

# **Middle Passage Study Guide**

## **Middle Passage by Charles Johnson**

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## Plot Summary

Rutherford Calhoun arrives in New Orleans as a newly freed slave who enjoys drinking and the company of exotic women. His soul craves adventure and new experiences. He soon meets Isadora, a naïve schoolteacher with a fondness for all living things. Although their personalities are almost polar opposites, Rutherford finds himself drawn to her unconventional attractiveness and proper ways. Isadora soon grows tired of Rutherford's wild habits however, and brings up the subject of marriage, telling him all he needs is a woman like her to bring him down to earth. Rutherford tells Isadora he will never get married; that his soul yearns for excitement and adventure, not marriage.

Isadora is hurt by this response but is still determined to make a man out of Rutherford, so she goes to Philippe "Papa" Zeringue, a wealthy business owner and local gangster to whom Rutherford owes a great deal of money. She makes a deal with the man that she will use her savings to repay his debts if Rutherford agrees to marry her at noon the next day. When Rutherford learns of their deal, he is horrified at the prospect and goes on a drinking binge at the closest bar. At the bar, he meets Squibb, a fellow alcoholic who plans to begin work the following day in the kitchen aboard the *Republic*. When Squibb passes out in a drunken coma on the table, Rutherford steals his papers and sneaks aboard the ship. He is soon exposed as a stowaway, since Squibb managed to make it on board, but Rutherford is allowed to remain.

The ship's captain, Ebenezer Falcon, maintains a well-known reputation for being callous and cruel but takes a liking to Rutherford and confides in him. The ship reaches the coast of Africa where they load up their intended cargo, including 40 Allmuseri tribespeople as slaves who are treated cruelly by the captain and crew. Just as some of the crewmembers were preparing a mutiny against Captain Falcon, the slaves themselves revolt and take control of the ship. Squibb and Rutherford become the only surviving members of the original crew. Conditions worsen; the ship quickly runs out of food and water and diseases run rampant. Rutherford becomes very ill and is in a terrible state when he is notified of a commotion on deck during a terrible storm. The ship is in severe disrepair and gives way during the storm, spilling the remaining crewmembers into the ocean.

Rutherford is rescued by the crew of a nearby ship, along with Squibb and a few Allmuseri children. Rutherford soon realizes Isadora is also aboard the new ship and that one of the ship's owners is Papa Zeringue. Zeringue has proposed to Isadora and intends to marry her, but Rutherford intervenes by blackmailing him just as Zeringue had done to Rutherford a few months prior. Rutherford returns to Isadora a changed man and they remain happily together.



# Entry 1: June 14, 1830

## Entry 1: June 14, 1830 Summary

Rutherford Calhoun, a freed slave from the cotton fields of the south, finds himself in New Orleans, a city where he immediately feels at home. He describes the town as having an air of steamy sexuality, its citizens seemingly in the constant pursuit of sin, and the women, who are beautiful, always smell of roses. Rutherford admits to being a thief and living off others. Unable to find work in the salons and Negro bars, he turned to stealing, which comes naturally to him. Reverend Chandler, his master, had noticed Rutherford's manual dexterity when he was a young child and could do nothing to stifle the boy's tendency for thievery, although he tried to teach him penmanship and Biblical virtues. Rutherford reveals that he has always been drawn to extremes, to sensations and to new experiences. He warns the reader not to be too judgmental of his way of life, although it may have been dishonest. He points out that city folks also live from cheating and crime, although they preach otherwise.

Rutherford often finds himself at the waterfront, a place he enjoys and finds refreshing. This is where he meets Isadora, a woman he identifies as being out of place in a city such as New Orleans. She is quiet and a devout Christian, twenty years old and a schoolteacher. Rutherford admits that she is pretty in her own plain sort of way, but what attracts him to her the most is her inner beauty, her stunning personality and intelligence. Although Rutherford hesitates to admit he is in love with Isadora, he clearly finds himself drawn to her. The teacher inside Isadora can't help but come out sometimes, something Rutherford finds rather annoying when she corrects his speech and questions his wild behavior. At one point, she brings up his rearing, pointing out that it had provided him with an education and that he must take his mind and do something productive with his life rather than waste it away by constantly getting drunk. Rutherford mentions his brother while recalling his childhood, saying only that he chose to stay with their slaveholder even after he was free to leave, and that he is not yet ready to speak any more of his brother. Isadora continues with her attempt to convince Rutherford to change his ways; she compares him to her father and points out that all he needs is a woman to bring him down to earth—exactly what her mother had done for her father. Isadora warns him that he is not common, and he needs to stop acting as if he is. Rutherford tells Isadora that he doesn't think he'll ever get married, that life is too short for such a constraining agreement. Isadora is hurt at Rutherford's response. She asks him what he would do if he was forced to get married, and this question thoroughly confuses Rutherford.

One day soon after their discussion, Santos, an extremely large, muscular, Negro man recognizes Rutherford and brings him, against his will, to Mr. Zeringue, the town gangster, otherwise known as "Papa." Rutherford is shocked to find Isadora sitting at a table in pleasant discussion with Papa when he and Santos arrive. Rutherford is left in the room alone with Mr. Zeringue, who informs him that Rutherford is indebted to him. Rutherford is further shocked at this, having never before met the man. He is soon



informed that his landlady, a moneylender, and a few others to whom Rutherford owes a combined fifty thousand francs, report directly to Mr. Zeringue, which meant Rutherford is directly indebted to Papa. Papa informs Rutherford of a deal that he and Isadora have made; Isadora will use her savings to pay Rutherford's debts to Papa if, and only if, Rutherford agrees to marry Isadora at noon on the following day.

Rutherford, frustrated and angry, tells Isadora he hates her and asks her how she can do this to him, to which she responds that it is because she loves him and she does not know what else to do since he isn't in love with her. Rutherford tells her this isn't true, that he does love her, but he just doesn't want to marry anyone at all. Isadora tells him simply that he will get married the following day or she will take her money back and leaves Rutherford standing alone on the dock. Rutherford is in shock, and spends the rest of the day and most of the following night cold and afraid, shaking with bouts of hiccups.

Rutherford begins thinking about his predicament and admits that he doesn't feel worthy of Isadora. He goes to the first pub he can find to try to forget his troubles; the bar is full of sailors and Rutherford admits he feels right at home there. He begins thinking of Isadora and her childhood. Her father beat his wife, causing her to die when Isadora was only three. He beat Isadora and her sisters as well, yet Isadora had somehow remained innocent as an adult, without a trace of hatred for anyone. Isadora's apartment, infested with all kinds of crippled animals she keeps and cares for, is proof of her kind heart. Rutherford tries to imagine what it would be like to marry her and decides his soul, which longs for adventure, could not bear marriage. Rutherford continues drinking heavily and begins talking to a sailor by the name of Squibb. Squibb tells him he is preparing to leave the following morning on the *Republic*, a ship headed by Captain Ebenezer Falcon, whose ruthless reputation is well known. Rutherford soon learns that Squibb is to be a cook aboard the ship, which is headed to Bangalang on the coast of Guinea, to pick up a shipment of slaves, and return in about three months.

Squibb soon passes out in a drunken coma and Rutherford takes Squibb's work papers from him and places them inside his coat. Although it is against his better judgment, Rutherford does this out of sheer desperation at the thought of his impending marriage. He heads to the *Republic* and falls into a deep sleep on a pile of canvas on the ship's hull.

## Entry 1: June 14, 1830 Analysis

The reader is introduced to Rutherford Calhoun as a young, newly freed slave who is lured by the excitement and sensuality of New Orleans, his new home. He is undeniably drawn to the civilizing presence of Isadora. Although he does not abandon his bad habits, he always finds himself coming back to her after days of binging; he sees her a source of comfort. Rutherford's wild spirit is evident from the first few pages when he divulges to the reader his tendency and natural ability to steal, his attraction to the sensuality of the city, and his propensity to spend night after night on alcohol binges.



Isadora's personality is presented as a complete opposite of Rutherford's, which makes their attraction even more powerful.

Isadora's intention is to make a man out of Rutherford, as her mother did for her father, and to make a family and settle down with him. Rutherford, however, is in a completely different state of mind; newly freed and free to do as he pleases for the first time in his life, he is more intent on following his adventurous soul than settling down. The mere idea of marriage frightens him. Isadora shows her dedication to the idea of marrying Rutherford by making the deal with Papa Zeringue; truly believing she will be successful in transforming Rutherford into a gentleman. Although he flees from the idea of marriage to Isadora, Rutherford's attachment to her and feelings for her remain unchanged.

When Rutherford speaks of his background and upbringing, he mentions his slavemaster, Reverend Chandler, and his brother, Jackson Calhoun. Reverend Chandler's unconventional rearing of Rutherford and his brother made Rutherford the educated Negro man he is today, with the ability to read and write, both skills that some white men in this time did not have. Rutherford speaks only very briefly, however, of his brother Jackson, mentioning only that he has a brother who has chosen to stay with their master even after they were both free to leave. He says that he is not yet ready to speak any more of his brother. This brief mention and the way Rutherford refers to his brother by his full name may indicate there are some painful memories associated with him. This is a foreshadowing of events to come later.



## Entry 2: June 20, 1830

### Entry 2: June 20, 1830 Summary

Rutherford wakes from a deep sleep when he feels the barrel of a pistol pressed against his stomach. The pistol is held by Peter Cringle, the *Republic's* first mate and quartermaster surrounded by a crew of rough-looking sailors, all in favor of throwing him overboard. Cringle orders Rutherford to his feet and he does not hesitate to obey his order since Cringle seems the most agreeable member of the crew. Cringle is tall and pale; he stands erect and presents himself as a gentleman, from his polished shoes to his wrinkle-free shirt. He informs Rutherford that he has less than one minute to explain what he is doing aboard the ship. Rutherford removes Squibb's papers from his coat, hands them to Cringle and tells him he is ready to report for work. Cringle reads the papers and proceeds to crumple them, telling him Squibb is already down below. Rutherford begins to claim this is a coincidence, then attempts to tell Cringle he has come aboard only to return the papers to Squibb. Cringle dismisses the surrounding crew, and as they depart, refers to them as hoodlums in a whisper to Rutherford.

Cringle takes Rutherford to the captain and the two become acquainted on the way; Rutherford mentions his reasons for being on the ship including his debts, a possible jail sentence and a woman. Cringle smiles at this and tells him half the ship's crew is here for those or similar reasons, but that being in jail is better than being on a ship because being on a ship *is* jail, only with the possibility of drowning. The two approach the captain's door, which has three bullet holes in it, and Cringle knocks. As they stand there waiting, the sound of creaking mattresses and a moan is heard from inside the room. Soon, a young boy emerges, greeting Cringle and giving the men permission to enter. Cringle is visibly pained by the disheveled appearance of the boy and the knowledge of what he has just endured; he tells Rutherford not to speak of this to anyone. The two men enter the captain's quarters and the captain is seated at a cluttered chart table with his back to the men. He orders Cringle to state his business and then dismisses him. Rutherford admits to the reader that he is of the opinion that a crafty Negro man is capable of manipulating a prospective employer around with a good sob story, so he begins by relating such a story to Captain Falcon. He tells him he has been unable to find work in a city like New Orleans where black folks are unable even to buy an ice cream; Captain Falcon is unimpressed and Rutherford continues, telling him that his mother had died from being overworked in the fields of Illinois. The latter part, Rutherford admits to the reader, is a lie, since his mother had really died in bed, but he likes the invented version better. Captain Falcon is still unimpressed, so Rutherford continues to make up lies about the abuse he had received from his stern slavemaster. Captain Falcon, who has kept his back turned to Rutherford since the start of their conversation, remains unimpressed by his stories but finally swivels around in his chair to face him.

Rutherford is shocked at the sight of the man known for daring expeditions; he is shorter than Tom, the young cabin boy he has just met. He has shorter legs than his chart table,



but it seems he attempts to compensate for his height in upper-body strength; his chest and back muscles were developed to enormous proportions. He has a long face, which contrasts his jet black hair, a belly Rutherford refers to as "unspeakable" and "his hands, like roots." Rutherford's initial assessment of the man's face is that he is intelligent. He realizes he has seen drawings of the man in newspapers in New Orleans but has never paid any attention to them. He realizes Captain Falcon is infamous.

The captain tells him to sit, telling him he doesn't like people looking down at him. Captain Falcon begins by telling Rutherford he generally doesn't like Negroes; Rutherford appreciates his frankness and apologizes, telling him that's something he cannot help. The captain continues, saying he has learned that Negroes tend not to think very often but that he doesn't blame him for stowing aboard. Captain Falcon informs Rutherford of the voyage ahead and the cargo they expect to pick up at Bangalang when they arrive: forty Allmuseri tribespeople, hides, ivory teeth, and gold among other things, totaling in value about nine thousand dollars. He admits that he and the officers have a profitable share in the earnings of the expedition; however, he makes it clear that if he allows Rutherford to remain as a part of the crew, it will be without pay. Rutherford agrees.

Captain Falcon then tells Rutherford he believes firmly in excellence, although it may be unfashionable. He believes the crews aboard eighty percent of the ships at sea are incompetent, but not his crew; he won't tolerate incompetence. It is his belief that the reason minorities are not yet ready for the title of first mate or quartermaster is because "discrimination has denied them the training that makes for true excellence..." The captain then tells Rutherford that he reminds him of a colored cabin boy who was aboard on his first trip to Madagascar, and when Rutherford asks if he is aboard the ship now, he replies to a shocked Rutherford that they had eaten him. Captain Falcon tells Rutherford that although he believes in Christian decency, there is no civilized law that applies at sea. Rutherford notes how Captain Falcon enjoys telling the story of eating the cabin boy and notes that he thrives on the fascination he receives from others by telling stories such as these.

