination reveals a dedicated and humble servant of his prince. Full of himself and always blustering about, he is probably the most-unique minor character presented in the novel, and is very memorable.

William McCullum and the Sinhalese Divers

McCullum joins Atropos during Chapter 9 and thereafter plays a significant role in the narrative. He is the wreck-master and salvage director of the Coromandel Coast; in other words, a salvage expert. McCullum has underwater demolitions and salvage experience, which allows Atropos to recover a vast amount of gold and silver from a wrecked ship. McCullum is a huge man, with enormous muscles and a fierce demeanor. He is brusque, proud and generally difficult to work with. He looks down upon nearly everyone and finds most people beneath his notice. McCullum insults Eisenbeiss and the two men fight a duel in which McCullum is shot in the chest. The bullet travels around to McCullum's back without doing mortal damage. Eisenbeiss, acting as ship's surgeon, removes the bullet and McCullum slowly recovers.

McCullum employs three Sinhalese divers to descend to the wreck. The dive leader is named Looney. Little information is offered about the men, other than they are pitifully skinny, able to dive to sixteen and one half fathoms, and hold their breath for over three minutes. They have severe diet restrictions and in general keep apart from the men in Atropos. They do not speak English and view McCullum as equal parts expert and tyrant. McCullum and the divers are all experts at their respective tasks, however. McCullum is obviously a master of his trade, a fact which Hornblower realizes. Even so, McCullum's constant antagonism of everyone and obnoxious attitude about everything is very trying on Hornblower. McCullum recovers his health just in time to direct the final, most-technical, stages of salvage.

George Turner

Atropos leaves England with two master's mates but without a master. George Turner joins the ship at Malta and is warranted her master. He is described as a wizened and aging man but possessed of strength and excellent health. Turner is familiar with the language and custom of Turkey and acts as Hornblower's translator on several occasions. Turner's presumptive attitude toward Hornblower borders on paternalistic and always irritates and infrequently provokes Hornblower, which is all very enjoyable to



the reader. Turner's addition to the crew is viewed by Hornblower as a somewhat needless imposition, but in this Hornblower is wrong. Turner proves entirely reliable and always capable. He performs all his duties with exact attention and, perhaps more than any character except Hornblower, contributes materially to the success of the salvage operation. The only occasion on which Turner balks is during Hornblower's tricky navigation of the west passage out of Marmorice Bay; as the master, he is charged with the ship's safety regarding navigational dangers and is therefore appropriately concerned about the maneuver.



Objects/Places

Queen Charlotte

Queen Charlotte is a canal boat upon which Hornblower takes passage to London. She runs through a series of locked canals and a two-mile tunnel cut through the Cotwolds. Queen Charlotte is seventy feet in length and five in beam, and draws less than one foot. She travels around nine miles per hour and is crewed by a single man at the tiller. As a towed craft, she is harnessed to a team of horses which provide propulsion both with and against any current. Queen Charlotte and her operation are discussed in the first two chapters of the novel.

The Captain's List

Individuals in the Royal Navy, once appointed to the rank of post captain, were placed upon the Captain's List. The list indicated the relative ranks of seniority of surviving captains and, traditionally, was not modified for political or military reasons. Thus, one listed, a captain would inexorably march up the list until his death. Admirals were appointed from the top of the list, and captains higher on the list received preferential assignments. One month before the novel's opening, Hornblower was captain 601 on a list of 602. Since that time, twenty captains has been promoted admiral, two captains had been killed in action, two others had died, and forty-two lieutenants had been promoted—moving Hornblower to position 577 of 619. Near the end of the novel Hornblower reflects that he has continued up the ranks in the list and that there are now about fifty captains lower in seniority. Hornblower estimates the Royal Navy's post captain ship posts at about 470, meaning many captains went without posting. Hornblower's therefore sees his posting to Atropos as exceptionally fortunate.

HMS Atropos

HMS Atropos is a single deck, twenty-two gun warship. She bears four long nine-pounders—two forward and two aft—and eighteen twelve-pounder carronades as the main armament. A sixth-rate ship, she is among the smallest ships in the Royal Navy suitable for command by a post captain. Her normal complement would be about 150 men and she would displace in the neighborhood of 500 tons. During the time of the novel, fewer than two dozen such vessels were in commission in the Royal Navy. Atropos is named for one of the Greek goddess of fate—she was the mythological mechanism of death, and ended each mortal life by cutting their metaphysical thread with her abhorred shears. Hence, Atropos' figurehead depicts a woman wielding a large pair of gilded shears. After carrying Hornblower safely through the Mediterranean for many months, Atropos is sold to the King of Sicily, against Hornblower's judgment, as a gesture of international goodwill.



