

# **The Letter of Marque Study Guide**

## **The Letter of Marque by Patrick O'Brian**

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# Plot Summary

Jack Aubrey is penniless and disgraced, wrongly convicted of crimes and discharged from the Royal Navy. Stephen Maturin, Aubrey's particular friend, has purchased *Surprise*, a frigate recently sold out of the naval service. Maturin refits *Surprise* and Aubrey commands her on a series of short but lucrative raids. Aubrey's situation improves over time, and he is reinstated in the Royal Navy, while Maturin travels to Sweden and is reconciled with his beautiful wife Diana.

At the opening of the novel Jack Aubrey is penniless and disgraced. He has been convicted of crimes he did not commit and has been discharged from the Royal Navy. Stephen Maturin is wealthy but unhappy because he is estranged from his beautiful wife Diana Villiers, who has traveled to Sweden under the protection of a handsome man named Jagiello. Maturin has the good fortune of purchasing *Surprise*, a frigate being sold out of the Royal Navy. Maturin outfits *Surprise* as a private man-of-war, also known as a letter of marque. Aubrey commands the ship and finds many seamen willing to serve on a privateer with a captain known to be brave, decisive, and very lucky. Maturin invites his friend Nathaniel Martin to serve as assistant servant, and the appointment saves Martin from a destitute financial situation ashore. On the first brief shakedown cruise *Surprise* encounters *Spartan*, an American privateer. *Spartan* has just captured and sunk *Azul*, a Spanish ship heavily burdened with quicksilver. Fortunately for Aubrey, *Spartan* had transferred all of the quicksilver before *Azul*'s sinking. With *Spartan* condemned as a legal prize, Aubrey, Maturin, and the crew of *Surprise* become instantly wealthy.

*Surprise* next travels to the French port of St. Martin, where a French man-of-war, *Diane*, is anchored. After extensive planning, a bold nighttime raid is launched on the harbor by the ship's boats while *Surprise* stands offshore and causes a diversion. Aubrey leads his men to *Diane* and she is seized by a surprise boarding action. After a heated battle, *Diane* is captured, as are two gunboats and two merchant ships. The small flotilla of prizes sails out of the harbor, but Aubrey collapses from a pistol shot to the back. With the five new prizes condemned as legal, Aubrey, Maturin, and the crew of *Surprise* becomes wealthier still; under Maturin's care Aubrey quickly regains his health. Aubrey then engages in various political activities and gains his deceased father's political position, an advantage that guarantees his reinstatement in the Royal Navy. Meanwhile, Maturin travels to Sweden aboard the star-crossed *Leopard*. He finds Diana in excellent spirits and health, returns to her a cherished blue diamond, and is reconciled with her. The novel thus ends on a happy note all around and the various protagonists board *Surprise* for a happy return to England.

# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

Jack Aubrey is penniless and disgraced, wrongly convicted of crimes and discharged from the Royal Navy. Stephen Maturin, Aubrey's particular friend, has purchased *Surprise*, a frigate recently sold out of the naval service. Maturin refits *Surprise* and Aubrey commands her on a series of short but lucrative raids. Aubrey's situation improves over time, and he is reinstated in the Royal Navy, while Maturin travels to Sweden and is reconciled with his beautiful wife Diana.

The novel is set in England during 1813, or a fictional extension of that year, during the Napoleonic wars between England and France. Ex-captain Jack Aubrey has been dismissed from the Royal Navy for financial impropriety in a scandalous case involving stock market fixing. Though he was not involved in the crime, he was nevertheless found guilty. Stripped of his naval appointment, Aubrey is also nearly penniless and faces an uncertain future and nearly overcome with crushing depression. All is not lost, however—Aubrey's favorite ship, *Surprise*, has been sold out of the Royal Navy service and has been purchased by Stephen Maturin, Aubrey's particular friend and confidant. Aubrey and Maturin has been close friends for many years and have sailed together on many voyages. Maturin generally acts as ship's surgeon and is a medical man of exceptional ability. He is also a devoted and recognized naturalist and works for the British Naval Intelligence service as a pro bono intelligence officer. Maturin is a man of means, though he cares little for his considerable wealth. Along with the purchase of *Surprise*, Maturin has obtained a Letter of Marque, making his new vessel a privateer, or private man-of-war.

*Surprise* is refitted at the southern English port of Shelmerton, a sprawling town greatly peopled with smugglers and near pirates. Aubrey is repeatedly surprised at how rapidly *Surprise* is provisioned and repaired—used to governmental inefficiency, privately-funded operations appear miraculously efficient. Aubrey has a reputation for being lucky and hence many Shelmertonians desire to crew upon *Surprise*—Aubrey has a picked crew, another unusual circumstance. Aubrey's command is joined by several old friends, including Captain Tom Pullings, without assignment and acting as first mate, coxswain Barrett Bonden, steward Preserved Killick, and seaman Joe Plaice. *Surprise* readies for sea and awaits only the tardy Maturin's appearance before beginning a two-week shakedown cruise. For his own part, Maturin demonstrates his usual foolishness by a lengthy walk to the town and saving money instead of hiring transportation. He dawdles, gawking at birds, and then calls upon his friend Nathaniel Martin, asking him to act as surgeon's mate on the impending cruise; the destitute Martin eagerly accepts.

Maturin and Martin join the ship's company, and the officers attend a dinner gathering with some admirals and other notables. Aubrey is reticent, fearing unintended insult, but is much encouraged when an admiral makes a gift to him of a letter from Lord Horatio Nelson to whose memory Aubrey is much attached. During the dinner the talk covers

many subjects, including the then-contemporaneous first hot-air balloons. Maturin desires to ascend but the consensus is that such vehicles are flying death traps.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

Chapter 1 establishes the time and place of the novel—circa 1813 England during a time of prolonged war with France—and introduces several of the novel's primary characters, including Aubrey and Maturin, as well as numerous minor characters. The chapter also recounts Aubrey's recent legal troubles and dismissal from the service—happenings treated at greater length in a previous novel in the series. The chapter also introduces *Surprise*, Aubrey's favorite ship, and establishes that it is now a private man-of-war, or privateer, owned by Maturin. The fictional port town of Shelmerston is also described; it will be returned to at several points during the novel. The town is unlike any other English port in that it has a piratical flavor and is peopled by a variety of peculiar individuals including a local following of Sethians, an offshoot of Christianity holding that Adam's son Seth was particularly holy. The Sethian religion is later discussed by Maturin and Martin and some of their religious practices cause brief turmoil aboard *Surprise*. The novel also addresses the notable differences between service aboard a private ship and aboard a Royal Navy ship. Singing, nonchalance, and a certain air of individuality are all commented upon several times. The letter from Lord Nelson that Aubrey receives is symbolic of fortune; Aubrey certainly takes it as such, and the crew of *Surprise* also seize upon the letter's presence as more-or-less proof that their upcoming cruises will be successful. The friendship between Maturin and Martin is particularly humorous inasmuch as it allows Maturin to play something of the expert on all things nautical. While he knows relatively little, he knows a great deal more than Martin and ends up, generally, successful in his attempts at explanation for various nautical objects and behaviors. Pullings is an appointed Royal Navy captain, a post-captain, but he lacks an assignment—a common occurrence for a young captain without political influence. He is subsisting on half-pay and decides to act as Aubrey's first mate rather than languish ashore.