The captain instructs Rutherford to ask Mr. Cringle, whom he refers to as a "mama's boy," to find him a hammock and to tell Squibb to find some work for him in the kitchen, telling him also that it is his bet Rutherford will be a man's man by the time the ship reaches New Orleans. Rutherford asks if the captain means that he will become a man like the captain himself, to which Captain Falcon replies, "No, never like me, Calhoun." This reply, Rutherford admits, is reassuring to him, although the captain would never know it.

Cringle takes Rutherford to the crew's sleeping quarters, also called the "orlop." The room smells strongly of ammonia, urine and decaying wood. The room is dark since it is located far below the ship's deck and very little air is able to penetrate it. Cringle shows him how to make a hammock out of sailcloth and Rutherford mentally compares Isadora's cat-infested apartment, which he had once considered intolerable, to his present surroundings. Here, there are cockroaches and rats everywhere. The orlop is not nearly as foul, however, as the head, where the makeshift toilet is located; a place





so vile that Cringle's eyes water as he presents it to Rutherford, telling him he could either use it or swing his bottom end overboard like he and the skipper prefer to do. Rutherford learns more about the ship from Cringle during his first few days aboard, and finds it is a typical ship. This means that it is always wet, smells awful, and is full of disease. The most disturbing thing that Rutherford notices, though, is that the ship is physically unstable; it is constantly breaking apart and being repaired. Cringle warns him the ship will not be the same when it returns to New Orleans. The crew seems to spend most of their time at sea attempting to repair their ship.

Rutherford learns the two primary duties of the sailors aboard ship. First, the sailors must keep the ship afloat at all costs; the second duty is to stay drunk. Each man knows how to run the ship, from the sails to the ropes, and all parts of the ship. However, any man who remains sober while not on watch is considered a fool. The biggest drunks turn out to be Squibb and his parrot. As Rutherford helps him prepare dinner for the crew, he learns that Squibb has been an alcoholic since the age of eleven, when he headed off on his first voyage. He is unsure of his age and had trouble keeping track of anything else in his constantly drunken state. Squibb had drunkenly fallen twenty feet from a mizzentop on his last trip, landing on his right foot and shattering the bone. In its place is a metal rod, which causes him to walk with a limp. Squibb tells Rutherford of his many wives, admitting he's not sure whether he has five or six. He pines for one in particular named Maud, and constantly speaks of her, saying he feels that he's still looking for her so he can have another chance to treat her right.

Cringle points out a man by the name of Nathaniel Meadows as the only crewmember Rutherford should avoid. Meadows has escaped from the law in Liverpool after murdering his entire family. Rutherford adapts quickly to life at sea and informs the reader that although the trip to Africa is uneventful, none of the men aboard ship will live to see New Orleans again. Cringle appears to be the only one who knows what will happen, as he appears to have a sixth sense about disaster. Cringle appears slightly out of place among the crew and Rutherford says he learns later that Cringle has become an officer by accident. Cringle's correct speech is taken as arrogance, and the captain interprets his sensitivity as weakness. The main thing Rutherford notices about the *Republic* is the absence of women; it is a ship of only men. This fact seems to pressure each of the crewmembers to prove his manliness, otherwise his masculinity would be questioned by the rest of the crew, something each man wants to avoid. Cringle, however, keeps away from this competition of manliness, which apparently makes him feel out of place. By keeping his distance from them, the crewmembers lose respect for Cringle, who seems only to relax when he is alone on watch or reading. He feels comfortable talking to Rutherford once he learns he has grown up with a theologian slavemaster.

One night, while talking with Rutherford, Cringle remarks that the rest of the ship's crew cannot feel what is about to happen. The sea is rough that night and Cringle speaks of the magnificent things of which the sea is capable, of and how he sometimes envies the men of the crew for their stupidity. Rutherford feels uneasy hearing Cringle speak this way. Cringle tells Rutherford of the Allmuseri tribespeople they will be collecting once they reached Africa to comprise their cargo of slaves. They are a spiritual group and



Cringle informs Rutherford that in all records, only one sentence exists describing their tribe, and this from a Spanish explorer named Rafael Garcia who now resides in an institution for the insane in Havana: "They're a whole tribe-men, women, and tykes-of devil-worshiping, spell-casting wizards."

## Entry 2: June 20, 1830 Analysis

Rutherford has begun to form relationships with a few crewmembers. From their first meeting, Cringle stands out from the rest of the crew as the most civilized of the men aboard the ship. When Rutherford is discovered, it is the general consensus among the crewmembers that he should be thrown overboard, but Cringle shows him mercy and decides to take him to the captain instead. On their walk to the captain's cabin, the two men make pleasant conversation, which seems to form the beginning of a friendship. Once inside his cabin, Captain Falcon shows Rutherford mercy as well by allowing him to work and stay aboard the ship. He tells him that although he generally doesn't like Negroes, he sees something different in Rutherford, which sets him apart immediately. Once Rutherford begins his work in the kitchen, he befriends Squibb, who appears simply as a melancholy drunk, but friendly and harmless at the very least.

Rutherford has gotten a crash course in life aboard the ship and found the entire experience to be worse than he had expected, from the filthy surroundings to the physical instability of the ship itself. At the closing of the second entry, Rutherford and Cringle share a nighttime conversation during which Cringle divulges some information about the future of their voyage. Cringle appears to know something about their destination that no one else knows, and Rutherford finds this strongly unsettling. Cringle's knowledge serves as a foreshadowing of what is to come. He tells Rutherford of their destination and the cargo they intend to carry back and shares with him his feelings of what is to come, which closes the entry with a feeling of foreboding.



## Entry 3: June 23, 1830

### Entry 3: June 23, 1830 Summary

Forty-one days after the ship leaves New Orleans it finally reaches Africa and Cringle gives Rutherford a brief history of the trading post. Rutherford finds himself glad to be back on land; he has found the ship to be uncomfortable and felt claustrophobic on board. The sudden loss the ability to denote the difference between up, down, left and right has rattled him to the point where he wakes with a scream some nights, choking on the rank stench of the sleeping quarters. Cringle has yelled at him constantly for being slow while on watch and he has longed for dry pants, floorboards that stay still, and sometimes he found himself longing for Isadora. He has also come down with a light cold and the constant coughing gives him headaches.

After the anchor is lowered however, Rutherford is unable to celebrate with the crew and remains quietly in the bunk. His thoughts are of the night Captain Falcon had caught him rummaging through his cabin; he begs the reader to keep the news to himself because he believes that this was the night that Captain Falcon began his "courtship" of Rutherford. Rutherford had quietly slipped inside the captain's quarters with his natural ability that allowed him to do this kind of thing with ease. Theft is something he finds pleasing; it breaks the power of the wealthier class over the poor. He mentions the "either/or" dilemma he and his brother faced as slaves, the moral problem created when food was so scarce that to eat a morsel would be denying that morsel to his brother. Although Rutherford admits he and his brother fared better than other slaves, they faced this dilemma day after day. He mentions that the reverend slavemaster's prophecy that Rutherford would grow up to become a thief had materialized. Once Rutherford is inside the captain's quarters, he does not deface property or cause the mischief he normally does upon breaking into a wealthier man's room; this time his motive is different. He wants only to learn about Captain Falcon.

He soon learns that the captain has rigged his room with clever booby traps and keeps all of the ship's weapons secured with a lock, both things Rutherford had expected. He is surprised, however, to find crates of items from every culture the captain has come into contact with, from scrolls to silk prayer carpets and paintings done on rice paper. The items are so foreign that Rutherford assumes they could only have been taken through raids and murders. He realizes that the wealthy families who finance the *Republic* must be paying the captain separately for items such as these to stock American museums. Rutherford moves on, and comes across the captain's journal, which he proceeds to read, and learns a great deal about the man. Captain Falcon had been born to a Nantucket minister and a quiet, lonely woman who lived vicariously through her son. Falcon had grown up determined to outperform his father and make his mother proud, bringing her gifts from all the places he traveled that she would never have the chance to see. The captain's mother passed away when he was only fifteen years old, but this has not dampened his resolve.



Captain Falcon has made his share of enemies, however, and is wanted for either murder or treason in three states. The captain sees the war against England as stupid and full of military mistakes; he and other seamen of his mindset became involved in the slave trade, which was booming in the south and some have turned to piracy. Although the sea itself is a dangerous place, by escaping to it, he has escaped the consequences he would face by remaining on land. Captain Falcon has become an expert at survival. The man who was portrayed in his journal entries possessed rare qualities including the craving to achieve perfection, which brought with it the bouts of suicidal depression and loneliness, as well as contempt for anyone who didn't meet his exceptional standards. Captain Falcon thought simultaneously in Latin, French and Greek, and had written a set of exercises in each of these languages to which he credits his survival ability. He also held himself to a strict personal regimen which included teaching himself to read six lines of any book in one snap, find everything in his cabin blindfolded, withstand extreme temperatures in case of a shipwreck, ignore pain, strengthen his eyesight, survive on little food and work while everyone else slept.

Rutherford continues reading the captain's journal, learning more and more about the man. Captain Falcon considers himself misunderstood and holds an inherent distrust of his crew, keeping knives hidden in each cabin of the ship. He focuses his creativity on weapons, primarily guns since he had been born a terrific marksman. Rutherford notes that although he seems superficially dedicated to survival, he has the air of a man who wants to die, a quality that made his place of authority even more frightening. Captain Falcon wants nothing more than to be accepted by his crew, and tries in vain to join into conversations but is never successful. He and Cringle disagree constantly, which usually benefits the crew. In the final entry in his journal, Captain Falcon writes of something extra he plans to add to the ship's cargo in addition to the forty slaves, something one man before them had lost five slaves in an attempt to capture. It was a creature the captain felt would earn him a great deal in Europe, but he did not provide any sort of description, only an allusion to its great power.

As Rutherford read with fear the passage about the elusive creature, the captain approaches him from behind. Rutherford has been so absorbed in reading that he has not heard the captain enter the room and stammers something about trying to find a lantern and stumbling in by mistake. The captain refuses to believe Rutherford's ramblings and accuses him of coming to murder him in his sleep. Rutherford swears that he had only come for the lantern. The captain told Rutherford that six men had tried to kill him onshore less than an hour ago; he had been unarmed except for his steel-toed boots. Captain Falcon told Rutherford that he was teased about his small size when he was a boy, something that pained his mother a great deal, but ever since he began wearing these boots, he had been able to defend himself. He advises Rutherford to fashion himself a pair for the trip home. The captain asks Rutherford if he has a pistol and when he admits he does not, the captain insists on finding one for him.

Falcon shows off a pistol he has just fine-tuned and points out that it cannot be fired unless the handler is wearing a magnetized ring such as the ones he wears. The captain then hands Rutherford the pistol as well as one of his own magnetized rings and a customized holder for ammunition. He continues giving Rutherford advice on how to



protect himself. As the captain begins to undress, his beard catches on the collar of his shirt, and he is cloaked by the material for a few seconds. During this time, Rutherford considers shooting him but refrains. The captain continues talking to Rutherford, telling him he hopes Rutherford can see he trusts him. Then the captain asks him to be his eyes and ears around the crew, as well as with the Africans once they have boarded. He asks Rutherford to give him a full report once a week. Rutherford asks if he is implying that he should be the captain's spy; the captain is hurt at this question and insists that Rutherford would be doing this service only as a friend.

Captain Falcon continues talking to Rutherford, telling him about every member of the crew, details Rutherford wishes not to have heard because hearing such gossip and secrets about the men aboard ship makes him feel unclean. He tries to surmise the captain's intentions for telling him these things and can think only that his plan is to divide and conquer his crew. Rutherford closes his eyes for a moment and thinks of Isadora who would say these kinds of things were sent to test him. When the captain falls asleep, Rutherford bends over him and again considers killing him with the same gun he had just been given. His eyes fall on the magnetized rings they both now wear, and shudders at the thought that the rings bind them together as if they are married. Rutherford is unable to sleep that night since he hears the terrible screaming sounds coming from the tribespeople on land. He wakes Squibb to ask him about the Allmuseri, and learns that they are being prepared for the sale tomorrow. Squibb says that families are separated, and then are made to shave off all of their body hair, are bathed and soaked in oil to make their hides shine, and are given a feast to fatten them up for the buyers the following day.

In town the next day, Rutherford sees the prisoners lined up and shackled to one another and marvels at them. They are a tall people, even taller than the Watusi tribe of Africa known for the extraordinary height of its members. Rutherford has never seen people like this before and Cringle notes that it would be better to be dead in a ditch than in the shoes of the prisoners before them. Their village has been destroyed by famine and most are not healthy enough to survive the voyage to New Orleans. As they speak together, Rutherford begins to tell Cringle of the talk he had with the captain the preceding night and Cringle warns him to stay away from Falcon, telling him he is mad. Rutherford also learns from Cringle that Falcon has been unhappily married to a woman named Molly for thirty years and has no desire to return to her. Cringle continues, telling Rutherford that Falcon is a vicious man who keeps a dated account of every insult he has ever received so that he can re-read it while intoxicated and keep the anger inside him alive. He watches for each man to show a weakness; he knows that Cringle's weakness is Tommy, the cabin boy. Falcon knows that Cringle can't stand the way he takes advantage of the young boy and uses this fact to his advantage. The conversation turns to the creature the captain plans to bring aboard. Cringle tells Rutherford that the creature belongs to Allmuseri and has no business in their world, and he fears the ship will not make it back to America if action is not taken. Cringle warns Rutherford to take sides quickly since they plan to take action against the captain once the ship sets sail for New Orleans.