Atropos's named crew includes: Hornblower, Captain; John Jones, 1st lieutenant; Horrocks, Smiley, and Prince—midshipmen; Eisenbeiss, surgeon; McCullum, temporarily salvage master; Looney and two other Sinhalese-temporary salvage divers; Carslake, purser; Owen and Still, warrant officers of unspecified role; Clout, gunner; Leadbitter, coxswain; Silver, master's mate; and Turner, master.

Ceremonial Barges

Nelson's Thames River funeral procession takes place aboard a series of clumsy ceremonial barges. The barges handle like a cargo lighter and feature open bows with twelve oars. The middle and stern of the barges are covered with a solid canopy that covers seating for dignitaries or, on one barge, a platform to carry the massive coffin.

Hornblower's Watch and Chain

Hornblower has a rather unexceptional pocket watch on a chain that he uses to mark time during Nelson's funeral procession. In order to constantly see the time, Hornblower hands the watch from Nelson's coffin and then forgets it. It is subsequently taken into Nelson's private viewing area and Hornblower fears his watch lost for good. Lieutenant Bracegirdle humorously suggests the watch will be interred with the great man—but by special dispensation of Lord St. Vincent, Hornblower is allowed to retrieve his watch and chain.

Amelia Jane and Vengeance

Amelia Jane is a London brig anchored at the Downs near Atropos during a thick fog. Amelia Jane is taken by surprise and captured by a French prize crew from Vengeance, a disguised trawler acting as a privateer. Hornblower, acting on the slimmest of clues, boards Amelia Jane with a small group of men and restores command to her proper captain. He then sends Jones and the men of Atropos to board and capture Vengeance. The two ships do not occur in the narrative outside of Chapter 8.

Marmorice Bay

Marmorice Bay is deep-set anchorage on the southwest coast of Turkey. The bay runs in a generally north-south direction, and the town of Marmorice lies at the northernmost extremity. The bay joins the Aegean Sea by two waterways running on either side of Passage Island. The east passage is much preferable and used by all large ships. The west passage is shallow, twisting, and encumbered by the large Kaia Rock. Two fortresses overlook the bay. Marmorice Bay is a major setting during the latter portion of the narrative and is the site of Atropos' salvage operations.



The Wreck of HMS Speedwell

Speedwell was an aged transport ship used to ferry armament and pay chests. During an anchorage in Marmorice Bay she was heeled over to clear weed from her hull which had been insufficiently coppered. A freak wind caught the careened ship and rolled it over, the sea pouring through her open gun ports swamped and sank the boat on the western side of Marmorice Bay—taking 250,000 pounds sterling to the bottom. Speedwell sunk nearly intake and landed keel up. The salvage of Speedwell consumes the latter portions of the narrative. Except as a valuable wreck, the ship is unimportant to the plot.

Demolition Charges and the Flying Fuse

As Speedwell is sunk upside-down, her treasure room is inaccessible by normal methods. McCullum, the salvage master, instructs Hornblower in the construction of a demolition charge with a so-called flying fuse. The charge is used to crack open Speedwell's hull and thus expose her treasure. The flying fuse is a normal fuse coiled into a barrel which is then sealed watertight except for a small hole. The fuse is lit through the hole and the barrel is fully sealed, before being positioned by divers. The coiled fuse gives a certain length of time before detonation. The charge is thus a crude ticking time bomb.

Mejidieh

Mejidieh is a Turkish ship of ancient construction. Her mizzen topsail is lateen rigged and she is very beam, short at the water, and high. A two-decker, she carries an impressive number of large cannon—though the number is not specified. Mejidieh appears in Marmorice Bay after Hornblower has completed the bulk of the salvage operation, and threatens to capture Atropos if Hornblower does not hand over all the salvaged gold and silver. Hornblower escapes the larger ship by executing a tricky and dangerous passage out of the bay.

Castilla

Castilla is a Spanish frigate, or ship of war—a rare survivor of Trafalgar. She carries forty-four guns and throws three times the weight of metal as Atropos in a broadside. Castilla is berthed at Cartagena when Atropos passes by and pursues the English ship for a few hundred nautical miles until eventually engaging her in combat, aided by HMS Nightingale. The chase and combat with Castilla consume the final three chapters of the novel. Castilla bears forty-four 18-pounder long guns, making her the equivalent of the largest British fifth-rate.