# Chapters 2 and 3

## Chapters 2 and 3 Summary

Aubrey takes *Surprise* on a short shakedown cruise, heading south. After a few days, a Royal Navy frigate closes with *Surprise*, intending to press numerous hands from her. Maturin hands Aubrey a letter of protection from the admiralty, forbidding Royal Navy vessels from pressing Aubrey's hands. The crew, and particularly Aubrey, are delighted. Maturin and Aubrey contemplate the future—the men responsible for the crimes for which Aubrey was convicted are Wray and Ledward. They are both crooked government officials in French pay; their arrest was bungled, and they escaped to France. Maturin privately believes this series of events indicates that Wray and Ledward are being protected by someone high up in government; in any event, until they can be brought to justice, Aubrey's conviction is unlikely to be overturned. During the cruise, Aubrey relentlessly practices the men at the great guns. During one such exercise, Padeen, Maturin's steward, is burned and injured on the hand. Maturin administers laudanum to the Irishman. Later, Padeen develops an impacted wisdom tooth and begins to surreptitiously dose himself with laudanum. Maturin is an opium addict, taking truly heroic doses of laudanum on a daily basis. His friend Martin suspects this impropriety, and they discuss the relative merits of laudanum. After a few days another ship, HMS *Tartarus*, closes *Surprise*. *Tartarus* is captained by William Babbington, who once served many years as a midshipman and lieutenant under Aubrey. Babbington carries Mowett as a passenger; Mowett is another friend of Aubrey and Maturin. After a brief but happy reunion, the two ships part ways. Aubrey despairs of ever welding the old *Surprise* crew and the new Shelmerstonians into a cohesive unit, but then a vast storm system moves into the area. *Surprise* is driven by the ferocious storm and the exhausting days of danger and hard work accomplish what Aubrey hoped they might—the crew emerges united in purpose.

In Chapter 3 the storm continues for several days, damaging *Surprise* but only lightly. As the storm dies away *Surprise* raises the American privateer *Merlin*, a cutter sailing as consort to *Spartan*, a heavy frigate and American privateer. *Surprise* easily catches the damaged *Merlin* and captures her without fighting. Maturin learns from a Spanish gentleman that *Merlin* is carrying many people to France; the people have been removed from several prizes taken by *Spartan*. *Spartan* has placed her five prizes in a distant small port and is awaiting the capture of the Spanish *Azul*, said to be carrying a fabulous treasure of quicksilver. Maturin communicates this information to Aubrey, and Aubrey decides he must attempt the capture of *Spartan*. *Surprise* is duly painted blue and her rig is altered to appear as a barque. The ship runs down to the probable area of *Spartan*'s cruising. Aubrey hopes *Spartan* will mistake *Surprise* for *Azul* and thus close to board. But the plan goes awry as the wind fails and *Surprise* arrives just as *Spartan* closes with *Azul*. The men pile into the boats and row toward the violent combat, arriving after *Azul* has been captured. After a brief but intense melee, Aubrey succeeds in capturing *Spartan*. *Azul*'s surviving crew has abandoned her, and she is run onto shoals and sinks. Thus, Aubrey takes *Spartan* as a prize, the American ship bearing

Azul's vast fortune in quicksilver. Maturin speaks to the signals person of Spartan and learns the location and private signals of Spartan's prizes. Aubrey causes Spartan and Surprise, still disguised as Azul, to stand off the harbor containing the prizes and gives the private recognition signal. One after another the five prizes come out and are captured in turn. Aubrey thus concludes his shakedown cruise by bringing home seven prizes.

## Chapters 2 and 3 Analysis

Lord Nelson's letter certainly proves to be a talisman and what was intended to be an uneventful shakedown cruise of a few weeks turns into an exceptional adventure. Surprise captures two American privateers and their five prizes. One of the privateers contained the entire considerable treasure of the Spanish ship Azul. Though Spain and England are allies against France and America, at this point in history, the fact that the American ship had transferred the cargo and the Spanish officers had deserted their sinking ship makes the quicksilver Aubrey's legal prize. The vast wealth garnered on the short cruise is truly incredible. At a stroke, Aubrey goes from being penniless to being fabulously wealthy, and Maturin's already considerable fortune is greatly advanced. Even the common seamen aboard Surprise are effectively established for life, should they choose to invest their prize money rather than squandering it on whores and drink. So far as Shelmerston is concerned, Lucky Jack Aubrey fully deserves his sobriquet. The actual capture of the merchants is not directly discussed in the novel. Chapter 3 presents Aubrey's plans and as Chapter 4 opens the capture is a fait accompli. Later, reflections upon the capture indicate that Aubrey's plan was executed without a hitch. Quicksilver, or mercury, was used by the Spanish in their gold mining operations in America. Its collective value on the open market in England is vast. Note the descriptive imagery about the early sailing portions of the narrative; they are enjoyable and informative. Also note that Padeen's early use of laudanum foreshadows his later addiction, as does Martin's denigration of the drug.

# Chapters 4 and 5

## Chapters 4 and 5 Summary

Surprise returns to England and begins to resupply. Maturin and Martin visit an apothecary and resupply the ship's medicine chest. They discuss laudanum, and Maturin confesses to taking daily doses of 40 times the medicinal dose. Later, Maturin visits his friend Sir Joseph Blaine and learns that Wray and Ledward, two spies largely responsible for Aubrey's legal troubles, have escaped England and are known to be in France. Nevertheless, Surprise's recent victories have made Aubrey fantastically wealthy, and Maturin confides in Sir Joseph that Aubrey hopes his new-found wealth and fame will lead, perhaps, to reinstatement. Sir Joseph bluntly states that it will not—what Aubrey must do is engage a French national ship of superior force and claim victory. Regardless of the odds, a victory over a privateer such as Spartan will not be seen in official circles as sufficient grounds for reinstatement. Sir Joseph then explains that he has intelligence about the sailing date of a powerful French ship, the *Diane*, and provides the details to Maturin. Maturin asks about news involving his wife Diana; Sir Joseph notes that she left England for Sweden with a young and dashing soldier known as Gedymin Jagiello—also a friend of Maturin. Sir Joseph presumes the relationship to be sexual but has no especial knowledge about it. Maturin ponders the nature of his marriage and feelings and notes that he has Diana's enormous blue diamond, the Blue Peter, and desires to return it to her. Elsewhere, Martin takes Padeen to the dentist for a painful extraction, and at Aubrey's home a massive silver plate service arrives in honor of his recent victory, courtesy of British merchants happy with the capture of an American privateer. Later still, Maturin arrives at Aubrey's home and the men discuss the French ship *Diane*. Aubrey produces maps and charts and they discuss an attack on the French ship.

In Chapter 5, Aubrey returns to Surprise to ready for the mission against *Diane*. He is informed that a minor mutiny of sorts has transpired. Several of the Shelmerstonian hands profess a faith known as Sethianism, apparently a variation on standard Christianity, which holds that Adam's and Eve's son Seth was perfect while their other children were not. Part of the Sethians' religious worship involves clearly marking their homes with the name Seth, and thus the Sethians have marked Surprise—their beloved home—with the name Seth. Upon being ordered to remove the painted name, they had refused, as had the remainder of the superstitious crew. Aubrey discusses Sethian theology with Martin, who provides much information and then Aubrey speaks to the so-called mutineers. He compromises on a middle path—the name may remain, but it must be covered with a piece of painted sailcloth such that Surprise can retain her proper appearance. The middle path appears to satisfy everyone involved and the curious incident is thus over. Surprise sails shortly thereafter and anchors in a deserted bay similar in size to St. Martin's—Aubrey explains his plans for taking *Diane* and then begins many days of ruthless practice and exercise, determined that every man must know and execute his duty flawlessly. Meanwhile Padeen continues his daily use of laudanum and becomes a confirmed addict.