The list of the ship's cargo includes hides, ivory, gold, rice, sheep, goats, vegetables, butter and beeswax, in addition the forty slaves, totaling in value at \$8,885. The skipper will receive a 25% reward of this total, compared to the sailor's pitiful twelve dollars a month. The total cargo value, of course, does not include the mysterious creature the captain will ensure boards the ship before they depart.

The Allmuseri panic when they see the filthy, rat-infested orlop where they will be held. They see the white men as savages because, according to their mythology, the whites had once been part of their tribe but had fallen into what was, to them, the darkest of all sins. "The failure to experience the unity of Being everywhere was the Allmuseri vision of hell." To them, being shipped to where these sinners reside is the equivalent of being sent to purgatory. A woman throws her baby overboard in order to save it from the terrible future she faces. Falcon brutally beats any slave who steps out of line and Rutherford is not able to watch the slaves treated this way. The inhumanity he witnesses troubles Rutherford so much that he questions how he will be able to go on after observing it. Falcon puts him in charge of feeding the Allmuseri.

The crewmembers speculate as to the mysterious cargo inside the crate that Captain Falcon will speak to no one about. They draw straws to see who will be the first to sneak below to peer inside the crate while the captain sleeps and Tommy, the young cabin boy, draws the shortest straw. When he emerges, it is with pale, bluish skin and blank face. When he speaks, his eyes glow and his words are nonsensical as if a mixture of exotic languages. Cringle covers the shivering boy in his coat and tells the eager men that Tommy had not been able to approach the crate because of the dense air surrounding it, which is apparently a natural defense of the creature inside the crate. The floor near the crate is covered with the creature's defecation, which crawls with a variety of worms and insect-like creatures. Inside the crate, the creature paces and scratches its nails against the walls, speaking with a sweet voice like that of a siren and singing a song, which Tommy sings for the crew. Tommy is unable to speak after he is finished with the song and one of the crewmembers declares that the creature must eat people. Tommy remains in Cringle's cabin for the rest of the voyage home.

### **Entry 3: June 23, 1830 Analysis**

This third entry is a turning point for Rutherford. Although the ship has finally reached land, something he has been longing for since they had departed from New Orleans, Rutherford is unable to celebrate with the rest of the crew. Instead, he remains alone in his bunk; thinking about the night he spent with Captain Falcon, and fearing that it means the worst. When the captain finds him in his cabin, he could have reacted by throwing him off the ship immediately, but, instead, he invites him to sit down with him and they begin talking. The captain then begins sharing with him secrets about almost every crewmember aboard, secrets Rutherford wishes he didn't hear. The captain also insists the Rutherford carry a gun with him and gives him one, along with a magnetic ring, identical to his own, in order to manage the gun properly. Rutherford notes a few opportunities throughout his meeting when he has a clear shot at killing the captain, but refrains from doing so. When the captain goes to bed that night, Rutherford looks at the



ring on his finger, and sees it as a symbol of their connection, as if they are married and he shudders at the thought of it. This night was the start of an unusual relationship between the two men that will play a role in the development of the novel. Although Rutherford seemed to have grown closer to the captain during this night, the following day Cringle warns Rutherford about the captain and cautions him to make a decision to be either with or against him, since Cringle knows that there is a plan to take action against the captain soon.

Rutherford includes details of the ways of the Allmuseri, and their views on their new surroundings and of their captors. He seems fascinated by their way of life and appreciates their culture much more than any of the other crewmembers do. He seems to serve as a link between them, therefore their mistreatment affects him deeply.

The mysterious cargo in the crate down below remains a secret. After Tommy emerges from the hold, strangely changed, the identity of the creature becomes even more of a mystery.



## Entry 4: June 28, 1830

### Entry 4: June 28, 1830 Summary

As the *Republic* leaves the African coast and starts for home, it is leaking badly and soon comes upon rough water and bad weather. Rutherford senses an uneasiness in Captain Falcon's orders and believes that the captain he knew they are heading for stormy weather. It is the stormy season off the coast of Africa, and the ship endures a great deal of rough weather. Much of the crew is unable to eat because of the rough water, and even the roughest sailors find themselves praying since, as they say, there are no atheists at sea. Rutherford notes that Nathaniel Meadows, the man who has supposedly murdered his entire family, looks nothing like the barbarous man he is portrayed to be. In fact, his body and facial features are somewhat disfigured and he has an air of meekness about him.

Throughout the bad weather, the ship continues to take on a great deal of water, and although the captain has the pumps going all day and all night, the Allmuseri are sitting in a foot of water in their hold. Captain Falcon believes that slave rebellions can be prevented by placing one slave in charge of a group of ten and giving him the responsibility of making sure they behave. One of these men in charge is named Ngonyama. Rutherford comes to know him well in the first few weeks of their voyage back and notes that, of all the slaves, he is by far the most mysterious. He always remains quiet and seems to be waiting for something. Ngonyama has the ability to fade into the background as he studies everything around him. During one of their conversations, Rutherford shows him a picture of Isadora and Ngonyama asks him why she has smudges on her face. The smudges under her eyes and chin had been added by the artist to give the portrait depth. Rutherford realizes that Ngonyama's depth perception is something very different from his own. The Allmuseri are accustomed to the flat, seemingly depthless, artistic technique similar to that of the ancient Egyptians. When Ngonyama helps Rutherford and Squibb in the kitchen, the two men are fascinated by the eerie way he carves a pig, making no sound and moving as if the knife were one with his hand. He slices without hitting bone and the pig falls apart as if by magic. Squibb swears it is some kind of a heathen trick but this type of mysterious grace is something the Allmuseri share.

Ngonyama talks with Rutherford about the history of his people and he finds himself fascinated with what he learns. Their speech, for example, is something far different from any other language Rutherford has ever heard or imagined. The sounds they produce are like deep, melodious breaths and the meanings of the words they produce are different as well. For example, nouns or words for anything fixed are almost nonexistent and in their place are verbs. A bed is referred to as a "resting" and a robe is called a "warming." Their written language is unique as well, consisting of smoothly drawn pictograms that Rutherford said make him relax when he looks at it. The Allmuseri are the most sought-after slaves in the world, sold at twice the price of other tribespeople. They dislike property which make them easy to clothe, they are easy to





feed since they do not eat any meat, they require no medication since they possess the ability to heal themselves, they rarely fight, will not steal, and it is said they feel physically sick if they wrong anyone.

Rutherford befriends an Allmuseri woman and her daughter, Baleka. After throwing the young girl a biscuit one day, the mother inspects it and throws it back saying her daughter deserves much better than a moldy biscuit. That evening, Rutherford shares his dinner with the young girl and from then on, she and her mother expect him to share his every plate of food. Baleka stays with Rutherford constantly. The ship runs into a particularly bad storm with powerful wind, rain and lightning. It is a storm like no other, and Rutherford remains hypnotized by it; anything not tied down is tossed in the air as the ship is thrown around in waves as big as small mountains. Rutherford hangs on tightly to Baleka as the ship appears to have fallen down under columns of water that crash on the deck with a powerful force, sweeping people right off the deck and out to sea, including Baleka's mother. Then suddenly, the wind shifts and the storm passes leaving the remaining crew soaking wet and stunned, then slowly breaking into applause. When Rutherford turns to see Ngonyama, he is amazed to find him completely dry. Ngonyama then tells him to lie forward or below the following day at noon and that if he had any friends aboard, to tell them the same. Without any explanation, he walks away leaving Rutherford frustrated and confused at his request.

As the crew goes through the motions of putting the ship back into working order, they all still half-expect the ocean to show its fury once more. Matthew McGaffin stands up to Cringle and tells him angrily that the ship is falling apart and that if something is not done about the captain soon, they will never make it home. He continues on, accusing Cringle of not having the guts to stand up to Captain Falcon, but Cringle does not reply. He is flustered by the tirade and walks away.

That night, a group of crewmembers, including Cringle, McGaffin, Squibb, and Rutherford, assemble to discuss a mutiny against the captain. Although there is initially discussion among the sailors that Rutherford should leave the meeting since he a stowaway and not truly one of them, Cringle convinces the men that they need all the help they can get. Cringle informs Rutherford that the meeting has been convened to discuss the best way to get the ship back on course and that the assembled men do not trust the captain. McGaffin points out the ring on Rutherford's hand that Falcon has given him, but Rutherford denies any suggestion of a gift and swears he has stolen it from the captain. Cringle is appointed captain once Falcon is out of the way and he assures the men he will see to it that the captain's share of the cargo is equally divided among them. Cringle tells the group that mutiny doesn't bother him since, in fact, their entire country had been born out of rebellion. Once the conversation turns to Falcon's future, one man suggests that they put him off on a raft and give him a chance to survive. McGaffin shoots down the idea, saying Falcon would no doubt survive and hunt them all down one by one.

Finally, McGaffin asks Rutherford where he has gotten the captain's ring and Rutherford truthfully replies that he got it from the captain's cabin, admitting to successfully breaking in and getting past all of his locks and traps. Once the men learn of



Rutherford's skill, they decide to send him to break into the captain's cabin while he is detained on deck with the slaves. Rutherford agrees to this and each of the men slice a notch in his thumb and let the blood drip into McGaffin's mug before each takes a swig to seal the deal. The men leave and Rutherford looks on as Squibb prepares the captain's dinner. Rutherford then brings it up the captain's room; the captain answers the door naked and invites him inside. Noticing Rutherford's hesitation at seeing him nude, the captain reluctantly puts on some clothes and asks him to set down the meal and taste a little of everything before he begins eating. Falcon asks Rutherford if he thinks he is being overly cautious, to which Rutherford replies affirmatively. Falcon responds that, unlike Rutherford, he has never trusted or liked anyone in his life. Falcon then adds that he, himself, is the only truly real person although he admits he likes Rutherford because he feels Rutherford likes him in return. The captain then asks Rutherford for his report of the activities of the crewmembers. Before he begins, Rutherford begs the forgiveness of the reader for what he is about to divulge. He then admits that, although he is unsure why he does it, perhaps simply because he needed someone to talk to, he tells the captain everything about the coming mutiny, including the names of all of the men involved.

Falcon thanks Rutherford for his honesty and tells him that their plan would not have been as easy to execute as they thought. He tells Rutherford that he will not be an easy man to eliminate, having attempted suicide once, resulting only in 45-caliber ball flattened by his skull. Falcon adds that even if he is removed from the ship, it will not fix their problems. He believes that man himself is the problem; men will believe what they want to believe, and only that. Rutherford disagrees, telling him that if something is true, it cannot be suppressed, no matter who attempts to do so. Falcon responds by saying that conflict is all a part of consciousness and that even if they had thrown him overboard, within minutes the remaining men would have been fighting and dueling amongst themselves. Rutherford then asks the captain what he plans to do with the men who have planned the mutiny, to which Falcon replies that he plans to chain the rebels in the hold with the slaves and they will forfeit their shares of the cargo. To Rutherford's surprise, he plans to set them free upon reaching land. As his reward for Rutherford's honesty, Falcon tells him that he will double his share of the cargo, and will give him a bonus for the secret cargo.

Rutherford asks the captain what this secret cargo is. Falcon tells him that they are now beyond keeping secrets from one another, and tells him to sit down beside him, since what he is about to say should not be heard while standing.

## **Entry 4: June 28, 1830 Analysis**

The terrible storm seems to have left the shipmates changed. Ngonyama's appearance, totally dry in spite of the storm, is mysterious. His exchange with Rutherford is also mysterious, and adds even more obscurity to the warning he gives Rutherford to remain below the following day.



The fact that Rutherford is the only black member of the crew seems to draw him to the Allmuseri and he begins a relationship with a few members of the tribe. First, he spends time with Baleka, a bond that grows even stronger when her mother is swept away in the storm. He cares for her as if she is his own daughter and she grows more and more attached to him. Rutherford also begins a friendship with Ngonyama, a large Allmuseri man who teaches Rutherford a great deal about his people, and with whom Rutherford exchanges information in return. Rutherford joins in the meeting between the group of men planning to overthrow Falcon and is forced to make a decision between following along with their plan or honoring the promise he had made to the captain to be his "eyes and ears" aboard ship.

Rutherford appears to have sided with the group in favor of mutiny and the reader is surprised when he divulges the whole plan, including the names of each of the men involved, to the captain. Rutherford makes an aside to the reader in his journal entry, before divulging the planned mutiny. He states that he is not sure to this day why he told the captain about it and supposes that he was in an emotional state and simply needed someone to talk to. He begs for forgiveness from the reader, which adds to the reader's loyalty towards Rutherford. The reader has been forced to make a decision along with Rutherford. Already presented with the side of the shipmates in favor of mutiny, the reader also learns the side of the captain, who says the problems aboard the ship will not be solved in his absence.



## Entry 5: June 30, 1830

### Entry 5: June 30, 1830 Summary

Captain Falcon tells Rutherford that what he is carrying in the secret crate below is an Allmuseri god and Rutherford is understandably shocked. Falcon adds that the Allmuseri have been worshipping this god since the Stone Age and they believe it is the driving force behind the universe. Falcon, however, is only concerned with the money and fame it will bring and the fame, enabling Falcon to make a mark in the history books. Leaving the captain's room that night, Rutherford's mind is bubbling with the news he has just heard. The fact that the ship is carrying a god aboard frightens him, and he finds himself concerned with whether this will cause a natural disturbance like the Apocalypse.