Themes

Military Adventure on the Sea

The novel's overarching setting is the Mediterranean Sea during a time of war; Napoleon Bonaparte's military adventures threaten the British Empire, and only a strong naval response keeps the combined French and Spanish aggression at bay and ensures the survival of the empire. As a post captain of the Royal Navy, Hornblower's sworn and obvious duty is to engage the enemy at every opportunity. He carries out this duty with HMS Atropos.

The novel relates a series of sea voyages from December, 1805, to January, 1808; although, the voyages are fictional they contain references to many historical elements, and the maritime combats described are partially derived from several historical accounts. The ships mentioned represent fictionalized ships of historically-appropriate type, though the crews are entirely fictional. The aptly-named Atropos is exactly the type of smaller ship of war used to perform the duties Hornblower executes. 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.

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 and amphibious 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 gone by.

Salvage

The novel is presented as a series of episodes that string together to form a period of service in the Royal Navy. Much of the action in the various episodes is atomic to the individual episode only and does not impact the remainder of the narrative. This is also the case with the prolonged salvage operation discussed during Chapters 11 through 18. By any standard, however, the salvage operation is the most significant episode presented in the novel. In fact, Atropos' basic deployment from Chapter 6 onwards points toward the salvage of Speedwell. Atropos is equipped and staffed for the job, and it is obvious that the mission has been contemplated since at least late 1804, as McCullum has been travelling for a stated eighteen months prior to joining Atropos. At the time, McCullum had started his voyage, Hornblower had been commanding HMS Hotspur and was a lieutenant.

The novel's only well-developed setting is Marmorice Bay, the site of the salvage. The locale is well developed only because a close understanding of the geography and politics is required by the salvage operation and subsequent flight. The bay is described



extensively in physical terms. Turner notes the prevailing current and tidal conditions and discusses the local geography at some length on several occasions. Turner discusses the local and regional political situation, and even some of the local customs are presented. The bay itself is well-described, and the two methods of egress are especially developed. Not only this, but the various equipment used for underwater demolitions is discussed, and the processes for locating the wreck, placing the charges and recovering the treasure are all discussed at length in the text. Atropos remains on station for weeks and weeks while the salvage proceeds and finally only leaves due to Turkish threats. Thus, the salvage operation forms a major segment and theme in the novel.

Personal Character Development

Hornblower, the protagonist and principle character, undergoes a great deal of character development in the novel. He begins the novel in the company of his wife and child and views Maria as rather cloying and irritating. Throughout the novel, he thinks often of her, however, and thinks with fondness of his young son and newborn daughter. Returning home at the conclusion of the novel, he is dismayed to discover his two children sick with smallpox. He makes the resolution at the end of the novel to remain by Maria's side and offer what comfort he can.

This familial development, however, is only one thread of Hornblower's character. On several occasions in the novel he puts aside his personal feelings or pride to accomplish his mission. First, he offers to serve as crew during the canal boat transit. Then, he engages in the atypical business of planning a funeral procession without complaining. He humbly petitions the various port authorities, using a mix of obsequious pleading and praise, to provision his ship. Later, he puts up with McCullum's rude and provocative demeanor to extract specialized knowledge from the man. Finally, he humbly submits—though he has no choice—to the process of being stripped of command. All this is done with an eye toward duty. Hornblower's willingness to put his personal pride and interests aside in favor of the general weal becomes more apparent as the novel progresses.

The theme of personal character development is echoed in several minor characters. Most notably, Mr. Midshipman Prince joins the crew without qualification or experience. Vaguely expecting special treatment, he is instead subjected to typical usage and quickly develops into a capable officer and seaman. Still a boy, however, his skylarking imperils Atropos, and he receives his subsequent punishment with equanimity. In short, like Hornblower, Prince's character development runs throughout the novel. Lieutenant Jones also develops his personal character under the sage tutelage of Hornblower. At first, barely competent as a lieutenant, by the end of the novel he receives command of Atropos, even though the thought horrifies Hornblower. Other minor characters also develop during the narrative as, for example, on several occasions when Hornblower mentally notes improved or superior performance. Indeed, the theme of personal character development is a major theme in the narrative and continues through all the various episodes presented.



Style

Point of View

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

The third-person point of view allows Hornblower to be presented in a highly-sympathetic manner. For example, the narrative structure portrays Hornblower's isolated or affected mannerisms as deliberate rather than haughty. The narrative also allows portrayal of Hornblower's life situations as difficult but not entirely pathetic. The sole exception to this is in Hornblower's seeming inability to find happiness without constant conflict. In this way, the choice of narrative view is appropriate and successful. Indeed, the structure of the novel and the method of plot development nearly require the use of a third-person point of view. Finally, the frequent appearance of minor characters is allowed through the point of view selected; it is carried throughout all but one of the novels of the series and is accessible and successful.