## Chapters 4 and 5 Analysis

Maturin's self-proclaimed daily consumption of laudanum is 1,000 drops, while he offers 40 drops as a stout medicinal dose. Later it is disclosed that Padeen is an impaired addict taking 60 drops per day. However, Maturin is using diluted laudanum as Padeen has been siphoning the drug and replacing it with brandy. It is therefore unclear how much drug Maturin is using, though as a medical man he should be incredulous at his own massive consumption. Several other minor scenes hint that Maturin is being obtuse about Padeen's addiction.

Wray and Ledward are characters from a previous novel, whose various movements have little to no bearing on the current novel's development. Likewise, Jagiello is a character from a previous novel in which he, Maturin, and Aubrey developed a close and lengthy friendship. Maturin knows that women find Jagiello beautiful and irresistible, but he also knows Jagiello is an honorable man. Sir Joseph's opinion carries weight, but Maturin is diffident about his feelings. His partial estrangement from Diana is detailed in a previous novel in the series. The mission proposed by Sir Joseph—that Surprise attack and take Diane—heavily foreshadows the action presented in Chapter 6.

The Chapter 5 incident of the Sethians is curious, interesting, and enjoyable but has no effect on the remainder of the plot. Aubrey's solution is ingenious; the Sethians' practice of jerking their thumbs upward upon mention of the name Seth is humorous. In essential character the Sethian faith appears typically Christian excepting their peculiar belief about Seth and multiple lines of human descent, some mingled with imperfect angels, etc. Aubrey's plan is to sneak into St. Martin's harbor and essentially steal Diane from the quay—an operation Aubrey refers to as a cutting-out expedition. He realizes that success will mean reinstatement while failure will mean failure on many fronts, and he is therefore driven to succeed. The seemingly endless practice sessions are designed to teach every man his job, leaving no room for confusion.

# Chapters 6 and 7

## Chapters 6 and 7 Summary

Surprise and the St. Martin's blockade squadron rendezvous on the open sea. The squadron is led by William Babbington, one of Aubrey's protégés. Aubrey is technically under Babbington's command due to British maritime laws, and even though Aubrey bears a letter from the admiralty instructing Babbington to render assistance, it remains for Babbington to decide on a proper course of action. Fortunately he completely agrees with Aubrey's plans and endorses them wholeheartedly. Babbington also notes that he is promoted to post captain rank, news that Aubrey receives with enthusiasm. Aubrey then presents the plan to Babbington and the other squadron captains; in brief, Surprise's boats will sneak into the harbor at night; the British seamen will board Diane and carry her away, and Surprise will close the shore and fire on the battery as a distraction. Additional hands from the squadron will wait in boats to assist with towing if necessary. Questions are answered; orders are written, and Aubrey returns to Surprise. Meanwhile Maturin and Martin discuss literature and fiction, Maturin insisting that a tragedy can end happily if certain essential points are fulfilled.

Aubrey then begins a torturous period of waiting for the right hour. At the proper time, Surprise blacks out her lights and sneaks in toward the coast, launching her boats and making the final approach. Surprise's boats are joined by boats from the other ships and the flotilla sneaks into the harbor, gaining Diane's deck with complete surprise. The ship is soon captured, but as she is cast off so she runs forward and her prow becomes entangled between two gunboats moored with chains. As Aubrey's crew struggles to free the ship, the French forces begin to arrive from the town's garrison and a fierce battle ensues. During the fight Aubrey feels as if someone kicks him in the back, and he also takes a few saber cuts on his limbs. The ship is finally freed and the attackers driven back. Aubrey decides the time is propitious and in addition to snatching Diane orders his men to also take the two gunboats and two merchant ships moored on the same quay. The captured squadron of five ships sails out of the harbor. Aubrey's prizes are joined by Surprise, but before he can gain the company of the blockading squadron, he passes out from loss of blood.

In Chapter 7 Aubrey learns from Maturin that what he had perceived as a kick in the small of the back is actually a pistol ball—or bullet—lodged near his spine. In an excruciatingly painful but successful operation Maturin removes the ball and then doses Aubrey with laudanum—Aubrey comments that it tastes like plain brandy. The ships rendezvous with the squadron and Babbington marvels at Aubrey's complete success. The prizes and Surprise return to England where the public is in a frenzy of adoration for Aubrey. Sir Joseph organizes a small dinner party with Aubrey as the guest of honor and several influential persons in attendance. The dinner is tedious but successful and Aubrey's injuries quickly heal. Later, a well-positioned government man speaks with Aubrey and tells him that a request for a pardon would surely be honored. Aubrey takes the offer as a back-handed compliment, however, noting that requesting a pardon would

be tantamount to confessing guilt, and thus Aubrey refuses. Sir Joseph makes it plain to Maturin that Aubrey's refusal makes his reinstatement into the Royal Navy doubtful.

## Chapters 6 and 7 Analysis

Chapter 6 presents Aubrey at his apogee of military form. Driven to achieve a resounding success so he may be reinstated in the Royal Navy, Aubrey drives his crew relentlessly in practice and drill. The rendezvous with Babbington is particularly daunting because Aubrey cannot outright suggest that Babbington not participate in the raid—and if Babbington chooses to participate, he will accrue all the success as the ranking military officer. Fortunately for Aubrey, Babbington is "smart enough" to understand the situation and causes all Royal Navy forces to be well away from the decisive action, leaving all the glory to Aubrey. The situation hangs in doubt for several critical moments as Diane cannot be freed and the French begin to counterattack. Aubrey uses Diane's deck guns to deflate the French attack and free the ship from the quay and then instead of being content with his notable prize he takes four additional vessels, including two merchant ships. It is truly a remarkable stroke. Aubrey is seriously wounded several times, however, including being shot in the back. Fortunately his particular friend is a very proficient surgeon and Aubrey's iron constitution soon has him on the road to recovery. In England, Aubrey's fame is enormous as an eager public adores the new hero. In addition, his already-considerable estate is again enlarged notably. Seemingly, reinstatement is within grasp, but Aubrey is too proud to accept it on any terms but his own. While most men would jump at the chance of an official pardon, Aubrey sees it only as an admission of guilt and declines. Aubrey's decision is not practical but instead is based on ideals. This marks a major turning point in Aubrey's characterization as it demonstrates that he is fully committed to correct principles and not merely to a temporal paradigm. It also precipitates a minor narrative crisis because it places his position in doubt, but the doubt is resolved in Chapter 8.