Throughout their conversation, the ship's dogs have been howling uncontrollably and when Rutherford goes out on deck to see what has been causing all of the commotion, he finds Meadows standing before the dogs. Meadows is wearing Rutherford's clothing and beating the dogs viciously as he imitates Rutherford's voice and even his nervous habits. Rutherford is amazed at the detail Meadows has achieved in his imitation, and then watches as he removes his clothing and lets the dogs snap at it. He then puts on a pair of Cringle's trousers and continues his routine with clothing from the Allmuseri as well, to get the dogs familiar with each of the scents accompanying the articles of clothing he carried. This intricate charade causes the dogs to hate their owners as Meadows continues to beat the dogs. Heading back along the deck after witnessing this, a frightened and surprised Rutherford finds himself having to pass through a great deal of wreckage from the disintegrating ship. The magnitude of the damage is clear as he describes the injured people and debris strewn along the deck as he passes.

Rutherford makes his way back to the galley where he finds Squibb caring for Baleka, who appears to be ill. Squibb asks him if he has any relatives and Rutherford finds himself telling him about his brother, Jackson. They had grown up with Reverend Chandler, who had inherited the boys from their father and kept them only out of Christian duty since he hated the idea of slavery. The reverend's family had died, which left Jackson and Rutherford to inherit everything he had, including a house, furniture and grounds. Jackson was eight years older than Rutherford, so they had not grown up together. After Reverend Chandler grew ill, it was Jackson who fulfilled his every whim, cared for, and nursed him. Jackson was the epitome of goodness, and he was ashamed of Rutherford, who was the problem child, always getting into mischief. One Sunday, when it had become clear that the reverend was near death; Jackson called for Rutherford to meet him in their master's chambers. Jackson had approached their master's bed and poured him a glass of water. When Jackson informed him that Rutherford was also present, Chandler frowned at the news, having always liked Rutherford less than Jackson.



That night, Reverend Chandler dismissed both brothers, telling them they were free to leave if they so wished. He then told Jackson that he was indebted to him for all Jackson had done for him. He also told him that he could take anything he wanted for Rutherford and for himself. Jackson responded by saying that he could not accept the gift of land or property since he did not believe anyone could really own the trees or anything else. His final decision was to divide the estate among all of the slaves. Rutherford had told his brother he was a fool for saying this, and Chandler told him that Jackson was wise beyond his years. Rutherford had stormed off that night, leaving the two of them complimenting one another and remained in an angry fit for days afterward. In the end, Rutherford ended up with forty dollars, a bible, and Chandler's bedpan.

Squibb falls asleep shortly after Rutherford finishes his story, and Rutherford notices that Baleka seems to be coming down with a fever. Back up on deck, Rutherford finds Ngonyama looking out to sea toward Bangalang, and this reminds Rutherford of the way his brother used to look out onto the road where their father had gone and never returned. Rutherford approaches Ngonyama and asks him what he would do if he were master of the ship. He tells Rutherford that he would sail back to Bangalang and return the ship to the crew, turning this whole ordeal into just a terrifying story to tell their grandchildren. Surprised at this, Rutherford asks him why he would not harm the crew, to which Ngonyama replied, "Anger, we say is like the blade of a sword. Very difficult to hold for long without harming oneself." Seemingly satisfied with his reply, Rutherford gives Ngonyama a key he had stolen from Falcon's cabin the night before.

## Entry 5: June 30, 1830 Analysis

Squibb and Rutherford have grown closer recently-Rutherford trusting him with the care of Baleka, and telling him the details about his upbringing with Reverend Chandler and his brother, which are all things he has never mentioned to anyone before. The reader is now able to fill in the gaps of Rutherford's background. It is clear that Rutherford holds a grudge against his brother, and will probably never forgive him for relinquishing their inheritance. He finds it very difficult to speak of him, and throughout his description, he makes it clear that neither Reverend Chandler nor Jackson liked Rutherford; in fact, they were both ashamed of him. That night, Ngonyama and Rutherford, both unable to sleep, find themselves on deck. Ngonyama's stature as he stares out to sea toward the direction of his home, reminds Rutherford of the way Jackson used to look down the road to Chandler's farm after their father left. Ngonyama hears Rutherford's approach and welcomes him. When Rutherford asks him what he would do as master of the ship, Ngonyama replies honestly. Rutherford seems satisfied with his nonviolent answer and presents him with a key he stole from the captain's room the preceding night.

This key will play a crucial role as the novel continues to unfold. It is a symbol of trust that Rutherford gives to Ngonyama, trusting that he will use it wisely. Ngonyama's answer to Rutherford's question as to what he would do as master of the ship is entirely nonviolent, therefore Rutherford gives him the key and trusts that he will put it to good use. The reader now knows to expect some kind of slave escape.



## Entry 6: July 3, 1830

### Entry 6: July 3, 1830 Summary

Rutherford witnesses the slaves coming up from their hold, stinking of their own vomit and feces. He knows that they have been forced to sit in contorted positions so that as many slaves as possible can be squeezed into every inch of space. As a result, when the slaves emerge from their hold, many find it difficult to move and are in terrible physical states. It is then that Rutherford decides the captain is entirely evil for making these human beings endure such torture. Ngonyama and Meadows carry an Allmuseri corpse from down below and, following orders, Meadows slices off the boy's ears so that Falcon can save them and prove to his benefactors that he had indeed picked up the required number of Africans. Rutherford is told to help the men throw the corpse overboard, something he finds disturbing, since the sight and smell of the corpse are almost unbearable. Rutherford guesses the boy to have been about his own age and wonders if he has been torn from a beautiful woman, as this is how Rutherford has lately thought of his situation with Isadora. The men are finally able to throw him overboard, but Rutherford is left with a piece of the boy's rotting flesh in his hand, and has the feeling that his hand no longer belongs to him, that it will never be clean again. Rutherford looks into Ngonyama's eyes and tries to decipher his expression.

Rutherford explains that it is impossible to understand the Allmuseri; their actions are many times misleading. He adds that when visitors came to their village, they spat at their feet, which caused many to react violently, assuming it was an insult. However, the Allmuseri's meaning was only that the visitors must be tired and their feet hot from traveling so that they might appreciate some water on their boots to cool them off. Now, when he looks at Ngonyama's eyes, he sees an emptiness and displacement that can only come from being miles away from home in a strange place. Rutherford then realizes that he has seen the Allmuseri way of life as something fixed, however, he sees now that their time aboard the ship, their exposure to a different way of life, has changed them. They are no longer purely Allmuseri. Ngonyama then quietly returns the key Rutherford had given him; it had not been the right one to unlock their leg irons. However, something in Ngonyama's face tells Rutherford that even if the key had provided a means of escape, it would not have done any good.

On deck, Cringle quietly orders Rutherford down to the captain's cabin to carry out their mutinous plan. Rutherford manages to pick the lock, but once inside, he breaks down, suddenly finding himself unable to breathe and unable to choose between Cringle and Falcon. The panic continues and Rutherford finds himself praying, asking God if this is some sort of test. He feels a crushing feeling of dread that he cannot shake; it has paralyzed him completely. Then, as if he was spewing forth everything wrong that had ever taken place in his life, Rutherford burst into tears.

Suddenly, a mate named Fletcher burst into the room in a frenzy, telling Rutherford that Cringle and his men are too late with the uprising. He says that eight of the captain's



men burst into the storeroom, and killed Daniels, another of the mates, and that he, himself, barely escaped. Before Rutherford can warn him, Fletcher opens the cabinet where Falcon stores his guns, and set off one of his traps, dying as pieces of bone and teeth scattered cross the room. The explosion has temporarily deafened Rutherford, who escapes from the room and runs into Falcon in the hallway, unable to hear anything the man said. Falcon is carrying a saber in one hand and a bloody scalp of hair in the other. When Rutherford could finally make out the man's words, he is surprised for the first time to hear fear in his voice.

Sensing all of the commotion and confusion on deck, Rutherford's first impulse is to find Baleka and Squibb. Once on deck, Rutherford finds himself surrounded by blood, ripped up dog carcasses, a dead sailor's body, and men fighting each other to the death. Then Meadows is killed right before his eyes, sliced across the stomach and his bowels spilled out at his feet. Rutherford quickly realizes that, although he has no idea how, the slaves have escaped and staged an uprising themselves. The Allmuseri art of capoeira is based on fighting in close quarters while bound, so they had thrown powerful kicks once they'd fallen, broken ankles with foot sweeps and choked using their chains until one of the slaves had found the key to their shackles and freed them all. Ngonyama got Rutherford's attention, telling him that if he wished to plead for the lives of any men, he must do it now. Rutherford confronts him, saying that he had told him he would set the men free if he were in charge, to which Ngonyama replies that the decision was not his to make.

As Rutherford enters the captain's cabin, he finds it in ruins. Inside, seated in a chair and badly hurt, is Cringle, surrounded by three Allmuseri men passing around a bottle of some of the captain's best rum. When they enter, Ngonyama tells Rutherford that he can relax there, that these men are his brothers, although Rutherford is not entirely convinced of this. When Cringle attempts to speak, one of the Allmuseri men yanks his head back by his hair. The men continue to consider what to do with Cringle; they did not allow themselves to celebrate their victory over the crew. Ngonyama tells them they are not free men yet, they are free of nothing more than the hold. Each of the Allmuseri men has a story to tell about the way that they and their families have been treated, including humiliation, rape, and other forms of brutality, pointing a finger at Cringle with each accusation.

Rutherford tries his best to convince the men that they need Cringle to read the maps and navigate the ship. Cringle says he refuses to help the slaves, and Ngonyama points out that this is a mistake on his part. The Allmuseri will not accept that Rutherford is on their side until he, himself, kills Cringle. Rutherford lifts the hatchet over Cringle's head but is unable to kill him, insisting they will need his help. Rutherford then tells the Allmuseri they should keep Cringle until they sight land; they should make him *their* slave. This change of wording stops them in their tracks and the men finally agree. When they leave, Cringle tells Rutherford it had been a mistake to teach Ngonyama English, that they had been ready to kill Rutherford as well. Rutherford tells him he is not on anyone's side and his intent is just to stay alive. Cringle then thanks him for saving his life, saying he will do anything he asks.



That night, the Allmuseri have a ceremony to cleanse the ship after the bloody uprising. While looking around the ship for survivors, Cringle and Rutherford find Baleka and Squibb hiding in a storeroom. Baleka immediately embraces Rutherford. The survivors of the original crew, Squibb, Cringle and Rutherford, discuss what will happen next and admit they have no control; the Allmuseri are in command now. Captain Falcon remains under lock and key in his own room. After the Allmuseri's ceremony, Ngonyama approaches Rutherford and tells him that he must tell the captain to plot a new course for them, assuring him that he will die if he refuses. Rutherford then finds himself entering the cabin to have this last conversation with the captain.

## **Entry 6: July 3, 1830 Analysis**

When Rutherford enters the captain's cabin, following Cringle's order to carry out their plan to overthrow the captain, he finds himself in a complete and utter panic. Rutherford finds that he cannot choose between the captain and the group that plans to overthrow him; he has pledged his allegiance to both. Unable to choose between the two, he falls to his knees, unable even to breathe, Rutherford finds himself praying, something he has never mentioned doing before. His flood of tears causes him such anguished thoughts that he finds that he does not care whether he lives or dies. Yet not an hour later, he finds himself pleading for Cringle's life and for his own.

Although the reader may have expected an uprising from the slaves after Rutherford gives the key to Ngonyama, when he returns it, the expectation abandoned in favor of the mutinous group of crewmembers who plan to rise against the captain. It therefore comes as a surprise when Rutherford finds the slaves have escaped and murdered almost all of the crewmembers. When Rutherford notices the way the Allmuseri have changed, having been exposed to a new way of life aboard the ship, it can be seen as foreshadowing of these events since the bloody uprising is completely out of character for the hitherto peaceful tribe. The power struggle is evident from the beginning of the entry, when the slaves are brought out onto the deck in such a desperate, pathetic state that Rutherford curses Falcon, calling him the devil for treating them so terribly. Then, at the end of the entry, the three remaining crewmembers discuss their futures, admitting that the Allmuseri are in complete control. The captain who has so cruelly treated the slaves remains locked in his cabin, also completely at their mercy.





# Entry 7: SAME DAY

## Entry 7: SAME DAY Summary

Rutherford enters the captain's cabin to find it in ruins and the captain trapped under a large piece of timber. Falcon is badly hurt, unable to stand. His shoulders crack as he pulls himself along the floor and Rutherford can see that half of the ribs on his right side are broken. Although he is clearly in physical pain from his injuries, Rutherford sees also that he seems to be hiding deeper, more emotional pain underneath. He finds himself pitying the captain, but also pitying himself and the rest of the surviving crewmembers since they are all now in the same pathetic situation. As he speaks to the captain, Rutherford sees that the falling beams in his room had damaged his nervous system and he is no longer able to control his facial muscles or his bowels. Falcon recognizes Rutherford and asks him if it is the end of the world. Falcon admits that the crew had underestimated the intelligence of the Allmuseri slaves.