Setting

The novel features two principle settings. The first and most important setting is well developed and is aboard HMS Atropos, an English ship-of-war with 22 guns. The ship sails exceptionally well, fights well within her limitation of class and is responsive—indeed Atropos becomes favored by her crew. The ship is of typical construction of the time, with a single gun deck, quarterdeck, vanishingly small stern captain's cabin and so forth. She has three ship-rigged masts and is capable of sailing in fairly light wind. Her compliment is 150 seamen, though she does not bear a marine contingent. Atropos' crew is capable though her senior lieutenant, John Jones, is unimaginative and fairly slow to respond in stressful situation. Excepting the initial few chapters, virtually the entire narrative transpires aboard Atropos.

Alongside Atropos, the novel features a diffuse secondary setting composed of various harbors, fortresses and landscapes in the Mediterranean. Named locales include Gibraltar, Cartagena, Cape Ferro, Palermo and Sicily, Malta, Rhodes and most significantly Marmorice Bay. Most of these are not described in significant detail and are developed only as transient settings for plot development. As these secondary settings generally refer to historical places and geographic locations, their development relies heavily upon facts obtained from historical reality. Marmorice Bay, however, is



exceptional in that it provides the dominant setting for Chapters 11 through 18. The bay is described extensively in physical terms, including notes on the prevailing current and tidal conditions, the local geography and the local and regional political situation. The physical layout of bay itself is well-described, and the two methods of egress are especially developed.

Language and Meaning

The novel's language is generally simple 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, historic objects or historic events. It is notable that the novel was originally written and published in England and uses standard English spelling styles, which may somewhat unfamiliar to American readers, though they pose no problems of meaning. Occasional words are given in a foreign language, although these, too, present no particular barrier to comprehension, as they are brief and their meaning is easily inferred from the context. When conversations are held in Turkish between Hornblower and the Mudir, for example, only the translated-to-English portion of the conversation is presented.

The novel becomes linguistically complex in two primary respects. First, when dealing with nautical events, a somewhat complicated specialized language is used that includes references to various parts of sailing craft and sailing techniques that may not be particularly familiar to modern readers. The technical language is accurate and interesting and a reference to a general sailing encyclopedia will assist in a careful reading and complete understanding of the text. Note that many of the nautical terms are included in the vocabulary sections of this summary. Second, the novel makes frequent reference to various events, which occur prior to the novel's opening, proper; this is a standard construction technique and does not detract from the novel's readability. Nearly all these events, of course, occurred in a prior volume of the series, of which this novel is the fourth (or fifth, if one includes the unfinished final novel of the series).

Structure

The 342-page historical novel is divided into twenty-one chapters. The novel, published originally in England in 1953, retains English spelling and grammar but most reprints use standard American punctuation. The novel's primary time line considers events transpiring over fourteen months between December 1805 and January 1808. The novel chronologically is the fourth in a series of ten novels (fifth, if counting the unfinished eleventh novel), though it was the eighth-written volume of the series. 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 time line are minor and are clearly identifiable as such. Thus, the novel's principle time line is accessible and easily followed. The passage of time within the novel is very uneven, however—some paragraphs span weeks or months while other chapters are devoted to the activities of a single evening. Although common in fiction in general, the construction within the novel is somewhat disjointed and lends a sort of episodic feel to some of the major plot developments.

The novel is part of a series of novels dealing with the same characters and similar themes. The novel is chronologically the fourth book in a series of ten completed novels, but was the eighth-written, and taken with the other volumes is an example of a roman-fleuve, or novel sequence. If one includes the incomplete final novel of the series, the novel would be the fifth book in a series of eleven. Many of the principle characters presented in the novel, therefore, are recurring characters with backgrounds and histories lightly re-developed from prior works. This process, while apparent, does not detract from the narrative.

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 Napoleonic war between England and France during the years 1805-1808. Based on textual statements and links to historic events, the novel can be accurately placed as having transpired between December, 1805, and January, 1808. Thus, the novel's language, technology, politics, geography, et cetera, are all based upon historically-accurate representations. Most of the political situations discussed no longer exist and may be unfamiliar to modern readers.



Quotes

"Having climbed through the locks, the canal boat was now winding over the pleasant Cotswold country. Hornblower was bubbling with good spirits, on his way to take up a new command, seeing new sights, travelling in an entirely new way, at a moment when the entirely unpredictable English weather had decided to stage a clear sunny day in the middle of December. This was a delightful way of travelling, despite the cold.

'Your pardon for a moment, ma'am,' said Hornblower.