# Chapters 8 and 9

## Chapters 8 and 9 Summary

Aubrey's father, General Aubrey, was politically involved with minor party intrigues against the ruling coalition. The political troubles that resulted in Aubrey's legal difficulties also brought General Aubrey's fortunes to a new low, and he escaped to the countryside where he lived incognito. Aubrey then learns that his father, General Aubrey, has died. He travels back to his childhood home and settles the legal situation with various attorneys, buries his father, and spends time with his much-younger half brother Philip. The funeral is attended by a Mr. Norton, a relative of Aubrey's, who Aubrey addresses as Cousin Edward. Edward and General Aubrey had been at political odds, but Edward respects Aubrey. After an evening of discussion Edward announces that he plans to elect Aubrey for the seat of the borough of Milport, to replace his father the late General Aubrey. Aubrey is overwhelmed with gratitude as he realizes that the seat will surely gain him reinstatement in the Navy. Meanwhile Maturin attends an opera and is much taken with the line "Ah tutti contenti saremo così" (p. 240), Italian for "Ah, then we shall all be happy". Maturin then arranges passage to Stockholm where, he explains to Sir Joseph, he plans to return Diana's blue diamond to her. Sir Joseph arranges for Maturin to travel upon a government transport, the *Leopard*. Maturin had served aboard the *Leopard* when she was a warship commanded by Aubrey, and he is shocked at her deteriorated and slovenly appearance. True to her jinxed luck, *Leopard* runs aground and Maturin goes ashore while the transport is heaved off. Upon his boarding again, the crew learns he once served on *Leopard* and thereafter hold him in high esteem. But *Leopard* is slow and eventually overtaken by *Surprise*. *Surprise* is on her last "shakedown" cruise to the Baltic, prior to running to a South American mission. Aubrey takes *Surprise* to Riga for refitting after dropping Maturin off in Stockholm.

In Chapter 9, Maturin is ashore in Stockholm. Early on his trip he breaks his bottle of diluted laudanum and travels to an apothecary to purchase a replacement bottle. While there he also buys a store of coca leaves for chewing. As he takes a dose of laudanum he remarks on the curious flavor, thinking the apothecary must use a different alcohol for the tincture—but in reality it is simply because it is not nearly wholly diluted with brandy. Maturin then walks to Diana's tenement at Jagiello's estate, planning only on seeing where it is before retiring for the night. But he runs into Diana, who immediately recognizes him and joyfully hails him. They retire to her home where Maturin surreptitiously fortifies himself with another heroic dose of laudanum. He then gives Diana her fabulous blue diamond and she weeps. She tells him she has been making her living by ascending in a hot air balloon astride a horse, so that people pay for viewings. She also tells him that her relationship with Jagiello is simply one of protection. Maturin explains that his rumored affairs are unfounded. After much discussion, they are reconciled and then joined by Jagiello. Later, Diana and Maturin climb a tower and Maturin becomes confused by his mounting drug haze; he then collapses, pitching down steep stairs. When he regains consciousness he finds that several days have passed. His fall shattered his second bottle of laudanum, driving



broken shards of glass dangerously close to his heart. The attending physician announces Maturin an inveterate opium addict and tells him he must stop using the drug or die; Maturin thereafter turns to coca leaves. As Maturin's health recovers, Aubrey arrives in Surprise, newly fitted out. Diana travels to Surprise and takes a cabin while Maturin and Aubrey arrive, Maturin gaily singing "Ah tutti contenti saremo così" (p. 284).

## Chapters 8 and 9 Analysis

Aubrey, fabulously wealthy, politically connected, and soon to be reinstated in the Royal Navy, has no real reason for continuing to captain Surprise on her mission to Riga and, later, to South America. Yet having given his word to Maturin and owing a debt of gratitude to Sir Joseph, Aubrey plans to execute his duty. The trip to South America, much discussed by Maturin, Aubrey, and Sir Joseph, does not transpire in the current novel. The political troubles caused by General Aubrey have been much-considered in several previous novels; that Aubrey has succeeded as well as he has in spite of his father's politicking is particularly impressive. The subtle interview between Edward and Aubrey provides some of the best dialogue in the novel. Note also the letter from Aubrey to Maturin which works as a narrative construction device to advance the plot. Similar letters are used elsewhere in the novel but not to this extent, and similar devices are used throughout the series of novels. Maturin's notice of the line of opera (p. 240) echoes the eventual happy ending of the novel, as does his earlier contention with Martin that a tragedy can have a happy ending, given some "peculiar." Maturin and Aubrey's involvement with Leopard spanned several previous novels; Leopard is a fictionalized representation of a historic ship of some renown. That Maturin boards Leopard again is a sure sign that he can expect an uncomfortable and delayed passage; the ship is symbolic of disaster. And in fact, Maturin leaves Leopard for Surprise, inasmuch as Surprise has more than made up the distance involved in a several days' delay in departure. The description of Maturin's sea chest is a particularly nice detail.

Chapter 9 provides a good deal of information about Maturin's drug habit. He has been habitually using about 1,000 drops per day, which equates to perhaps an ounce of tincture of laudanum. When going ashore for several days' stay he takes his own bottle, which contains brandy-diluted laudanum. He breaks this bottle and replaces it with a bottle of undiluted laudanum received from an apothecary. He notes the new drug tastes very different from the old and attributes this to the apothecary using a different alcoholic tincture. Yet Maturin's usual dose leads to a muddled thinking process, physical collapse, and prolonged unconsciousness—obviously, Padeen's constant dilution of Maturin's laudanum supply has had the unintended consequence of weaning Maturin from the drug, even as his daily dose continued to increase. When Maturin falls, his new bottle shatters and drives glass splinters into his chest, near his heart; Maturin symbolically interprets this as an omen (refer to p. 276). The novel concludes with a happy return for all the primary characters.

# Characters

## Jack Aubrey

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

Aubrey wears his blonde hair in a long queue and dresses as a traditional ship's captain. Aubrey is very athletic, possessed of an almost super-human vigor, great strength, and an incredible constitution. He is also particularly fond of food and drink, and Maturin often cautions him against becoming overly corpulent; his weight fluctuates wildly. Aubrey is handsome and fairly useful, though his good-looks are marred by a variety of scars and combat-related wounds including an ear sliced apart in an old encounter and various scars on his head. Aubrey is usually quite useless on land, though on military occasions he proves useful enough.

As described in previous novels of the series, Aubrey is a disgraced man cast out of the Royal Navy for crimes of which he is innocent but of which he has been convicted. The crimes involve fixing of the stock market and other financial improprieties. His great hope in life is to somehow clear his name and become reinstated as a post captain. He takes his dismissal very hard and is in a deep, crushing depression at the opening of the novel. Not only has he lost his commission and standing, but he is facing financial failure and massive debt. He therefore accepts an invitation to captain the *Surprise*, a recently outfitted private man-of-war—a privateer—and pursues that appointment with his characteristic energy. By the end of the novel, Aubrey's good-faith efforts and genuinely open and honest disposition have allowed him to regain the public spotlight and reclaim his valued position within the Royal Navy.

## Stephen Maturin

Maturin is one of two principle protagonists of the novel and shares the spotlight with his particular friend and confidant Jack Aubrey. Maturin is a quiet man who much prefers the closeness of a study to the attention of others; his personal expertise lies in the area of medicine and he is also a natural scientist of some repute; for example, Maturin often speaks at the Royal Society as an expert on birds. He is an unchallenged and undoubted master in his element of medicine and science, and his medical opinions are surprisingly modern and always correct. Although possessed of great financial means, he cares nothing for the finer things in life and champions political causes that are obviously doomed simply because they are philosophically correct. Maturin, in addition to being a physician and scientist, is a pro bono agent for the secret intelligence network



of England. From time to time, Maturin's relationship with the intelligence service is complicated, especially as he has become entangled and identified in the past.