As they discuss their situation, Rutherford tells him that the slaves have control of the ship, but Falcon corrects Rutherford, telling him that they don't own the ship. Rutherford had been hitherto unaware of the ship's finances. When Falcon explains that the ship and its entire cargo belong to the three men who have financed it, Rutherford is taken by surprise. Falcon adds that the men will not be understanding of the crew's situation after the uprising; they will see only their lost investment and nothing else. Falcon shares the names of the ship's three financiers: Zebediah Singleton, Elihu Griswold and Philippe Zeringue, the same man who had attempted to force Rutherford to marry Isadora in New Orleans. Rutherford finds himself wondering what a black man like Zeringue would have been doing buying and selling slaves.

Rutherford implores the captain to do as the slaves ask, since all of their lives depend on it. The captain then instructs Rutherford that whatever happens to him, he must continue writing in the ship's log, recording everything that happens on the voyage. Rutherford reluctantly agrees. Before he leaves, the captain asks Rutherford for the magnetic ring he had given him days before and Rutherford hands it to him and the captain orders him to leave. As Rutherford leaves the room, he sees Ngonyama and Diamelo entering, and he knows the captain is inside looking for a gun. Suddenly, a shot is heard and Rutherford hears someone say there has been a death; he prays it was not Ngonyama. Entering the captain's room, he finds the captain himself holding the gun that had blasted away half of his head.

Life aboard the *Republic* goes on after the captain's death, however, and the ship is in serious need of repair. The remaining passengers find themselves in constant argument, which causes more problems. The badly damaged ship now floats along with the pitiful, half-starved passengers barely able to keep it going. Diamelo, one of the Allmuseri men who led the rebellion, hates the Americans and never speaks directly to them. He curses Ngonyama for speaking up for Rutherford and his few remaining crewmembers, and threatens the Americans constantly. Ngonyama has known Diamelo



since childhood and has never known him to be violent until now. Diamelo is a thin man and Rutherford knows he could take him down in a fight. Although the captain, and all of his possessions, have been thrown overboard, Diamelo insists that his spirit is still very much alive.

Diamelo enforces new rules aboard the ship for the remaining crewmembers: only the Allmuseri language can be spoken when in the presence of the Allmuseri, Falcon's old maps cannot be used, only the new maps prepared by Ghofan, and singing songs in English is forbidden. The remaining crew must learn Allmuseri stories, nurture the Allmuseri god, use Allmuseri medicine, and eat Allmuseri food. Each of the passengers take turns going below to feed the Allmuseri god, but this is the only one of Diamelo's rules that is followed. As for the consumption of Allmuseri food, the rations are so low that the crewmembers find themselves munching on candles and leather to get by. Not only is the crew starving, they are also sick; diseases ravage the ship and Squib finds himself the unofficial ship doctor. His methods are brutal, however, since he had little training. The most popular solution to treat a wounded limb is amputation, and a sore tooth is treated by extraction. The crew is plagued with a multitude of terrible diseases from eczema to Black Vomit. Cringle is in a terrible state and his skin afflictions left him with a terrible stench.

One night, as Cringle pours over the maps in Falcon's cabin, he tells Rutherford the story of how he ended up aboard the *Republic*. His father is a very influential businessman, and it was his decision to send Cringle on this voyage. Having become successful on his own, Cringle's father was intolerant of people who were born with wealth. Ironically, his wealth has turned his children into the same privileged people he so despises. Cringle was appointed to this job, as well as many other jobs by his father, and hated all of them. As hard as he tries, Cringle has been unable to make his father proud of him with any of the jobs he had found on land. Rutherford tells Cringle that he sometimes feels as if he has no past, that when he looks behind him for his father he finds only emptiness. Cringle tells Rutherford he is lucky not to know who his father is. Cringle has been trying his whole life to live up to his father's expectations but has been unable to. He begins talking about an orphan brother his parents adopted, and how he despises the way his father dotes on him. Cringle becomes overwhelmed and asks Rutherford to leave him alone for a while. Rutherford urges him to get some rest and helps him to his hammock, noting that the poor man's body is covered in open sores, which emit a terrible smell; he is plagued by a terrible cough and his gums bleed from infection.

Rutherford, himself, admits he is in no better shape than most of the other passengers. However, he finds himself forced to forget his own pain in order to take care of the others when they need him. He cares for Baleka when she cries for her mother, he intervenes when Diamelo threatens to kill Squibb for not understanding the orders he gives him in Allmuseri, and when the Allmuseri fall behind in their work from weakness. He clowns around and makes jokes for the children, although he is weak and tired himself. Rutherford finds himself thinking about a time when, as a child, he had asked Reverend Chandler what he could do for others, but the man had replied simply, "Yes, that *is* the question, Rutherford. What *can* you do?" This reply had hurt Rutherford and



made him even more intent on theft and mischief. Now, attempting to comfort the weary passengers aboard the *Republic*, he looks back in his memory for things that had happened to him in his life and finds himself realizing that the "I" he is today is simply a compilation of all of those events.

Ngonyama tells him later that day that the evil they are experiencing is a result of all the crewmembers they killed in the uprising and he holds himself responsible for that. It is an essential Allmuseri belief that what a man holds within his heart is manifested in his life; if a man's heart is clear, he is rich and even a king can be poor if he holds hatred inside.

Rutherford has been dutifully recording all of the goings-on aboard the ship in the log and finds himself wishing for his lost crewmembers to be back in the room with him. He also finds himself thinking of Isadora and the way she would watch him look at women in magazines and on the street, slightly jealous if he looked too long but never letting him know it. In his daydream, he goes crawling back to Isadora, buries his head in her skirts and weeps, begging her to forgive him for all he had done to her. Baleka comes in to check on him and Rutherford notes that she, in the Allmuseri way, never displays her feelings to anyone. She is very careful to do nothing that might upset or offend anyone else. Her feelings are "like heat from hands on a glass," hardly imperceptible in her speech and actions.

Baleka then informs Rutherford that it is his turn to feed the Allmuseri god down below. Rutherford goes down into the hold and feels the urge to vomit as his lungs inhale the stale air. Inside the room, everything is completely still and shrouded in complete darkness. Rutherford is so weak he is unable to move. He sees the box to his right and then it opens, revealing the god that can mold itself into any form it pleases, delighting in driving men out of their minds. As it leaves the box that night, Rutherford recognizes the form immediately as the one man on earth with whom he has unfinished business with: his father, Riley Calhoun.

## Entry 7: SAME DAY Analysis

When Rutherford enters the captain's room and sees his physical injuries, he notices that the captain's emotional injuries seem to be causing him the most pain of all. The captain is a very proud man, and this helplessness hurts him more than his physical injuries. When he asks Rutherford for the magnetic ring to his gun, and then uses the gun to kill himself, the severity of his depression becomes evident; he could not go on living on the ship he had once captained without being in control. From Rutherford's point of view, the captain's death leaves the ship and its remaining passengers, "as all in the suddenly silent room knew-alone and sightless on strange waters, our chances for reaching home and dropping hook dashed by his death like driftwood."

The readers learn a great deal about Cringle's character when he reveals his past to Rutherford. At this point, Cringle's disease-ravaged body is in such a sorry state that one cannot help but feel sorry for him. It seems that he is approaching death and,



before he passes away, tells his story to Rutherford, thus leaving his character more easily understood. Cringle has evidently spent his entire life in a fruitless pursuit to please his father. He arrived on the ship at his father's bidding, not by choice and now, it seems, this voyage will be just another failed attempt to please his father. Cringle's body and his emotional self are failing together; he has grown weary of his life's pursuit. When Rutherford put him in his hammock, it is for a much-needed rest.

The ship and its crew are left in a terrible state, ravaged with diseases, and torment after the uprising and the captain's death. Although Rutherford is sick and weak as well, he finds himself forgetting about his own pain and suffering to concentrate on easing the suffering of his crewmembers. His selflessness endears him to the reader. His daydream about Isadora, in which he begs for her forgiveness, shows a change in Rutherford's inner self; he began this journey as a young man in search of adventure and fleeing from the marriage that he now finds himself longing for.



## Entry 8: August 1, 1830

### Entry 8: August 1, 1830 Summary

Rutherford finds himself faced with the vision of his father as the Allmuseri god takes on his form. He almost passes out from nausea and weakness, but manages to stay on his feet. Rutherford thinks back to his childhood and the source of the feelings he has for his father. He was a handsome man, well built and the women loved him. Even after a long day of working, he would play the guitar and sing, frequently making grown women cry. He was a muscular man but wasn't popular with the men; some even tried to kill him. Riley won in confrontations, however, because of his tremendous strength. He was constantly getting in trouble, and blamed his wild ways on slavery. On New Years Eve of 1811, Riley had escaped but never made it more than ten miles from the farm before he was captured and killed. Seeing the Allmuseri god in the shape of his father proves too much for Rutherford to handle and he finally faints. He comes to semi-consciousness, hearing screaming and with double vision. Squibb is feeding him a choice piece of steak, and when he sees Rutherford that is awake, tells him to lie still. Squibb is bleeding him, a medical practice that Rutherford questions, and wonders if Squibb is even capable of carrying it out without killing him. Rutherford learns that he had been unconscious for three days, since going below to feed the creature. He also learns that a ship has been spotted about two miles away. When Rutherford mentions Cringle's name, Squibb pauses and informed Rutherford that he had just had Cringle for supper.

Cringle's already sorry physical state had gotten worse and he knew death was near. Rather than allow himself to die naturally, however, and leave his crewmembers with the unpleasant task of cleaning up after him, he had instructed Squibb to kill him so that he could leave his body to the starving crewmembers, to provide them with some badly-needed sustenance. Cringle's death and selflessness has left the crew silent and somber. Rutherford is unwilling to believe he is gone, wanting Squibb to deny the story of his death, but he could that he has told the truth.

Rutherford warns the reader that what follows must not go further than the pages of the journal in which he writes. Squibb has been caught stealing rations from food that had been set apart for children, he had been that hungry. Squibb is so ashamed of his actions that he is unable to speak to anyone for days. Now that Rutherford lies sick and bleeding and is under Squibb's care, Squibb informs Rutherford that Ngonyama has also fallen ill, the blood in his urine indicating internal bleeding. Squibb's opinion is that Ngonyama doesn't have much time left; none of them have much time for that matter. Their only hope is the ship that has been sighted nearby. Diamelo is in favor of firing on the ship and then abandoning the *Republic* in favor of the other ship. Squibb leaves after drawing a pint of Rutherford's blood, leaving him even weaker than before.

Rutherford falls into a deep sleep. He has never fallen ill until now; his gums are bleeding, he feels sharp pain throughout his body and he has a high fever. Rutherford hears a knock at his door. Someone looks inside, passing on and saying nothing.



Rutherford feels his chest burning, his eyes filmy, his body weak, and he falls into a deep sleep. When he wakes, unsure of how many days have passed, he feels as if he is on fire. Still very weak and with blurry vision, he climbs out of bed and kneels by his bed, unable to stand up. Rutherford manages to put on his pants and stumbles out onto the deck. He finds himself dreaming of home, noting that he is sure the Allmuseri also dream of home. Yet to them, home was a clear and peaceful memory. To Rutherford, home is more like returning to a war in progress; yet even this seems more welcoming than his present circumstances.

Rutherford falls and Baleka comes to him, finding him in such a bad state that he cannot even remember his own name. Rutherford is brought back to his bed. The room around him seems to be spinning and he is unable to even sit up. His bowels run black and he feels pain throughout his body. Ngonyama enters the room, shivering and clearly in pain but trying not to show it. When he sees him, Rutherford remembers the Allmuseri practice Ngonyama taught him in which each person relinquishes a selfish desire and then there is a celebration. Ngonyama pushes Rutherford back onto his bed when he tries to sit up. Although they have become close friends, they are unable to help each other. Rutherford's mind spins and he feels himself fall into darkness once more. Ngonyama stays with him for a time, then leaves. Rutherford's illness begins ravaging his body even more, causing tremors and more pain. He feels as if he is becoming paralyzed and going blind. A storm rages on outside and the cabin door flies open to reveal Ngonyama, who comes inside and helps Rutherford to his feet. When Rutherford asks for help in dressing, Ngonyama tells him that there is no time, there are only twelve passengers left, including them. As soon as they get out onto the deck, an explosion rocks the boat, shocking Rutherford and throwing him back. The ceiling caves in and Squibb falls beneath Rutherford. The falling planks from the ceiling pin them down and Squibb, with a strength Rutherford cannot explain, shoves the planks aside and gets them back out on deck. As they got, they see Diamelo's body lying near a cannon, which Rutherford supposes, has misfired and killed him.

The deck is in chaos, but Rutherford can see Ngonyama at the wheel; he has lashed himself to it and is unable to break free. The ship breaks down the center and Squibb hurriedly takes off all his clothing and pushes Rutherford toward a boat waiting with three crying children inside. Fighting to keep the small boat upright, Rutherford feels the deck slam upward suddenly, which sends all of the passengers flying into the sky.

According to Rutherford, the feeling of hitting the ocean is inexplicable. The water is freezing and he is unable to make out the ship as he slips underwater. As he goes underwater, his past flashes before his eyes, and he finds that there is very little to evaluate. Rutherford battles to stay afloat. He sees the Allmuseri grabbing onto pieces of wood and debris to stay afloat, but as the boat sinks nearby, it sucks them down with it. During the night, the shipwrecked passengers go one by one and Rutherford is unable to say who lived and who did not. The hammock on which he lay should have kept him afloat during the night, but it did not last and the entry ends as Rutherford feels himself slipping below the waters of the Atlantic.