Maria, with the sleeping little Horatio in her arms, gave a sigh at her husband's restlessness and shifted her knees to allow him passage, and he rose under the restricted height of the first-class cabin and stepped out through the forward door into the open bow of the passage boat. Here he could stand on his sea-chest and look round him. She was a queer craft, fully seventy feet long and, judging by eye as he looked aft, he would think hardly five feet in beam—the same proportions as had the crazy dugout canoes he had seen in use in the West Indies. Her draught must be less than a foot; that was clear as she tore along behind the cantering horses at a speed that must certainly be all of eight knots—nine miles an hour he told himself, hurriedly, for that was the way they measured speeds here inland." (pp. 3-4)

"At Brentford, in the early light of the winter's morning, it was cold and damp and gloomy. Little Horatio whimpered ceaselessly; Maria was uncomfortable and weary, as she stood beside Hornblower while her trunk and Hornblower's two sea-chests were being hoisted out of the boat.

'Is it far to Deptford, my dear?' she asked.

'Far enough,' said Hornblower; between Brentford and Deptford lay the whole extent of London and much more besides, while the river on which they were to travel wound sinuously in wide curves, backwards and forwards. And they had arrived late, and the tide would barely serve.

The wherryman were soliciting for his custom.

'Boat, sir?' Sculls, sir? Oars, sir?"

'Oars,' said Hornblower.

It cost twice as much for a wherry rowed by two oarsmen as for one rowed by a single man with sculls, but with the ebbing tide it was worth it. Hornblower helped Maria and the baby down into the sternsheets and looked on while the baggage was handed down.

'Right, Bill. Give way,' said stroke-oar, and the wherry shot away from the slip out onto the grey river.

'Ooh,' said Maria, a little afraid." (p. 36)

""Sir! We've sprung a leak!"

My God! The news chimed in with this thoughts with perfectly devilish accuracy of timing.

'How bad?'

'Dunno, sir. But it's up over the floorboards. That's 'ow we know. Must be making pretty



fast, sir.'

That must have been when Horrocks allowed the barge to crash against the pier. A plank started. Up over the floorboards already? They would never get to Whitehall Steps in time, then. God, if they were to sink here in the middle of the river! Never, never, never would England forgive the man who allowed Nelson's coffin to sink, unceremoniously, in Thames mud beside the Isle of Dogs. Get in to shore and effect repairs? With the whole procession behind them—God, what confusion there would be! And without any doubt at all they would miss the tide, and disappoint the waiting thousands, to say nothing of His Majesty. And tomorrow was the final ceremony, when the Body would be carried from the Admiralty to St. Paul's—dukes, peers, the royal family, thousands of troops, hundreds of thousands of people were to take part in or to watch the ceremonies. To sink would be disaster. To stop would be disaster. No; he could get into shore and effect repairs, causing today's ceremony to be abandoned. But then they could get the Body up to the Admiralty tonight, enabling tomorrow's funeral to be carried out. It would ruin him professionally, but it was the safest half measure. No, no, no! To hell with half measures.

'Mr. Horrocks!'

'Sir!'

'I'll take the tiller. Get down in there. Wait, you fool, and listen to me. Get those floorboards up and deal with that leak. Keep bailing—use hats or anything else. Find that leak and stop it if you can—use one of the men's shirts. Wait. Don't let all the world see you bailing. Pitch the water out here, past my legs. Understand?'

'Err—yes, sir.'" (pp. 68-69)

"St. Vincent stood looking at him from under his eyebrows.

'The navy has two duties, Hornblower,' he said. 'We all know what one is—to fight the French and give Boney what for.'

'Yes, my lord?'

'The other we don't think about so much. We have to see that when we go we leave behind us a navy which is as good as the one in which we served. You've less than three years' seniority now, Hornblower, but you'll find you'll grow older. It'll seem you've hardly had time to look round before you'll have forty-three years' seniority, like me. It goes fast enough, I assure you. Perhaps then you'll be taking another young officer to present him at the Palace.'

'Er—yes, my lord.'

'Choose carefully, Hornblower, if it ever becomes your duty. One can make mistakes. But let them be honest mistakes.'

'Yes, my lord.'

'That's all.'

The old man turned away without another word, leaving Hornblower with Bracegirdle under the portico.

'Jervie's in a melting mood,' said Bracegirdle.

'So it seems.'

'I think he wanted to say he had his eye on you, sir.'

'But he had an anchor out to windward all the same,' said Hornblower, thinking of what St. Vincent had said about the chance of one's making mistakes.



'Jervie never forgives, sir,' said Bracegirdle, seriously.