Maturin is a small, squat man who in many respects is the antithesis of Aubrey. The novel offers his weight as nine stone, or about 126 pounds. Maturin is much given to introspection, subtle interpretations, and Byzantine analysis of the current situation. He is nearly entirely mental, with little interest in things physical—though capable enough in combat when the time comes. Although he is possessed of a nearly preternatural constitution, Maturin is not notably dexterous or strong, though his physique is rarely a handicap to his desires. Although he can be over-confident of his abilities, he is nearly always correct in his analysis of situations and people. A notable exception to his typical clarity of vision centers on his love interest and wife, Diana Villiers; Maturin generally is unable to comprehend her complexities and unwilling to accept her rather obvious shortcomings. Like Aubrey, Maturin derives great pleasure from music and is a capable musician. Maturin is willfully but secretly addicted to opium and often praises the drug as a panacea. Maturin is unwittingly, and humorously, weaned off the drug as his steward, Padeen, begins to use the drug and replace the fluid with brandy.

## **Diana**

Diana Maturin nee Villiers is exceptionally beautiful; indeed, physical beauty and sexual allure are clearly her dominant features, and she easily controls most men through her physical charms. Diana is in her mid thirties and has long, jet black hair and a long, slender neck. She is the cousin to Sophie Aubrey, Jack Aubrey's wife, and has a long and complex history that is fully developed in several prior novels including her marriage to Maturin, the ceremony performed by William Babbington. Diana has absconded to the Baltic with the young and beautiful Jagiello, putatively in response to rumors of Maturin's infidelity. In any event, Diana is not the type of woman to remain long in any one situation. Diana is particularly fond of a gigantic blue diamond called the Blue Peter, which she sacrificed in an attempt to secure Maturin's freedom in a previous novel. During the current novel, Maturin returns the Blue Peter to Diana. Diana has supported herself—somewhat—by ascending astride a pony in a hot air balloon and selling tickets to the spectacle.

## **Tom Pullings**

Pullings has served under Aubrey as a lieutenant during previous novels in the series. He eventually gained promotion to captain, largely through Aubrey's efforts. He is an enthusiastic and optimistic captain, a devoted supporter of Jack Aubrey, and an extremely capable navigator, seaman, and officer. During the novel, Pullings lacks an appointment and is thus receiving only half-pay, though his time is entirely his own. Because he has no political influence, he has little prospect for an appointment, and because he is married, he has a financial responsibility. Because of this, Pullings has enlisted as the first mate aboard Aubrey's private man-of-war *Surprise*. Pullings' great reliability allows Aubrey much discretion in handling the ship and is a constant comfort

to both Aubrey and Maturin. Pullings is always dependable and is an always memorable minor character.

## **Preserved Killick and Barrett Bonden**

Preserved Killick is Jack Aubrey's steward and has been a faithful servant for many years and on many occasions. Killick is keenly aware that his personal fortunes are inextricably linked to Aubrey's success and ensures that Aubrey is always presented in the most favorable circumstances attainable. Beyond professional interest, however, Killick is a loyal friend and defender of Aubrey and goes to great lengths to provide hot coffee, good food, plentiful drink, fresh fruit, clean clothing, and other amenities under often-difficult circumstances. Killick often serves as a sort of comic relief within the narrative; his presumptuous and rude lines delivered in a whiny nasal tone set Aubrey's teeth on edge.

Barrett Bonden is Aubrey's coxswain. He is easily the most dependable character in Aubrey's crew. For example, Aubrey demonstrates his complete trust in Bonden by selecting him to look after Maturin on dangerous missions. Needless to say, the reliable Bonden always demonstrates complete tact, honesty, and devotion. Both men join Aubrey's cruise aboard *Surprise*, and the subsequent spectacular successes enjoyed ensure that both men are wealthy beyond their dreams; even wealthy, they both remain entirely devoted to Aubrey.

## **William Babbington**

Babbington is the captain of HMS *Tartarus*. He is a smaller man, stunted by various bouts with venereal diseases contracted during an active youth. A capable sailor and captain, Babbington is much infatuated with women and pursues them with a vigor rarely seen among even sailors. He was more-or-less raised aboard ships where Aubrey was the captain and owes much to his senior officer and friend; indeed, Babbington's promotion to post rank is due somewhat to Aubrey's influence coupled with the influence of his several family connections. Babbington has known Maturin for many years, and performed the marriage between Maturin and Diana Villiers. Babbington appears with some regularity in the earlier novels in the series, and his appearance in the current novel is a welcome event. Babbington is the ranking naval officer of the squadron blockading St. Martin and thus Aubrey is reliant on Babbington for permission to proceed with his plan.

## **Sophia**

Sophie Aubrey, née Williams, is Aubrey's wife of several years and the mother of his two twin daughters, Charlotte and Fanny and younger son, George. She is an exceptionally beautiful and very devoted woman though the financial and legal stresses of marriage have left her over-thin, in Maturin's estimation. Although Sophie is rather rough around the edges, being raised in the country and largely uneducated, she has a natural grace





and sympathetic bearing that carries her successfully through social engagements. Unlike her mother who is stern, penurious, and abrasive, Sophie sees wealth as simply a means to an end—though having lived through poverty she is keenly aware of wealth's virtues. Sophie's natural disposition is trusting, open, and honest. Maturin values her as a particular friend. One of the novel's elements of construction lies in the presentation of Aubrey's letters to Sophie as plot development. Sophie does not occur as a primary character beyond the novel's opening, though Aubrey notes that she has helped settle the purser's accounts for *Surprise*.

## Sir Joseph Blain

Sir Joseph Blain is the head of the Naval Intelligence office during the period of the novel. As such he is fantastically knowledgeable about virtually any topic tangential to politics, the military in general, and the Royal Navy in particular. Sir Joseph is a thoroughly patriotic and entirely reliable man, not given to histrionics or political trends. He instead is completely focused on pursuing goals which further the interests of England. He shares a close friendship with Maturin; aside from both being involved in secret intelligence work, both men are avid naturalists and scientists. Sir Joseph also admires Maturin's dedication to the work and not the remuneration. During the current novel, Sir Joseph demonstrates activity in securing for Aubrey a reinstatement in the ranks of the Royal Navy. Sir Joseph is a minor but recurring character in the series of novels and his political influence and close personal friendship with Maturin explain in part why Maturin, hence Aubrey, always seem to come out on top.

## Reverend Nathaniel Martin

Nathaniel Martin is a man of the cloth and devoted to religion, though seamen are notoriously unsympathetic to a parson aboard their ship—for superstitious reasons. Thus, Maturin engages Martin's assistance as an assistant surgeon and not as a preacher. Martin's situation ashore is financially desperate, and he gladly accepts the offer of work, sending his advance pay home to his wife and then literally running to *Surprise* to join her. Maturin apparently does not infer Martin's truly desperate financial situation and instead ascribes his eagerness to patriotism and loyalty. Throughout the novel, Martin serves with reliable distinction even though he is very unhandy with nautical things and phrases. Martin is very educated, speaks several languages, and knows volumes about religion. He is naturally inquisitive and, like Maturin, a competent naturalist, artist, and musician. Within the narrative, Martin functions primarily as a student of Maturin, and some of the more risible sections of the novel deal with Maturin's nautical instruction to Martin.