## Entry 8: August 1, 1830 Analysis

Rutherford spends the bulk of this entry in a semi-conscious state as he feels his illness overtaking his body. He is in terrible pain, and, sick for the first time in his life, he feels his body slipping away. The friends he has grown close with during the voyage, though they visit to keep him company and care for them as best they can, are unable to help him recover. In this way, Rutherford is entirely alone with his painful sickness, unable to help even himself. The tone of this entire passage is disheartening as the state of affairs on the ship goes from bad to worse. The story Squibb tells of Cringle's selfless sacrifice, asking Squibb to kill him so that his crewmembers could have his body, touches Rutherford deeply, yet it saddens him to hear that his friend has passed away. There is a touch of irony in that Rutherford eats Cringle's body without knowing it, yet at the start of the voyage, Falcon's story of cannibalism made him nauseous. He had no idea circumstances could reach such a dire, desperate state as to make cannibalism a necessity for survival.

Rutherford is still very ill as the *Republic* breaks down the middle and sinks. He finds himself alone in the Atlantic surrounded by debris and people around him sucked down by the force of the sinking ship. He does not know who has managed to survive and who has drowned. When his life passes before his eyes, he notes that it provides very little to look at. Throughout the entry, circumstances aboard ship have become so desperate that it is difficult not to lose hope. As the entry closes, with the shipwrecked crewmembers drowning around him and with Rutherford slipping below the Atlantic alone, it seems as if all is lost.



## Entry 9: August 20, 1830

### Entry 9: August 20, 1830 Summary

Rutherford begins the passage by noting that his life could very well have ended when he slipped under water that night. However he had become so frail and weakened from bloodletting, that he found himself more buoyant than most and managed to stay afloat, floundering in the water until he was rescued. Someone's arms fished him up out of the water and someone's hand grabbed him by the hair and pulled him over deck railings. Rutherford has been rescued, along with Squibb and three children. A group of people gathers around them and asks what kind of fish they are; their conditions were so terrible that they are barely recognizable as human. Rutherford is so glad to be rescued that he does not release the ship's captain from his thankful embrace for half an hour. Rutherford soon learns the name of the ship is the *Juno*, and Captain Quackenbush is a kind man who listens patiently as Squibb recounts the tale of their misfortune and thanks God for allowing him to come to their rescue.

The change in pace from the *Republic*, where Captain Falcon had trained his crew to exist in survival mode and expect the worse, to the *Juno*, where Rutherford finds himself with time to relax, comes as such a shock to him. He finds himself shaking and crying easily, something he has not done in so long that he finds it refreshing. When the ship's boy asks him whether he would prefer a white bedspread or a blue one, he is shocked. The initial reason for his surprise is that the ship's boy reminds him of Tommy, but also because he cannot think of how this decision can really matter. He is unable to sleep for more than four hours at a time since Falcon had so successfully taught him to catnap in order to stay up for nighttime watches. Rutherford is plagued by nightmares of the Allmuseri god and sometimes falls to the floor with the feeling that the *Juno* is sinking. He is in such a confused state that he begins inventing excuses as to why he cannot leave his cabin, remaining there for weeks. At times, he is so depressed that he feels guilty even for being alive, feeling that by living, he has somehow stolen life from Cringle or Ngonyama. Rutherford even considers hanging himself so that he can join his drowned crewmembers.

After the storm passes, Rutherford hears the passengers aboard the *Juno* singing, "Have You Ever Been in New Orleans," which does nothing to brighten his mood. Throughout his ordeal, Rutherford keeps writing in the ship's journal, using it as a means of escape, his writing helping to sort out the great mix of feelings he is experiencing.

Baleka, who is among the children rescued from the shipwreck, takes care of Rutherford through his bout of depression, bringing him whatever he needs. She has been well cared- for, and is dressed in new clothes and shoes. Rutherford asks her the name of the man who has presented these gifts. Her reply is, "Mr. Zeringue," an answer that shocks Rutherford. To illustrate her answer, Baleka does an impression of Mr. Zeringue by puffing out her belly and pretending to flick the end of a cigar, and Rutherford is sure she is speaking of the man he knew in New Orleans.





Baleka leads Rutherford to Mr. Zeringue and Rutherford finds himself at rehearsal for the wedding of Isadora and Zeringue, which is to take place the following day. To Rutherford, Zeringue looks slightly downcast, apparently upset at seeing his investment in the *Republic* sink before his eyes. Isadora, on the other hand, looks beautiful. She has lost a great deal of weight, and the lighting in the room plays on her face perfectly, Rutherford finds her beauty striking. Santos is overseeing the rehearsal and recognizes Rutherford. He attempts to grab Rutherford, who uses a move he has seen the Allmuseri men practice during the mutiny, and manages to knock the large man to the ground. Their encounter interrupts the rehearsal and, as people start to gather around, Zeringue and Isadora approach, each slowly realizing who he was. Zeringue immediately asks to speak to Rutherford in his office about the sinking of the *Republic* while Isadora closely inspects Rutherford and says finally that he does not look or sound the same.

Rutherford knows that she is right. His manner of speaking has changed after having grown so close with the Allmuseri during the voyage. Slowly, her face changes to a frown and she asks him harshly where he was on the day of their wedding, exclaiming that she had waited for him for hours and had been humiliated in front of everyone. Rutherford tells her he is sorry, and that he would do things differently if he could. He then begins to tell her about Baleka, saying that the young girl has been orphaned and that he has grown to care deeply for her, but wants Isadora's help in raising her. Isadora tells him she cannot accept his proposal and when Rutherford asks if it is because she is engaged to marry Zeringue, she runs to the rail and vomits.

After regaining her composure, Isadora tells Rutherford what happened after he had left her at the altar. Zeringue had cared for her, sent her flowers and then proposed to her. She had accepted simply because she could not refuse a man who owns half the city and kills people for interrupting him. She admits that she is sometimes so afraid of him that she cannot eat or sleep. Rutherford tells her that he's not surprised Zeringue wants to marry her because of how beautiful and cultured she is. After she accepted his proposal, Zeringue told Isadora that she would have to let all of her animals go, and she refused to send them out into the cold without knitting them all sweaters. Since then, she has been knitting every day and then unraveling her work at night in an attempt to stall. Hearing Isadora's story, Rutherford feels that she deserves her trouble for bringing Zeringue into their lives in the first place, but he knows that he must rescue Isadora from him.

Rutherford enters Zeringue's cabin, where he and Santos are waiting for him. Rutherford finds the cabin exactly as he has expected it, littered with all the comforts Zeringue requires. Zeringue tells Rutherford that he will not ask how he ended up aboard the *Republic*, if Rutherford does not ask why Zeringue is interested in the cargo. When Rutherford asks if by "cargo" he meant the slaves, Zeringue is taken aback and pretends to be surprised that this was what comprised the bulk of the ship's cargo. Zeringue, one of the ship's benefactors, is desperate to prove that Falcon caused the ship to sink. He asks Rutherford if he is willing to testify in court, for a sum of money, that Falcon had gone mad and was unfit to captain the ship.



Rutherford runs his fingers over the ship's log he carries in his hands. When Zeringue sees it, he asks Rutherford what it is. When Rutherford tells him it contains an accurate count of each slave on board by name, as well as a list of all of the men who had invested in the voyage, Zeringue is surprised. He orders Santos to take the book from him but Santos, who has slowly been following their conversation, has just realized that his master has been dealing in slaves. He tells them that his grandfather was an Allmuseri and becomes angrier as he realizes that his master has been dealing in Allmuseri slaves. Zeringue becomes afraid of angering Santos further, and begins fabricating a story, saying that he did not know the ship would be carrying slaves until he had already agreed to the deal and it was too late to back out. Santos does not believe him. Rutherford adds that the only Allmuseri who have survived, the children, will not believe it either, and in order to repay them, he should provide each with an endowment until they come of age. Zeringue agrees to this immediately. When he asks Rutherford if he plans to destroy the ship's log, Rutherford replies that he would rather hold onto it as insurance.

Santos is still absorbing the fact that Zeringue deals in slaves and again asks Zeringue why he has done this, becoming angrier by the moment. Rutherford is relieved to have Santos on his side. Zeringue asks Rutherford if there is anything else he needs and Rutherford replies that Zeringue should leave him alone with Isadora. Looking at the logbook in Rutherford's hands, Zeringue exclaims that that is blackmail, to which Rutherford replies that Zeringue must be very familiar with blackmail. As he leaves the man's cabin, he hears Santos tell Zeringue that he is going to kick his ass.

Rutherford takes a walk around the deck to clear his mind, feeling nervous, as if he is about to step from his old life in New Orleans into a new one with Isadora. Finally, he knocks on her door and she invites him in. He finds her dressed in a revealing nightgown, unlike any he has known her to wear, and he smiles to himself as she tries her best to seduce him. They fall into bed together, going through the motions of preparing to make love, but then Rutherford stops. Isadora is surprised, having assumed that this is what he wanted. Rutherford feels that it is not right yet, and is content to lie with his beloved Isadora. The two fall asleep together in a loving embrace.

## Entry 9: August 20, 1830 Analysis

When Rutherford finds himself aboard the *Juno*, he realized the impact that life on the *Republic* had on him. Suddenly he is faced with decisions such as which color bedspread he prefers, and is presented with great varieties of food, after having just eaten his first mate a few nights before. The change has affected him deeply. He has nightmares and sometimes has such overwhelming feelings that the *Juno* is sinking that he falls to the ground. Rutherford experiences depression so intense that he feels guilty for simply breathing, for being alive, believing that he has somehow stolen life from his friends and shipmates. He even considers suicide to relieve himself from this guilt and join his drowned shipmates. The ordeal had certainly left him changed and the adjustment to life aboard the *Juno* proves extremely difficult. Rutherford continues to write in the journal throughout his ordeal, and he finds that it helps to free his mind from



his worries and to sort out his feelings. Rutherford's emotional change has been accompanied by a physical change, complete with a loss of hair, creaking bones and a long beard. He appears to have aged many years. His difficulty in adjusting to a peaceful life, along with his physical change, are indicative of how much the voyage aboard the *Republic* had changed him. He is a completely different man from the boy who stowed onboard a few months prior.

Isadora's mention of knitting sweaters for her animals and then unraveling them at night to stall for time is an allusion to Homer's epic poem, *The Odyssey*, where Odysseus's wife does the same with her husband's burial shroud in an attempt to delay an impending marriage to one of her suitors.

There is a great deal of situational irony in the exchanges between Zeringue and Rutherford. In the beginning of the story, Zeringue took great pleasure in attempting to blackmail Rutherford into marrying Isadora. However, his attempt was unsuccessful and fate has brought them back together. This time, Rutherford holds the upper hand in the matter, and succeeds in blackmailing Zeringue into leaving him alone with Isadora.

After his talk with Zeringue, Rutherford takes a walk to clear his head, feeling nervous, as if he was about to take a big step from an old life into a new one. It becomes evident how much he has changed from his old life until now. Rather than make love to Isadora, as he had been wanting to since he met her, Rutherford decides that is not what they need. Instead, he is content to lie peacefully, with her in his arms. Isadora senses the difference in him, and they fell asleep together, both content with the life they plan to live together, as if that had been their plan all along.



# Characters

## Rutherford Calhoun

Rutherford is the main character of the novel, the writer of each of the journal entries through which the story is told. At the beginning of the novel, he is a young, newly freed slave who is taken in by the sensuality of New Orleans, his new home. Born with a natural ability to steal, he makes this his livelihood when finding honest work proves difficult. Rutherford adopts a wild lifestyle, going on alcohol binges and sleeping with loose women. When he meets Isadora, a proper schoolteacher, his attraction to her is undeniable. Rutherford refuses to abandon his wild ways and Isadora, growing tired of this, brings up the subject of marriage. She tells Rutherford that what he needs is a woman to bring him down to earth, like her mother did for her father. Rutherford disagrees, telling her that he doesn't ever want to marry anyone. At this point in his life, Rutherford's soul is thirsty for new experiences, and the thought of settling down into a marriage terrifies him. Rutherford runs away from the proposal and embarks on the voyage of a lifetime aboard the *Republic*. He endures many hardships and witnesses even more on this voyage, which proves to be more trying than he ever could have imagined. The Rutherford who started the voyage to escape a marriage to Isadora is long gone by the time the voyage ends. The Rutherford who is fished from the ocean after his ship sinks is a man whose priorities have changed completely. He even wants Isadora to help him raise Baleka, an orphan Allmuseri girl, whom he has grown to love as his own child. Rutherford has questioned his life and his upbringing throughout the trying times that he endured on his voyage. He has emerged from his experiences a changed man, the man Isadora wanted to marry. In the end, Rutherford finally desires and obtains what he thought he never wanted.

## Isadora

Isadora is a kind, gentle schoolteacher who meets Rutherford in New Orleans. She takes in the handicapped, stray animals she finds, turning her small abode into a menagerie of disadvantaged creatures. Growing up, she and her sisters were beaten by their drunken father, who beat her mother to death when Isadora was only three. Although she comes from a background of suffering, she grew to adulthood with no hatred in her heart for any man. Isadora's only desire, it seems, is to marry Rutherford, provide him with a family and live happily ever after with him. She cares for him deeply and puts up with his wild habits in New Orleans, but finds herself unable to continue, wanting Rutherford to commit to her. When Rutherford refuses to marry her, she is hurt and attempts to persuade Rutherford into marriage by arranging a deal with Papa Zeringue to repay his debts in exchange for an immediate marriage. The following day, however, Isadora is left alone at the altar, humiliated and upset. In her sorrow, she accepts a proposal of marriage from Mr. Zeringue and plans to marry him until the night of their wedding rehearsal, when she finds Rutherford. The wedding between Isadora



and Zeringue is called off and she finally ends up with Rutherford as she had originally wanted.