'Well—'

Twelve years of service in the navy had gone far to make Hornblower, on occasions, fatalist enough to be able to shrug off that sort of peril—at least until it was past.

'I'll take my boat cloak, if you please,' he said, 'and I'll say good-bye, and thank you.'

'A glass of something? A cup of tea? A mouthful to eat, sir?'

'No, thank you, I'd better shove off.'" (pp. 95-96)

"The exaltation even remained when he quitted the deck and descended into the cabin. Here the prospect was cheerless in the extreme. He had mortified his flesh after he had come on board his ship at Deptford. His conscience had nagged him for the scanty hours he had wasted with his wife and children; and he had never left his ship again for a moment after he had reported her ready for sea. No farewell to Maria lying in childbed, no last parting from little Horatio and little Maria. And no purchase of cabin equipment. The furniture about him was what the ship's carpenter had made for him—canvas chairs, a rough-and-ready table, a cot whose frame was strung with cordage to support a coarse canvas mattress stuffed with straw. A canvas pillow, straw-filled, to support his head; coarse navy blankets to cover his skinny body. There was no carpet on the deck under his feet; the light came from a winging and odorous ship's lantern. A shelf with a hole in it supported a tin washbasin; on the bulkhead above it hung the scrap of polished-steel mirror from Hornblower's meager canvas dressing-roll. The most substantial articles present were the two sea-chests in the corners; apart from them a monk's cell could hardly have been more bare." (pp. 151-152)

""If you please, sir—'

'What is it, Mr. Jones?'

'If you please, sir, there has been a duel.'

No one could ever guess what would be the next burden to be laid on a captain's shoulders. It might be an outbreak of plague, or the discovery of dry rot in the ship's timbers. And Jones' manner implied not merely that there had been a duel, but that someone had been hurt in it.

'Who fought?' demanded Hornblower.

'The doctor and Mr. McCullum, sir.'

Well, somewhere they could pick up another doctor, and if the worst came to the worst they could manage without one at all.

'What happened?'

'Mr. McCullum was shot through the lungs, sir.'

God! That was something entirely different, something of vital importance. A bullet through the lungs meant death almost for certain, and what was he to do with McCullum dead? McCullum had been sent for all the way from India. It would take a year and a half to get someone out from there to replace him. No ordinary man with salvage experience would do—it had to be someone who knew how to use the Ceylonese divers. Hornblower wondered with sick despair whether a man had ever been so plagued as he was. He had to swallow before he could speak again.

'Where is he now?'

'Mr. McCullum, sir? He's in the hands of the garrison surgeon in the hospital ashore.'



'He's still alive?'
Jones spread despairing hands." (pp. 170-171)

"These were the blue waters where history had been made, where the future of civilization had been decided, more than one and more than twice. Here Greek had fought against Persian, Athenian against Spartan, Crusader against Saracen, Hospitaller against Turk. The pentaconters of Byzantium had furrowed the seas here, and the caracks of Pisa. Great cities had luxuriated in untold wealth. Only just over the horizon on the port beam was Rhodes, where a comparatively minor city had erected one of the Seven Wonders of the World, so that two thousand years later the adjective "colossal" was part of the vocabulary of people whose ancestors wore skins and painted themselves with woad at the time when the Rhodians were debating the nature of the Infinite. Now conditions were reversed. Here came Atropos, guided by sextant and compass, driven by the wind harnessed to her well-planned sails, armed with her long guns and carronades—a triumph of modern invention, in short—emerging from the wealthiest corner of the world into one where misgovernment and disease, anarchy and war, had left deserts where there had been fertile fields, villages where there had been cities, and hovels where there had been palaces. But there was no time to philosophize in this profound fashion. The sands in the hourglass beside the binnacle were running low, and the moment was approaching when course should be altered." (pp. 184-185)

"What stores did you get?"

'Very little, sir, today, I'm afraid.'

'There was only the local market, sir,' supplemented Tuner. 'The Mudir has only sent out word today. The goods will be coming in for sale tomorrow.'

'The Mudir?' asked Hornblower. That was the word Turner had used before.

'The head man, sir, the local governor. The old man with the sword who came out to us in the boat yesterday.'

'And he is the Mudir?'

'Yes, sir. The Mudir is under the Kaimakam, and the Kaimakam is under the Vali, and the Vali is under the Grand Vizier, and he's under the Sultan, or at least that's how it's supposed to be—all of 'em try to be independent when they get the chance.'

'I understand that,' said Hornblower.