## Padeen

Padeen is Maturin's servant, or steward, and is responsible for keeping Maturin's clothing and cabin in good order. He is described as large and physically powerful. He

speaks only halting English and is usually very quiet and reserved. Maturin finds him trustworthy and competent. During early cannon practice, Padeen's hand is injured and burned and Maturin doses Padeen with laudanum to decrease the pain. Later, Padeen develops an impacted wisdom tooth that leads to massive swelling and considerable pain. Maturin doses Padeen with hellebore, but Padeen sneaks doses of laudanum from the medicine chest, replacing the tincture of laudanum with brandy. Padeen continues this behavior for several weeks before having his tooth extracted, and then continues to steal and use laudanum for months until he becomes addicted. His constant replenishment with brandy causes the laudanum to become diluted—and inadvertently weans Maturin's addiction to the drug. Padeen is a minor character in the novel.

# Objects/Places

## Surprise

Surprise is a private man-of-war, owned by Stephen Maturin, and captained by Jack Aubrey. She was French-built and has previously been known as L'Unité, Retaliation, and Retribution. Her figure-head is a gilded woman with an ample bosom and a surprised look on her face. She displaces about six hundred tons, has a crew of about two hundred men, and carries a main armament of twelve-pounder long guns. She also carries thirty-two pounder carronades as ballast, and the main guns can be switched around with a few days' work. Her cannons are named, and the names provided in the novel are Willful Murder, Jumping Billy, Belcher, Sudden Death, and Tom Cribb. Her named crew include Jack Aubrey, captain; Stephen Maturin, surgeon; Tom Pullings, 1st mate; West, 2nd mate; Davidge 3rd mate; Bulkeley, bosun; a carpenter known only as Chips; a gunner known only as master gunner; Martin, surgeon's mate; Bonden, coxswain; Killick and Padeen, stewards; and seamen Warren, Hurst, Farrell, Harvey, Fisher, Whitaker, Webster, Joe, James, Bentley, Darkie Johnson; and the Sethians Slade, the Brampton brothers, Mould, Hinckley, Auden, and Vaggers.

## Letter of Marque

A letter of marque, also known as a private man-of-war or a privateer, was a privately-owned ship that received an official governmental license to conduct war upon the shipping interest of a national enemy. For example, during the current novel Surprise is a letter of marque licensed to prey upon French interests. Various legalities were involved in letters of marque, but for the purpose of the current novel suffice it to say that Aubrey is well within his legal rights to attack, sink, capture, and burn French ships and port facilities.

## Shelmerston

Shelmerston is a fictional port town on the southern coast of England; much of Surprise's initial fitting out and crew operations are conducted there. The town is described as atypical for England inasmuch as it has a distinctly piratical flavor and is much favored by smugglers and tariff-runners. The town also boasts a polyglot of races and religious ideologies.

## Diane

Diane is a French man-of-war safely tied up at the quay in St. Martin's. Early in the novel she is blockaded by a squadron commanded by William Babbington. During the middle portion of the novel, Aubrey leads a cutting out expedition to St. Martin and

Diane is captured, along with two gunboats and two merchant ships. Her capture greatly improves Aubrey's political and financial standing.

## **Laudanum**

Laudanum, or tincture of opium, is an alcoholic herbal extract of opium—in simple terms, it is ethanol fortified with morphine. Throughout the novel, Maturin administers doses to patients as medically appropriate. He also battles his personal addiction to the drug.

## **Carronades**

A carronade was a short smoothbore cannon used by the British Navy until about 1860. They were designed as short-range cannons. Light-weight and devoid of many of the features of long guns, carronades were devastating at short ranges but notoriously inaccurate beyond pistol-shot ranges. A carronade weighed approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  as much as a long gun throwing an equal weight of metal: the novel states a twelve-pounder cannon weighed 34 hundredweight while a thirty-two pounder carronade weighed 17 hundredweight.

## **Canister Shot**

Cannons and carronades typically fired solid iron balls or cannonballs, but they could be loaded with canister shot for short-range, anti-personnel effect. Canister shot consisted of a thin metal canister containing dozens or hundreds of lead musket balls. The novel states canister shot was discharged at 1,674 feet per second, and obviously a hundred or so musket balls traversing a ship's deck at that speed would kill anyone in the path.

## **Sethians**

The Sethians are a religious sect with several bases, one of which is in Shelmerston. In the novel, seven Sethians join the crew of *Surprise*, including Slade, the Brampton brothers, Mould, Hinckley, Auden, and Vaggers. In observation of their religious beliefs, they paint the name Seth boldly upon the side of *Surprise*—an act which causes a near mutiny. Martin explains the Sethian's religious beliefs in some detail, though in essence he maintains they are generically Christian.

## **The Blue Peter**

The Blue Peter is an enormous blue diamond, taken from a mine named Golconda. The diamond is owned—some might say stolen—by Diana Villiers. Diana trades it for Maturin's release from a Parisian prison, as detailed in a previous novel in the series. Maturin secures the diamond's return and gives it back to Diana in the current novel, an

act which she views with extreme gratitude as she is particularly fond of the massive jewel.

## Silver Service

After Aubrey captures the American privateer Spartan and her consort cutter, he is awarded a massive silver service by the merchants of England. Such rewards were common practice for the time. Sophie reviews the proposed engraving and, sensitive to her husband's pride, offers several revisions which are accepted. The silver service is magnificent and Aubrey particularly enjoys giving one heavy silver spoon to each of his children.

# Themes

## Honor

Aubrey's dominating concern throughout the narrative is his discharge from the Royal Navy. Although the discharge is accompanied by financial ruin, that situation is of secondary concern to Aubrey. All his attention and energy is devoted to regaining his appointment as post captain in the Royal Navy because Aubrey finds this the only honorable paradigm. Throughout the early portions of the novel Aubrey gains the respect and trust of his crew, develops relationships with several political figures, and prosecutes an enormously lucrative and successful action against an American privateer. Later, he engages a French man-of-war and captures it along with two gunboats and two merchant ships. All these successes garner public acclaim, huge financial rewards, and substantive political clout. And yet Aubrey is not satisfied with them because he has not been offered reinstatement. Then comes the telling moment—he is offered a pardon if he but asks for it. Aubrey will not ask for a pardon, however, as he conceives that doing so would be a tacit admission of guilt—if no crime was perpetrated, then surely no pardon is needed. Requesting a pardon would therefore be dishonorable, and Aubrey refuses to participate in this political process. Instead, he holds out because of his personal honor. Honor is displayed in other ways in the novel; Maturin and Sir Joseph pursue intelligence activities according to their own code of honor. Meanwhile Wray and Ledward have dishonored themselves and their station by treachery. Other men, such as Bonden and Killick, serve with honor within their respective spheres.

## Enduring Difficulties

Most of the novel sees the primary protagonists living a life of mental anguish with no likely end in sight. Aubrey begins the novel nearly penniless and discharged from the Royal Navy. Maturin begins the novel estranged from his wife and addicted to opium. Martin begins the novel entirely destitute. Pullings begins the novel without assignment and on half pay. And yet all these men are devoted to duty and do what needs to be done to maintain honor. Each of the men makes personal sacrifice to provide for loved ones and to pass through difficult times inasmuch as they are able. For Martin and Pullings, difficult times essentially end with employment, but Aubrey faces the difficulty of his discharge from the Royal Navy throughout the entire narrative. Maturin spends months worrying about his relationship with Diana even as he unwittingly is weaned from his opium addiction. At the conclusion of the novel Aubrey's repeated and brilliant performances has gained him fame, fortune, and the political influence necessary to secure reinstatement. Maturin is reconciled with Diana and freed of addiction. Pullings, Martin, and the other men of *Surprise* are all wealthy. Jagiello has performed a notable service for Diana, and she receives back her cherished blue diamond. Thus the narrative features much painful enduring through difficult times with the light at the end of the tunnel proving remarkably welcoming.