## Squibb

Squibb is a drunk whom Rutherford first meets at a pub the night before his impending marriage to Isadora and the departure of the *Republic*. When Squibb passes out in a drunken stupor, Rutherford steals his employment papers, planning to take his place onboard the ship the following morning. However, Squibb makes in aboard and the two end up working together in the ship's kitchen. Later on, Squibb becomes the *Republic's* unofficial physician, despite his lack of training. Squibb has been an alcoholic since he was 11 years old and on his first voyage at sea. He had once fallen 20 feet while drunk and managed to land on his right foot, which shattered the bone and rendered the leg useless. The bone was replaced with a metal rod and Squibb walks with a limp. He claims to have five or six wives, although he pines over one in particular named Maud, and continues to talk about and look for her. Rutherford and Squibb build a close friendship during the story.

## Peter Cringle

Peter Cringle is the first mate and quartermaster of the *Republic*, although it is later revealed that he was appointed to this position by mistake. Cringle first discovers Rutherford the morning the ship departs and brings him to the captain. He is tall and thin with white skin and distinguishes himself unintentionally from the rest of the ship's rugged crew by his speech, which is always correct. Cringle's sensitive nature also proves to be somewhat of a downfall since Captain Falcon misinterprets it as weakness. From their initial encounter, Rutherford and Cringle become friendly and Cringle considers Rutherford one of the few men he feels comfortable talking to. Cringle heads a group of crewmembers who plan to overthrow the captain. However, they are unable to carry out their plan because of an uprising by the slaves. Cringle is one of the few members of the crew who remain alive, at Rutherford's pleading, though he soon falls ill. By the time Cringle's illness has overtaken him, he is ready to die. The crew has run out of food and water and is practically starving. Cringle's last act is to sacrifice his body for the crew to eat, allowing himself to be killed rather than die on his own and leave a mess for his men to clean up.

## Captain Falcon

Captain Falcon is the captain of the *Republic*, a man whom Rutherford mistakes for a dwarf upon first meeting him because of his small stature, something for which he compensates with massive, muscular shoulders and a shrill voice. He has a long face, black hair, and hates when people look down at him. Falcon's father was a minister and his mother was devoted to her son and lived vicariously through him. She was unable to travel as she would have liked and Falcon became determined to outperform his father



and make his mother proud. Although his mother died when he was fifteen, his resolve did not waver and he continues on his quest. Throughout his travels, however, he has managed to make enemies and is wanted in three states for murder or treason. As a child, Falcon was bullied by others and keeps dated accounts of all of the insults he has received. He re-reads the list when he is drunk so he can keep the anger alive. Falcon was unhappily married for thirty years to Molly. Underneath his apparent unhappiness, he wants to be accepted by his crew.

## Reverend Chandler

Reverend Chandler was the Calhoun's slave master, although he hated slavery. He inherited Rutherford and his brother from their father, and, out of his religious guilt, taught the boys more than some white men of their time knew. Reverend Chandler made no attempt to keep his opinions about Rutherford a secret, and it was clear he much preferred Jackson Calhoun to his younger brother. Since the rest of his family died before him, his entire estate would be inherited by the two brothers. Once his death was imminent, the boys came to see him and Calhoun told Jackson that, because of his kindness and care, he could take anything he wanted for himself and for his brother. Although Rutherford did not receive much of an inheritance, Reverend Chandler did greatly impact his life through his teachings.

## Jackson Calhoun

Jackson Calhoun is Rutherford's older brother. When Rutherford and his brother were freed from slavery, Jackson Calhoun chose to stay with their master. Rutherford finds it difficult to speak of his brother initially, and mentions only his name in the first entry. Later on, however, he finds himself telling Squibb the story of his upbringing. The readers then learn that Jackson Calhoun is eight years older than Rutherford, which means that they did not grow up closely together. Jackson was the epitome of goodness, while Rutherford was the bad child and Jackson was ashamed of his younger brother. When Reverend Chandler fell ill, Jackson never left his side, caring for his every need. When it came time to accept his inheritance, however, rather than taking his share, Jackson told Chandler that he did not believe in owning property and insisted that the estate be divided among each of his servants and hired hands. This infuriated Rutherford and he has never been able to forgive Jackson for this.

## Philippe "Papa" Zeringue

Philippe Zeringue is a wealthy and powerful man in New Orleans, owning a great deal of property in the city. He is not a clean businessman, however. He is more of a gangster and makes a deal with Isadora to clear Rutherford's debts if Rutherford agreed to marry Isadora at noon on the following day. When Rutherford flees, leaving Isadora alone at the altar, Zeringue takes advantage of her emotional state and proposes to her. Zeringue was a benefactor for the *Republic* and this fact is made known by Rutherford



once he finds Zeringue aboard the *Juno*. In response to Zeringue's blackmail in the beginning of the story, Rutherford blackmails him at the end and Zeringue is left with no choice but to relinquish Isadora to him.

## Santos

Santos is an extremely large Negro man with a muscular stature, attributed to his slave years where he served as a dirt-pit wrestler for his slave master on a plantation. When he was finally freed, Santos was undefeated. He comes across Rutherford in New Orleans and, acting as Zeringue's minion, brings him to the gangster. Santos is still with Zeringue when Rutherford finds them aboard the ship after his rescue. Most importantly, Santos is present when Rutherford discusses Zeringue's participation in the voyage of the *Republic*, and immediately turns on his master when he finds out he has contributed to the capture of the Allmuseri because Santos' ancestors were of the same tribe.

## Allmuseri

The group of slaves the crewmembers picked up at Bangalang was comprised of Allmuseri tribespeople. They are gentle by nature and had been captured in their homeland to be shipped to America and sold as slaves. The Allmuseri were known to be high quality slaves for the following reasons: they did not eat meat so they were easy to feed; they did not believe in property so they were easy to clothe; they were known to be able to heal themselves so they did not require any medicine; they seldom fought; they could not steal; and they were said to become physically sick if they wronged anyone. The group managed to stage an uprising against the crew and take control of the ship, killing almost all of the white crewmembers.

## Baleka

Rutherford first meets Baleka when he tosses a biscuit to her mother one day. After the mother inspects it, she throws it back, telling him that her daughter deserves much more than a single moldy biscuit. Rutherford agrees with her and in an attempt to correct the situation, he shares his dinner with Baleka and her mother that night and every night afterward. Baleka immediately becomes attached to Rutherford, following him everywhere. Their attachment grows even deeper when Baleka's mother is swept into the sea after the ship is hit by a strong storm. Rutherford and Squibb care for Baleka throughout the voyage and are rescued together by the crew *Juno*. Once Rutherford finds Isadora, he asks her for help in raising Baleka, a child he has grown to love as his own.

## Ngonyama

Rutherford finds Ngonyama to be, by far, the most mysterious of the Allmuseri. He is a large man, but very quiet, taking in his surroundings and learning as much as he can



about them. He stands out when Falcon appoints him as one of the "head" slaves, in charge of a group of ten others; Rutherford and Ngonyama become close friends and teach each other many things. Rutherford teaches him to speak English and, in return, Ngonyama teaches Rutherford about the history of his people and their way of life. Rutherford asks him one day what he would do if he were captain of the ship. Ngonyama replies that he would sail the ship back to Africa and then return the ship to the crew. Upon hearing this, Rutherford passes him a key he had stolen from the captain's cabin the preceding night, believing it to be the key to the Allmuseri's chains. When the slaves plan their uprising, Ngonyama warns Rutherford to stay below and essentially saves his life by sticking up for him when the rest of the Allmuseri men are in favor of killing him. Ngonyama and Rutherford share a close friendship, helping and learning from one another throughout the novel.

## Diamelo

Diamelo is one of the Allmuseri men who heads the slave rebellion against the American crew. Although Ngonyama has befriended Rutherford, and speaks on his behalf, Diamelo refuses to accept that he is on their side and is of the opinion that he should die. His hatred for the Americans never weakens and he refuses to speak to them directly; even when passing them an object, he slides it across the floor with his toe rather than handing it to them. He also washes himself in salt water when touched by the shadow of an American. He enforces rules for the remaining crewmembers after the uprising, forcing them to speak only Allmuseri, and use only Allmuseri medicine, among other things. His hatred for the Americans is complete and unrelenting. When Rutherford speaks out of turn, he threatens to throw him into irons. Ngonyama has known Diamelo since childhood and had never known him to be violent. It is clear, therefore, that his time as a slave aboard the *Republic*, and his subjection to the American culture have completely changed his personality.

## Nathaniel Meadows

When Cringle gives Rutherford his first tour of the ship, he points out Nathaniel Meadows as the one crewmember he should be sure not to cross, since he had escaped the law in England after killing his entire family. Meadows, however, proves not to be as cutthroat as he is originally made out to be and actually has a meek appearance. One night, Rutherford witnesses him dancing in Rutherford's clothes before a group of dogs. He has taken the clothing from Rutherford and Cringle as well as some of the Allmuseri, claiming to be doing laundry and saving on soap and water. He uses the clothing to entice the dogs as he beats them, getting them violently familiar with the scents of the owners. Meadows plans to take part in the uprising against the captain, but ends up being killed, before Rutherford's eyes, by one of the Allmuseri during the uprising of the slaves.





## Matthew McGaffin

Matthew McGaffin is the boatswain of the ship, as well as a former strongman in the circus. He is characterized by a black eye patch, strong voice, and a walrus-like moustache. He is a leader in the group of crewmembers planning to overthrow Captain Falcon and hates the Allmuseri tribespeople, claiming they are heathens and it was they who caused the incredible storm that had almost capsized the ship. McGaffin stands up to Cringle about the many problems of the ship and insists that Falcon must be killed. In the end, however, McGaffin is among the crewmembers killed in the slave uprising.

## Tom

Tom is the ship's cabin boy. Captain Falcon has a sexual affair with the boy and knows this deeply troubles Peter Cringle; Falcon uses this fact to get to Cringle. After seeing the Allmuseri god down below, Tom is permanently changed. He walks with a strange smile on his face and the only part he plays in the story from that point, is to play his flute for the Allmuseri when they come up from their hold for air once a day.



# Objects/Places

## New Orleans

New Orleans is the city where the novel begins, a city that intrigues Rutherford because of its sensuality and a city where he immediately feels at home. As the story progresses, New Orleans becomes simply "home," a destination that seems to get further and further out of reach as the story unravels.

## The dock

When Rutherford first moves to New Orleans, he goes to the dock and looks out over the water, many times after a night of drinking. He finds the area to be relaxing. Most importantly, however, this is where Rutherford first meets Isadora.

## The Republic

The *Republic* is the ship on which the bulk of the story takes place. It is captained by Captain Ebenezer Falcon and is headed for the African coast where it will pick up a cargo of slaves and then return to New Orleans. The ship, however, does not make it back to New Orleans. After enduring a terrible storm and an uprising, the ship breaks in half and sinks during a final storm, leaving what is left of its half-starved crew floundering in the ocean to be rescued. The *Republic* and its crew is central to the story because it is where most of the book takes place and the entries in the ship's log make up the novel itself.

## Isadora's apartment

Isadora's love for animals turns her apartment into a menagerie of handicapped cats, birds, and other animals. Rutherford initially finds this annoying, since their hair and feathers are everywhere. After leaving New Orleans, and throughout the voyage, however, he finds himself thinking of Isadora and wishing he were in her apartment with her.

## Bangalang

Bangalang is a trading post and the first stop the *Republic* reaches, 41 days after leaving New Orleans. The post is controlled by Owen Bogha and is where the crew picks up the bulk of their cargo including hides, ivory teeth, gold, rice sheep, goat, vegetables, butter, beeswax, and their human cargo: the Allmuseri tribespeople.



## The captain's cabin

Captain Falcon's cabin is where Cringle brings Rutherford when he finds him on deck and where Rutherford meets with Falcon several times. The two share a unique relationship, which is built upon the conversations they share in this cabin. Falcon trusts Rutherford more than his other crewmembers and the reader learns a great deal about him through what he tells Rutherford in these meetings. The cabin also serves as a kind of symbol of the captain's history of expeditions, since it is filled with items from all of his other voyages. When the slaves revolt, the cabin is destroyed and it serves as Falcon's prison while he is kept there under lock and key, surrounded by his ruined treasures. Unable to handle this, Falcon commits suicide here.

## The galley

The galley is where Rutherford is sent to work with Squibb, preparing the ship's meals. Rutherford and Squib spend much of their time here and develop a friendship that lasts until the end of the book.

## "The hold"

This is where the slaves are kept; a dark, wet, filthy place where they are packed as tightly as possible. The hold is rat and insect-infested, a terrible, inhumane place to keep any living thing.

## The secret cargo

Captain Falcon brings aboard a large crate about which he is very secretive. There are many rumors spread by the crew about the secret cargo. The truth is not known until Falcon divulges it to Rutherford: the crate contains an Allmuseri god. The god is known to change the minds of those who come into contact with it. It also has the ability to change into any shape it pleases. Tommy, the cabin boy was visibly changed after being dared to approach it. When it is Rutherford's turn to feed the creature, it changes into the shape of Rutherford's father, Riley Calhoun, causing Rutherford to faint.