No one who had given any study at all to the military and naval history of the last few years in the eastern Mediterranean could be ignorant of the anarchy and disintegration prevailing in the Turkish Empire. What Hornblower wanted to hear about was the effect these were producing locally and today." (pp. 224-225)

"But Hornblower knew how lucky he was. Lucky that McCullum had survived a pistol shot in the ribs; lucky that the Ceylonese divers had survived the journey all round Africa from India to Asia Minor; lucky—incredibly lucky—that the Turks had been so complacent, allowing him to carry out the salvage operation in the bay without guessing what he was doing and without interfering. It was consideration of this good fortune that reconciled him at last to the worry regarding the guarding of the treasure in the lower lazarette. He was the most fortunate man on earth; fortunate (he told himself) and yet at



the same time he owed some of his success to his own merits. He had been clever in his handling of the Mudir. It had been a cunning move to accept a bribe to stay here anchored in the bay, to appear reluctant to do the very thing he wanted most to do. Collingwood would approve, no doubt. He had recovered the silver; he had recovered one-third of the gold already. He would receive a pat on the back from authority even if McCullum should find it impossible to recover the rest." (pp. 265-266)

"A big ship, gaudily painted in red and yellow, coming in under topsails, a broad pennant at her mainmast head and the flag of the Prophet at her peak. She was a great clumsy craft, old-fashioned in the extreme, carrying two tiers of guns so that her sides were unnaturally high for her length; and her beam was unnaturally wide, and her bowsprit steeved higher than current fashions in European navies dictated. But the feature which first caught the eye was the lateen rig on the mizzen-mast; it was more than thirty years since the last lateen mizzen in the Royal Navy had been replaced by the square mizzen topsail. When Hornblower had first seen her through his glass the triangular peak of her mizzen beside her two square topsails had revealed her nationality unmistakably to him. She looked like something in an old print; without her flag she could have taken her place in the fighting line in Blake's Navy or Van Tromp's without exciting comment. She must be almost the last survivor of the lesser clumsy ships of the line that had now been replaced by the stately 74; small, clumsy, but all the same with a weight of metal that could lay the tiny Atropos into a splintered wreck at one broadside." (pp. 275-276)

"'Up helm and bear down on the enemy. Call all hands, Mr. Still, if you please. Clear for action.'

During all the long flight and pursuit he had not cleared for action. He had not wanted action with the vastly superior Castilla, and had been determined on avoiding it. Now he hoped for it—hoped for it with that tremor of doubt that made him hate himself, all the more so as the repeating of the order brought a cheer from the men, the watch below pouring on deck for duty with expectant grins and schoolboy excitement. Mr. Jones came bustling up on deck buttoning his coat; apparently he had been dozing comfortably through the afternoon watch. To Jones would fall the command of the Atropos if any accident should befall him, if a shot should take off his leg or dash him into bloody fragments. Odd that the thought of Jones becoming responsible for handling Atropos was as disturbing as the rest of it. But all the same Jones must be brought up to date on the situation and told what should be done. He did it in three sharp sentences." (p. 318)

"'Muster the port-side guns' crews,' he said. 'Every man, gun captains and all. Arm them for boarding. Arm every idler in the ship. But leave the hands at the mizzen braces.' 'Aye aye, sir.'

'Pikes, pistols, and cutlasses, lads,' said Hornblower to the eager men thronging round the arms chests. 'Mr. Smiley, muster your topmen for'rard by Number One carronade starboard side. Stand by for a rush.'

Young Smiley was the best fighting man of them all, better than the nervous Jones or the stupid Still or the aged Turner. It was best to give him the command at the other end of the ship. Aft here Hornblower would have things under his own eye. And he realized



he was still unarmed himself. His sword—the sword he had worn at the court of his King—was a cheap one. He could guess its temper was unreliable; he had never been able to afford a good sword. He stepped to the arms chest and took a cutlass for himself, drawing it and dropping the scabbard discarded on the deck; looping the knot over his wrist he stood with the naked blade in his hand and the sunlight beating down in his face. Now they were closing on Castilla; only a cable's length apart and it looked closer. It called for accurate judgment to come alongside.

'Starboard a point,' he said to the helmsman.

'Starboard a point,' came the repetition of the order." (pp. 322-323)

"'His Sicilian Majesty,' went on Collingwood, 'needs a ship.'

'Yes, my lord?'

Hornblower was none the wiser.

'When Bonaparte conquered the mainland he laid hands on the Sicilian navy. Negligence—desertion—you can understand. There is no ship now at the disposal of His Majesty.'

'No, my lord.' Hornblower could guess now what was coming.

'While coming out to visit Ocean this morning His Majesty happened to notice Atropos, with her paint all fresh. You made an excellent business of your refitting, Captain, as I noticed.'