## Better Lucky than Skilled

Aubrey and Surprise participate in two major military encounters during the novel. On the first encounter they attack and capture the American privateer Spartan, and on the second encounter they attack and capture the French man-of-war Diane. Both encounters are successful in part because of extensive preparation, but both encounters are remarkably successful because of dumb luck. Surprise learns of Spartan through a lucky chance encounter with her consort; the consort is fortunately damaged by storm, and the point of sail during the chase happens to favor Surprise. Later, Surprise comes upon Spartan only minutes after Spartan has captured Azul. Azul's officers have all fled, and Azul is critically damaged and sinking, yet Spartan has had sufficient time to offload Azul's valuable cargo. Spartan is caught entirely by surprise and captured without much of a fight. Much of Surprise's preparation—disguising herself to look like Azul—appears in vain and all of Surprise's gunnery training amounts to nothing in the encounter. Later, Diane is captured using a well-practiced plan, but a freak gust of wind drives her prow between two chained gunboats. Aubrey fears the French counterattack will retake the entangled ship. But after the counterattack is beaten back, Aubrey seizes the putatively unfortunate moment and carries away not only Diane and the two gunboats, but two merchant ships as well. Thus, once again Lucky Jack Aubrey demonstrates that skill is good, but it's better to be lucky.

# Style

## Point of View

The novel is told from the third-person, limited, point of view. The narrator is reliable, entirely effaced, and unnamed. Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin, the main characters, are the protagonists and central figures in all the scenes in the novel. The narrator divulges some internal thoughts of the two protagonists, but not of other characters. The majority of the story is told through action and dialogue; revealed thoughts are infrequent and are used for characterization rather than plot development. Occasional personal letters allow for some first-person introspection without destroying the cadence of the overall narrative structure.

The third-person point of view allows Aubrey and Maturin to be presented in a highly-sympathetic manner. For example, the narrative structure portrays Maturin's penurious manners as silly and frugal rather than stingy. The narrative also allows portrayal of characters' life situations as difficult but not pathetic. In this way, the choice of narrative view is appropriate and successful. As both characters are roughly equal in significance, the third-person point of view also allows their textual representations to be roughly equivalent. Indeed, the structure of the novel and the method of plot development nearly require the use of a third-person point of view. Finally, the frequent appearance of minor characters is allowed through the point of view selected; it is carried throughout all of the novels of the series; it is accessible and successful.

## Setting

The novel features two primary types of settings. The first and most significant is aboard *Surprise*, a British private man-of-war. The ship is owned by Maturin and captained by Aubrey, officered by Pullings and others, and crewed by a highly proficient but rag-tag assortment of seamen. One of the novel's achievements is the presentation of shipboard life as something intriguing and even desirable while simultaneously presenting a realistic view of the hardships endured.

The second setting presented in the novel is diffuse and consists of numerous ports, cities, and islands. Included among these settings are Ashgrove Cottage, in England, a few ports of call on the voyage—Shelmerston, St. Martin, and Stockholm. In general, these settings are transient, poorly described, and thought of—at least by Aubrey—as locations to fight, refit, or re-supply. While the action aboard ship is dominated by Aubrey, the action ashore is usually dominated by Maturin. This division of the narrative by locale allows each man to figure prominently within his best environment.



## Language and Meaning

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

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

## Structure

The 284-page novel is divided into nine enumerated chapters of roughly equal length. The narrative is presented in strictly chronological order with each chapter's events occurring after the events in the previous chapter and before the events in the subsequent chapter. References to previous events occur with some frequency and characters from time to time think about future events. Such deviations from the principle timeline are minor and are clearly identifiable as such. Thus, the novel's principle timeline is accessible and easily followed.

The novel is intended to be read as part of a series of novels; specifically as the twelfth novel in a series which extends to twenty volumes. Many of the principle characters presented in the novel, therefore, are recurring characters with backgrounds and histories developed in a prior novel(s). Similarly, events happening prior to the scope of the current novel are often referenced. This structure may prove somewhat difficult for readers unfamiliar with the prior novels. Nevertheless, basic character glosses and event recaps are provided.

The structure is further complicated by adherence to historical events. In broad terms, events in the novel are fictional or fictionalized events which could have occurred, or did occur, in the period of time used as the novel's setting—namely, the war between England and France during the year circa 1813. Thus, the novel's language, technology, politics, geography, etc., are all based upon historically accurate representations. Note that many of the novels are set in circa 1813 such that the narrative time would consume several years—a problem acknowledged by the author.

## Quotes

"Ever since Jack Aubrey had been dismissed from the service, ever since his name, with its now meaningless seniority, had been struck of the list of post-captains, it had seemed to him that he was living in a radically different world; everything was perfectly familiar, from the smell of seawater and tarred rigging to the gentle heave of the deck under his feet, but the essence was gone and he was a stranger.

Other broken sea-officers, condemned by court-martial, might be worse off: indeed, two had come aboard without so much as a sea-chest between them, and compared with them he was uncommonly fortunate, which should perhaps have been a comfort to his mind—it was none t his heart. Nor was the fact that he was innocent of the crime for which he had been sentenced.

Yet there was no denying that materially he was well off. His old but beautiful frigate the Surprise had been sold out of the service, and Stephen Maturin had bought her as a private ship of war, a letter of marquee, to cruse upon the enemy; and Jack Aubrey was in command." (p. 7)

"This particular misery had many aspects, not the least being his sharp, immediate, practical realization that he was the potential prey of his own service; but he was not much given to analyzing his feelings and once the squadron had disappeared he resumed his dogged walk fore and aft until as he turned he caught sight of a lugger hoisting her sail in the harbor. A small figure was waving something white in the bows, and borrowing Davidge's telescope he saw that the waver was Stephen Maturin. The lugger went about to cross the bar on the starboard tack and Stephen was made to get out of the way—to sit upon a lobster-pot amidships; but even so he continued his thin harsh screeching and the waving of his handkerchief; and to Jack's surprise he saw that he was accompanied by Parson Martin, come to pay a visit, no doubt." (p. 24)

"'I am sorry if I seemed so hipped this morning,' said Jack. 'The fact of the matter is—I do not mean to complain, Stephen, but the fact of the matter is, I had just had a dream so real and true that even now I can touch it. The dream was that the whole affair, the trial and everything that followed, was itself a dream; and my huge relief, my joy at realizing this, my immense happiness I think it was that woke me. But even then I was still partly in the dream and for a moment I looked confidently for my old uniform coat.' He dipped his oars and completed his circle round the ship, looking attentively at her trim: his reason acquiesced in everything Stephen had said, but in his irrational part a very small glow was dissipating the most extreme unhappiness." (p. 47)