## Food

Throughout the voyage, food becomes a central issue. Rations are low and food is very scarce. After the slave rebellion, food becomes so scarce that the crewmembers find themselves chewing on candles and leather to stay alive. Cringle sacrifices his body so that the crew can use it for food. Once Rutherford is rescued after the *Republic* sinks, being presented with food comes as a shock to him, especially after having eaten part of his first mate only shortly before. Rutherford talks about growing up as a poor child, and the either/or agony of having so little that there is not enough to share and to eat

even one biscuit is to deprive your brother of that same biscuit, making every day a moral dilemma.

## The Juno

The *Juno* is the ship that rescues Squibb, Rutherford, Baleka, and a few other Allmuseri children after the *Republic* sinks. Also on board are Isadora, Philippe Zeringue, and Santos, all from Rutherford's past in New Orleans. Aboard this ship, Rutherford is presented with so many luxuries that he is not accustomed to that he goes into shock and depression for several weeks, unable to leave his cabin. In the end, it is here he stands up to Zeringue and finds himself happily back with Isadora.



# Themes

## Race

Rutherford Calhoun is the only black member of the all-white crew of the *Republic*, which sets him apart from the beginning. Once the Allmuseri are aboard, however, it serves as an unspoken connection to them. Rutherford finds the slaves more willing to communicate with him than any of the other crewmembers and becomes friendly with a few in particular: Baleka, her mother, and Ngonyama. Rutherford treats Baleka as his own child, caring for her as a father would his daughter. His friendship with Ngonyama is mutually beneficial; Rutherford teaches him to speak English and Ngonyama teaches him to speak Allmuseri and tells him about his people and their history and culture. This alliance saves Rutherford's life when Ngonyama sticks up for his friend after the slave revolt when the other Allmuseri men are in favor of killing him along with the rest of the American crewmembers. At the same time that his race brings him closer to the Allmuseri, Rutherford's status as the only black crewmember also alienates him somewhat from the white sailors. Some of them question his alliance to the group during the meeting when they discuss a mutiny against the captain.

Race becomes a factor once more after the slave rebellion because the balance of power has shifted and the blacks have taken control of the ship, killing most of their white captors. Diamelo, one of the Allmuseri men, has grown to hate the white men so much that he washes himself in salt water when the shadow of a white man touches him and refuses to speak to any of them directly. Race comes into play throughout the novel, both uniting Rutherford with the slaves, and separating him from the crew aboard the *Republic*.

## Theft

Stealing is a Rutherford's natural ability, a kind of mischief that he seems to have inherited from his father who had similar wild ways. In New Orleans, Rutherford makes his living by stealing, having been unable to find any honest work. Since reaching adulthood, theft comes so naturally to Rutherford that it like an instinct that he is unable to stifle. Once aboard the *Republic*, Rutherford steals mainly from the captain's cabin, unable to help himself. One day, when delivering the captain's dinner, Rutherford steals a key he finds on a table, believing it to be the key to the Allmuseri's leg irons. Rutherford gives the key to Ngonyama to help him escape, first asking what Ngonyama would do if he were master of the vessel. Ngonyama gives him an answer that involves no violence and, although it turns out to be the wrong key, the exchange becomes a symbol of the trust between Ngonyama and Rutherford. It also becomes a precursor to the slave's uprising.

One fateful night that proves to be a pivotal point in the relationship between Falcon and Rutherford, as well as central to the development of the novel, Falcon finds Rutherford



in his cabin. Rutherford has used his natural ability to break in and avoid the captain's clever traps. His break-in provides insight into the captain's life when Rutherford reads the captain's journal. Additional insight is gained by the long conversations Rutherford and the captain share. Throughout the novel, Rutherford's natural ability in thievery serves as a kind of catalyst for central events in the story.

## Companionship

Companionship is something that every human being craves, and the crewmembers aboard the *Republic* are no exception. Friendships are formed between the most unlikely crewmembers, Falcon and Rutherford, for example. Captain Falcon is known for his brutality and ruthlessness, but with Rutherford, he shows a softer side that is simply in need of acceptance and a listening ear; Rutherford provides him with both. The aforementioned relationship between Ngonyama and Rutherford is mutually beneficial as is the relationship Rutherford shares with Baleka. Rutherford also begins a friendship with his work partner, Squibb. Although his opinion of Squibb is not entirely positive when he first meets him, he grows to appreciate his soft side. Squibb eventually helps Rutherford care for Baleka and nurses him when he is ill.

The main relationship that exists from the start of the novel until the end is the one between Isadora and Rutherford. At the start of the novel, Isadora yearns for their relationship to be more serious and Rutherford runs from it, fully believing he is not ready to settle down. Perhaps he was right; however, as he undergoes hardship after hardship aboard the *Republic*, he finds himself thinking more and more fondly of Isadora. When he finally gets a second chance with her, he approaches her as a changed man, and they begin a new relationship. The relationship has developed into the one Isadora had wanted from the beginning, and the one that the new and improved Rutherford wants now more than ever.



# Style

## Point of View

The story is told in the first person, from the point of view of Rutherford Calhoun. It is Rutherford's journal that comprises the novel, and therefore the reader sees and experiences the story through him. Although the novel contains dialogue and descriptions, each of the scenes are told through Rutherford's eyes. He includes a few asides to the reader, which draws him closer to audience and allows a relationship to develop, drawing the reader in. The telling of this story in first person is entirely appropriate, since it centers on the Rutherford's growth as the main character, this growth could not be more evident as the reader sees him change and grow through his own eyes.

With use of the first person narrative, the reader learns about each of the other characters and events through Rutherford, as if they are experiencing everything with him. Rutherford's thoughts, feelings and experiences are, therefore, made more clear to the reader. Since the novel centers on Rutherford's character, it would not have been the same had it been told from another perspective. The first person narrative creates suspense as well as developing a close relationship with the reader and is an essential element in the effective telling of the story.

## Setting

The story begins in New Orleans on June 14, 1830, and ends on a ship called the *Juno* on August 1, 1830. The bulk of the story, however, takes place aboard the *Republic*. During this period of time, slavery was a profitable business, and this is central to the story. The *Republic* was a slave ship headed to Africa to pick up a cargo of slaves and bring them back to America to sell for the profit of the ship's benefactors. The time period and historical references are accurate throughout the book and play a large role the story. The novel could not have taken place in any other time period since the slave trade plays such a large role, not only in the destination of their ship but the fact that Rutherford himself was a freed slave.

The *Republic* plays a role in the setting as well; the unique ship and its crew of hardened sailors are unique and add color and character to the novel.

## Language and Meaning

The story is told in an easy-to-read manner; its colloquial, journal-like style makes the reader feel close to the action. The language is indicative of the time period as well as the setting, using both historical and nautical vocabulary. The author also uses a variety of literary devices including irony, analogies, metaphors, and foreshadowing to add to the story. The journal entries are written as if Rutherford has written them, and so are

written in a conversational style that makes the story easy to read. The author also includes a few asides as if Rutherford is speaking directly to the reader of his journal, which adds to the effectiveness of the novel and Rutherford's character.

## Structure

The novel is divided into nine sections, each an entry in Rutherford's journal. The first entry takes place in New Orleans as Rutherford arrives in this magnificent city he so eagerly calls home. The second entry begins his voyage on the *Republic*, and continues through the end of the eighth passage, which ends after the *Republic* sinks and Rutherford finds himself slipping under the surface of the ocean. In the ninth and final entry, Rutherford is rescued onto another ship where he finds Isadora and a few other characters from his life in New Orleans. The journal entries are written in chronological order and run a span of about two months in the summer of 1830.





## Quotes

"Of all the things that drive men to sea, the most common disaster, I've come to learn, is women."

Entry, the first; Page 1

"New Orleans, you should know, was a city tailored to my taste for the excessive, exotic fringes of life, a world of port of such extravagance in 1829 when I arrived from southern Illinois-a newly freed bondman, my papers in an old portmanteau, a gift from my master in Makanda-that I dropped my bags and a shot of recognition shot up my spine to my throat, rolling off my tongue in a whispered, '*Here, Rutherford is home.*'"

Entry, the first; Page 1-2

"Did I love Isadora? Really, I couldn't say. I'd always felt people fell in love as they might fall into a hole; it was something I thought a smart man avoided."

Entry, the first; Page 7

"The sea does things to your head, Calhoun, terrible unravelings of belief that aren't in a cultured man's metaphysic. We ate tallow first, then sawdust, stopped up our noses and slurped foul water from the pumps before barbecuing that Negro boy.' Falcon added-sadly, I thought, 'He was dead, of course, crushed by a falling mast. He tasted...stringy.'"

Entry, the second; Page 33

"We were forty of a company. And we'd all blundered, failed at bourgeois life in one way or another-we were, to tell the truth, all refugees from responsibility and, like social misfits ever pushing westward to escape citified life, took the sea as the last frontier that welcomed miscreants, dreamers, and fools."

Entry, the second; Page 40

"Everything must be done slowly, deliberately, first the breath coming deep from the belly, easily, as if the room itself were breathing, limbs light like hollow reeds, free of tension, all parts of me flowing as a single piece, for I had learned in Louisiana that in balletlike movements there could be no error of the body, no elbows cracking into chair arms in a stranger's space to give me away. Theft, if the truth be told, was the closest thing I knew to transcendence."

Entry, the third; Page 46

"If you have never been hungry, you cannot know the *either/or* agony created by a single sorghum biscuit-either your brother gets it or you do. And if you *do* eat it, you know in your bones you have stolen it straight from his mouth, there being so little for



either of you. This was the daily, debilitating side of poverty that no one speaks of, the perpetual scarcity that, at every turn, makes the simples act a moral dilemma."

Entry, the third; Page 47

"For my part, I wanted to live a little longer. I was only twenty-three years old. The Apocalypse would definitely put a crimp in my career plans. I needed the world as I knew it, as evil and flawed as it was, to *be* there for a while."

Entry, the fifth; Page 103

"On my knees, I did nothing, though it felt as if the room, and ship even, fell away. Some part of me was a fatherless child again. Alone in an alien world. Wanting to belong somewhere and to someone."

Entry, the sixth; Page 126

"And to comfort the weary on the *Republic* I peered deep into memory and called forth all that had ever given me solace, scraps and rags of language too, for in myself I found nothing I could rightly call Rutherford Calhoun, only pieces and fragments of all the people who had touched me, all the places I had seen, all the homes I had broken into. The 'I' that I was, was a mosaic of many centuries, a patchwork of others and objects stretching backward to perhaps the beginning of time."

Entry, the seventh; Page 162

"Drowning, I saw my past spool by me, a most unsettling experience, there being in my case precious little of value in review."

Entry, the eighth; Page 184

"My hands trembled. I felt precariously balanced between my old life in New Orleans and the first rung of another with Isadora, if she would have an old, broken down sea dog like me. But why would she, I wondered. She did not know me as I was now. What was worse, I could not explain myself in a single day. Telling her all I'd endured since I'd last seen her would take a thousand more nights than Scheherazade needed to beguile King Shahryar."

Entry, the ninth; Page 205



## Topics for Discussion

Isadora is Rutherford's love interest throughout the novel. Although he is hesitant to admit his true feelings toward her, it is clear he is drawn to her and feels a strong connection with her. What is the impact of their relationship on the story and on Rutherford and his actions? How do their differences impact their relationship?

Rutherford is the only black member of the *Republic's* crew. How is this fact reinforced throughout the story? How does Rutherford's race affect his relationship with the rest of the crew? How does it affect his relationship with the Allmuseri tribespeople?

From his initial introduction, Captain Falcon is portrayed as a ruthless man, with a reputation that is well known among seafarers. Although he proves to be a callous man by many of his actions, he shows a softer side to Rutherford that makes him appear more human. How do these two points of view compare? How does Rutherford's relationship with Captain Falcon impact the reader's view of him?

Peter Cringle is the first crewmember that Rutherford comes into contact with aboard the *Republic*; it is he who finds him asleep aboard the ship on their first day at sea and disagrees with the crew's overwhelming opinion to throw him overboard. Besides that fateful day, how else does Cringle prove to be different both physically and emotionally from the rest of the crewmembers?

When Jackson Calhoun is mentioned in the first entry, Rutherford mentions only his name and states that he is not yet ready to speak of him. Later on, he divulges the reason for this to Squibb and the reader learns why he was hesitant to speak of it before. What made Rutherford and his brother so different? How did Jackson Calhoun's actions toward the proposal of their inheritance alter Rutherford's future?

From the night Captain Falcon gave Rutherford a gun and a magnetic ring identical to his own, Rutherford feared he had become the captain's "bride." The two men did share an unusual relationship and Rutherford found himself torn at times between the captain and the crewmembers. How did his relationship with Captain Falcon affect his behavior?

When Rutherford comes into contact with Isadora after being rescued, he tells her he is a changed man. How has Rutherford evolved from the man who ran from marriage at the beginning of the story to the man who longs for Isadora's companionship and help in raising a child at the end?

The story ends with Isadora and Rutherford falling asleep in each other's arms, having decided not yet to consummate their relationship. Why did they choose not to do so? How does this change the affect of the ending?

There are several instances of irony throughout the story. Point out as many as possible and how each adds to the development of the novel.

The novel is written in the form of a journal, with nine entries, each written by Rutherford himself. Throughout the novel, he makes several asides to the reader before and after specific passages. How do these asides, in conjunction with the journal-like organization of the book, add to the novel and the personification of Rutherford's character?

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