'Thank you, my lord.'

'His Majesty does not think it right that, as an island King, he should be without a ship.'

'I see, my lord.'

Here Bentinck broke in, speaking harshly.

'The fact of the matter, Hornblower, is that the King has asked for your ship to be transferred to his flag.'

'Yes, my lord.'

Nothing mattered now. Nothing was of any value.

'And I have advised his lordship,' went on Bentinck, indicating Collingwood, 'that for the highest reasons of state it would be advisable to agree to the transfer.'

The imbecile monarch coveting the newly painted toy. Hornblower could not keep back his protest.

'I find it hard to believe it necessary, my lord,' he said. (p. 333)

"'The apothecary?' she asked from where she bent over the bed.

'No, Mother. It's Horry come back again.'

'Horry? Horatio?'

Mrs. Mason looked up to confirm what her daughter said, and Hornblower came towards the bedside. A tiny little figure lay there, half on its side, one hand outside the bedclothes holding Mrs. Mason's finger.

'He's sick,' said Mrs. Mason. 'Poor little man. He's so sick.'

Hornblower knelt beside the bed and bent over his son. He put out his hand and touched the feverish cheek. He tried to soothe his son's forehead as the head turned on the pillow. That forehead—it felt strange; like small shot felt through velvet. And Hornblower knew what that meant. He knew it well, and he had to admit the certainty to



himself before telling the women what it meant. Smallpox. Before he rose to his feet he had reached another conclusion, too. There was still duty to be done, his duty to his King and country, and to the Service, and to Maria. Maria must be comforted. He must always comfort her, as long as life lasted.' (p. 342)



Topics for Discussion

After reading the novel, do you envy the life of a common sailor in the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic wars? Why or why not? Would you rather be a seaman aboard *Atropos* or Collingwood's flag ship *Ocean*? Why?

What characteristics of Hornblower do you admire? What characteristics do you find less than admirable? Why do you think Hornblower is such an enduring character in the popular imagination?

In what ways is Hornblower an effective naval captain? How could he improve? What things does he do right, and what things does he do wrong?

Hornblower and Maria have been married for about thirty-two months at the opening of the novel; they have one infant son, and Maria is pregnant. By the end of the novel they have been married for about fifty-seven months and both of their children will shortly die from smallpox. How much time do you think Maria and Hornblower have spent in each others' company during their marriage? What does this say about Maria's strength of character?

During early conversations between Eisenbeiss and Hornblower, Hornblower threatens to have Eisenbeiss flogged if he contravenes ship's practice. If your supervisor at work or teacher at school could have you tied up and flogged for irritating them, would your behavior be any different than it now is? Discuss.

During much of the canal boat transit from Gloucester to Brentford, Hornblower steers the boat. Maria is aghast that her husband would thus willingly lower himself to manual labor. Hornblower is rather taken with the canal boat and fascinated by its operation. If you found yourself in Hornblower's position, would you volunteer your services or await the arrival of additional crew? Discuss.

During Chapter 4, Hornblower arranges Horatio Nelson's funeral procession down the Thames River. Discuss the political situation existing immediately prior to Nelson's monumental victory at Cape Trafalgar—why is Nelson considered, to this day in England, a national hero of mythic proportion? Within the fictional world of the Hornblower novels, why did the author consider it important to link Hornblower to Nelson in this intimate way?

During Chapter 8, *Atropos* anchors to wait out a thick fog. Hornblower then detects the presence of a French privateer in the area, and takes successful steps to capture the vessel. Why is this episode included in the novel? Could Chapter 8 simply be removed from the narrative without impact to the overall structure?



Discuss the salvage operations carried out during Chapters 11 through 18. Which aspects of the salvage do you find most interesting—the technical processes or the fact that a "cascade of silver" is recovered from the ocean floor? Are Looney and the other Sinhalese equal participants in the venture? Or are they more akin to slaves, owned by McCullum?

Hornblower's tricky escape from Marmorice Bay, down the west channel and between Kaia Rock and Sari Point, was the "correct" decision inasmuch as it was successful. But what would have happened had Atropos run aground in the shoaling passage? Discuss the short-term, medium-term, and long-term results that would likely have eventuated given failure in the escape?

Had he been senior captain, Hornblower would have enlisted Nightingale's assistance in jockeying for tactical advantage over Castilla. Ford, the senior captain, simply sets Nightingale alongside Castilla and orders Hornblower to do the same. As Ford's tactic was successful, it is difficult to fault. But from the vantage point of an armchair observer, which captain's approach would have been 'more' correct?