"Jack Aubrey had a bloody bandage round his head, obscuring one eye; he usually wore his long yellow hair neatly plaited and clubbed with a broad ribbon behind his neck, but so far he had not had time to wash the pints of clotted blood out of it and the stiffened locks stood out in all direction, giving him a most inhuman look; yet he was pleased with the way the ship's company had behaved—no moaning over short commons, though biscuit and cheese and small beer had been their fare for three days, no hanging back when they were required to go aloft, no skulking below, no wry looks—

and his remaining eye had a benevolent expression. 'It is a remarkable fact,' he observed at breakfast, 'that in the course of many years at sea, I have never yet come across an incompetent carpenter. Bosuns, yes: because they often top it the tyrant and turn the hands awkward. Even gunners, who cannot always be brought to accept the slightest change. But not carpenters: they seem to have their trade born in them.'" (p. 68)

"Jack spent the greater part of it gazing at the hypnotic wake as it spun out mile after mile, or watching the familiar stars in their course. The breeze did freshen from time to time and once he was able to chalk seven knots two fathoms on the board, but it was never enough for any change of sail, nor did it alter this faintly moonlit, starlit, dreamlike sailing over the dark sea except by adding a certain deep satisfaction." (p. 92)

"'I ask these indiscreet questions partly because I am closely concerned but also because they bear directly on the reinstatement of Captain Aubrey.'  
'Lucky Jack Aubrey,' said Blaine, smiling again with lively pleasure. 'By God, was such a stroke ever seen? How did you leave the dear fellow?'  
'In the bosom of his family, and happy as far as his pocket is concerned: but, you know, that hardly weighs with him, in comparison with his restoration to the Navy List.'" (p. 114)

"Jack Aubrey had always disliked the practice, by no means uncommon in the Navy, of coming aboard without notice and catching his ship's people unawares; but this time, there being neither ship's boat nor coxswain at hand, he had no choice. And he was just as glad, because now as he and Stephen were being taken out in a Shelmerston skiff, he saw that the Surprise was a quite unfeigned model of industry. Stages were over the side; the last traces of blue paint had vanished under a fine fresh white; Mr Bulkeley and his mates were creeping about the rigging like huge spiders, renewing fairleads and clapping red leather jackets on to the larger strops, a very pretty touch; and although her trim was not quite what he could have wished—she was a trifle by the head—it was clear that she had most of her water in. Shelmerston water was the best south of the Thames for going far foreign, but it was not easily come-at-able and in his absence the Surprises must have made many a weary voyage in the boats." (p. 139)

"Towards the end of their second pot Stephen heard a shrill fiddle no great way forward and after its first squeaks the deep Shelmerstonian voices chanting  
'Walk her round and walk her round, way oh, walk her round  
Walk her round and walk her round, way oh and round she goes.'" (p. 163)

"The buckle made fast, they saluted again, and again after the reptilian stillness Stephen leapt in, crying 'Ha! Ha! Ha!' It was the same parry, the same whirling and clashing with swords darting so fast that only the swordsmen could follow them—the same stamping feet and heavy gasping breath as they lunged, the same extraordinary agility—but then came a check in the rhythm, a subtle flaw, and there was Davidge's sword in the hammock-netting.



He stared at his empty hand for a moment, deeply shocked, but quickly, in the general cheering, he put what face he could upon it and cried 'Well done, well done! I am a dead man—one more of your corpses, no doubt.'

Then, having recovered his sword and found that it was unhurt he said 'May I look at yours?' Stephen passed it; Davidge turned it about and weighed it and looked closely at its guard and grip. 'A spring quillon?' he asked.

'Just so. I catch my opponent's blade here; the whole thing is a matter of timing and leverage.'

'It is a murderous weapon.'

'After all, swords are for killing. But I thank you very heartily, sir, for this exercise; you are complaisance in person.'" (pp. 184-185)

"The ermine robe, the golden crown,  
And the leaves of strawberry oh,  
Who's the Tar we'll see in Town?  
Sure 'tis Captain Aubrey oh.  
Who smote 'em low, who smote 'em high?  
Hey the leaves of strawberry oh,  
Who did the Frenchmen in the eye?  
Sure 'twas Captain Aubrey oh.  
In Martin's port the other night,  
Hey the leaves of strawberry oh,  
Who woke them with a horrid fright?  
Who but Captain Aubrey oh?" (p. 206)

"'Could you not spend an afternoon at Milport, to meet the electors? There are not many of them, and those few are all my tenants, so it is no more than a formality; but there is a certain decency to be kept up. The writ will be issued very soon.' Then, seeing Jack's look of astonishment, he went on, 'I mean to offer you the seat.'

'Do you, by God?' cried Jack; and realizing the extent, the importance, the consequence of what his cousin had just said he went on, 'I think that amazingly handsome in you, sir; I take it more kindly than I can say.' He shook Mr Norton's thin old hand and sat staring for a while: possibilities that he hardly dared name flashed and glowed in his mind like a fleet in action." (p. 228)

"Long before he went up the side, helped by the cheerful cutter's midshipman, Stephen had had a premonition of disaster; and although the happiness or unhappiness of the ship was wholly irrelevant to his sense of personal catastrophe, the feeling was strengthened by his first sight of the Leopard's captain and pilot wrangling, while three of the officers steadily lashed the men heaving at the capstan-bars, swearing as loud as ever they could brawl." (p. 238)

"'Hey there,' he cried, hurrying after her, 'this is Dr Maturin's cabin. Who are you, ma'am?'



'I am his wife, sir,' she said, 'and I beg you will desire the carpenter to sling a cot for me here.' She pointed, and then bending and peering out of the scuttle she cried 'Here they are. Pray let people stand by to help him aboard: he will be lying on a door.' She urged West out of the cabin and on deck, and there he and the amazed foremast hands saw a blue and gold coach and four, escorted by a troop of cavalry in mauve coats with silver facings, driving slowly along the quay with their captain and a Swedish officer on the box, their surgeon and his mate leaning out of the windows, and all of them, now joined by the lady on deck, singing 'Ah tutti contenti saremo così, ah tutti contenti saremo così' with surprisingly melodious full-throated happiness." (p. 284)

## Topics for Discussion

Does the novel have a "happy ending" or does the novel simply end at a moment when all of the major protagonists happen to be happy?

Given that Maturin is intelligent and scientific, how could he not know that his laudanum supply was being constantly diluted? What aspects of the narrative make Maturin's failure to notice credible? What hints should Maturin have picked up on?

Aubrey is offered a political position by his Cousin Edward. Prior to offering the seat, Edward subtly interviews Aubrey to sound out his political viewpoint. What are the unstated terms that Edward hints are expected of Aubrey once the seat is gained?

The attack on St. Martin's harbor is a resounding success. Some elements of the success relied upon good planning and execution, while other elements relied on luck. Of the two elements—skill or luck—which one is more significant for Aubrey in general?

During the novel, Spain is England's ally and hence the Spanish ship Azul would not be a legal prize for Surprise. Yet Aubrey claims Azul as a prize due to various extenuating circumstances. Discuss the series of events that allowed Aubrey to claim Azul.

Surprise has several crew members who profess the Sethian faith. Martin provides much information to Aubrey about the Sethians' beliefs. In general, would you hold the Sethians to be Christian? Why or why not?

After several resounding victories, Aubrey is made a very, very wealthy man. And yet he remains unhappy and generally unsatisfied with his life. Why? Discuss.

Maturin and Martin engage in a lengthy metaphysical conversation about the nature of tragedy and fiction. Maturin suggests that given certain conditions, a tragedy may yet end on a happy note. Assuming Maturin's arguments are valid, would you consider the current novel a tragedy? Why or why not?